

Sending Off All Your Good Treasures: Rural Schools, Brain-Drain, and Community Survival in the Wake of Economic Collapse

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Based in qualitative interviews and ethnographic research conducted in the remote rural town of "Golden Valley," California, this paper explores the roles of schools and education in structuring rural community life in the wake of economic devastation caused by the timber industry collapse in the region. We look in depth at the ways in which education is either valued or rejected by community residents in their struggles to keep their children nearby and promote a viable future for their community. We critically investigate the ways in which brain drain is perpetuated within the community, and how moral categories constructed around perceptions of a family's moral worth influence the amount of encouragement or support children receive with regard to education and future prospects within or outside of the community. We find that in the new economic landscape, moral and class divisions within the community are magnified and reproduced through the local school system, with results that may consign some young adults to a life outside of the community, and others to chronic economic insecurity.

Golden Valley,¹ California, a small, remote community in the northern forested region of the state, was once a bustling logging town with an economy tied heavily to the timber industry. Generations of its men needed little formal education to make a respectable living there, often learning skills from their own fathers as teenagers, and transitioning to full time work in the forest sector rather than finishing high school. Women frequently married young, and tended homesteads and children rather than working for pay, relying on their husbands' incomes to support the families. Things changed permanently in 1990 with the spotted owl ruling,² which banned timber harvesting in the owl's habitat. The resulting closure of the local forests to logging set off a chain reaction that resulted in the closure of the local sawmills and the loss of jobs in most timber-related sectors of the economy. The last sawmill closed in 1996, taking 150 of the best remaining (men's) jobs with it. By 2003, when this research was conducted, the community was an economic black hole, with the few linger-

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¹All names, including those of people and places, have been changed to protect the confidentiality of participants.

²The 1990 listing of the northern spotted owl as threatened under the Endangered Species Act led to Federally-enforced reductions of timber harvesting through much of the Pacific Northwest, in order to preserve the owl's habitat. Federal timber harvests in the region dropped by 80 percent between 1989 and 1994 as a result (Daniels & Brehm, 2003).

ing jobs clustered in local government, the school system, child and elder care, and a small and shrinking service sector. Despite significant outmigration in the late 1990s, the community persisted, with a population tied deeply to the land and community. In the wake of such drastic labor market restructuring, Golden Valley residents struggled to make sense of their new economic and social landscape.

With regard to the community's future, education became a point of much ambivalence for Golden Valley residents, many of whom viewed it as a necessary evil, but their children's best hope for success. For still others, education represented a source of judgment and marginalization. As one of the few remaining social institutions in the diminished community, the public school system took on ever increasing importance. The school district was one of the community's few remaining employers, yet also a barometer of its health and tangible evidence of its decline. Residents looked to its public schools as a source of community cohesion, but also recognized them as the main agents of "brain drain," the phenomenon by which the most talented young individuals are funneled out of rural communities in search of healthier labor markets and greater opportunities elsewhere (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Gibbs, 2005). How an individual or family conceived of education and its importance was influenced by several factors, including their own levels of education, current employment status, attachment to the place and its people, and moral standing within the community.

For a rural town in troubled times, education and local schools can become battlegrounds upon which the fate of the community rests, ultimately playing crucial roles in the transition to a post-industrial local economy. This paper

explores the sometimes conflicting positions of schools and education in structuring rural community life in the wake of economic collapse. We look in depth at the ways in which the local school system and the pursuit of higher education are either valued or dismissed by community residents in their struggles to keep their children nearby and promote a viable future for their community. We critically investigate the ways in which brain drain is perpetuated within the community, and how moral categories constructed around perceptions of a family's moral worth influence the amount of encouragement or support children receive with regard to education and future prospects within or outside of the community. We find that in the new economic landscape, moral and class divisions within the community are magnified and reproduced through the local school system, with results that may consign some young adults to a life outside of the community, and others to chronic economic insecurity.

Background: Social and Economic Forces Contributing to the Rural Brain Drain

Rural America has experienced significant changes in population over the past century (Johnson, 2006). Outmigration of rural populations to urban areas followed the loss of agricultural and extractive industry jobs. In 1900, 60 percent of the United States population lived in rural areas, compared to 25 percent in 1990 (Mills, 1995) and 17 percent in 2009 (Gallardo, 2010). Outmigration has been the consistent trend over time, despite a short "rural rebound" in the 1970s (Johnson, 2006). Rural areas continue to experience slower growth than the rest of the U.S., 2.9 percent growth in rural counties versus 9.1 percent in the U.S. between 2000 and 2009 (Gallardo, 2010). Much of this trend is due to the loss of young adults; between 2000 and 2009, rural counties lost individuals under the age of 45 at a higher rate than nonrural counties (Gallardo, 2010).

Rural young adults, compared to nonrural, are more likely to migrate away from their home communities (Gibbs, 1998). This is especially true for rural young adults with educated parents, high academic achievement, and high educational aspirations (Roscigno & Crowley, 2001). As Carr and Kefalas (2009) note, "Small towns are especially good at recognizing, nurturing, and launching talented individuals" (p. 51). Unlike urban communities, rural communities must adjust to the consistent outmigration of their most talented young adults (Lichter, McLaughlin, & Cornwell, 1995), many of whom have skills and professions the communities need badly (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). According to Artz (2003), "Absent regional effects, metropolitan areas have gained college-educated workers at the expense of nonmetropolitan and rural areas" (p. 13). According to estimates from the 1991 NLSY study,

college graduates make up 16 percent of rural residents who stay in their communities, compared to 43 percent of those who leave. People with a high school diploma or less make up nearly two-thirds of adults who stay in their rural communities (Gibbs, 1998).

Rural America, Morris and Western (1999) argue, has been particularly hard hit by the shift in the United States economic structure from agriculture and a natural resource-based economy to an industrial economy, and later to economic domination by service sector industries. The importance of the public school as an institution has increased for many rural communities as the economic health in the countryside has diminished (Lyson, 2005; Woodrum, 2004). Lyson (2005) argues that as rural communities lose other important social institutions, rural schools become "symbols of community autonomy, community viability, community integration, personal control, personal and community tradition, and personal and community identity" (p. 23). However, for those communities that lack sufficient labor market opportunities, local schools also become agents of brain drain, preparing children for out-migration to pursue higher education necessary for jobs elsewhere (Gibbs, 1998). Whether an individual pursues higher education depends on several factors however, including the local labor market, social class, gender, and often the encouragement or discouragement received from both parents and teachers. The following discussion delves into the forces behind the rural brain drain.

Who Stays and Who Leaves? Factors Related to Educational Attainment and Outmigration of Young Adults

Despite the increasing importance of educational attainment in both rural and urban labor markets, not all students are equally likely to pursue higher degrees. It is well established that youth from families with higher socioeconomic statuses are significantly more likely to go to college, even when they perform poorly in high school (Gerard & Haycock, 2006). As with urban youth, research shows that family financial resources are related to educational expectations and attainment in rural communities (Jencks et al., 1979; Sewell & Hauser, 1975). Rural scholars argue that financial resources and class status are important in influencing parents' cultural outlooks toward education, as well as whether they consider the expense of higher education to be within the realm of possibility for their children (Corbett, 2007, 2009; Woodrum, 2004). Parents who believe their children should pursue higher education may influence children's expectations and achievement through encouragement, as well as through involvement in their children's school and educational activities (Fan & Chen, 2001; Keith et al., 1998; Lareau, 2003; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992).

There is some evidence to suggest that noneconomic factors may also influence how socioeconomic status operates for some rural youth, perhaps because of the presence of social capital factors (McGrath, Swisher, Elder, & Conger, 2001; Wilson, Peterson, & Wilson, 1993). Research suggests that some low-income rural families are more able to compensate for a lack of economic resources by utilizing social capital within their communities to propel their children into education (Elder & Conger, 2000; Hofferth & Iceland, 1998; McGrath et al., 2001). Social capital plays a complicated role in rural communities, however. Previous rural researchers have found that the amount of social capital available to rural residents is frequently dependent on other forms of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), including cultural and human capital (Duncan, 1999; Fitchen, 1991; Nelson & Smith, 1999), as well as “moral capital” based on a family’s perceived moral standing in the community (Sherman, 2009). This suggests that it is important to look at both economic and social factors in order to fully understand why some rural young adults leave to pursue education and some stay behind.

Equally important in understanding the educational paths taken by rural young adults is the influence of adults in mentoring roles such as teachers. School administrators and teachers frequently provide strong influences in the form of encouragement and attention for those children who are perceived as having potential to succeed in their educational careers. Carr and Kefalas (2009) observe of the rural young adults who tend to pursue higher education, “Their families, teachers, neighbors, and coaches have raised them with a sense of manifest destiny about how their lives will unfold” (p. 29). They argue that often the best and brightest students are vetted by “teachers, parents, and other influential adults,” who concentrate extra attention and resources on the most talented and worthy students, and help “set them on the leaving path” (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, p. 33). Although they acknowledge that social class and family standing play a role in deciding who gets this support, they maintain that “a talented kid not from the best part of town could be groomed as an Achiever” as long as the community recognized the child’s moral fortitude and the family’s deservingness (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, p. 33).

How a child comes to be recognized by teachers and the larger community as one who “deserves” an education is often understudied in rural contexts, however. Researchers frequently pay close attention to the roles of parents’ cultural norms, educational attainment, and economic resources in influencing children’s educational outlooks (Budge, 2006; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Woodrum, 2004), without sufficiently examining the ways in which educators themselves construct and perpetuate community-level judgments regarding which children are destined to stay or go. For example, in his analysis of the brain drain in a coastal fishing village, Corbett (2007) repeatedly makes

the assumption that regardless of social standing, students “received the same education and mobility messages in school” (p. 211). While he acknowledges that “educators distinguished between ‘work-focused’ families and ‘education-focused’ families” (Corbett, 2007, p. 217), he doesn’t suggest that this distinction leads to differential treatment in school. He also portrays the family and individual as the loci where this identity is constructed, and gender and financial resources as the main factors that influence families’ orientations towards education. Yet, research in education has long recognized that teachers’ and school administrators’ preconceived notions about children’s backgrounds and their likely educational trajectories can influence the degree to which their academic achievement is supported or undermined in school (Becker, 1963; Gorski, 2005; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).³ Although a family’s income may significantly shape these preconceptions, they also can be constructed around noneconomic factors such as race and moral fortitude that may have little to do with parents’ actual attitudes toward education or children’s levels of talent or motivation (Ferguson, 2003; Gorski, 2005; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2009).

It is important to examine the processes by which rural children come to be seen as future stayers or leavers, and the ways in which individual and family attributes interact with community-level social constructions to influence educational trajectories. While family social class and economic resources are clearly important in this process (Budge, 2006; Corbett, 2007, 2009; Fitchen, 1991; Woodrum, 2004), in the rural setting, other noneconomic factors often also come into play, particularly when economic distinctions are limited within a community. Scholars have noted the divisive impacts of noneconomic symbolic social boundaries in cohesive communities (Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont & Fournier, 1992), which often “become more important during periods of rapid social change” (Stein, 2001, p. 8) like the economic collapse experienced by Golden Valley. Prior work by Sherman (Sherman, 2006, 2009) explored the moral landscape of Golden Valley and illustrated the process by which those families with weak labor market ties and/or histories of public aid receipt, drug use, or alcoholism were systematically judged and excluded from the community’s few remaining resources and opportunities.

This paper builds on the previous work to look in more depth at how these moral divides impact the children of families with both high and low levels of “moral capital” (Sherman, 2006, 2009). It explores the implications of these moral standards for the educational, geographical, and career trajectories of children brought up in Golden Valley

³See Gorski (2005) for a discussion of the common acceptance amongst educators of viewpoints like Ruby Payne’s (2003), which “reinforce the image of people in poverty as morally deficient” (Gorski, 2005, p. 10) and as failing to properly value education.

in the post-spotted owl environment. We find that both a family's social class standing and their moral status impact the ways in which their children are viewed and treated in school, their stances towards the schools themselves, and ultimately the hopes and expectations that parents hold for their children's future education and career paths. We argue that in a rural community like Golden Valley locally-constructed perceptions and understandings of moral worth play important roles in influencing a child's school experiences and future educational trajectory. In this process, existing social inequalities are reinforced and exacerbated, privileging some children over others based on the perceived behaviors and moral values of their families, rather than on their own abilities, interests, or aspirations.

Field Site and Methodology

The research, conducted by Sherman from 2003-2004, took place in a forested mountain region of Northern California, in the community we call Golden Valley. Golden Valley had suffered significantly in the years since the spotted owl ruling, and by 2000 had a poverty rate of nearly 25 percent and an unemployment rate of 21 percent (U.S. Bureau Census, 2000). The 1996 sawmill closure left a large sector of the population with a choice between leaving the area in order to find work or staying put with little prospect for employment, particularly anything that paid comparably to the logging and sawmill jobs that were lost. Besides the increase in unemployment, there was also a significant shift in the demographic makeup of the labor force at this time, as men fell out of the workforce and women increasingly entered the paid labor force. Men's labor force participation dropped from nearly 60 percent in 1990 to less than 50 percent in 2000, and their unemployment rate rose from 10 percent to 25 percent. Women's workforce participation, on the other hand, rose from 36 to 41 percent over the decade, although their unemployment rate correspondingly rose from 11 to 15 percent (U.S. Census, 1990, 2000). There was also a large out-migration during the 1990s, and although many people later returned, the population had not recovered fully. In the early 2000s the community experienced some in-migration by both middle-class and poor families, yet Golden Valley remained a very isolated, insular community with little ethnic or class diversity (85 percent white according to the 2000 Census).

Sherman conducted the research while living full-time in the field site, completing 55 tape-recorded, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with native and longtime members of the community, as well as a year of ethnographic fieldwork done in Golden Valley and the surrounding smaller communities. About equal numbers of men and women (25 women and 30 men) were interviewed, singly and in couples, depending on their preferences. The participants

ranged in age from 23 to 60 years old, and the average age of the sample was about 39. Nearly 78 percent of the interview participants were married, remarried, or cohabitating, and the remaining 22 percent were single (including those who were widowed or divorced without remarriage). Most were white (92 percent) or Native American (8 percent), and most (88 percent) had children. About 30 percent were not in the workforce, although this does not include a number of participants whose jobs were seasonal or unstable, but who were employed at the time of the interview. With only a few exceptions, most participants had low incomes that placed them below or close to the poverty line, which reflected the class makeup of the community itself. Two-thirds of Golden Valley households had annual incomes under \$30,000 at the time (U.S. Bureau Census, 2000).

Interview questions were focused around several themes, including life histories, family histories, job and labor market experiences, and current marital and family situations and concerns. The original participants were recruited through contacts in the community, including several people who worked in organizations that focused on job creation and retraining, and snowball sampling was used to find subsequent interviewees. Interviews were transcribed and coded for themes that emerged through analysis. Although there were specific questions that guided the research, the interviews were open enough to allow participants to take them in their own desired directions and to provide them the space to narrate and interpret their life stories for themselves (Gluck & Patai, 1991). There was also completely unstructured time at the end of the interview for them to bring up anything else that they felt was important and that should be known about themselves or their community.

The approach towards field research was heavily influenced by Burawoy's "extended case method," which "applies reflexive science to ethnography in order to extract the general from the unique, to move from the 'micro' to the 'macro'" (Burawoy, 1998, p. 5). It positions the researcher not as detached observer, but rather as participant who maintains a dialogue with the subjects themselves, filtering that dialogue through an understanding of the macro level forces at play, simultaneously sustaining a constantly evolving dialogue with the theoretical ideas through which experiences are being interpreted. Thus, although much of the research was based on more formal interviews, Sherman also participated in the community as part of it, learning continuously from its inhabitants, and modifying her understandings of their beliefs and experiences through constant interaction and discussion with them. Not only were their reactions to her interpretations helpful for gauging the accuracy of her understanding, but their attempts to influence and color her observations spoke volumes about their concerns, boundaries, and fears.

The combination of the complementary methodologies allowed for learning about Golden Valley in ways that neither could have facilitated on its own. The interviews were an opportunity for going into great depth with individuals, and broaching subjects that they might not have been willing to discuss in more informal and less controlled settings. They gave the subjects the opportunity to be consciously self-reflective and assign their own meanings to the experiences they discussed (Anderson & Jack, 1991). On the other hand, the ethnographic methods were vital to learning about people who were less comfortable with the formality of a tape-recorded interview (often those with lower social standing in the community), and were also extremely useful in discovering the inconsistencies between people's on-tape declarations and their daily lives, feelings, actions, and behaviors. Ethnographic informants included professional relationships, informal acquaintances with whom Sherman interacted frequently, closer friends, and sometimes even complete strangers who happened across her path. Most ethnographic subjects were aware of the research agenda. Although like most ethnographers, Sherman was in danger at times of blurring the lines between key informant and friend, it was often these informants/friends who provided the sounding boards against which to test understanding and measure the limits of comprehension.

For ethnographic data, the aim was to experience life in as many different settings and social circles as possible. Thus, Sherman regularly frequented social spaces such as the handful of local bars and restaurants, and attended the few social events that there were in Golden Valley, from the County Fair, to the rare adult dances, to community meetings, and several festivals that occurred during her time there. She also volunteered consistently with several local businesses and charitable organizations. This volunteer work was an important component of the ethnography in a number of different ways. While doing small projects for local businesses, she learned much about important events and changes in the community's daily life, and was also able to witness such things as the process by which job seekers were filtered and chosen by those who had jobs to offer. While the interviews allowed for great depth with individuals, this ethnographic work helped to achieve a much broader understanding of social life in Golden Valley.

Results

The following sections explore the meaning and roles of Golden Valley's schools and education more generally for residents of the community as they navigated the new economic and social terrain following the forest industry collapse. First, we describe the importance of the local schools as symbols of community vitality and locations where community occurs. In this context, the decline of the school system is seen as a mirror of the decline in the

community itself. We then explore the implications of this symbolic tie, particularly with regard to the reinforcement of moral boundaries and scapegoating of those community members perceived as lacking moral standing. The following section looks at how these moral divides impact the educational trajectories of the community's youth, and contrasts the experiences of families with higher and lower amounts of "moral capital." While a family's income and class status influence children's educational trajectories, we find that their moral status, as determined by the community's perceptions of their behaviors and attitudes, also heavily influence the ways in which children are treated in the local schools and their likelihood of pursuing higher education and leaving the community. This section concludes by exploring the community's ambivalence around education in the post-spotted owl economic climate, and discusses its implications for the next generation of adults.

Schools, Community, and Moral Decline

In Golden Valley, there has long been an ambivalence concerning education, as historically many of the community's men didn't finish high school before going to work in the forests and sawmills.⁴ However, the town's elementary school and high school have also played an important role in the community, often being the site within which social events took place or community ties were formed and perpetuated. Residents frequently cited the importance of school dances, science fairs, movies, and sports matches as opportunities for the reinforcement of social ties and strengthening of community identity. For many the day-to-day interactions between students and teachers were also part of the process of sustaining the community. Grace Prader, a 45-year-old married mother whose mother had been a schoolteacher in Golden Valley, described the importance of the local teachers as keepers of the community's social history:

I think it's the continuity I think I enjoy the most. And my mom told me that, quite often she would start to teach grandkids. Quite often little Jesse Jones would sit where daddy used to sit. And it was on purpose. It was just, she'd look up and she'd be like, John's here. Oh, no, no, it's Jesse. But she had lots of kids who sat and you could look out there and go, that's John's kid, that's Mike's kid.

Given that the two public schools were such an important part of community life, it was perhaps unsurprising that many participants described the devastating effects of the economic collapse in terms of the schools' struggles.

⁴For a more in-depth discussion of the gendered nature of rural education and its impacts on brain drain in resource-based communities, see Corbett (2007).

For many Golden Valley residents, the clearest signs of community decline were issues such as falling school enrollments, increased free lunch eligibility, and lowered parental involvement in school events and activities. The school system appeared to be a personification of the community itself for many, and an embodiment of its successes and failures. Thus even as it showed signs of the community's distress, it continued to be seen as a pivot point around which community was constituted, and often the greatest resource for those in need. Keith Bartlett, a 31 year-old sporadically employed logger whose wife worked in the grade school, explained the importance of the local schools to him: "In a small community like this, I think that people in the school, teachers, coaches, they understand and they see, and understand, you know, certain people's situations, and they're good at making it more comfortable."

Despite their importance to the community, many residents believed that Golden Valley's schools had been severely damaged by out-migration of working adults and families following the economic collapse. Although a number of these individuals and families had later returned, many did not. There had been only limited in-migration since the mill closure, and the population had not fully recovered. One of the clearest signs of community loss for many was falling enrollments in its two schools. A surprising number of respondents seemed to know the exact enrollments of the town's grade school and high school, and to connect these numbers back to population loss due to out-migration following the forest industry decline. For example, Susan Elders, a 50-year-old homemaker whose children were grown, explained:

It was those with the younger children that had to leave [Golden Valley]. And so then the schools lost *so* much. When my eldest boy started high school here we had 240 kids in the high school. When my youngest boy graduated we had 140 kids. In a--what would that be?--three year span. We went from 240 to 140, and I think the school is looking at 132, I believe, this year. So it's just gone down. And then the grade school has normally been 400 and above, I believe they're down to 270.

Meanwhile, as surrounding communities also lost enrollment, several school systems had consolidated with Golden Valley, which now included children from smaller communities up to 45 minutes away. As 25-year-old gas station clerk Kenny Blake explained:

Since the mill closed, a lot of families have been forced to move because there just aren't jobs. And when families move, kids move with 'em. So your friend groups get smaller, and smaller, and smaller, until there's only ten kids your age in

the area, and you have to drive up to thirty miles away to see half of 'em, because Golden Valley encompasses almost half of Jefferson County in its school district.

This consolidation contributed to a sense of declining community, as children from distant communities were less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, and their parents were less likely to attend school events. For many Golden Valley residents, this combination of decreasing school enrollments and increasing geographic dispersion of the remaining students were clear signs of their community's loss and decline, and a great source of anxiety for the town's future.

Falling enrollment was not the only sign of community distress made visible through the school system, however. Many participants also discussed what they perceived to be the changing nature of the student and parent populations. Generally their concerns clustered around two areas: parental apathy and lack of involvement, and increasing poverty among the remaining families. Many argued that not only had the economic collapse resulted in the out-migration of hard-working families, but that a disproportionate number of the families who remained lacked work ethics and family values. They imagined these families to be mostly welfare cheats⁵ and other moral degenerates (Sherman, 2006, 2009). Fred Graham, a 50-year-old Forest Service employee, observed:

The local kids are leaving and we're getting a lot of welfare families that have replaced the younger generation in the school, so, uh, you got a lot more lower socioeconomic groups in here, which makes for a larger free lunch program, and problems in the schools.

The proportion of students receiving subsidized lunches at the time was close to 80 percent, another number that many residents had memorized as indicative of the increasing deterioration of their community.

To many people, increasing poverty was problematic not simply on its face, but because they also believed that the nonworking poor were morally flawed and unable or unwilling to contribute to the community sufficiently -and here again the local schools seemed to be among the main arenas in which "community" occurred. For a number of respondents, the immoral poor were distinguishable from —⁵Contrary to popular belief in the community, welfare use actually dropped in half between 1990 and 2000 (U.S. Census, 1990, 2000). This is likely due to a combination of factors including welfare reform in 1996 as well as growing stigma around welfare receipt (Sherman, 2006). The poverty rate in the community changed only slightly over the decade, dropping from 27% in 1990 to 24% in 2000 – likely due to out-migration of many of the poorest residents after the labor market collapse (U.S. Census, 1990, 2000; Wilson, 2002).

hard working families through their lack of involvement in school-related events and activities. Kate Burton, a 30-year-old hairdresser and married mother of two school-aged children, explained:

I would say that there's a less percentage helping [with the schools], and part of that would be because the mill closed and a lot of the families that really cared, that worked hard, they're gone. So the majority, I would say, of the ones that are here now, are lower economic situation. But still, to me that's no reason not to come to open house or whatever. So yeah, we lost a lot of our families that are really interested in participating and helping when the mill closed, and that's a bummer.

Kim Clark, a married, 32 year-old stay-at-home mother, expressed a similar concern:

I see a lot of kids in the school whose parents really don't involve themselves in their kids' lives. They just take it for granted that the school's gonna give that kid what they need.

For parents like Kim and Kate, who often, despite financial struggles of their own, saw themselves as among the morally upstanding members of Golden Valley's community, signs of decline were visible in every school event and in their children's ever emptier classrooms. Less clear for Golden Valley's remaining residents was what these concerns meant for the community's future and what role education might continue to play in it. While many parents believed that the local schools were crucial to preparing their children for economic success in adulthood, others developed hostile stances towards both the local schools and education more generally, which they viewed as a path toward increased out-migration and community decline. The following section explores ambivalence around the brain drain and its impacts, and the ways in which moral divides within the community influenced attitudes towards education and children's educational trajectories.

Moral Divides and Educational Trajectories

You're sending off all your good treasures, but truly there's no employment here. So you can't ask your son or daughter to stay, because there's nothing for them to do. You know, there's no jobs. I don't know what they would do if they did stay here. And I would think that a lot of them--the kids that are college bound, obviously--they all want to experience the city before they decide. I mean, this is a decision you have to make. -Cathy Graham, teacher at Golden Valley Elementary School

Education as necessary evil. A number of Golden Valley residents, particularly those who were still tied to what remained of its labor market, recognized the brain drain phenomenon as a necessary evil. While they frequently wished things could be different, many accepted with some resignation that investing in higher education and leaving the community was now the only path to economic success for young adults. Many adults regretfully acknowledged that there were simply no economic opportunities for the next generation. When asked if he had encouraged his children to leave Golden Valley after high school, Eric McCloud, a 48 year-old public employee and father of two, replied:

Yeah, 'cause there's nothing here for them. For them to stay here there was nothing they could do. They could box groceries.

Susan Elders similarly explained with regard to her grown children who had left Golden Valley:

They love their ties back here, they love to come back, just the quiet, serenity of coming back to their home. But they know there's no jobs here.

Several parents were quite emphatic with regard to their children leaving, fearing the worst if they stayed. Jeanie Mayer, a 45-year-old single mother of two teenagers insisted:

I want them out of here the weekend they graduate high school," following up by explaining, "Yeah, because there's just really nothing here for them right now.

Some parents saw this forced exodus as permanent, but a number believed that while their children might have to leave the valley to pursue higher education, it might also eventually allow them to return and make a living there—a phenomenon common in some scenic amenity-rich rural areas that researchers have coined the “brain gain” (McGranahan, Cromartie, & Wojan, 2010; Winchester, 2009). Allison Butters, a 30-year-old married, working mother of three young children who had gone back to school to get her two-year Associate in Arts (AA) degree, explained what she saw as the link between higher education and her children's future in Golden Valley:

Do you hope that your kids will stay here when they're done [with high school]?

No. I wouldn't care if there was one who actually came back and schooled themselves so that they could survive here, like I did. But if you're not a teacher and you don't own a business it's kind of hard to. I wouldn't want them to stay unless they schooled themselves so that they could survive here. I have one that wants to be a vet, they could survive here.

So you'd like to possibly see them come back?

Yeah. Well, I want them all to go to college.

April and Craig Layton were young, married, working parents who both only had high school diplomas, having eschewed college in favor of work and motherhood. They believed that the same choices would not be available to their children, however, and stressed the importance of higher education in facilitating their children's ability to survive in Golden Valley someday:

April: I want them to leave Golden Valley, and go to college, and then if after they do something with their lives that way, if they choose to come back and can make a living, then they're welcome to come back. I really want them to leave.

Craig: I want them to definitely go experience the world a little, and then see if they want to come back if it's possible.

For those who saw higher education as necessary, there was often a sense of acceptance of the brain drain phenomenon, frequently coexisting with the hope that it might be reversible or temporary, eventually contributing to future brain gain. Frequently adults who felt this way were currently working in Golden Valley themselves (although often underemployed and/or working for low wages), and had at some point pursued education and training that helped them to find employment in the post-spotted owl labor market. These individuals typically held the local schools in high regard as an important step on the path to future employment, and feared that without sufficient human capital, their children would end up poor or unemployed. They often demonized those adults who didn't encourage their children to leave Golden Valley in search of education and training, blaming them for many of the community's current problems. As discussed in the previous section, a number of people believed that parents who lacked jobs or sufficient income were morally flawed and uninterested in their children's well-being. Golden Valley's moral elite often portrayed these parents and their children as embodiments of the community's social ills.

Schoolteacher Dawn Bartlett summarized this point of view, complaining about what she saw as the biggest problem in her grade school student population:

These kids that'll look at you and be like, 'I don't need to work. I'm just gonna collect a check when I get out of school.' And they are dead serious. That is their goal, and that is what they'll do. And that is so sad, but those are the models that they have.

Derek Lord, a 38-year-old public employee whose children were both away at college, felt similarly about

teenagers brought up on welfare, who he believed were likely to follow in their parents' footsteps:

Now there's a percentage of kids in school that it wouldn't even dawn on 'em to go work for it, and [they think] somebody's gotta give that to me. And I see that a lot here. We have in some cases third and fourth generation of welfare families that that's almost their legacy. I mean, they wouldn't even think about college, or think about what their career is. You know, why would you? And you know, that scares me.

Jeff Taylor, a 33-year-old mechanic and married father of two, expressed a similar concern over teenagers who didn't plan to leave Golden Valley for an education, but connected the problem to drug use versus welfare receipt:

The ones we get to keep are the ones that you didn't want. You want 'em to leave. Seems like that's what happens a lot. And that happens with a lot of the drugs I think around here. You know, the ones that have no future, I mean just didn't get an education, or they're stuck here, they turn to drugs.

For those adults who positioned themselves within the moral hierarchy as hardworking and upstanding citizens, education was generally viewed as the only path left to future success and respectability. They tended to accept that jobs that required less than a high school education were gone forever and were frequently resigned to, if not exactly happy, about the necessity of having their children leave Golden Valley to pursue education and training elsewhere. Many, although not all of these adults, had some amount of education and training themselves, and most were still employed at least part time--although often facing underemployment and serious financial struggles. For them, portraying the schools and education as a positive force was part of a larger moral stance that separated them from the community's supposedly morally bankrupt poor. They thus led through example of how to acceptably survive in Golden Valley, while simultaneously encouraging the eventual out-migration of their own children.

Resisting education, brain drain, and moral judgment. For those families whom the moral elite scorned, however, things were often different. Many of those who faced the most serious labor market and financial struggles rejected both the local schools as the pillar of their community and the brain drain phenomenon as necessary or preferable to the alternative. While some residents were more critical of the brain drain problem but still supportive of the local schools, this group at the bottom of the community's moral hierarchy frequently expressed a sense of alienation from and hostility towards both the town's two schools and

education itself. This stance often seemed to develop as a response to a sense of being judged or neglected by the community and its leaders and educators.

Greg Smith was an unemployed man with a spotty work history who had completed only a single semester of community college, and whose family lived off of disability assistance (SSI) and little else besides occasional under the table construction jobs or illegal activities such as selling marijuana. He complained at length about both jobs in the school system and teachers' attention going to those families that were more respected than his. Although he was asked no direct questions about the schools or education, he returned repeatedly to these topics as the main source of his frustration with Golden Valley. He believed that since the economic collapse, teaching in Golden Valley schools had been taken over by unqualified people:

Around here the schools now have everybody teaching with, that are uncredentialed and unprofessionals, and I'm telling [my children], you know, they're being graded by people that don't know shit. And I says, that's because you know, that the people around here are getting hired that used to work in the woods, as teachers. Sawmills, you know?

He went on to complain about nepotism in hiring:

The schools are terrible, terrible, you know? Um, yeah, they hire friends to run our schools, to teach it, with no professionalism at all.

For Greg, anger towards the local schools also manifested as anger at credentialism more generally. He explained:

In all my life, a high school diploma wasn't something that was necessary to do anything but go on to the next school. I mean, a job resume, who wants to know if you've got a high school diploma? You know, and then everybody I've seen go to college, including myself, it didn't affect their life at all hardly.

Thus he expected that his teenage sons do "whatever's required" to get through high school, but nothing more. For Greg, this rejection of higher education was also a renunciation of the brain drain itself. Unlike the parents who put their faith in education, he rejected the idea that a college degree would be the best path to future employment in the community. When asked if he thought his kids would stay in Golden Valley after high school, he replied, "I know they will. They might work all over, but this is home."

A number of Golden Valley's struggling families felt similarly that the local schools were not treating their children fairly, nor preparing them adequately for a future in the community. Many felt frustration with the teachers

and administration, who they believed were ignoring or undervaluing their children. Eli Jordan, a disabled former logger who had been out of work for almost a decade and receiving SSI, complained bitterly about his children being neglected in school. After years of frustration, he and his wife Laura eventually pulled all four of their children out of the public schools and homeschooled them, despite Eli having only an eighth grade education, and Laura having just a GED.⁶ Eli explained their decision:

What's bad is the teachers. They take kids that are smart, you know, and they say, "Oh, look how smart this kid is, he'll do this." And then the ones that aren't so smart, throw 'em in the corner. And the ones that need the help don't get it, and the ones that don't need it get all of it. It's true. You go look in a classroom. I didn't believe it 'til I seen it. It's ridiculous. I wouldn't send them to that school ever again. Ever.

Due to their own lack of formal education, Eli and Laura had their older children tutor the younger ones when they could afford to buy the books for their studies at all. Like Greg Smith, they didn't see education playing an important role in their children's futures.

Laura: I don't plan anything on what they want to do. Whatever they want to do is fine. If they wanna hang out at home for a while until they figure it out, that's good. You always hope your kids do certain things, but...

Eli: Well, they can be a doctor or they can shovel snow, whatever makes 'em happy. It wouldn't make any difference.

For the community members who were believed to lack moral values, Golden Valley's schools were often perceived as a hostile entity that ignored them at best, or at worst judged them as unworthy of the community's investment. Their feelings of having been forsaken by the schools and community often permeated their interviews. This experience of judgment was often substantiated by more integrated community members. Rosemary Taylor, a 36 year-old married mother who worked part time in the grade school, observed that local teachers played a role in what she saw as cycles of dependence and other social problems, perpetuating them through labeling (Becker, 1963) and self-fulfilling prophecies (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). She commented on the children of morally questionable families:

It's like they don't have a chance. You know, they're labeled... [by] the teachers and stuff. I

⁶General Education Development, a high school equivalency certificate.

mean, a lot of 'em are you know, really smart. And I've heard people say, "Well, look at his dad. He's gonna wind up just like his dad." You know, that's not good.

For the parents of these children, it was unclear whether negative attitudes towards the schools and education were the cause or effect of their rejection of the brain drain phenomenon. It was also not always clear how much their own school experiences might have influenced their views towards education in general. The phenomenon of teachers and school administrators labeling children was not new to Golden Valley, and many older adults there had their own stories of having been pushed out of school before graduation, whether by parents who wanted them to go to work in the woods, or by school administrators who invested in some students more than others. The difference for many of these adults, however, was that prior to the 1990s a high school diploma wasn't a requirement for a decent job in Golden Valley, and prematurely terminating one's high school career often just meant more years of income and experience for a future logger or mill worker. With the loss of this industry, the trajectory for the undereducated changed forever.

Future prospects and the loss of a way of life. In the post-spotted owl labor market, a higher proportion of remaining jobs required an education, and employers had a surplus of labor from which to choose. Numerous adults in the study discussed having pursued adult education since the 1990s in order to continue to work in this new economic environment. Angelica Finch was a 38-year-old working mother whose husband was permanently out of work due to a disability. She had dropped out of high school at age 17 when she got pregnant and was pressured to leave by school administrators who feared, she joked, "that pregnancy was contagious." She struggled at first to find work and spent time receiving welfare and Food Stamps before she finally found a reliable job with the U.S. Forest Service that helped her support her family. Unfortunately, like many Forest Service workers, Angelica was laid off after the spotted owl ruling. After the economic collapse, she struggled unsuccessfully to secure living wage work there, but the only jobs she could find were low-paid and demeaning, causing her to become demoralized and sink into depression and drug and alcohol addictions. Eventually, she made the choice to pursue both recovery and her GED and AA degrees, while working part-time at low wage work. Years of commuting several hours to the nearest community college put enormous strains on her marriage and family, but eventually paid off in the form of a steady and meaningful job with Golden Valley Elementary school. Angelica commented:

The education paid off, but it took a long time....
[Without my education] I don't think we would've

made it.

Having experienced life on both sides of the moral divide, she wanted desperately for her oldest son to attend college, and expressed concern that despite his recent high school graduation, he'd shown no interest in it. Without a college degree, she feared he would also be constrained to a life of poverty and drug and alcohol addiction. She had learned the hard way that for those without sufficient human capital, Golden Valley's ravaged labor market had little to offer.

In Golden Valley, the ambivalence around education mirrors ambivalence around the changing nature of the economy and labor market there. As in many communities that have experienced deindustrialization, education has become increasingly necessary for finding work, particularly work that is secure and pays a living wage (Egan, 2005; Morris & Western, 1999). While the residents with more social, human, economic, and moral capital generally grudgingly adjusted to these changes, frequently those with fewer of these advantages were left behind, feeling increasingly isolated from the community's mainstream and frustrated by the choices left available to them. For those whose families historically had lacked education, the new importance of high school and college degrees often seemed to be an affront to a long held way of life. Some expressed feeling almost personally insulted by the labor market's devaluation of their skill sets, and reacted angrily towards increasing credentialism in Golden Valley's labor market. Local business owner Ted Dorsey, whose two children had moved away to pursue college, articulated this dilemma and frustration over the lack of jobs for those without higher education:

You know, some people will look at a kid that graduated from Golden Valley High School, married his high school sweetheart, and worked --let's say they worked in the mill or logged, and owned a small modest home and raised their family--and they think, wow, that guy is just a, you know, an unsophisticated bumpkin, uh, not real educated, not real intelligent, not really contributing anything to society. Well, I think to me that's the most noble thing somebody can do. And if that's--maybe he's a guy that likes to hunt and fish, and just raise his kids and love his family, and if he wanted to do it in Golden Valley, dammit, he ought to have the opportunity to do that.... Not that I would have wanted my kid to stay and work in the mill. I probably wouldn't have wanted him to--it's a tough life--but if that's what he wanted to do.... And there's a lot of people that aren't college material, you know. There's a lot of people that are never gonna be a rocket scientist.

As the community faced a future without its historical sources of men's employment, those without sufficient education were likely doomed to non-living wage jobs and chronic under- and unemployment. While those children, whose families took a hostile stance towards education may have been more likely to stay in Golden Valley as adults, they were also more likely to end up with life chances that were much lower than those of their own parents, let alone their more ambitious peers. As most Golden Valley residents reluctantly recognized, the days in which a man with no high school diploma could make a decent living in the woods and mills were gone forever. Thus, for those who rejected both the brain drain and education itself, who were also typically rejected by the community and its few remaining employers (Sherman, 2006, 2009), the future looked bleak.

Conclusion: Brain Drain, Moral Distinctions, and Community Survival

In rural communities like Golden Valley, education can be a source of tension and confusion. While the local schools frequently play a vital role in socializing and caring for children, they can also be the source of either inclusion or exclusion from the community's limited resources and social support. They are also an undeniable part of the process by which a community's best and brightest young adults are siphoned off and shipped away to places with more opportunities. Depending on individuals' or families' positions in the social hierarchy, their levels of education and training, and comfort with sending their children away, the educational system can be a source of pride and a sense of belonging, or a source of frustration, marginalization, and anger. This paper has illustrated the ways in which a family's social and moral status influenced their experiences with the school system, their resulting support or rejection of the brain drain, and the likely trajectories these stances created for their children.

For the bulk of the community's families, Golden Valley's public schools were viewed as an important social institution, one which held the promise of possible future success there, and which for many seemed to be a personification of the community itself. However, this community was not equally accepting of all of its members. While its most integrated and successful residents frequently extolled the virtues of the schools as important sources of social support and community involvement, its more marginalized residents often experienced the schools as reinforcers of social divisions that further excluded and disadvantaged those with fewer resources, poorer job prospects, extended histories of government assistance, or problems with drugs and alcohol. Thus, the schools were agents of division as well as cohesion, often bolstering invisible moral divides

between those perceived as hardworking versus undeserving poor.

Although their narratives suggested that this was not a new phenomenon, in the wake of the economic collapse, it had new consequences, and despite the connection between education and out-migration, human capital investment remained one of the only options that could help a young adult procure a stable, living wage job in the community. This represented a serious break from the past in which a high school degree was generally considered unnecessary for men who hoped to support themselves and their families through work in the timber industry, and married mothers rarely entered the workforce at all. Thus, under new structural conditions, the impacts of social marginalization were magnified, and social divisions would likely grow more intense over time. While those who left and returned were welcomed back with open arms and first pick of limited work opportunities, those who stayed behind were further marginalized, both in the community and in the labor market.

Previous research on education has noted the link between a family's social and economic background and children's educational experiences and outcomes (Budge, 2006; Corbett, 2007; Gerarld & Haycock, 2006; Lareau, 2003; Macleod, 2008; McGrath et al., 2001; Roscigno & Crowley, 2001; Woodrum, 2004). However, with regard to the brain drain, the roles of social divisions in deciding who becomes educated are often downplayed or overlooked (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Domina, 2006; Fitchen, 1991; Lichter et al., 1995; McGranahan et al., 2010). The roles of teacher expectations, moral discourses, and social boundaries (Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont & Fournier, 1992; Stein, 2001) have also been under-studied with regard to the rural brain drain. While there is little dispute that it is "the best and the brightest" who tend to leave rural communities, this and similar terms are often used uncritically, with the implication of an underlying meritocratic structure that simply allows motivated and talented individuals to flourish in rural schools and go on to pursue higher education and employment elsewhere. What is missing from much previous discussion of the brain drain is a critical examination of the ways in which the category of "best and brightest" tends to be constructed around moral and social schisms, which predestine many children for one trajectory or another before they even enroll in school.

We have highlighted some of the processes by which rural communities choose to invest or disinvest in children's educations, based on moral judgments and expectations of children from the most socially integrated families versus those from poor or troubled families who are often judged and blamed for the community's social problems. We demonstrate the importance of the community's perception

of a family's moral standing in influencing whether a child is encouraged by both schools and parents to pursue higher education and outmigration, or is undervalued and discouraged, and ultimately left behind with neither skills nor social support. Without a full understanding of the social dynamics that underlie families' experiences in rural schools and beyond, the brain drain cannot be fully comprehended or successfully addressed.

This paper has investigated some of the forces that lie behind the brain drain phenomenon in an economically troubled rural community. Rather than creating a perfect meritocracy that supported all children's talents, Golden Valley's schools and teachers often assumed the worst of children from the community's most challenged families, while constructing the "good treasures" from those families deemed as more morally worthy. In Golden Valley, the schools were agents, not only of the brain drain itself, but of firming and defending social boundaries between the morally upstanding and the morally degenerate poor. That "the ones you didn't want" were the ones most likely to remain in the community seemed to bolster anger and judgment against them by those residents who reluctantly sent their own children away.

This judgment of those who stay ultimately does little to improve future prospects for either group in Golden Valley and rural communities like it. Rather than actively pursuing economic opportunities for low-skilled jobs, those with more resources prefer to send their children away to invest in higher education, in the vague hopes that sentimental ties might someday lure them back to be rural teachers or public servants. While some do return, many more do not, and those who do come back seldom forget the sacrifices they make to be there. For those who return, the belief in the moral superiority of their choices helps them to justify the lowered incomes and economic struggles that life in the isolated, economically ravaged community generally entails (Sherman, 2006, 2009). This moral stance also fuels the battle over the meaning of education however, resulting in the perpetuation of social divides as the next generation of educated adults filters back home to scorn their peers who never left.

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