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# Retaining Gifted Individuals for the Sustainability of Rural Communities

## Abstract

*Retaining Gifted Individuals for the Sustainability of Rural Communities* examined the supports and barriers to young gifted adults' choices regarding living in rural communities. The narrative methodology revealed the perceptions of remote rural community members through single, face-to-face interviews to understand the challenges and opportunities young gifted individuals encounter. Through community member interviews, participants echoed sentiments indicating supports, barriers, and the power of place play a significant role in gifted individuals' desire to remain in their local community. The findings suggested through celebrating place, engagement in the local community, and encouragement to solve local problems, gifted individuals will engage in redefining and redesigning their local community, creating a place where they want to remain and invest in the community for the sustainability of the area. The findings illuminated the need for further research on gifted education within rural areas to enhance the sustainability and success of those areas.

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RETAINING GIFTED INDIVIDUALS FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY  
OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

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A Dissertation in Practice

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

---

by

Jessie B. Matthews

June 2020

Advisor: Dr. Norma Hafenstein

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Author: Jessie B. Matthews

Title: RETAINING GIFTED INDIVIDUALS FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

Advisor: Dr. Norma Hafenstein

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## ABSTRACT

*Retaining Gifted Individuals for the Sustainability of Rural Communities* examined the supports and barriers to young gifted adults' choices regarding living in rural communities. The narrative methodology revealed the perceptions of remote rural community members through single, face-to-face interviews to understand the challenges and opportunities young gifted individuals encounter. Through community member interviews, participants echoed sentiments indicating supports, barriers, and the power of place play a significant role in gifted individuals' desire to remain in their local community. The findings suggested through celebrating place, engagement in the local community, and encouragement to solve local problems, gifted individuals will engage in redefining and redesigning their local community, creating a place where they want to remain and invest in the community for the sustainability of the area. The findings illuminated the need for further research on gifted education within rural areas to enhance the sustainability and success of those areas.

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*“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams,”*

*Eleanor Roosevelt*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Persistent Problems of Practice.....	1
Statement of Purpose .....	3
Research Questions.....	3
Personal Interest as the Researcher.....	4
Significance of the Study .....	6
Chapter Summary .....	7
 Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	 8
Characteristics of Rural Communities.....	9
What is Rural? .....	9
Rural Classifications .....	10
Benefits of Rural Communities .....	12
Challenges in Rural Areas .....	14
Definitions of Gifted Education.....	17
Gifted Education in Rural School Districts .....	18
Theoretical Framework.....	20
Importance of Place in Rural Areas .....	25
Connection of Place for Gifted Rural Individuals .....	28
The Need for Retention of Gifted Individuals in Rural Areas.....	29
Reasons for Gifted Individuals to Stay .....	29
Reasons Why Gifted Individuals Leave .....	30
Success of Local Areas Rely on Top Students .....	31
Challenges for Gifted Individuals in Rural Areas.....	31
Lack of Opportunities and Higher Education Access.....	31
Disparity in Funding and Teacher Training.....	33
Encouragement to Make a Life Outside Local Communities.....	34
Supports for Gifted Individuals to Live in Rural Areas.....	35
Place-Based Education in Support of Community .....	35
Develop Strong Community and School Relations .....	37
Encourage Students to Build Careers in Local Communities.....	38
Promote Potentials for Rural Areas .....	39
Gaps in the Literature.....	40
Chapter Summary .....	41
 Chapter Three: Methodology .....	 42
Study Purpose and Problem.....	42
Research Questions.....	43
Research Design.....	44
Setting .....	45
Sampling Type .....	45
Participants.....	46

Data Collection .....	49
Instrument .....	50
Interviews.....	50
Data Analysis .....	61
Reliability and Validity.....	63
Bias and Limitations .....	64
Chapter Summary .....	65
Chapter Four: Data Collection and Findings .....	66
Context of the Study .....	67
Description of the Region .....	67
Participant Categories .....	68
Community Leaders.....	69
Mentors of Gifted Individuals.....	69
Family Members of Gifted Individuals.....	70
Young Gifted Adults.....	70
Interviews.....	70
Interview Question Protocol .....	72
Data Collection Results.....	75
Reasons and the Draw to Living in a Rural Community .....	75
Community Leaders.....	76
Mentors of Gifted Individuals.....	82
Family Members of Gifted Individuals .....	89
Young Gifted Adults.....	94
Summary .....	101
Perceptions of the Local Area.....	101
Community Leaders .....	102
Mentors of Gifted Individuals.....	105
Family Members of Gifted Individuals .....	109
Young Gifted Adults.....	111
Summary .....	116
Influences of Future Sustainability of the Area .....	116
Community Leaders .....	117
Mentors of Gifted Individuals.....	123
Family Members of Gifted Individuals .....	131
Young Gifted Adults.....	134
Summary .....	140
Gifted Education in the Area .....	140
Community Leaders .....	142
Mentors of Gifted Individuals.....	151
Family Members of Gifted Individuals .....	159
Young Gifted Adults.....	164
Summary .....	173



Response to Research Questions .....	173
Chapter Summary .....	176
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications .....	177
Summary of Research Study.....	177
Theoretical Framework.....	180
Summary of Findings and Conclusions .....	181
Reasons and the Draw to Living in a Rural Community .....	184
Community Leaders.....	184
Mentors of Gifted Individuals.....	185
Family Members of Gifted Individuals.....	186
Young Gifted Adults.....	187
Perceptions of the Local Area.....	188
Community Leaders.....	188
Mentors of Gifted Individuals.....	188
Family Members of Gifted Individuals.....	189
Young Gifted Adults.....	190
Influences of Future Sustainability of the Area .....	190
Community Leaders.....	190
Mentors of Gifted Individuals.....	191
Family Members of Gifted Individuals.....	191
Young Gifted Adults.....	192
Gifted Education in the Area .....	192
Community Leaders.....	192
Mentors of Gifted Individuals.....	194
Family Members of Gifted Individuals.....	194
Young Gifted Adults.....	195
Limitations of the Research Study .....	195
Discussion and Implications .....	197
Perceptions.....	197
Supports and Barriers.....	202
Barriers.....	203
Supports .....	206
Power of Place .....	209
Redefine and Redesign .....	210
Dissemination of Research .....	215
Local .....	216
State.....	217
National.....	218
Recommendations for Future Research .....	218
Chapter Summary .....	222

Historical Reflection .....	225
References.....	226
Appendices.....	235
Appendix A: Community Partner Agreement .....	235
Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer .....	236
Appendix C: Recruitment Email Script to Community Leaders .....	237
Appendix D: Recruitment Email Script to Family Members of Gifted Individuals.....	238
Appendix E: Recruitment Email Script to Mentors of Gifted Individuals .....	239
Appendix F: Recruitment Email Script to Young Gifted Adults.....	240
Appendix G: Informed Consent for Community Leaders, Family Members, Mentors, and Young Gifted Adults.....	241
Appendix H: Informed Consent for Gifted Senior High School Students.....	245
Appendix I: Interview Question Protocol.....	249

## LIST OF TABLES

Chapter Three.....	44
Table 3.1: <i>Interview Questions and Rationale</i> .....	55
Chapter Four .....	68
Table 4.1: <i>Participant Interview Log</i> .....	73
Table 4.2: <i>Four Main Themes Found in Interview Question Protocol</i> .....	75
Table 4.3: <i>Theme One of Interview Protocol</i> .....	77
Table 4.4: <i>Theme Two of Interview Protocol</i> .....	103
Table 4.5: <i>Theme Three of Interview Protocol</i> .....	119
Table 4.6: <i>Theme Four of Interview Protocol</i> .....	143
Chapter Five.....	179
Table 5.1: <i>Participant Connection to the Rural Location</i> .....	184

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The narrative stories of individuals from a remote rural community provided insight into rural community members' perspectives regarding young gifted adults' choices to live in rural areas. The stories developed a bigger picture containing the challenges young gifted individuals face in remaining in their rural communities for the success and sustainability of the areas. The purpose of this study was to examine the supports and barriers to young gifted adults' choices in living in rural areas. The researcher focused on a single remote rural area, providing perceptions from four different groups of community members. Through a narrative investigation, the researcher interviewed several members from each category, allowing for stories of community members to reveal perspectives of the supports and barriers young gifted adults face regarding residing in rural areas.

### **Persistent Problem of Practice**

Rural communities across the United States are suffering from a loss of gifted individuals (Howley et al., 2009, p. 516). Haas and Nachtigal (1998) explain that the “traditional rural way of life is rapidly vanishing as the chase for the *good life* depletes community after community” (p. vi). Wilcox et al. (2014) continue to inform that “currently the overall trend is an outflow of youth from the country’s rural areas” (p. 2). The brightest individuals of these communities are consistently sent off to receive a

higher education and acquire a profitable job suitable to their needs and interests (Howley, 2009, p. 545). This is seen as “‘a necessary evil’ and ‘the only path to economic success for young adults’” (Paul & Seward, 2016, p. 312). Haas and Nachtigal (1998) explain, “the message about the good life has been clear: if you want good salaries, fine homes, and the world of mass culture, move to the city or suburbs” (p. vi). The authors paint a picture by stating, “rural young people graduate with a diploma in one hand and a bus ticket in the other” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. vi). After leaving, these individuals rarely come back to their home communities. This, in turn, leaves their rural communities to continue to decline and swim in what is known as “persistent poverty” (Puryear & Kettler, 2017, p. 144). Persistent poverty is also caused by outmigration being “accompanied by an in-migration of more transient populations living in deep poverty” (Wilcox et al., 2014, p. 2).

Many rural communities are stuck in this constant drain of the talent pool, eliminating potential leaders (Howley, 2009, p. 547). A reference to the “brain drain” is often cited as one of the biggest struggles and impacts on rural communities (Howley et al., 2009; Lawrence, 2009; Paul & Seward, 2016). The “brain drain” refers to the issue of “the loss of the most highly educated people from rural areas” (Howley, 2009, p. 516). Lawrence (2009) notes that “rural communities cannot afford to lose the contributions gifted students can make to rural community, culture, and economy...to nurture and sustain rural ways of living, rural communities need articulate leaders who understand and love rural places...” (p. 462). Many students of rural communities want to stay, but the opportunities and resources often make it impossible (Howley, 2009, p. 547). Haas

and Nachtigal (1998) state, “The quality of all our lives depends on raising a generation of young people to take their places as participants in a moral, communal, and democratic society” (p. 12).

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine supports for, and barriers to, gifted young adults’ choices regarding living in rural communities.

### **Research Questions**

This research was guided by an overarching research question with four sub-questions. The overarching question was:

What are the supports and barriers to gifted young adults’ choices regarding living in rural communities?

The sub-questions in support of the overarching question were:

1. What are the perceptions of young gifted adults’ regarding living in rural communities?
2. What are the perceptions of family members of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?
3. What are the perceptions of mentors of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?
4. What are the perceptions of community leaders of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?

These questions provided the direction of data collection, analysis, and the foundation for future recommendations.

## **Personal Interest as the Researcher**

I grew up in an urban region with family roots seated in rural Iowa. My heart was continually pulled into the smaller, slower paced regions, desiring the community connections, sense of belonging, and values that are maintained in an ever-growing world. Sleepy towns quietly come to life with hellos, howdys, and how-do-you-dos. Neighbors check on each other, noticing what seems like every movement, completing small acts of kindness for each other out of goodwill. Single lane roads lead the fields into small cracked buildings, rusted mailboxes, and kids laughing as they bike down the neighborhood, while leaves and tumbleweeds drift along the road. The air is clearer, life is slower, stars shimmer, and the values of importance shift, becoming more genuine and personal. With a reliance on nature; fame, wealth, and commercial values fade in rural regions.

The meaning of rural is hard to capture in words by many that value what it has to offer. It is explained as a way of life; an attachment to values and morals. Those that leave rural areas generally desire to return at some point in their life. It brings unique values and lessons that are learned, different to what many experience in urban areas. Those that were raised in rural areas never forget the lessons, values, and lifestyles of their home communities, taking it with them wherever life leads them.

After long reflection, I have found that my connection to the landscape, people, values, and way of life of rural communities is what keeps taking me back and embracing what the lifestyle has to offer. There is something so unique, personable, and unwavering about the sense of belonging connected to the rural landscape. Individuals learn life

lessons through the history of the regions, stories that are passed down through generations, chores, blood, sweat, and tears that result from the hard work of maintaining the land and personal wellbeing that bring lessons, community, and connections.

Community members often wear many hats, assisting to maintain the nature of rural communities, advancing with society in their own unique ways. Rural communities face many struggles and challenges yet demonstrate resiliency as they are never willing to show their nervousness as each member attempts to advance with the rest, pulling up their boots each and every day. When any member of the community is in need, the community envelops its arms around the individuals, helping as best they know how.

The rural way of life is certainly not for everyone, but it is the base of society, feeding the nation, maintaining bits of natural beauty that still exist in our world, and building values and lessons that are passed on for generations that guide many of the world's leaders. Rural areas need attention, recognition, and supports to continue assisting future generations and those that reside in the areas. Maintaining these locations is of the utmost importance as not only does much of the nation still consist of rural populations, but our world depends on the fruits of rural locations as the world continues to expand. To assist the maintenance of rural regions, placing value on place and future generations, leaders can be raised not only to guide society, but the rural locations themselves, assisting in transitions that rural areas face, developing and maintaining successful lifestyles and communities.



## **Significance of the Study**

Rural areas exist across the nation, each with their own unique cultures, values, and strengths. They are whispers of society, often overlooked and devalued. Hidden opportunities lie in these quiet little towns, where the community booms with talent that goes unnoticed to the rest of the world. They bring talent, personal growth, connection to bigger things, a view that many never get to see. Rural areas provide incredible community, strong values, a voice to its people, creating a sense of belonging, connection to the land, and internal pride. Rural communities, to some, hold the secret of life. While not full of glory and fame, a full heart, smiles, and pride can be found. They are, however, like a “canary in the coal mine” signifying a need for change and development of more substantial practices and infrastructures that lead to the retention of gifted young adults to promote success and sustainability within these regions (Tieken, 2014, p. 188).

This research study provides insights to the thoughts, stories, and current situations found within rural areas. The perceptions of community members lead to a better understanding of the current experiences and expectations young gifted individuals face, opportunities within their communities, and hopes for the future. The gathered perceptions add to the rural narrative, allowing for the opportunities and understanding to grow and lead the way within rural regions. Each category of participants represents the impact community members have, which is vital to the understanding of the rural areas, as rural regions are tied to community.

## **Chapter Summary**

This research study examined remote rural residents' perspectives of young gifted adults' choices regarding living in rural communities. The narrative research study was intended to guide future research and create a platform to share the voices of rural community members thoughts, in order to develop and guide a change to assist in supporting and encouraging the success of rural areas. Empowering rural community members will assist in maintaining and developing success for rural communities and all individuals that reside in the areas. Encouraging gifted individuals within the community to find their interest and paths in rural areas will also assist in developing success for generations to come, empowering young gifted individuals to remain or return to rural communities, if they so desire.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature provides a more in-depth understanding of rural communities, their benefits and challenges, and the experiences of young gifted individuals in these areas. Exploring the unique values and characteristics of rural areas provides insight as to what the perceptions young individuals and their communities hold regarding the local regions where they grew up. When studying rural regions, it is important to understand what rural means, the value of place, the importance of focusing on rural lifeways, challenges young individuals in these communities' face, and current supports and barriers for young gifted individuals to succeed in these communities. While existing studies inform researchers about education in rural areas, there is still a need for greater, more in-depth research. This research increases the understanding of rural aspects, needs, and necessary supports or strategies that will promote the sustainability of these regions, especially for young gifted individuals, who could bring many talents and assets to these communities. Limited studies exist regarding young gifted individuals' perceptions of living in rural areas.

This review explores what rural means, common trends that are being observed, and strategies promoted in rural education. In addition, this review will explore the theory of place and the effect it has on rural inhabitants. Understanding the theory of place will provide insight and a theoretical framework to examine perceptions of rural community members. The literature review is meant as a guide to help form a framework

for understanding the need for further research in the field of rural education and the recruitment of gifted individuals to promote success in these areas.

## **Characteristics of Rural Communities**

### ***What is Rural?***

“America was once a rural nation” with an abundance of resources and significance (Tieken, 2014, p. 11). These regions are located outside of urban city limits typically in remote areas (Goetz et al., 2018, p. 98). As Goetz et al. (2018) state, “one knows it when one sees it” (p. 98). These communities hold unique characteristics and importance, requiring attention and a voice, as they are “an important source of America’s food, water, energy, and other natural resources, and [they] contain areas of great natural beauty” (Goetz et al., 2018, p. 97).

Rural areas are typically recognized as countryside locations with wide open spaces, rolling hills, livestock, and small towns (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2019). According to the USDA (2019), a rural territory is defined as a “population size threshold of 2,500 to 50,000 people.” The 2010 Decennial Census states that “almost 60 million people, about 19 percent of the population, lived in rural areas of the United States” (United States Census Bureau, 2010). In addition, “42% of all public schools in the United States are in small towns/rural areas” (Azano et al., 2017, p. 62), which means “more than one in four of America’s public schools are rural” (Showalter et al., 2017, p.1). Rural areas educate more than 9.3 million students in the United States, which breaks down to nearly one in five of the nation’s students attend a rural school

(Showalter et al., 2019, p. 1). Showalter et al. (2019) explain that “more students in the U.S. attend rural schools than in the nation’s 85 largest school districts combined” (p. 1).

Beyond the USDA definition, rural is much more than just a population number and distance of miles from the nearest urban area (Spicker et al., 1987, p. 155). These regions are a particularly “complex relationship shared by rural school and rural community... a relationship necessarily written by local context and local history” (Tieken, 2014, p. 10). Rural areas are often known as “close-knit functional unit[s]” (Tuan, 1977, p. 169). Spicker et al. (1987) state, “rural America is far too complex to be defined by population alone” (p. 155). They continue to explain, “The key to definition is not in numbers but in the relationships between people and between people and the land” (Spicker et al., 1987, p. 155). Tieken (2014) states:

The *rural* in rural is not most significantly the boundary around it, but the meanings inherent in rural lives, wherever lived. Rural, then, is a matter of the commonplace interactions and events that constitute the rural “lifeworld,” a value mostly overlooked by the media and academia, and a significance impossible to quantify. (p. 5)

It is important to understand that rural in this manner “is tied to place; it provides a geography dependent sense of belonging... is not simply a matter of boundaries”

(Tieken, 2014, p. 5). Rural “constitutes one’s identity; it shapes one’s perspectives and understandings; and it gives meaning to one’s daily experiences” (Tieken, 2014, p. 5).

This identity gives rural its significance through its “place-dependent sense of rural belonging” (Tieken, 2014, p. 5).

### ***Rural Classifications***

When considering rural areas, it is “important to recognize the differences among rural places” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 464), understanding that not all rural communities are the same. “Rural communities are not homogeneous” and “are unique places” (Azano et al., 2017, pp. 73-74). As Lawrence (2009) explains, these communities are “like gifted students, their individual attributes offer different opportunities” (p. 464). Developing and implementing instructional strategies and systems requires attention to the unique culture of the communities (Azano et al., 2017, p. 74). “It is inefficient and ineffective to plan interventions and curriculum based on stereotypic or even generalizations across communities” (Azano et al., 2017, p. 74). Generalization across communities is not effective because “rural areas are diverse with their own set of local knowledge, defined as ‘ways of being in the world as well as perceptions and understandings about a particular place’” (Montgomery, 2004, p. 5).

Rural regions are classified into three categories that define the proximity to urban areas: fringe rural, distant rural, and remote rural (Puryear & Kettler, 2017, p. 144). Fringe rural is Census-defined as a “rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area,” as well as a territory located “less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster” (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2006). Distant rural is Census-defined as a “rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area,” as well as a territory that is located “more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster” (NCES, 2006). Remote rural is Census-defined as a “rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an

urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster” (NCES, 2006).

Each of these types of rural areas has its unique advantages and disadvantages, but often display similarities in educational needs (Puryear & Kettler, 2017, p. 99).

### ***Benefits of Rural Communities***

Communities in America “were once rural communities, and its schools were once rural schools” (Tieken, 2014, p. 11), creating a traditional, collaborative, family atmosphere in these regions. While rural districts face many problems when it comes to providing quality education, researchers have pointed out the numerous positives these communities have that urban areas do not (Azano et al., 2017; Ellzey & Karnes, 1991; Howley, Rhodes, & Beall, 2009; Howley, 2009; Lawrence, 2009; Tieken, 2014). Most rural settings have a “family atmosphere” that “provides close and supportive relationships between teachers, students, and community” (Ellzey & Karnes, 1991, p. 56). “The importance of family and community, a strong work ethic, and deep ties to the land” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 464) are crucial aspects that differentiate rural communities from their suburban and urban neighbors. In addition, the “strength of rural culture is the value it places on *stewardship*...a fundamental element” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 466).

Stewardship as a fundamental element “rests on the attitudes and practices of care that maintain local holdings in excellent condition for the long term” (Howley, 1998, p.10). This element is built for the “good of the community” and local public (Howley, 1998, p. 10). Stewardship “constitutes a devotion relevant to both accountability and the rural circumstance,” including the “entire community’s care of its children and youth,” binding generations together (Howley, 1998, p. 25). Howley (1998) informs that

stewardship in rural areas are “deeply educative practices” that develop wholistic attitudes connecting the land and community, honoring and developing legacies for generations (p. 10). Howley (1998) continues to state, “Everyone in the community has a part in this stewardship, whether or not they have children in school” (p. 25).

Stewardship is “part of the human condition,” creating a connection to the land with a “means to end the cycle of collapse” and comprising “an attitude of mutual care” (Howley, 1998, p. 26). “The point of stewardship is community...real, organic communities” that are centered on raising generations that take proper care on the culture of the land and have long-term commitments to the real-world (Howley, 1998, p. 27). Engaging in stewardship that maintains community as the center, as rural areas often do, the education system can assist in fostering “community in the world” (Howley, 1998, p. 29).

In rural areas, the school districts often have a smaller teacher-to-student ratio, allowing for deeper relationships in a school where the education staff, including administration, often “know the academic strengths and weaknesses of individual students” (Van Tassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2016, p. 290). This close-knit school culture allows for more individualized, innovative, and open teaching techniques (Ellzey & Karnes, 1991, p. 56). Rural communities also highly encourage and place a strong value on student participation in “sports, extracurricular activities, peers, and families” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 487). Small schools allow for greater student participation in all activities; thus, “each student has a role in the education process” (Ellzey & Karnes, 1991, p. 56).



The combination of a family-oriented atmosphere, smaller class sizes, opportunity for individualized instruction, and ability to participate in extracurricular activities allow rural students unique access to opportunities and lessons in which some urban individuals may not have (Lawrence, 2009, p. 487). Davalos and Griffin (1999) describe climates and relationships in rural schools through a metaphorical format: “classroom is like a family” (p. 312), which is “an asset of rural schools [and their] close tie to community” (Montgomery, 2004, p. 5). Strengths of rural schools also include support for “potential abilities of administrators to mobilize smaller, more manageable teaching staff to make instructional improvements, and possibilities for implementing innovative teaching practices” (Davalos & Griffin, 1999, p. 313).

Collaboration is required between community members and school personnel for success (Montgomery, 2004, p. 5). Schools need communities “because communities construe education as a shared commitment and responsibility” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 466). The numerous benefits of rural community culture help these areas “in ways that are not usually available to children in urban and suburban communities” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 488).

### ***Challenges in Rural Areas***

“Rural America has gone unnoticed for too long” (Beeson & Strange, 2003, p. 3). These areas “often seem invisible because many leaders never encounter these communities directly or lack a full understanding of rural America’s challenges” (Showalter et al., 2019, p. 1). While a rural area seems insignificant when compared to its urban counterparts, “its people are real, their problems significant, their prospects

worthy” (Beeson & Strange, 2003, p. 3). Haas and Nachtigal (1998) explain, “traditional rural life is rapidly vanishing as the chase for the good life depletes community after community” (p. vi). Howley (1998) states, rural lifeways and “rural meanings are now under extreme threat” (p. 19). Many rural communities face four significant problems that cause consistent lack of funding and success for school districts: “declining population, persistent poverty, changing demographics, and accountability requirements” (Howley et al., 2009; Howley, 2009; Lawrence, 2009; Puryear & Kettler, 2017; Showalter et al., 2017). Howley et al. (2009) explain, “These challenges are not new, and they certainly have an impact on many students in these schools, not just those who are gifted” (p. 515).

In addition to reoccurring problems that surface in rural communities, “the self-image that rural people are ignorant and rural knowledge is unimportant, and acceptance that to fulfill ‘higher aspirations’ children must leave,” become factors that “all work against the sustainability of rural life” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 464). In turn, “rural *schooling* often seems to promote goals that destabilize rural communities” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 465). These goals include “encouraging students to seek high-status jobs that require breaking the bonds to family and place” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 465). In addition, rural schools typically “educate students to take their places anywhere in the global economy” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, vi). By encouraging students to go “anywhere,” it usually means going “elsewhere” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. vi). All continuous factors lead to a constant drain and outflux of younger generations, leaving rural regions “doomed to poverty, decline, and despair” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. 5). Haas and Nachtigal

(1998) further explain this concept by stating, “rural young people graduate with a diploma in one hand and a bus ticket in the other” (p. vi).

“Rural communities often lack the same resources common to urban areas,” and often lack a variety of specific community resources that support student academic and extracurricular interests (De Leon et al., 1997, p. 16). Due to their isolated geographic location, which is common for many rural areas, rural students have not traveled away from their insular communities (Azano et al., 2017, p. 64). Rural areas typically have a limited number of cultural and social institutions, such as theaters, libraries, and museums, and often lack proximity to a variety of educational institutions (Petrovcic, 2016, p. 392). Due to the challenges of accessibility to these regions, there are fewer opportunities for employment and education (Petrovcic, 2016, p. 392).

Another reason that many young people leave rural areas is the lack of funding opportunities available for post-secondary degrees (Howley et al., 2009, p. 520). Resources for curricular activities require substantial funding, as “financial constraints were the primary reason for the lack of such provisions” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 484). The lack of funding available for qualified teachers in rural areas leads them to accept positions in districts with higher paying positions (Lawrence, 2009, p. 482). School districts also face a lack of local money to fund programs, and advanced students are often isolated due to lack of service options (Ellzey & Karnes, 1991, p. 56).

Additionally, while rural areas are portrayed as “being neighborly and close-knit,” not all residents find immediate inclusion and acceptance regarding their cultural identity (Garland & Chakraborti, 2006, p. 159). Garland and Chakraborti (2006) explained that

the perceived notion of rural areas having a “deep-seated sense of local identity complemented by strong feelings of belonging” can obscure and marginalize “the experiences of minority ethnic residents,” creating a feeling of exclusion (p. 159). With a sense of isolation, minority ethnic populations may experience rural areas as “cold and unwelcoming,” due to a stifling sense of community culture that is “intolerant towards difference and change” (Garland & Chakraborti, 2006, p. 169). Marginalization can be reinforced in some communities due to perceived notions of rural areas being primarily white (Garland & Chakraborti, 2006, p. 159).

### **Definitions of Gifted Education**

In this research study, understanding what giftedness means is crucial when discussing the supports and barriers that gifted individuals face within rural communities. While the federal government of the United States has created a definition of gifted individuals, local definitions of giftedness vary state by state (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], n.d.b). The federal definition of gifted students was first defined in the 1972 Marland Report to Congress, indicating:

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (NAGC, n.d.a)

Adding to the NAGC’s (n.d.a) definition, a western state defines gifted individuals as:

Those persons between the ages of four and twenty-one whose aptitude or competence in abilities, talents, and potential for accomplishment in one or more domains are so exceptional or developmentally advanced that they require special provisions to meet their educational programming needs. Gifted children are hereafter referred to as gifted students. Children under five who are gifted may also be provided with early childhood special educational services. Gifted students include gifted students with disabilities (i.e. twice exceptional) and students with exceptional abilities or potential from all socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural

populations. Gifted students are capable of high performance, exceptional production, or exceptional learning behavior by virtue of any or a combination of these areas of giftedness:

- General or specific intellectual ability
- Specific academic aptitude
- Creative or productive thinking
- Leadership abilities
- Visual arts, performing arts, musical or psychomotor abilities. (SDE, 2013, pp. 104-105)

Meanwhile, a midwestern state defines gifted as:

“Gifted and talented children” are those identified as possessing outstanding abilities who are capable of high performance. Gifted and talented children are children who require appropriate instruction and educational service commensurate with their abilities and needs beyond those provided by the regular school program.

Gifted and talented children include those children with demonstrated achievement or potential ability, or both, in any of the following areas or in combination:

1. General intellectual ability.
2. Creative thinking.
3. Leadership ability.
4. Visual or performing arts ability.
5. Specific ability aptitude. (Davidson Institute, 2011)

### ***Gifted Education in Rural School Districts***

Rural education is the “interaction of the characteristics of sparsely populated communities with the traditional rural values and beliefs of their inhabitants” (Spicker et al., 1987, p. 155). Due to rural school characteristics, they “tend to offer a more limited curriculum than metropolitan schools, offer fewer libraries and fewer programs for special populations, and employ fewer support personnel such as counselors and curriculum specialists” (Spicker et al., 1987, p. 155). Despite the rural school disadvantages, “rural people are generally pleased with their schools” (Spicker et al., 1987, p. 155).

“The issues underlying the education of gifted children in rural places are problematic and complex” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 462). In these areas, “there are insufficient services and options” for the gifted population (Lawrence, 2009, p. 469). Rural gifted students reported that they had “fewer opportunities for challenge that their suburban peers” have and they reported “a lower frequency of enjoyment than did the suburban students” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 472).

Gifted education is often not prevalent in rural districts because “it is assumed [gifted students] will succeed with no special provisions, and students with learning difficulties are competing for the primary teacher’s time” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 469). Rural districts may be reluctant to provide gifted education services because they “simply do not feel that these programs are necessary to teach gifted students” (Ellzey & Karnes, 1991, p. 56). Gifted students in rural districts often lack challenge and enjoyment that their suburban or urban age peers experience (Azano et al., 2014, p.88). The lack of funding and teacher training affects gifted learners in the rural classroom instruction, the identification process, and the ability to provide advanced, rigorous lessons that engage high-potential students (Ellzey & Karnes, 1991, pp. 56-57). Azano et al. (2014) mention, “the needs of these students are often overlooked in education policy despite well-documented limited financial resources and pervasive poverty” (p. 88). These researchers continue to explain that “relatively little is known about the experiences of gifted students in rural areas and even less about the teachers serving in this population” (Azano et al., 2014, p. 88). This ongoing dilemma, as demonstrated in literature, is significantly affecting rural gifted students.

When designed and implemented correctly, “an effective rural gifted program will enhance community pride, staff commitment, and career opportunity and academic success for students” (Ellzey & Karnes, 1991, p. 57). As Lawrence (2009) states, “These students come to school ready and eager to learn,” but are often behind their urban peers in life experiences and worldly knowledge (Lawrence, 2009, p. 475). By promoting and enhancing the curriculum to “return to the meaning of rural and the need to ‘ruralize’ gifted education” (Montgomery, 2004, p. 3), all students, not just gifted ones, will connect with and advance their learning and understanding, making stronger connections to the real world, within and outside their communities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As the purpose of this study was to examine supports for, and barriers to, gifted young adults’ choices regarding living in rural communities, the guiding theoretical framework that was used as the underlying structure for how this study is defined is the theory of place (Adom et al., 2018, p. 438). The theory of place serves “as an approach for contemporary socio-cultural inquiries, especially as space and place are increasingly connected by the postmodern dynamics of mobility, consumption and globalization” (Lau & Li, 2018, p. 43). Tuan (1977) defines place as “whatever stable object catches our attention” (p. 161) and “an organized world of meaning” (p. 179). It emphasizes “connections people have with one another and their surroundings” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. vi). The “identity of place is achieved by dramatizing the aspirations, needs, and functional rhythms of personal and group life” (Tuan, 1977, p. 178). Furthermore, the theory supports the concept that the “quality of life depends on the connections that

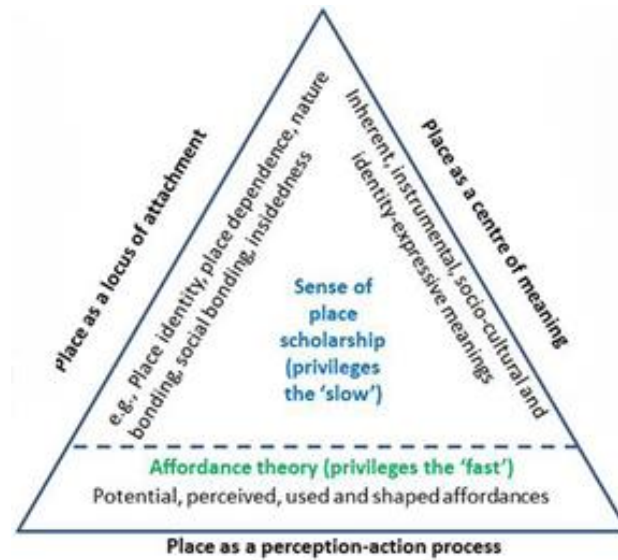
people have with one another and their surroundings, rather than on material wealth” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998).

Figure 2.1 demonstrates three aspects of the theory of place developing a representation of the concept that “describes human connection to places” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 1). The first aspect is place attachment, which is referred to as the “emotional bonds between an individual and a geographic locale,” indicating “how strongly a person is connected to a place” (Raymond et al., 2017, pp. 1-2). The attachment to place occurs slowly, growing stronger as the longevity of residing in a specific area grows (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2). The second aspect is place meaning, which indicates the “descriptive, symbolic meaning that people ascribe to a place,” developing meaning through experiences and relationships to places (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2). Strong attachments and stable meanings are developed overtime, slowly growing in intensity and bond (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2). In addition to place attachment and meaning, the theory of place combined with the affordance theory develops the third aspect, indicating the perception of space develops the perception of the possibility for actions that can occur within a particular setting (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 4). Place is an environment that is “immediately perceivable” through information and meaning, creating the possibility of dynamic relationships “between elements of mind, body, culture, and environment” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 4).



**Figure 2.1**

*Theory of Place*



(Raymond et al., 2017, p.1)

The theory of place, as displayed in Figure 2.1, creates “place meanings and place attachment” through “environmental behavior across the life course” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 11). Intertwining place meaning, place attachment, and place affordance builds a well-rounded view of the theory of place, and illustrates how individuals connect, disseminate, and act on perceived possibilities within an area (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2).

What Lau and Li (2018) call “sense of place” (p. 45) is a crucial component of reeducation of people to learn the art of living well where they are (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. 3). The “sense of place quite simply *is*,” Basso (1996) explains, “as natural and straightforward as our fondness for certain colors and culinary tastes...” (p. xiii). The thought that sense of place “might be complicated, or even very interesting, seldom

crosses our minds,” yet it asserts itself in “pressing and powerful ways, and its often-subtle components come surging into awareness” (Basso, 1996, p. xiii). The sense of place is a cultural activity and “is not just something that people know and feel, it is something people *do*” (Basso, 1996, p. 143). It is “accepted as a simple fact of life, as a regular aspect of how things are” and “inseparable from the ideas that inform it” (Basso, 1996, p. 144). Basso (1996) explained:

Sense of place asserts itself at varying levels of mental and emotional intensity. Whether it is lived in memory or experienced on the spot, the strength of its impact is commensurate with the richness of its contents, with the range and diversity of symbolic associations that swim within its reach and move it on its course. (p. 145)

The theory also indicates that the “quality of all our lives depends on raising a generation of young people to take their places as participants in a moral, communal, and democratic society” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. 5). Relph (2008) described this theory in the following way: “while place meanings are rooting in the physical setting and its activities, they are not a property of them but a property of human interaction and experiences of those places” (p. 47). “Places...are as much a part of us as we are of them,” states Basso (1996, p. xiv). They are “fueled by sentiments of inclusion, belonging, and connectedness to the past” (Basso, 1996, pp. 145-146). This sense of place “roots individuals in the social and cultural soils from which they have sprung together, holding them there in the grip of a shared identity, a localized version of selfhood” (Basso, 1996, p. 146).

Francisco Guajardo, a Professor of Education at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, is a noted expert in place-based education, with a strong connection to the

Theory of Place (Getting Smart, 2019). Guajardo’s understanding of the value of place developed through how he was raised in a small, rural Mexico border town of Texas (Getting Smart, 2019). His parents were storytellers “through nurturing duties” and “documenting life” (Getting Smart, 2019). Through the reflection of his personal life, the story told by Guajardo’s family cemented a consciousness of the idea of place (Getting Smart, 2019). Guajardo explains, “coming to place has a vital, very significant way of understanding” that developed over many years (Getting Smart, 2019). He continues to explain that “fun comes from where you are and your imagination, but your imagination is sparked by your experiences that you have access to” (Getting Smart, 2019). Guajardo explains that individuals “have fun when they are integrating with their place, as it releases a different kind of imagination” (Getting Smart, 2019). When forming ideas and values, it is essential for young individuals to examine their place, as it informs and shapes who they are and where they are from, developing respect for their place (Getting Smart, 2019). Through this process, young adults are “imagining themselves in the world in very concrete ways and finding their voice as intellectuals and citizens” (Getting Smart, 2019). Guajardo states, “Place has to do with how they find their voice, how their voice will look, and how it will sound,” emphasizing many lessons are to be learned from the value of place (Getting Smart, 2019).

Canter (1997) described the identity of place, stressing experience and choice, stating:

We have not fully identified the place until we know a) what behavior is associated with, or it is anticipated will be housed in, a given locus, b) what the physical parameters of that setting are, and c) the description or conception, which people hold of that behavior in that physical environment. (pp. 58-59)

Creswell (2009) described the identity of place, stressing material, meaning, and practice stating:

The material topography of place is made by people doing things according to the meaning they might wish a place to evoke. Meanings gain a measure of persistence when they are inscribed into the material landscape but are open to contestation by practices that do not conform to the expectations that come with place. (p. 170)

These three models of identification of place indicate the importance of “not only one’s perception but also one’s feeling about place” (Lau & Li, 2019, p. 45). As Morgan (2009) explains, “The concept of place refers to the subjective experience of embodied human existence in the material” (p. 11). Place allows people to make connections in particular ways that develop a sense of community and belonging (McCarthy, 2002, p. 180). Guajardo et al. (2016) explained the importance of place is due to each community holding “unique strengths, assets, and gifts, along with stories that exemplify and illustrate them” (p. 35). Places are also immersed in “distinct histories and dynamics that need to be understood if efforts to change them are to be successful and just” (p. 35). This theory provides a direction to “think about the way people live in this world” (McCarthy, 2002, p. 181). In addition, it assists in understanding how people are always connected, as well as shaped by, their environment (McCarthy, 2009, p. 183).

### ***Importance of Place in Rural Areas***

Place, “the physical world that surrounds us all,” is vital in rural communities, as it is “an epistemological condition that knows landscape’s power to constitute human identity” (McCarthy, 2009, p. 183). Individuals that live in these areas value where they

live, developing deep roots and strong connections (Conyers, 2001, p. 99). Haas and Nachtigal (1998) inform:

Connections to place include five components: (a) location: where we live ecologically, (b) civics: where we live politically, (c) worth: where we live economically, (d) connection: where we live spiritually, and (e) belonging: where we live in community. (Azano et al., 2017, p. 67 as cited in Haas & Nachtigal, 1998)

Making “connections to place prioritizes local knowledge” (Azano et al., 2017, p. 67). It takes a real place attaching “memory, common bonds, community habits, sorrows, and love” coming together to evoke song (Conyers, 2001, p. 102). Utilizing the surroundings of rural communities “is an opportunity for the land’s rhythm to become part of everyday life” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. 5). Sustaining rural requires “strong support by local residents for preserving rural character in the areas,” as place attachment is an “important motivation affecting residents’ attitudes toward land preservation” and community success (Lokocz et al., 2011, p. 65). Understanding the values local residents hold “significantly contributes to rural character” (Lokocz, 2011, p. 65). Lokocz et al. (2011) explain, “Plac[ing] a high value on natural amenities” (p. 71) promotes the “attempts to preserve rural character” (p. 66), as “understanding the values and attachments that residents have to their land and the surrounding rural landscapes is critical” (p. 75).

Montgomery (2004) explains, “Taking on perspective that builds on current values and strengths of a rural place can enhance the ways that schools and communities view their relationship and their assets” (p. 3). Place “is almost always associated with community,” as it “is a piece of nature that has been perfected through the use and the

cultivation and dwelling of generations of families,” built as a “place of habitation” (Conyers, 2001, p. 103). It is important for educators to become more conscious about the concept of place (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 620). Aristotle explained the power of place as:

To be at all – to exist in any way- is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is a requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced. How could it be otherwise? How could we fail to recognize this primal fact? (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 622)

Place “always ties us to the earth, to the land, to the dust from which we came” (Conyers, 2001, p. 103). It “humbles us; but it also causes us to think about real possibilities instead of possible realities” (Conyers, 2001, p. 103). Pythagorean Archytas of Tarentum stated:

Since everything that is in motion is moved in some place, it is obvious that one has to grant priority to place, in which that which causes motion or is acted upon will be. Perhaps thus it is the first of things, since all existing things are either in place or not without place. (Conyers, 2001, p. 106)

In rural areas, place is significant because all members of the community “speak and sing of [the place] because it offers to [them] a door by which [they] know what is true for all people, everywhere” (Conyers, 2001, p. 105). Rural community members “know words about this place; they are the same words that all [the] classmates and all [the] kinfolk know – the same words, and [they] think of them every time the place is mentioned” (Conyers, 2001, p. 105). As Eudora Welty stated, “It is through place that we put out roots, wherever birth, fate, chance, or our traveling selves set us down; but what these roots reach toward is the deep and running vein, eternal and consistent and everywhere purely itself” (Conyers, 2001, p. 106).

### ***Connection of Place for Gifted Rural Individuals***

As Howley (1998) explained, the theory of place provides the importance of:

Connections of rural people to wilderness, to life on the land, and to community, they have grounded ethics and the nature of the good life in lived experience in ways that defy most other cultural workers...[becoming] stewards of the land...[through] practical, ethical and aesthetic [ways]. (p. 9)

Understanding and promoting place provides the ability for gifted individuals to connect with local professionals and leaders to support success within rural areas (Surface, 2016). Through developing meaning connected to place, land, family, and community, students are actively engaged in ways they can “facilitate rural adulthoods” (Surface, 2016). Tuan (1977) explained, “Loyalty to homeland is taught in childhood” (p. 160). Rural communities can give rural students, especially gifted, “the message that [their] place is one of value and worthy of learning about” (Sparks, 2016, p. 12). Surface (2016) explained, there is a need to “celebrate place and champion personalized education” to meet the needs of rural gifted students. Creating opportunities for gifted individuals “to define and participate on their terms using the tools they are accustomed...we give them the freedom to enact change and with a love of place, change for the better” (Surface, 2016). Providing “a small ‘nudge’ that causes our young gifted students to move home to provide much-needed leadership will happen” through the promotion and understanding of the theory of place (Surface, 2016). Surface (2016) urges, “These students are our future and deserve to develop their talent.”

## **The Need for Retention of Gifted Individuals in Rural Areas**

A reference to the “brain drain” is often cited as one of the biggest struggles and impacts on rural communities (e.g., Howley, 2009; Howley et al., 2009; Lawrence, 2009; Paul & Seward, 2016; Puryear & Kettler, 2017). The brain drain refers to the issue of “the loss of the most highly educated people from rural areas” (Howley, 2009, p. 516). This loss occurs when rural communities’ brightest students leave the community to continue their education and career path opportunities, never returning to their rural communities. The brain drain is seen as the only option for economic success for many young adults, and therefore a “necessary evil” (Paul & Seward, 2016, p. 312). Lawrence (2009) notes that to nurture and sustain the rural lifestyle, rural areas need articulate leaders who understand and love their communities and will make valuable contributions to the community, culture, and economy (p. 462). Many articles explain how students of rural communities want to stay, but the opportunities and resources often make it impossible (Howley, 2009; Howley et al., 2009; Lawrence, 2009; Paul & Seward, 2016; Puryear & Kettler, 2017).

### ***Reasons for Gifted Individuals to Stay***

While there is a known depletion of successful individuals in rural communities, the literature often refers to individuals’ desire to stay in their small, home community (Howley, 2009, 547). Howley (2009) explains, “A common theme... is the desire to keep living in a rural place, especially the one they grew up in, remaining close with their families” (p. 547). The desire to stay is built upon relationships with community members, close family ties, and the sense of belonging (Wilcox et al., 2014, p. 7).



Lawrence (2009) explains, “rural students thought of their schools as an extension of family, with appreciation for the support they received” (p. 465). Today, however, “rural ways of life of living and being and knowing are devalued” (Howley, 2009, p. 540). This concept leads to the constant lack of funding, resources, teacher retention and training, and economic disadvantages (Wilcox et al., 2014, pp. 2-3). Topped with the secluded location leads to individuals developing an idea of limited opportunities and ability to succeed (Wilcox et al., 2014, pp. 2-3).

### ***Reasons Why Gifted Individuals Leave***

For many gifted students, leaving is seen as the only option for a successful and happy life (Paul & Seward, 2016, p. 312). There are multiple features of rural communities that make it difficult for individuals to stay, which are “fatalism, negative self-image, self-victimization, and compartmentalization of appropriate roles” (Lawrence, 2009, pp. 462-463). It is common for “rural schools and communities to tell gifted students they must leave in order to have fulfilling lives – lives made fulfilling by jobs available only in cities” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 466). While rural community members want the best for their bright individuals, promoting individuals to leave “admonishes rural life, while at the same time creating false hopes for finding a ‘happy’ life at great distance from family, friends, and community” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 467). While some students are eager to leave their small towns, “many gifted students from rural places want to stay in their communities instead of leaving to find what they are told is suitable work” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 462).

### ***Success of Local Areas Rely on Top Students***

Rural communities cannot afford to lose the contributions that gifted rural students give, regardless of whether, or not, they are formally identified as gifted, since they are the community leaders of the future (Lawrence, 2009, p. 462). For the sustainability and success of rural communities, these areas “need articulate leaders who understand and love rural places – people who are visionary and deeply rooted in rural life and who will create new businesses and products, stories, music, art, and responsible ways to develop resources” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 462). The reason rural communities need to nurture gifted students is because gifted students “understand the value of rural life and may find new and creative ways to sustain what is valuable in rural places” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 465).

### **Challenges for Gifted Individuals in Rural Areas**

#### ***Lack of Opportunities and Higher Education Access***

The lack of resources and funding for rural school districts often cuts advanced courses, leaving high-potential students with classes that lead to boredom (Zabloski & Milacci, 2012, p. 176). A solution to this may include dual-enrollment, online classes, or advanced placement (Van Tassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2016, pp. 292-294). Utilizing dual-enrollment and online courses, especially in high school, may keep students engaged and on track for graduation (Van Tassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2016, pp. 301-302). Advanced placement can be used in the younger grades for a similar effect (Van Tassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2016, pp. 295). This allows students to connect to “an academic peer group” to enhance learning (Van Tassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2016, p. 291).

In addition to a lack of resources and funding, rural districts often have a high teacher turnover rate and an education staff that is less qualified than those in urban areas (Davalos & Griffin, 1999, p. 308). A beginning solution may be to improve educator training, increase the understanding of the nature and needs of gifted learners, provide programming to increase interest and rigor, and assist teachers in better utilizing resources at their fingertips (Van Tassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2016, pp. 303-304).

Teacher education and training remain one of the significant challenges when discussing the success of gifted individuals in rural communities. There is often a lack of understanding about what giftedness is, how to differentiate for these students, minimal resources, and often an older mindset on the needs of gifted individuals (Davalos & Griffin, 1999, p. 308). Davalos and Griffin (1999) explain that limited funding and persistent attitudes that gifted students can do without special services are partially responsible for the lack of success for gifted students (p. 308). Davalos and Griffin (1999) go on to explain that “the push for heterogeneous grouping of students...the classroom teacher either differentiates curriculum according to student needs, abilities, and interests or teaches all students as if they are the same” (p. 308). It comes as no shock that often the latter is the option teachers go with, letting the top students float by, bored and underestimating their potentials (Zabloski & Milacci, 2012, p. 176). The lack of teacher training and education leads to the lack of challenge for gifted students, which in turn leads these students to believe they need to move away to succeed and find fulfillment and enjoyment in what they do (Azano et al., 2014, pp. 97-98).

### ***Disparity in Funding and Teacher Training***

Rural school districts are in constant need of funding and qualified teachers. It is not uncommon to see rural schools pinching budgets, crafting resources, and making do with what they have (Irvin et al., 2009, p. 29). Rural school districts often find themselves in a bind when it comes to hiring and luring highly qualified educators (Irvin et al., 2009, p. 29). Irvin et al. (2009) state, “Many small rural schools have difficulty staffing teachers” (p. 29). With lower pay, fewer resources, and the reality of living in isolated regions, these communities find it challenging to bring qualified and trained teachers into their communities (Irvin et al., 2009, p. 29).

A product of the lack of hiring of qualified professionals, causes many “rural schools [to] tend to have fewer specialists for gifted education services, limited resources and programming options, fewer research opportunities and field trips, and lack of services” (Azano et al., 2017, p. 63). “Fewer specialists, untrained staff, limited resources, and fewer program options” hinder qualified teachers from finding an incentive to move to isolated regions, when they instead can live in more convenient locations, are paid more, and will struggle less to make ends meet (Azano et al., 2014, p. 89). When it comes to gifted education, “teachers of gifted students typically have to travel long distances between schools to work with very diverse groupings of students” developing “feelings of professional isolation” (Azano et al., 2014, p. 97). Due to the lack of qualified education professionals, students attending rural school districts “experience inadequately supported gifted programs” (Kettler et al., 2015, p. 113).

### *Encouragement to Make a Life Outside Local Communities*

Through previous research, there have been recommendations made to encourage the retention of gifted individuals to stay in their local communities. These recommendations include incorporating resources unique to rural, a place-based investment model, dual-enrollment, and improved teacher training (Lawrence, 2009, pp. 482-483). The recommendations are intended to lead gifted individuals to realize the possibility of building a desirous future for themselves in their home communities. As Ellzey & Karnes (1991) explain, “enhance[ing] community pride, staff commitment, and career opportunity and academic success for students” (p. 57) will keep individuals and increase the sustainability of rural areas and create potential solutions. Through building a deeper understanding of the opportunities that may arise in local communities, gifted individuals may feel a need to stay in their communities. Howley (2009) portrays this understanding by explaining:

Rural communities also need not only farmers and mechanics (the old middle class) and therapists and physicians (nominal members of the new middle class) but freethinkers and critics disposed to help sustain rural places and positioned in social classes other than the elite. (p. 547)

In addition, support from local community and family members, and the participation in community activities presents a major role in the success and satisfaction in all rural children’s lives, especially gifted individuals (Miller et al., 2014, p. 14). By promoting a sense of family and community support in interests, gifted individuals may be more apt to stay within their community, making more connections for future aspirations (Miller et al., 2014, p. 14). Rural communities often hold value in extracurricular activities, such as sports, 4H, and clubs, in addition to having family and

community supports. Davalos and Griffin (2014) state, “Having this stability and sense of belonging in the classroom and community provided the social and emotional support necessary for these gifted students to concentrate on educations” (p. 312).

### **Supports for Gifted Individuals to Live in Rural Areas**

Howley (2009) implores, “Rural schools should serve rural families and communities, not a national and global economic machine” (p. 552). This concept can only be possible if rural schools continue “supporting and helping families and communities to further develop rural lifeways” (Howley, 2009, p. 552). Haas and Nachtigal (1998) state, “The quality of all our lives depends on raising a generation of young people to take their places as participants in a moral, communal, and democratic society” (p. 12).

### ***Place-Based Education in Support of Community***

As the community is vital in rural areas, designing a curriculum program with a place-based investment model in mind would increase community involvement and enhance students’ education (Paul & Seward, 2016, p. 312). This education model “emphasizes meaningful and plentiful community resources, integrating ‘rural purposes’ into gifted programming in rural schools, thereby mitigating some of the challenges” (Azano et al., 2014, p. 97). The place-based investment model “develops talents of high-potential youth in ways that could serve as an investment in the community” (Paul & Seward, 2016, p. 312). This model helps students develop “the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to adapt to or shape their environment” (Paul & Seward, 2016, p. 312) and grounds learning in “local phenomena and students’ lived experience...promoting

curricular relevance for rural students” (Azano et al., 2017, p. 67 as cited in Smith, 2002, p. 586). The curriculum is “designed to expose students to a wide variety of disciplines, topics, occupations, hobbies, persons, places, and events that would not ordinarily be covered in the regular curriculum” (Paul & Seward, 2016, p. 320).

In addition, this allows for strong community involvement, entrepreneurial thinking, development of future career aspirations, and advancement in academics to enrich students (Paul & Seward, 2016, p. 320). Howley (2009) states, “Rural education is about realms of meaning already in play in everyday life in rural communities and families” (p. 550), and the place-based investment model supports just that. When student learning is “tied to where a child lives” it becomes “equivalent to learning in a place that matters” (Azano et al., 2017, p. 67).

“PLACE (Place, Literacy, Achievement, Community, and Engagement) uses place-based instruction to promote skills in historically underserved high ability rural youth” (Azano et al., 2017, p. 63). In addition, it also “supports and honors the unique characteristics of where children live and attend school” (Azano et al., 2017, p. 67).

“Place has different, unique characteristics in each setting and the possibilities for engaging students with place-based curriculum are dependent on recognition of those differences,” explains Azano et al. (2017, p. 74). Place-based curriculum provides tailored instructional strategies, as “rural students are deeply tied to locality by their ‘sense of place’ or a constructed reality ‘informed by the unique experiences, histories, motives, and goals that each of us brings to the spaces with which we identify’” (Azano

et al., 2017, p. 67 as cited in Hutchinson, 2004, p.11). Allowing students to identify with the curriculum, ensures the “opportunity to learn” is based on the assumption:

Students do not have access to the same resources or experiences as the majority population, and hence, should not be compared to the majority population when determining their aptitude and achievement, but rather, should be compared to others who have the same opportunity to learn. (Azano et al., 2017, p. 63)

### ***Develop Strong Community and School Relations***

Rural areas survive because of the collaboration of all members of the community. Haas and Nachtigal (1998) define community as “how we collectively create a story about our place” and “how we live well together” (p. 20). They go on to state that communities are “narratives of who we are, how we get along together, how we make a living, and how we are connected” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. 20). This strong community collaboration should also be found within the schools or rural areas.

Including parents, families, council members, and experts in fields within the community in prominent roles provides well-rounded supports for the schools and role models for the students (Lawrence, 2009, p. 485). School “programs in rural areas that reach out to parents and peers may be effective in supporting the career decision making of gifted” by introducing students to new ideas, concepts, and careers (Lawrence, 2009, p. 485).

“Talent development occurs in the community” (Montgomery, 2004, p. 5) due to collaborations with experts and students. Through community collaboration, students are likely to be more interested and willing to discover new concepts when the ideas relate to their local communities (Montgomery, 2004, p. 4). “The families and teachers of these students can work together with what the community has to offer to differentiate learning experiences,” explains Montgomery (2004, p. 4). With a strong infusion of school and



community, the collaboration will provide students with strong supports, allow them to explore future options and needs of their local communities, and develop ideas on how to sustain the well-being of their community and the members that reside there (Howley et al., 2009, p. 528).

### ***Encourage Students to Build Careers in Local Communities***

As discussed, active community and school supports will lead to an instructional collaboration that allows for the differentiation of materials, providing insight, buy-in, and engagement for the students. Through community and school relations, educators and community members can “encourage students to develop the talents that are useful or valued in their rural communities” (Montgomery, 2004, p. 4). Encouraging students to develop talents to promote success in their local communities is pertinent to the survival and success of the areas, promoting new opportunities (Howley et al., 2009, p. 528). Through encouragement and supports, community members and stakeholders will be “equipping rural students and the adults who surround them with tools to create different, better future[s]” (Hass & Nachtigal, 1998, p. vi). Students in rural districts need to “understand how to create different futures for themselves” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. 16). School districts and community organizations can “provide an ‘environment of possibilities’ for planning, sustained focus, creative problem solving, and leadership” (Montgomery, 2004, p. 4). This unique position may “assist rural students in working in the real world to communicate with professionals and others outside of their community” (Montgomery, 2004, pp. 4-5).

Providing real-world experiences with the collaboration of community members that are experts in their field provides students with unique, applicable skills that “reinvigorate rigorous learning, and re-engage” individuals in their community (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. 16). These experiences also allow students to explore local careers, provide insight to future needs, and allow for a deeper understanding of what opportunities may exist in the future. In addition, the experiences cause students to develop career interests and specific pathways for future education or training. Montgomery (2004) explains, “children living in rural areas can maximize their education by making choices, with advice and support of families and teachers, to stay involved in their schools and communities” (p. 4). Furthermore, Haas and Nachtigal (1998) implore, “Rural schools should teach how to create jobs, not just how to get jobs working for someone else” (p. 16).

### ***Promote Potentials for Rural Areas***

Promoting the potential for rural areas requires students to be “at the center of their own learning and learning environment” allowing for the incorporation of “multimodal forms of continuous assessment to elicit student data critical for curricular and instructional planning and adjustment” (Azano et al., 2017, p. 66). Montgomery (2004) identifies this concept by stating, “Creative use of resources can serve as educational tools to build initiative among the talented youth of our rural communities” (p. 6). Combining resources, community experts, and differentiated educational experiences, relating to students’ local experiences, allows for promoted skills that may lead to future potential sustainability aspects of the local communities (Howley, 2009, p.

557). It is crucial that “appropriate curriculum for gifted students differs substantially from the general education curriculum ‘in content, process, product, and learning environment;’ it needs to be ‘more complex, more abstract, and more varied”” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 486 as cited in Ehlers & Montgomery, 1999, p. 96) to challenge and engage advanced students. An aspect that adequately promotes potential in rural areas is “teachers who appreciate and nurture the gifts of bright rural students, play a vital role in their lives...rural teachers need to learn how to offer differentiated instruction to students across a wide range of abilities, skills, and interests” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 486).

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Through reviewing the literature, it is apparent that more research on rural education, specifically rural gifted education, is warranted. As Wilcox et al. (2014) explain, “the fact remains that few studies of rural schools, districts, and their community contexts are sufficiently nuanced to take into account the obvious import of ‘place’ and the very idea of ‘the rural’” (p. 1). Lawrence (2009) supports this statement by explaining that while the current research has “frame[d] essential issues, it is also a plea for continued research” (p. 461). “Relatively little is known about the experiences of gifted students in rural areas” (Azano et al., 2014, p. 88), which is an ongoing dilemma, as deliberated in literature, significantly affecting rural gifted students. Haas and Nachtigal (1998) explain, “Telling a community’s story is key to the survival” of rural areas (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. 9).

Current literature supports the importance of understanding what rural is, the theory of place, the importance of gifted education in rural areas, challenges this

population faces, and current support strategies that may be implemented into these schools. The gaps in the literature support the need for future research on the perceptions regarding gifted young adults living in rural communities. By nurturing gifted students and providing them with opportunities and encouragement to stay, they “may find new and creative ways to sustain what is valued in rural places” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 465).

### **Chapter Summary**

“While respecting and integrating the unique experiences of life in rural America” (Azano et al., 2017, p. 66), education based around the theory of place can “invent the world we want to live in by linking people and their places, reinvigorating an inclusive civic life, and creating economic opportunities that do not require us to leave home” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. 25). “Rural communities need to find ways to attract new residents and retain current ones, stimulate economic development, combine cultures while preserving cultural diversity, and support educational institutions that shape and sustain democratic engagement” (Howley et al., 2009, p. 528). While gaps in the literature exist regarding perceptions of young gifted individuals living in rural communities, “helping talented students understand the value of contributing as leaders to their own communities would be a worthy aim for gifted programs in rural places” (Howley et al., 2009, p. 528).

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

To adequately portray experiences and stories of community members, this qualitative research study used the narrative approach, allowing for a holistic view of selected participants' perceptions regarding young gifted individuals' living in a rural community. The holistic approach emphasized the "complex picture of the problem or issue under study...identifying the complex interactions of factors in any situation" (Creswell, 2013, p. 47). The narrative study allowed the research to focus on "study[ing] people's individual life stories" (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 269). Narrative studies require "a great deal of understanding and sensitivity between the researcher and the person(s) being studied" (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 269).

### **Study Purpose and Problem**

The purpose of this study was to examine supports for, and barriers to, gifted young adults' choices regarding living in rural communities. The problem this study explored is the ideas of why rural areas lose many of their bright community members to their urban neighbors that ultimately leads to the loss of contributions these individuals could make in improving the rural lifestyle and communities.

## **Research Questions**

This research was guided by an overarching research question with four sub-questions. The overarching question was:

What are the supports and barriers to gifted young adults' choices regarding living in rural communities?

The sub-questions in support of the overarching question were:

1. What are the perceptions of young gifted adults' regarding living in rural communities?
2. What are the perceptions of family members of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?
3. What are the perceptions of mentors of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?
4. What are the perceptions of community leaders of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?

These questions provided the direction of data collection, analysis, and the foundation for future recommendations.

The researcher developed questions to explore different perspectives of community members regarding perceptions of gifted young individuals residing in rural communities. These guiding questions allowed for all stakeholders to provide insight as to what rural areas provide gifted young people, how gifted young people can improve rural living, and what supports this population may need to stay or return. By providing personal experience, knowledge, and perceptions, the questions guided participant

responses regarding their perceptions of gifted young individuals' choices regarding residing in rural locations. Furthermore, the research questions addressed the concern of the future of rural communities, their success, and community member perceptions regarding the matter. This study amplified community member voices, stories, and perceptions, promoting their voices to be heard.

### **Research Design**

The narrative approach allowed for participants stories and perceptions to be revealed about their experiences and community (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 255). The inquiry approach “rests on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make sense of random experience by the imposition of story structures” (Bell, 2002, p. 207). Story structures themselves are “one of the defining features of a culture...through which it makes sense of the world” (Bell, 2002, p. 207). The narrative approach, as Bell (2002) explained, “has an inherently temporal thread in that current events are understood as rising out of past happenings and pointing toward future outcomes” (p. 207).

Narrative studies are “interpreted to understand and illuminate the life and culture that created it” (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 255). Stories are shaped by, as Bell (2002) explained, “lifelong personal and community narratives” (p. 208). These stories “provide a window into people’s beliefs and experiences” (p. 209). Furthermore, narrative inquiries go beyond a rhetorical structure of “simply telling stories, to analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates” (p. 208). Creswell (2013) informs that the approach provides “ways for analyzing and understanding the stories” (p. 70), developing a framework to “‘restory’ the stories” (p.

74). “Restorying is the process of reorganizing the stories into some general type of framework” (Creswell, 2013, p. 74). The stories developed through this approach involve a “three-dimensional narrative inquiry space” that includes interaction, continuity, and situation (Creswell, 2013, p. 75). The narrative approach “requires a great deal of understanding and sensitivity between the researcher and the persons being studied” (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 269).

### ***Setting***

The narrative research study took place in a remote rural community, in a western state in the United States. Remote rural communities hold unique perspectives, characteristics, and values. These areas are located “more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster” (NCES, 2006). Remote rural areas bring a whole new meaning to rural due to the lack of convenience aspect to urbanized locations, experiences, and culturalism. The distance from urban areas creates isolation, solitude, lack of convenience, and different lived experiences such as raising families, experiences growing up, and different resources and supports in and out of school.

### ***Sampling Type***

A combination of purposeful and snowball sampling occurred to identify and select study participants. Purposeful sampling includes participants that are chosen due to being “particularly interesting” to the researcher (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 19). This sampling model “allows the researcher to select those participants who will provide the richest information, those who are the most interesting, and those who manifest the



characteristics of most interest to the researcher” (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 19). In addition, the selected individuals were chosen to “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156).

The snowball sampling technique allowed the researcher to “find subjects of interest from those who are most likely to be able to identify them” (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 19). This technique allowed the researcher to use “a few extant subjects to identify other individuals who might be appropriate for the study” (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 19). In addition, this method allowed participants to continue to be discovered until the researcher had a sample size that was appropriate for the study (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 19). By identifying participants of interest “from people who know people who know what [individuals] are information-rich” (Creswell, 2013, p. 158) provided quality responses that informed the research. The purposeful and snowball sampling techniques allowed for the selection of participants to occur in a manner that enabled the researcher to ensure participants met the prerequisites addressed in the following section.

### ***Participants***

Three to four participants for each of the four categories were selected to participate in the study based on purposeful and snowball sampling techniques. The four categories of participants were young gifted individuals (young adults from rural and self-identify as gifted), family members of gifted individuals (e.g. parents, guardians, grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings), mentors of gifted students (e.g. teachers, coaches, religious leaders), and community leaders (e.g. city council members, board of education members, business owners, religious leaders). Three to four individuals from

each of the four categories allowed for a pool of participants that was “used to develop a collective story” (Creswell, 2013, p. 157). When collecting data for a narrative study, one or two individuals are recommended to represent the population in question (Creswell, 2013, p. 157). Due to collecting information from four different categories and conducting single interviews, the research study involved three to four individuals from each category to expand the collected data pool. The participant structure allowed for developing a well-rounded concept of the multiple perspectives that come together to establish the perspectives of young gifted individuals residing in rural communities (Creswell, 2013, p. 157).

The community partner in this study assisted the researcher in delivering recruitment flyers to local organizations, local businesses, community centers, and school officials. Due to emergency circumstances, the researcher identified and partnered with a new community partner prior to the start of the recruitment process. The community partner plays a crucial role in the local community, as a highly involved individual that supports all citizens, represents the community on the city council board, and promotes new ideas that encourages the success and sustainability of the region, while maintaining the rural lifestyle. Individuals interested in participating in the research study were prompted by the recruitment flyer to contact the researcher or the community partner for more information regarding the study. While the community partner was not directly involved in the research study after the recruitment process was complete, the partner provided the researcher with suggestions on potential directions, advising research, and provided suggestions and feedback.

The recruitment process allowed interested individuals to contact the researcher or the researcher's community partner to learn more about the study. The technique provided convenience, referrals, and recommendations, ensuring all selected participants met the requirements of the study. To participate in the study, participants were required to be eighteen years or older, live in the designated remote rural western state in the United States, and have an impact on gifted young individuals. To assist the researcher in reaching out and identifying whether currently enrolled students that were interested in participating were identified as gifted and 18 years of age, the researcher obtained the superintendent's approval to contact the Director of Gifted Education of the school district that is located in the remote rural area. This assisted the researcher to communicate with interested students and indicate whether they fit the requirements of the research study. Due to the limitation of individuals of 18 years of age, currently enrolled in the local high school, and identified as gifted, the researcher broadened the young gifted adult category, through IRB approval, to include up to recent college graduates that self-identified as gifted. By broadening the young gifted adult category, the researcher maintained the intent of the category, increasing participant possibilities.

When indicating interest in participating in the study, individuals provided the researcher or the community partner with a contact email address to receive a formal recruitment email that provided the confirmation to partake in the research study. The formal recruitment email interested individuals received provided details based on the category in which the interested participant associated (community leader, family member, mentor, or young gifted individual). The slight differentiation in the

recruitment email scripts allowed for individuals from each category to be addressed with details that pertained to them. Many interested individuals were able to fit a variety of the categories and were placed in the most applicable category. The researcher communicated with the participants to set a time that was convenient for the participant to interview individually, face-to-face with the researcher. Interviews were conducted by the researcher in a quiet, public location, such as the local bookstore, designated room at the local community college, or quiet area in a local restaurant, and lasted no longer than an hour.

### **Data Collection**

The collection of data occurred through in-depth, research-based interviews containing open-ended questions, further prompted discussions, and observations of the individual's community. Interviews took place in person, face-to-face, and were recorded with permission from the participant, documented within a signed informed consent form. Interviews were conducted face-to-face due to the value of community and personal connection found in rural areas. This data collection format elicited stories and allowed for participant responses to provide insight into experiences, while also engaging in unanticipated discussion areas, assisting in a more in-depth investigation (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 335). According to Creswell (2013), "Stories and epiphanies will emerge from the individual's interviews" (p. 192). The development of interview questions were based on current literature, utilizing the theoretical framework, the theory of place, and suggestions from the designated community partner, guiding themes and concepts. Data collection resulted in first-order narrative stories that were used to tell the story and

experiences of the participants' perceptions. The narrative also resulted in "tell[ing] a story of the possible" (Tieken, 2014, p. 190) and allowed the stories to "come into existence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 150). Participants were asked to review their portion of the narrative to ensure all information was portrayed correctly, providing clarification or changes as to match what the participant intended to portray.

### ***Instrument***

**Interviews.** Interviews allowed participants to elicit stories that informed the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 161). Interviews also provided the researcher with the ability to "find out what [was] in or on someone else's mind" (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 265). The purpose of interviewing was to "access the perspective of the person being interviewed" through open-ended questions (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 165). Best and Kahn (2006) state, "the interview is often superior to other data-gathering devices," generally because people are more willing to talk than write (p. 335). An advantage interviewing had was that it allowed the interviewer to "explain more explicitly the investigation's purpose" (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 335). In addition, conducting interviews also had a unique and effective advantage through revealing human motivation "through actions, feelings, and attitudes" (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 337). A disadvantage of the technique is that it was time-consuming (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 337).

Creswell (2013) informs the seven steps of interviewing as developing research questions, identifying participants, determining the type of interview, developing an adequate recording procedure, designing an interview protocol, refining questions through testing, determining the location interviews will take place, obtaining a consent

form, and following quality interview protocols (pp. 163-166). The first five steps allow researchers to identify and develop a seamless approach in creating and preparing for interviews with participants. The first step, developing research questions, assists in guiding the study based on current literature. The designed questions should be “open-ended, general, and focused on understanding [the] central phenomenon” of the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 163). Creswell (2013) states, interviews should include “approximately five to seven open-ended questions,” developing more as needed to gain an adequate amount of information (p. 164). The next step dives into finding participants within sampling techniques who can answer the questions best (Creswell, 2013, p. 164). Following this step, it is important for researchers to determine the type of interview that will fit the researcher’s ability the best (Creswell, 2013, p. 164). In this particular study, interviews took place face to face, in-person, at a convenient area that had limited distractions. To ensure a convenient, secure location was identified, the researcher consulted the community partner. The identified locations were the local bookstore, a quiet room at the local community college, and a quiet area in a local restaurant if the first two options were closed. Creswell (2013) informs that in order to complete this step adequately, the recording procedure must be developed to ensure all equipment is prepared and proper consent information is documented (p. 164). Best and Kahn (2006) explain, “It is unethical to record interviews without the knowledge and permission of the subject” (p. 336). For this study, participants were recorded on a digital device, per consent of the participant, allowing the researcher to review and transcribe all interactions and conversations. The final preparation step is designing the interview

protocol, also known as an “interview guide,” that provides the interviewer and interviewee all necessary, specific documentation, including questions about the interview process (Creswell, 2013, p. 164).

The next two steps of the process finalize the preparation steps to ensure all aspects of the process are prepared, refined, and edited. Before interviewing, it is crucial to refine or “pilot” the interview questions, making sure they are seamless and thorough, while still at the level the participants will understand (Creswell, 2013, p. 165). This testing period allows for the researcher to identify any bias, reframe questions, collect any necessary background information, and ensure cogency within the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 165). In addition, it is essential for the researcher to identify the location in which the interviews will take place (Creswell, 2013, p. 165). The location should be convenient for participants, while also quiet and free from distractions such as the local bookstore or a quiet room located at the local community college (Creswell, 2013, p. 165). A specific place was identified with the interviewee, provided with options in mind from the researcher, which allowed for convenience and comfort.

The last two steps Creswell (2013) provided a guide for the actual, physical interview process phases. When arriving at the interview location, it is important to provide the participant with all necessary paperwork, including the interview consent form and planned interview questions (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). The interview consent form identifies the interviewee’s rights, the purpose of the study, aspects that will be covered within the interview, the time allotted for the interview, and consent to record the conversation (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). In addition, the consent form identifies how the

results will be utilized (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). In this study, participants were informed of the process, the recording procedures, and the protocol of analyzing results (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). When interviewing, it is important to stick to the designed questions based on literature, to ensure the research is on task and maintaining the planned structure (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). It is also important for the researcher to “be respectful and courteous to the interviewee,” respecting the participant’s time and input (Creswell, 2013, p. 166).

Table 3.1 identifies the interview question protocol and reference to the literature for each question. The interview questions provided a basis and structure to the process and protocol. The interview questions were printed and provided for the interviewee, in addition to the informed consent form, for the interviewee’s records.

**Table 3.1**

*Interview Questions and Rationale.*

Question Number	Interview Question	Purpose of the Question	What the Literature States
1	Why do you live in this area?	Allows to understand the background of the interviewee’s background.	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) state, “Community is how we collectively create a story about our place. It is a narrative of who we are, how we get along together, how we make a living, and how we are connected” (p. 21). The authors go on to state, “Community is how we live well together” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1985, p. 21).



2	Did you grow up in a rural community and return to or stay in that community?	Allows to understand the background of the interviewee's background.	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) state, "Community is how we collectively create a story about our place. It is a narrative of who we are, how we get along together, how we make a living, and how we are connected" (p. 21). The authors go on to state, "Community is how we live well together" (Haas & Nachtigal, 1985, p. 21).
3	Tell me your story in how you came to reside in this area.	Allows to understand the background of the interviewee's background.	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) state, "Community is how we collectively create a story about our place. It is a narrative of who we are, how we get along together, how we make a living, and how we are connected" (p. 21). The authors go on to state, "Community is how we live well together" (Haas & Nachtigal, 1985, p. 21).
4	Do you plan on staying for long in this community?	Allows to understand the background of the interviewee's background.	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) state, "Community is how we collectively create a story about our place. It is a narrative of who we are, how we get along together, how we make a living, and how we are connected" (p. 21). The authors go on to state, "Community is how we live well together" (Haas

			& Nachtigal, 1985, p. 21).
5	Do you have kids? Do you plan for them to stay in the community post high school?	Allows to understand the background of the interviewee's background.	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) state, "Community is how we collectively create a story about our place. It is a narrative of who we are, how we get along together, how we make a living, and how we are connected" (p. 21). The authors go on to state, "Community is how we live well together" (Haas & Nachtigal, 1985, p. 21).
6	Why do people live in this area?	Allows to understand participants overall perceptions of area.	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) state, "Community is how we collectively create a story about our place. It is a narrative of who we are, how we get along together, how we make a living, and how we are connected" (p. 21). The authors go on to state, "Community is how we live well together" (Haas & Nachtigal, 1985, p. 21).
7	What draw does residing in this area have for you and your family?	Informs why people may choose to live in this region and what attracts people to this area.	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) explains, "Living well depends on the connections people have with one another and their surroundings" (p. vi).  Ellzey (1991) explains a benefit of living in a rural area as a "family

			atmosphere” that “provides close and supportive relationships between teachers, students, and community” (p. 56).
8	What is the draw for most people to reside in this area?	Informs why people may choose to live in this region and what attracts people to this area.	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) explains, “Living well depends on the connections people have with one another and their surroundings” (p. vi).  Ellzey (1991) explains a benefit of living in a rural area as a “family atmosphere” that “provides close and supportive relationships between teachers, students, and community” (p. 56).
9	What is your perception of why people reside in this area?	Informs the idea of living in the region, whether it is willing, forced, or the only option for employment or other reasons. This question builds on question one, informing the perception of residing in the area over why people live in the community.	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) explain, “Rural people no longer want to be identified as rural, because it implies backward or ignorant with nothing of value to contribute to one another or to the larger society” (p. 22).
10	What is your perception of outside views regarding people residing in this area?	Informs the idea of living in the region, whether it is willing, forced, or the only option for employment or other reasons. This question builds on question one,	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) state, “Community is how we collectively create a story about our place. It is a narrative of who we are, how we get along together, how we make a

		informing the perception of residing in the area over why people live in the community.	living, and how we are connected” (p. 21). The authors go on to state, “Community is how we live well together” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1985, p. 21).
11	What is your perception regarding the retention of young adults in the community after high school?	Ties back to main research questions, as far as retaining individuals in this region.	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) explain, individuals can “invent the world we want to live in by linking people and their places, reinvigorating an inclusive civic life, and creating economic opportunities that do not require us to leave home” (p. 25).
12	How do the coal mines and power plant influence the area? Now? In the future?	The purpose of this question is to dive into the possibilities the community may hold for future generations to build new sustainable options to develop success within the area.	Tieken (2014) states, “These rural schools are a miner’s canary – the first to go, their sacrifice a warning to others” (p. 188). Tieken (2014) goes on to explain, “It doesn’t have to end this way; this doesn’t have to be the final chapter” (p. 190).
13	How profitable will this area be in the next decade for the community members that reside in the region?	The rumors of this area are bleak, allowing this question to inform where community members see this area heading in the next decade.	Lawrence (2009) states, encouraging and supporting gifted children is “critical to the sustainability of rural communities” (p. 488).  Tieken (2014) explains, “Here, in these communities, the question isn’t whether community exists. Here, the question is whether it

			will continue to exist” (p. 159).
14	What is needed for the success and sustainability of this area?	If the current industries are shut down, this question may provide insight to where the community members feel the career field is headed.	Lawrence (2009) states, encouraging and supporting gifted children is “critical to the sustainability of rural communities” (p. 488).
15	What future careers or industries do you foresee coming to this area to assist in the sustainability of the region?	Provides insight to what careers may develop in the area, allowing community members to provide details on where they see their community going.	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) explain, “Niche markets, local value-added production, and telecommunications that disseminate information everywhere are creating new jobs” (p. 16).
16	What is your familiarity with gifted education?	Assists researcher to understand the depth of knowledge the interviewee has regarding gifted education.	“Curriculum and instruction imbedded within the community and its culture with the support of appropriate role models can increase academic success for rural learners of promise” (Van Tassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2016, p. 297).
17	What are supports for gifted young adults’ choices regarding residing in this community?	In order to better understand the current systems in place and how community members perceive trends, this question allows participants to identify in what ways the community is promoting success and sustainability within its local opportunities and education systems.	Van Tassel-Baska and Hubbard (2016) explain, “Strong and supportive adult role models help rural gifted students understand and respond to their communities and culture” (p. 297). The authors continued to explain, “Curriculum and instruction imbedded within the community and its culture with the support of appropriate role models can increase academic success for rural learners of promise”

			(Van Tassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2016, p. 297).
18	What are the barriers for gifted young adults' choices regarding residing in this community?	Informs the researcher the interviewee's perspective regarding gifted students challenges with residing in their home community.	<p>Azano et al. (2017) explains, increasing "opportunity gaps for rural gifted students" that appear in every aspect of this population's education (p. 64). In addition, rural students face "geographic isolation, a defining criterion of rural spaces, means that many rural students have often not traveled far from their commonly insular communities" (Azano et al., 2017, p. 64).</p> <p>Haas and Nachtigal (1985) explain that many community members feel "there's no way to make a living there" as "rural America's population has dissipated as people have hastened to find jobs in urban factories" (p. 13).</p>
19	What are your perceptions of the local K-12 school district in this area?	This question provides insights to what the education system is doing, providing insight to what is currently happening and what improvements may need to occur.	<p>Haas and Nachtigal (1985) explains, we must be "equipping rural students and the adults who surround them with tools to create a different, better future" (p. vi). They continue to explain, teachers should "relate their work and lives to the places where they live and help students do the same" (p. vi).</p>

			Tieken (2014) states, “That school, it represents us. It’s a home, the heart of the community” (p. 151).
20	How do the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain in or return to this area?	This question is posed to inform whether the schools are reaching students in a way that promotes the local communities, future career aspirations, and incorporating the value of place.	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) state, we “need to help young people understand how to create different futures for themselves... how to create jobs” with entrepreneurship education opportunities (p. 16).  Ellzey (1991) explains, “An effective rural gifted program will enhance community pride, staff commitment, and career opportunity and academic success for students” (p. 57).
21	Do you feel students are challenged, engaged, and invested in their schools and communities? Why?	In order to further identify if schools are perceived to identify local strengths and place value, this question builds on informing the understanding of how well the school district is reaching all students, advancing levels and concepts.	Haas and Nachtigal (1985) explain, “Innovative rural schools hold classes in rural research and development, substituting real work in real time for abstract ‘contemporary-problems’ curricula” (p. 16). This approach allows students to “serve their communities, reinvigorate rigorous learning, and re-engage students turned off by more traditional approaches” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1985, p. 16).

22	What else might be helpful as I study this topic?	This question allowed for the participant to make any suggestions that might further the study and the topic being researched.	
23	Is there anything else you would like to share?	This question was posed to provide the participant with an opportunity to add any final thoughts or ideas that may not have been addressed throughout the interview.	

### **Data Analysis**

The narrative analysis requires the analyzation of the participants’ stories and perceptions, the chronology of events, and epiphanies (Creswell, 2013, p. 189). The theory of place was utilized to assist in analyzing and developing themes across the data, searching for perspectives of young gifted individuals residing in rural communities (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998). The narrative approach utilizes four analytic strategies including thematic analysis, structural form, dialogic and performance analysis, and visual analysis (Creswell, 2013, p. 192), which assisted in the investigation of data collection. The narrative analysis approach “looks backward and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experiences within place” (Creswell, 2013, p. 220), developing a well-rounded, in-depth approach.

As the data was collected, the recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher, allowing for direct interaction with the collected material, developing themes and codes through the process (Creswell, 2013, p. 190). The codes and themes assisted



in developing a “larger meaning of the story,” presenting the narration in a way that focused on the process, theories, and unique features (Creswell, 2013, p. 191). It was important for the researcher to “make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal[ed]” (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 270). The researcher asked participants to review their portion of the completed narrative to ensure all information was portrayed correctly, providing clarification or changes to match what the participant intended to portray (Creswell, 2013, p. 191).

Best and Kahn (2006) describe three important strategies of qualitative data analysis (pp. 270-271). The researcher’s first step is to organize the data (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 270). In this study, the collected data from interviews was formatted to identify responses from the four different participant groups with the same questions asked. This strategy allowed the researcher to organize the data into four main categories found among interview questions, portraying the responses to each category by the four participant categories. The organization strategy also allowed the researcher to apply common codes and themes while visualizing the connections within the participant groups and across all respondents. The next strategy requires the researcher to develop a description of the important aspects of the study (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 270). By developing a description of important elements, the researcher was able to establish a picture of the setting, the participants, perceptions of the participants, and results (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 270). The last recommended strategy requires the researcher to build an interpretation of the data (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 270). This strategy allowed the

researcher to identify the “why,” explain the findings, recognize the significance of results, and identify patterns (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 270).

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity are essential for effective research studies and data collection (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 288). Reliability is defined as the “degree of consistency that the instrument or procedure demonstrates” (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 289). Validity is defined as the “quality of a data-gathering instrument or procedure that enables it to measure what it is supposed to measure” (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 289). In addition, validity is often broken down into two categories, internal validity and external validity. Internal validity is “concerned with the accuracy of the information and how it matches reality,” while external validity is a discussion of “the limited generalizability of the findings and the need, if possible, to replicate the study and its findings” (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 271). Eisner (2017) enforces the concept of reliability and validity by stating, “We seek a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility, that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions” (p. 110). It was important for the researcher to use tactics, such as triangulation of materials, to ensure the credibility of materials.

During the narrative study, the researcher developed a rapport with participants through relationship building conversation at the start of the interviews, allowing for participants to feel comfortable to be involved in the process. Best and Khan (2006) explain, effective interviewing requires “establishing rapport” with participants (p. 336). By building rapport with the participant, the strategy provided confidence and higher

achievement results (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 336). In addition, the researcher ensured the collaboration of resources from multiple sources to support findings and analysis (Creswell, 2013, p. 190). The collected and analyzed data was securely stored in an Outlook Drive managed by the University of Denver and a folder securely locked within a safe only the researcher had access to (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 297). All collected data with linked identifiers is to be destroyed by the researcher three years after the completion of the research study for the safety of participants (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 297). Through adequately analyzing interview results, the process allowed the research to illuminate the subject matter and bring more complex ideas that are “sensitive [to] human perception and understanding” (Creswell, 2013, p. 246).

### **Bias and Limitations**

Within the study, personal biases resulted from the researcher previously being an educator in the local county that the study took place. The researcher had personal experience and connections to the area, including being a resident, previously holding a position that influenced the research, and has an understanding of the ins and outs of the region. Due to this, it was important that the researcher recognized the held position, how it affected connections with participants, and develop ways to reduce bias in the collection of data, analysis phase, and the restory of information. Best and Kahn (2006) explain that while the interview technique has many substantial advantages, the researcher is in constant “danger of interview bias,” due to “the objectivity, sensitivity, and insight of the interviewer [is] crucial” (p. 337).

Validity threats often lead to “effects that obstruct or reduce a study’s comparability or translatability” (Creswell, 2013, p. 245). The researcher took great lengths and utilized recommended strategies to avoid threats to validity. Some of these strategies included prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation of resources, peer review and debriefing, member checking, rich and thick descriptions, and external audits (Creswell, 2013, pp. 250-252). An important strategy that was utilized was triangulation, as the process allowed for the researcher to verify data by “agreement with other data obtained from other sources” (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 271).

### **Chapter Summary**

The research framework for this study was the narrative approach. The narrative approach is “a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience and its study” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Through this approach, face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants from four different categories. Each participant received the same 23 questions, allowing for the researcher to sort, analyze, and code the data through four different question categories. The chapter concluded indicating reliability and validity, and bias and limitations faced.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA COLLECTION AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative research study was to examine supports for, and barriers to young gifted adults' choices regarding living in rural communities.

This research study was guided by an overarching research question with four sub-questions. The overarching question was:

What are the supports and barriers to gifted young adults' choices regarding living in rural communities?

The sub-questions in support of the overarching question were:

1. What are the perceptions of young gifted adults' regarding living in rural communities?
2. What are the perceptions of family members of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?
3. What are the perceptions of mentors of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?
4. What are the perceptions of community leaders of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?

These questions provided the direction of data collection, analysis, and the foundation for future recommendations.

## **Context of the Study**

The research data collected for this study took place in the same remote rural community in a western state of the United States during the fall 2019 and winter of 2020. Data collection spanned over the course of two months, which allowed for convenient scheduling with interested participants' schedules. The data collection process took place with single, face-to-face interviews with community members at a convenient, local location, such as the local bookstore, quiet room in the local community college, or a quiet area in a local restaurant. The location interviews took place were based on the time and day of the week participants were available, as not all locations were open in the rural community on certain days and times. The interviews lasted no more than 60 minutes and were 23 questions, guided by the main research questions and theoretical framework.

## **Description of the Region**

The research study took place in a remote rural community located in a western state of the United States. The community is located "more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is more than 10 miles from an urban cluster" (NCES, 2006). The rural community accounts for the majority of the county's population and is located in the second largest landmass county of the western state (NCES, 2006). Individuals that reside in the region are directly impacted by the production and selling of coal. The non-renewable source has obtained negative publicity in the recent years, affecting the livelihood of those that reside in this remote rural location. Once a mining boom town,

the area has slowly declined in population, leaving its residents to fight for their livelihood and careers.

With recent societal changes and pressures, the community has felt the pressure of risking the surrounding mines shutting down, requiring the inhabitants of the region to find new sources of income and potentially a new way of life. During the time of this research study, surrounding coal mines and the local coal-burning power plant released information regarding projected closure dates and plans to cease production and business. The result currently leaves the members of the community in constant fear, anxious about what the future has to hold for the community and its individuals.

### **Participant Categories**

This qualitative, narrative research study focused on gathering perspectives from remote rural community members regarding young gifted adults' choices in living in rural communities. Community members come in all different ages, experiences, and positions. This research study included four different categories of local community members to assist in informing the research study from multiple perspectives and experiences, representing the make-up of the community. The demographics of the local region is "78% White, 19% Hispanic, 2% Two or More, 1% Black, and 1% Native" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The four categories of community members that informed the research study all hold positions that influence young gifted individuals in the local rural community. The four participant categories include community leaders, mentors of gifted individuals, family members of gifted individuals, and young gifted adults of the

local community. Each category held unique perspectives, stories, and insights adding to the rural narrative.

For this research study, all participants were required to be over the age of 18 and be a current local resident of the rural community. Participants were selected through random, snowball sampling based on their interest in partaking in the research study and recommendations provided by community members that had individuals in mind that would be particularly interesting to the research study. Three to four participants per category were selected, allowing for detailed data collection representing different community members in rural communities.

### ***Community Leaders***

Community leaders represented individuals that hold a valuable position in the community that makes a difference and adds to the overall climate of the rural region. These individuals could have been, city council members, school board members, business owners, school district administration, and more. The individuals that participated in this research study wear multiple hats, as well as fit into the participant category. The three community leaders are known through this research study by pseudonyms: Diane, Blake, and Rae.

### ***Mentors of Gifted Individuals***

Mentors of gifted individuals hold a unique position as they work directly with rural, gifted young individuals. This category represented individuals that are educators, coaches, spiritual mentors, and more. The three individuals that represented this



participant category are known through this research study by pseudonyms: Grayson, Adalyn, and Brooklyn.

### ***Family Members of Gifted Individuals***

Family members of gifted individuals are of the utmost importance in understanding young gifted adults' choices as they continually work to encourage success with their gifted family member. This participant category represented guardians, parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, grandparents, and more family members of gifted individuals. The individuals who represented this participant category are known through this research study by pseudonyms: Callie, Mia, and Maggie.

### ***Young Gifted Adults***

The young gifted adults' category represented individuals that are from the age of 18 to recent college graduates. This participant group assisted in understanding personal experience of those who were from the rural community and had either left or returned to the area. The individuals that represented this participant category through the research study are known by pseudonyms: Sylvie, Audrey, Ellie, and Hazel.

### **Interviews**

The narrative research study involved single, face-to-face interviews with each participant from the four different categories. The interviews highlighted the perceptions rural community members hold regarding the supports and barriers to young gifted adults' choices in residing in rural communities. All participants received the same interview questions that were organized into four main categories; reasons and the draw to living in a rural community, perceptions of the local area, influences of future

sustainability of the area, and gifted education in the area. The four main categories of the interview questions assisted in organizing the collected findings, developing a well-rounded insight into the community members perceptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The following section addresses each main category with each of the participant categories addressed. This provides a structure to the findings, allowing for the different participant categories to be addressed side by side amongst the four main categories.

Table 4.1 illustrates when the interviews took place, where the interviews took place, and how long the interviews lasted. The table also assisted the researcher in organizing and tracking each participant, noting the category in which they belonged, and the pseudonym attached to each participant.

**Table 4.1**

*Participant Interview Log*

Category	Participant Name	Participant Gender	Interview Date	Interview Location	Interview Start Time	Interview Length
Community Leaders	Diane	Female	December 15, 2019	Quiet area in local restaurant	2:30 pm	55 minutes
	Blake	Female	December 15, 2019	Quiet area in local restaurant	5:00 pm	50 minutes
	Rae	Female	January 18, 2020	Quiet area in local restaurant	6:00 pm	42 minutes
Mentors of Gifted Individuals	Grayson	Male	November 23, 2019	Quiet room at local community college	2:45 PM	55 minutes
	Adalyn	Female	November 23, 2019	Quiet area in local restaurant	4:00 PM	45 minutes

	Brooklyn	Female	November 24, 2019	Quiet area in local restaurant	6:30 PM	40 minutes
Family Members of Gifted Individuals	Callie	Female	November 24, 2019	Quiet area in local restaurant	5:00 PM	45 minutes
	Mia	Female	December 14, 2019	Local Bookstore	1:00 PM	40 minutes
	Maggie	Female	January 18, 2020	Local Bookstore	10:00 AM	32 minutes
Identified Gifted Young Adults	Sylvie	Female	November 16, 2019	Local Bookstore	1:30 PM	30 minutes
	Ellie	Female	November 23, 2019	Quiet area in local restaurant	5:30 PM	45 minutes
	Audrey	Female	January 18, 2020	Local Bookstore	1:30 PM	57 minutes
	Hazel	Female	January 18, 2020	Local Bookstore	11:30 AM	33 minutes

### *Interview Question Protocol*

The interview questions were broken down into four main categories by the researcher, which assisted in displaying the collected data in a manner that provided insight to the study. The following section, Data Collection Findings, is divided into the four main interview question categories, followed by the responses from each participant category. This structure allowed for the information to be “thematically connected,” creating “a concrete focused story” where each response was portrayed in a side by side comparison (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In addition, the organization of each participant’s response connected to the specific interview protocol category, created the ability to view potential recurring patterns found within the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). At the start of each interview, the researcher briefly addressed the interview

question categories with participants, as it assisted in understanding the path of the interview questions.

Table 4.2 demonstrates how the researcher broke the interview question protocol into four main categories to assist in organizing the data. A fifth category was made for the researcher to include findings from the concluding questions. Information found in the fifth category, concluding questions, was analyzed, coded, and placed into according sections of the four main interview categories.

**Table 4.2**

*Four Main Categories Found in Interview Question Protocol*

Interview Question Categories	Theoretical Framework Connection	Interview Questions
Reasons and the Draw to Living in a Rural Community	Place meaning: allows for “interpret[ation] of how place meanings individually form and/or are collectively shared, disseminated, and deployed” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2).	Why do you live in this area?
		Did you grow up in a rural community and return to or stay in that community?
		Tell me your story in how you came to reside in this area.
		Do you plan on staying for long in this community?
		Do you have kids? Do you plan for them to stay in the community post high school?
		Why do people live in this area?
		What draw does residing in this area have for you and your family?
		What is the draw for most people to reside in this area?
Perceptions of the Local Area	Place attachment: provides inputs, such as “cognitions, beliefs, attitudes, or other mental representations about a place,” to assist in creating and understanding “mental	What is your perception of why people reside in this area?
		What is your perception of outside views regarding people residing in this area?
		What is your perception regarding the retention of young adults in the community after high school?

	perceptions,” or outputs, that models the intensity of attachment and relationships (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2).	
Influences of Future Sustainability of the Area	Place affordance: indicates contextual information to “directly perceive what is there,” assisting to “actualize affordances” and “perceived meanings in a given place” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2).	How do the coal mines and power plant influence the area? Now? In the future?
		How profitable will this area be in the next decade for the community members that reside in the region?
		What is needed for the success and sustainability of this area?
		What future careers or industries do you foresee coming to this area to assist in the sustainability of the region?
Gifted Education in the Area	Place meaning, attachment, and affordance: Intertwining all three aspects of the theory of place provides the ability to understanding how to encourage and emphasize the development of the theory of place. The theory of place offers an understanding of how individuals form and disseminate meanings of place, create “cognitions, beliefs, attitudes,” and mental perceptions that build attachments to place, and ways to construct “perceived meanings in a given place” that actualize affordances (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2).	What is your familiarity with gifted education?
		What are supports for gifted young adults’ choices regarding residing in this community?
		What are the barriers for gifted young adults’ choices regarding residing in this community?
		What are your perceptions of the local K-12 school district in this area?
		How do the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain in or return to this area?
		Do you feel students are challenged, engaged, and invested in their schools and communities? Why?

Conclusion questions		What else might be helpful as I study this topic? Is there anything else you would like to share?
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**Data Collection**

***Reasons and the Draw to Living in a Rural Community***

The first eight questions of the interview protocol address the reasons and the draw for individuals to live in the rural community. Table 4.3 addresses the questions found within the first category of the interview protocol, the reasons and the draw to living in a rural community. This category reflects the theory of place aspect place meaning, which allows for “interpret[ation] of how place meanings individually form and/or are collectively shared, disseminated, and deployed” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2).

**Table 4.3**

*Category One of Interview Protocol*

Reasons and the Draw to Living in a Rural Community	Why do you live in this area?
	Did you grow up in a rural community and return to or stay in that community?
	Tell me your story in how you came to reside in this area.
	Do you plan on staying for long in this community?
	Do you have kids? Do you plan for them to stay in the community post high school?
	Why do people live in this area?
	What draw does residing in this area have for you and your family?
	What is the draw for most people to reside in this area?

This portion of the questions provided reasoning as to why individuals reside in the area and what the area provides for individuals that decide to reside there. Haas and Nachtigal

(1985) explain, “Community is how we collectively create a story about our place,” making connections with people and the surroundings (p. 21). Knowing the reason behind why individuals live in a rural community develops a base to the study, providing the importance the value a place has on individuals.

**Community leaders.** While not all originally from the local community, the community leaders have built a life in the area, raising families, and actively participating in the community through multiple avenues. The community leaders hold different positions within the community but hold similar values and reasons as to why they reside in the area. The leaders were ready to settle in a community where they felt they could raise a family and have a positive impact on the area. Community leaders Diane, Blake, and Rae share how they came to reside in the area and why they choose to stay in the community.

*Diane.* “Do you want all this kind of information?” she paused as she realized I had not asked any questions yet. When asked how Diane came to reside in the area, a slight smile swooped across her face, as if remembering the moment clearly, “if you want to know the truth, I think this area chose us.” After applying for jobs, both her and her husband were offered employment opportunities in the community as educators. “We were ready to settle down and be in a community where we could raise our children and where we could have a positive impact on that community,” she explained.

Diane grew up in a rural community until she was middle school age. Her family then moved to a suburban location, where she graduated high school. “I do, however, have a strong sense of rural communities and the importance of them, so that’s why we

wanted to be in a more rural area, as opposed to an urban area, just by choice.” After being asked if she planned on staying in the community for a while, she laughed and responded, “Well, we’ve been here for 45 years.” With the glimmering thought of wintering in a warmer location now that she and her husband are retired, she explained her husband is not too keen on the idea, as he is highly invested in the American Legion, Veteran’s Association, and the Elks Club.

Diane took a reflective momentary pause when asked why individuals live in the area, “I’m trying to think what a good answer is.” After a silent moment, she responded, “it may be because it is a small community.” “When we moved here it was a thriving community, yet now there are problems that need to be solved,” she explained, continuing excitedly, “But we have young people here who are working hard at trying to solve those problems, as well as our more established community.” After a thoughtful moment, Diane went on to explain, “I think they stay and live here mainly because they can make a difference here in a way that they might not be able to in a more urban area.”

**Blake.** Blake, a younger community leader eagerly sat, ready to start the interview process. When asked why she lived in the area, Blake lit up and proudly explained, “I live in this rural area because I want my kids to grow up in a place where they’re not just a somebody, that they have a wrap-around system.” She went on to explain, “I grew up in a smaller, very rural community with a graduating class of 16.” Those 16 students were the same students that she started kindergarten with. “My family homesteaded there, and I was the sixth-generation in that area...my great, great grandma was the first white baby born on the river, so yeah, my family just always lived in the



rural area.” Growing up in that community, “I felt like all the teachers knew me, valued me, and wanted me to do good things, so it was all about those relationships and connections that I think even brought me into education and made me who I am today.” Blake works in education and owns a thriving local business with her husband. She passionately went on stating:

I think something my husband and I both value is that we want to make a difference and have an impact on people’s lives and living in a larger city, it can be easier to go to your job, escape, and really just be kind of in the dark. Whereas here, it’s a little bit more pressure.

Contemplating the pressures, she continued to explain:

I like that... that you’re truly valued, and you can have an impact on people’s lives. I will say I don’t think I could live back where I grew up, it’s just a little too small. I like having a City Market (local grocery store) and a few restaurants.

Even when Blake went off to college, she went to a small college in a town of 3,000 people. Due to her experiences, Blake “wanted to be something more and add to what the rural community provides.”

After meeting her husband in the local community just south of where she grew up on Christmas break during college, she moved back to the community to start her career as an educator. When asked if she was planning on staying in the community for a while, she laughed, “well funny you ask that,” explaining that she and her husband were looking to move for several years as the “cost of living is pretty high for the amount you are making.” Looking to move further south, Blake explained:

We could buy a big house down there, make twice the money, and knowing that the mines are where they are right now, we definitely thought, “maybe we should get out ahead of time.” I think as I’ve gotten older and done a lot of traveling, I value the size of the town we live in, that it takes 10 minutes to get my kid to school, or I can be at the grocery store and back to my house in 15 minutes.

With joy crossing her face, she stated, “We bought a house. We are remodeling. We’re really committed to this area, and I love my job. If we were to move, I definitely think it would be to another similar-sized town.”

When asked whether she plans to have her children stay in the community, the tone got a bit more serious, “I just support them doing and being whatever, they want to be.” While she would love her children to live in the area, she wants her children to pursue their dreams:

I think something that always kept us here is to be close to family. My sister is here, my niece and nephew are here, my husband’s family is here...family is a big part of our lives, so I think that keeps us all here and it is what draws you to coming back here...it is the support system.

Joking, Blake added that if her children do move away, “I might follow them and move.”

When asked why people live here, without skipping a beat, she responded, “This area is a gem. People move here, obviously, because it’s beautiful.” With the quaint small town, the locals enjoy the amenities the region has:

I like the amenities [of the region]. I can be in the mountains in 30 minutes, I can be out four-wheeling, camping, and those kinds of things, or I can go to warmer

climates or [a larger, urban, city] in three hours. The mountains are right here, and I think that's what draws us here. The outdoor lifestyle is what we appreciate, as well as the slower pace. There's also not very many places that men can make the money that they do right here...men make three-figure incomes on high school diplomas in the mines, power plants, and oil rigs. Definitely, the slower pace and the outlets to this wonderful outdoor lifestyle that people have right here, and the money men can make, keep people here.

*Rae.* Rae, an involved, excited, and well-respected business owner and leader explained that she lives in the region due to growing up in the community, recognizing it is a town where the members, like other rural towns, provide high support, especially if you grew up there. "It's kind of the go where you're celebrated, not where you're tolerated, and I was where I was tolerated for a long time..." she explained. Rae stated:

It's where I grew up...my parents are here and my support system's here and I'm close to other family, and so I moved back for that...I currently live here because it's a really good home base for me and what I currently do with my life...It was a great spot to be able to kind of create a life.

Grinning, Rae proudly explained:

Being a part of a rural town, and what nobody really actually ever addresses, is that you have so many more opportunities because there's not enough people to do all the things...You can start running large programs and being all of the stuff that, in a city, would take you years and years and years to do...In a rural town, there's not enough people to do those things, so you can advance a lot faster.

Due to the opportunities the rural community provides, Rae explained, “I’m here for a variety of reasons now...I have multiple businesses here...I have a mortgage here...I have family here...my three years maximum now turn into that I probably want to be buried here.” Developing and owning six businesses, Rae has plans to be tied to the community in some fashion, whether she remains a permanent resident of the area or not. Rae responded, “Oh absolutely, 100%,” regarding if she preferred her home base be a rural community.

In response to being asked if she has kids and if she would want them to remain in the community, Rae explained from a behavioral economist’s point of view that is interested in economic development:

Statistically speaking, 60% of the US population lives within 40 miles of where they grew up...So I would assume that the lifestyle that they would and want to have, would kind of revert back to that rural hometown feel at some point.

Contemplating why individuals reside in the rural community, Rae stated:

You know, that's something that's changing too...People live here because of the livelihood...they live here because of the agriculture...the lifestyle...their jobs...their family. There's a variety of reasons. Proximity to other things, such as [the ski town] and places that people really want to live but can't afford, is kind of one of them. One of the big draws for me to stay in [the community], is that the cost of living is so much lower.

Identifying that the local community is unique in many matters, Rae explained:

Usually when you talk to individuals in a rural town, they say they're there because it is where they grew up or something that is a lot more emotional...whereas in [this community] every single person will give you a different answer as to why they're here...[the community] is an anomaly...its 100% different than any other town I've ever been a part of.

Due to her unique career positions, Rae is often traveling, considering the local community her home base. Due to her crazy schedule, she explained:

It's nice to go from having this crazy nonstop life, to being able to go back home...I feel like I'm kind living this double life because people just think of me as the [local businesses owner], and they don't know anything else that I do, so I can relax...it's kind of a sanctuary.

In addition, she added:

It's also a massively frustrating place to live...All the frustrations are kind of like the obvious things...being able to get quality food...being able to have quality relationships...Having the lack of educational support...being able to attract new industry...being able to have change in the area, because [community members] don't believe, they don't have a ton of educational background, so change is, historically, very, very difficult.

**Mentors of gifted individuals.** With different connections to the local community, each mentor came to call the community home with deep seated connections to the area. All mentor participants hold positions in education, influencing gifted

individuals in numerous ways. Mentors Grayson, Adalyn, and Brooklyn share the reasons they came to reside in the area and reasons as to why they may stay or leave in the future.

**Grayson.** Grayson, currently an educator in the local school district, holds a unique perspective, as he grew up in and returned to the local area. When his father became ill, Grayson decided it was time to return to his home community, allowing him to live near his father, “knowing our time together is limited.” When asked if he plans on staying in the community, Grayson confidently answered, “No.” After further prompting, he explained, “I am here for my father, so when my father passes, we will need to leave.” With news of expecting their first child, Grayson feels he and his wife will need to leave the community by the time their child reaches kindergarten, explaining:

As a parent, as a father, earning potential is incredibly limited and benefits are not ideal...it went from being tight and manageable to being just...people are doing it. I am the primary breadwinner, which is the problem. Typically, the teacher in the family is not the primary breadwinner...and being a teacher, especially in this area, is a considerable disadvantage... and that is not from the stinginess of the district, mind you.

When asked why people live in this area, Grayson explained:

You have a variety...the first group is they are from here in a different way than I am. I grew up here, my parents have both been here for a very long time, but they're both from other places, so they moved here and stayed...They stayed mostly because their families moved here and stayed here. The primary

population that will always be here are the old landowning families...the old Greek families that came here a long time ago, back when this was yet to be a state and they homesteaded it...they retained the property in the name of the family, so they will always be here because of that. Then you have another group, which is the children of miners, coal workers, and power plant people...those people will come and go as the economy favors or doesn't favor fossil fuel, which is why we've seen a massive decline.

Reminiscing, Grayson added:

So, when I grew up here as a teenager, we were bordering on almost hitting 12,000 people. Now we're down to below 9,000, mostly because of that reason, that regulations and business and the price of coal and mines shutting down...part of that's political. Part of it's just the fact that it's a finite resource, and some mines just literally run out. Some mines get fined to the point that they're no longer profitable. Some people, a businessman makes a mistake, but nonetheless, that's another category. That category will shrink and grow, depending on the market versus the first category, which will always be here because of land ownership. Then the last category is people that come here because they are part of the service industry, which again shrinks or grows as a result of mining, and at times, tourism. There are people who like being closer to the ski resort or they like the fact that it's a small town. They want a fresh start. I've met people who come here from bigger cities. Some of them are trying to get away from gangs, and others are just trying to literally get fresh air...get out of the pollution. They like it being

small. So, there's three groups, but there's only one group that's stable, and that's the people who own land because that's something that you give to your children. It's a continuous thing that you keep in your family. These are the major families, the names you recognize around town, the names that hold value in the community.

*Adalyn.* Adalyn came to reside in the local area due to her love of the outdoors and wanted to get away from the “hustle and bustle of the traffic of the city” she grew up in. Adalyn explained, “I like how calm and peaceful it is here in a rural town. I also love my job. So that really kind of keeps me grounded here.” A young educator that promotes student exploration in the community, society, and nation. While not from the local community, she initially came to the area because her ex-husband lived here and to begin her career as an educator. With plans to remain in the local community for the foreseeable future with her significant other and their children, she hopes her children go out into the world and gain valuable experiences. Adalyn explained:

I happen to have five kids and I really hope that they go and get a great college experience somewhere else...I think that it would be a good idea for them to get some free associate degree credits here (the community college provides free enrollment for local community members). Ultimately, I would like them to go to school somewhere else and have more experiences outside of the rural town. I feel like they would come here since I don't plan on moving, it would be good for them to, if I still lived here then they would always come back to visit. But I



would hope that they would have enriching experiences outside of the community.

Adalyn described people live in the area for several reasons:

A lot of people who grew up in [the area], stay in [the community], and you see that happen frequently. I sometimes wonder if it's because they don't feel comfortable with change, taking a risk, and leaving, or starting something new...there really are a lot of people that complain about this area and the lack of things to do and the lack of community support...but people don't really tend to leave if they're from here. I do think many live in this area because they love the outdoors. They also have a lot of things going for them, like businesses, but they also may not feel comfortable to leave.

The draw for Adalyn and her family to stay in the area is the outdoors:

My family really likes to camp in the summer and it's really convenient to just pack up and in like 20 minutes be at a camp spot because of how close we are to national forest areas. Also, with a family of seven, we require like a 3,000 square foot house. The cost of living is cheap here, so we can, on two teacher salaries, afford housing. Whereas if we moved to [an urban area], we would have to sacrifice space. And with seven people...that is not a great option.

Adding on to the reason why she and her family live in the local region, Adalyn explained many live in the area because:

The community has a lot of generations here. You have the grandparents, the parents, and the kids...you have generations. There are also foundations laid out,

like businesses, that the kids can then take over or start working, such as hunting outfitters...It's a family hobby where everyone is involved in hunting. So, many decide to stay because all of their hobbies and financials...all of the things that provide them money, are here too. I think that it's more like being grounded here because of generational continuance.

**Brooklyn.** Brooklyn, a young educator, originally moved to the rural area to teach. She then stayed in the community after meeting her husband that works at the power plant. Brooklyn, originally from an eastern state of the United States, explained that her hometown community was originally rural and a place where people would vacation in, but not live in. She related her hometown to the community where she currently resides. As she grew up, those from surrounding areas discovered the cost of living was cheaper, creating a boom in her community. However, it did not last, as individuals began moving back out of the area after the recession. Brooklyn explained:

It's a little smaller than it was, but it's still not rural like it was my parents first moved there. I would say it's probably like suburban now, but initially it was rural and then I moved here and I'm like, "This is beautiful because I don't have to travel to get to anything that I need" ...Benefits.

After competing for jobs in the area where she completed her degree in education, she started applying to locations all over the country, "not necessarily recognizing where I was applying, just pumping out applications online." This is when her current local community school district contacted her, offering her a job for the upcoming school year, garnering the response, "Done, SOLD." Much to her parent's dismay and hopes that she

would stay close, Brooklyn packed up and moved to the community where she currently still resides. She and her husband have no plans on leaving the rural community and hope to stay as long as the power plant is still open, “As long as the plant is here, we will be here.”

When asked if she would like for her children to stay in the community past high school, Brooklyn confidently answered with some remorse:

Realistically, I don't think my kids are going to stay in this community because I don't know what jobs will be here...But also, when you're looking like 20 years from now, I have no idea what the job market will even be. They may be able to stay here and work online and have this great career...I don't know...but I'm thinking right out, like probably not.

After a brief pause, Brooklyn described why people reside in the rural community as:

For the most part it started out as a ranching community. I'm pretty sure the plant was built so that the people who lived here would have power, just locally, to be able to have their ranches. Then it just grew from there. But the plant wasn't originally supposed to even last this long. The fact that it has, I guess, is pretty cool. This community was really just supposed to be small and then, because of the plant, it got larger, but it's still pretty small.

Brooklyn continued to explain:

Now I think a lot of people are still here because of the mines and the plant. Or that their ranch...or families that have been here forever, they'll stay here no matter what I think...But for everybody else, I think that's why they're here.

Brooklyn and her husband find a draw to continue to reside in the community due to:

Employment, I guess, is kind of first and foremost why we're here. But I think there are a lot of other benefits to living here. Just the ability to get from point A to point B without a lot of traffic that really everything that we need is available here. Anything that isn't here, you can just order it and it'll be here in two days, thanks to Amazon. But even like all the outdoor things that we can do, it's nice that there is a lot of things to do even if... well...you must take advantage of the things to do.

**Family members of gifted individuals.** With varied reasons for coming to reside and stay in the community, family members are building a life and supporting their families, planning for success and encouraging young gifted individuals to chase their dreams. While the family members hold different positions in the community, each are passionate in maintaining the wellbeing and future of the gifted individuals in their lives. Family members of gifted individuals Callie, Mia, and Maggie shared their story in how they came to reside in the area.

*Callie.* Callie, a single mother of three, resides in the area serving the community through the health profession. After her mother married her stepdad, good job opportunities brought her and her family to the rural area, “he brought us here and we just kind of never left.” Growing up in the community, Callie explained, “I stayed here for the support of my family.” Callie did leave the region for a few years but returned to the community after divorcing her ex-husband who served in the military.

While her house is currently for sale, she is looking at the opportunities of remaining in the local community or moving to a neighboring community. Callie explained her interest in the neighboring rural community is:

...simply because the schools are better there, and so I want to give my gifted kids more of an advantage. It is a school that's going to push them more. Also, because I work there, it would be easier not having to commute back and forth.

When asked if she planned for her children to remain in the community or region after high school, Callie replied:

I don't believe that's up to me. I believe that's up to them and what they choose to do with their life. As a mom, I'm raising them to go out there and explore what they want and who they'll fall in love with, and if that doesn't mean staying in the community, then I can't force them to do that...Really, I would love it. I would really love it for them to stay...I'm sure they'll have kids and I'd love to be around my grandkids, but we'll see where life takes us.

Shifting to why people live in the area, Callie explained:

Just for the jobs here... there are many good jobs down at the mines, or they have power plant jobs, and being able to live and having good work so close is important for a lot of people. The rural area also provides a good community that has your back. Personally, I will never move out of a small town like [here] or, if I want to move, I'd just go to [the neighboring community], which isn't as small. I don't want to live in a city because then I no longer have backup from the community. That's really important to me, having backup immediately, with kids or anything. Our community knows that all of us would come together if anybody needs something.

Relating the reason, she remains in the community, as well as why others reside in the area, Callie continued explaining:

While the closest good place to shop is two hours away, my kids have a solid community that takes care of them. We also have the ability to take advantage of what we like to do as a family right out our backdoors. Such as, ride the dirt bike, go hiking, go hunting, and everything is within 20 minutes. We're just an hour drive from any major activities that we enjoy doing, and that we can do...An hour is fine for that.

*Mia.* Mia, a mother of two, resides in the local community due to her husband being stationed with a job as a public service agent. Growing up in a rural community that had about 1,500 people, she remained in that area until her husband accepted the job where he is currently stationed. When provided the opportunity to be stationed elsewhere, she and her husband were asked to rank their top five choices. Three of the

five locations were rural communities, as both grew up in small towns and enjoyed the rural lifestyle. While currently planning on staying in the community, Mia and her husband are aware that they may have to move to a different area if her husband chooses to advance positions in his career.

When asked if she plans on her children to stay in the local community after high school, Mia explained:

Not necessarily. I really...I want my kids to do whatever they want. If they want to stay here, and that's a viable option for them and they can be successful here, that's great. If they want to move on and go somewhere else, I support that too. I want them to go where they're going to be happy.

Mia explained that many people live in the local region for several reasons:

Many come here for the coal industry. The hunting industry brings a lot of people in as well. I know a lot of people work in the coal mines and outfitting jobs, where people take others out on hunting trips. I think that's what brings a lot of people here. And then ranching...ranching is a big industry here as well, which in turn helps keep this area rural. Also, I think many come here for the winter sports and mountain activities at hand.

While she and her husband are not drawn to the area for coalmining, hunting, or ranching, the jobs in the area keep them there. Mia explained:

We're fortunate in that wherever we go, our careers do tend to exist. [Public safety] positions have people stationed all over, and then teaching is pretty much everywhere. So, we have jobs wherever there's a [public safety] station...rural is

what we like...we like the small area. I think we would prefer a small town wherever we go, but it wouldn't necessarily have to be [here].

*Maggie.* Maggie, a mother of a recently identified gifted student, grew up in the local community, moving to the area when she was in late elementary. While she left the area several times, she “always ended up back here.” She explained, “I like the small town feel better than cities.” While Maggie left the community several times to “escape,” she was always brought back primarily for her family. Maggie explained, “I am very big with my family and they're here.” While she planned on staying in the community for a long time, raising her kids in the area, she explained that her husband’s work may greatly affect if they are able to remain in the area, as he works at the local power plant. If she and her family are able to remain in the community, Maggie hopes her children will go off to college, “venturing out and having experiences,” learning what they desire as a lifestyle. If her children chose to then return to the community, Maggie explained she would greatly enjoy that.

The rural community has many benefits for its residents, as Maggie explained, “A lot of people live here because of good paying jobs with the coal mines and the coal power plant.” In addition, Maggie explained individuals reside in the area for the sense of community:

Everybody knows everybody...sure, going to the grocery store takes a little longer, but you see people and you talk to people... Just that community feeling... [community members] have a sense of community and even understand



the support strangers have for each other...If somebody is in need, we all come together.

**Young gifted adults.** With finding comfort and familiarity in rural locations, most young gifted adult participants returned back to their hometown, rural community. While not all plan to stay long-term, the rural location holds a special place in their hearts, reminding them of their roots and rural values. The young gifted adults' Sylvie, Audrey, Ellie, and Hazel returned to the rural community as educators after college, sharing their insight and perspective on residing in rural communities.

**Sylvie.** Sylvie, a young gifted adult that has recently returned to her home community, has begun her career in education of the arts in her hometown. After a student teaching internship in a large urban district, Sylvie was offered a position in the same district. However, as the school district needed to make budget cuts for the upcoming year, her position in the arts was cut. In a rush to find a new position for the upcoming school year, Sylvie landed a position in the school district that she attended growing up.

While not planning on living in her home community long, Sylvie explained: I teach in the arts and the arts aren't very funded or put of equal importance to other programs. There's not really a program for the arts in this district. While I've tried to start one, it doesn't seem to be catching on or growing. So, there's not a lot of room for me personally to grow in this area.

Although the local community does not provide avenues for Sylvie to grow personally in her career, she does think that it is “a good area for kids to grow up in,” due to its safe nature and the ability to “keep track of where your children are.” Sylvie continued to explain:

I think an area either similar to this or like this would be good for children to grow up in, but after high school, no. There's not a lot of different opportunities for kids after high school or even high school aged kids. There's just not a lot of activities. There's not a lot of different avenues for young adults to go into here.

When asked why people live in the area, Sylvie informed that:

There are a lot of families who have remained here because it's kind of a legacy thing. People also come here because it is a wilderness area, there is a lot of nature. There's room for ranching and things like that...also, a lot of people who have lived here just never leave.

Building off the previous statement, the draw for Sylvie and her family to live here has been that:

It is a close-knit community and it is also safe. You know a lot of what's going on in the area. You don't have to worry about necessarily locking your doors all the time, that kind of stuff. But it's also because there's hunting, there's those kinds of things. There's a lot of recreational activities that you can do.

**Audrey.** As a young gifted adult that has recently returned to her hometown community, Audrey likes “small towns because you know each other more, on a deeper level.” Audrey explained, “growing up in a rural community, it just feels right to live in

this area.” Born and raised in the remote rural community, Audrey left after her senior year of high school to become the first college graduate in her family. While she left her home community, Audrey went to a small college in a small city, surrounded by rural communities, “it wasn’t a university, but it was obviously bigger than my rural town.” After receiving her degree in education, Audrey returned to her rural community to be employed in the same school district she graduated from.

Returning to her home community was not always Audrey’s plan:

When I was a senior, I couldn't wait quick enough to leave this town. And after, like they said, the grass isn't always greener on the other side, after experiencing a larger community, I really missed some things about my small town. I decided that to come back would be nice...just the little things like the traffic, knowing people, and being able to teach kids that I potentially grew up with their parents... it’s just that knowledge of knowing one another, I think it can be comforting and nice.

Realizing the comfort of being home and back in a rural community, she would like to stay, yet the uncertainty that is unfolding about the future of the community is daunting.

Audrey explained:

The biggest thing right now is that they just announced that the power plant and the coal mines are all going to be shutting down in the next five to ten years. That's kind of scary and will be interesting to see what will happen with the economy. I mean, since where I'm at right now, I think I'd be okay, but if the population dramatically decreased, anything could potentially happen. So, it's

kind of like that waiting game of “if it gets better...and if not,” then I'll definitely have to leave. But I want to stay in a rural area, I feel like, most of my life.

Relating to her personal experience, when asked about her future children remaining in the community after high school, Audrey explained:

I think there's a lot to leaving to get that experience and then always wanting to come back. I don't regret that part at all, and I think leaving was needed, just because being in rural, there are some limitations. But going and experiencing those opportunities, then you can come back and help grow your rural community too. I think, of course, if they didn't want to leave, I wouldn't make them, but I think I would want them to go experience things. And then, of course, I'd want them to come back.

When asked what the draw of residing in the local area has, Audrey explained:

For many, it deals with their jobs, as far as farming, ranching, and coal mines and power plants. But also, a lot of people choose to live in this area because of the outdoors and the mountains. And a lot of the environment of the rural community, which, probably, is the biggest thing.

Similarly, Audrey enjoys the outdoors the local community has to offer, “there's just so much to do and having all the seasons.” She also appreciates that she doesn't “have to spend 15 minutes to go five miles.” In addition, Audrey loves the open space of the region. While the area is definitely not for everyone, Audrey explained that when the district completes interviews with applicants, they have to explain the area to the candidates, informing that it “is a unique place, how we have Walmart to go clothes

shopping, and that our little mall has nothing in it.” She went on to explain, “But the people that are here enjoy those things.”

*Ellie.* Ellie, a young gifted adult, is unlike the other two young gifted adult participants, as she is not originally from the local area. She is, however, from another rural community in a neighboring western state. Ellie explained:

I live in this area because I really like living in [this state] and I wanted to stay on the [rural side of the state]. I'm not a big city person, so I don't really like spending a lot of time in the urban areas, but I still like enjoying all of the outdoor stuff that [the state] has.

Ellie grew up in a neighboring western state in a rural community that is smaller than her current community of residence. Knowing she did not want to remain in her home community, she was torn with enjoying living in rural communities. Explaining this dilemma, Ellie informed:

It's weird to just stay in a town where you know everyone growing up. I just kind of wanted to get away from that and have a fresh start at life. But I do like rural communities better than living in the city.

Recently married, she and her husband moved to the local community because she was offered a job in the local school district. After she graduated college, Ellie had been applying and looking for a secondary teaching job in the region. After being offered several positions, she felt the position in the local district was the best fit for her.

Ellie and her husband plan on staying in the community for at least the next five years, due to the new position her husband recently accepted. Eventually, Ellie and her

husband would like to move to a location that is a bit closer to the mountains. While not planning to have kids at the moment, Ellie explained that if she did have kids, “I would not want them to stay. I'd want them to go on and experience other places besides the one that they grew up in.”

When asked why people reside in the local area, Ellie explained:

The main reason that people live in this area is for the outdoors. People that live here really have a lot of outdoor hobbies, like hunting or off-roading or hiking or whatever other things that they like to do outside. And then, a lot of people that live in rural communities just aren't comfortable in a city. People that grow up in rural communities tend to stay there because that's where they're most comfortable. Also, a lot of people in our community work at the mines and the power plant. Those are jobs that they could get into without having a strong educational background, so they can get a well-paying job where they can sustain their family and live comfortably and have extra money to do things that they like to do without having to go and get an education. And then a lot of people live in this area because their family also lives in this area. It's always a benefit to live in the same place where your parents are and your grandparents and siblings and people that you're close to are.

Adding onto why people live in the area, Ellie explained she and her husband are drawn to the outdoors of the area and the state. With a bit more diversity, cleaner areas, and more forward thinking, she and her husband are enjoying the move to the western state and how close they are to the outdoors. Ellie went on to explain, “...and just being in a

small community, you still get the benefit of knowing people and having that community support.” Pausing for a moment, Ellie added, “also, in comparison to other places [in the state], [the local community] is really cheap to live...we probably couldn’t have afforded to buy a house in another community...but we could afford to buy a house here.” Being a young couple, it was easy for them to settle down and buy their first home.

*Hazel.* Hazel, like Sylvie and Audrey, is a young gifted adult who has recently returned to her home community, beginning her career as an educator. Attending a college located in a small rural community, she knew she would like to continue living and teaching in a rural area. Due to landing her first job as a teacher back in her rural community, she was excited to return to be closer to her family. With a baby on the way, she knew the community would be a good place to raise her child. As the community’s future looms on the fate of the local coal mines and power plants, she hopes her family will be able to remain in the area as she “would have a hard time leaving.”

When asked why people live in the area, Hazel responded with ease, “Mainly for the jobs that are here.” Explaining, she stated, “It’s really good for agriculture opportunities and the power plants bring in a lot of people, so do the coal mines...other than that there’s elk hunting, but not much more.” The region, Hazel explained, is known for its elk hunting and agricultural opportunities, such as cattle ranching and sheep ranching, which keeps people in the area. For her and her family, they enjoy the region due to its beauty and outdoor activities, including hunting and sledding. She explained, “If we were to ever move, it would be hard to replace those kinds of experiences.”

**Summary.** While not all participants plan on staying in the local community forever, they all have a connection and understanding of rural areas. The region brings those in search of a well-paying job, the love of the outdoors, open space, and smaller community. For many, the region brings opportunities for growth and experiences.

***Perceptions of the Local Area***

Questions nine through eleven allow individuals to indicate their perceptions of the local community and what individuals from outside of the community may think. Table 4.4 addresses the questions found within the second category of the interview protocol, the perceptions of the local area. This category reflects the theory of place aspect place attachment, which provides inputs, such as “cognitions, beliefs, attitudes, or other mental representations about a place,” to assist in creating and understanding “mental perceptions,” or outputs, that models the intensity of attachment and relationships (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2).

**Table 4.4**

*Category Two of Interview Protocol*

Perceptions of the Local Area	What is your perception of why people reside in this area?
	What is your perception of outside views regarding people residing in this area?
	What is your perception regarding the retention of young adults in the community after high school?

Knowing the perceptions of the community from the local’s perspective and the perspective locals believe individuals outside the community hold, assist in developing the picture of how the community is perceived and what challenges may be faced.

Individuals that reside in rural areas often face negative perceptions, however, as a



community, they can define who they are and have the ability to “invent the world we want to live in by linking people and their places, reinvigorating an inclusive civic life, and creating economic opportunities” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1985, pp. 21-25).

**Community leaders.**

*Diane.* “I don’t get a lot of opinion on that to be honest,” Diane explained when asked what outsiders’ perceptions are of the rural community. “My son and daughter-in-law live in [an urban area] and they are just so impressed with the fact that we’re able to maybe begin to solve our own problems (speaking about the community).” Having conversations with her son and his wife, they know that “some changes in the way we make livings and do things here” are going to have to be made “if our community is going to continue to grow or continue to exist.”

*Blake.* When asked what Blake feels the outside perception is regarding people that live in the area, she responded “It is easy to look like we are uncultured or kind of backdoorsy or redneck or whatever those labels are,” waving off the thought with her hand. She stated:

I am a pretty non-stereotypical person, but I think it is easy to look at us and think, ‘Do they have culture?’ or ‘Do they understand political views? Are they very liberal? Or, they aren’t very liberal.’...the list could go on.

The view of retaining gifted individuals in the community after high school is “a double-edge sword” according to Blake. She went on to explain, “The boys, or males, in our area don’t value education as much because they think that they can go get these big jobs right out of high school, and they can work at the mines, power plants, or oil rigs,

which I think kills us.” Alternatively, she explained the other side of the sword, “...but I also think that there's a lot of families that when you have that family support system, they want their kids to go out, do better, and come back, much like I do.”

*Rae.* When asked what Rae’s perceptions of why people reside in the area, she explained, “it’s changing, but historically speaking...the amount of people who have never left the area and have no idea what happens elsewhere in the world is astronomical to me.” Rae continued to explain, “We have a notoriety at this point to be...we’re a coal town that has its own perception around it...so perceptions are both positive and negative in a lot of ways.” Building off her own perceptions, Rae discussed perceptions of outside views regarding people that live within the region, stating:

Depends on what they see and hear...if they're just reading things on the news, we sound like we don't know...But people who have come into the town, say [the community] is the nicest, or “we don't know how we're going to move here, but we're going to move here at some point.”

Continuing to explain outside perceptions, Rae continued:

...And the perception of rural people is that we're not very smart, we're not very ambitious, we're not very...whatever...I know more people with multiple degrees in this town than I do anywhere else. The perception of rural in general, I don't think has ever been very positive. I guess people just think of the hillbillies, and I think that just kind of goes without saying...and especially, we have a whole different bag of worms because we're a coal town.

Growing up in the local community, Rae recalled a program in middle school, “girls to women and boys to men,” that provided students with an understanding of what they could do when they graduated high school. She explained:

They took all of the boys to the mines and the power plants to show them what their jobs could be with a high school education, making \$80,000 a year. Then, they took all the girls to home-ec to show how to make things and maybe be a banker or something like that, it was the most bizarre... Like how to wear high heels...

The program, as Rae explained, “...is kind of that mentality of the difference between a coal town...you leave high school and can be making money that people with multiple degrees have.”

Regarding retaining young adults in the community after high school, Rae explained that young adults typically leave to gain new experiences, however, “People come back at a pretty good rate, and retain those that do... as long as we have things to do...which is across the board in any rural town.” Explaining this thought further, she stated:

People want a very specific thing and lifestyle component to where they're living. They want to have places to eat, they want to have places to go, they want to have family interactions and they want to have a good social life....As long as those things exist and are available, that's a really good sign and [the community] has quadrupled that in the last year... We have a brewery, a wine bar, multiple places

to shop downtown...new trails, staff in our parks, programs, events, festivals...we have all this stuff that didn't exist up until last year.

Rae continued to explain, "We live in a society now, where people are choosing where they want to live and then they find a job...that's the biggest thing when it comes to retaining."

**Mentors of gifted individuals.**

*Grayson.* Grayson's perception as to why people reside in the area include money and space. He explained:

They're here because they can get a job at the mine and because it's a small town with a lot of space. Some people like living in a more rural community, where they don't have to worry about the trouble of the anxiety in the city. So, if there's an opportunity to make money out here and they like being out in the country, that's why most of them come.

When asked of his perception of outside views regarding people residing in the area, Grayson chuckled and pondered for a moment, "Wow...Well, that's an interesting one."

Explaining his thoughts, Grayson stated:

The perception is that it's backward. Frankly, a lot of people here lean into that. They enjoy the concept of the deplorables. The concept of, "Of course I'm not one of you." From the outside looking in, it's outdated. It's backward. It's too conservative. It's stuffy. It's anti-intellectually, purposefully ignorant, favoring opinion over facts, out of step with the times, and poor. It's working-class. It's dirty. It's mean...wouldn't really want to be there. People don't really go there

unless if they want...They're either stuck here or maybe you're some kind of redneck or something and you enjoy it. That's the outside perception. Uncultured, poor, mean, purposefully ignorant, redneck-ish.

When asked to explain his perception regarding the retention of young adults in this community after high school, Grayson matter-of-factly stated:

It's going to drop off significantly. I mean...I'm one of few here still. I'm here. My sister has just recently returned to be with our parents. Counting me and her, I know of four of us who are still here out of the several hundred of us that started out. I expect that to get worse because most of the people who stayed, were staying for the mine. There was really a perception when I was young that the mine was forever because at that time it was...All of the mines were fully operational then. Since then, a couple of them have shut down...When young people get into their careers and they leave high school, arguably the most lucrative and popular employer in the area will not be able to employ them. So that'll really affect their ability to stay here. We're seeing that with the job and the population and no expectation for growth.

*Adalyn.* When asked of her perception regarding why people live in the area, Adalyn explained:

From a political standpoint, many people here have very similar political views. You have some really extreme conservative views with it being a mining town, not only does everyone have a similar belief of shutting down coal plants is not the right way to go, it's their way of life. It's a culture here. Mining coal has

provided food on families' tables for hundreds of years here in this town. And so, it's a generational thing that is embedded into the culture. I think that a lot of people stay because there's a lot of like-minded people here as well. It's not necessarily the same way if they leave. If they leave and go to a big city, they're going to be faced with a bunch of liberals. And I think that that would just be extremely irritating for a lot of community members.

Regarding Adalyn's perception of outside views on people that reside in the area, she instantly explained that it is "definitely not positive." Due to the local community neighboring a "ritzy ski town," the area gets "a bad rap" because of the run-down look. While the community has begun renovations, Adalyn described:

People kind of perceive people who live [here] to be trailer trash, if I'm going to be honest. And I think that comes from just, we really are kind of in our own world and in our own bubble in a way. And if you don't leave [the community], it's very easy to stay away from what's happening outside, which is a lot different. There's a lot of conversations that are happening politically that do not happen here. And then a lot of movements happening globally that are not discussed here. And I do think that there is a lack of education. I think that people do think that people are not educated...and I think there's some truth to that too.

When asked to explain her perception regarding the retention of young adults in this community after high school, Adalyn explained:

I don't think that we get retention of a lot of young adults in our community just because of the lack of opportunity. Our community college is so limited in what

degrees they can offer. So, I think that a lot of young adults eagerly want to get out of [the community] after high school. I think that they've spent such a long-time kind of being stuck in [this town]. So, when they get that ounce of freedom, they desperately want to go and explore and learn more.

**Brooklyn.** When asked what her perception is to why people reside in the area, Brooklyn explained that it is either generational or for employment. Regarding Brooklyn's perception of outside views on people that reside in the area, she thought for a moment before explaining that it is negative "because people wouldn't understand why you'd want to live in a small community" and due to the industry, that runs the local economy. Brooklyn explained:

All the way around, there's not a lot of positive perception. Even just looking at the [community chat on social media], nobody has a lot of positive things to say and that's even the people that live here, which is frustrating.

When asked to explain her perception regarding the retention of young adults in this community after high school, Brooklyn explained:

Not good. I think that it was good, especially for young men to be employed in the mines and make really good salaries, which was a huge draw and a lot of people took advantage of that. The hospital is trying to run this program where they'll pay for your education to go into nursing and then you have to stay for X amount of years after that. That program helps to hold onto people too. But we don't have a lot of that. The community college doesn't do a great job of helping

to diversify and they don't offer enough to keep people here for school. People are leaving.

**Family members of gifted individuals.**

*Callie.* Regarding Callie's perception of outside views on people that reside in the area, she hesitantly explained that the community speaks for itself, in that the outside world "gets a lot of bad news about us." She continued to explain, good things that often happen in the community do not get told, "they are just seeing the bad things going on...viewing us as a bad drug town." Callie stated, "It is sad because [the area] is one of the biggest camping spaces in the United States, as well as hunting, but we just get a bad rap."

When asked to explain her perception regarding the retention of young adults in this community after high school, Callie paused for a moment to think:

If you are from [the area], the only thing there is to be is a coal miner. For many, the reason to stay is to be in the coal mines. Often the message is, they're not smart or they're not skilled enough to do anything else, so they'll go work in the coal mines. A lot of the kids don't get out of [town], that's all they know...and with their high pay, it is kind of an incentive. The boys, especially, tend to stay around because they grow up knowing all they want to be is be a coal miner. In the community, education is not always held to the highest standard.



*Mia.* Regarding Mia's perception of outside views on people that reside in the area, she explained, "Probably what they would perceive people from any rural community, as farming and ranching people who are blue-collar workers. Maybe not as highly educated, but good, hardworking people."

When asked to explain her perception regarding the retention of young adults in this community after high school, Mia stated:

For a lot of kids, staying in the community, it is just something they do...For them individually, the opportunities are limited, but they stay because that's what their families have always done. I feel like a lot of kids that are here, and plan to stay here, are kids whose families have generations that have been here, or there is a family business or something that they're going to go into just like their dad did...I think kids that choose to go on to college and that route are less likely to come back.

*Maggie.* When asked what her perception of outside views regarding people that live in the area, Maggie explained:

I think a lot of people are like, "Well...they're just a bunch of redneck coal miners over there"...they see [the community] as the poor people...but then people who come to this community and actually see the community...they enjoy it.

Regarding the retention of young adults in the community after high school, Maggie explained, "You know, I think it could go either way...I grew up here, I like the town, it's home." She continued, explaining:

...it just depends on the person. I think it's good when people come back and I think people come back because they, most of the time, do want to be here. And even if they don't at first, sometimes they realize it's the better place for them.

**Young gifted adults.**

*Sylvie.* When asked what her perception as to why people reside in the area, Sylvie explained that there is a “legacy to follow through, especially with a lot of the older names in this town.” She went on to explain:

They're well known and right now, they think they're cream of the crop. So, they're at the top of the figurative totem pole. And if they were to go anywhere else, at this point, they would have to start all the way at the bottom and build a name for themselves. Where here, they already have that name and they know that. So, it's like a hierarchy in a community almost.

Regarding Sylvie's perception of outside views on people that reside in the area, she informed the community is perceived as “just a bunch of Podunk, cowboy rednecks.” She continued to explain:

They don't really see anything else that goes on. They don't see the closeness of the community and the support that they get if something is wrong. Or the families or if you're in a position where you're really down on your luck or you're ill or something, there's going to be community members who are willing to help you out...rather than the outside people just view it as, “Oh, they're stupid. They're rednecks.”

*Audrey.* When asked what her perception of why people reside in the area, Audrey explained that a big part of the reason is that it is generational. Providing an example, Audrey stated:

The coal miners...they see their parents grow up that way...and a lot of the men, that's just a generational thing. For my parents, their dads worked in the coal mine, and as soon as they graduated, they just went to the coal mines. It's a lot of money fast, and they don't have to have degrees, which is also a generational thing.

With generational coal mining keeping individuals in the community, she also explained, “the same goes with ranchers...a lot of boys right after high school might go to college for a year or two, and then they're back running their family's farm and taking over, or they're ranching.”

Regarding Audrey’s perception of outside views on people that reside in the area, she paused for a moment before explaining that they are seen as “rednecks.” She continued to explain, “People probably think we're uneducated, don't care about the environment, there is incest, and just a lot of those stereotypes fall into how they perceive [the community].” An additional perception she has seen is that the local education system is failing, explaining the constant comparison held to the “ritzier ski town” that neighbors the community. Audrey also recognized judgement felt from urban areas:

In cities, sometimes city people frown upon rural, maybe not necessarily the extreme biases and stereotypes, but still look down on them and don't understand why people would want to live in a rural area. People that were born in the city,

very few of them, I feel like, come here and are happy about it. Obviously, there's some, but it's kind of that if you were born there, you probably tend to appreciate it more than if you weren't. City people often are like, “why would you ever want to live that way?”

When asked to explain her perception regarding the retention of young adults in this community after high school, Audrey explained it depends on certain factors. While Audrey clarified many want to leave, others don't, or at least want to remain in rural areas. She continued to explain generational experiences play a factor:

There's a lot of people in [the community], where their parents never went to college. I'm the first generation in my family that went to college, and it's like that for a lot of kids too. But when I think of how many truly or actually graduated from college, it is slim pickings, like less than 20 out of 130, probably. But for the men...it's definitely that role of, “just go to the mine, you don't need an education.” They don't care if they can read or write. But I think that's the coal mine mentality, and their parents went there. And then the women...it's interesting, when I was in college, they talked about how there's a lot of those stereotypes of men are better than girls. But growing up, I didn't really ever feel that in our district. But looking at it now, guys were kind of the dumb ones or didn't need school and girls were book smart, but we didn't necessarily go to school either. Girls start having kids so young. They get married right away with the coal miners and then just have kids. Their roles become to just have babies and raise their kids, having their husbands support them.

Audrey explained that it was rare in her age group to go off to school and become successful.

*Ellie.* When asked what her perception of why people reside in the area, Ellie reiterated, “many are not really comfortable leaving and it is where they have a sure job at the mines.” She expanded on the thought, explaining:

If they were to move to a different community, there's not a ton of mining communities out there, so a lot of people have a hard time translating what they do here to other communities. So, for many, you just can't make that change, that's a really big change to move out of the community to another that's different than here and a lot of people just aren't comfortable with that.

Regarding Ellies’s perception of outside views on people that reside in the area, she shrugged and stated, “Maybe not the greatest things. I think there's a lot of perceptions that people in [the community] are uneducated, maybe racist, and think they are very, overly conservatively. They think uneducated and backwards thinking.”

When asked to explain her perception regarding the retention of young adults in this community after high school, Ellie stated that many leave in search for “bigger and better things.” On the other side of that thought, Ellie stated:

If they have goals for their future, those aren't always accomplished by staying. I do know a lot of young, smart people that have goals for themselves that do end up staying. I know a coach that I work with went to the cosmetology program at [the community college]. She wants to stay here run a cosmetology business in

town. Also, a recent high school graduate that babysits in the community is staying and going through the nursing program.

With stories of success, Ellie explained the community college has been a great benefit in retaining individuals that have career aspirations within the community. However, if individuals do not have interest in the offerings at the community college, “the only option is to leave.” The single industry focus of the community “limits the career opportunities that we have.” This affects individuals whose goals do not align with mining and programs that are offered at the community college, Ellie stated:

Young people should have the opportunity to leave [the area], especially if they've lived their whole life here because we kind of are sheltered from those things. I think it's important for them to leave and go learn alternative viewpoints and do something else, but then it would be really awesome if they could come back and bring that change into our community.

**Hazel.** When asked what her perception as to why people reside in the area, Hazel explained the coal mining industry, power plant, and agriculture bring people to the area, as well as it being “a really good town to raise a family because it is so friendly and you know most people here, making it a safer community.” Alternatively, Hazel indicated that outside perceptions of the community vary from hers. She explained:

Many just see it as a really tiny town that would be good for a little weekend hunting trip or to have fun. I mean if you were to go to [the neighboring community], it would be a relatively close to go ski. I feel like people from the cities might not think it's up to their standards because there's not as much to do

here...Walmart is probably the coolest thing we have, but to some that wouldn't really catch their eye much.

Although the community has wavering perceptions depending on what lens is looked through, Hazel explained many young adults seem to remain in the community or "do what I did and go to college and come back." Staying or returning to the community, as Hazel informed, "depends on the opportunities that are available." In addition, she indicated that if the individual's family is still in the area, it promotes individuals to return, "but if your family has moved from the area, the chances of coming back are slim."

**Summary.** Many of the participants have experienced similar ties to perceptions regarding living in rural areas. These perceptions include those that reside in rural areas being uncultured, uneducated, rednecks. While the participants admit there may be some truth to the assumptions, they do not view their community in the same ways. The individuals have a sense of pride and connection to the area, indicating they do not necessarily care what the outside perceptions are.

### ***Influences of Future Sustainability of the Area***

Questions twelve through fifteen of the interview protocol address community members perceptions of the future sustainability of the region. Table 4.5 addresses the questions found within the third category of the interview protocol, the influences of future sustainability of the area. This category reflects the theory of aspect place affordance, which indicates contextual information to "directly perceive what is there,"

assisting to “actualize affordances” and “perceived meanings in a given place” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2).

**Table 4.5**

*Category Three of Interview Protocol*

Influences of Future Sustainability of the Area	How do the coal mines and power plant influence the area? Now? In the future?
	How profitable will this area be in the next decade for the community members that reside in the region?
	What is needed for the success and sustainability of this area?
	What future careers or industries do you foresee coming to this area to assist in the sustainability of the region?

This information allows community members to provide insight as to how they perceive the community may sustain in the future, developing ideas as to ways in which the area may encourage future sustainable practices to support the success of the region. As Ticken (2014) states, “Here, in these communities, the question isn’t whether community exists. Here, the question is whether it will continue to exist” (p. 159).

**Community leaders.**

*Diane.* Diane explained, the coal mines and power plants “have been a major, major contributor to our community economically, and it’s frightening for a lot of our residents about the demise or the future demise of the power plant and the coal resources.” Diane went on to explain, “I personally believe that the demise is a little bit premature, it’s not going to happen overnight, but it is going to happen, and we need to be preparing for that.”



“I don’t think [the coal mines and power plants] are going to have as much influence in the future, but they will have an influence,” explained Diane. With a serious look, she continued to explain, “I mean, the powerplant may quit using coal, they may go to alternative energy sources, or they may go natural gas– that’s one of the things I hear most about.” Hearing the news about the different mines, Diane informed that one mine is looking to continue to grow their sales internationally, another mine is set to close in less than ten years, and all have cut their employee numbers considerably. “That is really scary for people,” she explained, “but it is not just the closing of mines that has caused fewer miners, they just don’t need as many miners anymore, automation has caused that.” With hope, she continued:

It is pretty uncertain, but if we can get the right leadership in government and look at younger people being involved in city council, for example, then they will start looking for some solutions, even if I do not agree with the solutions, I’ll appreciate their efforts.

With the uncertainty regarding the future of the community, Diane was asked about the profitability of the area for the members of the community in the future. After pondering for a moment, Diane’s response was, “I don’t know... I can only surmise that...it may not change, but hopefully, we can do some things with the community college to make it a more viable and influential economic resource.” “I would love to see us have a rec center,” she added, thinking of the recent community proposal projects:

It would be a great economic draw for people here, in addition to when broadband is put in place...we might be able to attract more people to come live here

because we have so much to offer young people and they can take advantage of hunting, fishing, camping, skiing, hiking, and all those outdoor activities – plus just being involved in the community.

For the success and sustainability of the area, Diane reflected on the Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce’s ideas about how the community must become part of the region, rather than just the community lines. “It is important to look at our community as a regional concept to help us improve economically,” she explained.

Alternatively, Diane explained:

We need to look at future careers or industries that could profit the region, such as the development of hemp that could be manufactured here...we have plenty of land, we just have to find a better distribution system in that we do not have the ability to transport goods from here to urban areas or places where it may be used.

Diane went on to explain, “another area that has been talked about a lot is training in aeronautics, which would include drones and pilot training.” In addition, Diane added the local community college is looking into partaking in training for cybersecurity. “Oh,” Diane added before moving on, “at one time, there was talk about having a hydroponic area that would use the steam from the power plant, but at the time they were unable to figure out how to accomplish the idea.” “Really, what we need is somebody to come in here with some big money and say, ‘okay, this is what I’m going to do,’ whether it is for hemp farming or aeronautics training or building drones,” she stated, “We have the ideas, we just need a way to finance them.”

**Blake.** As the coal mines and power plants highly influence the area, Blake admitted that she feels that “we're really at a crossroads right now.” “For a long time, people relied on the coal mines for high-powered paying jobs as it was the best that they could do” driving the economics of the area to “houses, vehicles, and almost a lifestyle that I question if those people with limited education will be able to maintain and obtain jobs in the next five years.” Blake explained:

It's going to hit a crossroads here...people are scared, and when people are scared, they don't want to invest in the community and education, and so I think we're at a big crossroads in our community on developing and if it will really be a community that can draw people in. If we live in fear and don't invest in [the community], it's going to end up hurting us.”

Regarding the profitability of the area, Blake has “seen improvements over the last year with the economic development team.” She explained that the team is “really trying to revamp the old downtown, get new businesses in, and I think that's essential... people have to start thinking differently.” Regarding thinking differently, she indicated that the community needs to look at “What services, goods can we provide in our local community that can sustain us?” With urgency, she added:

We have got to stop being so self-reliant on natural resources. We've seen, historically, how that's just killed us all the way...we can correlate it to Gold Rush or the oil booms and what that has done. When your natural resources are high, it's great. There's a lot of money and revenue coming in, but if we're only relying on that, it's really going to kill us. [The community] has to think really differently

in the next ten years...or five years...about what we're going to do and do differently.

In response to what the community needs to be successful, Blake explained:

We really need a good manufacturing company or technology or something very different coming out of this community to provide goods and services. Education will be huge in that. I know if I was running the high school right now, I would be partnering with the college and probably even the mine or the power plant saying, “What can we start doing differently to educate these kids so that they can produce in the next ten years and stay here locally?”

Blake added that trades are huge:

Especially when looking at outsourcing, there are crazy amounts of goods and services that we could be doing right in the United States, but we've got to invest in something like that to make it happen and educate our kids in that manner.

“Well I will say, and I can't believe it,” in response to what industries may come to assist in the sustainability of the area, “these hemp farms are big right now...One is going up in [the neighboring community], but with a whole fertile area right here...they're saying that's going to end up being huge.” Adding to the idea of hemp farms, Blake explained, “they are also looking at a solar farm here, but I still think we should be looking at manufacturing some goods in our area.” In addition, Blake explained:

I also think that there's a huge future in drone technology and that whole area, and a huge future in observing how the world works and how plants grow and survive,

translating those types of systems of the environment to solve life-long problems that we're facing.

**Rae.** Knowing the coal mines and power plants highly influence the area, Rae explained, “they’re going away.” As the community faces a crossroads, Rae described the good work that is occurring within the community, discussing how the area may move forward. A challenge that Rae explained the community is facing is the “reality that we will never ever, ever find anything that’s going to replace that tax space or those jobs...never...it doesn’t exist in the US anymore...you cannot get an \$80,000 job on a high school education.” Through the time of change, Rae stated:

I firmly believe that it's going to be a pretty big exit of people, but then that will make the town recreate itself and a huge influx of people will come in because of the quality of life stuff that'll happen, like the coffee shops and the breweries.

Furthering the conversation of change, Rae explained:

Marijuana is going to be a big thing, and the hemp manufacturing and that type of stuff. That is going to be the change... I also think we're going to attract a lot more people like me, because my money is not tied to [the community]. I make my money all over the world, and so I can live in [the area] and if the mines shut down, super sad for a lot of people trying to figure out what they're going to do, but my money is not tied here.

To further the success and sustainability of the region, Rae explained the needs include:

Larger industry jobs that can support a community and infrastructure changes...such as roads, transportation, byways, that type of stuff...Distribution

channels are a huge one...currently, they only exist for the power plants and that's one single line that goes from the plants to the mine and truck traffic that goes from the mine to the railroad.

Rae also foresees technology-based programs coming into the region to assist in regrowth and sustainability within the region. Rae explained, "the reality is things are moving more and more towards automation, so we're not going to have the workforce to do a lot of that stuff." In addition, she explained, "Agriculture development in sustainable products...creation and development of more sustainable project products that can be exported out." "Basically," she continued, "making various different things from what exists in our resource bucket." Regarding society and economics, Rae explained, "Things change so fast, especially when it comes to stuff like this, and rural towns feel change at a minute level."

### **Mentors of gifted individuals.**

*Grayson.* "The coal mine is the economy," Grayson responded when asked how the coal mines and power plant influence the area. He expanded on his statement explaining:

It's also the culture...The businesses. It doesn't matter what business it is...Wendy's, McDonald's, whatever. There's always a "We support coal" sticker in the window...What happens to you if you don't? You don't do business. Period. I don't exactly know the whole story behind it, but Bank of the West was, and the chairman made a statement about how he was no longer wanting to give loans to coal mines. Everybody I knew who had accounts there went and took their

money out that day...feeds into the idea of the ignorance...I see all sides of it because I've actually been around, but a lot of these people depend on the mine. Even the families that don't depend on it, generally support it because it's money and it creates markets. In general, everybody supports the mine. In reality, a few people might make a few offhand comments about global warming or something like that, but nobody has the guts to be like, "I blame the mine." Nobody would say that. You would be driven out. "Coal keeps the lights on" ...It's a big deal...It dominates the town.

When asked of the profitability of the area the next decade for those that continue to reside in the region, Grayson flatly stated, "It won't be."

For the success and sustainability of the area, Grayson excitedly responded, "That's almost a cultural question...It depends on the agenda." He explained that many define success in small areas as the town remaining small. While surrounding areas have had opportunities presented to them to expand, many have declined in order to maintain the small factor of the area. Grayson remembers when Walmart came into the local community, explaining City Council made it very hard for them to come in. To fit the community's standard, Walmart was "significantly shrunk" and were required to leave out specific amenities, in order to not take away from local businesses. Making it hard for the corporation to do business "was on purpose, as it was meant to allow local businesses to exist." With not wanting to drive local businesses away, the community also realized that the corporation would bring in business as well, as "it attracts a lot of people to the town who otherwise wouldn't come." Grayson explained:

One of my buddy's dad owned the One-Hour Photo here...the only One-Hour...back before cellphones had good cameras. His father supported his family with that business...then Walmart came. One of the first things he brought to City Council was no photo lab...and for a longtime, there were no photo kiosks at Walmart...but his business still went under because everybody got cellphones...it's tough.

“There's some people who want it very much to remain small and there is an incredible resiliency in communities like that,” Grayson explained. Growing up, Grayson thought that the area needed to diversify and grow to survive and be successful, but as he has watched people stay in the region, he has noticed that they're “sticking around because they like it.” To them:

That's their thing. They like the cowboy idea. They like the idea of living on the frontier. They like the idea of, "I have to survive out here. It molds my character. I have dirty hands and a clean mind. It's a tough life, but a good life.”

Relating his understanding to how keeping the area small provides success, he stated, “I guess it succeeds at a family level, but it certainly doesn't succeed at a community or an economic level.” Besides hunting tourism and ranching, there is not much beyond coal that will save the community unless something big came in, “The community would shrink and those who stayed here would be proud of staying here...it is part of the character of the community.” Grayson explained that if the community decided to define success as “retaining or attracting people,” the area would need to “diversify, offering people a way to make a living.” In addition, he explained that City Council would have



to be willing to say yes to a big corporation, “You can have the space. You can compete with the local businesses. We’re going to take the gamble that you’re going to attract more people than we’re going to put out of work.”

With the outlook of the meaning of success and sustainability in the region, Grayson explained that he does not foresee anything coming in. He stated:

Coal will either increase or it will decrease...If coal does well, it naturally will attract people to want to try to set things up here. So...It's will coal get better? If coal gets better, it will increase the financial health of the community. If coal dips, then we dip with it. Really, it's tied to coal.

*Adalyn.* When asked how the coal mines and power plants influence the area currently and, in the future, Adalyn sat up straighter, excited to respond:

Okay...The coal mines and power plant provide...well they are pretty much the building blocks of our economy right now and so it provides thousands of jobs. The majority of people that live in [the area] either work at the coal mine or the power plant. So that is what drives all the economy in our town and in the future.

As the community and members on the City Council recognize that the coal mines and power plant’s futures are not promising, Adalyn stated:

We need to make new goals and new plans to get away from that because once those things either shut down or more regulations are placed and people start losing jobs, we really need ways to build new jobs and opportunities for people in our community...there's an expiration date and our town is making a lot of actions to counteract that. But, right, now we have an actual effective plan.

In response to how profitable Adalyn thinks the area will be in the next decade for the community members that reside in the region, she recounted the uncertainty:

We do know for a fact that [a local mine] is closing down in the next five years.

We know that the [the neighboring community's] power plant is closing down in the next five years. We know that what the power plant that we currently have has three stacks to generate and one of those stacks has already shut down. We know that a second one is going to be shut down in the next 10 years...I think the power plant in the area has a chance of being successful in the future because they are a nationwide corporation and they will invest in renewable energy and natural gas and those newer technologies, they've already invested over a million dollars in research for carbon extraction from the air...I think that [the corporation] might be the money maker to our economy in the future...they might be innovative enough to make the changes and train their employees to make the switch. But the coal mines are really in trouble and we can't ignore the fact that those are a huge contributor to our economy.

When asked what is needed for the success and sustainability of the area, Adalyn again was eager to respond:

I do know of some things that [the community] is doing. I've been of paying attention to what direction are we moving to deal with this issue that is so forthcoming. In the next five years, we're talking about all of these power plants and mines shutting down and new regulations being placed. We don't know if Trump's going to be reelected...if a Democrat goes into office it's very possible

that some serious environmental regulations could get put into place. If those things happen, one thing that is huge is the growth of hemp in [the area]. The chamber of commerce has been holding workshops to help farmers learn about this now that it's legalized for farmers to grow...hemp can be used for paper, medicine, clothes, it's such a versatile crop, so I think that we're learning more and more about it. I think that is a great route for us to go. We need to find a new industry or multiple industries and hemp could be one of those industries. We need to find a new industry that is not fossil fuels.

Along with what is needed for the success and sustainability of the region, Adalyn addressed future careers and industries that may arise in the region reiterating the hemp industry. She explained that with being the sunshine state and having access to fresh water from runoff, hydro-plants and solar-plants could also become viable options. “The problem is we have negative attitudes towards those types of energy right now,” she explained:

But I think as our youth grow up to become adults and active members in our community, those attitudes might be eliminated. We could absolutely bring renewable energy to our region, along with sustainable farming. I think that there's a lot of opportunities, it's just a matter of getting the community on board. Coal mining is a culture and trying to find a way out of that is going to be really challenging.

In addition to renewable resources, Adalyn added tourism would be a good industry to capitalize on, explaining:

Yes...they take photos up here on the street and leave trash behind, but the thing is we need to value the economic growth that they would bring to our town and we need to get over it. We can't continue to be a closed off bubble.

“Oh,” she gasped excitedly, “Paleontology.” Explaining, she added:

We have one of the biggest paleontology programs in the nation. People are coming from out of country to go to [the community college] to take our paleontology program. Two years ago, we discovered a very rare dinosaur species and have been able to bring students out there to dig up those bones and now that dinosaur is called...If anyone who has an interest in geology, [the community] has so much to offer...It's also been labeled like a national observatory, which is a pretty big deal because in order to qualify for that, you must have no light pollution within a certain square mile radius or something to that effect. The [neighboring community] qualifies for that, so it's somewhere where people can go to look at the stars without any light pollution whatsoever. I think that's pretty special for anyone that's interested in astronomy.

**Brooklyn.** When asked how the coal mines and the power plant influence the area currently and, in the future, Brooklyn confidently answered:

They provide about a third of the jobs that people have here. Without them, there goes at least a third of the population...like families and all. It would be even more than that, though, it would be a significant impact in our community. Then, even looking at the money that they pay in taxes to the town and to the school, we would be severely struggling.

In response to how profitable Brooklyn foresees the area in the next decade for community members that live in the region, she explained:

It depends on how the closures roll out because at the power plant, unit one will definitely be closed. Unit two probably will be, but if unit three is still up and running, then it'll be... well, there will still be people here...because that means that [a local mine] would still be open too. But I think [another local mine] has hit its last vane, so they're closing down really regardless. So, that impacts all those jobs.

Brooklyn blatantly answered, “A new industry,” when asked what is needed for the success and sustainability of the area. Continuing the discussion, Brooklyn discussed future careers or industries that may come to the area to assist in sustainability, pausing for a moment to think:

Actually, [my husband] just went down to speak with congresses at the power committee, because they passed a law that is supposed to bring a new industry to areas where there's going to be power plant and mine closures to keep communities going. But, it's kind of a ridiculous bill. It doesn't have the funding that it needs to provide the things that it promises. There's no plan behind anything in it. It's just like, “we're going to fix it.” The government could force an industry here, which would be great, but they could also feel like eh...And then, it'll just be a ranching community and not much else. They have a bill written that passed our state legislator and not much else...it's House Bill 1314. It sounds great on the paper, which is the point of it.

**Family members of gifted individuals.**

*Callie.* When asked how the coal mines and power plant influence the area currently and, in the future, Callie responded confidently that it is “not looking good.” As the mines are beginning to shut down and reduce jobs, she explained that “it is sad” because one of the local mines “puts a lot into the community.” It is the mine that supports the local robotics teams, helps mentor students, and encourages young individuals to “think outside the box.” Callie explained, “The other mines don’t really do anything specifically for the community. They are all about the coal. They don’t really care about the community.”

When asked how profitable the area will be in the next decade for the community members that decided to continue residing in the area, Callie stated:

I don't think it's going to be very profitable. I really think that the mines are getting ready to close down, and at the power plant, it's going to be closing down soon, so I think our little town is definitely going to be whittling on down and going away because of the laws and stuff coming down on coal and power plants. Unfortunately, I don't think this community has a fighting chance come the next decade.

With that, Callie informed that she does not currently see anything that would assist in the success and sustainability of the region. She did explain that in order to succeed:

The area needs just overall more community support from all of us. Have more local shops and to shop more locally, and instead of hiring all those people that are outside of our town that are not supporting our town...hire people that are

residents and willing to work for the community. A lot of our farmers and ranchers hire people that plan to be here and support our ranchers and our farmers. That would be better.

When thinking about careers of industries she foresees coming to the area to assist in the sustainability, Callie stated:

I would say definitely that healthcare, no matter what, is going to be here. With the hemp and marijuana now becoming legal, we are actually seeing a lot more farmers growing that. In turn, that's going to bring in the businesses selling it, and then producing it. I could easily see some kind of manufacturer coming in to one of our old stores and developing the process of extracting the crops and taking it and selling marijuana or hemp.

*Mia.* When asked about how the coal mines and power plants influence the area currently and, in the future, Mia explained:

They influenced the politics of the people in this area tremendously. This is a very Republican county in a Democratic state, and the political views of the people living here, I think, do reflect the coal mines and the power plants. I worry that if the future of those industries go away, that this community will suffer and a lot of people will have to leave, because they won't have jobs.

In addition, Mia relates the current and perceived future in the next decade for community members that continue to reside in the region, explaining that the profitability of the region will be tied to the coal mines and the power plant. She stated:

If the coal mines and power plant are still here, it'll be profitable. Whenever they go away, either something else, some other industry, or some other form of job is going to have to take its place or the people are going to have a hard time finding a job here.

When asked what industry might come in and take coals place for the success of the region, Mia silently sat stumped for a moment:

That is a good question and I really don't know the answer to that one. It must be something that employs a lot of people and employs them in a way that they're making a livable wage. [This state] is expensive, and [this region] is not any different. I feel like we have a lot of people already that travel to [the neighboring mountain community] to work jobs where they make minimum wage, or maybe a little bit better, and they're struggling. So, for this county, or for this community to be viable, there's going to have to be something that comes in and offers a decent living.

*Maggie.* When asked how the coal mines and power plants influence the area currently and, in the future, Maggie explained:

Well, right now they are a very big economic part of our community. Everybody...their spouse works there, or they work there. They have a huge influence on our community because it has very decent paying jobs for our community...at least half the community works in some sort of mine or power plant job. In the future, if it goes away...which at this point it is...I think it's going to be very, very devastating for the town.



In response to how profitable Maggie thinks the area be in the next decade for the community members that reside in the region, she pondered for a moment, "...the next decade really depends on... how it goes." She continued, explaining, "If everything stays open for the planned decade...well...I actually still think profits are going down and people are going to leave on their own terms."

When asked what is needed for the success and sustainability of the area, Maggie shrugged:

Something that's going to bring in jobs...500 some odd people are going to lose their jobs...that would be like equivalent to 98,000 people in the city losing their jobs...It needs to be something that is going to pay decent.

Concerned, Maggie is unsure as to what careers or industries may come to the region with the ability to support its community members. While renewable energy is the "talk of the town," she demonstrated skepticism that the industry would provide enough jobs and opportunities.

### **Young gifted adults.**

*Sylvie.* When asked how the coal mines and power plants influence the area currently and, in the future, Sylvie confidently answered:

The coal mines are a big part of the community. If I had to guess, I would say over 80% of the people in [the community] work at either the coal mines, the power plants, or some form of job that relates to those because they are our sole income for the most part. Right now, with it being a kind of a hot political issue, our community's kind of up in arms about the different political viewpoints.

During the election year, it obviously affected how we were voting, how we wanted our town to vote, and how we wanted [the state] to vote.

Pausing for a moment, “In the future,” Sylvie quietly replied, “...I think it's going to turn into a ghost town.” Sylvie explained this thought, stating:

With the coal mines going out, I don't think it's going to be profitable. I think it's going to become desolate...nobody's going to be here anymore. I don't know what would come in. So, unless we start having bigger businesses or the college gets a big boom with expansion or bringing in students...there's not a lot of room for growth right now, sadly.

For the success and sustainability of this area, Sylvie recognized that the community needs “something that will bring in people.” She explained, “If you don't have a community, you don't have a town and you're not going to bring in any revenue...not having something to bring people is just going to send everybody away.”

*Audrey.* When asked how the coal mines and the power plants influence the area currently and, in the future, Audrey explained, “I don't think people, beyond our community, realize how much power we provide to other people.” Audrey explained power produced with coal is fairly cheap and quick, whereas renewable resources are not, leading the community to question the sustainability of the industry. Audrey informed one of the local mines “invests in the community,” as well as provides funding to local robotics teams, “they write us a check every year to help towards costs.” The local coal mine is also “highly involved in the community, helping donate where needed.” With the impact the mines have on the local community, Audrey explained:

As far as taxes, the power plants and the coal mines are in the top six places of what taxes that are a big support of our community that we live off of to function as a community...Someone was saying our district may lose something like \$6 million alone a year by the potential of losing these coal mines and these power plants. In a news article I was reading the other day, they said if you wanted to look at this type of closure happening in [an urban area]...here it's about 500 jobs that are going to be affected...in [an urban] area, it would be about 98,000 jobs that people would be losing....We either are going to have to rely on our younger generation to come up with something big to help us make up for all the lost money...or it doesn't look good.

Not wanting to give up, Audrey explained, “I think there's a lot of potential here.” While there are glimmers of hope with talk of manufacturing and a new recreation center, “A lot of people are worried right now.” Audrey explained that if one of the mines shut down, an article she read explained:

The top third of the miners should be able to retire...The middle group, they're hoping, can work out some deal to find jobs...But the newer miners are going to be the most affected because they're going to have to start over with a brand-new career.

When asked how profitable the area will be in the next decade for the community members that reside in the area, Audrey mentioned that beyond talk of creating solar panel fields, there is not much looking to come into the community at the moment. With the closing of the mines, “it is going to have a trickle effect on the economy...affecting

our restaurants, car dealerships, businesses, and housing market.” For the success and sustainability of the area, Audrey explained that the community needs “the younger generation to step up and be willing to push for changes...we’ve got to come up with something.”

*Ellie.* When asked how the coal mines and power plants influence the area currently and, in the future, Ellie explained the coal mines and power plants are “the biggest staple to our community.” She stated:

Even if you or your family is not employed by the coal mine, you are directly affected by it. My husband and I are hoping to in five years maybe move to somewhere else, but we own our house here, so if the coal mines are to close in five years from now and our whole economy crashes, we're not going to be able to sell our house. So even though neither of us are employed by the coal mine, we're affected by it. If we have mass exodus of people in our community, tons of teachers are going to lose their jobs because we don't have enough kids to educate...the hospital will have to layoff many of the nurses and doctors...it's going to affect our whole community.

Continuing the discussion of profitability, when asked how profitable the area will be in the next decade for the community members that reside in the area, Ellie stated:

It depends on what changes we make in our community...this next decade will be a big turning point for our community. If we are able to make those changes, we could continue to be really profitable. If we don't make those changes, our community could go through a major decline and depression. There is a lot of

uncertainty, so if we are able to diversify our economy and where we are profiting, I think we have the potential to keep going the way that we're going. But if we don't diversify our interests, I do see us not being profitable in the next ten years.

When asked what is needed for the success and sustainability of the area, Ellie brought good thoughts, but with a bit of hesitation:

While there has been talk of bringing in a hemp production industry, crops, and renewable energy industries, all of those ideas are really awesome, but I don't see them being implemented unless a community change in mindset happens because even a lot of people were really resistant to marijuana being legalized in our town...so a lot of people won't be supportive of the hemp industry...but when it comes down to it, do we really have any other choice? I think it's really important that we educate people on where our community is going and what opportunities are available for us...but unless people are able to make a mindset change, we won't see those changes happen.

In addition, Ellie provided insight into future careers or industries that may come to the area to assist in the sustainability:

The tourism industry could really take off here. Tons of people love coming to [the state] ...I feel like we're really missing out on a lot of possible tourism. We could advertise our hunting more and capitalize on getting more people to come here for the true western experience. We could also be running a rafting outfitting company...and do more to continue revitalizing our downtown, get more shops in

here, and bring in more modern hotels...really ramping up the amount of tourism that we get here could help in success, as that's what sustains a lot of [the state's] communities. We also have a huge paleontology program that could be promoted better and a national monument close. Our entire county could benefit if we advertised [the national monument] more as place that people could come visit...What little kid doesn't love dinosaurs? That could attract a ton of families to our community if we could offer more programming.

*Hazel.* When asked how the coal mines and power plant influence the area, Hazel clearly stated, "Right now, it is what keeps us alive...it is where the majority of our community works...When they talk about shutting down, it is scary and we don't really know what's going to happen to our town." With doubt of the industry fully shutting down in the future, "just because it is so big here and the whole area thrives on it," there was audible concern as the thought of the industry completely shutting down. Hazel explained, "If they were to completely shut down, I think we would become a ghost town...honestly...I could see it becoming like [a midwestern state] where you go seasonally...But as far as living here, it wouldn't happen."

In addition to the agriculture opportunities found within the region, Hazel indicated "the next big source of energy" may become profitable in the area if "some kind of training is provided for the coal mine and power plant employees." Being a "powerhouse for so much of the [western states], implementing a new energy source here would help us stay afloat."

**Summary.** With the fear and anxiety seen throughout the community, the region is at a crossroads with what may occur based on the sustainability of the area. With recent news regarding the community's economic development, the participants explained that the area needs a new industry to come into the region. The future holds promise with the encouragement of future generations to assist in the success of the community.

### ***Gifted Education in the Area***

Questions sixteen through twenty-one address community members understanding of gifted education within the local rural area. Table 4.6 addresses the questions found within the second category of the interview protocol, gifted education in the area. This category reflects the combination of all three theory of place aspects, place meaning, place attachment, and place affordance. Intertwining all three aspects of the theory of place provides the ability to understanding how to encourage and emphasize the development of the theory of place. The theory of place offers an understanding of how individuals form and disseminate meanings of place, create “cognitions, beliefs, attitudes,” and mental perceptions that build attachments to place, and ways to construct “perceived meanings in a given place” that actualize affordances (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2).

**Table 4.6**

*Category Four of Interview Protocol*

Gifted Education in the Area	What is your familiarity with gifted education? What are supports for gifted young adults' choices regarding residing in this community?
	What are the barriers for gifted young adults' choices regarding residing in this community?
	What are your perceptions of the local K-12 school district in this area?
	How do the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain in or return to this area?
	Do you feel students are challenged, engaged, and invested in their schools and communities? Why?
	What is your familiarity with gifted education?

This topic provides insight to community members understanding of what gifted education is, their perception of the local school district, and the supports and barriers to gifted young adults remaining in or returning to local rural communities after high school. Haas and Nachtigal (1985) explains, we must be “equipping rural students and the adults who surround them with tools to create a different, better future” (p. vi). In many rural communities, school districts create opportunities, representing what Tieken (2014) explains, “That school, it represents us. It’s a home, the heart of the community” (p. 151).



### **Community leaders.**

*Diane.* As the questions transitioned into education, Diane's experience came out. When asked about her knowledge of gifted education, she responded, "It is not as strong as maybe I would like it to be, but I rely on others who have more expertise in that field, like [the Director of Gifted Education]." Diane explained, "While I was teaching, our formal gifted program was pretty nondescript and not very effective." She went on to state, "I often thought that gifted students were identified because they were overachievers more than because they had some gift or talent." Thinking about students that have grown up in the district, Diane explained, "We have had many graduates who have gone to do important things and some really talented people, but not because we have a program that develops those talents."

When asked if there were supports for young gifted adults' choices regarding living in the area, Diane paused, "I don't know. I'll put it that way because I don't want to be negative and I'm not even sure that we have one. Maybe we do, but I am unaware of it." When asked about the barriers this population faces, however, Diane explained, "Work and jobs." Explaining this thought, "I mean, jobs that appeal to their talent, to their gift...there have been graduates that have gone outside the community and done enormous things... but what is there here for people with those kinds of talents and gifts?" Pondering, Diane added, "We don't do as much as we should do to recognize them locally." Still pondering, Diane said, "now there are still some graduates that have remained in the community and made really great contributions to the community... but the barriers mainly is there just isn't what they need here."

As Diane has experience being an educator and is still highly involved in the local school district, she admitted her perspective of the school district is fairly good, “I’m one of these people that tends to see the glass half full, and I have always been pretty positive about our school district.” Relating to the local district is a challenge, as Diane explained, “If you look at test scores and if you think that’s the only thing that determines a quality education, then you’re talking to the wrong person because I think those test scores are... well, I believe in accountability.” She went on to explain her view:

Test scores are a deterrent to us feeling good about our educational system in so many ways, as we have such a homogenous community that to rate us and rank us among other school districts, it does not tell what our story is.

Due to the misunderstanding of the local district based on test scores alone, Diane stated, “I do believe we’re beginning to tell our story better and to be more positive about our educational system, but it’s hard and hard work to overcome the scores and the rating system and the ranking.” Diane returned to the original prompt explaining:

As far as what we’re doing, I think we’re getting a greater emphasis on STEM... At the high school we have an excellent teacher up there who’s doing some great things with distributive education and with future business leaders, participating on a state level with her students.

With what seems too often to be lack of support from the local community, Diane explained:

We need to begin to emphasize those accomplishments, and we are... We’re beginning to use social media more and beginning to use print media more to try

to get our message out that students who go here can go anywhere and be successful.

To promote student engagement in the local community, Diane believed, “we do a lot of that with extracurricular stuff and do have community coaches and such that are involved and are really excited about it.” She went on to add, “we also promote involvement through the DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America) program, FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) program, and robotics teams, which all bring in people from the community to help.” Diane also felt that students are actively challenged, engaged, and invested in the schools and community because “we have a large number of students who are active and engaged in their educational process, and they're taking great advantage of that, and we're doing our best to provide that education.” She admitted that there is “a segment of our population, our student population, that are not involved, are not taking advantage of all that there is to take advantage of, that may not make it through to get a diploma.” The success of those students, as Diane explained:

It depends so much on the community, their parents, what kind of encouragement they get from home. How often do they have to stay home as a young adult, middle school or high school, to take care of younger children? There's so much dynamics, economic, social, and personal kinds of things that are going on out there that we can't be all things to all people.

To have all students actively involved and engaged, “we need more support from the community in so many different ways.” With a sad tone, Diane explained, “So not all of

our students are going to succeed, and I hate to be the person that says that, but that's how I feel about it. There's too much going on outside their lives.”

*Blake.* “Gifted might be one of my weakest areas, but still probably have a pretty good knowledge of it,” Blake responded regarding her personal understanding of gifted education. Regarding supports the community has for gifted young adults to reside in the local area, Blake’s response turned more towards the barriers the community holds. Blake explained, “with the identification of gifted kids, we jump through a lot of hoops to make it happen.” Blake added:

Traditional education is really, really hard for gifted kids, and in a rural area, it can be a disadvantage because we maybe don't gravitate and hone in on their qualities, such as arts or music or even just intellectual abilities...what they could be interested in and having them learn through those avenues. So, to keep them in [the community] I think is hard... I think it's hard, and I think it goes back to their family support system if they'll come back or if they'll go.

After a pause, Blake added, “I think that if my child was gifted, it would be really hard to stay in [the area]. I'll just say it. If they were twice exceptional, I'd be out in a heartbeat.” Blake feels that barriers to gifted young adults’ choices regarding living in the area are, “choice and opportunity.” Blake continued to explain, “I think it's can they get pushed? Do they get the services that they need?” In addition, “It also kind of depends what their talent fields are...Are there those opportunities? Are they able to connect with others?” “Those are all barriers,” she explained, “it is also not having adequately trained staff to support teachers in that area.”

As far as perceptions of the local school district, Blake admitted that it has “definitely changed dramatically in the last five years.” Explaining this idea, she stated, “Our student achievement's up, which is huge, as we're giving them more opportunities.” Five years ago, Blake explained, “there weren't any clubs at the middle school...any...zero...and now there are twelve different clubs, which is giving kids different outlets.” Another benefit is that “the school district's partnering with the community more than ever,” Blake explained, “and I think that through those partnerships, we'll be able to achieve great things.” Addressing the side of lack of support, “There's still some perception in the community around the school district trying to do new and innovating things and people thinking that new and innovative ways are not the way that kids should learn.” Yet with some negativity still existing around the local school district, Blake felt:

We're facing some of those barriers and also facing some barriers that our hardest kids are actually getting a ton of support but maybe not the right support because we have a lack of mental health, lack of peer support, lack of counseling, which results in some perceptions from people whose kids are falling through the cracks because we're drowning with that population right now.

When asked whether the local school is engaging students in learning that promotes residing in or returning to the local area, Blake lit up, explaining:

Problem-based learning is a huge part of that, allowing our kids to solve everyday problems in our community and connect with people working on those problems as careers and professionals and for them to say, “Oh my gosh. I'm a 13-year-old

that can make an impact” ... I think it draws out passion, and that passion will put them right back here. I think the biggest thing, even for me, is those relationships that I built with people...if you go and live in a big city, you won't have that much of an impact to the people that you get to serve and see every day, and when you have those ties to people, it's really hard to just go and be a number somewhere else...that naturally draws people back. I think wanting to serve your people is just such a high quality, and so we have to engage our kids to build those relationships so that they do want to come back.

In response to whether students are challenged, engaged, and invested in the schools and community, Blake stated, “We are doing such a better job of this...our philosophy of relationships and every kid needs a person is huge.” Blake explained, “when kids know how much you care, they'll work for you, and I think we're seeing that...seeing kids do great things because they're seeing success.” Blake proudly pointed out:

Man, we're winning lots of awards and doing big things...and when kids are a part of that, they are naturally like, “Oh my gosh. My school did this. I want to work hard for these people.” I've just been blown away by our teachers going and supporting our kids at drama club performances, club robotics, sporting events...and when the kids see that their teachers are in the stands or out there watching them, that's huge...that shows commitment and investment.

*Rae.* While Rae does not have a strong understanding of gifted education, she explained she has basic understanding of AP courses and the dual enrollment program. When asked what the supports are for young gifted adults' choices regarding residing in the community, Rae explained:

What I tell people all the time is they have all the opportunity in the world to be able to create their own life...because of that they have the wherewithal to be able to get way farther ahead to be able to create things that you couldn't create anywhere else...I was in the top 10%, but like I said before, you'd be able to create kind of your own life and what that looks like. I wouldn't be able to have my [local businesses] and everything else I'm doing even in a place like [the neighboring ski town].

When asked about the barriers young gifted adults' face regarding living in the community, Rae explained:

Overall resources...access to capital, access to workforce, a variety of things like that...Access to support networks around what it really means to be able to do that type of stuff...The beautiful thing about creating everything yourself is you get to create everything yourself....The negative thing to creating your own life and doing all that is you have to create everything yourself.

Shifting the conversation to the perceptions of the local K-12 school district, Rae stated:

I think that they've made leaps and bounds when it comes to progress...our overall community does not necessarily support education, which makes their

jobs a lot more difficult... and they, just like across the entire state, don't have the resources that they need to be able to do what they need to do... and an unfortunate thing...in a rural town, you're attracting maybe teachers who don't necessarily want to be there or they're all super young, this is their first time teaching, which has started detriments for the level of education because how can you teach and be able to learn from other teachers on what works and what doesn't work, if you're all brand new?

Expanding, Rae stated:

The unfortunate thing is, we have one track to kind of craft these students and the school district isn't able to do that because of the resources they've been allotted, which carries up into the college...Most students struggle...I mean I almost failed out of college my freshman year... We don't support education enough and our education system definitely doesn't provide a level of service that our students deserve.

When asked if the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain and return to the area, Rae explained:

We do a lot of really great programming...the college does a really good job creating programs that make sense for students to want to stay in the area...but we have to get a better guidance counselor in our schools because that will make or break a student's success...I 100% belief that...it is a huge impact to what that child's future ends up looking like.



Continuing the topic, Rae considered if students are challenged, engaged, and invested in their schools and their community, responding, “I think the top 10% are.” Pausing, Rae furthered her response stating:

...which is another thing, those top 10%, if you look at the demographics, both parents are in the home and both parents are working. Those are the parents that are going to sports games. There's a reason those students are on the top 10%...There's a reason those students are the ones that are in key clubs and programs that make them engaged with the community. And then the ones who aren't, there's a reason for that, too.

Rae explained, many of the 10% she discussed return to the community, just as she had.

Proudly, she explained:

There's so many people who graduated from [the local] County, who are doing these extraordinary, crazy, insane things. Like [a local individual] is the head engineer on the gas and the nitrogen containers for the space shuttle that's leaving in March...and another girl I grew up with is a nuclear physicist that controls pretty much every piece of nuclear energy in her field...there's just tons of stories like that...that no one ever talks about because first off, nobody even knows...There's people like me who are doing all the things, like helping communities come up with investments, doing crazy insane things...Nobody knows that we're all [local] County graduates because you just hear about, “Oh, you're from [the local] County, like barely even have an education,

right?"...Brilliant people who are running crazy projects all over the world graduated from [the local] County.

**Mentors of gifted individuals.**

*Grayson.* As the conversation shifted to education, Grayson explained his familiarity with gifted education:

I have had one training that defined the idea of what gifted and talented means, the kinds of needs that those students might have, and my expectations and obligations as a teacher to try and meet some of those students' needs...But I've only had about a day of that. It was part of new teacher training and it lasted for a few hours.

When approached with the supports the community has for gifted young adults' choices regarding residing in this community, Grayson explained the power plant in the community is a good employer, "you have to be intelligent for those jobs." Recently speaking with one of his colleagues, Grayson explained that her husband had to take numerous math tests, "trying to stay on out there," as they require knowledge of math and science. Grayson stated:

STEM education is a very serious aspect of working at the power plant. In addition to that, because there are federal and state regulations concerning reclamation and the process of mining coal, the jobs require science. There are white collar jobs at coal mines...engineers, geologist, environmentalists...but, there are not a whole lot of those jobs available and are highly competitive. So, if there is a student who is particularly gifted in these areas or interested in them and

they're willing to go out, get their education and then come back and compete for that job, that could be good.

Another career path that may be of interest to young gifted adults is a career in technology. "With the age of the internet," Grayson explained, "a previous city council member was exploring when he was in city government, the philosophy of promoting this as a destination where you can live, enjoy the country, and make money online."

When considering the barriers regarding young gifted adults' choices residing in the rural community, Grayson explained the mine jobs are far and few between, and they are "highly competitive to the point of favoritism." He continued to explain regarding jobs online, "the internet goes out here all the time," as well as "some of those opportunities fade just as quickly as they are created." Grayson stated, "Barriers are lack of availability, nepotism, and education." Expanding on the last point, he stated:

Kids leave to get that education because you have to go to a university outside of this town...bluntly speaking...the community college exists, but it's mostly for vocational training. If you're gifted and talented and you're concerned with academic pursuits, you're not going to this school. You're going somewhere else. When you go to that other place, what do you think of it? Do you like it? Do you realize, "Wait a minute? I could just stay here. There's more opportunity here than there would be going back home."

Bringing the discussion back to the local K-12 school district, Grayson described his perceptions of the county's school district as "it works." While the local school district "doesn't have what it needs," the educators are "willing to make a lot out of a

little.” He explained, “It has people who are willing to frankly work and not get paid to work...people who are overqualified for the jobs, and they still do them.” “The district,” he continued, “has a surprising degree of access to technology that a lot of rural places don't, which is a result of the community being willing to fund the schools to that degree or at least in that way.” Grayson added, “Mistakes are made, but I think that the intentions are good.”

When asked how the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain in or return to this area, Grayson responded there is a political element. Describing the slogan the school district has adopted, “I choose [the local] County,” it has let the community and its members to embrace why they are here. Grayson described that a contest was created for the community, teachers, students, and other members, to develop videos of why they “choose to be here.” Grayson explained:

This is a concept of community pride...“We're proud to be from here...We choose to be from here...We want to be from here...This is a culture...This is a decision that we're making...It's not because we're desperate or because we have no other choices...We want to be here.” There is a political sort of goal to control the narrative about being from here and about taking pride in being from here.

Taking the current thoughts on the local district, Grayson reflected on if students are challenged, engaged, and invested in their school and their community explaining, “it comes and goes.” Providing an example, he proudly explained:

The robotics team just got back from the state competition and did very, very well...The kids on those teams, they're super engaged, really cared about it, and

they did something...they were successful. There is an article in the paper every single week, talking about what we're doing because we were winning. This community is pretty good about recognizing success...If you are doing outstanding in something that makes you look good, and by extension, the community, you will be supported. It may not help to get a job here as the jobs are not tied to that, but as far as people being supportive of you and treating you like you belong here...

*Adalyn.* As the conversation shifted to education, Adalyn explained, “gifted education has become a passion of mine.” She continued to explain:

I am a secondary teacher and have worked with gifted students for the seven years I have been teaching. The reason why I have such a passion for gifted education is because I acknowledge that our gifted students really have the ability to make a difference in our world more so than their other peers...that's a touchy subject, I know...but they truly have the capability to be innovative and design solutions for problems that we face in the future. I feel like it's important to invest time in enrichment and helping them move forward to be contributing members of our society.

When asked what the supports are for young gifted adults' choices regarding residing in the community, Adalyn explained:

I would say that gifted individuals are actually encouraged to go elsewhere rather than stay...Some supports that should be in place would be really encouraging gifted individuals to focus on local issues and building some type of program to

allow them to get graduate credit while studying and learning about these local issues in order to come up with solutions...Find things that they're passionate about and have the opportunities for them to develop in that area.

When asked about the barriers young gifted adults' face regarding living in the community, Adalyn explained, "it's just the lack of opportunity...clear and simple." She continued to explain, "There's really nothing in place...especially with the economic question marks that we have in our community right now."

Shifting the conversation to the perceptions of the local K-12 school district, Adalyn stated:

Our district actually has the right administration in place to be effective...we have the right infrastructure in place as far as where we want to go with our curriculum, what our philosophy is, and what we want students doing. However, we cannot retain teachers. So even though we have these great ideas and great things in place, we constantly have new teachers...A large percentage of our schools are filled with new teachers every single year...and they're just trying to survive, which means a lot of our educators are in survival mode most of the year, not really focusing on enrichment and differentiation. We also don't have a lot of community support, due to generational trends of not needing an education to make money. Here, you can just graduate high school and go work for the mine, making more than somebody who's educated.

For the local school district and the community to be successful, Adalyn explained, “We really need that shift for community support to value education and to understand that our future looks a lot different than it did when they were graduating...”

When asked if the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain in and return to the area, Adalyn took a deep breath and jumped in:

I think that we are working to engage individuals in the classroom, but we are not focusing on retaining them in our community. If anything, teacher’s kind of give the idea of encouraging them to leave the community to just have experiences that they can't experience here.

Adalyn explained the FFA (Future Farmers of America) program at the high school is one that helps encourage individuals to stay in the community, as it “focuses on a lot of local issues, like local farming and agriculture, taking what kids already do outside of school and teaching them how to be more effective in that.” Continuing, Adalyn contemplated for a moment, thinking if students are challenged, engaged, and invested in their schools and in their community:

Our middle school has the right idea with the right leadership in place to do this...focusing on local issues, asking students to develop solutions to those local problems...but because we can't retain staff and retain the same philosophy and training amongst our staff... We also can't control what happens outside of the building, and I think that there's a lot of parental issues that prevent students from being engaged and invested in the community, due to negative talk that's happening at home.

**Brooklyn.** As the conversation shifted to education, Brooklyn explained her familiarity with gifted education is lacking as far as incorporating specific elements that are meeting the needs of gifted students. With attending several trainings, she feels more confident about addressing differentiation for students, but does not feel she is quite at the place to design procedures to help push students to the next level.

When asked what the supports are for young gifted adults' choices regarding residing in the community, Brooklyn explained, "the support would be from their parents to go to college elsewhere." While high achieving students are encouraged to leave the community for higher education, Brooklyn explained jobs at the power plant encourage individuals to return to the area. Brooklyn explained power plant positions include, "management positions, being environmentalist, or being an engineer."

When asked about the barriers young gifted adults' face regarding living in the community, Adalyn expanded on "there are limited opportunities." She stated, "The hospital is trying to expand, we have the school district in the community...but as far as if you were in an urban area where the possibilities seem endless, we just don't have those opportunities."

Shifting the conversation to the perceptions of the local K-12 school district, Brooklyn proudly stated, "our district is doing really great things." She continued to state:

We're making a lot of great progress and we have a strategic plan that we're actually following and striving to accomplish...test scores improving are showing that, but it is not necessarily acknowledged by the community. The perception



outside looking in is not necessarily the same as those of us who actually do work in the district... You can go into any classroom and see the engagement in students... We provide choice and provide different avenues for students to show their learning, connection to community, and all of this other stuff.

When asked if the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain in and return to the area, Brooklyn took a deep breath and explained:

The high school does a good job of providing electives for different opportunities that we have in the area, especially the Ag program... There's also opportunities for them to get involved in business experiences. The partnership with the college and AP classes has also been a helpful integration.

Continuing the topic, Brooklyn contemplated for a moment considering if students are challenged, engaged, and invested in their schools and in their community:

I would say that students are engaged in their learning. Just looking at what we're trying to do with best practices is really helpful. We've been really working hard to find what's going to work for students and give them opportunity for choice, implementing research-based strategies. On top of that, we've implemented so many new clubs, which is awesome because when I started, I ran the only two clubs that we had. Now, we have ten clubs, which is really exciting. A lot of our clubs are going out into our community, and into other's, showing off what we can do and having success. It is really important for our kids to be able to engage in different opportunities and have that community.

### **Family members of gifted individuals.**

*Callie.* As the conversation shifted to education, Callie explained her familiarity with gifted education is not significant. However, she has an identified gifted son and two other children that are being monitored. She explained her cousin's son is identified as gifted, but the elementary school "does not doing anything special or different for him." She has had the same experiences with her youngest son, "it's all the same," she explained in frustration. Her oldest son, now in middle school, was originally placed in higher classes, with likeminded peers, but as he moves his way up in the grades, his classes have gone back to being mixed ability. Frustration rose, as the thought of the district not challenging or pushing her children, Callie described the neighboring community has developed programs to push their advanced students, "showing them real-life scenarios," preparing them for the future with "critical thinking and problem-solving skills."

When asked what the supports are for young gifted adults' choices regarding residing in the community, Callie contemplated for a moment, stating, "We have opportunities for hands on tech stuff, but that's more for the coal mining or a guy working out at the power plant...not for supporting individuals to stay here." She continued to explain, "There's not much to push them and make them achieve more if they stay here...not with their ability."

When asked about the barriers young gifted adults' face regarding living in the community, Callie explained, "we don't have the options and they don't have the support to push themselves... They kind of get in a rut." She continued, stating, "We don't really

have too many role models that are going to mentor those gifted and talented kids and for a lot of them, having a good mentor is great...it's hard to follow gifted kids a lot of times.” “Unfortunately,” Callie continued, “I don't think they always have a lot of support or push for them to explore their potential.”

Shifting the conversation to the perceptions of the local K-12 school district, Callie stated, “They don't have the curriculum or the education to push these kids...throughout the county...there is none.” With a concerning look, Callie explained:

I have no idea what's going to happen when my oldest gets into 9th grade...Nobody has ever provided suggestions or supports when we go to parent teacher conference, they're like, “We don't know why you're here?”...but, what I want to know is, “How are you going to push him? How are you going to make sure he's not getting bored?” ...They don't even know how to really deal with him...so it's frustrating...a lost cause.

When asked if the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain in and return to the area, Callie paused, “There are several good programs, if your student is into it, that are really hands on and stuff, and using the education piece to learn more about topics to help their community, but other than that...no” Continuing the topic, Callie stated, “I don't think students are engaging and challenging, nor do the schools reinvest in them.” “My oldest is involved in 4H, which is an engaging program that has been investing in the community, but that has nothing to do with the school,” she explained. In addition, she stated, “The after-school robotics program is definitely investing in and improving the community.” Callie explained, “I

don't think that is always the case, but when it comes to one passionate teacher, I am fully willing to back that up.”

*Mia.* As the conversation shifted to education, Mia explained her familiarity with gifted education is “due to the fact that I'm a teacher.” However, after recently attending the state’s gifted and talented conference, she felt she has “a better understanding.” Mia continued to explain, “I think that in a lot of schools, especially rural ones...I've taught 18 years, all in rural...I don't know that we're meeting the needs of the gifted students.”

When asked what the supports are for young gifted adults’ choices regarding residing in the community, Mia informed:

With [the local community college] here, a lot of the gifted and talented kids, or the kids who are high achievers, have the opportunity to earn that associate degree while still in high school. That's a really big deal for a lot of kids, as it's less expensive to get your associate's that way and reduces the amount of student loans they could possibly have in the future....But, I don't know that this is a place where gifted and talented kids are going to stay if they're motivated individuals.

When asked about the barriers young gifted adults’ face regarding living in the community, Mia explained, “job opportunities in fields that they're interested in...unless they can find a job that allows them to work from home.” She continued to state, “So those opportunities, if they were available in [this community], I think kids would stay...but a lot of the jobs that they're going to want are not going to be in rural communities.”

Shifting the conversation to the perceptions of the local K-12 school district, Mia stated:

As a teacher in the district, I like where the middle school is going...I like the leadership that is being built, they are progressive. The high school is questionable, currently, but only because of a lack of consistency in leadership. If they could find somebody that's willing to stick around and make the hard choices and stand by them, things will change there. But the overall the attitude at the high school, amongst the faculty and students is tough... We live in a community where the perception of our schools is not a good one. Whether it's real or not, it's going to be hard to change that community perspective of the schools.

When asked if the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain in and return to the area, Mia explained many “classes are doing project-based learning that revolves around the community...finding a problem and trying to come up with a solution that helps their community.” Relating to her son who is identified gifted, Mia stated:

[My son] and his group in Lego Robotics recently did one on reviving the skate park, which I think when those projects are done in school, it gives kids some ownership in their community...and when you have ownership and that emotional tie in, you're more likely to come back.

Continuing the topic, Mia informed that getting students challenged, engaged, and invested in their schools and in their community is “improving,” which “has to do with what we are offering them throughout the school day.” Describing a strength of the

district, Mia stated, “The addition of project-based learning in every classroom...project-based learning has been a goal in one of our buildings now for two or three years...it’s really huge.” “Also,” she added, “having opportunities like the science fair and National History Day promotes those challenging opportunities and gives students those challenging opportunities.” With addition of after-school programs like robotics in the schools, Mia explained, “we are giving students opportunities that maybe didn't exist even five years ago.” She continued, “The best part about it is, while it's challenging to our gifted and talented kids, it's also pushing other students as well and giving them those same opportunities.”

*Maggie.* As the conversation shifted to education, Maggie excitedly announced, “My 11-year-old has finally ... they've been testing him for years to have him identified as gifted, but...this year, finally, he was identified as gifted.” With the excitement and anticipation, Maggie explained she knows “a little bit about [gifted education].”

When asked what the supports are for young gifted adults' choices in living in the community, Maggie quietly thought for a moment, concluding, “I don't know, to be honest.” She explained, “I think if they stick around, they end up in the coal mines and the power plant industry...that's just where people go.” In regard to barriers young gifted adults’ face in remaining in the community, Maggie explained, “there's not a lot here for them to use whatever they're gifted in.”

Shifting the conversation to the perceptions of the local K-12 school district, Maggie stated, “They're decent...I think more funding and better pay for our teachers would be great. They do what they can with what they're provided with and teachers are

wonderful.” Maggie explained that through the school district, students are challenged in certain areas, however, advanced students are not challenged. Maggie explained her son has been struggling with being underchallenged for years and has faced many behavior problems due to being bored. She stated, “When he was done, they wouldn’t give him anything else.” Maggie explained that she feels the community, while not always able to challenge each student, “does a pretty good job about engaging students in the community.”

**Young gifted adults.**

*Sylvie.* As the conversation shifted to education, Sylvie, an identified gifted individual, explained her familiarity with gifted education:

I was never fully sure what that meant, beyond higher achievers and go getters.

Working in education, I can see kids who are gifted and deal with many of these kids being a teacher of the arts, but there's obviously a range of how kids learn and their abilities.

When asked what the supports are for young gifted adults’ choices regarding residing in the community, Sylvie pondered, “The only things that I can think of specifically, is through the schools. There are clubs, like Lego-Robotics, student council, drama club, theater, and public speaking classes...in the high school, they also have AP classes.” When asked about the barriers young gifted adults’ face regarding living in the community, Sylvie explained, “A lack of advanced technology in our town...we're kind of behind. There's not a lot of jobs or careers in [the community] that have those types of

things.” She continued informing, “Usually if you're excelling, you're excelling toward the future and we're not necessarily keeping up with the future.”

Shifting the conversation to the perceptions of the local K-12 school district, Sylvie stated, “it's tough for the schools...a lot of our teachers and educators are not certified.” Frustrated, she explained, “if I were a parent, I would want a certified teacher teaching my child...Not somebody trying to be a teacher, but hasn't quite gotten to there, or hasn't taken the steps to get there.” “Regardless of the teachers,” she explained, “I think the schools are taking steps toward becoming more advanced, especially with our one-to-one technology.”

When asked if the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain in and return to the area, Sylvie explained:

We bring in a lot of people from the community to see the work that we're doing with students, which is great and hopefully encouraging students to see the different options that they have...but I'm not necessarily sure we promote them in remaining here.

Continuing the topic, Sylvie explained that although it depends on the student, the majority are not challenged, engaged, and invested in their schools and in their community. She continued explaining:

There are some who, especially the gifted kids, are searching for more challenges...they go and find it...but as a whole, I don't think that they're necessarily super engaged or invested in what we're doing. It has just become so monotonous that it's an everyday thing...just something we all have to do and



that's why we're here, which is probably a result of the community in general...if parents are not interested, their kids aren't going to be interested.

*Audrey.* As the conversation shifted to education, Audrey explained her familiarity with gifted education:

I was identified as gifted growing up but didn't see a change. I was in more advanced classes in high school, but it wasn't really any different from everybody else. Learning from others that are working on degrees and certificates in gifted education, I have learned about how people are identified as gifted, which is interesting to me that a child can be gifted in just one area and not necessarily all, or just be considered intellectually gifted...it is interesting how many different ways a child could be potentially gifted.

When asked what the supports are for gifted young adults' choices regarding residing in the community, Audrey explained, "There's opportunities if they were willing to seek it...as far as starting businesses or going off to receive a college degree and returning to the community." "...that's the thing about rural areas," she stated, "if you do go off to get an education and come back, you can find many opportunities and move up quickly...even run the town." When shifting to the barriers young gifted adults' face regarding residing in the community, Audrey stated, "There's not necessarily many unique opportunities...but here, you have the ability to create something...it's just a matter of finding it."

Audrey excitedly stated, "I have a lot of perceptions about it," when asked about her perceptions of the local K-12 school district:

In comparison to when I was here...leaps and bounds...100% better. My perceptions are not the worst, but definitely not the best, and there's always room for improvement. The middle school has made leaps and bounds, and the elementary schools are advancing. The electives in the schools are not just "let's have fun," they're educational and the students are enjoying it. The rigor level academically is leaps and bounds above what it used to be. Now, the high school, I don't think has changed much since I went there. Although, students are going to [the local community college] for classes and a lot of kids are graduating from high school with their associate's in cosmetology and automotive...which is really neat...that didn't exist when I went there.

When asked how the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain in and return to the area, Audrey related what the school district has recently shifted its focus to:

That's another way the district has changed...implementing project-based learning into the curriculum, inviting community members to assist our students on their projects... The district is trying to change the perception and make education more important in the community, demonstrating what we are doing in the schools. The district started the "I choose" challenge, where educators and students create videos on why they choose [our county]. This was created in hope to change the way people perceive our district, inviting people to become involved.

Regarding encouraging students to stay in or return to the community, Audrey explained, “there’s nothing here for them besides the power plant, so they leave...sometimes individuals will return if their families are still here...but many of them don’t come back if they leave.”

In asking whether students are challenged, engaged and invested in their schools and community, Audrey responded, “As the rigor has increased, student’s kind of don’t have a choice...sink or swim...they’re having to invest in their education.” She explained that programs in the district, particularly those like FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America), DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America), and FFA (Future Farmers of America) help engage students in their education and community.

*Ellie.* As the conversation shifted to education, Ellie lit up when asked about her familiarity with gifted education:

Well...I'm currently getting my master's in gifted education, although I'm only one semester into it. I would say that qualifies me as being more familiar with gifted education than most people, as [the state] doesn't require any gifted education courses for you to get your teaching certificate. Most teachers, although they all teach gifted students, don't necessarily have the training that is required to actually work with those gifted learners. I still have a lot to learn, but I would think that I'm more familiar than most...I was also identified as gifted when I was young, allowing me to advance through several grades.

When asked what the supports are for young gifted adults’ choices regarding residing in the community, Ellie stated:

If they grew up here, having their family here and being comfortable with the area can be an encouraging factor to get them to come back here. Also, having the community college here allows kids to stay here for cheap or free, gaining credits towards their undergrad degree. With the good paleontology and nursing programs, if they were interested in a career that is offered at [the local community college], they can do that for little to no cost to them. Also, community members are willing to work with our kids and be helpful to programs that we have in the schools.

While Ellie sees the community has great aspects, she sees things that could be done to increase supports for individuals to return to the community. She stated, “There aren’t many colleges in this region of the state, so if we were able to have a full four-year college here, I think that would really encourage a lot of people to stay.”

When asked about the barriers young gifted adults’ face regarding living in the community, Ellie explained:

A major barrier starts with their schooling. In bigger cities, kids have the opportunities to go to STEM schools. They can go to gifted and talented schools, they can go to art schools, they can go to dance schools, they can go to schools that are specific to their interests and we just don't have that here. And then going forward from that, college, a lot of gifted kids, they want to go off and go to college. We don't have those opportunities available to them. Also, attitudes...A lot of our gifted kids are more sensitive to other people's feelings and what's going on. With our conservative, sheltered community, the kids want to go out and they

want to experience things and solve some of those bigger problems. They just don't have the opportunity to do that in [the community], or the support to address those issues because a lot of people in our community shut down when it comes to dealing with those sensitive topics our gifted kids actually want to dive into, and help solve and analyze.

Shifting the conversation to the perceptions of the local K-12 school district, Ellie stated:

One of the reasons that I ended up moving to this school district is, when I interviewed, I felt like the administration was the most supportive, knowledgeable, and up to date with where education was headed. I liked the systems that they had in place and where they were going, which was a big draw for me to come here.

“However, teacher retention is a huge thing,” her tone shifted as she explained she is one of two certified secondary science teachers in the district, with a group of six others who are unlicensed and still an unfilled position in the subject area. “So, what kind of quality education are our kids getting?” she asked, explaining that while some unlicensed teachers are eager to learn and will be effective, “they are currently first year teachers without an education degree.” “On top of that,” she stated, “the state does not require teachers to receive courses in gifted education to become educators.” Baffled, Ellie explained, “So, coupling teachers who are certified, but had no education in gifted education with teachers who aren't even certified, our kids probably, honestly, aren't getting what's best for them.”

When asked if the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain in and return to the area, Ellie proudly explained:

The engineering teacher at the local middle school does a lot of problem solving with kids involving our community's problems and really teaches them how to solve problems in our community, which is a huge benefit...but that's just one teacher in our sea of...however many...hundred teachers...that we have involved in our school district. While students may get pockets of solving problems in our community, they maybe don't do that all the time. As far as graduating and staying here, we don't really try to get them to stay because opportunities we have are limited and we want what's best for our kids, meaning they might have to leave.

Contemplating her last statement, Ellie ends on a hopeful note, stating, “It'd be awesome if they could go learn bigger and better things somewhere else and bring that back into [the community].”

*Hazel.* As the conversation shifted to education, Hazel, an identified gifted individual, explained her familiarity with gifted education:

Beyond being identified as gifted growing up and enrolling in more advanced courses, as a teacher I only have a few gifted students. Due to this, I don't interact much with them, but they do have opportunities to come together during lunch and when [the Director of Gifted and Talented] comes in for the meetings with them.

Hazel indicated the community needs to “really work on” providing supports for gifted young adults to reside in the community after high school. Some programs, like “the 4H program and robotics leagues” help develop supports for gifted individuals to engage in their community. However, the lack of emphasis on education within the community hinders the development of broader program opportunities. Hazel explained:

With the coal mines and power plants in the region, most of the time you only need a high school diploma...So there’s not really a drive to continue on with education if you come from a family where everybody has worked in that industry...if some have the drive, they could push through and find ways to challenge themselves.

Shifting the conversation to the perceptions of the local K-12 school district, Hazel stated:

Our district really does have good resources...we just need to be better about using them and be on the same page about how we can use them...Some schools, more than other schools, have more access, even though they are just as familiar with the resources as the other...It would be beneficial to be straight across the board with all schools for the benefit of all students.

When asked if the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain in or return to the local community, Hazel explained:

When I was in school, we had career day where they brought in a bunch of people from all different kinds of businesses around town. We got to do mock interviews and they talked about what their job was and what jobs are offered in their

businesses, which was cool...Our students go on fieldtrips that allow them to see a lot of different opportunities in our community...This promotes finding something they like and chasing it.

With the new curriculums and standards being implementing in the district, Hazel explained the students within the community are “definitely feeling challenged and engaged.” She continued stating:

Students are being pushed to a whole new level that they are not used to and you can see that they’re really uncomfortable at times, but have already grown so much from it...We also do a pretty good job of trying to support them in those challenges by providing them with materials they can use at home.

**Summary.** A change is occurring in the local school district, as students are engaging in projects and afterschool programs that tie learning to the community. This change is being observed and appreciated, as the community is taking pride in student accomplishments and being local community members. Although changes have started to be made in encouraging students to engage in local schools and programs, participants agree that there is work to be done to continue this shift.

### **Response to Research Questions**

The overarching research question addressed the supports and barriers to young gifted adults’ choices in residing in rural communities. The overarching research question states:

What are the supports and barriers to gifted young adults’ choices regarding living in rural communities?



This research question is directly tied to the purpose of the research study, which examined the supports for, and barriers to, gifted young adults' choices regarding living in rural areas. The findings from the collected data indicated many young individuals face barriers in remaining in their local community due to the lack of opportunities, choices, and pathways. As rural areas are remote and isolated, the community often encourages the areas brightest individuals to leave after high school to pursue what society often portrays as greater and more fulfilling lifestyles. While young individuals often leave their home communities in search for fulfilling opportunities, many continue to desire the rural lifestyle. The rural lifestyle often attributes to many supports young gifted individuals attain in remaining in their rural community. As a member of a rural community, the status brings it with a strong sense of pride, belonging, and attachment to place. Rural areas provide individuals that are seeking ways to remain in their local area with a variety of different avenues, allowing individuals to be creative and the ability to create a lifestyle they desire. Alternatively, from the barriers, there are many opportunities that support individuals with the ability to potentially experience and do more, as there is often a shortage of individuals that are able to fill all the positions available in rural areas. This type of opportunity provides young gifted adults the ability to take ownership and create a lifestyle they desire, while remaining in their rural community.

The sub-questions in support of the overarching research question addressed the perceptions of young gifted adults' choices regarding living in rural communities from the four community member participant categories. The sub-questions are:

1. What are the perceptions of young gifted adults' regarding living in rural communities?
2. What are the perceptions of family members of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?
3. What are the perceptions of mentors of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?
4. What are the perceptions of community leaders of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?

The findings from the collected data indicated a commonality among the perceptions of community members of the rural area. While the members saw the benefit of young gifted adults leaving their rural community after high school to gain new experiences, understanding, and ability to grow, many would like to see them return to the local community. Returning to the area after gaining new experiences and knowledge, provides individuals the ability to implement what they have learned, altering systems that are in place to advance the success and sustainability of rural regions. The perceptions the community member participants held were common in desiring to assisting young individuals in setting goals that may encourage them to return to the community after gaining new experiences. They felt this would allow young gifted individuals to assist in advancing, supporting, and profiting the area, while maintaining the desired rural lifestyle and way of living.

## **Chapter Summary**

In Chapter Four, the researcher communicated the findings of the collected data from interviews to effectively portray the results of participant participation. The main body of the findings chapter covers the results from the data collected from the participant interviews. By breaking the participant interview questions down into four main categories, the researcher was able to adequately portray the findings from each participant category within the section. Representing the collected data in categories provided the researcher with the ability to "highlight certain information in the description" and "identify patterned regularities" (Creswell, 2013, p. 181). This strategy allowed the reader to "make contrasts and comparisons" from the responses found in each of the participant categories, providing insight into the perceptions of the rural community members (Creswell, 2013, p. 181).

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

*Retaining Gifted Individuals for the Sustainability of Rural Communities* is a collection of narratives from four various community member category groups. The narrative research study sought to inform the perceptions of different remote rural community members regarding young gifted adults' choices in residing in rural communities. Themes and patterns emerged through participants' stories and perceptions from single, face-to-face interviews, analyzed through the theoretical framework lens.

A comprehensive evaluation of the findings took place by analyzing collected data from the four main interview question response categories. The four interview response categories were addressed by all individuals within the four participant categories. The evaluation and analysis of the findings produced emerging themes and patterns that were supported by literature and the theoretical framework, theory of place.

### **Summary of Research Study**

Participant interviews produced the data necessary to compile and complete an analysis to uncover themes and patterns that emerged, relating existing literature of rural communities. Through analysis, the theoretical framework, theory of place, guided the discovery of themes, patterns, and implications associated with the guiding research questions. The four participant categories: community leaders, mentors of gifted individuals, family members of gifted individuals, and young gifted adults', provided a

well-rounded insight into remote rural community member perceptions regarding young gifted adults' choices in residing in the local community.

Individuals that partook in face-to-face interviews through the research study were required to be current residents of the remote rural community within the western state of the United States. All participants were required to be over the age of 18 and fit into a specific participant category. Young gifted adults were expected to be identified gifted individuals completing their senior year of high school to recent college graduates that returned to the local rural community. Family members of gifted individuals had a family relation to an identified gifted individual. Mentors of gifted were those that hold a position within the community that directly influenced identified gifted individuals' lives. Finally, community leaders were required to hold a position of influence within the community, directly or indirectly affecting and shaping the lives of gifted individuals within the community. Three individuals were chosen to represent community leaders, three represented mentors of gifted individuals, three represented family members of gifted individuals, and four individuals represented the young gifted adult population. All participants were eager to share their experiences, stories, and perceptions.

The purpose of this doctoral research project was to examine the supports for and barriers to young gifted adults' choices regarding living in rural communities. The problem explored was the idea of why rural areas lose many of their bright community members to their urban neighbors that ultimately leads to the loss of contributions these individuals could make in improving the rural lifestyle and communities. The research study was conducted to answer the following questions:

What are the supports and barriers to gifted young adults' choices regarding living in rural communities?

1. What are the perceptions of young gifted adults' regarding living in rural communities?
2. What are the perceptions of family members of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?
3. What are the perceptions of mentors of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?
4. What are the perceptions of community leaders of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?

The interview questions were split into four categories, addressing the draw individuals have to live in a rural community, perceptions of the local area, influences of the future sustainability of the area, and gifted education within the region. These sections assisted in providing reasoning for the supports and barriers to young gifted adults' choices to remain in or return to their local communities.

This chapter includes the summary of findings from each of the four interview question categories from the four categories of participants, limitations found within the study, discussion and implications of the research study findings, and recommendations for future research.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The guiding theoretical framework that was used as the underlying structure for how this study was defined is the theory of place (Adom et al., 2018, p. 438). The theory of place serves “as an approach for contemporary socio-cultural inquiries, especially as space and place are increasingly connected by the postmodern dynamics of mobility, consumption and globalization” (Lau & Li, 2018, p. 43). Place emphasizes “connections people have with one another and their surroundings” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. vi). In addition, the theory supports the concept that the “quality of life depends on the connections that people have with one another and their surroundings, rather than on material wealth” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998). The theory indicates that the “quality of all our lives depends on raising a generation of young people to take their places as participants in a moral, communal, and democratic society” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. 5). Relph (2008) described this theory in the following way, “while place meanings are rooting in the physical setting and its activities, they are not a property of them but a property of human interaction and experiences of those places” (p. 47).

When forming ideas and values, it is essential for young individuals to examine their place, as it informs and shapes who they are and where they are from, developing respect for their place (Getting Smart, 2019). Through this process, young adults are “imagining themselves in the world in very concrete ways and finding their voice as intellectuals and citizens” (Getting Smart, 2019). Guajardo states, “Place has to do with how they find their voice, how their voice will look, and how it will sound,” emphasizing many lessons are to be learned from the value of place (Getting Smart, 2019). Place

allows people to make connections in particular ways that develop a sense of community and belonging (McCarthy, 2002, p. 180). This theory provides a direction to “think about the way people live in this world” (McCarthy, 2002, p. 181). In addition, it assists in understanding how people are always connected, as well as shaped by their environment (McCarthy, 2009, p. 183). Montgomery (2004) explains, “Taking on perspective that builds on current values and strengths of a rural place can enhance the ways that schools and communities view their relationship and their assets” (p. 3).

### **Summary of Findings and Conclusions**

The narrative interview data collection process provided an opportunity for individuals to share their stories, experiences, and perceptions regarding young gifted adults’ choices in residing in rural communities. The data collection process revealed the importance of place, defying odds of rural communities, ideas for future sustainability, and the effects of the education system within rural areas.

All individuals that participated in the research study are local residents of the remote rural community in the western state of the United States. All participants demonstrated a tie to the rural community, lifestyle, and admiration for the values rural communities provide its residents. Table 5.1 demonstrates the individuals that participated in the research study, identified by pseudonyms administered by the researcher, participant group they identify with most, position hold in the community, and connection to rural area.



**Table 5.1***Participant Connection to the Rural Location*

Participant Category	Pseudonym	Position	Connection to Rural	Desire to Remain in Rural	Theoretical Framework Connection
Community Leaders	Diane	Influential Community Board Role	Partially raised in rural, moved to a raise family in rural	Has been a resident for 45 years with no plans of leaving	Place meaning and place attachment
	Blake	Business Owner and Influential Community Role	Generationally grew up in a neighboring rural community, married and resides in husbands home community	Once thought about moving to another rural community in a different state, but decided has attachments to the current rural community	Place meaning, place attachment, and place affordance
	Rae	Multiple Business Owner	Raised in and returned to home rural community	Has no plans to leave rural community currently and would like to have some attachment to the community for the foreseeable future	Place meaning, place attachment, and place affordance
Mentors of Gifted Individuals	Grayson	Educator	Raised in and returned to home rural community	Has plans to leave the local rural community by the time his child reaches school age	Place meaning

	Adalyn	Educator	Raised urban, but was appealed to the rural lifestyle	Has no plans to leave the local community, as has attachments to the local area	Place meaning, place attachment, and place affordance
	Brooklyn	Educator	Raised in and returned to home rural community	Has no plans to leave local community, but dependent on the future of the areas job market	Place meaning and place attachment
Family Members of Gifted Individuals	Callie	Mother and Health Practitioner	Raised in and returned to home rural community	If to move, would move to the neighboring community, still being close to local community	Place meaning and place attachment
	Maggie	Mother and Educator	Raised in rural and moved to local rural community	Currently has no plans of leaving, but dependent on spouses' career	Place meaning, place attachment, and place affordance
	Mia	Mother and Student at Local Community College (soon to graduate)	Raised in and returned to home rural community	Plans to remain in local community, but dependent on the future job market of area	Place meaning and place attachment
Young Gifted Adults'	Sylvie	Educator	Raised in and returned to home rural community	While enjoys the area, the job market does not provide opportunities for her career	Place meaning and place attachment

	Audrey	Educator	Raised in and returned to home rural community	Would like to remain in the local area, but depends on the future sustainability of the region	Place meaning, place attachment, and place affordance
	Ellie	Educator	Raised in rural and moved to local rural community	May move in the future, but to another rural location	Place meaning, place attachment, and place affordance
	Hazel	Educator	Raised in and returned to home rural community	Would like to remain in the area, however, dependent on the sustainability of the region	Place meaning and place attachment

Table 5.1 assisted in understanding participants’ backgrounds and connections to the research study. All participants eagerly answered questions, demonstrating common themes and patterns through experiences, stories, and perceptions. All participants were or had pursued higher education, from an associate’s degree to a Doctor of Philosophy. The purpose of the study was to collect narrative accounts from four different categories of community members that reside in the local remote rural location.

***Reasons and the Draw to Living in a Rural Community***

**Community leaders.** While one community leader grew up in the local community, another grew up near the local community, and the other came to reside in the area after deciding it would be an excellent place to raise a family. Although all members have different backstories in how they came to live in the local community,

they all had ties to the rural way of life and admired rural values. Diane explained that “this area chose us,” while Blake stated, “I want my kids to grow up in a place where they’re not just a somebody, that they have a wrap-around system.” “It’s kind of go where you’re celebrated, not tolerated,” Rae explained as she reasoned why she returned to her hometown. Wanting to make a difference and have an impact on others’ lives, the community leaders have built a life they are proud of, leading the community in a variety of ways, taking advantage of the array of opportunities rural areas provide. Each expressed strong relations to the theory of place, particularly in meaning, as they emphasize a strong bond to the geographic region (Raymond et al., 2017, p.2).

The community leaders collectively agreed that individuals reside in the local region due to the area’s livelihood, relating to the theory of place, indicating individuals “create meaningful mental perceptions” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2). These perceptions are developed through mental input representations about a place, such as “cognitions, beliefs, [or] attitudes,” creating the mental outputs (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2).

Currently, individuals come and have come to reside in the area for the careers at the coal mines, power plants, ranches, and outfitting. Many also come to live in the area for all the outdoor activities, slower-paced lifestyle, sense of community, and ability to be somebody. Through experiences, meanings, and relationships, individuals experience meaning-making within a location, creating place meaning (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2).

**Mentors of gifted individuals.** While one mentor of gifted individuals returned to his home community, the other two became residents of the area through searching to start their first career jobs as educators in rural communities. All three residents enjoy

aspects the rural lifestyle has to offer; however, only two plan on remaining in the community long term, due to opportunities and costs of residing in the area. Each participant came to the interviews in different stages of family life. As a parent of five, a new parent, and an expecting parent, all are looking at the future and ways to support their families by encouraging them to experience the world and gain new insights, whether that means they will remain in the community or go off to a different area.

The mentors of gifted individuals implied people reside in the community for well-paying jobs at the coal mines, power plant, ranching, outfitting, and outdoor recreational activities, which was in agreement with the community leaders. In addition, individuals are generational homestead ranching families or generational coal mining families. Those that come from homestead families, old landowning families, will always reside in the area, according to Grayson. Individuals also remain because of the coal mining industry, their fathers and grandfathers were miners, so it becomes part of the “generation continuance,” as Adalyn explained. Whether individuals reside in the region due to careers, recreational activities, or generational factors, the mentors emphasized meaning and attachment aspects of the theory of place, as individuals develop “strong attachments and stable meanings” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2).

**Family members of gifted individuals.** All mothers of gifted individuals, Callie, Mia, and Maggie find comfort in the rural lifestyle and have plans to remain in rural areas for the foreseeable future. All from rural areas, two from the local community, all agree that the community provides their children, as explained by Callie, “a solid community that takes care of them.”

The mothers of gifted individuals had similar responses as the community leaders and mentors of gifted individuals, explaining people come to live in or remain in the area due to the careers with the coal mines, power plants, ranching, outfitting, and outdoor recreational activities. As Maggie explained, people come to reside in the area for community supports, “everybody knows everybody...if somebody is in need, we all come together.” Through place attachment and place meaning, individuals attach to aspects of the theory of place through “social relationships and physical environments” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 5).

**Young gifted adults.** Three out of the four young gifted adults that participated in the study grew up in the local community. They returned to the community after receiving a bachelor’s degree, and all came to start their careers as educators. Growing up in rural communities, the young gifted adults came to realize the opportunities and draw rural areas have, discovering place attachment and meaning during their experience away from the rural location. Sylvie, a new educator of the arts, finds it difficult to pursue her passions in the rural community, due to the lack of opportunities to pursue her interests. However, the others currently plan to reside in the local area for at least a few years. With the uncertainties of the future of the coal mines and the local economy, each participant is cautiously aware their plans may change quickly.

Echoing the other participant groups, all young gifted adults agreed that individuals come to reside in the local community due to jobs at the local coal mines, power plants, family ranching businesses, outfitting, outdoor recreational activities, and the rural lifestyle. Ellie discussed how many that grew up in rural communities tend to

remain in rural areas, due to being the “most comfortable” in those areas. Raymond et al. (2017) explained this type of attachment to place as a connection “between [the] mind, body, and environment,” producing emotional experiences that individuals desire (p. 6).

### ***Perceptions of the Local Area***

**Community leaders.** Uncultured, rednecks, backdoorsy are all negative perceptions the community leaders are accustomed to hearing. Rae explained that being a coal mining community adds its own stigma to the area, especially with the view on nonrenewable resources at the moment. However, they perceive the area a bit differently as members of the local community. “Places have inherent meaning,” transcending culture and reflecting essential properties of a place, contributing to pride within the region (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 5).

Regarding the perceptions of young adults remaining in the community, Blake explained, is “a double-edged sword.” On one end, young individuals are eager to start their careers at the local coal mines. On the other, those with supportive families go off to gain experiences, some returning for family and comfort of the local lifestyle.

**Mentors of gifted individuals.** Backwards, lack of education, working-class, too conservative are some of the negative perceptions the participants in the mentor category hear about their local community. While they agree some individuals feed into the perceptions, they also see a different, positive side to residing in the area, creating attachment and meaning to their local place of residence.

The participants in this category were all in agreeance with each other and had slightly differing opinions of the retention of young adults within the area. All three

indicated that the rate of young adults remaining in or returning to the community is not high, due to the lack of opportunities. While some tend to stay in the community to join the local mines and power plants, the opportunities are starting, as Grayson stated, “to drop off significantly.” “People are leaving,” explained Brooklyn, and there is “no expected growth,” stated Grayson. Through population decline, there is a lack of an opportunity mindset to view possibilities within the area, signifying a need for the promotion of affordances within place.

**Family members of gifted individuals.** With a mix of responses, the family members of gifted individuals recognize the perceptions of outside views on the community are not always positive. As negative press tends to dominate and overshadow positive aspects, many view the community as a “bad drug town,” according to Callie. In addition, Maggie added that people view the community as “poor...redneck coal miners.” Positively, Mia explained that amongst negative aspects, many see the community as “hard-working people.”

While “education is not held to the highest standard” in the community, Callie explained those that tend to remain in the community are typically males headed into the coal mines. All three explained there are not many opportunities for young individuals to remain in the community. However, some remain for the lifestyle and to be close to their families. Although the family members projected the importance of place meaning and attachment, they lack the promotion of affordance within the area.



**Young gifted adults.** Podunk, cowboys, uneducated, overly conservative are several of the common perceptions all four young adults hear about their local community, including, as Audrey explained, the common question, “why would you ever want to live that way?” Proud of where they are from, the negative perceptions are at the forefront of their minds, but they shrug them off, as they understand what it means to be from rural areas. This resiliency demonstrates how place contains meaning and attachment. Sylvie explained that those outside the community “don’t really see anything else that goes on...the closeness of the community...the support.”

As recently graduating and returning members of the community, the participants see a mixture of results regarding young adults remaining in or returning to the community. Ellie explained, “If they have goals for their future, those aren’t always accomplished by staying.” While it is possible to meet one’s goals in several different fields, the participants remarked many individuals leave the local community due to a lack of opportunities. Those that stay in the community are often pursuing a career in the mines. There is a lack of mindset regarding affordance possibilities within the region.

### ***Influences of Future Sustainability of the Area***

**Community leaders.** As the coal mines have been a significant contributor to the community over the years, uncertainty is striking fear into many of the local residents as the future of the region is uncertain. The community, as explained by the community leaders, is taking steps to come up with a solution to an alternative industry that may take over the area, providing opportunities for its residents as they transition from the era of coal mining. With a revamp in local businesses to a new city council team, the

community leaders have hope that the area will continue to prosper and solve the problems that are arising to sustain the region. Possibilities are being created by shaping “patterns of affordance” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 8). All three participants recognized that a change is going to occur through the development of affordance patterns and are open to the possibilities that may assist in the success and sustainability of the region.

**Mentors of gifted individuals.** “The coal mine is the economy...Coal keeps the lights on,” Grayson explained, “they are the building blocks of the economy,” Adalyn added. Recognizing the coal mines play a crucial role in the local community, the participants recognized the mines are the driving force of the economy and make a “significant impact on the community,” supported Brooklyn. With the current impending news of plans to shut the local mines and power plants in the near future, the participants recognized a shift in the community’s culture is unavoidable. With an “expiration date,” explained Adalyn, a new industry is needed to assist in the sustainability and success of the region. According to the participants, the community is at odds of not wanting change but recognized it is vital and imminent to focus on affordances and possibilities that may exist within the region.

**Family members of gifted individuals.** Influencing the community economically, politically, and educationally, the coal mines and power plants play a huge role within the region. While only one participant has a direct connection to the coal mine and power plants, all recognized that the coal mines and power plants affect all residents in the region in some form, directly or indirectly. With some skepticism, the participants agreed with Mia’s input; the region will need “something that comes in and

offers a decent living.” Callie explained, “The area needs just overall more community support,” shopping and hiring locally. Using possibilities and affordances that exist within the area as pathways, individuals have the “ability to learn new skills” to build the “potential for new forms of immediately perceived place meanings,” changing a place through actions, opening “space for new meanings” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 8).

**Young gifted adults.** As “the biggest staple to our community,” Ellie explained, the coal mines and power plant affect the entire community, whether individuals work directly in the industry or indirectly as a community member. Audrey explained, “I don’t think people, beyond our community, realize how much power we provide to other people.” Recognizing the “next decade will be a big turning point,” Ellie explained and supported the other participants’ views, indicating if changes are made through perceived possibilities and affordances, the area will continue to profit through diversifying the local economy.

### ***Gifted Education in the Area***

**Community leaders.** While not all community leaders have a strong understanding of what the term gifted means, they each had a connection and understanding that individuals should be provided opportunities that challenge and promote their strengths and talents. Each was proud of individuals that have graduated from the local school district, going on to do important things in and out of the community. Diane explained, “We have had many graduates who have gone to do important things and some really talented people.”

While each agreed that the promotion of talents, abilities, and strengths are important, the local community does not always, as Diane explained, “recognize them locally” as much as they should. However, she continued to explain, “we’re beginning to tell our story better and to be more positive about our educational system,” overcoming obstacles found within the local community regarding education. Blake described new opportunities, programs, and clubs that have taken shape in recent years, providing more engagement and supports for young individuals to partake in interest-based activities and become involved within the community. Blake believed this type of affordance opportunity development will allow the community and school district to “achieve great things” and begin to change the perception of the community and those surrounding. Through these opportunities being developed, Rae explained, individuals “have all the opportunity in the world to be able to create their own life.”

**Mentors of gifted individuals.** Recognizing gifted education is often placed to the side, as training and experience within the field are limited, the mentors of gifted individuals recognized that, as Adalyn explained, they “have the ability to make a difference” in the local community. Currently, advanced students tend to be “encouraged to go elsewhere rather than stay,” stated Adalyn. Yet there is a collective agreement that supports need to be put in place to encourage gifted individuals to focus on local issues and build programs that would support local opportunities. Although there are limited opportunities within the local community for young gifted individuals, the mentors agree that infrastructures are being put in place to begin encouraging more opportunities and programs to construct a framework of possibilities and affordances. Brooklyn explained,

“our district is doing really great things...making a lot of great progress,” providing choice and different avenues for students to demonstrate their learning through connecting with the community.

**Family members of gifted individuals.** With identified gifted children, the family members, while do not necessarily have a deep understanding of gifted education itself, understand the importance of providing individuals the ability to engage in challenging opportunities that allow for all students to learn something new each day, finding joy and interest in the learning process. Although some programs are in place with support from community organizations, overall, family members feel gifted children are not challenged, pushed, or supported throughout the entirety of their education, due to a lack in curriculum, instruction, and understanding to support gifted students. As Callie explained, many young gifted individuals find themselves “in a rut,” due to the lack of options and support to push themselves. This rut hinders individuals from pursuing unknown possibilities and affordances that may exist in the region.

While challenges remain prominent, the local school district at some levels is starting to “improve,” as Mia explained, “with what we are offering [students] throughout the school day.” One school level has begun promoting and developing a problem-based learning approach that, according to Mia, “is really huge.” She continued to explain, “The best part about it is, while it’s challenging our gifted and talented kids, it’s also pushing other students as well and giving them those same opportunities.” These opportunities not only increase students’ place meaning and attachment but provide

insight into place affordances and possibilities that will “open spaces for new meaning” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 8).

**Young gifted adults.** Being identified as gifted at a point in their K-12 education, the young gifted adults have a range of understanding of gifted education. While the individuals were identified as gifted, many did not experience any significant changes to what they were offered. The curriculum stayed the same until they reached high school and were able to enroll in more advanced courses. The young gifted adults explained the school district is beginning to promote learning that allows gifted students to become engaged, take an interest in their education, and have the ability to have choice and voice within opportunities. Problem-based learning has allowed for the curriculum to advance, engaging students to work with community members, learning about affordances, and solving problems found within the local community. Audrey explained, “the rigor has increased,” encouraging students to invest in their education, and inspires them to connect to their location of place through definite meanings, attachment, and develop affordances and possibilities to remain in their area.

### **Limitations of the Research Study**

Limitations are “those conditions beyond the control of the researcher,” placing restrictions on the parameters and conclusion of the research study (Best & Khan, 2006, p. 39). As a previous resident of the remote rural community in the western state, the researcher has close connections and ties to the area of study. Through positions held and ties to the area, the researcher had previous understandings of the region, community, and challenges that the area faces educationally, economically, and culturally. In addition,

“stories are inherently multilayered and ambiguous,” meaning the “subjectivity of the researcher are particularly evident in this work” (Bell, 2002, p. 210). The researcher remained as objective as possible by following parameters designed to limit bias throughout the research study. Some of these methods included triangulation of resources, participant member checking and review when available, and protocols and procedures designed to assist in remaining objective through the data collection and analysis process (Creswell, 2013, pp. 250-252).

Through the nature of narrative research studies, the “time commitment required makes it unsuitable for work with a large number of participants,” and requires “close collaboration with participants” (Bell, 2002, p. 210). While the researcher designed the study to allow three to four individuals per participant category, many other individuals were recommended for the researcher to contact through snowball sampling and recommendations. The study could have included many more voices of the community, providing an even more in-depth narrative. However, the researcher, due to time limitations and the nature of narrative research studies, limited the number of participants indicated within the parameter of the research study.

Narrative research studies also take “people’s stories and place them into a larger narrative,” resulting in “imposing meaning on participants’ lived experience” (Bell, 2002, p. 210). This act means that “participants can never be quite free of the researcher’s interpretation of their lives” (Bell, 2002, p. 210). However, the effects of “re-storying can be powerful” (Bell, 2002, p. 210).

The study may have also faced some delimitations, “boundaries of the study,” (Best and Khan, 2006, p. 39). As the research study took place in one remote rural community and looked at different layers of community members, the research study is not generalizable across all rural communities. Every rural community is different, and considerations need to account for the unique aspects of each rural location (Azano et al., 2017, p. 74). Montgomery (2004) explained, generalization across rural communities is not practical due to the diverse sets of local knowledge, perceptions, and understandings of places (p. 5).

## **Discussion and Implications**

### ***Perceptions***

The guiding research questions for this study began with an overarching research question, followed by four sub-research questions. The four sub-research questions addressed the perceptions of all four participant categories, community leaders, mentors of gifted individuals, family members of gifted individuals, and young gifted adults’:

1. What are the perceptions of young gifted adults’ regarding living in rural communities?
2. What are the perceptions of family members of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?
3. What are the perceptions of mentors of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?
4. What are the perceptions of community leaders of young gifted people regarding living in rural communities?



All individuals across the four participant categories held common perceptions regarding young gifted adults living in rural communities. Each participant responded in a manner that echoed what the others were stating. Which constructed a whole picture of the perceptions of young gifted adults' choices in remaining in the community.

The young gifted adult participants explained that specific factors play a role in whether individuals decide to remain in the local community or leave after high school. Generational experiences, family, and future goals play a vital role in choices to remain in the area. Individuals from the area face, as Audrey explained, generational experiences portraying what the future looks like and can be encouraged. Boys within the local community are encouraged to follow in the footsteps of their fathers into the coal mining industry. It is implied that they do not need an education to make a good future for themselves. In addition, girls often seemed to do well; however, according to Audrey, they start having children at a young age, marrying a coal miner, and remain in the local community.

Respectfully, Hazel explained while many leave the community to go to college or gain experiences outside of the local area, they are drawn back due to their families residing in the area, as well as opportunities that allow them to be closer to their families. The draw to return demonstrates meaning, attachment, and affordances found within the theory of place. Howley (2009) explained that individuals “desire to keep living in a rural place...remaining close with their families” (p. 547). Hazel explained that if individuals' families have moved, “the chances of coming back are slim.” In the search for “bigger and better” things, Ellie explained opportunities either encourage individuals

to remain in the local region or leave in search of those experiences. While she noticed that many leave the area to attain goals they have set for the future, some individuals act on affordances and have been able to establish goals to remain in the local area, taking courses at the local community college and training centers. Yet, many must leave to accomplish the goals they have set.

Often young individuals learn from a young age that leaving is the only option to establish a fulfilling life with economic success (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Howley, 2009; Paul & Seward, 2016; Wilcox et al., 2014). Encouraging the idea of leaving the local community after high school, Ellie explained, “Young people should have the opportunity to leave...especially if they have lived their whole life here.” She would hope, however, that they would return and bring their new experiences and understandings to support and make changes within the community, assisting with the success and sustainability of the region. Lawrence (2009) indicates that it is vital to encourage the retention of young gifted individuals within rural communities to assist in the success and sustainability of rural communities’ culture, values, and economy (p. 462).

The family members of gifted individuals explained young adults tend to remain in the local community, due to encouragement from the community and generational factors that relate to place attachment and meaning. Callie explained, many individuals from the area learn that the “only thing there is to be is a coal miner,” with the high pay being an incentive. As education is “not always held to the highest standard,” Callie explained individuals tend to remain in the local community, especially “the boys.” The

participants indicated that the opportunities within the region are limited for many, resulting in, as Mia explained, those that “choose to go on to college and that route, are less likely to come back.” This outflux of young gifted individuals is often referred to as the “brain drain,” depleting talented individuals from rural communities (Howley, 2009; Howley et al., 2009; Lawrence, 2009; Paul & Seward, 2016). Although those that go on to gain experiences outside the local community tend not to return, Maggie explained, “it’s good when people come back.” She continued to explain how many want to remain in the community because they “do want to be here,” with the belief that it is a “better place for them.” Wilcox et al. (2014) indicated that individuals desire to remain in or return to their local communities due to relationships built within the community, family ties, and a sense of belonging found within the region (p. 7). The desires reflect “essential properties of a place” that individuals are attracted to as “places possess intangible emotional, symbolic, and spiritual meaning” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 5).

The mentors of gifted individuals’ perceptions of young gifted individuals remaining in the local community are waning. From the area, Grayson explained he and his sister are some of the few that still remain in the area from their peer group. Many individuals, especially men, remain in the community for the mines. However, as Grayson explained, the “most lucrative and popular employer in the area will not be able to employ them...affect[ing] their ability to stay here.” Brooklyn agreed with Grayson, explaining the retention of individuals, especially young men, was good, due to the opportunities with the coal mining industry. However, it does not look good currently, “people are leaving.” With lack of opportunities and vision for perceivable affordances,

young adults “eagerly want to get out,” Adalyn explained, because they “desperately want to go and explore and learn more.” Lacking opportunities and resources accustomed to urban areas generally draw individuals away from their home communities, searching for new experiences, diversity, and accessible resources (Petrovic, 2016).

With perceptions of hope, the community leaders’ responses resonated with the responses from the other three participant groups. Blake explained the retention of young individuals in the community after high school is “a double-edged sword,” which Paul and Seward (2016) referred to as “a necessary evil” (p. 312). Individuals, especially males, remain in the community to start a career in the coal mining industry, unfortunately leading to the devaluing of education. This “kills us,” Blake stated. However, with strong family support systems within the community, young individuals leave the area with encouragement to gain experiences and trainings from their support systems, hoping many of the individuals will return to the community after gaining such experiences (Tieken, 2014). Rae explained that while many leave the community after high school, individuals “come back at a pretty good rate, retaining those that do.” Rae stated that young individuals want specific “lifestyle components to where they’re living,” which is an essential factor to consider when “it comes to retaining” young people in rural communities. Emotional bonds, relationships, and possibilities within regions allow individuals to construct meaning and attachment, which draws them back to a place that is held as special (Raymond et al., 2017, pp. 2-4). Haas and Nachtigal

(1998) explained the “quality of life depends on the connections that people have with one another and their surroundings, rather than on material wealth.”

The prospect of opportunities young gifted individuals may obtain after high school is irreplaceable and an encouraged endeavor from all community member participants. However, the loss of these individuals leaves a noticeable effect on the local rural community. As many community member participants indicated, it would be wonderful for the young gifted adults to return to the local community and bring the knowledge and experience they gained while gone to promote changes, advancements, and sustainable avenues for the area. As a community, it is crucial to becoming involved with the young gifted population, encouraging insights to different careers, paths, and avenues one may take or even create to make a fulfilling life in their local community. Building perceivable affordances “opens up possibilities for new activities” (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 8). This assists in reshaping the standard message to encourage young individuals to remain in the area. Many individuals would like to stay in their hometown, but find it challenging to find opportunities to advance. If at a young age, they learn of the different opportunities the rural community truly provides, it would encourage individuals to create a life and path they want to assist in building and maintaining a successful community.

### ***Supports and Barriers***

The main guiding research question, which explored the supports and barriers to young gifted adults’ choices regarding living in rural communities, resulted in understanding resources and challenges this population faces. The supports and barriers,

young gifted adults face, each extend from opportunities they encounter. They are a guiding force in the choices young gifted adults make in residing in rural communities; it is vital to recognize how these factors work together. It is also imperative to acknowledge the role the theory of place plays in determining supports and barriers rural regions face. As Guajardo explained, “Place has to do with how they find their voice, how their voice will look, and how it will sound” (Getting Smart, 2019). Many lessons are learned through the value of place, intertwining attachments, meanings, and affordances found within place (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2). Understanding how these factors work together, as well as how the theory of place and rural values play essential roles, provide insight into potential suggestions for solutions and implications of the practice.

**Barriers.** Due to the remote, isolated location, there are many barriers young gifted individuals face when deciding what their future may hold. As rural areas contain a limited number of career avenues, young gifted adults may find it difficult to discover paths of interest that apply to their talents. With a lack of environmental diversity, the draw for many wanes, leaving the thought that there is nothing for them within the local community, especially if individuals are in search of pathways into industries like the arts. In agreeance, the participants explained there is a major lack of opportunities within the rural area for gifted individuals, encouraging them to leave and search for better opportunities and experiences.

Education plays a large role in young gifted individuals’ lives; however, it tends to be found less than satisfactory for those in search of fulfilling and challenging avenues.

The participants explained a major concern within the local education system is a lack of ability to challenge students, leading to monotonous daily routines where students go through the motion waiting to leave the community. Many rural school districts lack resources and funding, resulting in cutting advanced courses (Zabloski & Milacci, 2012, p. 176). Several major factors directly affect students' choices in remaining in the local area, one being that the community, in general, does not put a major emphasis on education, leaving students that are motivated accustomed to leave to pursue advanced educational pathways. However, as Lawrence (2009) explained, communities impact education constructs, meaning both schools and communities take on a "shared commitment and responsibility" (p. 466).

Although many community members would like to encourage young gifted individuals to return back to the local community, the participants indicated that individuals are often encouraged to leave the area to gain experiences that they would not be able to gain in the local region. There is a lack of emphasis on promoting residing in the area. Lawrence (2009) explained, "rural schooling often seems to promote goals that destabilize rural communities" (p. 465). These goals tend to "encourage students to seek high-status jobs that require breaking the bonds to family and place" (Lawrence, 2009, p. 465). Breaking rural bonds takes individuals "anywhere...elsewhere," outside of their rural communities (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. vi). In addition, advanced students generally lack opportunities and choices in programs, activities, and projects. Ellzey and Karnes (1991) explained that due to lack of funding, rural school districts have limited

programs, leaving advanced students in isolation due to the absence of service options (p. 56).

Another major factor that affects the education system in promoting advanced programming and supports is the challenge of recruiting and retaining educators to the local community. “Many small rural school districts have difficulty staffing teachers,” due to lower pay, fewer resources, and experience of isolation, personally and professionally (Irvin et al., 2009, p. 29). Although many teachers may be excited and willing to put in the time to learn best practices, many educators are new to the profession, or are currently pursuing a teaching degree and are unlicensed. The community member participants stated that many teachers within the district are in survival mode, affecting the quality of instruction and differentiation for all students, especially gifted and talented individuals, providing inadequate support and experiences (Kettler et al., 2015, p. 113).

As several participants indicated, while they enjoy the rural community, it can be, as Rae explained, a “massively frustrating” place to live. For young gifted adults, it is hard to blend the lifestyles desired in rural communities. While rural communities provide many positive opportunities, individuals that design their own, unique, pathways often go through the process alone without support networks to assist in answering unknown questions or developing specific aspects. Resources tend to be limited in rural areas. This limitation makes it difficult to acquire materials and build for necessary aspects of developing businesses and industries. Occasionally, as several younger participants indicated, it can be difficult to gain quality relationships that encourage,



push, and support one another in personal and professional endeavors. Petrovcic (2016) explained rural areas typically have limited cultural and social institutions, such as a variety of restaurants, theaters, libraries, museums, and more (p. 392). Rural communities also find it difficult to make changes, inhibiting new industries or businesses developing within the local communities, which would, in turn, provide more avenues for young gifted adults looking to remain in the local community.

A looming challenge in retaining individuals hangs over the community currently, as the region is at a crossroads. With the news of surrounding local coal mines and the power plants shutting down, the region, as participants explained, are “scared,” “fearful,” “anxious,” and “frightened” for what the future of the area may hold. As the coal mining industry directly impacts the local economy and residents, young individuals at large are encouraged not to go into the coal mining industry, leading them to leave the local community in pursuit of different experiences, education, or opportunities. The push to leave creates a void in retaining young gifted adults that may be able to make an impact on what the future may hold for the community. Lawrence (2009) explained rural areas require contributions of young gifted individuals, “who understand and love rural places” (p. 462).

**Supports.** While rural areas face overwhelming amounts of barriers regarding retaining young gifted individuals within the community, there are many potential aspects and supports in enticing individuals, which are found through the many opportunities within rural areas. Although many opportunities are barriers, changing the mindset of local community members may assist in altering the embedded culture and begin

encouraging young individuals to remain in or return to the local area. Starting with the education system, the local community is taking great strides to incorporate community partnerships to, as Blake explained, “achieve great things.” Through community partnerships and supports, members of the area are working directly with students providing opportunities to see problems within the community, building solutions to those problems, encouraging connections and involvement that develop pride and a sense of place and belonging. Ellzey and Karnes (1991) explained that enhancing community pride, commitment, academic success, and promoting career opportunities, would assist in increasing the ability for rural areas to create potential solutions and increase in sustainable outcomes (p. 57). In addition, young individuals are being introduced to avenues that were not as prominent before, learning a multitude of careers that exist, careers that could exist, and opportunities that are needed and could be developed within the local region. Individuals are needed not only for traditional careers in rural communities, but to become creators, innovators, and freethinkers (Howley, 2009, p. 547).

The local school district is also implementing project-based learning, infusing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) learning opportunities, developing more clubs and programs that provide different outlets for students, all with the growing support of the community. Through choice and opportunities, students are able to explore new and innovative experiences through the lens of their local community. The transition taking place in curriculum decisions ensures “each student

has a role in the education process,” enhancing education experiences (Ellzey & Karnes, 1991, p. 56).

In addition, the local community college has developed a program that allows local residents to enroll in programs tuition-free. This has provided opportunities for advanced high school students to begin enrolling in college-level courses, with an ability to gain a free associate’s degree before graduating high school. Community members have indicated this is a major steppingstone in supporting their advanced students and provides the benefit of decreasing future student loans.

Rural communities provide many opportunities and pathways for its residents if individuals are motivated and willing to put in the effort to discover ways to access these avenues. Rae explained, “what nobody really actually addresses is that you have so many more opportunities [in rural communities] because there’s not enough people to do all the things.” Due to the lack of individuals with the qualifications to engage in the opportunities, individuals can, as Rae explained, “advance a lot faster.” While it may take years to be able to achieve certain experiences, positions, and opportunities, the ability to advance in rural communities happens much quicker and in many different ways. Young individuals in rural communities have the ability to create their own lives in a way that suits their interests and abilities. Rae stated, “the beautiful thing about creating everything yourself is you get to create everything yourself.” Taking ownership and filling a need in the community can be of high interest to those that have set goals and dreams for their future. Haas and Nachtigal (1998) explained, young individuals in rural communities need to “understand how to create different futures for themselves,”

assisting students in discovering ways to remain in local communities (p. 16). In addition, young individuals are able to make a difference many times in ways they may not be able to in urban areas, creatively solving problems and taking on leadership roles, as they have closer connections to those that reside in the local community (Montgomery, 2004, p. 4).

### ***Power of Place***

Individuals that reside in rural areas find a deep connection to place. Haas and Nachtigal (1998) inform that connections to place include location, civics, worth, connection, and belonging. Rural areas, contrary to many perceptions held about the areas, hold many unique advantages and opportunities. Rural residents share a common draw to the regions, due to the values, lifestyle, support systems, tie to place, and recreational activities. “This area chose us,” Diane explained of the remote rural community, indicating the values, recreational activities, and support systems that exist within the rural community, developing attachments and meanings to the area. Rural areas hold unique values that are taught and learned for generations. Generally, common across these areas, some values that the participants indicated include deep connections to people, community, and place, with wrap-around support systems, strong relationships, and the capacity to be a part of something bigger. Through the ability to make a difference and have an impact on others’ lives, rural areas allow individuals to feel they are a somebody who is truly valued and hold a commitment to each other and the town. Rae explained the remote rural community is like a “sanctuary,” drawing her back and encouraging her to engage in the community. The rural values above, as Blake

explained, “shape who you are,” whether one remains in or returns to the local rural location. The values of the area often develop meaning and attachment to place, creating “emotional bonds between an individual and a geographic locale,” strongly connecting a person to a place (Raymond et al., 2017, pp. 1-2).

As “a hidden gem” of the western state, Blake, along with the other participants, reside in the local region due to the many outdoor activities and amenities that the area holds. As the rural location where the research study took place is located in an area that holds mountainous activities, such as mountain biking, dirt-biking, fishing, camping, hiking, skiing, hunting, and more, it is also a highly agricultural area. Away from the “hustle and bustle” of the city, Adalyn explained, the area is peaceful, slower in pace, and provides a strong sense of place. With a connection to the land, residents also find a sense of importance, belonging, and community.

### ***Redefine and Redesign***

Due to the community experiencing a crossroads in what the future may hold, young gifted individuals could make a major impact on the way the community transitions into a new era. Young gifted individuals, if provided opportunities, experiences, and exposure may be able to begin seeing the needs of the community, develop solutions to local problems, and develop a sense of understanding how to create a fulfilling life that impacts the local community that provides them a sense of place and belonging. Harvey et al. (2013) explained through Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, “human beings desire affiliation and belonging,” looking for supportive relationships through community and place (p. 244). Haas and Nachtigal (1998) stated that through “equipping

rural students and the adults who surround them with tools to create different better future[s],” individuals may be able to gain and develop talents that are useful in promoting success and sustainability within the local area (p. vi).

Rural communities are in a unique position to feel the impact of their young gifted community members, who can defeat odds and develop avenues that assist in redefining and redesigning rural area perceptions, developing future pathways for success and sustainability. Communities are “a place to build, and play, and celebrate” (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35). This type of change starts at the K-12 school district level, encouraging a community culture mind shift, creating connections through place-based and problem-based education. Place should be “at the center of the teaching and learning process,” as it is a “critical ingredient of change” (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35). An education system that focuses on place-based and problem-based learning encourages higher engagement, as well as develops a strong connection to the local region, encouraging individuals to find avenues to remain in their local community. Place-based education “emphasizes meaningful and plentiful community resources, integrating ‘rural purposes’ into gifted programming in rural schools” (Azano et al., 2014, p. 97). Also, the instructional model assists young individuals in developing “the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to adapt to or shape their environment” (Paul & Seward, 2016, p. 312). Furthermore, focusing on place through instructional practices “helps bright students think about challenging professional jobs needed in their own towns” and “engage in their communities and thinking of ways to build their future there” (Sparks, 2018, p. 8). Supporting and honoring unique characteristics and values where individuals reside provides tailored

instructional strategies constructed by students' sense of place, with ties to the local region (Azano et al., 2017, p. 67).

Connections to place, personal values, and understanding of opportunities bring individuals back to areas that entice the lifestyle they desire. Continuing to develop programs through local rural school districts that engage students in local areas develops connections of what students may want to pursue after high school graduation, whether it means individuals remain in their local community, or go off to gain experiences, education, and pursue opportunities. These opportunities may bring them back to their local community, providing an avenue to make a difference in their communities, developing and filling aspects that may be missing from their local economy.

Montgomery (2004) explained, programs that infuse community and school relations related to young individuals' local area "encourage students to develop talents that are useful or valued in their rural communities" (p. 4). The development of these talents valued by individuals local place are pertinent to the survival and success of local areas, promoting the creation of new opportunities (Howley et al., 2009, p. 528). Haas and Nachtigal (1998) stated that rural schools must teach young individuals to create jobs, allowing them to develop careers and pathways that are of interest (p. 16). In addition, individuals have the opportunity to engage in the local area in ways that could take a lifetime in larger areas, providing them a voice, strong connections, support systems, and the ability to be fulfilled in making a difference in others' lives.

Engagement in the local community and school district encourages students have the opportunity to learn what several rural community members have noticed growing up

in rural areas. Rural areas provide many opportunities for young individuals to fill a need within the community, advancing and gaining experiences unique to rural areas, making a difference in their local community, impacting and connecting with individuals that reside in the area. “Place humbles us,” Conyers (2001) explained, “but it also causes us to think about real possibilities instead of possible realities” (p. 103). Through opportunities, “we can improve it, and cultivate it, and build it; we work upon it and with it; we are its stewards” (Conyers, 2001, p. 103). While creating opportunities within rural communities can be challenging due to potential isolation of development, the ability to create what they may not be able to elsewhere can bring a sense of fulfillment, belonging, and place. Creating their own pathways and opportunities can be a challenge, with proper supports and networks, individuals can find success and advancement in developing successful avenues. Developing, finding, and connecting with support networks will allow for individuals to take their ideas and pathways to new levels, creating change and demonstrating the power of rural areas. An example of a support network is Women in Rural, a network that provides women making differences in rural areas to connect, find quality relationships, and develop a support system that assists in advancing their passions and ideas. Through the advancement of ideas and passions, individuals are able to “leave [the place] better, not more impoverished, than one found it” (Conyers, 2001, p. 103).

Rural areas have many attributes to celebrate, creating a culture that entices advancement, builds opportunities, and continues to grow stronger connections. One way to assist in promoting opportunities within rural areas is to celebrate the successes of



young individuals to encourage individuals that desire to remain in rural regions to create a path that will allow them to remain in rural communities. Demonstrating local rural graduate success stories, whether individuals remain in the local community or went off to different places in pursuit of interests and passions, provides young individuals with a sense of pride and knowledge of what opportunities exist. Currently, in the local region where education is not held to the highest standard, young individuals grow up thinking there are only two paths after graduation, enter the coal mining industry or leave their community in pursuit of more opportunities. With the promotion of stories of successful individuals that grew up in the same local community, young individuals will learn there is a multitude of pathways, developing a stronger sense of community pride and potentially encourage motivated gifted young individuals to create a life for themselves in the community they desire to remain in, while pursuing their passions. Celebrating successes demonstrates “students are living and creating their own lives and futures through understanding and attempting to solve problems in their own communities and globally” (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, p. 87). In areas that already have a unique connection to community, lifestyle, and place, opportunities can be promoted, advanced, and encouraged to redefine and redesign the perspectives of rural regions for the success and sustainability of the communities. Tying success and learning to the local region provides young individuals with opportunities of “learning in a place that matters,” and recognizes local attributes and abilities (Azano et al., 2017, p. 67).

Rural areas, although often forgotten, maintain a high standard in society as they are some of the last areas that continue to preserve the nation’s natural open spaces and

provide the main source of food. As young gifted adults continue to leave their rural communities in search of a successful and fulfilling life, rural areas can take some steps that may assist in encouraging the retention of some individuals. Enhancing and capitalizing on rural ways of living, community pride, and encouraged supports to provide efforts in building and setting goals that may encourage young gifted individuals to remain in or return to their rural community after high school. In addition, implementing a place and problem-based curriculum within the local school districts provides the community to dive into problems, opportunities, and community supports that allow individuals to learn the needs of the local areas. This type of instruction engages and promotes young individuals to learn ways to solve local problems and needs, finding ways to create a fulfilling life that enhances rural communities' success and sustainability. Celebrating the rural lifestyle and successes within the area may continue to maintain the success and sustainability of the region, as well as redefine what rural is and its capabilities. Tieken (2014) explained, "I loved that I couldn't separate the 'rural' from 'teaching,' that teaching here was completely and utterly tied to this very particular place" (p. 6).

### ***Dissemination of Research***

The research findings will be presented, implemented, and assist in guiding future endeavors locally and nationally to raise awareness for the need to advance gifted education in rural communities. Chris Whitty explained, "Research is of no use unless it gets to the people who need to use it" (NIHR, 2019). The findings of this research study

are essential and vital to the expansion of current research, practices, and future endeavors.

**Local.** To begin disseminating the findings of the research study, it is important to start in the community where the research took place. The results can be presented by reaching out to school district leaders, the board of education, and other stakeholders, demonstrating the perceptions of local community members. Through the presentation of the research study findings, the researcher will be able to implore the need for instructional changes and necessary community supports to guide the advancement of education for enrolled gifted students, as well as the benefit of all students. Including all stakeholders ensures all members of the rural community are able to come together to support and promote the rural way of life. Additionally, instilling a desire in young individuals to remain in and return to their local community to promote and advance the directions the area can take in the time of uncertainty regarding the future of the industry that supports the region.

The research findings will also be presented at the local city council meeting to disburse the information further, incorporating more stakeholders in hopes of promoting the need for community support to advance the local education system. This presentation of findings will be delivered in a manner that focuses on the advancement of the community, future aspirations, and encouragement of guiding young individuals to invest in their local community. As a result of a connection made through the research data collection process, a collaboration between a local businesswoman and the researcher will be developed in the summer of 2020 after the completion of the doctoral research

project oral defense. The local businesswoman discussed the many success stories of local community graduates, whether they remained in the community or adventured out nationally or globally. She indicated that these success stories are not often discussed, celebrated, or known. The success stories need to be told and celebrated, promoting the avenues young individuals can take after high school graduation, whether it is a traditional path or the development of their own way. The creation and compilation of profiles will be distributed through the community in the local newspaper and displayed in the local high school. This project promotes the celebration of individual success stories that will encourage young individuals to take their futures in ways they may not have thought before.

**State.** While the findings are specific to the local region where the study took place, it is crucial information to spread to bring awareness and promote further areas of research. To accomplish the dissemination of the research findings, the researcher will be applying to present the research study findings to the state gifted education conference, allowing for the ability to connect with rural educators.

Additionally, the researcher will be reaching out to several state rural agencies to connect, build partnerships, and establish networks. Through contacting these agencies, the ability to network and discuss potential policy changes may occur at the state level, promoting education for all students to ensure every child has the opportunity to reach “their greatest potential” (State Succeeds, 2019).

**National.** In addition to local and state levels, the research will be disseminated through national avenues as well. The researcher plans on presenting the research findings at multiple national conferences to a variety of audiences. Additionally, the researcher plans to submit to a variety of education journals, particularly those focused on rural and gifted education. Some journals include the Rural Educator, the Journal of Research in Rural Education, and the Journal for the Education of Gifted. The researcher also plans on contacting the Redefining Rural podcast to network and promote the research findings. Through publishing in journals and presenting on podcasts, the researcher will be able to continue to spread the information of the findings, implications, and areas for future research on rural gifted education.

Through contacts and networking within conferences, journals, and podcasts, the researcher would like to work with organizations to support the development of policy and legislation regarding supporting rural areas and school districts. The National Rural Education Association and the Rural Community and Community Trust organization promote advocacy at the policy and legislative levels to assist rural schools and communities' success.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Rural areas hold many valuable and admirable qualities that go unnoticed and underappreciated. Providing these areas with a voice and telling their stories will bring to light what these areas have to offer, affordances that exist, and the importance they bring to the greater society, developing a well-rounded society. In hopes of continuing to

promote research in rural communities, there are several suggestions for future research based on this research study and suggestions from the rural participants.

Ellie, a young gifted adult participant, recommended starting with conducting a research study focusing on parents and guardians of identified gifted individuals. She explained that parents and guardians of identified gifted individuals are highly influential in their children's lives, as they assist and influence goal setting. In addition, goals set by parents and guardians are more likely to be followed through. This type of study, Ellie explained, "could bridge the gap between problems and solutions for getting parents on board" to encourage young gifted individuals to remain in or return to their local communities to assist in the success and sustainability of the areas.

As a goal of the researcher and a recommendation from Audrey, a young gifted adult participant, taking the parameters of this research study and conducting a new research study that would allow aspects of generalization across rural communities would be beneficial to see the similarities and differences found between a variety of rural locations. Audrey, as well as the researcher, believed it would be interesting to see if any of the aspects the remote rural community in the western state face verse other remote rural areas within the same western state or different states of the United States. This type of research study would demonstrate the impacts rural areas are facing and how communities can start facing the barriers and developing higher supports for young gifted adults to remain in their local areas if they so desire.

The researcher, similar to above, recommends taking the parameters of this research study to conduct a new study that uses the phenomenological case lens. Using

the phenomenological case lens for analysis may display a phenomenon that exists in a case bound by the community. This research study may assist in providing more information regarding supports and barriers that young gifted adults' face in remaining in rural communities.

As individuals within rural communities' face isolation regarding developing original pathways, groups within communities are designed to support each other, developing a strong community in a variety of ways. These types of groups include young professional groups, veteran groups, interest-based groups, and more. A specific group designed to connect women in rural communities across the nation, Women in Rural, seeks to connect, provide support, education, and resources for personal and professional development. The network is aimed to connect, as Rae explained, "extraordinary women in unordinary places." Rae, a community leader, recommended a future research study regarding the perceptions of women in rural across the nation, hearing their stories that indicate supports and barriers.

As the community places high interest and focuses on the coal mining industry due to it being the livelihood of the region, it leads to the question: What would the area be like if the community valued education in the same way it values the coal mining industry? The statement, "The boys, or males, in our area, don't value education as much because they think that they can go get these big jobs right out of high school, and they can work at the mines...which kills us,"made by community leader, Blake, correlates with the gender of the majority of the participants. Twelve of the thirteen participants from this research study are women, potentially confirming that males of the region value

education less than women. Conducting further research based on the perceptions of education within the region from both male and female perspectives may provide insight to how education is valued, by whom, and ways community leaders may address changes within the local community to promote and advance education within the local region.

While the rural lifestyle provides connection, community, and place of belonging for many, this may not always be the case. Individuals whose culture differs from the majority of a community's population may find themselves feeling isolated, out of place, and unwelcome. Conducting a research study to understand the perceptions of belonging from a variety of individuals from multiple cultures within rural locations would provide a deeper understanding of how community members connect with their place. It would also provide insight into whether individuals feel included or excluded based on their culture and how their culture affects the sense of acceptance, belonging, and desire to succeed within the local region.

Noticing a discrepancy between rural community member perceptions and what social media and the news portrays, a study completed on the correlation between news and social media versus the actuality of rural perception influences would provide rural community members to identify what is being portrayed accurately and what is not. Rae, a community leader, recommended a future study of this sort to assist in better understanding perceptions and correlation effects amongst rural communities.



## Chapter Summary

*Retaining Gifted Individuals for the Sustainability of Rural Communities* has revealed the perceptions of remote rural community members regarding young gifted adults' choices on living in rural areas. The purpose of this study was to examine those perceptions building a narrative based on the perceptions of rural community members, analyzing for themes and patterns that provide insights to developing success and sustainability within these regions. Through the data collection process and analysis phase, it is evident that specific themes and patterns emerged through the participants' perceptions, stories, and experiences. Rural regions contain supports and barriers to young gifted adults' choices regarding remaining in rural areas. The supports and barriers are both due to opportunities found within the rural area. While the areas lack opportunities for an abundance of advanced career and educational opportunities, lack resources, and lack continuous engagement and support, the areas provide avenues, if encouraged and promoted, to create solutions to problems and the ability to fulfill gaps seen within the community through recognizing existing affordances.

Advancing current education structures in the local school district with the promotion of place-based and problem-based educational learning, students, especially gifted individuals, will develop a deep connection to their local community, building pride, seeking opportunities, and creating pathways to remain in the local area. Enhancing these aspects emphasizes the theory of place, ascribing meaning to the region, strengthening attachments to the area, and promoting individuals to take action on perceived potential possibilities or affordances (Raymond et al., 2017, p. 2). Developing

these types of programs will not only encourage individuals to connect with their community but also encourage them to remain in or return to the area. Through the development of this type of engagement and supports within the local school district and community, rural communities can, with the support of their young gifted adult population, begin to redefine and redesign the local community for the success and sustainability of the area, especially in a time of unrest with the looming unknown future.

While not for everyone, to many, like Audrey, being part of a rural community “just feels right,” and it is where they are most comfortable. With a sense of place, community pride, and the ability to create solutions to local problems, the retention of young gifted adults could guide the future of rural communities developing success and sustainability for generations to come. Rural communities “need articulate leaders who understand and love rural places – people who are visionary and deeply rooted in rural life and who will create new businesses and products, stories, music, art, and responsible ways to develop resources” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 462). Young gifted adults that have been raised in rural communities “understand the value of rural life and may find new and creative ways to sustain what is valuable in rural places” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 465).

Rural gifted education is the “canary in the coal mine,” indicating a need for the development of more substantial instructional infrastructures that leads to the retention of gifted individuals (Tieken, 2014, p. 188). The rhythms and patterns of the communities are guided by the space and structure of the schools, binding the communities together. Like urban areas, rural communities rely on their schools “for shape and structure, for substance and sustenance” (Tieken, 2014, p. 188). With the ability to feel the effect of

seemingly minute changes, rural schools are often the first to go, offering as a sacrifice warning to others (Tieken, 2014, p. 188). Society cannot let the good work of rural communities go unrecognized, as these communities do not tell simple stories (Tieken, 2014, p. 190). Their stories are made of resilience and survivors, defeating the odds and circumstances. “They reject the myths and stereotypes; they refuse the foregone conclusions,” allowing for rural areas to rewrite the narrative and redefine who they are (Tieken, 2014, p. 190). These areas “remind us to see the complexity and possibility beyond the simple packaging and believe again in the vast potential of public schools to serve students and transform society” (Tieken, 2014, p. 188). Howley (1998) explained, “In the future rural educators *might well* help cultivate such meanings again” (p.32).

## HISTORICAL REFELCTION

Toward the completion of this research study, the COVID-19 pandemic began its march across the United States. As businesses closed, education transitioned to remote learning, and many individuals filed for unemployment, the nation began to look at life in a different light through social distancing. With first responders on the line, working for the health of the nation, political leaders fought to ensure the safety of all citizens. Life as we knew it had transitioned to considering vital daily needs, possibilities within a variety of fields, and uncertainties within the future. Rural areas virtually bound together, creating a common voice calling for help in the preparation of the effects the pandemic would have in the medical field, education system, local business, and loss of local jobs. In this time of unknown, more than ever, rural communities need articulate leaders that are able to guide communities through transitions of hardship and uncertainty.

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APPENDIX A

Community Partner Agreement Letter

October 18, 2019

To whom it may concern:

[REDACTED] agrees to be Jessie Matthews' community partner for her doctoral research project, *Retaining Gifted Individuals for the Sustainability of Rural Communities*. The purpose of the study is to examine supports for and barriers to gifted young adults' choices regarding living in rural communities. The results of this study may assist rural communities in supporting gifted growth in unique ways to encourage bright individuals to stay in or return to their home communities.

The role of the community partner is to support the researcher by answering questions, advising research, suggesting potential directions, and assist in the participant recruitment process. The researcher's findings will be presented to and discussed with the community partner throughout the process to allow for the partner to provide suggestions and input. The results of this partnership will develop a well-rounded, community-based approach, incorporating key aspects of the rural areas' needs and interests.

Signed:

[REDACTED]  
Council Member

11-1-2019  
Date

  
Jessie Matthews  
Researcher

Nov. 1, 2019  
Date

## APPENDIX B

### Recruitment Flyer

The University of Denver's Morgridge College of Education is conducting a research study on: Retaining Gifted Individuals for the Sustainability of Rural Communities. The research study will be examining the supports for, and barriers to, young gifted adults' choices regarding living in a rural community. The study will take place at a quiet, local location, such as the local book store or the local library. Participants must be current [REDACTED] residents, over the age of 18, and have a connection with gifted young individuals. Eligible participants will be asked to complete an interview with the researcher. The interview will last no longer than 60 minutes.

For more information, please email Jessie Matthews or [REDACTED] at

[REDACTED] or [REDACTED] You may also contact Jessie Matthews by phone at [REDACTED]

Principal Investigator: Jessie Matthews

Community Partner: [REDACTED]

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Norma Lu Hafenstein



## APPENDIX C

### Recruitment Script Email to Community Leaders

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Jessie Matthews and I am a student from the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study. This is a study about remote rural community members' perceptions on young gifted adult's choices regarding living in rural areas. You're eligible to be in this study because you are a community leader whose position influences gifted individuals in the rural study location. I obtained your contact information through your response to the recruitment flyer.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will partake in one, face-to-face interview that will last about sixty minutes. The interview will take place in a quiet public place, such as the local book store or library. Some questions you may encounter through the interview involve the reason individuals reside in the local rural area, the draw the region has for individuals and families, and the perspective on the future of the region's success and sustainability. I would like to audio record your interview, so I may use it to transcribe your interview for my data collection.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at

\_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Jessie Matthews



## APPENDIX D

### Recruitment Script Email to Family Members of Gifted Individuals

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Jessie Matthews and I am a student from the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study. This is a study about remote rural community members' perceptions on young gifted adult's choices regarding living in rural areas. You're eligible to be in this study because you are a family member of an identified gifted individual and you reside in the rural study location. I obtained your contact information through your response to the recruitment flyer.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will partake in one, face-to-face interview that will last about sixty minutes. The interview will take place in a quiet public place, such as the local book store or library. Some questions you may encounter through the interview involve the reason individuals reside in the local rural area, the draw the region has for individuals and families, and the perspective on the future of the region's success and sustainability. I would like to audio record your interview, so I may use it to transcribe your interview for my data collection.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at

\_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Jessie Matthews

## APPENDIX E

### Recruitment Script Email to Mentors of Gifted Individuals

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Jessie Matthews and I am a student from the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study. This is a study about remote rural community members' perceptions on young gifted adult's choices regarding living in rural areas. You're eligible to be in this study because you are a mentor of an identified gifted individual and you reside in the rural study location. I obtained your contact information through your response to the recruitment flyer.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will partake in one, face-to-face interview that will last about sixty minutes. The interview will take place in a quiet public place, such as the local book store or library. Some questions you may encounter through the interview involve the reason individuals reside in the local rural area, the draw the region has for individuals and families, and the perspective on the future of the region's success and sustainability. I would like to audio record your interview, so I may use it to transcribe your interview for my data collection.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at

\_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Jessie Matthews

## APPENDIX F

### Recruitment Email Script for Young Gifted Adults

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Jessie Matthews and I am a student from the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study. This is a study about remote rural community members' perceptions on young gifted adult's choices regarding living in rural areas. You're eligible to be in this study because you identify as a Young Gifted Adult that is over the age of 18 years old. I obtained your contact information through your response to the recruitment flyer.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will partake in one, face-to-face interview that will last about sixty minutes. The interview will take place in a quiet public place, such as the local library or community college. Some questions you may encounter through the interview involve the reason individuals reside in the local rural area, the draw the region has for individuals and families, and the perspective on the future of the region's success and sustainability. I would like to audio record your interview, so I may use it to transcribe your interview for my data collection.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at

\_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Jessie Matthews

## APPENDIX G

# Informed Consent for Community Leaders, Family Members, Mentors, and Young Gifted Adults



08/27/2019

1

### Consent to Participate in Research

**Study Title:** *Retaining Gifted Individuals for the Sustainability of Rural Communities*

**IRBNet #:** 1452542

**Principal Investigator:** *Jessie Matthews*

**Faculty Sponsor:** *Dr. Norma Lu Hafenstein*

**Study Site:** *Remote rural community in a Western state in the United States*

**Sponsor/Funding source:**

#### **You are being asked to participate in a research study.**

Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not you may want to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will describe the study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

#### **Purpose**

If you participate in this research study, you will be invited to share your experience as an active rural community member surrounding the examination of supports for, and barriers to, gifted young adults' choices regarding living in rural communities. The problem this study will explore is the ideas of why rural areas lose many of their bright community members to their urban neighbors, ultimately leading to the loss of contributions these individuals could make in improving the rural lifestyle and communities.

The project will be designed through the compilation of interview responses from multiple perspectives, identifying aspects that assist in better understanding the choices gifted young adults' make when considering residing in or leaving their local communities. Responses from interviews will assist in gaining community members perspectives and stories on the subject matter. Interviews will take place face-to-face in a quiet, public setting within the local community, such as the bookstore or the library. If selected, will partake in one interview that last about 60 minutes. Once the interview has been transcribed and narrated within the study,

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Consent v2 June 2019

the researcher will ask you to review the portion that attains to you, ensuring all information has been compiled correctly and the way the you intended.

Several types of questions you will encounter during face-to-face interviews include the reason individuals reside in the local rural area, the draw the region has for individuals and families, and the perspective on the future of the region's success and sustainability. At any time during the study, you have the right to refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time.

#### **Risks or Discomforts**

There are no expected risks to you as a result of participating in this study. However, potential risks may involve stress and/or discomforts of participation during the interview process. If during any part of the study you experience psychological or emotional discomfort as a result of the interview process, you will be provided with the names and telephone numbers of agencies, such as a crisis hotline, to assist in alleviating mental health concerns.

An additional risk that may occur is a breach of confidentiality. Collected data will be confidential with linked identifiers as an added step for privacy. All collected data will be store securely in an Outlook Drive managed by the University of Denver. All linked identifiers will be deleted three years after the completion of the research study. In addition, with written consent from you, interviews will be audio recorded. All audio recordings will be stored securely in an Outlook Drive managed by the University of Denver. Three years from the completion of the research study, all audio recordings will be deleted. Audio recordings will be utilized solely by the researcher and will be used only by the researcher to develop a narrative for the study. The researcher will allow you to review the section where your interview was used to ensure your ideas, thoughts, stories, and experiences were portrayed correctly. At this time, you will be able to provide feedback or make changes to your section.

#### **Benefits**

The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study is the enjoyment of adding your story, experience, and perspective to assist further advancing research within rural communities and gifted education. Your narratives will assist in better understanding supports and barriers to gifted young adults' choices regarding living in rural communities. The researcher cannot and does not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study. Your decision whether to participate in this study will not affect your employment.

#### **Confidentiality of Information**

All collected data will be confidential with linked identifiers. The link between your identifiers and the research data will be destroyed three years after the completion of the research study. Collected data will be securely stored in an Outlook Drive managed by the University of Denver.

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**Limits to confidentiality**

All of the information you provide will be confidential. However, if the researcher learns that you intend to harm yourself or others, including, but not limited to child or elder abuse/neglect, suicide ideation, or threats against others, the researcher must report that to the authorities as required by law.

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

**Use of your information for future research**

Your information collected for this project will NOT be used or shared for future research, even if the researcher removes the identifiable information like your name or date of birth.

**Data Sharing**

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance social sciences. The researcher will remove or code any personal information (e.g., your name, date of birth) that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information or samples the researcher may share. Despite these measures, the researcher cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

**Consent to audio record solely for purposes of this research**

This study involves audio recording. If you do not agree to be recorded, you can still take part in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_ YES, I agree to be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ NO, I do not agree to be audio recorded.

**Questions**

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Jessie Matthews at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact Dr. Norma Hafenstein at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].



08/27/2019

4

If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the University of Denver (DU) Institutional Review Board to speak to someone independent of the research team at 303-871-2121 or email at IRBAdmin@du.edu.

**Signing the consent form**

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## APPENDIX H

### Informed Consent for Gifted Senior High School Students



08/27/2019

1

#### Consent to Participate in Research

**Study Title:** *Retaining Gifted Individuals for the Sustainability of Rural Communities*

**IRBNet #:** 1452542

**Principal Investigator:** *Jessie Matthews*

**Faculty Sponsor:** *Dr. Norma Lu Hafenstein*

**Study Site:** *Remote rural community in a Western state in the United States*

**Sponsor/Funding source:**

#### **You are being asked to participate in a research study.**

Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not you may want to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will describe the study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

#### **Purpose**

If you participate in this research study, you will be invited to share your experience as an active rural community member surrounding the examination of supports for, and barriers to, gifted young adults' choices regarding living in rural communities. The problem this study will explore is the ideas of why rural areas lose many of their bright community members to their urban neighbors, ultimately leading to the loss of contributions these individuals could make in improving the rural lifestyle and communities.

The project will be designed through the compilation of interview responses from multiple perspectives, identifying aspects that assist in better understanding the choices gifted young adults' make when considering residing in or leaving their local communities. Responses from interviews will assist in gaining community members perspectives and stories on the subject matter. Interviews will take place face-to-face in a quiet, public setting within the local community, such as the bookstore or the library. If selected, will partake in one interview that last about 60 minutes. Once the interview has been transcribed and narrated within the study,

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the researcher will ask you to review the portion that attains to you, ensuring all information has been compiled correctly and the way the you intended.

Several types of questions you will encounter during face-to-face interviews include the reason individuals reside in the local rural area, the draw the region has for individuals and families, and the perspective on the future of the region's success and sustainability. At anytime during the study, you have the right to refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time.

As an identified gifted student of the local, rural school district, a document will be obtained from the school district, ensuring the true identification of giftedness has occurred in at least one domain. The sole use of this information is to prove you are an identified gifted individual.

#### **Risks or Discomforts**

There are no expected risks to you as a result of participating in this study. However, potential risks may involve stress and/or discomforts of participation during the interview process. If during any part of the study you experience psychological or emotional discomfort as a result from the interview process, you will be provided with the names and telephone numbers of agencies, such as a crisis hotline, to assist in alleviating mental health concerns.

An additional risk that may occur is a breach of confidentiality. Collected data will be confidential with linked identifiers as an added step for privacy. All collected data will be store securely in an Outlook Drive managed by the University of Denver. All linked identifiers will be deleted three years after the completion of the research study. In addition, with written consent from you, interviews will be audio recorded. All audio recordings will be stored securely in an Outlook Drive managed by the University of Denver. Three years from the completion of the research study, all audio recordings will be deleted. Audio recordings will be utilized solely by the researcher and will be used only by the researcher to develop a narrative for the study. The researcher will allow you to review the section where your interview was used to ensure your ideas, thoughts, stories, and experiences were portrayed correctly. At this time, you will be able to provide feedback or make changes to your section.

#### **Benefits**

The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study is the enjoyment of adding your story, experience, and perspective to assist further advancing research within rural communities and gifted education. Your narratives will assist in better understanding supports and barriers to gifted young adults' choices regarding living in rural communities. The researcher cannot and does not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study. Your decision whether to participate in this study will not affect your employment or school performance.

**Confidentiality of Information**

All collected data will be confidential with linked identifiers. The link between your identifiers and the research data will be destroyed three years after the completion of the research study. Collected data will be securely stored in an Outlook Drive managed by the University of Denver.

**Limits to confidentiality**

All of the information you provide will be confidential. However, if the researcher learns that you intend to harm yourself or others, including, but not limited to child or elder abuse/neglect, suicide ideation, or threats against others, the researcher must report that to the authorities as required by law.

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

**Use of your information for future research**

Your information collected for this project will NOT be used or shared for future research, even if the researcher removes the identifiable information like your name or date of birth.

**Data Sharing**

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance social sciences. The researcher will remove or code any personal information (e.g., your name, date of birth) that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information or samples the researcher may share. Despite these measures, the researcher cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

**Consent to audio record solely for purposes of this research**

This study involves audio recording. If you do not agree to be recorded, you can still take part in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_ YES, I agree to be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ NO, I do not agree to be audio recorded.

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**Consent for Accessing Education Records**

Education records used by this research project are education records as defined and protected by Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). FERPA is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. Your consent gives the researcher permission to access the records identified above for research purposes.

\_\_\_ **YES**, I give permission to the researcher to access my education records for this research project.

\_\_\_ **NO**, I do not give permission to the researcher to access my education records for this research project.

**Questions**

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Jessie Matthews at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact Dr. Norma Hafenstein at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the University of Denver (DU) Institutional Review Board to speak to someone independent of the research team at 303-871-2121 or email at IRBAdmin@du.edu.

**Signing the consent form**

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

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**Printed name of subject**

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**Signature of subject**

---

**Date**

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## APPENDIX I

### Interview Question Protocol

#### Interview Question Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Project Description:

Questions:

1. Why do you live in this area?
2. Did you grow up in a rural community and return to or stay in that community?
3. Tell me why your story in how you came to reside in this area.
4. Do you plan on staying for long in this community?
5. Do you have kids? Do you plan for them to stay in the community post high school?

6. Why do people live in this area?
  
7. What draw does residing in this area have for you and your family?
  
8. What is the draw for most people to reside in this are?
  
9. What is your perception of why people reside in this area?
  
10. What is your perception of outside views regarding people residing in this area?
  
11. What is your perception regarding the retention of young adults in the  
community after high school?
  
12. How do the coal mines and power plant influence the area? Now? In the future?
  
13. How profitable will this area be in the next decade for the community members  
that reside in the region?

14. What is needed for the success and sustainability of this area?
  
15. What future careers or industries do you foresee coming to this area to assist in the sustainability of the region?
  
16. What is your familiarity with gifted education?
  
17. What are supports for gifted young adults' choices regarding residing in this community?
  
18. What are barriers for gifted young adults' choices regarding residing in this community?
  
19. What are your perceptions of the local K-12 school district in this area?
  
20. How do the local schools engage students in learning that promotes individuals to remain in or return to this area?
  
21. Do you feel students are challenged, engaged, and invested in their schools and communities? Why?

22. What else might be helpful as I study this topic?

23. Is there anything else that you would like to add?