

Creating a Sense of Community through Leisure

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I would like to dedicate this research to my Grandma Martha and my husband Mike.

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ABSTRACT

Rural communities make up an important aspect of the American society. For many individuals, rural communities provide a unique culture, as well as opportunities for employment, social interaction, and leisure activities. Through this study a clearer picture was discerned of how residents' leisure activities could help them cope with change, and possibly strengthen their overall sense of community. This study looked at a typical rural mid-western community, which has undergone a number of economic and social changes throughout the years. Focusing on its resident's leisure activities, using McMillan and Chavis' (1986) sense of community model, which includes the components of membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection.

Given the subtly and complexity of leisure, this study took an ethnographic approach where data was generated by living in Valhalla for a three-month period of time. Fourteen semi-structured interviews (9 males and 5 females) were conducted. Interviewees ranged in age from 30 to 74, with an age distribution lined up with the United States Census data (2013). Along with interviews, participant observations were done in a variety of locations around town, and observing a multitude of activities (i.e. eating/drinking, and attending church). Archival data (i.e. newspapers and documents) was gathered, with permission from the local Historical Society.

In the end, three main categories of leisure activities were observed: leisure on the road, home-based leisure, and community-based leisure. Leisure on the road addressed fulfilling residents' needs outside of Valhalla, detracting from a strong sense of community. Home-based leisure reflected the membership and fulfillment of needs

components of sense of community. The membership component did seem to lead to a strong sense of community among some participants, however the fulfillment of needs component was independent in nature, and led to a decline in residents' sense of community. Finally, community-based leisure included all four components of sense of community, and were observed to potentially enhance resident's lives, and foster ones sense of community through interpersonal relationships, community cohesion, social support, and fulfilling some personal and social needs. However with Valhalla's current lack of communal leisure they will continue to deteriorate.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Rural communities make up an important aspect of the American society. For many individuals, rural communities provide a unique culture, as well as opportunities for employment, social interaction, and leisure activities. More holistically, rural areas provide a unique value system, food, and natural resources to the American (and world's) population (Flora & Flora, 2004). However, change has been consistent for rural communities, and how communities deal with change continues to play an important role in the future of rural communities. Through this study a clearer picture should be discerned of how residents' leisure activities may help them cope with change, and possibly strengthen their overall sense of community. This study will be looking at Valhalla, which is a typical mid-western rural community that has undergone a number of ups and downs throughout the years. This study will be evaluating residents of Valhalla's leisure activities, using McMillan and Chavis' (1986) sense of community model, which includes the components of membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection.

Many rural communities have experienced tremendous decline over the decades, to the point that many are struggling to survive in the modern global marketplace. In the 19th century, the industrial revolution transformed the nation from a predominately rural nation to a predominately urban nation, leaving rural communities with a decline in population, decreased tax base, eroding infrastructure, lack of economic opportunities, and youth out-migration. As people moved away from rural communities, they took with

them certain skills and abilities, thereby leaving the remaining residents with rising costs, and decreased accessibility to goods and services (Flora & Flora, 2004).

In light of these economic and social changes, understanding how rural resident's leisure activities, and interactions within their community, may help predict the future of that community. Leisure is an important concept and has intentionally been used to build and strengthen communities (Hemingway, 1988), by maintaining, strengthening, and developing relationships among groups of individuals (Glover & Stewart, 2006). Leisure can be seen in a number of ways, through helping others, sharing common interests, and celebrating shared ideals. Even something as simple as laughter can be the origin of a shared experience, that breaks down barriers, and brings the entire community together.

Throughout decades, rural communities have faced a decline of leisure opportunities, along with other facets of community life, resulting in weakened kinship, and other forms of fellowship that once connected individuals (Glover & Stewart, 2006). The decline of leisure opportunities is associated with a reduction of community involvement in civic activities (Putnam, 2000), which is a crucial component to addressing community needs and improving the quality of life in rural communities (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). Therefore, leisure is a necessary for the sustainability of a community, and is associated with a strong sense of community that can help individuals overcome social, political, and economic challenges.

Valhalla is a typical rural midwestern community that has encountered social, political, and economical challenges throughout the decades. As globalization, transportation, and technology has increased, businesses and factories have decreased, leaving Valhalla with declining resources, high unemployment rates, and limited services

and amenities. Valhalla residents have been forced to leave their community for many of life's necessities, and gain connections and networks elsewhere.

The Interactional Community Perspective

With the interactional community perspective, communities are not autonomous social systems that exist independent of the larger society, but have varying levels of systemic completeness and interaction. The interactional community perspective focuses on social interaction as a necessary part of community (Wilkinson, 1970), where the community serves as the principal setting for exchange between individuals and society (Luloff & Wilkinson, 1979). The interactional community perspective is comprised of three elements: territory or locality, a complete local society comprised of social organizations or institutions that facilitate redundant interaction among residents; and social interaction on issues of local interest in the community field (Wilkinson, 1991). The interactional field allows rural communities to bring their experiences, resources, and energy to develop a sense of community, and better their future. By using the interactional community perspective in this study we will discover the impact of one's leisure activity to the community structure as a whole. Specifically, we will be examining the residents of Valhalla's leisure activities and associations (formal and informal), and evaluate how they interact and connect with each other to solve issues within the community, and potentially build a sense of community.

Sense of Community

Psychological sense of community is a concept used to describe feelings of belonging, identity, and support individual residents experience, in various types of communities. Sense of community is seen as an asset to communities, and maintains the

notion that people with similar guiding principles, living in proximity, and work together on issues that affect their community (Pretty, Bishop, Fisher, & Sonn, 2006). In previous research, sense of community was considered a core construct that could motivate residents to take action that would improve the welfare of their community (Fisher, Sonn, & Bishop, 2002). Sense of community goes beyond the individual, and is a unique construct within a larger community, which focuses on the feeling of the whole community, and the services, membership, and connections that are available to those within (Pretty, Bishop, Fisher, & Sonn, 2006).

Sense of community is most often associated with McMillan and Chavis (1986), which defines sense of community as, “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another, and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) model is divided into four components including: (a) membership or feeling of belonging, and emotional safety, (b) influence of a member on the community and mutual influence of the community on the member, (c) integration and fulfillment of needs met by the rewards of members for their participation and accomplishments, and (d) shared emotional connection involving a shared history. Each component works together to contribute to an individuals’ sense of community relative to their neighborhood, town, or organization (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Sense of community (SOC) is an important concept, which has been studied across disciplines, and environments such as community psychology (Fisher, Sonn, & Bishop, 2002), community institutions (Martz & Sanderson, 2006; Oncescu & Giles, 2014), neighborhoods (Brodsky & Marx, 2001; Kingston, Mitchell, Florin, & Stevenson,

1999), psychological rehabilitation programs (Herman, Onaga, Pernice-Duca, Oh, & Ferguson, 2005), community organizations (Hughey, Speer, & Peterson, 1999), and international communities of interest (Obst, Zinkiewicz, & Smith, 2002b). Sense of community can be considered as a channel for social involvement, and active participation in the community (Prezza, Amici, Roberti, & Tedeschi, 2001), which is necessary for providing individuals a sense of social and local belonging. By pairing sense of community with the interactional community perspective, this study will focus on the social exchanges between residents of Valhalla, and how those may build a sense of community.

Leisure within a community allows for individuals to come together, not around issues of power, but around appreciation. The appreciation can focus on numerous issues, such as church, sport, food, or history. By coming together individuals are able to build relationships beyond the topic at hand, and create a sense of identity and belonging, and build their sense of community. With sense of community being a feeling one has towards their community, leisure is seen as a pathway to gain that connection to the community. For example, a resident who loves to garden, may use their neighbors grass clippings for compost, teach others about gardening, be praised on the appearance of their yard, and give away some of their produce to their neighbors and friends. Understood in this way, the simple leisure activity of gardening is transformed into an activity that builds a sense of community.

Rurality

A number of studies have mentioned that rural communities have experienced challenges in maintaining their resident's sense of community, due to their dwindling

resources and amenities (Oncescu & Giles, 2014; Smith, Krannich, & Hunter, 2001; Wilkinson, 1991). But, what is a rural community? Rural communities have been studied by many disciplines throughout the years, in many different ways; however the one thing they all have in common is that there is not one single definition of what ‘rural’ means. Edwards and Matarrita-Cascante (2011) looked at four major journals in the leisure and recreation field, and found that the most widely used definition came from governmental agencies (i.e. Office of Management and Budget and US Census), where ‘rural’ is viewed as encompassing all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area (i.e., greater than 2,500 residents)(US Census, 2010a). However, that governmental measurement of rural does not tell the whole story, for example a county could be labeled ‘urban’ when only a portion of that county is urban. For the purpose of this study we will use the rural tragedy concept. This concept focuses on changes within social institutions within a community that align with rural tragedy. These changes could consist of factories closures, increase in out-migration, or school consolidation. In this case Valhalla, has had all three of those changes.

Rural communities have been studied within the leisure and recreation field for a number of years, and can be summed up in six main categories (Edwards & Matarrita-Cascante, 2011). Several studies viewed rural as a descriptive characteristic, such as a location (Dunlap, 2009) or demographic variable (Cardenas, Henderson, & Wilson, 2009). While other studies viewed rural as an instrument for leisure benefits, such as a setting within close proximity to natural resources and amenities (Van Patten & Williams, 2008), or having increased access and opportunities for outdoor recreation (Churchill, Plano Clark, Prochaska-Cue, Creswell, & Ontai-Grzebik, 2007). Rurality has

also been studied through its hardships, such as decreased access and opportunities of recreation in the context of rural tragedy (McCormick, 1994). All six of these categories focus on residents of rural communities attitudes and behaviors or actual recreational opportunities themselves, with little focus on the social context of the community. Therefore, this study will be focusing on rural resident's leisure activities, and how they impact one's sense of community.

The Research Setting

Valhalla is a rural Midwestern community with 2,322 residents, approximately 60 miles northeast of Indianapolis, IN. Valhalla's incorporated boundaries encompass a little over one square mile; therefore everything it offers is within close proximity to one another. Valhalla, like many contemporary rural communities, does not and cannot compete with nearby urban communities when it comes to lifestyle amenities, and economic opportunities. Despite its lack of amenities, Valhalla offers a grocery store, doctor's office, dentist office, veterinarian, library, a few gas stations, dine-in restaurants, and a number of parks.

Valhalla is very similar to many rural communities, as it has experienced an exodus of industrial and manufacturing employers. Valhalla's heyday was in the 1980s with almost 3,000 residents (Stats Indiana, 2014), where all the houses were filled with residents, working in or near Valhalla. Unfortunately, several large companies, such as General Motors and Delco Remy decided to move their factories overseas, resulting in skyrocketing unemployment. Residents were forced to move away and find other jobs, leaving behind the decline of local social institutions.

Valhalla never fully recovered from those factory closures, and is still struggling to survive. With Valhalla being a dead-end town, where highway 785 ends and does not directly connect any two towns, there is a very small chance an outsider may stop by to purchase gas, eat lunch, or shop. Leaving much more weight on the shoulders of the current residents for local economic activity. Valhalla currently has less than half of the businesses it once did, forcing residents to visit other communities to gain employment, attend school, and gather needed supplies. Throughout all of Valhalla's struggles with declining economic activity and out-migration, it has been able to maintain its overall population for the past twenty-five years.

While walking through Valhalla a visitor may see run down buildings, overgrown lawns, and planks of wood rotting on porches, but they may also see several places of interest, such as churches, historical society, civic center, and several parks. Residents may not be able to purchase clothing, machinery, or home necessities in town, but they can attend ball games, swim in the creek, attend bible study, and have community dinners in well-maintained facilities. Despite not having all the amenities a larger community can offer, Valhalla's residents still maintain their bonds via their passion for communal leisure activities. These leisure activities allow for residents to socialize with others, and build relationships among neighbors and families, which develop strong social networks, and a sense of community (Ramsey & Smit, 2002; Smith, Krannich & Hunter, 2001). Therefore, this study is looking to discover those important leisure activities for the residents of Valhalla, and how those leisure activities contribute to their sense of community.

Methodology and Methods

Given the subtlety and complexity of leisure, ethnography has been the methodology that is able to capture depth and true meaning through living, eating, and sleeping within the environment, hoping to gain an insiders perspective (Wolcott, 2008). This ethnographic study plans on using participant observations, archival data, and semi-structured interviews with photo-elicitation, in hopes to capture that deeper understanding of leisure for the residents of Valhalla. Participant observation will consist of observing the daily life, seasonal events, and unusual happenings of the residents of Valhalla. I will begin with making myself known around town, attending church services, hanging out at establishments, and making connections. Archival data will be collected through the historical society, looking at the local newspaper (established in 1885), through school yearbooks, and other resources. The semi-structured interviews will be utilizing photographs generated by residents of Valhalla, to help strengthen the discussion of their leisure activities.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the current study is to explore the function leisure plays in maintaining a sense of community among the residents of Valhalla. The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What types of leisure activities do residents of Valhalla participate in, currently and in the past?
2. How do residents' current leisure activities foster a sense of community?
3. How do residents' current leisure activities help Valhalla residents cope with change?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leisure within Communities

As a result of historical and cultural influences, leisure has been defined in a number of ways (Brightbill, 1960). Leisure seems to have derived from the Latin word *licere*, meaning, “to be permitted,” and is defined in the modern dictionary as “freedom from occupation, employment, or engagement” (Brightbill, 1960, p. 3). Leisure has meant different things in different cultures, with little agreement on the meaning and what it implies. Many scholars view leisure as freedom from work, while others view it as an instrument for social control, a status symbol, an organic necessity, a state of calm, quite, contemplative dignity, or a spiritual, aesthetic, cultural condition (Brightbill, 1960). What all viewpoints do have in common is that leisure deals with time and the behavior in which individuals participate.

In contemporary society, leisure is understood as free time in which people pursue activities for personal pleasure and fulfillment. If considered at all, the ideas of leisure and community are understood to be indifferent to one another. Not so in previous eras, when leisure and community were understood to be closely intertwined with virtue and politics (Hemingway, 1988). Leisure was seen as the foundation of the communal life of the *polis* (city-state), and serving the *polis* was the highest calling for any citizen. Therefore, leisure was necessary for a successful *polis*, and without leisure the *polis* would not exist (Hemingway, 1988).

In more modern times leisure’s focus drifted away from community and to the individual. Individuals tend to participate in leisure as they see fit, whether it be alone,

with others, benefiting the community or not. Leisure was once done for the common good of the community, while in modern times leisure is done as 'consumption' or as a 'shared meaning' (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). Leisure as consumption was seen as one's own choice to participate how one wished to satisfy their own desires, without contemplating the community as a whole. An individual may want to shop, exercise and/or paint, which may or may not include or benefit others. If done individually, it may satisfy the individual at the time, but it also may create a feeling of alienation. As technology has advanced, so has individualism and consumption in leisure (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). For example, in contemporary society many individuals have personal electronic devices such as tablets and cellular telephones, which have allowed for easier connections to the larger community in many ways, but are also done in a private manner. Three individuals could be in a room together, playing games, checking e-mail or social networks and may not say a word or interact in any way with each other. While in the presence of others, each individual is gaining pleasure from his or her own activity and not by interacting with others in the immediate vicinity or from the surrounding community.

Leisure can also be seen as a shared meaning, when one still participates in a leisure activity of their choice that involves others. For example, five individuals may enjoy reading murder mysteries, therefore they pick a book and announce in four weeks they will get back together and discuss the book. These individuals have a shared interest in reading murder mysteries, but this leisure activity is still not focused on the community as a whole. It involves a large amount of passive (reading) non-interactive time that is somewhat focused on the individual, but mainly focused on the shared interest of the group.

Leisure as consumption and leisure as a shared meaning can be individualistic as discussed above, but they can also be community oriented. One who has an interest in cooking, may prepare food for the homeless, and one who enjoys reading may work with the youth on their reading skills. In this way, leisure may be more individualized when compared to prior eras, but more communal in the sense that leisure represents one's personal values or their interpretation of their relationship to the broader norms and customs within their culture. Leisure opportunities are able to uplift, enhance, and support both individuals and communities.

Community-oriented leisure is a way to open the door into a communal life, by allowing individuals to connect with others. Aristotle thought leisure had a specific function in creating peace within the community (Hemingway, 1988), by maintaining, strengthening, and developing relationships among groups of individuals (Glover & Stewart, 2006). Those relationships provide a starting point upon which collective spirit of the community is reflected, making the community much more than just a location (Glover & Stewart, 2006). For example, activities that begin as a shared leisure interest, such as community gardening, may result in new friendships, the ability to feed the less fortunate, and also improve community aesthetics. By studying community-oriented leisure one may understand how to further social justice, acceptance, and promote a healthy functioning community (Glover & Stewart, 2006).

Communities

Community, like leisure, is a complex concept that has been researched by many, with some of the earliest scholarly conceptualizations appearing in the 1880s. Since the 19th century, community has been a subject of inquiry for a great number of social

researchers, due to the concern with the consequences of increasing urbanization, modernization, and industrialization on social solidarity and integration. Outlining the history of this inquiry becomes problematic as everyone seems to have their own particular interpretation (Warren, 1978), but there have been a number of avenues of research that have helped define the field.

A basic theme of prior work includes attempts to derive an agreeable definition of community. Hillery (1955) reviewed community definitions within the social science literature and found ninety-four definitions of community. Despite this variety, most definitions include three components or basic agreements: 1) social interaction, 2) geographic space, and 3) common ties (Hillery, 1955; Wilkinson, 1991). In other words, community was a geographic location where there is a sense of belonging together, in which people interact with others to carry out the functions of everyday life.

Beyond defining community, a number of central theoretical and methodological approaches in community research were acknowledged. To understand changes in rural and urban characteristics due to industrialization and urbanization, one of the earliest perspectives was a typological approach originating with Tönnies' (1887/1957) concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Tönnies (1887/1957) believed that *Gemeinschaft*, or communities based on sentiment and strong bonds between kin, neighbors, and friends, were being replaced by *Gesellschaft*, or communities based on self-interest, competition, and negotiated accommodations. Residents of *Gemeinschaft* communities focused on the community as a whole and interacted with various residents on a consistent basis, as seen in pioneer towns; while residents of *Gesellschaft* communities focused on individual

freedom, material success, consumption, and individualism, as seen during the period of industrialization and urbanization.

As opposed to classification by time, social systems approaches examine the functions of the community, particularly locally relevant functions. Key issues within a system approach includes a portrait of the groups composing the community, relationships among these groups, the boundary of these relationships, systemic linkages across boundaries and how communities vary from other social systems (Bates & Bacon, 1972). Warren (1978) adopted a systems approach to explain tensions between *Gemeinschaft* communities and social changes leading to more *Gesellschaft* communities. Echoing the assertion that society was transforming from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* arrangements, Warren reconciled that American communities were shifting from horizontal (local) ties to vertical (extra-community) ties. The social system approach helps develop an understanding of the level of interactions individuals and organizations have within a community.

The Interactional Community Perspective

The interactional community perspective originated by Kaufman (1959) and was extensively elaborated by his student Wilkinson (1972, 1991). The perspective was first described as an approach that might stem the perceived negative influence of an emerging mass society, while also serving as a template for guiding development efforts (Kaufman, 1959). Consistent with the generally accepted definition of community, the interactional community is composed of a territory, a local society, and a process of locality-oriented collective actions (Wilkinson, 1991). Wilkinson (1991) thought, “the

substance of community is social interaction” (p. 13), and each of the three components were seen through examination of interaction.

With the interactional approach, communities are not an autonomous social system that exist independent of the larger society, but have varying levels of systemic completeness and interactions. Kaufman (1959) recognized that residents who worked and met their daily needs outside the local area affected some local communities. Kaufman found that any given local society needs a balance between those who focus on life within the locality and those who orient social life beyond the locality.

Wilkinson, Kaufman’s student, synthesizes over thirty years of interactional thought in the text *The Community in Rural America* (1991). Despite critics who contend that community has been rendered irrelevant by factors of mass society, Wilkinson mentioned:

“The community has not disappeared and has not ceased to be an important factor in individual and social well-being. People still live together in places, however fluid might be the boundaries of those places. They still encounter the larger society primarily through interactions in the local society. And, at crucial moments, they still act together to express common interests in the place of residence. Local social life has become very complex in the typical case, but complexity and the turbulence associated with it do not in and of themselves rule out community.” (1991, p. 6)

By acknowledging a community’s territory, associational patterns, solidarity, and processes of collective action in terms of interaction, the complexity of modern social life

is captured by the interactional perspective. A community's territory is defined by local interaction patterns, but territory also shapes the pattern of local interaction. For example, if the grocery store, the hardware store, and the park are all on the same block, residents are likely to park and walk from place to place allowing for more interactions. Although a community may lack the completeness of a wholly independent social system, the interactional approach examines the dynamic and emergent patterns of interactions that do exist among individuals, organizations and institutions to identify the structure of community social life. Finally, interaction may lead to a shared bond among residents that becomes a basis for community solidarity and community action. Wilkinson (1991) believed that elemental bonds among community residents emerge from social interactions, particularly those "that embody and express mutual interests in the common life of a local population" (p. 4).

The interactional community perspective is comprised of three elements: territory or locality, a complete local society comprised of social organizations or institutions that facilitate redundant interaction among residents; and social interaction on issues of local interest in the community field (Wilkinson, 1991).

Territory or Locality

Wilkinson (1991), argued that recent transformations of communities, such as the increased significance of the larger society and the challenges of defining the fixed boundaries of a community are not new, but have been plaguing communities since the 1700s and earlier. His solution to the territorial issue is to view social interactions as the deciding factor for determining local territory. Interactions define the local territory; therefore borders are in constant flux depending on resident's interactions. The built

environment both is created by local inhabitants and shapes their interactions. For example, imagine the growth of a community and the development of a retail district on the edge of town. The new retail district shifts some interaction away from the central business district and also might pull neighboring residents who shopped elsewhere into the community's new retail district.

Local Society

The local society “is the organization of social institutions and associations in the social life of the local population” (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 24). The systems approach identified important elements of the local society, focusing on the order, interdependence and functions of various institutions and organizations within the community (Figure 1).

With the growth and transformation of communities, Warren (1978) directs attention to the significance of vertical and horizontal ties among and between local and extra-local units and institutions. An interactional approach finds community in the varying levels of interaction in the local society, rather than requiring an independent and complete system. This is not to say the interactional community is unaffected by a decline of a local society. The absence of all or most institutions associated with locality-relevant functions, such as businesses, schools, local government, churches, or voluntary support groups, can restrict interaction and limit the emergence of an interactional community. Wilkinson argued this point, noting the lack of local material density may restrict development of “weak ties” (Granovetter, 1973) in rural places and severely limit development of community.

Hunter's (1975) investigation found that an urban neighborhood found the persistence of community through informal neighboring interactions, such as chatting

with neighbors, exchanging favors, and visiting in homes, despite the decline of the local facility use (grocery, shopping, church, movies, etc.). Overall, Hunter discovered that even in the absence of traditional social institutions, local society and informal friendship/neighborhood are interrelated and crucial for the existence of an interactional community.

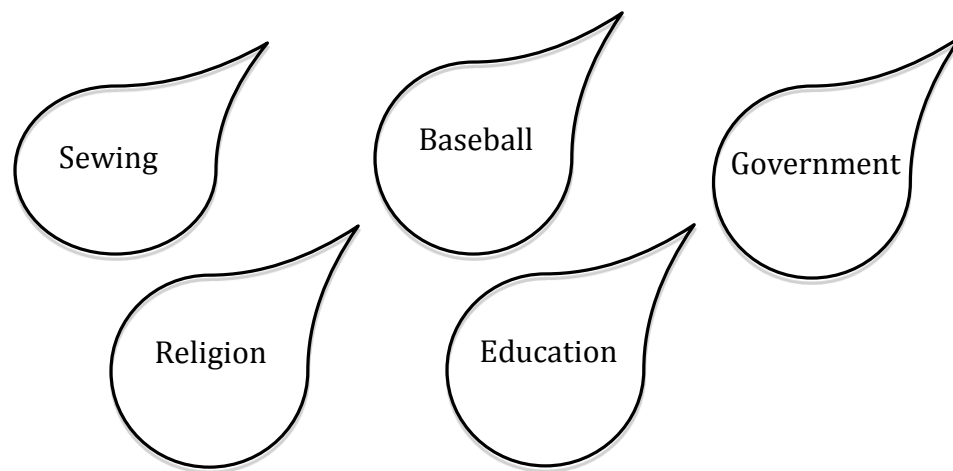


Figure 1. Social Fields

Community Field

Wilkinson (1991) described individual social fields connecting into a larger system, as community fields. The attention here is directed toward the course of action that affects community structure, rather than how community structure affects social practices. Kaufman (1959) discovered that community fields grew when relationships amongst individuals grew into organized groups that worked on issues affecting the whole community. “The community field cuts across organized groups and other interactional fields in a local population” (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 36). A community field

connects community organizations with individuals, and builds their capacity to solve issues. The gray area, in Figure 2, is where the community field can be seen. Each social field has its own interests and individuals, and when they act together they are able to accomplish a common good for the community as a whole. For example, the baseball team may take donations for fabric so parishioners and sewers can come together and make clothes for children and families who are unable to afford them. The focus for the development within the community is to foster the expertise of the residents, to be part of building community capacity for the future. Rural communities have undergone several changes throughout the last several decades, and many have struggled to survive, but with the interactional field rural communities are able to bring their experience, resources, and energy to better their future.

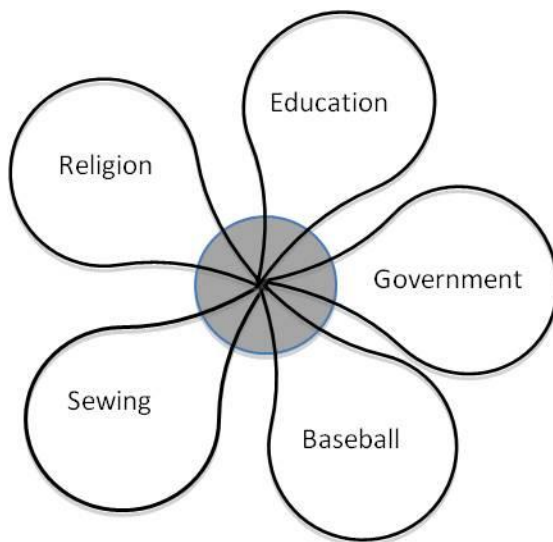


Figure 2. Community Fields

Rural communities

Rural communities are an important aspect of the fabric of American society and they illustrate the dynamics of the interactional conceptualization of community. Until the middle of the 20th century, the majority of the American population lived in rural communities. Despite the growing urbanization of the United States (US Census, 1970; US Census, 2010b), rural America contains almost one of every five Americans and accounts for 80% of the nation's land surface (Lichter & Brown, 2011). As Flora and Flora (2004) pointed out, rural areas contribute many things to the nation, including "... (1) food security, (2) a sense of land stewardship that protects natural resources, (3) a value system connected to both the land and human relationship, and (4) protection of diversity" (p. 15). Therefore, it is important for rural communities to continue to remain viable and successful entities, as they once did.

A farmer's life, in the pioneer days, was often thought of as an independent life. Every farmhouse was a factory, not of one specific item, but of many. All day long the spinning wheel and loom were making carpets, shawls, bedspreads, towels, and garments from local materials for the residents of the house. The kitchen was viewed as a multi-purpose room, preparing daily meals, as well as household items, such as soap and candles. Agricultural equipment was handmade by the farmers, therefore not consisting of much (Dunn, 1920). As independent as the farmer's life sounds, they were not fully independent. As community members came to live together, individuals would have their own skill sets. For example, one may be especially good at making horseshoes. Over time, the entire community would become dependent upon him for his horseshoes,

leaving him little to no time for farming; therefore he becomes dependent upon others for his food supply. Thus, over time, the community has its blacksmiths, carpenters, shoemakers, teachers, storekeepers, doctors, that all depend upon each other, resulting in interdependence developing in the simplest communities.

A series of developments in the 1800s, led many residents of rural communities, who depended directly on farming pursuits to move to urban communities holding industrial jobs, and indirectly depended on farming (Trachtenberg, 2007). Several factors contributed to these changes, including mechanization, industrialization, transportation, communication, and globalization.

Mechanization

Mechanization of the United States agriculture has been considered a major factor of social, economic, and environmental change in rural communities (Berardi, 1981; Donaldson & McInerney, 1973). As agricultural operations were mechanized the total agricultural work force decreased (Friedland & Nelkin, 1972; Hamilton, 1939, Schmitz & Seckler, 1970), reducing the numbers of hired farm workers (Bertrand, 1954), seasonally hired farm workers (Rasmussen, 1968), and family workers (Tolley & Farmer, 1967).

“From 1909 to 1929 the output per person working in agriculture increased approximately 37 percent. This increased productivity made it possible for 7.5 fewer persons to produce an agricultural output” (Shaw & Hopkins, 1938). The displaced workers were usually the least educated and skilled (Hamilton, 1939), which made the transition difficult due to their limitations in experience and training. The better educated and young individuals tended to migrate out of the rural communities and into urban. Those who did move took their skills and businesses, resulting in a loss of community

function (Anderson & Miller, 1953; Brunn, 1968). Churches and schools began to close (Bertrand, 1954), local businesses were boarded up, property values declined that resulted in a reduced tax base (Berardi, 1981), and housing was abandoned.

Industrialization

During the late 1700s to mid 1800s the Industrial ushered in a machine marketing economy. Factories produced goods for the market and the financial income went back into production, consumption, and/or savings. Agriculture was seen as one of the first commercialized markets, as farmers sold practically all they produced to the market, and purchased their needs from the market. Commercialization increased competition and by the late 1800s and early 1900s competition increased the mechanization of the farm. For example, in 1920 there were less than a quarter million tractors used and by 1940 there were over six times that many (Anderson, 1946). The high level of prosperity in the country generally meant a heavy demand for labor, which absorbed surplus agricultural production. But in agriculture, industrialization meant agricultural mechanization, specialized farming, and the gradual disappearance of the self-sufficient family farm. The trend toward mechanization and industrialization of the farm economy meant rural electrification, the automobile, the radio, the tractor, specialized farm machinery, and specialized and highly technical processes in all aspects of dairying, grain raising, cattle, and hog production, poultry farming, and so on.

Transportation & Communication

The mid-1800s marked a time for increasing industrialization and technological advances like railroad, telegraph, telephone, and internal combustion engines. Americans increasingly relied upon technological infrastructures like the railroad, electric, and

telecommunication systems for economic and social activities. The First Transcontinental Railroad was completed in 1869 and covered 1,907 miles across the western United States. By 1920, 254,000 miles (408,800km) of railroad tracks had been laid in the United States (Cowen, 1997), as they railroads and transportation continued to improve it led to improvements in mobility for individuals and products (Dunn, 1920). The railroads were a dependable year round transportation system, unlike prior forms such as horse and boat. Good roads increased the ease in which residents associated with one another, attending church or community meetings, and enjoyed the social life and entertainment of neighboring cities or villages. Railroads and roads both helped surrounding towns, cities, and states, for example the timber from the mountains may have been needed on the flatlands to build railroads, or the cotton from the plantations of Tennessee may have been needed at the Mills in New England and needed transported. This allowed farmers access to markets far away, but also put farmers in higher competition with each other, thus lowering the price they could charge for their products. As profits decreased, farmers looked for ways to increase their production to make up for the lower prices of their crops.

Prior to the improvements in transportation businesses were isolated and communities had to survive without competition from outside. Telephone and mail systems made for easier communication, local and afar, lowering the feeling of isolation in rural communities. The telegraph was first seen form of mass communication, and seen in the United States in 1844 (Cowen, 1997). The telegraph was used to dispatch news about the war, relay stock and commodity prices and orders between markets, and conduct diplomatic negotiations. By 1876, Alexander Graham Bell found a way to

transmit and reproduce the sound of voice over electrical cables, and the telephone was born. From 1877 to 1893, the number of phones increased from 3,000 to 260,000 and by 1920 there were 13 million phones in the United States providing service to 39 percent of all farm households and 34 percent of non-farm households (Cowen, 1997). The telephone was seen as more of a local amenity, with the ability to call the local merchant, fire department, or neighbors. Phoning the repairman to see he had the needed part, and if not to order the part had saved a lot of time. In addition, farm homes had been saved from destruction by fires because of prompt help secured by word over the telephone and valuable animals had been saved through the early arrival of the veterinarian who was summoned by phone.

The rural free delivery by the United States Postal Service was established in 1896 and began the communication alteration. Prior to this, majority of rural residents were isolated from the rest of the world, and gained information through informal word-of-mouth communication. The rural free delivery allowed rural residents a broader perspective of life as well as leisure activities, through personal mail, magazines, journals, and more.

As the technology of transportation and communications improved, rural communities were brought more and more into contact with a greater range of socioeconomic contacts and interaction with the outside world, resulting in a decline of autonomy.

Globalization

Globalization trends have impacted the economic and social fabric of rural communities. Globalization focuses on multi-national corporations to move to parts of

the world where labor is least expensive. Manufacturers are no longer limited to locating close to their targeted consumers. Free trade allows for the cheap importing and exporting of goods across national boundaries. Therefore, rural communities have been affected by the loss of jobs to other parts of the country and the world (US Census, 1970). An example of globalization can be seen walking through the aisles of Wal-Mart, and finding items cheaper than in locally owned 'mom and pop' stores. Even though it was made in another country and the items in a 'mom and pop' store are made locally or not.

While globalization has had an obvious impact on the economic lives of rural Americans through lay-offs and job insecurity, the social impact in rural America is also profound. One of the overlooked results of globalization is the relationship between government and its citizens. Security has been a reason for why people have come together to live in communities, at first focusing on personal safety from outside forces (Bauman, 2007). Later, laws and regulations were enforced to protect individuals from one another within communities. As personal safety became relatively assured, the other areas of safety and protection were implemented. Individuals became concerned about economic well being and the government responded with various policies to protect the workers and the industries for which they worked.

Globalization has taken away even those tenuous protections of economic security. People feel less secure because the political process has become "decoupled" from the process of globalization (Bauman, 2007). In other words, the United States government cannot mitigate the changes happening because of globalization; because the actual decision makers for the global economy are global forces outside the control of the government. Nations choose to join the global economy by adopting free-trade policies.

However, once a nation has made the decision, the national economy becomes intertwined in the global economy. Once this occurs, many decisions that will affect the national economy are beyond the control of the national government. Furthermore, “Society is no longer protected by the state, or at least it is unlikely to trust the protection on offer; it is now exposed to rapacity of forces it does not control and no longer hopes or intends to recapture or subdue” (Bauman, 2007, p. 25). Economic insecurity within a community can create unemployment, alienation, migration and an overall lower level of sense of community.

Sense of Community

Psychological sense of community is a concept used to describe feelings of belonging, identity, and support in various types of communities. The construct was first defined by Sarason (1974), as a sense that an individual belonged to a community and part of a dependable unit. These communities may include an urban or rural town within a specific geographic territory, or social groups based on similar interests, goals, and needs. The terminology is often used to focus on a sense of belonging and connection to a place as well as social interaction and resources sharing within a community. Sense of community is seen as an asset, and maintains the notion of people with similar guiding principles living nearby and working together on issues that affect their community (Pretty, Bishop, Fisher, & Sonn, 2006). In a study within community psychology, sense of community was considered a core construct in community psychology that can motivate residents to take action and improve the welfare of the community (Fisher, Sonn, & Bishop, 2002). Groups of people, whether in a geographic community or a community of interest, have a responsibility within their community to be encouraging of

each other and work together to build community (Felton & Shinn, 1992). Healthy communities are accommodating, regardless of members having personal affiliations with other community members. Community members may continue to have a sense of community while residents move in and out of communities. Sense of community is not based only on individual relationships, but on the feeling of the whole community and the services, membership, and connections that are available to those within (Pretty, Bishop, Fisher, & Sonn, 2006).

Current ideas of psychological sense of community have evolved from various theoretical domains. Tönnies (1887/1955) was concerned with the changes in societal social structures and argued that *Gemeinschaft* was being replaced by *Gesellschaft*. The collective goals of the village (*Gemeinschaft*) were being lost to the larger scaled developments of *Gesellschaft* (Bell & Newby, 1972). Concern around the demise of the *Gemeinschaft*, led to Sarason's (1974) work that was influenced by the belief that sense of community was important to contentment with life (Pretty, Bishop, Fisher, & Sonn, 2006). In his influential work, Sarason (1974) described sense of community as the feeling that one is part of an everyday society that is trustworthy, loyal, accessible, and encouraging.

Historically, sense of community was associated with rural living and linked with community activities such as barn raisings, quilting bees, and places where everyone knew each other's name (Glynn, 1981). This sentiment existed within towns as a necessary part of life, and led to many shared responsibilities. Glynn's (1981) research looked at three different communities, and found that residents of one community would show a greater sense of community than the others associated with the following

predictors; (a) length of time spent living in a community, (b) how satisfied they were with the community, and (c) the number of neighbors one could name. He found a relationship between sense of community and an individual's capacity to serve within the community.

Psychological sense of community, often referred to as sense of community, has been most often associated with the McMillan and Chavis' (1986) model. McMillan and Chavis built on Glynn's research (1981) by developing a working definition that involved four separate components to describe psychological sense of community. The McMillan and Chavis theory defined sense of community as, "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another, and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p. 9). Surveys, questionnaires, and other methods of research on sense of community most often reflect feelings of belonging, influence, and commitment to a community or organization. While the community or organization may offer support and a sense of identity to those involved, sense of community is broader and focuses on the positive features of the community (Pretty, Bishop, Fisher, & Sonn, 2006).

McMillan and Chavis' (1986) model is divided into four components and includes: (a) membership or feeling of belonging and emotional safety, (b) influence of a member on the community and mutual influence of the community on the member, (c) integration and fulfillment of needs met by the rewards of members for their participation and accomplishments, and (d) shared emotional connection involving a shared history. Each component works together to evaluate an individual's sense of community about their neighborhood, rural town, or organization (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

McMillan and Chavis (1986) described membership as an investment made by each member to belong to a community. It is a sense that one has the right to belong to a group because he/she has invested a part of themselves in the group. There are four attributes to this element, including boundaries, emotional safety, sense of belonging and personal investment. Boundaries provide the guidelines for membership in the group; within a community, this may be operationalized through language, dress or ritual, and is illustrated by those who feel they belong and those who do not. Emotional safety can be paralleled to security, and can also be linked to physical and economic security. Sense of belonging is demonstrated through the feeling that one has a place in the group, a feeling acceptance, and even a willingness to sacrifice for the group. Finally, personal investment is an important aspect of group membership; when individuals give something of themselves, working toward this will contribute to the overall feeling one has earned a place within the group. Consequently, membership within the group will be more meaningful and significant (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

The second element, influence, is a reciprocal concept. On one hand, for an individual to be attracted to a group, he/she must have some power or influence over the actions of the group. However, a cohesive group will also have some influences over its members. Influence also has four characteristics important in defining the element: “...(a) the members are most attracted to a community in which they feel they have power; (b) that a community’s influence on its members to conform is significantly related to the members’ sense of community; (c) that the pressure towards conformity and uniformity comes from the need of individuals and the community for consensual validation, by which members achieve closeness; and (d) that a member’s influence on the community

and the community's influences on the member operate concurrently" (p. 25). All of these characteristics work together to determine who is a member and who is not.

Influence in Valhalla may include the participation of local residents' in local elections to elect city and school leaders, as well as the newly elected leaders' influence on policy decision made on behalf of the residents.

The third element is integration and fulfillment of needs, or more simply, reinforcement. This element is defined as a personal motivator, and can be illustrated by making the obvious connection that for any group to remain positive and cohesive, the individuals involved must be getting something out of the association, the individual/group association must be rewarding for its members. Some effective reinforces within communities are membership status, community success, or competence of other members. A particularly strong and stable community has the ability to tie people together to meet others' needs while meeting their own (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Support is a need that is often met in rural communities, through sickness and death; many residents will bring food to the family in need and attend funerals.

Shared emotional connection was identified as the fourth and final element outlining sense of community. This is in some measure based on knowledge of a shared history and has the power to facilitate or hinder the strength of the community. This construct is defined as an affective component of community because it is communities themselves that can offer members the opportunities for positive interaction, opportunities for personal investment, and even the potential to share a strong spiritual bond with members. Important aspects of this construct are contact hypothesis, quality of interaction, effect of honor or humiliation, and spiritual bond (McMillan & Chavis,

1986). Residents of rural communities may have shared emotional connection to their town, especially if the community has suffered a significant event together. This event may be a disaster such as a flood or tornado, or it may be the high school wrestling team traveling to a state tournament with major community support.

In an example of how these four elements might work together, McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggested that sense of community could be seen among members of an intramural basketball team in the following way:

“An announcement is put on the dormitory bulletin board. People attend the organizational meeting without knowing each other out of their individual needs (integration and fulfillment of needs). Only residents of the dorm are allowed to play on the team (membership boundaries are set). The team spends time together practicing (personal investment in the group; allows for shared time and space, which in turn provides shared valence events). They play a game and win (shared successful event and reinforcement for being a member). As the team continues to win, team members become recognized and congratulated (reinforce – gaining honor and status for being members). Someone suggested that they all buy matching shirt and shoes (common symbols) and they do (influence).” (p. 11)

Each of the four components acts to strengthen each other; none are mutually exclusive of the others, and no one criterion causes another criterion. Sense of community is a desirable construct that can have a major influence on promoting community satisfaction and well being, civic participation, collective action, and

resident's connectedness to their community, which ultimately contributes to resolving local community problems. Therefore, there is a critical value in strengthening the sense of community within a community for the good of the community and its residents.

Sense of community has been a major construct in multiple empirical studies over the past thirty years. Findings have varied and many researchers have attempted to provide continued validation for the four components, as described by McMillan and Chavis (1986). Others have disagreed on the number and specific factors that make up sense of community (Brodsky, O'Campo, & Aronson, 1999; Buckner, 1988; Davidson & Cotter, 1986; Bishop, Chertok, & Jason, 1997; Obst, Smith, & Zinkiewicz, 2002a). Various studies have shown sense of community to be both a multidimensional and a uni-dimensional construct.

McMillan and Chavis' (1986) four components of psychological sense of community led to the development of the Sense of Community Index (SCI), developed by Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, and Wandersman (1986). The instrument consists of 12-items with a true or false response and includes three items for each of the four factors theorized, including one negatively worded item for each of the four factors. Questions have been raised about the SCI's psychometric properties (Chipuer, & Pretty, 1999; Long & Perkins, 2003; Obst & White, 2004), due to weak alpha reliabilities, which ranged from .64 to .80 in different studies. The scale was then modified using a 5-point Likert scale that allowed participants to record the intensity of response (Nasar, & Julian, 2005).

An analysis of the influence of the negatively worded item was completed by Peterson, Speer, and Hughey (2006). A Likert-type response format was used instead of the original true-false format. Cronbach Alpha was .82 and .78 for the first and second

samples respectively, and the authors suggested that the earlier mixed use of positively and negatively worded items in the SCI may be a factor in the SCI's poor psychometric properties.

Several other scales have been developed to measure the components of sense of community, such as Davidson and Cotter's (1986) 17-item scale on sense of community, Buckner's (1988) 18-item scale on neighborhood cohesion, Skjaeveland, Garling, and Maeland's (1996) 14-item scale on multidimensional measure of neighboring. An 8-item Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) was developed and tested on over 300 participants, to evaluate McMillan and Chavis' (1986) four components (Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008) in the participants' neighborhoods. Eight items were used in a 5-point Likert-type scale with response options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Cronbach's alpha for the overall BCSC was .92 while alphas for the components subscale were .86 for needs fulfillment, .94 for membership, .77 for influence, and .87 for emotional connection. Unlike the original Sense of Community Index all items were positively worded, as suggested with recommendations of the sense of community literature (Peterson, Speer, & Hughey, 2006).

A Sense of Community Index II was recently developed (Chavis, Lee, & Acosta, 2008), that consists of 24-items and used with a sample of 1,800 people. An analysis found that it is a very reliable measure (coefficient alpha = .94) and evidence was found on the four subscales as theorized by McMillan and Chavis (1986).

In an overview of the sense of community literature, Hill (1996), anticipated that there was "widespread agreement that sense of community is an aggregate variable" (p. 433), but there is an inconsistency as to specific factors that make up sense of

community. Hill (1996) suggested this disagreement came about because of a “significant percentage of these aspects of psychological sense of community are different from settings to settings” (p. 433). Chipuer and Pretty (1999) indicated that “this lack of consistent findings may be due to the variety of models guiding the research, and the variety of scales used to measure psychological sense of community in the different settings” (p. 645). Psychological sense of community appears to be a multidimensional construct that differs based on the venue.

In research studies, sense of community has been correlated to various indicators of quality of life. Prezza and Costantini (1998) investigated the correlation between sense of community and life satisfaction, self-esteem, a sense of social support, and satisfaction with community services. The research validated that sense of community and life satisfaction was highest in smaller communities. It was found that life satisfaction was positively correlated with sense of community in small towns, but the same correlation was not found in urban communities. In a study by Obst, Smith, and Zinkiewicz (2002a), rural participants were more likely to be involved in their community, and had a higher sense of community than those living in urban areas.

Other quality of life relationships studied included sense of community and mental, physical, and social well being (Chavis & Newbrough, 1986), perceptions of safety (Perkins & Taylor, 1996), and participation in the community (Levine & Perkins, 1987). Sense of community was also found to be positively correlated with political and social participation (Davidson & Cotter, 1986; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Obst, Smith, & Zinkiewicz 2002a). Quantitative studies involving community membership (Obst & White, 2007), self and collective efficacy, community satisfaction, and well

being (Fisher, Sonn, & Bishop, 2002; Puddifoot, 1996), and community engagement (Mancini, Bowen, Martin, & Wave, 2003) have all added to the literature.

Both geographic and social communities have found evidence for the McMillan and Chavis (1986) model of sense of community. Evidence was found in a qualitative study by Plas and Lewis (1996) for the factors of membership, shared emotional connection, and needs fulfillment. Sonn and Fisher (1996) substantiated McMillan and Chavis' (1986) four components of sense of community in interviews with immigrants from South Africa. Brodsky (1996) also found evidence of the four dimensions through interviews of single mothers living in dangerous housing projects. Ricketts (2005) found that two factors surfaced during qualitative interviews and these were titled membership, belonging and community satisfaction.

A number of demographic variables have been shown to be linked with Psychological Sense of Community, including older age (Davidson & Cotter, 1986), length of residence (Glynn, 1981; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Royal & Rossi, 1996), income and education (Bonnes, Bonaiuto, & Ercolani, 1991), size of town (Prezza & Constantini, 1998), and having children (Buckner, 1988; Obst, Smith, & Zinkiewicz, 2002a). Bishop, Chertok, & Jason (1997) found the opposite to be true, with a lower sense of community found in families with children. Other socio-demographic features related to high sense of community included being married and higher income levels (Davidson & Cotter, 1986). Not all of these variables were consistent across all studies.

In larger studies utilizing factor analysis, evidence was found for the four attributes of sense of community within the dimensions of geographic communities (Obst, Smith, & Zinkiewicz, 2002a), and even an Internet virtual community (Obst,

Zinkiewicz, & Smith, 2002b). This Internet virtual community was made up of individuals in a science fiction fandom, and titles given to the factors in this study were belonging (membership), cooperative behavior and shared values (fulfillment of needs), friendship and support (shared emotional connection), and disaffection with leadership and influence (influence).

Overall, a strong community can benefit the residents, the community, as well as the greater society. People of all ages who feel a strong sense of community tend to lead happier and healthier lives, and strong communities create a more stable and supportive society.

Conclusion

In summary, rural communities have undergone several dramatic changes and leisure can play a vital role in the survival and vitality of those communities. Leisure has the ability to strength neighborhoods, towns, states, and nations; by building active communities, facilitating a strong and healthy workforce, building economies, solving social problems, and making the environment more aesthetic (Russell, 2005). The interactional and sense of community concepts can be important tools for exploring their nature in contemporary society, due to their focus on personal and social connections and overall sense of belonging.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The concepts of *community* and *leisure* are both complex in nature, and require an in-depth and detailed study in order to fully grasp the meaning they have within people's lives. In an effort to capture the subtleties of the meaning-making process, the proposed study seeks to build a deeper understanding of the role leisure has played for connecting Valhalla residents through the years.

Description of Valhalla

Valhalla is a quaint rural community in the middle of Indiana, approximately 40 miles northeast of a 200,000+ resident community, and 8 miles east of a 50,000+ residents community. Valhalla's incorporated boundaries encompass a little over one square mile; therefore everything it offers is within close proximity to one another. Valhalla, like many contemporary rural communities, does not and cannot compete with nearby urban communities when it comes to lifestyle amenities, and economic opportunities. However with the exceptions of a clothing store and a hardware store, Valhalla is able to offer a grocery store, several gas stations, a doctor's office, a dentist office, a veterinarian, a library, a few dine-in restaurants, and a number of parks.

Taking a step back in time, as early as 1822 in the present site of Valhalla, there was a dense forest, broken with swamps, where scattered wigwams still marked the homes of the remaining American Indians. Around 1824 the European Americans arrived and built a log cabin, which began life in Brown Creek. As European Americans continued to inhabit the area the American Indian population was forced out, and by 1827 White Wing and his family were the last of the Indians in the area (Stum, Hess, Mattox,

Clevenger, & Jones, 1975). In 1829, Jacob Koontz was the first to establish his home within the present boundaries of Valhalla. The first homes of the pioneers often were a single room with dirt floors, a giant fireplace on one side, and the furniture was sparse and of the plainest kind.

Jacob Koontz took notice that the nearest trading point was in Rightsville (16 miles away), which under the most favorable conditions would take at least two days on horse back to get there and back. With roughly thirty farmers already settled, Koontz saw a need for their own village. Unfortunately, the onset of malaria and scarlet fever killed many, including Jacob Koontz in 1830.

In the 1830s more European Americans settled in Valhalla, one established a tannery and began manufacturing leather, another brought a load of goods and established a general store. In 1832, a highway known as Old State Road opened, extending from Rightsville to Johnston, with Valhalla in the middle.

The opening of the state road invited a steady flow of immigrants mainly from Virginia into the region, and Valhalla changed rapidly, gaining a blacksmith, public tavern, inn, and doctor. The town was incorporated with 15 residents in 1840, allowing for its own government, and shortly after woods were leveled, new lots were created, and streets were developed.

Another large expansion came in 1856 when the Pan Handle Railroad Company completed their rail through Valhalla, increasing the population to 188. The railroad came from the east and brought more people, as well as conveniences that improved living conditions. The cabinet making and furniture business began booming, raising the population of Valhalla to 711 by the 1870s. The gas boom in 1887 brought factories and

a migration of people to the area. Valhalla had 22 taverns, some even with boarding houses. By 1900 the mighty Welsch Hotel opened, with the finest furnishings and chandeliers and elegant rooms with separate stairways for the ladies. The Welsch Hotel was also the first and only place in town that had electric lights.

By 1905 an interurban train began running from Valhalla to Johnston (20,000+ population), which took thirty minutes to travel the nine and a half miles. The interurban was thought to be the first form of public transportation for Valhalla, allowing residents to enjoy amenities in Johnston, such as a roller coaster, a skating rink, a dance pavilion, and various other amusements. Valhalla itself continued to make its own improvements such as on December 29, 1910, when they gained electrical current for public street lighting, consumer lighting, and power service. This dramatically changed Valhalla, allowing for longer workdays and the creation of labor saving devices. As cars became popular and individual travel became more and more common, the interurban made its final run on February 18, 1930.

As with much of the country, Valhalla had a rude awakening in the 1930s and 1940s due to the Great Depression. Times were tough across the board, not because of a lack of businesses, but because nobody had any money to spend. Jobs were scarce, and the jobs that could be found only paid a few cents for a hard day's work. During these times families and friends stuck together, planting gardens, picking berries, and canning vegetables. Rabbits and chickens were raised for meat, even in town. Fortunately, Valhalla received money from a work relief program the federal government established, thus Valhalla received sewer improvements, cemetery improvements, and a gymnasium. By the mid-1940s people began spending money again, but life was not back to normal

yet. With WWII and the imposition of rationing for the war effort, simple supplies, such as fold-down paper matchbooks, zippers, and silk stockings, were beginning to disappear. Post war, many soldiers returned and Valhalla was on the rise once again.

Valhalla continued to grow with just under 3,000 residents in its heyday, in the late 1970s and 1980s. The General Motors Plant and Nicholson File, both in Johnston, and a few smaller factories in Valhalla employed nearly 40,000 individuals. Local businesses were booming, with plenty of department stores, grocery stores, and taverns, among others. Unfortunately, in the 1980s foreign competition started taking its toll on domestic industries, many of which moved overseas. Layoffs were consistent, General Motors alone laid off 22,000 employees by 1990 (Bulletin, 2006). Many residents of Valhalla were forced to move away or commute elsewhere to find work. With the departure of many of its residents, Valhalla lost many of its businesses, leaving behind run down homes and businesses. As of 2014, the Liebhart Mills Plant was the largest employer in Valhalla with just under 50 employees, while in nearby Johnston the Nestle Plant, Hoosier Park, and the Flagship Enterprise Center combined employed more than 3,000 people.

Valhalla still has 2,322 residents (47% male and 53% female), the majority (97%) being white and a small minority identifying as Hispanic or African Americans. Of its current residents, 85% have a high school diploma and 16% have an advanced degree, which is reflecting by the occupations of its residents, the majority being repairmen or workers in the service industry (US Census, 2010c). The working class status of Valhalla is reflected by its average household income, \$38,522 as of 2012, which is almost \$10,000 less than the average for the state of Indiana (US Census, 2010c).

In Valhalla's heyday, residents could have walked down the street and heard laughter from children and adults alike, and seen residents attending to their yards and homes; compared to the same walk today, residents may not see or hear anyone on the street. If residents look closely they may still see all the detail each house has, such as the woodwork on the oversized porches. If residents use their imagination and take away the overgrown bushes and weeds they may see the beautiful flowerbeds and gardens that once surrounded the houses. In the past, women usually stayed home and maintained the household, but now a majority of all adults must contribute to the household finances, therefore not spending as much time on the maintenance of their home.

While walking down Locust Street in the past, residents may have heard engines roaring from vehicles, and saw residents constantly entering and exiting local businesses. Now, Locust Street appears more like a ghost town, no longer having a number of grocery stores, hardware stores, hat shop, shoe repairman, butcher, and department stores; instead, Locust is populated by several deteriorating buildings, including a grocery store, Papa Pizza, taverns, barber shop, historical society, and gas station.

Just south of Locust Street, one would find Dietrich Memorial Park, which is very similar to what it once was in 1966, minus the giant metal slide, splash pad, and upgrades to the baseball diamonds. One may sit on the benches that overlook the creek that runs through the middle of the park. On warm, sunny, summer days, children can often be found jumping and splashing around in the creek, or on the splash pad that spurts water into the air. Others may be found gathering under the picnic pavilions to gain relief from the sun. The black top area that was once used for ice and roller-skating is now used as a

basketball court. Finally, as the sun goes down, the lights on the baseball diamonds turn on, the games/practices begin, and more residents arrive to watch the games.

Valhalla may not have the amenities larger communities are able to offer, but along with their modernized parks, Valhalla does have a lot of social organizations to join, including church groups, Lion's Club, American Legion, Masonic Lodge, and Red Hat Society to mention a few. For its size, Valhalla does have a lot to offer when it comes to leisure and recreational aspects of life.

Qualitative Research

The purpose of the proposed qualitative study was to explore the connections rural residents experience towards their community through their leisure activities. A qualitative inquiry allowed the researcher to explore the subtlety of the meaning making processes that underlined residents' leisure choices, and the manner in which those choices fostered a connection to the community. As Crotty (1998) mentioned, only through dialogue can we understand the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings. Therefore qualitative inquiry was deemed most appropriate for this study.

Gaining Entry and Building Rapport

Beep, beep, beep... a humid gust of wind came rushing through the half open window, rolling over my back, as I leaned over to turn the alarm clock off. Still tired from the previous day of driving. I rolled myself out of bed and made my way to the bathroom to take a quick shower and get dressed for the day. At roughly 6:15, Tom, who I was staying with, asked if I was ready for breakfast and errands. Then off we went to the Hut, a local tavern/restaurant, to meet some of Tom's friends for breakfast. It was a five-

minute drive at most from Tom's house to the Hut, located on Locust Street. We pulled up to the hut and parked in the back.

The building, which was constructed in 1968, was originally an old gas station. With half the building lined with bricks about four feet high from the ground that wrapped around, and the other half, which we walked through, had two large sliding garage doors. Immediately after Tom and I walked in, his friends welcomed us, as we were the last of the group to arrive. I recognized a few of Tom's friends from past visits, and introduced myself to the others. The seven friends, six men and one women, ranged in age from their 40s to 80s, and seemed to all know each other very well. Once Tom and I sat down they asked me for \$1 to add to the middle of the table, I was not sure what this was for but I did it anyway. The waitress, with a Midwestern accent, came by to take our breakfast orders, many of them ordered 'the usual', while I ordered the omelet. Looking around the tavern, it felt very comfortable with old pictures and jerseys on the walls, and even scrapbooks on the end table beside us. The smell of fresh coffee being brewed and bacon on the stove reminded one of breakfast at grandmother's house. As the outsider, Tom's friends wanted to know all about me and began to ask me several questions. They all seemed very interested in what I had to say, and what I was planning on doing in their community. The more I talked with them, the more it became clear that they had all spent many years in Valhalla. They represented a cross-section of Valhalla's, occupations, a vet, a repairman a, farmer, and a banker, to name a few. We continued to talk about politics and news, both local and national, but what they seemed to enjoy most was to give each other a hard time as well as talk each other up. All the achievements one accomplished were brought up by another and not the individual themselves. For example,

Luke informed me that Matt flies planes in his free time and Samantha mentioned Ron has served on many committees, has been a key individual in Valhalla, and contributed significantly to the library.

After breakfast, I was instructed, along with others, to write a number between one and fifty on a napkin and fold it up. The waitress came by and picked a number, whomever's number came closest got the money in the middle of the table, Tom happened to be the winner that week. As we all left, everyone had a smile on their face and mentioned see ya next week if not before.

Tom and I headed back to the house, located just outside the northwest corner of town, to pick up Huey, his large fun-loving German Shepard. Huey was very excited to go for a ride in the truck, unfortunately it was a very short ride, roughly three minutes at most, considering it was less than a mile on the same road, which Tom lived. Once we arrived and checked in Jake, from breakfast, came around the corner to welcome Tom and I.

After the vet we headed back home to drop off Huey, and pick up the recycling. Tom and I then jumped in the truck and headed to the recycling center, located just outside the southeast corner of town. We drove across the entire town, passing one stoplight and three stop signs. With it being roughly 9am, the sun was shining brightly and the temperature was rising. As we drove, I saw a few individuals in their robes walking to the end of their driveway to get their newspaper, and others mowing their lawns. As we passed, Tom gave a smile, head-nod, and slightly raised his hand on the steering wheel to say 'hello.' Tom also informed me of whom they were, including a little backstory. Tom not only talked about the individuals we saw, but as we passed homes he

told me who lived where. It took about ten minutes to arrive at the recycling center, as we pulled up I was reminded of a stereotypical junk yard where a giant dog would come running at you. Fortunately, there was no dog, and Tom and I walked around for while saying 'hello,' before we found a smiling face of someone who worked there. Tom, Nick (the worker), and I began unloading the four trash bags of recycling out of the truck, and loaded them on the scale. Tom told Nick the bags were all full of tin so Nick weighed the bags and wrote Tom a check. Once we got in the truck, I asked Tom if he was good friends with Nick, Tom mentioned he did not know him that well at all. Therefore, I was surprised that Nick did not look inside the bags to make sure they were all tin and/or full of recycling.

On our way back home we stopped by three different houses, which had their front door open. The individuals within the houses were all very welcoming, and invited us in to sit and talk, with one still being in their pajamas and robe. They all offered us something to drink and insisted we stay awhile, except for Ms. Lily. Our time with her got cut short (15 minutes) due to her plans for the day, so she invited me to lunch later in the week to continue our conversation.

Ethnographic Research

Situated in the interpretive tradition (Crotty, 1998), ethnographic research is concerned with the analysis and interpretation culturally patterned social behavior, such as that described in the scene above (Wolcott, 2008). Ethnographic research explores the daily lives of individuals and groups (Fetterman, 1998), as well as the “process through which social realities are constructed and sustained” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, p. 375). To engage in ethnographic research is to toggle between “what culture is in general . . .

while attempting to portray specific aspects of the culture of some human group in particular” (Wolcott, 2001, p. 52-53). This study explored the socio-cultural dimension of life in a rural community, specifically through residents’ leisure choices.

Data Generation

Residents of rural communities are best positioned to describe the nature of everyday life in a rural community. Therefore, I worked with the residents of Valhalla to gain an *emic* or insider’s perspective of daily life in a rural community. Facts on paper can offer a lot of information, but such facts cannot adequately capture the impact of Valhalla’s continuing decrease in population, and the loss of several much needed amenities and resources over the last thirty years. Therefore, I generated data from Valhalla in the following ways.

Archival

Archival data are the routinely gathered records of a society, community, or organization and may further supplement other qualitative methods. For example, population increases and decreases due to factories opening and closing could be tested through public records, and newspapers found in the offices of the county seat or state capital. As with other methodological decisions, the decision to gather and analyze documents or archival records should be linked to the research questions developed in the conceptual framework of the study. This study used content analysis with newspapers, yearbooks, and photographs of the Valhalla community. Content analysis is a method for describing and interpreting the artifacts of a society or social group. I used these artifacts to gather the personal, and social leisure activities of the Valhalla community throughout the years.

Participant Observation

In addition to the archival data collection, I immersed myself in the Valhalla community as a participant observer (Wolcott, 2008), which allowed for first-hand observations of rural residents in their everyday activities (Hughes & Sharrock, 2007). With ethnographic research lasting a long period of time, it is important that the researcher collects both passive and active observations to become part of the community. Initially, the participants know they are being watched and put on an act, thus what the researcher observes is blatantly affected by the researcher's presence. Participants may be demonstrating what they believe is the 'ideal,' behavior or what they believe the research is looking for. Overtime, the researcher and the participants will get to know each other, and begin to relax and show more natural behaviors.

This interactional approach is usually thought of in conducting qualitative research, but a lot can be gained from passive research as well. For example, a researcher may want to be 'a fly on the wall' during a town council meeting, if the researcher wants to know about issues in the community. In that case an active researcher may influence the way individuals discuss their issues. Through participant observations, the researcher is able to gain a starting point and filter through details, which will continually be used throughout the study. For the purpose of this study I performed both active and passive participant observations, 'hanging around' town and attending community events, while passively watching the actions of residents, engaging in informal conversations, and semi-structured interviews.

Sampling

Snowball sampling for the semi-structured interviews was selected for the sampling method of this study, which is often used while working with populations that are difficult to reach, studies that are time dependent, and/or sensitive topics (Berg, 2001). The name, snowball sampling comes from the analogy of making a large snowball, such as one for a snow person. One begins slowly with a small amount of snow, and as one continues rolling the ball, it picks up more snow and becomes larger. In a similar fashion, the researcher starts with a small number of participants who have the desired characteristics for the study. These participants are then asked for referrals to other participants with the same characteristics. As more participants are interviewed, the researchers are referred to more participants, and the sample grows. For the purpose of this study stakeholders of Valhalla consisted of the first round of interviews, and they recommended further participants.

Interviewing

Qualitative interviews attempt to gain an understanding of the interviewee's meaning making process relative to a specific topic, or set of experiences. There is not a uniform procedure for interviews, but Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) view them as a "conversation that has structure and a purpose" (p. 3), and have developed a seven-step roadmap that may be used to conduct qualitative interviews. The seven steps include thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The thematizing phase includes formulating the purpose of the study, in this case exploring residents of rural communities social and personal connections, created through leisure activities. Within this phase the interviewer needs to

gain an in-depth familiarity with his/her participants and location. The interviewer will insert himself/herself within the community being studied, and observe the local language, the daily routines, and power structures, to gain a sense of what will be discussed in the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The designing phase involves how the study will be conducted, including selecting the research procedures and techniques. In this case I decided to do interviews using photo-elicitation, allowing for a deeper understanding of the residents' perceptions of their connections to Valhalla. An interview guide was developed (see Appendix A); with the questions focused on the photographs that residents took, in relation to their feelings and connections to their community.

The next phases consists of conducting the interviews based on the interview guide, followed by the preparation of the interview material for analysis. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and checked for accuracy by repeatedly listening to the recordings, and reading the transcriptions. Once transcribed, interviews were analyzed through inductive thematic analysis, which focused on pinpointing, examining, and documenting patterns from the 'bottom up' (Creswell, 2007), through two phases of coding (initial and focused coding). Once the coding was complete, researchers reviewed the accumulated codes in relation to the research questions, and create thematic categories that will be explored using analytic memos (Charmaz, 2006).

The verifying phase establishes the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the interview findings. Reliability refers to how consistent the findings were, validity refers to whether the interviews investigated what they intended to, and generalizability compares the findings to other studies. Finally, reporting includes explaining the studies

findings and implications of those findings. Using Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) roadmap to link these seven phases will strengthen the studies validity, because "validation does not belong to separate states in an investigation, but permeates the entire research process" (p. 248). The use of validity throughout increased the overall trustworthiness (described in more detail below) of the entire study.

Photo-Elicitation

Photo-elicitation is a research tool that was originally pioneered in anthropology (Collier, 1967), which has become a well-established technique in ethnography, and other types of social research (Alexander, 2008; Banks, 2001; Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002). In simple terms, photo-elicitation involves conducting interviews, in which participants discuss photographs with the researcher, "using photographs to invoke comments, memories, and discussions" (Banks, 2001, p. 87). Researchers may use pre-existing images with strong links to research questions (Eck, 2003), or researchers may use photos that they have taken themselves (Gold, 1991). A third strategy is to give cameras to participants so that they can generate their own photographs for discussion (Clark- Ibáñez, 2004). The last, participant-led strategy has become increasingly popular in photo-elicitation, and was the approach taken here (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004).

The interviews involved in photo-elicitation can be conducted through structured or unstructured formats. Structured interviews are often used for pre-existing or researcher-generated photographs, while the unstructured are often used with participant-generated photographs. Through interviews the researcher is looking for participants attitudes, and worldviews related to the photographs, and clarification of the participants' understanding of that photograph. If the photographs are participant generated, the

researcher is also looking to understand why they chose to photograph what they did. This study used participant-generated photographs; therefore the researcher looked for all three. By giving the participants the ability to photograph the subject of research, it also allowed the researcher to avoid implementing too much of their own interpretive lens (Harper, 1998) into the study.

Photo-elicitation has been used in a number of studies, including outdoor adventure experiences (Loeffler, 2005), tourist behavior (Zainuddin, 2009), and communities (Beckley, Stedman, Wallace, & Ambard, 2007; Stewart, Liebert, & Larkin, 2004; Van Auken, Frisvoll, & Stewart, 2010). John Collier first used photo-elicitation in the mid-1950s, while investigating how families adapted to life among ethnically different people, and to new forms of work in urban factories. During Collier's (1957) study he used both photo elicitation interviews and non-photo elicitation interviews with the same families to see how each method worked. Afterwards he felt the photo elicitation interviews were sharper, deeper, and clearer, than interviews without photographs. After analysis, Collier also found that by adding photographs it not only helped participants overcome fatigue and repetition, but the responses also produced more data. Overall, Collier (1957) found that interviews with photographs resulted in more meaningful responses, while the interviews without photographs involved more probing, resulting in less meaning.

Photo-elicitation has been known to have several benefits over solely verbal-interviews. The first being that the photographs it generates provide the stimuli for "deep" interviews. That generally last longer, are more focused, and are more effective in getting below the surface. For example, if you ask participants how they feel about a

local park they may respond with superficial feelings such as they have fun there, but if you add a picture they may respond with a childhood memory. The second benefit is that photo-elicitation can produce different types of information than other techniques. For example, if a participant was interviewed because they enjoyed swimming the researcher may only gather basic information, but if the participant took a picture of a swimming pool and the researcher asked, “why did you take this photograph?” The participant may disclose the multifaceted frustration with rural living. Another benefit of photo elicitation is, that it addresses the concerns about power relations between researcher and participant. The researcher will take a more passive role in the interview process, focusing more on listening, with questions serving only to probe issues raised by participants (Collier & Collier, 1986). The photograph becomes a “medium of communication” (Clark-Ibanez, 2004, p. 1512) with participants focusing more on the photo than the interview. Finally, Van Auken, Frisvoll, and Stewart (2010) found that photo-elicitation encourages participant engagement within the participants’ community post interview. For example, a participant reflects on the negative aspects of their community, and after the interview they realize they want to help revive those areas. Photo elicitation may have a number of benefits, but as with everything else there can be some downfalls, for example it is more time consuming than other forms of interviewing, participants may forget why they took a certain picture, and/or inappropriate pictures may be taken. Overall, the benefits of photo-elicitation are generally greater than the downfalls.

Interview Procedures

This portion of the study used photo-elicitation, and in-depth semi-structured interviews to construct a data set based on the residents of Valhalla. Snowball sampling was utilized to recruit participants, which gathered a broad spectrum of the community's population. Meetings were set up with individuals whom I was acquainted with, and found to be the stakeholders of Valhalla, during the reconnaissance phase of the study. This initial meeting discussed the purpose of the study, and what was requested of the participant. If they agreed to continue with the study, they signed the consent form and were provided with a digital camera. They had one week to take ten photographs of places or activities they felt they had a strong connection with. They were informed that their photographs do not necessarily need to be based inside the boundaries of Valhalla, but they should instead try to capture what provides the most meaning to them, outside of work. Participants were allowed to add any pre-existing photographs they had, in order to capture different seasons, or different experiences that were not otherwise replicable. Once the participant was done, the cameras were picked up, and a follow-up interview was scheduled. Two sets of photographs were printed and labeled, during the interview both the participant and the researcher had a set. In the end, participants were allowed to keep their set of photographs, if they wish.

The follow-up interviews last between 1-2 hours and began with background questions, which establish rapport and created context for the individual's history related to Valhalla. The remainder of the interview focused on the participant's photographs, and the ways in which the photographs represent the participant's sense of community, related to Valhalla. The participants will be asked to explain why they chose to take the

photographs they did, and what those photographs represent to them. I looked for social and personal connections residents had towards Valhalla, other residents, and places within Valhalla, through their leisure activities.

Data Transformation

Wolcott (1994) outlined a strategy of data transformation, which included the processes of description, analysis, and interpretation (D-A-I). Generating data on a descriptive level involves asking the question, “what is going on here?” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 9), and attempting to answer that question in the richest, most vivid manner possible. To enhance the descriptive nature of qualitative work, Kurtz (2014) believes the best stories have four levels, events, experiences, emotions, and perspectives. Initially the researcher should tell the story through the events that occurred, watching out for opinions, suggestions, and/or complaints. Then add in individual’s experiences that were collected second-hand, through rumors, or even newspaper articles, as long as it is a personal experience. Followed by some emotions, in good descriptive stories there is much more than just facts, you need to know how people felt when they had the experiences they did. Finally, a researcher needs to add an individual’s perspectives on the event to give it depth. Without all four levels a story is not a story, it might be an experience or a memory but not a story.

Analysis should entail a process of identifying patterns across data. Analysis is intended to be a controlled process that involves the detailed coding and sorting of data and results in statements of fact reared from data (Wolcott, 1994). This study follows a constructivist grounded theory approach of analysis, which analyzes the data early and frequently, to separate, sort, and synthesize the data through qualitative coding. Coding is

the process of attaching a descriptive label to a section of data so that a given piece of data may be efficiently sorted and compared with other pieces of data to identify underlying patterns. For example, when examining participants' sense of community, codes could consist of labels such as 'strong ties' or 'weak ties'.

Coding involves at least two stages: initial and focused coding, where initial coding is "provisional, comparative and grounded in the data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 18). Some general guidelines in the initial coding phase include: remain open, stay close to the data, keep your codes simple and precise, construct short codes, preserve actions, compare data with data, and move quickly through the data (p. 49). The first step in initial coding is line-by-line coding, involving naming (Glaser, 1978) or conceptualizing (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) each line of the data. This step establishes conceptual names for the data, which begins the comparative process within previously collected data, recollections of the field notes and interviews. This process gains early insights about what kinds of leisure activities rural residents participated in, and what kinds of data to look for in the future.

The second coding phase is focused coding. These codes are more "directed, selective and conceptual than line-by-line coding . . . allowing the researcher to synthesize and explain larger segments of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). This is an active process, comparing data to data, across interviews and participant observations, which enable repeated interaction with the data. In this process categories should begin to emerge; ideas, events, actions, comments, and interactions that are "found to be conceptually similar in nature or related in meaning are grouped under more abstract concepts" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102).

The most crucial step, and the step that will facilitate the focused codes into tentative categories, is memo writing. Memos are similar to the exercise of free-writing, as they relate to a conversation with yourself about how a particular code or category is developing, what it means to you, what it may mean to the participant, and how it fits into the bigger picture. This process begins early in the research and continues throughout, providing a valuable opportunity for the researcher to freely explore and expand upon any ideas and thoughts they had throughout the process up to that point. Charmaz (2006) made some suggestions for memo writing: define each code or category by its analytic properties; spell out and detail processes incorporated by the codes or categories; make comparisons between data and data, data and codes, codes and codes, codes and categories, categories and categories; bring raw data into the memo; provide sufficient empirical evidence to support your definitions of the category and analytic claims about it; offer conjectures to check in the field settings; identify gaps in the analysis; and interrogate a code or category by asking questions of it (p. 82). This process, if executed early and often, will result in a more thoroughly analyzed data and constructed theory. It will also be less likely to contain gaps due to an increase in the awareness of questions that need to be answered and areas that still need to be addressed. Within this study, the researcher continually compared and contrasted the leisure activities found during the analysis phase, from the interviews, participant observations, and archives, and determined if residents of Valhalla developed personal and social connections towards their community, through their leisure activities.

During the interpretation phase of Wolcott's data transformation process, the data was synthesized and new interpretations were made of the phenomenon. This phase

“transcends factual data and cautious analyses and begins to probe into what is to be made of them” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 36). The process of interpretation entails constant consultation with relevant literature and theory, as well as field notes and memos.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in practice exists when the findings are arrived at by using multiple methods of data collection, and data analysis. In interpretive research, the practice of triangulation was traditionally used, which conceptualized a phenomenon as a fixed point to be observed multiple vantage points, using multiple methods. More recently Richardson (2000) introduced crystallization to replace triangulation, which saw the subject not as a fixed point, but as that which is perpetually changing, and approached it in multiple ways. Crystals, like life, are continually growing, shifting, and expanding, as well as reflecting different colors, patterns, and arrays depending on the angle it is approached. Therefore, crystallization goes against the traditional idea of ‘validity’, to the point that Richardson (2000) believes that there is no single truth, and texts validate themselves. Where crystallization provides a “deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic . . . but also understanding that there is always more to know” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934).

Crystallization requires the researcher to immerse himself/herself in the data and process of data collection. Through this immersion, the researcher is able to crystallize the data, meaning the researcher will reflect on the data and attempt to identify, and articulate patterns or themes. For the purpose of this study, the researcher gained different points of view on the topic, through participant observation in multiple settings, and semi-structured interviews using photo-elicitation with a wide range of residents (young,

old, working class, retired, home-grown, immigrant, etc.). Despite the use of multiple methods of data collection, the concept of crystallization recognizes that there is no one correct, or definitive way of explaining the role leisure plays in the lives of rural residents, and further that the phenomenon itself is in a constant state of change.

An additional dimension of trustworthiness involves working with research participants to insure that the data collected is an accurate representation of their experiences. As such, interview transcripts and field notes were made available for participants to react to. Subsequent to their review, the researcher engaged in dialog with participants around any concerns they may have.

Timeline

January 2015: Propose & Submit IRB

January-April 2015: Collect Data

May 2015-September 2015: Analyze Data

October 2015: Defend

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Throughout the data generation process, Valhalla residents were observed participating in a variety of leisure activities that strengthened their overall sense of community, and created a more satisfying environment for all. Data was generated by living in Valhalla for a three-month period of time, where archival data, participant observations, and interviews were gathered. Interviews were initiated with two Valhalla stakeholders, which helped generate a larger sample size through the snowball method. Fourteen semi-structured interviews (9 males and 5 females) were conducted. Interviewees ranged in age from 30 to 74, with an age distribution lined up with the United States Census data (2013). All interviews were conducted with Caucasians, matching the 99% Caucasian makeup of Valhalla (US Census, 2013). Along with interviews, participant observations were done in a variety of locations around town, and observing a multitude of activities (i.e. exercising, eating/drinking, and attending church). Archival data (i.e. newspapers and documents) was gathered, with permission from the local Historical Society. Altogether, leisure activities were seen to play a significant role in Valhalla resident's lifestyles, which strengthened their community and helped them adapt overtime.

Walking down the frozen cement sidewalk, I was bundled up wearing jeans, tennis shoes, a headband over my ears, gloves, and a winter jacket. It was around 5:30pm, so I had 30 minutes to walk ten blocks to Bible study, the blue skies were darkening, with the cold settling in. As I began to walk, my feet were getting heavy with a numbing sensation,

but I thought to myself, I will get the blood moving as I walk. I noticed four teenagers, 2 females and 2 males, talking and relaxing on the other side of the street. The two males were sitting on a 3-foot cement retaining wall, while the two females were standing around them. They were bundled up just like me, but I thought those guys butts have to be frozen sitting on the cold cement. Then again I remembered growing up in the Midwest, and spending lots of time outside in below freezing temperatures, it becomes normal. I looked over, raised my right hand up to wave and say “hello,” but they did not even acknowledge me. Oh to be a teenager again, I thought.

I continued walking down the block, as my feet were officially giant blocks of ice, and icicles were building in my nostrils. I passed several houses that appeared to be old and disintegrating, with no personal touches (Figure 3). Leaves were scattered everywhere from last fall, fences were leaning, and siding was falling off the side of the house. I am not a carpenter, but with a few days of work I felt I would be able to turn many of these houses around. I kept thinking, “who is proud to come home to this?” I understand if they did not have the money to reside the house, put a new roof on, or replace the windows, but what about the small stuff, like raking their leaves, cutting their grass, or planting some flowers. If a big windstorm came through, which is very typical in the flatlands, how would some of these houses survive?

As I continued to walk I spent more time focusing on the ground than I did on the surrounding area. Many of the frozen sidewalk blocks had buckled where they connect or the edges were bulging, from tree roots pushing them up, or the earth’s movements over the years. Some of the cement blocks were missing altogether, leaving a pile of frozen mud or leaves in its place. I saw another individual walking towards me on the other side

of the street, I raised my hand again to say “hello,” but instead he kept his head down, and walked past. I figured he too was focused on the sidewalk, and preventing his face from meeting the cement.

I had only walked two blocks, but I was already getting my blood moving and beginning to warm –up. Then I saw this phenomenal palace like house on the corner, it was nothing like the other houses I just walked by. This house (Figure 4) was triple the size of the others, had two maybe three floors, a Rapunzel type tower, and a large wrap around porch. It was clear to me this house got plenty of attention, and was well taken care of. It was like night and day compared to the nearby houses. There were no leaves in the large corner lot, it was decorated with Christmas lights and holiday decorations, and the long driveway was a smooth slab of cement. While walking the last few blocks to the church, I saw a good mix between the two types of houses, realizing that there were several pockets of people who wanted to revive the community (Participant Observation, 2/9/2015).

Once I reached the church, I walked through a huge parking lot that had 5 rows that could hold twenty cars each, with only about ten cars at the moment. The church looked recently constructed, it was a long one-story light brown brick building, with the main entrance being under an awning that stuck out two car widths. I approached the main entrance and noticed four glass doors, two on the left and two on the right. I walked through the far right door, into a large atrium with high ceilings. Immediately entering, there was a receptionist type desk in the middle, but nobody was around. I heard several voices coming from my right, in the fireplace room. I walked into the fireplace room, where there were six round wood tables scattered around, all with four or five matching

chairs. The far wall had a fireplace; I am guessing that is where it got its name. In the front of the room there was a large flat screen television on a pushcart, like I had in grade school. There were already ten people there, about half males and half females, ranging in age from their 30s-60s. With five minutes to go before bible study started, I walked across the room to an empty table. I heard a voice to my left, "Welcome." I turned my head, and saw a 60-year-old guy sitting down next to me, with a huge smile that went from ear to ear, looking straight at me.

I returned with, "Thank you."

"You new here?" he asked.

"Yeah, this is my first time here," I said.

He then stood up, shook my hand and said, "I'm Al," and pointed to his wife across the room and said, "That's Katy, my wife."

I said, "I'm Jes, nice to meet you." Al then proceeded to introduce me to everyone in the room.

I found my way to an empty table and began taking my gloves and winter coat off, within seconds I heard a "Welcome to Bible study," I looked up, and there were two ladies one in her 40s, and the other in her 50s. I said, "Thanks, I'm Jes." I guess it was pretty obvious I was new. Finally, a couple in their sixties sat next to me at the table. We welcomed each other and Mary asked, "Do you have a relative who goes here?"

I told her, "No, I just saw it, and wanted to come check it out."

She asked me, "really, you just saw it?"

I said, "Yeah, I'm staying with my Uncle for awhile and wanted to come check it out."

Mary began telling me about what I had missed in Bible study, scooted her chair closer to me, opened her book, and placed it on the table between us. She said, “Here you can follow along with me.” Mary also mentioned about Bible study on Sundays prior to service, and that I should come, and she will introduce me to everyone (Participant Observation, 1/28/2015).



Figure 3. Deteriorating Home



Figure 4. Well Taken Care of Home

From the previous narrative, it is easy to see how an outsider could have a difficult time becoming part of the community. Walking through town created a lonely, independent feeling, understanding how a resident could easily alienate oneself. However, if one purposefully involved himself or herself within an organized group, the Valhalla community is very inviting and welcoming. After analyzing the data generated throughout this study, findings revealed that Valhalla residents' leisure activities were viewed in three ways, leisure on the road, leisure within their home, and community-based leisure.

Leisure on the Road

RING . . . RING . . . RING . . . Hello? I answered the phone.

"Hey Jes, this is Olivia! How are you doing?"

"Hey, Olivia I'm doing well, how are you?" I said.

"Are you still up for exercising with the old folks tonight?" She said.

"Yup, it's at 5:30 right?" I said.

"That's right, I'll be by to pick you up around 5:00. You are two houses away from the county line correct?" Olivia said.

"Yup, there is a blue light shining on our front porch too," I said.

"Perfect, see ya then!" She said.

"Bye!" I said.

At 5:00 p.m. I was standing by the front door waiting for Olivia to pull in the driveway, wearing shorts, t-shirt, and a sweatshirt, ready for our fitness class. Right on time, Olivia pulled right in! As I walked out the front door and towards the car, I saw Ella sitting in the front seat of the 2000 sedan. Ella was Olivia's mother-in-law who I

knew from church, I guess she was coming with us. I hopped in the back, "Hello," said Olivia and Ella." Hey Guys," I said right back at them. Olivia pulled out of the driveway, and headed out of town towards Johnston.

"How were your days?" I said.

Olivia replied, "Mine went well, although I did have to send a kid to the principal's office, for punching another kid." Olivia teaches band for Rightsville's middle and high schools, about 30 minutes from Valhalla.

"Well, that sounds rather interesting," I said.

"Yeah, he deserved it," she said.

"The kid who got punched, or the kid who went to the principal? I asked.

"The kid who got punched, he's been picking on this other kid for months. So he finally got what was coming." Olivia answered.

"Alright, then. How was your day Ella?" I asked.

"Mine was fine, nothing too crazy around here." Ella said.

Roughly, fifteen minutes later we were pulling into this giant church parking lot in Johnston. The blacktop parking lot was only half full, with probably 50 plus cars. We got out of the car, and walked towards this newly built circular church, along with about ten others coming from the parking lot. We walked in the front door, and saw two women in their 30s standing by a rectangular fold-up card table to our right. I walked right past them, and through a set of double doors into a large atrium, where sixty plus adults were spread out, wearing workout clothes, looking up at the stage in front, and waiting for their workout to begin.

“This is the advanced class, it lasts one hour and fifteen minutes. We are doing the workout for the old folks.” Said Olivia.

“Sounds good to me,” I replied.

The three of us followed the wall, and walked down a long hallway past several classrooms. I did not see anyone else in the hallway, in either direction, but I kept following Olivia and Ella. We made several turns, with every hallway looking the same. I better not get lost; I have no idea where I am, I thought to myself. Finally, we entered one of those classrooms, where the chairs were stacked up, and pushed towards the wall. The back wall had built in cubbies, and the walls were decorated with kids posters and drawings. This was definitely a classroom during the day. I immediately saw Nora, Grace, Lillian, and Claire who I had known from church in Valhalla.

Nora said, “Hey Jes, glad to see you joined the old folks for a workout.”

I laughed and said, “Who knows, you might be better than me, it’s been awhile since I’ve worked out.”

Lillian said, “I bet you still have us.”

I walked over to Peyton, the instructor and gave her \$5 for the one time fitness class. Peyton said, “oh you’re new, I will have to grab a consent form for you to sign,” and she left the room. About 5 minutes later, she came back with the form, and asked whom I was related to. I mentioned I was just here with some of my friends for the workout. She said, “Oh, alright then!”

At 5:30, Peyton pressed play on the circular 80s boom box she had placed on the floor in the front of the room, and stood in the front, facing the class. The rest of us spread out, making three rows of six. It was kind of tight spacing, but we made it work. I

looked around and thought, “Yup, Olivia was right, I was the youngest person, with the next youngest being twenty years older than me.” After the 45 minutes, the workout was over, we all grabbed our belongings, and we headed out. Once again walking through the endless white hallways, and we eventually found our way out. Burr . . . the sun had gone down while we were inside, and the temperature had dropped. I wished I had worn pants over my shorts, but it was not a far walk to the car. As we headed back to Valhalla, Olivia asked if I wanted to go to dinner with Roscoe, Noah and her.

“Yeah, I would love to. When are you going?” I replied.

“I’m not sure but it will be a little later, Noah has to work late tonight, and it will be once he gets home from work.” She said.

Noah is a choir instructor for middle and high school students in Rightsville, 30 minutes northeast from Valhalla.

I said, “sounds good, just send me a text or call when you know more!”

“Oh, watch out for this pothole on the left!” Ella stated.

“Dang, that one would have swallowed the car.” Olivia stated.

“Yeah, I noticed it yesterday while I was out. It’s a large one.” Ella replied.

As they dropped me off at my uncle’s, Olivia said she would text me about dinner. After I showered and changed, I began talking with my uncle, my stomach began growling, and I realized it was almost 8:00pm, did Olivia forget about me? I wondered. I sent Olivia a text, and she responded with, “Noah just got home, we will pick you up shortly.” Man, Noah worked late tonight. Within 10 minutes, Olivia, Noah, and Roscoe were all in the driveway waiting for me. I hopped in the car, and we were off towards Johnston once again.

“Hey Guys,” I said.

“Hey,” They all replied.

“Did you have a good workout with the old farts?” Noah asked.

“Why, yes it was a great workout,” I replied.

“Where are we headed for dinner?” I asked.

Noah laughed, “How do you not know? Thursdays are 10 cent wing night!”

“Oh, well in that case I’m glad I have you guys to fill me in on these things.” I said.

We got to the restaurant, and we immediately got sat down at a table, it’s not like it was to busy that late at night.

After dinner, Roscoe mentioned there was a sale on Diet Coke at the grocery store next door. Roscoe loves Diet Coke; he normally has his mom purchase cases of Diet Coke for him, when she comes to town. Noah pulled into the grocery store parking lot, and we went in and got several cases of Diet Coke. After the grocery store, Noah asked if we could stop by Target on our way back. Olivia said, “sure why not,” and I said, “let’s go for it.” Noah did not need anything from Target, he just loves this store, and there is nothing like it in Valhalla. After about twenty minutes of walking around, we left empty handed.

Finally, we were headed back to Valhalla! (Participant Observation, 3/12/2015)

Leisure activities were not always seen to be within Valhalla city limits. In fact all interviewees admitted to participating in leisure activities outside of Valhalla. The main reasons being for shopping (100%), entertainment (93%), eating out (79%), and hobbies (79%). Leaving Valhalla for leisure activities seemed to be a norm for all residents, and

even easier and more frequent for the 72% of Valhalla residents who travel an average of 31 minutes to work, which is six minutes greater than the national average (McKenzie, 2015). Majority of Valhalla residents work in larger communities, which have malls, theaters, chain and local restaurants, and many more amenities making it easy to participate in leisure activities outside of Valhalla.

Shopping

Some may not view shopping as a leisure activity, however when shopping is done as an activity to pass time, and not necessarily viewed as a necessity it can be leisure. Shopping inside Valhalla is limited to the CVS, Dollar General, and local grocery store, all of which are mainly shopping as a necessity. It is no wonder 100% of the interviewees discussed shopping outside of Valhalla. If someone is in need of clothing, shoes, or home goods, they must make a purchase outside of Valhalla. Noah mentioned, “Target is my favorite store, I buy everything there . . . I wish we had something like that closer” (Interview, 3/24/2015). Jacob stated, “Johnston is where we [his family] go shopping, since there is nothing here. Wal-Mart is the cheapest for vision, clothing, and many things, obviously” (Interview, 3/26/2015). While at breakfast with the Rooster Club, Thomix asked me if I wanted to head to Costco (45 minutes away) with him. I said, “sure,” and Luke chimed in asking if we would pick him up some items (Participant Observation, 1/31/2015). Leaving Valhalla for shopping purposes was a must for current residents. As seen in the narrative above, and the observation between Thomix and Luke, tying trips together (i.e. dinner and shopping), going with friends, and grabbing items for others was a common occurrence between residents.

Entertainment/Travel

Leaving Valhalla for entertainment was the second highest leisure reason residents left, and was seen equally throughout all ages. With Valhalla's entertainment being a golf course, a few taverns, and some churches, residents were observed leaving for a few hours or a few days for entertainment purposes. Liam and his wife are season ticket holders to a semi-professional baseball team an hour away (Interview, 3/6/2015), while Olivia goes on weekend get-a-ways (i.e. Nashville or Atlanta), with two other Valhalla residents, three times a year (Interview, 3/25/2015). Both Liam and Olivia enjoy going to new places, and getting away. Liam states, "It's something different . . . and it does get you out of town and into the big city, and since we spend most of our days around town, a it's a little bit of a date, it's an event." Olivia said, "it's a girls weekend . . . it's something to look forward to . . . we can all relax and put our life behind us for a short while." Thomix, like Liam and Olivia, also enjoys leaving Valhalla, and plans motorcycle trips with some of his buddies out west.

The vast beauty of the place intrigues me, you can just travel for miles and miles and not see a whole lot. After living around this area, where you have people right next to ya, out there you have to plan going to town, you might drive down the road, and see a lane that goes back to the house that is 3 or 4 miles off the road . . . it's pretty awesome (Interview, 2/22/2015).

Overall, majority of all residents left Valhalla for entertainment purposes, but they also enjoyed having a "home base." Majority of all the leisure activities Valhalla residents' leave for are activities that cannot be found in Valhalla.

Eating Out

Valhalla does contain a few restaurants, however almost 80% of the interviewees preferred leaving Valhalla when it came to eating out. Residents viewed their restaurants as being “overpriced” (Participant Observation, 2/12/2015), “warmed up frozen food” (Participant Observation, 3/6/2015), and “I’d rather have a frozen TV dinner” (Participant Observation, 3/10/2015).

On a Friday night, I pulled into the gravel parking lot of Luke’s restaurant around 6:30pm, and parked next to an old, rusted out pick-up truck. As I walked to the front door, I noticed eight rectangular wooden picnic tables spread out in the front, and on one side of the one story building. Two side-by-side windows approximately four-foot by eight-foot on the front of the building and one on the side, were filled with an aluminum foil like material, like athletes get after finishing a marathon, that was duct taped from the inside. Along with a giant 12-foot long painted banner, like what you would see on the side of a float during a parade that said, “The Best Food in Town.” This seemed like a rather interesting, and potentially promising place for dinner. As I walked in there were three rows of tables that were four tables deep. With only three tables occupied, I walked to the back and sat in far right corner. After I sat down a cheery high school girl came right over to give me a menu, and take my drink order. OH BURR . . . the door just opened up, and a party of four walked in. This place is definitely not heated, they need to fix that, it is below freezing outside. Within what seemed like a minute the waitress was back with my drink, and asked for my order. I had barely even looked at the menu, and had no idea what kind of food they had, as she continued to stand there I felt pressure to order right then. I’m guessing there menu does not change

much, so locals probably do not need to much time. Finally, I ordered a chicken dinner; the waitress walked to the side of the restaurant within eye sight, and shouted my order to the cook. Within about ten minutes my food arrived, pretty speedy service I thought. As I began to eat I realized why it was so fast, the chicken wings reminded me of the ones you get in the freezer section of the grocery store, the ones you pop in the microwave for a minutes before eating, and the mashed potatoes had a flakey texture to them like the flakes found in boxed mashed potatoes, that you heat and add water to. For serving this type of food it should come out speedy. AHHH . . . I should have seen it coming, two people just left, bringing in the cold air. I figured I needed to quickly eat my food before it got cold, and wondered if anyone ever asked to get their food re-warmed mid meal. Oh my, I felt something warm on my nose, not sure where it is coming from but I will take it. There must be some heat inside this building, but not much. No wonder they have the aluminum foil like material on all the windows, to keep the heat in. It is no surprise why less than half the tables are full during peak dinner hours on a Friday night. I know if I lived here I would not come here for warmed up frozen food and freezing temperatures.

Mason summed it up by saying,

If I'm going out to eat it's usually not in Valhalla, there isn't many places to eat here . . . if you are going to eat in Valhalla you either eat at the tavern, which is not just eating; or you eat at the diner, which is just basically eating to stay alive, not entertainment (Interview, 3/22/2015).

Roscoe mentioned,

“we go out to eat every Sunday after church . . . and after choir practice, and board meetings we do that too . . . it's an opportunity to go out to eat .

. . yeah it's usually always not in Valhalla, there are so many more choices in Johnston. We carpool so it's easy and added fun" (Interview, 3/7/2015).

Alex also enjoys leaving Valhalla for a good meal, but he is also influenced by his wife to leave stating, "Since my wife's illness [Parkinson's Disease], she gets embarrassed, and doesn't want to eat in Valhalla, so we always leave" (Interview, 2/25/2015). Now, Jacob mentioned that he does not leave Valhalla for meals, however he also mentioned he does not eat out in Valhalla either. "We [family] don't go out to eat. With three growing boys, my wife and I can't afford to go out. We may pick up some pizzas to bring home, but that's about it" (Interview, 3/26/2015). Overall, Valhalla does have a few places to eat, but many would rather eat at home or leave Valhalla.

Hobbies

Leaving Valhalla for resident's personal hobbies (i.e. geocaching, hiking, camping, or garden tours) was another item discussed in 80% of the interviews. Residents of all ages and genders were seen leaving for their personal hobbies, but it was observed that married residents were less likely to leave for this purpose. Tom, a 65-year-old resident enjoys geocaching and has found all of the caches around Valhalla, so he leaves Valhalla weekly to find new caches (Interview, 2/15/15). Noah loves walking and running at the State Park in Johnston, and says, "it's peaceful, relaxing, and a good stress reliever . . . it's like a sanctuary, where I can retreat in my mind" (Interview, 3/24/2015). William also enjoyed leaving Valhalla regularly to go fishing at a nearby State Park or lake (Interview, 3/7/2015). Valhalla may not be able to offer many geo-caches or a State Park, but it does have a library, American Legion, several churches, parks, and taverns. Valhalla may have become more limited in their offerings over the years, but that does

not mean the residents have to limit themselves. Instead they found ways to still participate in activities they were interested in, by leaving.

In summary, as Valhalla has aged and declined so has their social institutions (i.e. theatre, restaurants, and billiards hall), resulting in residents leaving Valhalla regularly, sometimes on a daily basis to fulfill their needs. During Valhalla's heyday residents did participate in leisure on the road, but on a sparingly basis. Minnick (n.d.) mentioned how he would occasionally go to Johnston on Saturday evenings for shopping and attend a movie, but majority of all his time was spent in Valhalla, for there was plenty to do. Now, Valhalla residents leave regularly due to a lack of amenities, but in Valhalla's hey day they had department stores, grocery stores, hardware stores, shoe stores, hat shops, and more. Therefore, living in Valhalla, having access to shopping and entertainment, majority of residents had no need to leave.

Home-Based Leisure Activities

Leisure activities within the home were very popular for Valhalla residents, as they are for most Americans, with the average American spending approximately 4 hours a day participating in home-based leisure (i.e. watching TV, computer games, reading, relaxing) (American Time Use Survey, 2015). As companies have closed their doors population has declined, K-12 education has moved outside of the town, residents have been left with very little. Home-based leisure is simple, easy, and takes as much or as little time as they want. All interviewees participated in leisure within their home, and eleven of the fourteen interviewees noted they typically spend five or more hours a day participating in technological leisure (i.e. television or computer) and hobbies (i.e. reading or knitting).

Technological Leisure

Technological leisure like watching television, watching movies, or playing on the computer/tablet were discussed in every single interview, and noted in a large quantity of observations. While the average American spends 3 hours a day on technological leisure (American Time Use Survey, 2015), Valhalla residents mentioned and were observed spending 5 or more hours a day on technological leisure. When asked why they participate in so much, Roger a 27-year-old resident said it was something to look forward to, “There is not much to do in this town, therefore a new episode of my favorite television show gives me something to look forward to” (Participant Observation, 2/5/2015). Liam a 68-year-old retired schoolteacher stated,

It’s [tablet/computer] something I can do by myself in the comfort of my own home. I am able to follow what is going on outside of town, like DNR – Department of Natural Resources, and the NSGA, um . . . I follow historical photos, New York Times, and the Washington Post (Interview, 3/6/2015).

Lillian video chats from her home computer, with her sister and niece who live in Ohio. “I enjoy video chatting, they live several hours away, but it makes me feel closer to them” (Participant Observation, 2/10/2015). Without these technological leisure activities it could be easy for Valhalla residents to feel isolated and alone. Liam would have to rely on the daily newspaper to get information from outside the community, and Lillian would have to travel to Ohio every time she wants to see her niece. Residents like Mary, a retired 70-year-old life long Valhalla resident who does not drive often feels secluded from others in the community.

Sometimes I don't leave the house for weeks at a time . . . my son brings me groceries and medications, and sometimes brings me meals too. I enjoy going to church, but I hate to force others to go just because I want to, so I don't go as much as I would like (Participant Observation, 2/1/2015).

Mary also mentioned that television kept her grounded, and connected to the world. At times she might not know what is going on in Valhalla, but she at least knew what was going on in the country and world. Technological leisure provides resident's access to the larger society, and potentially reduces the feeling of loneliness or seclusion, for a short while.

Hobbies

Participating in individual hobbies such as reading, gardening, and woodcarving within the home was also noted in 100% of the interviews. Hobbies seemed to provide residents with an activity of their choosing, that worked on self-improvement, relaxation, escape, or mitigating life's challenges. Jen, who enjoys gardening, feels it is a test of her faith,

I enjoy the quite time outdoors, and it's relaxing, and I try to plant new flowers and plants every year. It is a real test to my faith, I can plant the seed, water it, and nurture it, but who knows if it will come up or what it will look like, only time will tell (Interview, 3/30/2015).

Laura a 30-year-old resident enjoys reading, because she can escape from her current life, if she wants to be a millionaire or travel to Africa, she can (Participant Observation, 2/10/2015). Emily a 75-year-old who had polio in her twenties is physically limited in

life, and enjoys crocheting. Her daughter brings her balls of yarn and she will spend hours crocheting blankets, hats, socks, and other items.

I can't go far as my legs don't work very well anymore. I watch television, but there are only so many game shows and re-runs you can watch. I enjoy crocheting because it keeps my hands moving, which is just about all I have left of this body, and I give most of the stuff I make away, so I feel like I am helping others at the same time, in my own little way (Participant Observation, 6/23/2014).

Leisure as a hobby also focused on residents using their skills to help mitigate their own life's challenges. Liam mentioned, "I trapped raccoons, muskrats, as a schoolteacher I didn't make much money, it was supplemental income" (Interview, 3/6/2015). To save money John a 58-year-old went to the library, checked out books on home repair, and built his own house. John did refer to local friends in the area, but for the most part he purchased or rented his own equipment and supplies, and did the framing, plumbing, electrical, drywall, roofing, he did it all (Participant Observation, 3/14/2015). Ned a 54-year-old farmer is very limited financially; as social institutions in town closed, he began making his own cigarettes, wine, bread, and more (Participant Observation, 2/10/2015).

Leisure activities as hobbies were seen in a variety of ways, however they all seemed to give residents a sense of satisfaction (i.e. outcome from activity, escape, or pleasure), and in some cases allowed residents to gain supplemental income. Leisure activities as hobbies were also seen tied with technological leisure, where Jen who enjoys planting may go online to gain information on a specific flower, and Laura who enjoys reading may read a physical book or an e-book.

Home-based leisure has changed dramatically since Valhalla's heyday. As the current pictures (Figure 5) from the interviews depicted many independent activities, Figure 6 demonstrates what home-based leisure activities were like in the past. The independent leisure activities that are so commonly seen today were rarely seen in the past. Minnick (n.d.) actually remembers a time when he enjoyed putting together model airplanes, and got teased because it was so trivial. Home-based leisure activities in the past often consisted of activities with others like shooting guns, mushroom hunting, reading comics, and relaxing, but majority of their time was spent interacting with others in the community, and not spent at home like it currently is.

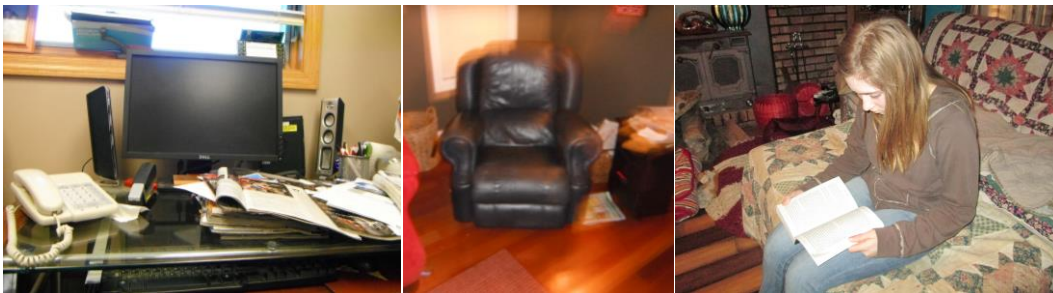


Figure 5. Current Home-Based Leisure Activities



Figure 6. Historical Home-Based Leisure Activities

Community-Based Leisure

Community-based leisure was social in nature, and viewed through residents volunteering (85% of interviewees), and social institutions (79% of interviewees). Community-based leisure is important to Valhalla, as the community has declined residents have learned to adapt. Olivia summed it up when she said, “It’s about giving back to the community . . . it’s about Valhalla, and helping Valhalla” (Interview, 3/25/2015).

Volunteering

It was clear that residents cared about other residents; individuals were seen helping others regularly in their own special ways. For instance, Olivia is a 56-year-old who has lived in Valhalla for 32 years; she has an interest in gardening, and has volunteered her time to help construct gardens around the community such as at Water’s Park, the library, Gazebo Park, and other resident’s homes. She states,

The volunteer things I do, the community service things I do. Whenever you do just that, you usually get more back then what you give. There is just a sense of . . . what you do matters, and just the fulfillment . . . of doing something for people, helping people (Interview, 3/25/2015).

Alex first gained a sense of self-confidence, and the feeling he can do this when he was 10-years-old, at the little league baseball diamond in Valhalla. For that reason Alex donates his time to the high school softball team stating,

I try to help them and support them . . . for example there’s a couple of girls from dead end families. I don’t think they would have ever made it through high school if me and the other coaches there had not directed

them . . . it is a wonderful way to pay back Valhalla (Interview, 2/25/2015).

Olivia and Alex both found ways to take their personal interests and turn them into a way to help Valhalla. However, Valhalla, like many communities, has a number of needs that must be addressed, and individuals can only do so much. When residents team up and volunteer their time, the amount of help is endless. For example, Life church, in Valhalla, hosts a soup luncheon on Super Bowl Sunday, with the proceeds going to the local food pantry, which provides food for families who would have gone hungry (Participant Observation, 2/2/2015). The Valhalla sewing group makes patchwork and crocheted blankets out of scraps, for the sick (Participant Observation, 2/18/2015), which kept Lily warm during her chemotherapy sessions (Interview, 3/15/2015). The Seasoned Citizen's provides a weekly lunch and a social opportunity for the elderly (Interview, 2/26/2015). What one might view as a small contribution to the community could mean a great deal to another.

Social Institutions

Leisure done within Valhalla's social institutions has declined over the years with the decline of attendance, and the loss of the theatre and local pub; however there are still a few things residents enjoy doing, and take pride in. Ava a 57-year old librarian, sings in a choir and said, "I really enjoy singing . . . we [choir] always laugh a lot . . . I always leave happy . . . and it's a release or something" (Interview, 2/26/2015). Mason golfs with his buddies on Saturdays and mentioned, "I really enjoy it, because I'm with friends . . . I like the competition, I like being outdoors, and it's a great way to relax and put life aside" (Interview, 3/22/2015). Thomix goes to a local tavern a few times a week and says, "it's

not the nicest place ever, but it's home, and it's a place I can go to relax and talk with friends" (Interview 2/5/2015). From the above examples, social institutions may have dwindled over the years, but residents still enjoy what Valhalla has left to offer.

Community leisure activities are key to bringing residents together, forming bonds, and helping the community prosper, however it is not seen nearly as often or to the extent as it once was. Valhalla residents volunteered their time, talents, and skills to not only increase the aesthetics of the community (painting murals), but also to encourage others to move to Valhalla, by building Habitat for Humanity houses, and creating fun festivals/events, like an alumni basketball game (figure 7). In Valhalla's hey day the amenities were much greater than they are now with a swimming pool, Van Noy Theatre, and Cossack Inn (figure 8). With an abundant amount of possible community-based leisure activities, residents were able to create and develop an endless amount of interpersonal relationships, which ultimately strengthened Valhalla. As Valhalla has declined those leisure opportunities have done the same. The M_News (1992) demonstrates the slow death of Valhalla, as the Annual Fall Funfest was cancelled due to lack of manpower, and the local drug store that had served Valhalla for sixty-nine years finally closed due to lack of business. Finally, M_News (1995) reflected on the high school auditorium (figure 9) where the entire community once enjoyed school plays, graduations, concerts, and community meetings. It was the pride of the community and often compared to the opera house.



Figure 7. Historical Community Volunteering

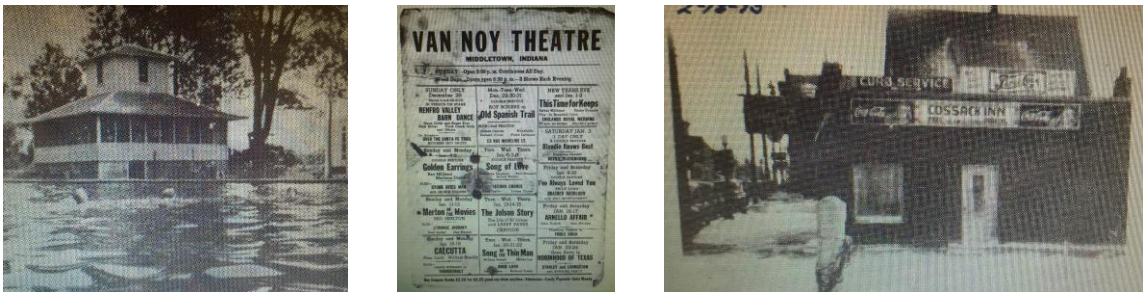


Figure 8. Historical Social Institutions

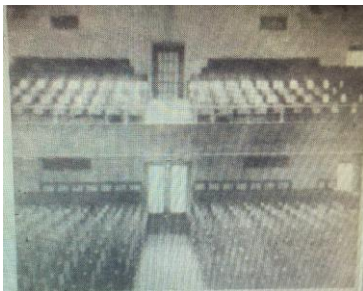


Figure 9. Historical High School Auditorium

In summary, Valhalla has changed dramatically over the years, resulting in a decline in population, community funding, and social institutions, as well as an increase in daily commuting and isolation. Valhalla residents were found to participate in a variety of leisure activities that may or may not have brought them closer as a community. For

example, leisure on the road and home-based leisure were more individualistic, and did not lead to a lot of community interaction. While community-based leisure activities were social in nature and lead to increased appreciation, and desire to help better the future of Valhalla. Throughout my time within Valhalla I saw a number of residents working together however, I would guess that less than half of the residents were observed. Therefore, do the others care about the community? Do they just live in Valhalla and participate in leisure activities elsewhere? Do they only participate in home-based leisure?

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This study sought to understand how Valhalla's residents used leisure activities to foster a sense of community, and how it could help residents adapt to the challenges of rural living. Valhalla (population 2,322), like many rural communities has changed dramatically over the years, leaving behind only a portion of what the community once had. As a result of Valhalla's decline, communal leisure opportunities within the community were limited to churches, taverns, parks, and homes. For that reason, many residents were observed spending majority of their time outside of Valhalla, and within their own home, while a very small portion of their time was observed in communal leisure activities. Given Valhalla's present situation, it was important to study whether current leisure activities would address the decline of social institutions, by bringing residents closer as a community. Using the sense of community concept, this study focused on residents' leisure activities as practices that may or may not enhance their sense of belonging, identity, and support from others (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Overall, Valhalla residents participated in three categories of leisure activities: leisure on the road, home-based leisure, and community-based leisure. Leisure on the road addressed fulfilling residents' needs outside of Valhalla, detracting from a strong sense of community. Home-based leisure reflected the membership and fulfillment of needs components of sense of community. The membership component did seem to lead to a strong sense of community among some participants, however the fulfillment of needs component was independent in nature, and led to a decline in residents' sense of

community. Finally, community-based leisure included all four components of sense of community, and did showcase a strong overall sense of community.

Leisure on the Road

Valhalla residents have been very resilient when it comes to their challenges, but they still suffer from a decline of social institutions and amenities, such as medical care, public education, entertainment, and shopping. Leaving Valhalla regularly was an easy decision for most, since a majority already left daily for work and school, having access to malls, theaters, chain and local restaurants, and many other amenities. Residents were observed leaving Valhalla for shopping, entertainment, eating out, and personal hobbies. Engaging in leisure activities elsewhere weakened Valhalla, both economically and socially, as residents were spending their money elsewhere, creating memories elsewhere, beginning to build relationships elsewhere, and potentially moving elsewhere. Therefore, by bringing leisure opportunities back to Valhalla it could increase one's interpersonal relationships and produce economic benefits. Every dollar spent elsewhere is a dollar that could be spent within Valhalla. For example, if the current restaurants put a little more effort into their dishes residents might be more likely to eat there. Meaning a family of four might spend \$10 a piece, therefore contributing \$40 to the future of Valhalla.

Similarly, Scott, Park, and Cocklin (2000) and Milbourne and Kitchen (2014) studied declining rural communities, where the loss of basic services such as general stores, retail facilities, post offices, and other key services led to everyday mobility, and threatened the sustainability of the community itself. Reiterating what was observed in Valhalla, with the disappearance of factories, hardware stores, and retail stores, resulting

in residents needing to travel outside of their community to receive life's necessities, and desirable recreational opportunities. Ultimately, weakening and limiting their social ties within Valhalla, which led to residents being less inclined to look out for their neighbors, and other community members.

There has been very limited research on building connections and relationships through traveling outside the community, such as Valhalla residents going shopping together, picking items up for each other, or going to a restaurant with other Valhalla residents outside of town. Due to the lack of public transportation, some Valhalla residents did indicate a paradoxical dependence or loyalty that was created by having to travel out of town for leisure and basic services. Residents were forced to carpool, borrow a vehicle, or have someone pick up items for them, which Scott, Park, and Cocklin (2000) also found to be true. Having that dependence or connection with another community member did build a bond, because without that relationship one's livelihood or access to other activities of daily living were in peril. Overall, Valhalla does not have an autonomous social system or suitable array of leisure activities, therefore residents must leave town to fulfill some personal, social, and physical needs, while potentially strengthening their local relationships in the process.

Neighboring behavior such as helping someone with groceries, borrowing a cup of milk while baking cookies, or watching a house/pet while on vacation, is informal reciprocal assistance between neighbors. Neighboring was seen in Valhalla as a way to work through challenges (e.g. driving a neighbor to doctors appointment or picking up groceries for a neighbor), and led to a stronger sense of community. Unger and Wandersman (1985) who focused on the social interactions of neighboring also found

that social interactions allowed residents to build relationships, and discuss mutual problems. A number of studies have specifically linked sense of community with neighboring, and is considered necessary for future growth (Perkins & Long, 2002; Unger & Wandersman, 1985). Therefore, with Valhalla residents spending so much time away from their home, it would be interesting to look further into how carpooling, borrowing vehicles, or picking up items for each other were understood as neighboring behaviors.

Overall, with employment, services, and leisure opportunities being outside of town, leisure on the road has increased dramatically. Throughout this study, residents indicated that when they left for work it was usually alone, but when they left for leisure (e.g., eating out, going to the theatre or mall) it was usually with another Valhalla resident. Surprisingly, when Valhalla residents leave town with another resident it may strengthen their sense of community, by enjoying each other's company and developing interpersonal relationships. Unfortunately, majority of the time residents left they left autonomously, spent money elsewhere, and built connections elsewhere, which all led to weakening their overall sense of community within Valhalla.

Home-Based Leisure Activities

Due to the lack of available leisure opportunities (i.e. theaters and retail stores) in the community, home-based leisure was seen to be a prominent leisure activity for many of Valhalla residents. As Valhalla's economic situation has depreciated, feelings of loneliness and seclusion have increased. For example, Mary, a longtime resident who does not drive, mentioned that sometimes she does not see anyone for days and/or leave her house for several weeks at a time. Valhalla does not have the population, social

institutions, school spirit, or the employment opportunities it once had. Leaving the current residents with higher taxes, longer commutes, and fewer leisure opportunities. In response, Valhalla's residents have used two forms of home-based leisure to mitigate life's challenges, technological leisure, and hobbies.

Technological Leisure

All participants engaged in technological leisure such as watching television, movies, or playing on the computer/tablet. As entertainment technology has advanced and local amenities have depreciated, residents have turned to technology for entertainment, relaxation, and escape. A majority of residents have Internet connections within their home, which gives them immediate access to a wide range of entertainment options (i.e. streaming movies, e-mail, social media, video chat). Valhalla residents can shop online and have items shipped directly to their home, stream movies and videos (i.e. Netflix and YouTube), connect with local and distant friends on social media, as well as voice and video chat with others across the world. Residents may even have more connections within the walls of their own home, than they have from Valhalla itself. Some residents mentioned they would have moved away by now if they did not have an Internet connection at home, because it opens up so many avenues for entertainment and life's necessities (i.e. online shopping). Residents also mentioned how the Internet kept them grounded, connected to the rest of society, and provided them comfort from Valhalla's constraints. Similarly, Kilpeläinen and Seppänen (2014) studied technology use in small villages, and found that residents regularly used computers and cell phones to help maintain, and enhance their everyday life. They discovered villagers used technology in three main ways, as a routine (i.e. e-mails, video chat), for entertainment

(i.e. playing games, playing music, watching television/movies), and as a utility (i.e. library services, shopping, working from home). Similarly, Valhalla observed residents using computers and cell phones mainly for entertainment and shopping.

Technological leisure may help fulfill residents' needs, and decrease the feeling of isolation and seclusion, however it is an individualized experience thereby decreasing social interaction, and community involvement as well. Likewise, Van Ingen and Van Eijck (2009) found that passive leisure activities (i.e. watching television/movie) were negatively related to individual's social connections, leading to fewer residents getting together to work on common goals for the community. Therefore, if social interaction is the foundation of community (Wilkinson, 1991), the more independent home-based leisure activities individuals engage in, the weaker their ties will be to their community. Meaning, the more time one spends at home, the foundational social interactions and connections one needs for a strong sense of community are absent.

Hobbies

Leisure activities as hobbies were few in number, due to Valhalla's economic and social decline leaving behind a limited amount of opportunities. A majority of leisure activities within the home were technology based, which we discussed above and the rest were typically done individually to escape from Valhalla's nothingness, improve the aesthetics of their home/community, or because they did not have the finances for what they wanted/needed. These hobbies however did enhance resident's membership and fulfillment of needs components of sense of community.

Residents did gain a sense of belonging or membership through gardening or building their home/barn. Initially, gardening and building one's own home was meant to

be a solo activity, but ended up leading to socializing with other residents as they walked by, or took notice of their garden/home. Similarly, other researchers found gardening to involve formal and informal social interactions between family, friends, and neighbors (Comstock, Dickinson, Marshall, Soobader, Turbin, Buchenau, & Litt, 2010; Glover, 2004; Kaplan & Kaplan, 2005), resulting in higher community satisfaction and an emotional bond to their home and/or community.

Through participating in leisure hobbies within the home residents were able to fulfill some of their personal and social needs, such as self-improvement, entertainment, relaxation, escape, and supplemental income. For a short time, residents seemed to enjoy those activities, but after awhile some began feeling isolated and alone. For example, after a long day at work sitting at home reading a book was nice and relaxing, but after awhile it became redundant and boring.

Overall, home-based leisure was able to increase some residents feeling of membership to Valhalla (i.e. gardening and building home), and fulfill some needs (i.e. entertainment, relaxation, or escape). However, many residents participated in these activities because of their lack of connection to Valhalla, and/or their lack of leisure opportunities Valhalla offered. Therefore, Valhalla's depreciation has led to residents feeling isolated from their own community. Similarly, Borgmann (1992) and Putnum (2000) indicated with the rise in personal technology, there was also a rise in passive leisure (i.e. watching television), but they also found that activities without social interaction were unsatisfying to the individuals. In addition, Arai and Pedlar (2003) mentioned, that the increase in individualized leisure activities has led to individuals

pursuing leisure with little interest in the ramifications for the community or society as a whole. Falling in line with what we found in Valhalla with home-based leisure.

Community-Based Leisure

Community-based leisure such as volunteering and socially interacting within social institutions were not the most popular leisure activity for participants, however individuals who did participate were able to strengthen their overall sense of community. Along with Valhalla, a number of other studies have found social interactions to be the brick and mortar of what holds a community together when threats and problems arise (Brennan & Luloff, 2007; Flint, Luloff, & Theodori, 2010; Korsching & Allen, 2004; Wilkinson, 1991). Wilkinson (1991) and Brennan and Luloff (2007) argued that through communal leisure a bond/relationship emerged due to residents shared interests, shared spaces, and shared problems. Prezza, Amici, Roberti, and Tedeschi (2001) and Glover (2004) also found that through communal leisure one could build their citizenship and their sense of community. As Valhalla has declined over the years with factory closures, out-migration, and school consolidation, it is essential that residents actively participate and accept responsibility (i.e. volunteer, town boards, helping the less fortunate, and supporting local businesses) to better the future of Valhalla.

Volunteering

Valhalla residents who volunteer within the community are key players in the future of Valhalla. Residents were observed creating community gardens, helping youth athletics, providing food for the hungry, and creating comfort for the ill. Volunteering allowed residents to develop and strengthen friendships and personal autonomy, along with enhancing their personal connection to Valhalla as a whole. Echoing Arai and

Pedlar's (1997) study where volunteering was associated with camaraderie, a sense of connection to the community, and a shared emotional connection. In addition, residents who volunteered gained a feeling of being valued, and being able to contribute to something larger than them, developing the influence and fulfillment of needs components of sense of community.

On a larger scale volunteering in Valhalla led to a more cohesive community, where residents were willing to work together for a common good. Similarly, Brennan and Luloff (2007) found that communal leisure and volunteering created an environment where residents became aware of community needs, and where opportunities for community action emerged. As Valhalla residents gained a sense of belonging and connection to the community, they wanted to use their skills to help, whether it was through raising funds, increasing community aesthetics, or taking someone to town.

In summary, the stronger residents interpersonal relationships grew, the more they became devoted to the community, and helping others. Valhalla residents were able to use volunteering, as a leisure activity where they gained a sense of belonging and purpose, were able to fulfill their personal and social needs, as well as build emotional connections with others.

Social Institutions

Surprisingly, even with Valhalla's decline over the years they still have a number of social institutions still remaining (i.e. taverns, golf course, and churches). Social institutions within a community hold a unique position, for they bring people of all ages together, reinforcing the sense of cohesion for the entire community (Oncescu & Robertson, 2010). For example, throughout this study I regularly found residents of all

generations playing golf, using the library, or spending time in the park, developing and strengthening their interpersonal relationships, mirroring Wilkinson's (1991) research where social interaction is the center of community. Social institutions such as these have a way of bringing people together from all parts of the community, due to their common interests; making it easier to develop connections, gain a sense of belonging and feeling of membership.

Participating in social institutions around Valhalla, allowed residents to fulfill some of their personal and social needs, such as food, entertainment, relaxation, self-improvement, and escape from life's challenges. These leisure activities not only fulfilled resident's personal and social needs, but they also increased the quality of life within Valhalla, which Middleton (2000) found to be true as well. For these social institutions were seen as a common location, which allowed residents to enjoy their leisure activity, develop a strong social support network, and potentially gain a strong sense of community (Ramsey & Smit, 2002; Smith, Krannich, & Hunter, 2001). Kweon, Sullivan, and Wiley (1998) studied the relationship between social institutions and social ties, and stated that the use of social institutions could predict the overall strength of the community's social ties, and sense of community, which was seen to be true for Valhalla as well.

Conclusion

Overall, communal leisure activities have the ability to enhance residents lives and foster ones sense of community through interpersonal relationships, community cohesion, social support, and fulfilling some personal and social needs. Similarly, Ramsey and Beesley (2006) found that rural residents satisfaction was not only connected

to their interpersonal relationships, but also to their perceived level of community support, which could be increased through communal leisure. From the results of this study it seems that Valhalla will continue to decline in the near future. They have several very dedicated older residents who are involved in a number of organizations and/or committees, but for the most part residents participate in leisure individually within their own home or outside of Valhalla, both lowering their connection to Valhalla. Leisure activities play a significant role in connecting individuals and building interpersonal relationships; therefore without major changes to resident's leisure activities the future of Valhalla is in limbo.

This study sought to understand how Valhalla residents used leisure activities to foster a sense of community, and how they helped residents adapt with the challenges of rural living, using the interactional theory. I believe the interactional theory was a value to this study, with the focus on the social interaction of resident's leisure activities, instead of just looking at residents who call Valhalla home on their tax forms. Within this study the interactional theory helped us discover how residents spent their leisure time, and whom they were making their connections with. With that in mind, the interactional theory was an asset to this study since the focus of leisure activities was on social interactions, and not necessarily the activity itself, allowing us to fully dive into the community aspect of leisure.

This study also found that the sense of community concept worked well to gain a general understanding of Valhalla life, and resident's feelings of belonging, identity, and support within Valhalla. This study showed that Valhalla residents regularly associated with others outside of Valhalla, ultimately lowering their sense of community. Therefore,

residents were not as likely to take action, and improve the welfare of their community. With that in mind, if Valhalla continues down the same path they will continue to deteriorate, however if they could bring back community wide-leisure activities (e.g. outdoor movies downtown or grill-out at the park), residents could strengthen their local social ties, and increase their overall sense of community.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has been a learning process from the initial topic, methodologies, analysis, to the interpretations of the analysis. I hope to take the knowledge that I have learned into the field of leisure studies, and continue to learn, and share. With that in mind, this chapter is summarizing my final conclusions of this study.

Valhalla

Valhalla is a typical rural Midwestern community with a population of 2,322 that was struck by The Rural Tragedy in the late 1800s, and have been disintegrating since. Rural communities play a critical role in our economy, and leisure has a unique way of satisfying one's life, therefore this study focused on how leisure activities could help residents cope with changes, and possibly strengthen their overall sense of community. My initial thoughts upon entering Valhalla were that it was run-down, and did not have a lot to offer its residents. Typically, a healthy community is often seen as having both social and economic opportunities, which Valhalla did not have an adequate amount of either. While walking around town I noticed a few well-kept Victorian style homes and outdoor spaces, but there were more homes and businesses that were disintegrating and boarded up. I also observed few cars driving around town, and figured majority of residents spent most of their time elsewhere, which was seen to be true. Therefore, with disintegrating infrastructure and a lack of residents, I initially thought Valhalla was a dying community, with a lack of leisure opportunities, and a low sense of community. However, as I got involved and became part of the community I learned that was not necessarily the case. Many individuals were observed doing what they could to help

Valhalla grow, in their own way. Residents of Valhalla do not have a lot of money; therefore they contributed socially rather than economically, through volunteering, using their talents/skills (i.e. sewing, cooking), and filling in when needed. Just about everyday I heard someone asking another, if they needed a ride, or if they needed something picked up from town. With Valhalla not having many amenities, or many of the basic social services, it was clear that everyone needed a little help. Throughout my time in Valhalla I remembered the saying, it takes a village to raise a child, but I kept thinking it takes a village to raise a community. Without the community and social ties, some of those residents would not survive. Valhalla is a shadow of its former self, and will probably never fully recover; but currently Valhalla is holding steady with what it has, and many residents are still proud to call it home. Although, without major changes twenty years from now Valhalla could be extinct, for their main economic contribution to society is agriculture. Their pillow and canning factories are small, and could easily be moved elsewhere. According to Wilkinson's interactional approach Valhalla itself has already collapsed, and has been consumed by Johnston. Leisure opportunities can help with rebuilding communities, but leisure alone cannot rebuild a community.

Leisure Activities Help Build Sense of Community

Leisure activities and social interactions are an important part of building a strong community, and increasing one's sense of community (Prezza, Amici, Roberti, & Tedeschi, 2001). Unfortunately, rural communities have encountered a decrease in leisure opportunities, and other facets of community life (Glover & Stewart, 2006), resulting in a reduced sense of community and cohesion (Miller, 1993). Leisure was seen in Valhalla in a variety of ways, such as helping others, sharing common interests, and celebrating

shared ideals, demonstrating mutual interest in their common life (i.e. goals, beliefs, and values), and resulting in stronger social ties. With leisure being such an important element in creating, and maintaining these social ties and an overall healthy community (Arai & Pedlar, 2003), it is pivotal that Valhalla continues to promote social interactions and communal leisure. Unfortunately, through the decay of Valhalla current residents suffer from higher taxes, longer commutes, and fewer leisure opportunities. In cases like Valhalla, there are some things that leisure activities will never be able to compensate for, such as the lack of medical care, but through residents helping with rides, meals, and more in time of need, it creates a cushion from their current situation. Overall, communal leisure activities have the ability to enhance resident's lives and foster ones sense of community, however with Valhalla's current lack of communal leisure they will continue to deteriorate.

Leisure Activities Help with Rural Tragedy

Leisure research has been behind in bringing awareness to rural tragedy, however it is finally starting to come around, through social, political, economic, cultural, and technological changes (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Edwards & Matarrita-Cascante, 2011; Oncesu & Robertson, 2010). Due to these changes mobility of rural residents has increased dramatically, to the point that rural residents depend on neighboring communities for daily necessities, and leisure opportunities. This was seen to be true for Valhalla residents as well, majority of residents travel outside of Valhalla for work, groceries, shopping, and other daily activities, leaving less time for regular interactions with neighbors, and leisure opportunities in general. Making it crucial for Valhalla residents, and other rural residents to come together and foster a sense of community.

Older Valhalla residents were often observed talking about the good ole days, and all the community activities they used to have, fundraisers, festivals, and carnivals. As rural tragedy dramatically changed their lifestyle, these conversations along with watching television, reading a book, or going for a run provided a distraction or amusement to the decay of their community. Overall, rural communities have been dealt a difficult hand, and how they cope with these challenges could determine their future.

There were multiple times throughout this study, that I thought to myself Valhalla has this, they can pull through. Once one takes the step, and invests in the community, there is much to offer. A lot can be said about interpersonal relationships, where trust, cooperation, and collaboration come about. A limited number of Valhalla residents were seen interacting with one another on a daily basis, listening to each other's problems, and offering solutions. It was not about having state of the art facilities for Valhalla residents, it was about the people. The stronger the interpersonal relationships became, the more they wanted to help each other, and work together to achieve great things (e.g. raise funds or collect donations for the less fortunate). Similarly, Oncescu (2014) found that communal recreational activities within rural communities created a social cohesion, that lead to an increased quality of life for rural residents, and Arai and Pedlar (1997) found that volunteering as a leisure activity could lead to a more meaningful community life. Unfortunately, probably only a quarter of Valhalla residents were observed participating in communal leisure, and the ones who did were older in age. Therefore, does Valhalla need to get the other three-fourths of the residents to participate in leisure activities within Valhalla, or do those residents need to gain a sense of community first? By participating in social leisure activities there is a good chance they will gain a sense of

community, but without a sense of community why would someone begin participating in social leisure activities? In rural communities, like Valhalla, residents typically initiate social leisure activities since they do not have the money to hire a professional. Luckily, Valhalla actually does have a handful of professional staff in the parks department, however they focus solely on the maintenance of the grounds. If one of those staff members could focus on initiating communal programs that could raise one's sense of community.

My Journey as a Scholar

As I mentioned earlier, this study has been a learning endeavor for me. Throughout the study, I have grown as a researcher, specifically looking at ethnographic research and looking at the importance of both participant observations and semi-structured interviews.

Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic research was chosen for this study, due to a desire to explore rural residents' daily lives. To engage in ethnographic research is to toggle between "what culture is in general . . . while attempting to portray specific aspects of the culture of some human group in particular" (Wolcott, 2001, p. 52-53). In other words, there may be common cultural practices, however through spending quality time, observing, and talking with residents one can gain specific knowledge of the cultural context. I feel this was the appropriate approach for this specific study, I do not believe I would have been able to gain the same depth of knowledge through a survey method, or by visiting Valhalla for short periods of time. Like I mentioned earlier, my initial thoughts of

Valhalla were that the town was run-down, and had very little to offer. Without this approach, I believe my final results would have presented a completely different story.

As a scholar I have a long way to grow, however I do believe my three-month period of time in Valhalla, observing participants and conducting interviews, I was able to focus on specific leisure activities within their lives. If I were to do this study again, I believe I would use both participant observations and interviews again, however this time I would have experience with both of these methods making them more efficient and effective. I feel my observations and interview questions were much smoother and more straightforward near the end of the three-months, versus the beginning. Overall, my three-month period of time in Valhalla was a very small amount of time to gather information, when compared to traditional ethnographic studies (Wolcott, 2008), but I believe I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the role leisure plays within Valhalla residents' lives.

Observations and Semi-Structured Interviews

From the beginning of this study both participant observations and semi-structured interviews were the main focus for data generation. The observations concentrated on gaining a first-hand idea of Valhalla's everyday leisure activities (Huges & Sharrock, 2007), and the semi-structured interviews focused on taking those observations to a deeper level (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Although, I added a twist to the semi-structured interviews, and incorporated participant photographs. The photographs were meant to generate discussion within the interviews, through participant's comments and memories (Banks, 2001), rather than the typical question and answer responses found in interviews.

This study demonstrated that the combination of the three was successful. I performed observations for approximately a month prior to beginning the interviews, which allowed me to gain a basic understanding of the Valhalla lifestyle. The interviews were a success, however a number of participants felt a lot of pressure when it came to the photographs. I was wanting participants to take simple photographs of what they enjoyed doing, although many felt their photographs were not good enough, or were not sure what to photograph. They felt as if a photograph of a television, tavern, or church seemed too simple. I believe the photographs were a great addition to the interviews, but with them causing so much stress for some participants I might try a different angle in the future. The main idea of adding photographs to interviews is to have participants think about their favorite leisure activities prior to the interview; therefore in the future, I might try having the participants make a list of their favorite leisure activities to bring with them to the interview. This would make them think about their activities prior to the interview, but remove the pressure of taking photographs. Overall, after the interviews were completed, all participants mentioned they put way more pressure on themselves than needed, when it came to the photographs.

What I would do Differently

If I were to do this study again there are a few changes that I would make. First off, I might not use photo-elicitation within my interviews. I liked the photographs I received, however it placed a large amount of stress on my participants. Participants did not want to take photographs of mundane activities (e.g. watching television, picture of pets, or computer screens), when in reality that is what I wanted. I did like the fact that they had to think about their leisure activities prior to the interview, therefore if I did this

again I may ask the participants to make a list of their favorite leisure activities versus taking photographs. Personal experience was another thing that I would like to change, which I feel I have now done. Prior to this study, I personally had not had much experience doing interviews or participant observations. I would have liked more experience in what to ask during interviews, and what to look for in observations. I currently feel more confident now than I did when I started, however I could always more practice. I spent a total of three months there, which gave me a general understanding of Valhalla, however there is still so much more to learn. If I were to go back, I could dig deeper into specific individuals and activities, observe leisure activities in different seasons, as well as administer a survey to potentially gain perspectives of residents who I did not observe. Overall, I enjoyed my time in Valhalla and I believe I gained a general understanding of the purpose of leisure activities within Valhalla, however like anything in life, there are always changes that can be made.

Implications for Future Research

This study focused on the role leisure activities play within a rural community, and dealing with change. This study focused on the Valhalla's social and economic decline, and determined how leisure activities were incorporated into its residents' lives. This knowledge can be used as insight for future research, however what works or does not work for Valhalla may not be transferrable to another rural community. Every community has its own unique characteristics, and has access to different amenities.

Rural Areas

Rural areas all have their own unique lifestyle along with their own challenges, but by living in Valhalla I am able to speak about their lifestyles, and challenges. I was

able to capture what it was like to be a newcomer, and a member of the community during my stay. I easily saw how a newcomer might not feel welcomed. When I went to a social institution (i.e. church or Lion's Club), I was immediately welcomed with open arms. Everyone there wanted to know who I was, what I was doing, and whether I was going to keep coming back, in fact I still talk to a few residents I met through church, six months after I left. On the complete opposite side, while walking down the street, going to the library, or tavern, nobody was forth coming in communications, but there were constant stares and whispers of residents trying to figure out who I was. Rural communities tend to be very homogeneous, and because they do not have many random visitors, newcomers might have a hard time connecting. I would recommend future research look into newcomers' perceptions of a rural community, and the community's perceptions of newcomers. Rural communities might get used to seeing the same faces everyday, however for the community to survive, it not only needs newcomers, it also needs newcomers who invest in the community.

Rural communities are also unique when it comes to the distance they are from an urban center. Some rural communities are within 10 miles from an urban center, and some may be within 30 miles. Valhalla's closest neighboring community is roughly 11 miles away, therefore if the same study were to focus on a rural community that was 30 miles away from an urban center, would the results be different? Valhalla residents were eager to help others with rides and supplies, but would they be as eager if they had to travel farther? Would they have easy access to Internet, allowing them to shop online and get food and clothing delivered to their front door? I would recommend studying, and comparing rural communities that are near and far from urban centers. Along with

comparing rural communities from different portions of the United States, such as comparing a rural community in the south that is roughly 11 miles away from an urban center, to Valhalla. By comparing different rural communities in different areas, we can acquire the knowledge base that is needed to fully understand the challenges rural communities face.

Rural Leisure

Rural Leisure is a topic that has a variety of angles that can be studied, initially I would recommend taking a more in-depth look at residents' leisure activities outside of their community. By studying these leisure activities the researcher should gain an understanding of what residents are interested in, and what the community could focus on, that would be beneficial to bring into the community.

Rural communities have been suffering from out-migration for several decades (Middleton, 2000), but with K-12 programs no longer within many rural communities, including Valhalla, children are taught at a young age that their home community cannot provide for them. Therefore, when they get older it is only natural for them to migrate elsewhere. Since leisure activities contribute to the creation of close knit communities, and local community pride (Tonts & Atherley, 2005), Valhalla and other rural communities need to create more leisure programs for the youth to build their shared emotional connection. Therefore, I plan on studying what communal leisure opportunities rural communities offer the youth, and whether the youth participate, to determine where the gaps lie in creating a sense of community within the youth.

Finally, with the lack of urban amenities, and employment in rural communities, many residents commute to work. Commuting takes up a lot of time, and allows for

friendships and relationships to build outside of their home community, ultimately taking residents' interests and time away from their hometown. Generally, there have been studies on how far individuals commute to work, and what times they leave and return from work, but I would recommend studying rural commuters, along with their leisure activities. Are individuals coming home between their commute and leisure activity? Are their leisure activities typically closer to their work or home? If their choice of leisure activity were offered at a time they were available within their home community, would they participate?

Sense of Community

Sense of community was a concept that worked well within this study, to gain a general understanding of leisure and the community. In the future I would suggest going more in depth into how leisure helps residents deal with rural tragedy. For example, digging deeper into a specific topics such as transportation or factory closures. By doing that the researcher may gain a better understanding of how that aspect of life really changes the atmosphere, and resident's perceptions of life. I would also recommend looking further into each community organization, and discovering why residents join. Throughout this study it was observed that some individuals joined a specific organization (i.e. Lion's Club or church) out of obligation to friends or family, or because they wanted to be a part of the organization. It would be interesting to see if the reasoning to join changes one's sense of community within that organization. This could potentially be done through the use of the Sense of Community Survey, allowing for a larger number of responses, and gaining a general understanding of the impact a specific topic, or a specific organization has on one's sense of community.

Parting Thoughts

Overall, this study was a great experience, and much knowledge has been gained. I really enjoyed my time in Valhalla, learning their lifestyle, and making new friends. For the most part, Valhalla is a very welcoming community that is interested in building lifelong friendships, versus weekly acquaintances, which was the hidden key to what holds Valhalla together.

Although, sometimes it is hard to see past the exterior of the rural community, due to the unrealistic image the media and books have painted in our minds. Future scholars, including myself need to take rural communities out from the back seat, when it comes to leisure research. There is no question rural communities are suffering, but how they use leisure to increase their perceptions of life. For example, this study observed residents helping each other in their leisure time, through volunteering, cooking for each other, or picking up items at the store for one another. As Olivia mentioned, “it’s all about the people, not our buildings, but the Valhalla people” (Interview, 3/25/2015), it really is about what is on the inside that counts. The people in Valhalla have inspired me to continue to look at life through the people, and not through the services and resources one has access to.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Welcome, thanks for agreeing to participate in this study!

1. Briefing
 - Purpose of the Study
 - Voluntary Participation
 - Confidentiality
 - Arbitrary names will be given
 - Identifiers in photographs will be blurred
 - Potential Risks and Benefits
 - Personal
 - Societal
 - Consent to audio record
 - Audio recordings will be kept for 1 year
 - Transcriptions will be kept for 5 years
2. Background
 - When were you born?
 - Where were you born?
 - Do you have family and friends here in Middletown?
 - Where do majority of your family live?
 - How long have you been in Middletown?
 - What brought you to Middletown?
 - Why do you choose to stay living here?
 - What would you say you do for a living?
 - Is this job located in Middletown?
 - Are there specific activities you regularly participate in that are not in Middletown?
 - How long would you say it takes you to get to and from work on average?
 - **When you think of Middletown**
 - **Do you feel like a member of the community?**
 - **Do you feel like people respect you?**
 - **Do you feel like you can receive your personal and social needs?**
 - **Do you feel like you have an emotional connection with them?**
3. Pictures
 - Can you describe this picture for me?
 - Where was this taken?
 - Can you describe the significance of this picture to your life in Middletown?
 - How often do you go here?
 - How long have you been going here?
 - Did someone introduce you to this or did you find it on your own?

- Are there people you do this with regularly?
- Is there somewhere else you could do this activity?
- Would you get the same result/satisfaction if you did this activity somewhere else?
- What effect would this have on you if it were to disappear?
- Do you tend to go here alone or with others?
- Do you feel this place/activity brings you closer to Middletown? How?
- If you wanted this place/activity to change how much do you believe your voice would be heard by the community and/or the town council?

Membership

- Belonging
- Acceptance

Influence

- Power
- Control
- Leadership
- Reputation
- Significance
- Weight
- Guidance
- Monopoly

Integration & Fulfillment of Needs

- Alliance
- Combination
- Mixture
- Achievement
- Contentment
- Perfection
- Completion

Shared Emotional Connection

- Shared rough times
- Shared good times
- Individual or community

4. Other

- Are you attached to this place? Why or Why not?
- Is there anything else I haven't asked that you want to tell me?

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Resident of Middletown, IN:

You are being asked to participate in a research study sponsored by Middle Tennessee State University. *This study is investigating the function of leisure activities for creating sense of community for residents of a small rural town. The results of this study may help Middletown and similar small towns that wish to maintain a sense of community amongst residents.*

By completing this survey, you provide consent to participate in this research project. The survey will take approximately five minutes to complete and all questions must be answered for the questionnaire to be useful. Once you are complete if you could **place the envelop with the survey inside, by your front door.** The principal investigator will be back **tomorrow to pick up.**

If you miss the principal investigator and still wish to participate please contact Jessica Finnerty, information is below.

Thank you in advance for participating in our study. Your participation will contribute to knowledge that will foster residents' connections to Middletown and to one another.

Jessica Finnerty, M.S.
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APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL



2/2/2015

Investigator(s): Jessica Finnerty, Dr. Rudy Dunlap

Department: Health & Human Performance

Investigator(s) Email Address: jf3q@mtmail.mtsu.edu; rudy.dunlap@mtsu.edu

Protocol Title: Leisure's Role in Strengthening Rural Communities

Protocol Number: #15-164

Dear Investigator(s),

Your study has been designated to be exempt. The exemption is pursuant to 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, or Observations.

We will contact you annually on the status of your project. If it is completed, we will close it out of our system. You do not need to complete a progress report and you will not need to complete a final report.

It is important to note that your study is approved for the life of the project and does not have an expiration date.

The following changes must be reported to the Office of Compliance before they are initiated:

- ☐ Adding new subject population
- ☐ Adding a new investigator
- ☐ Adding new procedures (e.g., new survey; new questions to your survey)
- ☐ A change in funding source
- ☐ Any change that makes the study no longer eligible for exemption.

The following changes do not need to be reported to the Office of Compliance:

- ☐ Editorial or administrative revisions to the consent or other study documents

☐ Increasing or decreasing the number of subjects from your proposed population

If you encounter any serious unanticipated problems to participants, or if you have any questions as you conduct your research, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Lauren K. Qualls, Graduate Assistant
Office of Compliance
615-494-8918

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION LETTER TO USE HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES

The Middletown Fall Creek Historical Society in Middletown, Indiana gives permission to Jessica Finnerty to use our resources to collect archival data for her dissertation.

John Smith
Treasurer

January 30, 2015