Exploring the Relationship between Discourses of Gender, Drug Use, and Rurality among Rural Young Women

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Abstract

This research investigates recreational drug use, a leisure practice that has been at the centre of debate in regard to what constitutes ‘respectable’ and ‘deviant’ leisure. Using a feminist poststructural perspective and positioning theory, this study investigates how rural young women make sense of recreational drug use practices in the context of constantly shifting ideas about what it means to be a ‘respectable’ drug user as well as a ‘successful’ young rural woman. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four young women (aged 18-30 years) living in the County of ‘Wildlark’, Ontario (population approximately 50,000). Findings showed that the young rural women drew on multiple and at times contradictory discourses of age, class, and gender when negotiating their subjectivity. Further, their identities as ‘successful’ young rural women were interwoven with neoliberal discourses of a normative life trajectory and mobility imperative. This research demonstrates that recreational drug use and the young rural women who use drugs can not be easily classified as ‘respectable’ or ‘deviant’ since our understanding of what constitutes recreational drug use is constantly shifting and impacted by who, what, when, where and how the drug use occurs.

Keywords: Gender, Recreational Drug Use, Rurality, Poststructuralism, Young Women
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Chapter One: Introduction

Although people engage in a diverse range of leisure activities, there has been a tendency for leisure research to focus primarily on leisure that is considered to be ‘respectable’ (Spracklen, 2013). As Franklin-Reible (2006) states, “leisure studies has held to a traditional understanding of leisure activities as inherently and unquestionably ‘good’… beneficial to humanity, essential to well-being…a means of providing the opportunity to find freedom, truth, and beauty” (p. 55). The association of leisure with the ‘social good’ dates back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the early history of leisure and its use as a tool for moral reform (Rojek, 1999). Indeed, activities that fall out of the range of moral acceptability – activities involving sexual experimentation, violence, alternative religious or spirituality, or drug use – are categorized as ‘deviant’ leisure – a term that essentially constructs these leisure practices as ‘illegitimate’ (Williams, 2009), something ‘other’ than leisure (Franklin-Reible, 2006), and devoid of value (Rojek, 1999). This acceptable/deviant binary of leisure is problematic for how it renders some practices invisible in leisure studies scholarship, even though these forms of leisure are pervasive in contemporary culture, immensely popular, and personally meaningful (Franklin-Reible, 2006; Rojek, 1999; Williams, 2009). It also closes down conversations about how such distinctions between ‘leisure’ and ‘deviance’ are constructed, and about the ways that our ideas of what constitutes ‘respectable’ leisure are ever-changing (Spracklen, 2013), and influenced by ways of thinking that are socially, historically, and even geographically situated.

In this research I investigate one practice that has long been at the centre of debate regarding what constitutes ‘legitimate’ leisure: recreational drug use. Recreational drug use is generally defined as the occasional and limited use of illegal drugs (cannabis, ecstasy, amphetamines, LSD, cocaine, etc.) in specific settings, and without severe consequences to the
user (Jarvinen, 2015; Measham et al., 2000; Parker, 2005). Throughout history, the morality of drug use has been constantly shifting and debated. For example, psychoactive drug use was conceptualized within 1960’s medical discourse as abnormal and connected to ailments such as blindness and sterility yet considered part of a glamorous and ‘high class’ lifestyle in the 1970’s-1980’s (Bright, Marsh, Smith, & Bishop, 2007). Since the 1990s, recreational drug use has become a more common leisure practice among young people (Demant, Ravn, & Thorsen; 2010; Parker et al., 2002). In fact, Parker et al. (2002) argue that recreational drug use, particularly the use of party drugs like cocaine and ecstasy have become ‘normalized,’ meaning that it is a common part of average young people’s leisure lives and no longer an activity exclusive to marginalized individuals or concentrated within particular subcultures.

Although normalized, drug use continues to occupy an “ambivalent social position” in contemporary society (Shiner & Winstock, 2015, p. 255). For example, we see popular music artists like Miley Cyrus and the Weeknd experience mainstream success while singing about their use of cocaine and MDMA. Recreational drug use is also fairly common among young people in Canada, as the 2004 Canadian Addiction Survey found that 69% of 20-24-year olds used one of the following eight substances in the past year: cocaine, speed, ecstasy, hallucinogens, heroin, cannabis, steroids and inhalants. However, the current push among governments to legalize cannabis – a drug banned in Canada in the 1930s out of concern that it turned people into ‘raving maniacs’ (Hathaway & Erickson, 2003) – has also revealed multiple perspectives regarding drug use participation, not all of which are favourable toward drug use. Shiner and Winstock (2015) make the point that while recreational drugs have become increasingly common and perhaps familiar, “their use is still widely thought to be harmful and
morally dubious, creating a series of challenges for those who engage in such behaviour” (p. 248).

However, not all recreational drug users negotiate this moral ambiguity in the same way. The construction of drug use as ‘respectable’ intersects with classed, gendered, racialized, and emplaced discourses that are constantly in flux. As Skeggs (2005) explains, “respectability contains judgments of class, race, gender, and sexuality and different groups have differential access to the mechanisms for generating, resisting and displaying respectability” and that ultimately it is “a property of middle-class individuals” (p. 2-3).” Drug use researchers Pereira and Carrington (2016) agree; they contend that social class, rather than the physical or psychological effects of particular substances, is a more significant determinant of whether a particular form of drug use is considered problematic. Whereas drug use is constructed as “a fun activity of middle class drug users,” it is represented as an irrational and irresponsible act for users from among the “unruly working class” (p. 383). Respectable drug use also has a time and a place; for example, we are more accepting of drug use when it is occurring in a club or party context than when it occurs in the workplace. It is important to consider how recreational drug use is discursively constructed because it has real-world implications for people, for example in terms of the treatment they might receive within the legal system and social spheres (Martin & Stenner, 2005). In this study I focus specifically on recreational drug use among rural young women, and how rural young women make sense of recreational drug use in the context of constantly shifting ideas about what it means to be a ‘respectable’ drug user as well as a ‘successful’ rural young woman.

I chose to study drug use among rural young women because there has been limited research conducted on drug use among this group (Smith, 2014; Gfroerer, Larson & Colliver,
2007). Research on drug use in rural communities has tended to focus on drug use among youth, typically of high school age (e.g., Kraack & Kenway, 2002). I argue that this research does not translate well to young women, because of the ways that drug use is constructed differently in relation to gendered notions of ‘growing up.’ Indeed, a central focus of this thesis is the influence of the discourse of the normative life trajectory – the belief that growing up successfully means engaging in a series of life activities (e.g., high school, university, stable employment, marriage, child-bearing) in a particular order, and by particular age-based milestones (Settersten & Ray, 2010). The young women in this study continually negotiated this discourse, along with multiple discourses of femininity, including traditional discourses that construct drug use as ‘risky’ behaviour for young women and ‘bad’ behaviour for women transitioning into adulthood and motherhood (Measham, Williams, & Aldridge, 2011), as well as neoliberal discourses of femininity that construct recreational drug use as a form of female empowerment and adventurous risk-taking (Romo, Marcos, Rodrigues, Cabrera, & Hernan, 2009). Thus, for these (and all) young women, engaging in drug use involves a careful negotiation of multiple and competing beliefs about what it means to be a ‘successful young woman.’

In this thesis I take the view that drug use as not only a leisure activity, but also a context for young women to perform a gendered identity, through challenging and reproducing traditional and non-traditional forms of femininity (Measham, 2002). This view of drug use aligns with poststructural understandings of identity performance. It is also an approach to researching drug use that opens up the possibility for different ways of understanding drug-using women than the dominant view, in which drug users are framed as socially marginalized individuals who have fallen victim to their drug use (Smith, 2014). This dominant view or ‘grand narrative’ was one I experienced firsthand in the town where I grew up. Although drug use was
common among young women who lived there, the stories that reached the paper tended to frame young women as having ‘fallen victim’ to drug use, even in cases where it was known that she was a regular drug user (Wildlark Guardian, 2012). In this research I aim to show that drug use practices, and the identities of drug using women are more fluid and diverse than this grand narrative suggests.

I also chose to study rural young women because I believe that the rural context introduces another layer of complexity to the negotiation of a respectable identity for drug-using young women. Whereas drug use is somewhat normalized in urban areas because of the large populations and perceived easy access to drugs in cities (Council on Drug Abuse, 2011), it is viewed more problematically in rural communities, likely because it disrupts the notion of the ‘rural idyll’ and reinforces discourses of rural instability and decline. The dominant discourse of rural drug use as an epidemic invading rural communities, and a major health risk (Linemann & Wall, 2013). For example, a recent CBC News (2016) story entitled “Drug abuse in rural communities: ‘It’s everywhere,’” offers a typical example of the way that rural drug use is portrayed. This story suggests that hard drugs are available in every community no matter how small, and that underneath the idyllic exterior of rural communities, drug use runs rampant. The discourse of a rural drug epidemic positions drug users in rural communities as immoral and operating outside the bounds of acceptability.

Linemann and Wall (2013) argue that the anxiety about drug use in rural communities is tied to the anxieties that are provoked in rural communities in the current moment of rural uncertainty and upheaval. Although rural communities have traditionally been imagined as ‘idyll’ – ideal places to live and raise children because of its connection to nature, perceived safety, and peacefulness (Leyshon, 2008), rural communities are experiencing rapid shifts in
social and economic structures due to globalization and technological development (Jackson, Tirone, Dovovan & Hood, 2007; Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006). As a result of this ‘rural restructuring,’ rural local labour markets have become unstable and unpredictable and rural communities are facing issues related to youth outmigration, declining employment rates, poor health, and high-risk behaviours among youth (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Oncescu, 2015). There has also been a decline in middle class residents and traditional economic activities such as agriculture, and these changes have put the culture of rural communities in jeopardy (Edwards & Matarrita-Cascante, 2011; Oncescu, 2015).

Rural restructuring has introduced new discourses of rurality that focus on economic decline and a need for young people to leave rural communities to find success. Indeed, another focus of this study is the discourse of the ‘mobility imperative,’ a discourse that frames rural communities as lacking the economic, educational and leisure opportunities needed for youth to transition into successful, and out-migration as the only successful path to adulthood for young adults in rural communities (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Farrugia, 2016). This discourse positions young adults who stay in rural communities as discursively ‘out of place.’ Thus, the decision to stay or leave their hometown is a defining issue for rural young adults that has social and emotional implications and impacts their identity and wellbeing (Esterman & Hedlund, 1995; Jackson et al., 2007).

However, in focusing on rural young women I also aim to show that ‘rural’ is not a singular concept or in a binary relationship with urban communities but that there are multiple constructions, ideas, and identities of ‘rural.’ The women involved in this research study interacted with multiple gendered rural identities associated with the spaces they occupied in rurality: family farms, small towns, and native reserves, for example. Edwards and Matarrita-
Cascante (2011) have argued that it is important for researchers to acknowledge that ‘rural’ is not a singular category, but that ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ are better understood as on a continuum encompassing symbolic urban and rural features. I argue that perhaps an even better way to think about rural is as a spectrum of identities, in which multiple dimensions are at play (e.g., historical, cultural, symbolic, material, economic, political). Thinking of rural identities as a spectrum allows researchers to open up and appreciate new ways of thinking about rural communities and identities and the ways they are constructed within discourse.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine how rural young women make sense of recreational drug use in the context of constantly shifting ideas about what it means to be a ‘respectable’ drug user as well as a ‘successful’ rural young woman. I utilized a feminist poststructuralist perspective to explore the following research questions: (1) Among rural young women, how are rural young female recreational drug users positioned? (2) How do young rural women position themselves in relation to drug use? (3) How do young rural women negotiate broader discourses about rurality, gender, and recreation when positioning young female recreational drug users? In this thesis I report on the data I collected using co-constructed interviews with four young women between the ages of 21-25 years old who self-identified as rural young women and lived in communities of between 5 000 and 7 000 residents. They were all young women who had stayed in their hometowns rather than leave to pursue opportunities elsewhere.

I used feminist poststructuralism to analyze how these women negotiated their subject position as young women ‘in place’ in rurality and how they made sense of drug use among rural young women. Feminist poststructuralism is a broad ontological approach and mindset that
considers the many voices and perspectives present in a particular context. Although poststructural research can use similar methods as interpretivist qualitative research approaches, it regards qualitative research and its participants differently (Martin & Stenner, 2004). Whereas interpretivism positions and reproduces individuals within certain discursive ‘truths,’ poststructuralists consider how discursive truths create limits and possibilities and how individuals position themselves within them (Aston, 2016). Poststructuralists trouble the idea that what participants say can be taken in a straightforward context; instead participant accounts are analyzed in relation to relevant discourses (Martin & Stenner, 2004). Rather than search for an overarching ‘truth’ or a ‘common experience’ in participant’s accounts, feminist poststructuralism encourages researchers to use contradictions in the data as a point of analysis (Raby, 2005).

I engaged in recruitment efforts that included contacting individuals within my personal network through social media, visiting rural townships, posting flyers in local establishments, and attending community events. In total, I recruited four rural young women. The challenge of recruiting participants for this study reflects, I believe, the limited discursive space for young rural women to negotiate a ‘respectable’ subjectivity as a young woman living in a rural community as well as a rural young woman drug user. However, the small number of participants does not discount the value of this study because the purpose of feminist poststructural research is not to uncover an overarching truth or grand narrative but instead to offer insight into how individuals negotiate their own values, beliefs and practices in relation to broader discourse (Aston, 2016). Therefore, the value in feminist poststructural research is in how it can present individuals’ experiences negotiating ever-changing discourses within a particular context. For this reason, the quantity of voices does not add trustworthiness to the
findings. Instead, the value of the findings is in how it demonstrates the diverse ways that individuals interact with discourse. Although I acknowledge that this study does not describe the totality of ways that rural young women negotiate subjectivity (nor can any study), it presents some important ways that young rural women opened up a discursive space and positive and ‘respectable’ subject positions for rural young women who use drugs, within discourses that position drug users and rural young women negatively.

**Organization of the Thesis**

I have organized my thesis in the following way. In the next chapter, I offer a lengthier description of feminist poststructuralism, the theoretical framework for this study. Following this I present a review of related literature, which includes an overview of the discourses of normative life trajectory and the mobility imperative, as well as a review of related research on the topics of rurality, gender/young womanhood, and drug use. In Chapter Four, I discuss the methods used to conduct this research study and I present my study findings in Chapter Five. In this chapter, I discuss how participants negotiated multiple discourses surrounding rural young adulthood and drug use when positioning themselves and rural young women. In Chapter Six, I discuss the media and cultural implications of shifting ideas about what it means to be a ‘respectable’ drug user as well as a ‘successful’ rural young woman. I argue that a more diverse conceptualization of rural communities and subsequently rural young women would better represent the lives of individuals living there.
Chapter Two: Feminist Poststructuralism

As discussed in Chapter One, the theoretical framework that informed this study is feminist poststructuralism. Poststructural theory originated as a reaction to structuralism, a tradition in which theorists subscribed to the idea that language was an objective and knowable structure that could be used to predict patterns (St. Pierre, 2000). Poststructural theory rejects the idea that language is transparent and knowable and instead focuses on understanding context-specific language use. Poststructuralism assumes that language does not reflect an already present social reality but rather it creates and constitutes our social reality (Weedon, 1987). Poststructuralists are concerned with language because it demonstrates how both actual and possible forms of social organization are constructed. Language often brings to light how the consequences of social and political organization are understood and implemented.

Poststructuralists draw attention and show how ‘normal’ does not just exist, but our ideas about normal are stabilized through discourse and are legitimized through social interactions and institutions.

Feminist poststructural frameworks recognize and attend to how the discourses that constitute normalcy are embedded in relations of power. However, unlike conceptualizations of power that equate power with domination, poststructural frameworks think of power as enacted everywhere (Foucault, 1978), and operating through individuals, interactions, institutions, and politics, etc. (Gannon & Davies, 2006). Foucault (1978), for example, views power as a network of relations between individuals and institutions that both reinforces and challenges dominant discourses. Foucault (1978) sees power as both constraining and liberating: it limits what we can do and allows us new ways of thinking about ourselves.
Foucault (1978) conceptualizes discourse as a productive force that reproduces and creates subject positions. As discussed by Mills (1997), a “discursive structure can be detected because of the systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context, and because of the effects of those modes of thinking and behaving (p.17).” For example, discourses of femininity and masculinity define parameters that individuals draw on when discursively constructing themselves as gendered subjects. Poststructural research understands experiences as having no inherent meaning; rather meaning is given to the experience through a range of discourses and the use of language (Weedon, 1987).

Poststructuralism emphasizes the ways that ‘social facts’ are produced through discourse and social interactions that are embedded in relations of power (Foucault, 1990). This includes even the ‘social fact’ of identity as a fixed, essential self. In poststructuralism, ‘identity’ is conceptualized in terms of ‘subject positions’ that are constituted and reconstituted in and through discourse (Meacham & Buendia, 1999). Poststructuralism is concerned with understanding the process of subjectification, or the ways that individuals come to occupy subject positions, and how factors such as language, discourse, and power impact the construction of an individual's ‘identity’ (Davis & Gannon, 2010). Discursive structures dictate how individuals perform their subjectivity in how they act, talk and what they wear (Mills, 1997). Poststructural research acknowledges how subjectivity and subject positions are constructed within broad discourses of race, age, gender, rurality, leisure, ethnicity, and so on. (Martin & Stenner, 2004). Judith Butler (1990) explains gender performance as a repetition of acts associated with dominant gender norms. Through performing acts related to discursive gender norms, individuals align themselves with masculine, feminine and queer subject
positions. The social construction of gender is particularly relevant for rural communities, where researchers like Smith (2014) have found that the gender performances available to women are particularly limited.

Subjects are constituted by multiple discourses at any one point in time. Poststructuralists draw on the concept of agency to understand how individuals comprehend their ability to shape how others view them (Raby & Pomerantz, 2013). Within poststructuralism, agency is understood as the critical reflectivity subjects enact in the discursive production of themselves (Davies, 1991). Poststructuralists understand agency as an individual’s capacity to shape how others view them. Agency is understood as never free from discursive structures but instead conceptualized as an individual’s capacity to recognize how they are constituted within relevant discourses and to resist, subvert and change the discourses in which they are being constituted within (Davies, 1991). As such, agency is the ability for subjects to recognize the multiple ways they are discursively positioned and shape how they are positioned within particular discursive frameworks. However, agency is always partial and impacted by socio-cultural forces that impact the production of self (Raby & Pomerantz, 2013). Furthermore, acts of resistance include performing a subjectivity in an opposing way to the normative social characteristics associated with that subjectivity. These acts of resistance are understood as an opportunity to reorganize and regroup subjectivities (Foucault, 1978). Because discursive structures shape how individuals think, communicate, and give meaning to the world, acts of resistance bring about new ways of thinking, and new subject positions (Raby, 2005).

The available subject positions for young women in rural communities are constructed through discourse, which are shaped by grand narratives and binaries. Grand narratives make overarching claims about the meaning associated with a particular experience or identity. These
overarching claims dictate how individuals act within the social world and what behavior is deemed as appropriate or deviant (Gannon & Davies, 2006). A common example of a grand narrative discussed within modernist research is the experience of being a ‘woman’ (Butler, 1990). This grand narrative makes overarching claims related to the experience of womanhood that is meant to apply to all women.

   Grand narratives are often structured by binaries, which encompass particular characteristics related to the performance of an identity. Binaries are defined as identity categories that shape how individuals see themselves in relation to the world (Gannon & Davies, 2006). These categories often deem what is normative and tend to exclude subjectivities that do not fulfill the characteristics of that binary (Gannon & Davies, 2006). For example, grand narratives surrounding rural young adulthood present two subjectivities, young adults who out-migrate and those who stay. This binary valorizes young adults who move away for the purpose of work or education over individuals who chose to live out their lives in their hometown.

   Finally, in this study I use positioning theory to understand how discourses of rurality, gender, and drug use construct subject positions for female rural recreational drug users. Although positioning theory has its roots in psychology, it has close ties to poststructuralism as both approaches recognize the power of discursive practices and how people are positioned through them (Davies & Harré, 1990). Positioning theory is particularly interested in how language is used within institutions and social interactions, as it aims to reveal the reasoning and discursive practices that are constituted and performed through interpersonal encounters in everyday life (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré et al, 2009). Davies and Harré (1990) assert that it is conversations that reveal an individual’s position and subjection, not the grammar within language.
Chapter Three: Review of Related Literature

In this chapter I present literature and research related to the discourses relevant to this thesis: rurality, gender, class, drug use, and young adulthood. Over the course of this study I went to the literature at two different times: first when I was developing my research proposal, and again when I was analyzing my interview data. Both reviews of the literature informed my knowledge of the relevant discourses present in young rural women’s lives, however the second literature review helped me better conceptualize my results from a poststructural perspective. As discussed in Chapter One, a poststructural perspective acknowledges the multiple discourses individuals draw on when performing their subjectivity and positioning others. When positioning themselves and others rural young women negotiate multiple discourses at once, and that these discourses at times align or contradict each other.

This chapter is organized into the following sections. In the first section I discuss discourses of rurality, specifically discourses of the rural ‘idyll’ and rural dull. I explore how these discourses influence people’s experiences migrating into and out of rural communities, as well as how they intersect with discourses of race, class, and gender. In the next section I present the two dominant discourses affecting the young women I interviewed in this study: the mobility imperative and the normative path to adulthood. As I discussed in Chapter One, the mobility imperative frames out-migration as the successful path to adulthood for young adults in rural communities (Farrugia, 2016). The normative life trajectory is the belief that an individual’s path from youth to adulthood should move through a series of steps that are linear and progressive. I focus specifically on this because the young women in this study drew on this discourses when negotiating their position as successful rural young adults. In the last section I review empirical research that has explored relationships between rurality, gender, leisure, and drug use. This
literature deepened my understanding of drug use as a practice that is deeply contextual and tied to how individuals construct identities that are gendered, classed, raced, and geographically located.

**Conceptualizations of Rurality**

Debates about rurality have established that there is not simply an object seen as *the rural*, rather that it is a social construction produced through symbols and discourse (Campbell & Bell, 2000). One powerful discursive construction of ‘the rural’ is as an ideal space for a calm life and childhood. Rurality has been constructed within popular discourse as idyllic because of its close connection to nature and sense of freedom (Jones, 2011). Social constructions of the rural idyll tend to contrast rural life with urban life and its perceived dangers (Ni Laoire, 2007). Rural spaces are seen as innocent because of the lack of crime and social connectedness (Ni Laoire, 2007). Rural communities are also regarded as idyllic because they encompass the outdoors, open space, and a lifestyle associated with idealised notions of the past. They are seen as idyllic because of a perceived quiet and safe atmosphere. As noted by Ni Laoire (2007), rural communities are also idealized because of their perceived strong social networks and religious and family ties, which are often regarded as lost in urban life (Ni Laoire, 2007). Due to the idyllic setting, rural communities are also regarded as natural and safe spaces to raise children, with the assumption that children raised in rural communities remain innocent longer without the consequences of urban pressures, demands and sophistications (Jones, 1990).

The conceptualization of rural communities as idyll may influence an individual’s decision where to live. For example, Ni Laoire’s (2007) research found that rural residents who out-migrated from rural Ireland drew on the discourse of the rural idyll to justify their return to their rural communities later in life. Ni Laoire collected several narratives from migrants on why
they left their rural community and why they choose to return later in life. The participants in this study regarded rural spaces as a good place to raise children because of their sense of freedom, safety, support, and strong family networks. Other aspects of the rural idyll, such as the perception of a slower life, were discussed throughout the migrants’ narratives. Participants’ constructions of rural life were often shaped through their return visits back to Ireland, which motivated migrating back later in life. Although participants did not use the term rural idyll explicitly, their descriptions of the rural communities coincided with popular discourse surrounding the rural idyll and in turn opposing urban life (Ni Laoire, 2007).

Although the predominant discourse surrounding rural communities frames them as idyll, rural communities are also discursively constructed as spaces in a state of decline and lacking opportunities for young people. This discourse has been tied to several concerns noted in research, including poor job opportunities, lack of public transportation, and other facilities, family transience, and community design (Smith & Brown, 2002). These issues have been highlighted through rural communities’ loss of community infrastructure, services, and employment opportunities, all of which have eroded social capital, and put them in a state of decline, rather than progressing (Smith & Brown, 2002). Researchers have problematized the construction of rural communities as in a state of decline because it often labels those who stay within rural communities as disadvantaged for not leaving (Norman & Power, 2015).

Rural communities are also constructed in decline due to issues of class, gender, sexism and racism (Driscoll, 2014). As Driscoll (2014) discussed young women in rural communities are often positioned as the uneducated, poor, and uncultured in comparison to their urban counterparts. This positioning of rural girls is shaped by larger discourses and popular media, which construct rural communities as places young adults have ‘nowhere to go and nothing to
do’. The negative positioning of rural young adults, in combination with the issues associated with rural communities have contributed to the construction of rural communities as dull.

Rural communities are also conceptualized as dull due to their lack of leisure opportunities for young adults. As discussed by Driscoll (2014) the lack of leisure opportunities for young rural women is discursively constructed as a problem for rural residents and fuels the assumption that rural girls are problematic and in need of management (Driscoll, 2014). This assumption limits the leisure opportunities and subjectivities available to young women. In her research Driscoll sought to investigate how discourses of rurality and girlhood intersect and construct conceptualizations of rural girlhood. She found that rural girls were positioned one of two ways: as a symbol of town success or as someone who needed to be managed due to their risk of becoming a bad girl. These two constructions – the rural girl as a success or trouble maker – impacted where it was viewed as appropriate for rural girls to ‘hang-out’ or partake in leisure activities. Hanging out in areas deemed out of bounds for rural girls, like the park at night, positioned rural girls as ‘bad girls’. However, this gendered leisure discourse also intersects with broader discourses surrounding race. Driscoll found that identifying as a ‘white’ rural girl allowed some girls access to certain town spaces that indigenous girls could not access without being positioned negatively. The spaces young rural women had access to shaped how they saw themselves as ‘rural young women’ and also impacted their desire to stay or move away from their rural hometown.

The construction of rural communities as both idyll and dull is demonstrated in Rye’s (2006) research on how rural youth conceptualize their community in relation to popular discourses of rurality. While controlling for factors, such as social class, gender, and mobility, Rye surveyed 653 rural Norwegian teenagers enrolled in upper secondary schools across the
regions. Rye’s findings demonstrated that youth’s constructions of their rural community were for the most part in line with the social construction of the rural idyll that frame rural communities as a safe, outdoor, and socially connected space. However, youth also constructed their rural community as dull, boring, and unsophisticated due to the absence of leisure and employment opportunities. Rye noted that the construction of the rural as ideal and dull was not mutually exclusive but rather complementary. The youth did not identify the rural as specifically idyll or dull; instead, they identified factors that contributed to the social construction of these two perspectives. Rural research such as Rye, have also noted that participants experiences of ‘the rural’ are mediated by constructions of age, gender, social class, sexuality, and race. For example, Rye found that youth who came from lower income or high-income families saw their communities as idyll, while in contrast individuals from a middle-class background where more likely to see their community as ‘dull’. Rye’s article provides unique empirical evidence demonstrating how the social constructions of rurality aligned with Norwegian rural youth views.

The framing of rural communities as a poor white space has also been explored in research. For example, Jaroz and Lawson (2002) explore the construction of the country redneck identity, through their investigation of cultural politics and class within rural USA. A redneck is conceptualized as a white rural male who is unsophisticated, dirty, often poor, and racist. The authors asserted that this term is representative of a white class difference, and as such the term operates as a rhetorical category used to refer to poor white people. They also argued that the redneck discourse positions rural communities as wild, primitive, and at times dangerous. Using three case studies, Jaroz and Lawson demonstrated that there is a national discourse surrounding rednecks, in which being a redneck is regarded as a lifestyle choice. The authors problematize
how presenting poverty as a choice and an individualized cultural trait overshadows the real issue of poverty within some rural communities and can result in exploitive processes. Jaroz and Lawson asserted that this discourse makes rural middle-class whites and marginalized groups discursively invisible. Class becomes understood and defined through lifestyle and creates a form of white racism displayed as redneck racism.

**Discourses of Rural Young Adulthood: Mobility Imperative and Normative Life Trajectory**

Farrugia (2016) defines the mobility imperative as a process that discursively positions youth as out of place in rural communities and in place in urban communities. The mobility imperative frames out-migration as the only successful choice for young adults. In other words, the mobility imperative frames moving away from the rural town a part of the normative life path for rural youth. According to Farrugia (2016), the emergence of the mobility imperative has been tied to three broad socio-economic changes: the industrial restructuring that has been occurring across the global economy since the 1980s; the increased need for post-secondary education; and the discursive framing of urban spaces as youthful. As discussed by Walsh (2013) the first factor, economic restructuring in rural communities has led to a decrease in available opportunities within local labour markets. This restructuring has caused education and work opportunities to be increasingly located in urban spaces, and structurally disadvantaged rural youth in their access to these resources (Eascott & Sonn, 2006; Farrugia, 2016). In order to access these resources, out-migration becomes a requirement for rural young adults (Corbett, 2013).

The second factor, the increased need for post-secondary education, is promoted through young adult discourses and neoliberalism. Discourses of young adulthood construct a normative life path that young people are expected to follow into successful adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Traditionally, this life trajectory includes completing higher education, moving out of the
parent’s home, living independently before marriage, obtaining full-time work, getting married, and having children (Arnett, 2004). Among young adults, thinking independently, accepting responsibility for oneself, and becoming financially stable are the most important criteria for reaching adulthood (Arnett, 2004). These aspects of self-performance are engrained within the life path young adults are expected to follow. The life path discourse also aligns with neoliberal values that prioritize a flexible, responsible and self-sufficient individual. Francombe-Webb and Silk (2016) note that these discourses produce subject positions for young women in which the ideal neoliberal feminine subject strives for self-fulfillment, and “demonstrates conduct of self through monitoring, surveillance and self-investment” (p. 654). The combination of discourses of young adulthood and neoliberal femininity have encouraged a perspective in which post-secondary education is viewed as a necessary part of young adulthood and a step that helps lead to a successful future. It also constructs young people who leave rural communities as successful and following the ‘right’ path, and young adults who stay in their rural community as failing or ‘off track.’

The third factor, the discursive framing of urban spaces as youthful, has also encouraged out-migration. As discussed by Farrugia (2016), pop culture and media frame urban communities as ‘cool’ places of youthfulness because of their opportunities for leisure and consumption. Broader symbolic discourses of young adulthood frame urban communities as ideal spaces for youth to experience new opportunities, access increased economic resources, and fulfill a broader range of subjectivities (Farrugia, 2016). Urban communities are discursively constructed as modern, sophisticated and glamorous. In comparison, rural communities are constructed as great places to raise children or grow old, but not to live as young adults (Leyshon, 2008). Whereas rural communities are conceptualized as idyll for childhood because they are safe,
socially connected, and far away from the dangers of urban life (Ni Laorie, 2007), they tend to lack the leisure and economic opportunities associated with growing up or being a young adult (Leyshon, 2008). Because hegemonic discourses of young adulthood prioritize experiencing a variety of opportunities while working towards a stable career, the mobility imperative encourages out-migration as the way for young adults to participate in and experience cultural symbols of youthfulness (Farrugia, 2016).

Corbett (2013) found that the mobility imperative is so engrained within rural communities that it is encouraged and reproduced within formal educational curricula. For example, Corbett discussed how for rural youth high school acted as a sorting space where youth were identified as ‘college material’ or not. Those who were deemed college material where often given increased resources and opportunities. Educators prioritized individuals who planned to pursue post-secondary education and leave their rural community following high school. As such, the mobility imperative makes rural youth feel that their community encourages them to leave and that staying is viewed negatively by the community (Eascott & Sonn, 2006). Research has critiqued the mobility imperative for being both classed and culturally biased. Corbett (2013) argues that an individual’s ability to move and participate in further education is often dependent on a person’s access to financial resources and family assistance. Similarly, Shigihara (2015) notes that minority groups tend to transition to adulthood earlier because they take on social responsibilities and face more life challenges, which can limit their ability to out-migrate and access further education and employment opportunities. However, as discussed by Francombe-Webb and Silk (2016), in neoliberal discourse of femininity and success, factors such as family finances are given little consideration when constructing non-moving rural subjects as failures. Rural subjects who fail to leave are viewed as failures for being ‘work-shy’ or passive about their
Researchers have also investigated how rural young adults respond to the mobility imperative. In their study on rural youth mobility, Eascott and Sonn (2006) found that although young adults recognized they needed to leave to be successful, they did not necessarily want to leave. Their study participants were generally happy to stay in their home communities, even as they felt pressure to leave because their rural community lacked economic opportunities. Participants’ desire to stay stemmed from place-based attachment to their rural community and memories of an idyll rural childhood (Eascott & Sonn, 2006). Cairns (2014) also found that place-based attachments played a role in how – and where – rural youth envisioned their futures.

Researchers such as Settersten and Ray (2010) have discussed how the normative path to adulthood has changed in recent years. The idea that there is a normative path to adulthood has been challenged in recent discourses. Further, the temporal expectations regarding the age that people should reach adulthood have changed. These changes are due to the increase of young people staying home later in life, due to economic changes and the expectations surrounding marriage (Settersten & Ray, 2010). Historically, attending postsecondary education would allow a person to fulfill a middle-class standard of living following graduation. However, recent economic changes such as inflation and student loans have made it increasingly difficult for young people to move out of their parent’s home independently (Settersten. & Ray, 2010). In recent years, it has become more acceptable for young adults to live with their parents into adulthood and postpone milestones such as having children in the pursuit of becoming financially stable (Settersten & Ray, 2010). Similarly, in contrast to ten years ago when the expectation was to build an adult life with a partner, young people are now more likely to create a life for themselves before settling down. However, even within this broadening of the
normative life trajectory for young adults, obtaining financial stability is still regarded as a signifier of successful adulthood.

The normative path to adulthood is contextual and constantly shifting. As such the subject position of a young adult and expectations surrounding the normative life trajectory vary based on geography and other factors such as race and culture. Within North America, discourses of a normative life trajectory for young adults are shaped by white, middle-class values that often do not encompass the differing ‘paths’ to adulthood marginalized populations may take (Shigihara, 2015). However, as discussed by Settersten and Ray (2010), middle-class families themselves are now struggling to support young adults on their elongated path to adulthood. Experiences of young adulthood and how long the path to adulthood takes varies based on gender, race, class, and ethnicity (Settersten & Ray, 2010). Young adults with financial means typically extend their path to adulthood because they have the family support and resources to accommodate their choices (Shigihara, 2015). In comparison, young adults with fewer financial resources generally transition into adulthood earlier than their counterparts because they face more challenges and take on social roles and responsibilities earlier in their life course (Shigihara, 2015).

Research on Rurality, Gender, Leisure, and Drug Use

Research on rurality and femininity.

Research has shown that the dominant discourses surrounding rurality and gender in rural communities have an impact on the available subjectivities and opportunities for rural women. For example, in a study on youth identities in the British countryside, Jones (1990) shows how the construction of rural communities as an ideal space for childhood also constructs male as the
conceptualized childhood gender, rendering the female experience discursively invisible. Jones asserts that this is related to the construction of young rural girls as tomboys, which is reproduced in television, magazines, and lay discourses. Jones found that the tomboy label leaves little space for young girls to explore feminine identities within the countryside. In comparison, male youth identities are often aligned with rural nature and male youth are positioned as rugged, wild beings who enjoy the outdoors. Jones’ research demonstrates that due to the conceptualization of rural communities as ideal, young women often experience limited access to a wide range of subject positions.

Another example of research on rurality and femininity is Norman and Power’s (2015) research on how young girls’ feelings of emplacement impact their mobility and perceptions of other young women. Norman and Power problematized the discourse of rural communities as in a state of decline because it does not fully consider the complex factors surrounding young people’s decisions to leave, or the connections to space that individuals embody. Norman and Power conducted 18 focus groups and 13 interviews with young women from rural Newfoundland, in which they asked about girls’ decisions to leave or stay in their rural hometown (Norman & Power, 2015). The researchers found that the discourse surrounding education and career opportunities was largely linked to urban communities. Women who left were constructed as successful and women who stayed in the community were constructed as trapped (Norman & Power, 2015). Those who stayed stressed the importance of gaining stable work within the community to gain independence and respect. Women who were unable to find gainful employment often described a sense of not belonging. The researchers found that rather than blaming the rural economy for their lack of employment, rural women tended to see
themselves as failures, and blamed their personal faults for being unable to become a contributing member of society.

Similarly, Cairns (2014) explores how popular discourses of rurality impact rural women’s perceptions of their futures and the performance of rural femininity. The purpose of her study was to investigate how place-based identity, class, and gender impact perceptions of young rural women’s futures. Cairns analyzed the experiences of grade seven and eight girls in rural Ontario (Canada) completing a computer education program called *The Real Game*, in which young people plan out their futures and design a life plan. Her study found that young rural girls constructed contradictory narratives of their futures. Young girls envisioned careers and a lifestyle associated with urban communities however, they were committed to remaining in their rural community as they matured. Cairns argued that this tension is reflective of two overlapping conditions within a rural context. First, rural communities have limited opportunities to girls to create successful (i.e., middle-class) futures. At the same time, rural girls are subjected to discourses of neoliberal femininity that encourage self-invention and to be mobile in the pursuit of education and careers. These discourses, presented through television, music, newspapers, and other popular cultural outlets, construct an ideal model of feminine success as one that is most commonly achieved in urban settings. Cairns’ work demonstrated the emotional tension created between a young girl’s visions of an urban future and their attachment to their rural community. It also demonstrated that the dominant discourses of gender in rural communities impact the subject positions available to rural young woman.

In a seminal summary paper on constructions of gender and rurality, Little (2002) found that rural masculine and feminine gender identities have typically been studied in relation to traditional farming roles and that the hegemonic construction of masculinity and traditional
gender roles is associated with farming. The introduction of technology has created similar versions of masculinity within the farming industry, such as entrepreneurial and management positions (Little, 2002), such that masculinity is typically tied to dominance over technology and nature. Within these discourses, men continue to be the centre of production and breadwinners in rural communities. In contrast, femininity is often constructed in terms of “feminine pride” and the traditional roles woman play within rural house households, and a focus is put specifically on childcare and the nurturing personality of females. Little argues that current research has yet to engage with the study of gender fluidity and the study of mobility in contemporary research in geography.

**Research on gender, rurality, and leisure.**

There is a growing body of research that explores how leisure intersects with the construction of gendered identities in rural communities. One example of research on rurality, gender, and leisure is Norman, Power and Dupre’s (2011) research about how discursive constructions of rurality and gender are performed through youth leisure practices in the context of rural coastal Newfoundland, Canada. Their findings showed that there is a discourse within the rural community which suggests that the landscape is gendered: the town is coded as a feminine leisure space and the woods is regarded as masculine. The town was discussed as a boring place where youth were under high surveillance by adults, which made youth feel stereotyped as disrespectful or distrustful. In contrast, the woods were seen as a place of freedom and safety, and where children should be. This binary of the woods as masculine and the town as feminine was reinforced through young boys understanding of young girl’s leisure interests as shopping, make-up and overall ‘safer’ activities, which works to create a subject position for young rural woman as feminine, delicate, and town-based (Norman, Power & Dupre, 2011).
Female youth could take up this subject position without negative consequences. However, this division can be exclusionary for individuals who want to participate in activities not typically associated with their gender. It is for this reason that Norman, Power, and Dupre argue that the rural idyll is unrepresentative of rurality and that the idyll rural childhood does not exist, as rurality is not experienced unanimously by youth. Norman, Power, and Dupre suggest that this is representative of a larger discourse that makes it difficult for females to participate in male-dominated leisure activities.

Similar to Norman, Power, and Dupre (2011), Smith and Brown (2002) research how rurality and gender impact the leisure activities of middle-aged rural women in a small New South Wales town. Smith and Brown (2002) problematized the declining conditions of rural communities and studied the impact of these conditions on women’s health and leisure opportunities. Using mixed methods, the researchers found that many of the leisure activities provided in rural communities were male-oriented. Media outlets, such as the newspaper, tended to highlight male sports or family activities for children rather than the rural woman herself. The leisure opportunities in rural communities provided woman with little choice but to fulfill a typical mother identity or resist and participate in male-dominated activities. The complex power relations and social networks surrounding leisure participation construct the places women felt comfortable attending or partaking in leisure. Smith and Brown highlight that rural communities have a particularly exclusionary nature towards those who deviate from heterosexual norms. Their research demonstrated that individuals who do become marginalized due to their sexuality often have little support and are labeled for their difference.

In an ethnographic study conducted in the south west of England, Leyshon (2008) explore the relationship between rurality and gender performance in rural leisure spaces. The
purpose of his research is to investigate how embodied experiences, such as drinking, provide opportunities for gender performance and identity formation. He explores how young women construct and reproduce their own identity through their drinking practices. This research illuminates the importance of the rural pub in the production of identity. Pubs were seen as a key site for the production and reproduction of community values, morals, and social etiquette. Participants discussed the importance of being seen at the local pub and its importance to village life for young people (Leyshon, 2008). Those who did not regularly attend the village pub struggled to maintain a profile within the community, and they were actively othered by regulars. Central to a rural woman’s experience of pubs is the performance of their bodies. This is seen in the desire to wear clothes that either attract or prevent advances from the opposite sex. Through this form of embodiment, women are performing their identity within the pub environment, however, it also positioned women in a traditionally subservient role, or as servers or sexually attractive objects.

Leyshon’s (2008) analysis demonstrates many discursive resources, which worked to affirm young women’s identities. The construction of femininity was seen through two processes: inclusionary and exclusionary practices. Leyshon unsettled the idea that rural pubs are an inclusive site for young woman to participate in identity construction. Instead, he argues that rural pubs are largely sites for the performance of hegemonic masculine through drinking with older men, participating in rituals, and drinking in excess. These practices made some people feel intimidated or out of place within the pubs. At times, women mimicked aspects of masculine behaviour (i.e. drinking in excess), however, in general, the women had a consistent distaste towards men’s advances or actions in the pub environment. It is because of this that some young rural women preferred going to a pub or club in an alternative town over visiting the village pub.
Overall, the findings demonstrated that popular rural leisure spaces such as pubs provided a space for young adults to reproduce and resist traditional conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity.

Research completed by Dunkley (2004) also investigated the relationship between gender and rurality. Dunkley studied how teens’ place in society, gender and the rural context shapes the leisure lives of rural young adults. Further, she investigated the strategies teens employ to create social opportunities. In her paper, Dunkley examines where young adults participate in leisure and how that is shaped by society’s belief surrounding teens’ place in society. Typically, teens are seen as separate from adults and therefore in need of a separate space. In rural communities, the idea that teens should have a separate space away from adults is problematic, as rural communities often lack the infrastructure and teen leisure opportunities found in urban centers. Often the lack of leisure opportunities for rural teens results in the only acceptable place for their leisure time being at home or school.

Following the alcohol-related deaths of two male teens in St. Elizabeth Vermont, Dunkley (2004) chose to focus her research on risky leisure activities related to drunk driving in the rural context. She collected data using observations and open-ended interviews with nine young men and women between the ages of 13-17. Dunkley found that parent’s expectations of their sons and daughter’s leisure behavior differed drastically and as such boys were allowed more freedom in their leisure activities. Boys were therefore more satisfied with their leisure activities than young women. Girls had less freedom in relation to where they could participate in leisure and experienced more surveillance from adults as a result. Girls used several strategies to manage the increased monitoring of their leisure activities by their parents and create leisure opportunities for themselves (Dunkley, 2004). Some girls chose to quietly break the rules, while
others decided to embrace the social identity of a partier and distanced themselves from the traditional expectations surrounding rural girlhood.

**Drug use and rurality.**

Substance abuse has typically been associated with urban communities because of their large population and perceived accessibility of drugs (Council on Drug Abuse, 2011). Further, the conceptualization of rural communities as idyll as perpetuated the belief that alcohol and drug abuse is primarily an urban issue. However, research has shown that drug abuse and alcohol consumption rates in rural communities are similar to urban communities (Council on Drug Abuse, 2011).

Rurality is an important construct to consider within drug use research because it impacts how resources are allocated and what policy decisions are made (Gfroerer, Larson & Colliver, 2007). Rural communities deal with specific contextual factors that impact drug use rates, such as community norms, isolation, unemployment, and the accessibility and availability of prevention and treatment resources (Council on Drug Abuse, 2011; Swain & Stanley, 2011). For example, community norms regarding the use of alcohol and drugs can impact youth substance abuse rates (Swaim & Stanley, 2011). Isolation tends to limit the recreational programs for youth to take part in, and youth turn to substance abuse for entertainment (Council on Drug Abuse, 2011). The isolation of rural communities also makes it easier to cultivate drugs, because it can be done out of sight (Council on Drug Abuse, 2011). Swaim and Stanley (2011) argue that limited resources have been allocated to rural substance abuse because of the common assumption drug use is not a rural problem (Swaim & Stanley, 2011). Some individuals may not be able to access these resources because they are too expensive or too far to travel to (Council on Drug Abuse, 2011). It is important to understand how both individual and community
variables impact drug use in order to inform policy and prevention efforts (Swaim & Stanley, 2011).

A report prepared by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health’s (2012) investigated the differences in drug use practices of youth in rural and urban communities. Data were collected from the 2011 *Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey*, which surveyed students in grades seven through twelve in Ontario. The purpose of this survey was to “monitor drug use, mental health, physical health and other behavioural risk factors (p.1). The report stated that youth within rural communities are more likely to report the use of non-medical prescription drugs such as Percocet and Tylenol No. 3. Similarly, rural youth are more likely to use cough medicine, the stimulant used to treat ADHD (Ritalin or Adderall), and methamphetamines to get high. Rural youth were more also likely to consume alcohol and high caffeine energy drinks, and more likely to report driving motorized vehicles under the influence of alcohol or drugs. In contrast, urban youth had higher rates of using inhalants such as glue and solvents.

In the US context, Gfroerer, Larson and Colliver (2007) used data collected in the 2003-2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health to compare drug use rates among individuals living in three types of counties: rural (population under 20,000); urbanized metropolitan (non-metropolitan areas with a population higher than 20,000); and metropolitan areas (areas defined as metropolitan). The findings demonstrate that in contrast to the perception that drug use rates are highest in urban communities, the rates of substance abuse within the three types of counties were comparable.

In a Canadian study, Pulver, Davison, and Pickett (2015) explored the relationship between drug use and how young people used their leisure time. Pulver et al. (2015) analyzed data collected in the Canadian Health and Behavior in School-Aged Children Survey. This
survey gathers data on grade nine and ten students across Canada, and in the survey, students are asked about their “recreational use of prescription drugs and their time-use in structured and unstructured activity contexts” (p. 217). Pulver et al. (2015) found three forms of time use that related to youth drug use: time with family; time with friends; and extracurricular activities. Spending evenings at home with family was connected to lower rates of prescription drug use. In contrast, youth who spent time with friends after school or in the evening were more likely to report prescription drug use. They also found that youth who did not participate in extra-curricular activities were more likely to report recreational use of drugs. They point out that these findings support other research that shows a positive relationship between extra-curricular activity participation and high academic performance and self-esteem. However, extra-circular activities are often limited in rural communities, so youth end up just spending time with friends, which is where they report using and accessing substances. Pulver et al. suggest that rural communities should focus on finding structured opportunities for rural youth, with the aim of lowering substance abuse rates.

Valentine, Holloway, Knell, and Jayne (2008) also studied the relationship between rural young people’s leisure and substance abuse, specifically alcohol consumption in rural communities. Valentine et al. (2008) draws attention to the current concern regarding binge drinking among youth in urban areas and suggest that that panic surrounding binge drinking is being applied to the rural context, when in fact opinions regarding alcohol consumption often differ in these communities. Valentine et al. were interested in the role of alcohol consumption in rural young adult’s lives, particularly consumption that occurred in rural formal and informal spaces such as pubs and outdoors. Surveys, interviews and participant observations were used to collect data from rural residents of all ages living in Cumbria, UK.
Valentine et al. (2009) found that the leisure drinking practices of rural youth differed from their urban counterparts. The pub was seen as an important site for social interaction within the village, due to the lack of other local recreation opportunities. Further young people’s participation in alcohol consumption within the pub and other informal spaces such as their home, or outdoors was not only tolerated but normalized by residents. Drinking within rural communities was seen as a normal part of growing up, and parents often had accepting attitudes towards their child’s drinking. The lack of concern towards adolescent drinking meant that parents were often facilitators in their child’s drinking, which runs counter to policy recommendations. Valentine et al. (2008) conclude their paper with a discussion of how positive attitudes towards drinking in rural communities differ from the moral panic surrounding binge drinking in urban communities. Further, they suggest that future research acknowledges the differentiated nature of alcohol consumption and regulation within rural and urban communities in order to produce public health documents that reflect attitudes towards drinking in the rural context.

Researchers have used positioning theory within a poststructural theoretical framework in a number of substance abuse studies relevant to this research. For example, Ravn (2012) used positioning theory to understand the identity of youth recreational drug users and how it is constructed. Ravn (2012) held focus groups with 53 recreational drug users living in Copenhagen and smaller towns in Denmark. The aim of her study was to investigate norms and internal distinctions that are expressed discursively. Using positioning theory, Ravn (2012) identified six identity dimensions associated with being a recreational drug user: “drug practice, general drug knowledge, context-specific drug knowledge, practices for checking drugs, acknowledging one’s positioning of the surrounding drug community and age (p. 513).” Drug practice included
participants knowing the correct setting and dosage to prevent them from becoming overly intoxicated. Drug knowledge included discussion of participants being able to distinguish between drugs and their effects. Context-specific drug knowledge involved participants’ knowledge of their personal drug use and drug use experiences, and checking drugs implied that recreational drug users should know how to tell if the drugs they are taking are damaged. The dimension of acknowledging one’s position in the community related to the idea that inexperienced users should spend time with more experienced users so they can teach them about the drug scene. Finally, all participants agreed that age mattered; it was not safe for minors to be participating in recreational drug use.

**Gender and drug use.**

Research that investigates the relationship between gender and rural drug use is underrepresented in the literature (Smith, 2014). This may be because dominant conceptualizations of femininity do not typically coincide with drug use, so drug use is typically regarded as a male issue (Smith, 2014). However, recent research has shown that the gender gap between male and female drug use prevalence rates has been decreasing (Measham, 2002). In a review of drug use literature, Measham found that in the 1980s, research on women’s drug use framed it as deviant and criminal, and positioned drug-using women as ‘bad’ women. In the 1990s a shift occurred, and drug use began to be characterized as recreational rather than problematic. This shift occurred because, at the time, drug use had become a more widely recognized practice within youth culture, rather than something that only occurred within marginalized or subcultural groups. More recently, drug use has been regarded as a way of doing gender and a performance of identity, in that through drug use individuals perform their identity.
by drawing on and challenging traditional and non-traditional forms of femininity (Measham, 2002).

Measham (2002) highlighted three elements that should be considered when completing gender and drug use research: where the drug use occurs; what type of drugs are used; and the user’s mindset. An individual’s mindset about their drug use can reveal how individuals are positioning themselves in relation to broader discourses of gender, drug use, and risk-taking. For example, participation in drug use can act as a form of resistance to dominant conceptualizations of the ‘good girl’ or to offset an ‘uncool’ identity. Understanding young women’s subject positions in relation to drug use can best be done through witnessing social interaction and noticing how individuals speak about their drug use. Measham (2002) stated that although gender is an important concept in drug research, other factors, such as leisure, music, and pop culture also impact drug use.

An example of research that has studied the relationship between gender, place, and drug use is Smith’s (2014) ethnographic research on female injecting drug users. Although rural injecting drug users are likely to experience similar problems to their urban counterparts, the purpose of Smith’s study was to explore the meaning of injecting drug use in rural women’s lives and how living in a rural community shaped their experiences and perceptions of drug use behaviour. Interviews were conducted with 20 active female injecting drug users between the ages of 19 and 46 years old. Smith’s findings demonstrate that injecting drug users had several positions they fulfilled in their everyday lives. For example, along with being a drug user, they were mothers, friends, workers, and so on. Smith found that it was important for the women to maintain these other roles in their community, to avoid the risk being labeled a bad woman. Smith also found that rural communities had particularly traditional gender divisions, which
impacted female drug use and identity. Rural women felt closely monitored or judged and described the closeness of rural communities as restrictive.

The women’s relationship with their male partner also played a significant role in their drug use (Smith, 2014). Many participants cited that they were introduced to injecting drugs through their male partners. While the women noted that participating in drug use with their partner could often lead to violence, they also were reluctant to leave their domestic situations, not only because they felt an emotional attachment but also because they had an attachment to their community as well as a fear of judgement from the outside communities (Smith, 2014). This study demonstrated that women’s drug use is gendered and impacted by rural communities’ traditional constructions of femininity.

Another example of how drug use has been studied in relation to identity and how it influences individuals self-positioning is Rodner’s (2005) research on the construction of identity among drug users in Sweden. Rodner interviewed 44 drug users who where considered individuals who used drugs but also “lead lawful lives within the normative expectations of society” (Rodner, 2015, p. 333). Using discourse analysis, Rodner found that participants used labels to separate themselves from other drug users or drug use patterns that participants had ascribed a negative position. Participants made reference to others in order to construct positive representations for themselves and their drug use. Rodner found that participants frequently drew from the national discourse surrounding drug use in Sweden, in which drug use is constructed as highly criminal and unhealthy.

Miller and Carbone-Lopez (2015) also studied the relationship between drug use and gender performativity. Like Measham (2002), the researchers were critical of the dominant constructions of women drug users, often viewed as victims who become dependent on drug use
or drug sales for financial security or relationships, or as volatile actors who are not unrestricted by societal constraints. Miller and Carbone-Lopez (2015) problematized these constructions because the first issue denies that women have agency, and the second ignores how societal constraints may impact women’s agency. Miller and Carbone-Lopez suggest that rather than constructing female drug use as criminal, we frame it as one of the intersecting factors impacting how women do gender.

Miller and Carbone-Lopez (2015) interviewed 40 incarcerated women who had been court ordered to participate in a drug and alcohol program. Miller and Carbone-Lopez explored what an intersectional approach can reveal when used to situate drug use and drug markets within community contexts. The drug use practices of participants in this study were shaped by local discourses of race, class, place, and gender. Their research found that when discussing or rationalizing their drug use, women drew upon cultural discourses of motherhood, femininity and domestic responsibilities. For example, women explained their drug use by referencing its ability to assist them in achieving feminine ideals, such as being supermom or superthin. In other words, they positioned themselves as morally good by drawing on conventional gender norms.
Chapter Four: Methods

The purpose of this study was to investigate how young rural women make sense of and position themselves in relation to drug use, and how these positions engage with broader discourses of rurality, gender, and recreation. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Among rural young women, how are rural young female recreational drug users positioned?
2. How do young rural women position themselves in relation to drug use?
3. How do young rural women negotiate broader discourses about rurality, gender, and recreation when positioning young female recreational drug users?

Methodological Approach

As discussed in Chapter One, this research project used a feminist poststructural perspective, and the data analysis was guided by positioning theory. I chose a feminist poststructural perspective for how it allowed me to consider how young rural women negotiate subjectivities within discourses of gender and rurality, as well as race, class, and sexual orientation. The goal of this research is to honour the multiplicities of participant’s experiences and stories, rather than derive social realities or overarching truths from the data (DeVault & Gross, 2006).

Positioning theory is used by researchers to analyze the language used in everyday life, to understand how an individual’s subject position is established and performed (Harré et al., 2009). Davies and Harré (1990) highlighted several considerations researchers should contemplate when analyzing text using positioning theory. First, researchers should consider the metaphors and images embedded in language, because metaphors and images can invoke a way of thinking
that impacts how individuals position themselves. Second, researchers should think about how participants might view their position as a role or character within a relevant grand narrative. Third, researchers should consider how individuals draw on unconscious assumptions and relevant discourse when negotiating their position. Researchers should also consider how a person’s background or political and moral values shape their subject position, for example how a person’s position as a ‘rural young woman’ is influenced by other factors, such as class, age, ‘race,’ and religious identity. It is important within poststructural research that researchers are conscious of the intersecting factors that impact the construction of positions. These factors include power, access, and features of their claimed or desired identity. As I discussed in Chapter One, individuals may be aware of their own positioning and have the agency to shape how they are positioned.

Site Selection

As I mentioned in Chapter One, the site for this study was Wildlark (a pseudonym), the rural area closest to my hometown. Established in 1950, The County of Wildlark is situated in Southern Ontario and features agricultural land, urban areas and lakefront rural communities (County of Wildlark website, 2017). Currently, the County of Wildlark hosts a population of approximately 50,000 residents. The County of Wildlark is comprised of seven townships and two native reserves. Although the City of Wildlark geographically falls within the County of Wildlark, due to its size it operates independently from the County. The nearby City centre features local high schools, college, university and a mall that are frequented by residents of the surrounding counties.

In recent years, lack of economic development and a steady population decline has caused concern within the County (County of Wildlark Demographic Analysis, 2013; Minutes,
Surrounding municipalities have grown in population in recent years, with the majority of this growth focused in urban population centers. The decline in Wildlark’s population has been connected to an increase in out-migration of individuals 65 and older, as well as residents between the ages of 15-29-year old (County of Wildlark Demographic Analysis, 2013). The out-migration of individuals between the ages of 15-29 is comparable to other surrounding Ontario municipalities.

Although the concept of rurality has been defined in different ways, the traditional approach in research has been to conceptualize rural spaces geographically, by their population or community features such as a close connection to nature and agriculture (Cloke, 1997). Alternatively, rurality has been investigated as a social construction, which is an approach that understands rural communities as subjective and shaped by symbolic meaning and discourse (Trussell & Shaw, 2009). Within this approach, discourses such as the rural idyll and rural dull are acknowledged for how they shape our images of the rural context (Trussell & Shaw, 2009). What becomes prioritized in research, then, is the subjective experience of rurality, and whether people self-identify themselves and their community as ‘rural.’ This study was informed by both definitions of rurality. I chose Wildlark County as the study site based on its traditional rural features. Additionally, I chose participants who self-identified as rural girls and conceptualized their hometowns in accordance with social constructions of rurality.

**Step-by-Step Procedures**

**Preparing to enter the field.**

Before going into the field, I journaled about my initial thoughts regarding the research and the community. My research journal had three sections: reflexive writing, methodological
considerations, and theoretical memos. The reflexive writing section included reflection on how I was interpreting the data, my role in the analytic process, and how my preconceived ideas and assumptions surrounding rurality, drug use, and femininity could be impacting the analysis (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Salvin-Baden & Major, 2013). As discussed by Mauthner & Doucet (2003) reflexivity involves reflecting on personal values, morals, and experiences to understand how these factors may have shaped the research. Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2006, p.496) define reflexivity as “a communal process that requires attentiveness to how the structural, cultural and political environments of the researcher, the participants and the nature of the study affect the research process and product.” Reflexivity allows researchers to consider the interpersonal and institutional powers at play within the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). Through completing a reflective journal, I was able to make my history, assumptions, and values visible within the research (Ortlipp, 2008). Ortlipp (2008) suggests that making a researcher’s history and assumptions visible helps control for bias and adds validity to the research process. Further, it also helps to expose the power relations present within the research process and illuminate how researchers may impact the data (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2006). Feminist researchers Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2006) provide a list of potential reflexive questions to include in a reflexive journal at the end of their chapter in The Handbook of Feminist Research, which I drew upon when writing the reflective portion of my journal.

I have included aspects of my reflections throughout this chapter as a way to add reflexivity to the research process. Through journaling, I was able to reflect on how my thoughts and experiences might impact the research. For example, it was surprising to me how much my own experience as a young woman who grew up in and then left a small town influenced how I constructed young rural women who continued to live there. Following high school, I chose to
leave my rural town (population approximately 80,000) for post-secondary education in a larger city. Although the population of my hometown is not reflective of a rural community, it was a space I had constructed as rural due to its close connection to nature and socially connected atmosphere. My decision to move away rather than go to a local post-secondary institution was primarily driven by the idea that I would be more successful and have more career opportunities if I lived in a ‘big’ city. Further, I had assumed that moving to a town where ‘everybody doesn’t know everybody’ would allow me to fulfill a young adult subjectivity I never felt I could perform at home. Since leaving, I have chosen not to move back to my rural hometown because, at times, I still believe that there are larger career opportunities available to me in a larger city. For me personally, this research project has helped me see how successful adulthood can be achieved in rural communities and better recognize how my constructions of young rural women who did not out-migrate were mainly based on a perspective that is embedded in gendered and neoliberal discourses.

The section of the journal that focused on methodological considerations contained a record of the data collection procedures of the study. As recommended by Demant, Ravn, and Thorsen (2010), this section included information on sampling respondents, the construction of interview questions, as well as the changes that I made to the research plan and the reason for these changes. During the interview process, I did make changes to the interview guide; I removed one question that was overly leading, and I added questions that revolved around participants’ history with drug use. These questions allowed participants to discuss their thoughts on drug use and tell stories about their interactions with drug use, which helped to reveal the discourses participants drew on when positioning young rural women who participate in drug use.
The final section of my research journal included theoretical memos. I used this section to help me understand my theoretical framework and how it guided the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). This section primarily included memos written during the data analysis phase about conducting analysis using a poststructural perspective. At times, I struggled with my desire to find a ‘truth’ in the data. In my journal, I was continually going back and forth between wanting to create concrete subject positions for rural young adult drug users (i.e., the addict, party-girl) and maintaining a poststructural perspective on the data. As discussed by Weedon (1987), the purpose of poststructuralism is not to find the truth in the data but instead to understand how social facts are constructed through discourse and power relations. This section also included notes on positioning theory and how my participants and I were actively positioning ourselves throughout the interview. For example, in this section I wrote notes about how during one interview a participant referenced my subject position as a rural girl who has out-migrated when she compared her career aspirations against mine. I made note of this because it revealed something about how discourses of a normative life trajectory affect the available subject positions for young rural women. As recommended by Ortlipp (2008), I reviewed this section of the journal throughout the data analysis phase. Reading through my notes helped remind me of the purpose of my study and how the theoretical framework impacts the data and data analysis.

**Sampling.**

As indicated by Salvin-Baden and Major (2013), poststructuralist research typically involves small sample sizes. Similar to other poststructuralist research, I employed the purposive sampling strategy of criterion sampling. The aim of criterion sampling is to select participants that fit within the criteria of the study before beginning data collection, to help ensure that the
researcher receives relevant and in-depth information on the topic (Salvin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Initially, I set age, gender, location, and residency criteria for participant selection: participants had to be young women between the ages of 18 to 30 years old, who had resided in a rural community in the County of Wildlark for at least twelve consecutive months. As the study progressed, I loosened the residency requirement from a consecutive twelve months to a minimum of three months, and I added self-identification as a ‘rural girl’ as a selection criterion. This meant that if a participant had moved to/back to the rural community at least three months prior to data collection, and self-identified as a ‘rural girl,’ they were invited to participate in the study. If the participant had moved out of the community (e.g., to attend college or university) and only visited their rural community sporadically (such as during holidays), they were not considered.

Since I was interested in learning about how young rural women position themselves in relation to drug use, I aimed to sample young women who were involved with drugs in a variety of ways, including women who were not involved with drugs at all. It was useful to interview women who had varied experience with drugs to get a fuller picture of the subject positions that were available to rural young women and the range of ways that rural young women negotiated discourses of gender and rurality.

**Entering the field and participant recruitment.**

As mentioned previously, the site for this study was rural communities within the County of Wildlark. I recruited participants using several strategies: I contacted individuals within my network, I visited the community, I posted flyers in community establishments, I handed flyers to young rural women in the community, and I asked participants to pass along information
about the study if they were comfortable doing so. When recruiting, if individuals were interested in the study they could contact me through a study website (ruralresearch.weebly.com) or email (brittney.patton2016@gmail.com). The study website housed study information, a consent form, and a place for potential participants to send me their contact information. A copy of the website text has been included in Appendix C. After receiving an email from potential participants stating their interest in the study, I replied by email with a letter that detailed the study requirements and I attached a consent form. A draft of the email/letter of invitation is included as Appendix D.

I began recruitment by contacting 22 individuals through my Facebook network. I sent out the initial Facebook message on December 12th, 2016 and sent out a follow-up email on January 2nd, 2017. The text of these messages is included as Appendix E and F. The first round of recruitment resulted in my first participant (Anne). On January 2nd, 2017, I sent out 15 more Facebook messages to individuals who were not included in my initial round of recruitment. I then followed up with these individuals by sending out a follow-up message on January 9th, 2017. I recruited another participant (Sarah) during this second round of Facebook messages. After exhausting my Facebook contacts, I reconsidered my recruitment strategy and submitted a modification to the research ethics office, so that I could include Instagram as one of the social media platforms I could use to recruit participants. On January 17th, 2017, I sent out ten Instagram messages. I was unable to recruit any participants through this platform. Although all participants offered to pass the study information on to the rural young women in their network, this form of snowball recruiting did not result in any additional research participants. The final two participants were close friends of mine who I invited to participate in the study while socializing with them. Having an in-person conversation with them allowed me to explain the
study and reassure them that it would be confidential. I followed up these in-person discussions by sending participants a private Facebook message with the study invitation and confidentiality form. Overall, recruiting participants from my personal network was my most effective recruitment strategy. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, I think that having a personal connection with the researcher (myself) makes people more open to participating in the research.

Knowing my participants impacted my study in several different ways. First, it allowed me to begin the interviews with a strong rapport with participants. Having a strong rapport with participant prior to the interview, strengthened the interview process and allowed the participants to feel more comfortable discussing their lives and interactions with drug use. Having a relationship with my participants also impacted my awareness of the positions they negotiated as young women. Interviewing participants revealed to me how I positioned them as rural young women prior to the interview and after. Interviewing participants was an illuminating experience that allowed me to further understand the process of positioning and caused me to reflect on how my construction of rural young women impacted the research.

I also attempted to recruit participants by visiting rural communities within the County of Wildlark and speaking to residents about my study. Between December 22nd, 2017 and April 10th, 2017, I visited each rural township in the County at least once and recruited in 14 communities within these townships. I attempted to visit the communities on different days of the week and different times, to diversify who, I interacted with in the community. I made a total of 26 visits and I hung up or handed out approximately 140 flyers throughout the County. The flyers contained the same information and are included as Appendix H. While hanging up flyers, I spoke with individuals working in local business establishments in the area such as local
grocery stores, restaurants, pharmacy’s, convenience stores, and recreation centers. A script for this conversation with individuals working in the local businesses is included as Appendix G.

While visiting the local establishments that were restaurants or eateries, I would sit at a table and work or have a coffee. I had limited success recruiting through community establishments and did not receive any emails from potential participants. During my visits to the rural communities in Wildlark, I was surprised at the low number of young women I saw working or spending time within the communities. I visited the communities at different times or days of the weeks to diversify when I was in the communities. However, in general, I found that the rural communities lacked young adults. During my time within these establishments, I mainly observed families and seniors using the services. However, visiting business establishments was useful in a different way; it allowed me to get a sense of the community and who was frequenting the area during the day.

Although the young women I did meet seemed interested in the topic of the study, most did not follow up for an interview. Their decision to not follow-up may have been due to the sensitive nature of the research topic. Although I assured potential participants that all information would remain confidential, I also got the sense young women felt hesitant to participant in a ‘drug use’ study. The risky nature of the study influenced my ability to recruit individuals outside of my social network. When asking participants to pass along the flyer to individuals within their network, participants were noticeably nervous about revealing to others that they had participated in the study. One participant stated she would be nervous sharing the information for fear that individuals she passed the flyer onto would discuss her participation in the study. When recruiting within the rural communities, I found it difficult to directly recruit young women, even when they were interested in the subject. One young woman that I spoke to
felt that drug use was prevalent among her male and female peers. We had a very passionate conversation regarding drug use in her community and young adults, however when asked to participate in the interview she declined. Although I assured her that her identity would remain confidential, she was uncomfortable participating in the study. I think the fear of being connected to the study and the negative beliefs surrounding drug use, kept individuals who did not know me well and have a trust in my ability to be confidential from participating.

While recruiting, I received a variety of reactions when people learned that my research topic included ‘drug use’. Some people seemed surprised by the topic. One store owner, an older woman, stated that she did not feel comfortable having a flyer connected to drug use posted in the store. In contrast, some people said that they felt the research needed to be done because they thought there was nothing in the community for youth to do but drugs. Thus, recruiting had an unexpected benefit: it helped illuminate the multiple perspectives in rural communities regarding drug use.

After having limited success visiting community establishments, I expanded my recruitment pool by attending community events and programs such as local farmers markets and fitness classes. Attendance at community events occurred between June 7th and June 20th, 2017. I visited a total of ten community events and handed out 30 flyers. Although this strategy did not generate more participants, visiting the communities helped me better understand the rural context, including the close-knit nature of these spaces. For example, after attending one fitness class where the three other participants spent most of the time discussing their lives and plans for the next week, I journaled about feeling like an outsider. Although I tried to actively participate, I was left out of their conversations and I got the sense I had disrupted their weekly social time. This experience made me consider the impact that moving to the rural community for several
months and participating in weekly programs such as a spin class might have had on the recruitment process. In future rural research, I hope to integrate myself more fully into the community, rather than just visiting the communities.

Ultimately, I recruited four study participants: Anne (21), Jenn (24), Sarah (23) and Rachel (25). All four young women lived in a rural community within or surrounding the County of Wildlark yet lived in different rural communities. Three of the rural communities were within a 15-minute drive to the City of Wildlark. The fourth participant lived in a rural community located an hour’s drive from the City, however, a different city centre was a 15-minute drive from her hometown.

Informed consent.

I obtained informed consent prior to data collection. In the letter of invitation, I sent out, I attached a consent form and asked participants to review it prior to the interview. The consent form included information on the research study, its risks, and benefits, as well as the voluntary nature of this research. A copy of the consent form is included as Appendix I. Before beginning the interview, I briefly reviewed the contents of the consent form with participants and then asked them to sign a copy for themselves and me. Participants were informed that they could opt out of the research study at any time and would not experience any negative repercussions. None of the participants exercised this option, or even the option to skip a question in our interview. All participants requested that a summary of the research be sent to them after the study is completed and left their email as contact information.

Risks and confidentiality in a rural context.
There were several psychological risks related to this study. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, it was possible that participants may experience feelings of embarrassment or worry about how they responded. Also, some individuals may have had negative experiences related to drug use, either their own or involving family members, friends, or classmates. Additionally, there was a possibility that the questions in the interview about drug use and attitudes towards drug use may have caused the participant to engage with memories of these experiences in ways that were emotionally distressing. I managed these risks by sending out the interview guide to potential participants and asking them to review it and consider if any of the questions would cause them to remember negative experiences. Participants were then able to make a fully informed choice about participating in this study. At the end of the interview, participants were provided with the contact information of a local counselor and phone counseling service, who they could contact if they experienced any emotional distress.

Because some forms of drug use are illegal and attitudes toward drug use are often unfavorable, participants in the study also faced the social risks such as loss of status and reputation. These social risks were also increased because this study was interested in drug use in rural areas, where there was a chance that participants in the study may know one another. Although involvement with drugs was not a criterion for participation, because the study asked about drug use it is a possibility that people might assume that the participants in this study are supportive of or active in their use of drugs. My primary strategy to minimize the social risks of the study was to maintain as much privacy as possible regarding a participant’s involvement in the study. I aimed to ensure that no one other than the participant herself would know about a participant’s involvement in the study. To achieve this, I considered several different strategies. First, I only contacted participants through Facebook or Instagram messenger (which sends
Direct messages privately) and email. Using direct messaging helped mitigate the risk of someone else answering the phone or overhearing conversations about the study. Participants were also asked to choose an interview location where we would not be overheard or interrupted by anyone they knew from the community. In order to maintain confidentiality, I also decided to use a pseudonym for participants as well as all relevant geographical locations (rural community, city) in all written reports. This includes using a pseudonym for any source material that included the name of the study area (e.g., local newspapers, government documents).

**Data Collection Approaches**

**Pre-interview questionnaire.**

To help gather information on participants’ backgrounds, I asked participants to fill out a pre-interview questionnaire. This questionnaire asked women about their social identity (i.e., sexuality, subculture, ethnicity), family background, rural community, and attitudes towards drugs. As an individual’s position is impacted by factors such as class, age, race, ethnicity, and sexuality, the data I collected via the pre-interview questionnaire helped me contextualize the ways that participants drew upon discourses in the process of positioning. The pre-interview guide allowed me to gather specific information about each participant’s background and reduced the amount of transcribing associated with each interview. A copy of the pre-interview guide is included as Appendix A.

**Semi-structured interviews.**

Similar to other positioning theory researchers such as Rajiva (2009), Jones (2006), and Amsterdam, Knoppers, and Jongman (2015), I used one-on-one interviews as my main data collection approach. Interviews provide a space for in-depth conversation with individual
participants (Demant, Ravn, & Thorsen, 2010), and are a well-regarded data collection approach because they allow the researcher to speak directly to the interviewee. The goal of interviews is to generate a conversation-style discussion between the interviewer and interviewee (Demant, Ravn, & Thorsen, 2010) while also asking targeted and clarifying questions throughout the interview.

Interviews have been used in previous research on drug use and gender because the informal and confidential environment of the interview allows both the researcher and participants to discuss sensitive topics (Demant, Ravn, & Thorsen, 2010). Interviews provide two types of data that are relevant to this study. First, they provide information on the topic and the context or situation in which it occurs. Knowing the context allows the researcher to understand what local or overarching discourses impact how users understand themselves and experiences (Miller & Carbone-Lopez, 2015). Additionally, the conversational style and setting of interviews offered insight to the positioning process because in interviews respondents actively position themselves in relation to the topics or practices being discussed (Miller & Carbone- Lopez, 2015).

The interviews were semi-structured, which meant they were guided by some pre-set questions. Semi-structured interviews do not necessarily follow a set order of questions, but instead allow the interviewer to introduce sensitive topics when appropriate (Demant, Ravn & Thorsen, 2010). A benefit of this type of interview is that participants had the opportunity to express their opinions on an issue rather than being restricted to the pre-set interview questions (Demant, Ravn, & Thorsen, 2010; Salvin-Baden & Major, 2013). It also allowed for ideas that were unanticipated prior to the interview to be explored, such as information regarding
participants’ background and its connection to their thoughts on drug use. A copy of the interview guide is included as Appendix B.

Semi-structured interviews are used by poststructuralist researchers because they provide a context for the researcher to participate in the co-construction of data. Poststructural researchers want to participate in the process of making-meaning because they are interested in decreasing the power that the researcher holds over the participant (DeVault & Gross, 2006). It is also based on an acknowledgment in poststructuralism that researchers can never be fully removed from the research process; a researcher’s background, moral values, and opinions always have some impact on the research process (Demant, Ravn, & Thorsen, 2010; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

Throughout the study, I was particularly sensitive to how my own experience of leaving Wildlark County would impact a participant’s discussion of their choice to live in a rural community. I was also aware of how my own opinions surrounding drug use would affect how participants constructed the idea of recreational drug use. To help with this, I asked participants to define the term recreational drug use for themselves and refrained from discussing my definition of the phrase. I found that participants were often cautious about what my response would be to their definition of the term ‘recreational drug use’. To help manage this, I remained conscious of my body language and facial expressions. I worked to maintain open and positive body language, particularly during participants’ discussions about drug use. It was important to me that participants felt comfortable discussing the topics without fear of judgment or stigmatization. To further reduce the power hierarchy between myself and the participant, I participated in generating meaning throughout the interview by strategically disclosing information about myself (DeVault & Gross, 2006). I typically revealed information about
myself while participants were filling out the pre-interview questionnaire; I shared information on my own background, age, and history within Wildlark as participants shared their own. I felt that this helped build rapport between myself and the participant and strengthened the interview and depth of the data I collected.

While interviewing, I subscribed to the idea that “telling requires a listener and that the listening shapes the account, as well as the telling and listening, is shaped by discursive histories” (DeVault & Gross, 2006, p. 179). It was important that I listened to more than just what the participants said but also considered the context, tone, environment, and emotions felt by the participant. During the interviews, I engaged in active listening to avoid imposing a discourse on the data. I considered and worked to recognize how my assumptions and privilege might be impacting the interview, and I worked to avoid hearing only what I wanted to hear rather than what the participant was trying to say.

A challenge associated with qualitative interviews is that the quality of the data collected is dependent on the quality of the interview questions (Salvin-Baden & Major, 2013). To strengthen the quality of my questions, I conducted pilot interviews with two young women (aged 22 to 25) from my personal network. Following the pilot interviews, I debriefed the questions with the participants; I asked them if any questions were confusing or difficult to answer or if there were significant aspects related to the topics that I did not ask about. I changed then edited the interview guide prior to data collection. For example, I clarified the question regarding participants’ background in my pre-interview guide by adding more detail. I added an additional question about participants’ history with drugs over their lifetime. Although neither of the participants of these pilot interviews lived in a rural community, I found that the pilot
interviews were also useful because they offered insight into the discourses and subject positions that young women draw upon when positioning themselves and others.

**Conducting interviews.**

All interviews were face-to-face and held in the participants' hometown, to ensure that the interview location was convenient for participants. Participants were asked to set aside one hour for the interview and suggest a location within their community that was a quiet space where conversation could occur privately, and we could meet without being interrupted by other community members. I began the interviews with casual conversation as I filled out the pre-interview guide.

The first interview, with Anne, was held on January 4th, 2017 at a local Tim Hortons and lasted 36 minutes. We were both nervous throughout the interview, so I held a follow-up interview with Anne on January 28th, 2017. Anne and I were much more relaxed in this second meeting; this interview was 22 minutes long. The interview with Jenn took place in her home on January 27th, 2017 and lasted one hour and twenty-two minutes. Due to our close friendship, the conversation in this interview flowed easily. The interview with Sarah was held on February 27th, 2017 at a local Tim Hortons. The interview lasted one hour and forty-one minutes. This interview taught me some important lessons about keeping the interview on track and how to bring the participant back to the topic, as at times I believe I could have been more directive of the topic of conversation. The interview with Rachel was held at a local café and was one-hour and eight minutes long. This interview provided me with a different perspective on rurality because Rachel grew up on a native reserve. However, she constructed this community as a rural space, and it was partly Rachel’s framing of her native reserve as rural that led me toward defining rurality as a social construction rather than solely geographically.
The local Tim Horton’s and cafe were acceptable places for interviews. We were not interrupted, and the spaces were quiet enough to allow for the interviews to be clearly recorded. I did, however, reflect throughout my journals on how a public location impacted Anne’s comfort level as on the night of Anne’s interview the Tim Hortons was quite busy. Perhaps it would have been beneficial for me to suggest a more private location when Anne first suggested Tim Hortons. With the other interviews, the locations were not as busy and allowed for more privacy. All participants allowed me to record the interviews with an audio recording device so that I could transcribe them verbatim. Following the interview, I gave each participant a $10 Tim Horton’s gift card as a token of my gratitude. I also sent all participants an electronic copy of the transcript of the interview, so that they could review it for accuracy and remove anything they were not comfortable talking about. All participants chose to review their transcripts and all participants approved the transcripts and made no requests for sections to be changed or deleted.

Data management.

I stored all of the data I collected on my computer in a password-protected file folder. I saved interviews using a particular naming system that included the date and time the interview was conducted. Participant’s names did not appear in the naming process, the interview recording, or on the transcript. I was the only person with access to the handwritten legend of who completed each interview, which I kept locked in a desk drawer to ensure that participant’s names remained confidential. I personally transcribed the interview recordings, which further maintained confidentiality and consistency in the research. Once I had completed and transcribed an interview, I began the data analysis process.

Data Analysis
As explained by Medved (2009), there is not a step-by-step data analysis procedure connected to positioning theory. Instead, researchers use components of positioning theory that are best suited for their research questions. Positioning theory is often used in conjunction with discourse analysis because discourse analysis assists in revealing the discourses individuals draw on when positioning themselves and others (Medved, 2009). Therefore, I used Foucauldian discourse analysis in conjunction with positioning theory to guide my analysis. This combination has been used by other poststructuralist researchers such as Amsterdam, Knoppers, and Jongman (2015), Jones (2006), and Ravn (2012).

Foucauldian discourse analysis tries to understand how language shapes our understanding of the World and how discourse perpetuates social inequalities (Willig, 2008; Wooffitt, 2005). Foucauldian discourse analysis aims to uncover how subjects are constructed in discourse and explore how that impacts subject’s lives (Willig 2008). Discourses produce subject positions that have real impacts on individual’s lives, for example, they can allow or limit certain experiences or ways of being. I undertook several of the stages of analysis of Foucauldian discourse analysis suggested by Willig (2008). These stages included identifying the wider discourses present and the subject positions made available within them. I then identified the possibilities for performance of the discursively available subject positions. Researchers using these methods look for patterns within the conversation, such as what positions are dominant within discourse and how or why that dominance is maintained. Discourse analysis also includes mapping out the structures and functions of discourse as well as identifying the relationships between speakers (Salvin-Baden & Major, 2013).

I began data analysis by transcribing and then reading each interview transcript a minimum of six times. This step helped familiarize me with the data and allowed me to see any
initial points of contention (Medved, 2009). I read the data for three overarching aspects: the positions individuals fulfilled, the actions associated with performing a position (i.e., the subject position of a student was associated with the act of attending post-secondary), and the context/storylines related to that position (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003).

When first reading the data for the positions the participants fulfilled, I began by making jot notes on the side of the interview transcript that stated the subjectivity I saw participants describing. For example, I highlighted quotes where I could identify subjectivities such as student, or retail worker. After I identified the relevant subjectivities, I reviewed the data and made jot notes on how the subject positions were constructed by larger discourses. For example, I reread the text while considering how the discourses of the rural idyll and rural dull were referenced by participants, and how participants drew on these discourses in the process of positioning themselves as rural young women.

The jot notes led me to look for storylines to help identify the subject positions that were discursively available to rural young women, and specifically rural young women who use drugs. Storylines are overarching stories from the past and present that individuals draw on to understand themselves within a particular context (Demant, Ravn & Thorsen, 2010; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). For example, participants drew on stories of experiences with drug use among family members or among peers at high school parties when positioning young rural women drug users. Storylines are used to make sense of social actions and the social values or beliefs associated with them (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003).

I also made jot notes on the transcripts to track my thoughts on participants’ positioning in relation to relevant discourses. I then focused my analysis on excerpts that discussed a participant’s positioning of themselves and the acts associated with that position. (Medved,
2009). As recommended by Medved, I analyzed the data to understand how individuals position themselves and others by searching for self-referential terms such as ‘I’ or ‘we’ and othering terms such as ‘them’ or ‘they’. This process of data analysis allowed me to identify the subject positions young rural women negotiated when positioning themselves and others.

Presenting the data.

In order to display the data, I first rearranged the transcripts to group the data into four sections: rurality, young adulthood, leisure, and recreational drug use. After rearranging the data, I wrote a paragraph in the comments section of the document that described the positions I thought participants were constructing and how they were drawing on relevant discourses. I then began writing my findings chapter, in which I connected my analysis to relevant literature. After presenting my research at a conference, I began to think that displaying the data in narratives would be a better way to demonstrate the subject positions and discourses that young rural women draw upon in the process of positioning. In order to create the narratives, I grouped the participant quotes from the rearranged interview sections together, and from there I began rearranging the quotations to construct narratives. The narratives are presented in the first section of the next chapter, in italics. I have also included excerpts from the interviews in the later sections of the findings, which I identified using quotation marks.

Reflexivity as Trustworthiness in Feminist Poststructuralism

Through-out the research process I engaged in reflexive journaling with the intent of providing trustworthiness to the data. As discussed by researchers such as Ortlipp (2008) and Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2006), reflexive journaling helps to make bias and assumptions within the research process visible. In relation to this research, reflexive journaling provided me an
opportunity to reflect on the methods of this study, in particular the recruitment process. Before starting my research, I had assumed that it would be easy to reconnect with individuals I knew from high school for the purpose of recruitment. However, to my surprise the strong connection I felt to my hometown did not carry over into recruitment, in fact I found it quite difficult to recruit young women I had known previously in the area. If I was to conduct research in a rural community again I would consider moving to the community for the period of time that I was conducting the research. Living in the rural community while conducting recruitment and data collection would allow me to socially integrate into the community and to connect more organically and serendipitously with possible participants. Rather than being positioned as an outsider coming into the community to complete research, I think that living, working, or participating in recreation within the rural community, would have helped deconstruct the outsider/resident binary between myself and participants.

Reflexive journaling also allowed me to reflect on how my identity as a white graduate student, living in the City and experiencing young adulthood shaped my positioning of participants. My journal entries demonstrate how I positioned my participants within discourses of young adulthood. Through journaling my thoughts, I was able to identify some of the relevant discourses surrounding the construction of rural young women. Further, I was able to recognize how my own positioning of participants shaped presumptions prior to the interview and within the findings of the research. However, if I were to conduct this research again I would aim to recruit participants from both in and outside of my personal network. I assume that working with individuals outside of my personal network may have allowed for different discourses to come to light. I would also aim to recruit young women with a broader range of racialized, ethnic, and religious self-identifications. This may have provided more opportunities to understand how race
and religious discourses impacted the construction of drug using young women. In order to bring to light the ways that discourses are ‘aged,’ I would add a question to my interview guide about how participants about how they construct drug use throughout their lifetime – for example, how they felt about drug use during high school and what they see their relationship with drug use being in the future.
Chapter Five: Findings

In this chapter, I show how multiple discourses of femininity constructed the subject positions of rural young women. The most prevalent and often overarching discourse that constructed young rural women’s subject positions was neoliberal femininity. This discourse impacted how the young women constructed ideal rural young adulthood and negotiated the subject position of young rural women who use drugs. The subject position of young rural women drug users was also shaped by discourses of drug use normalization and healthism.

I have organized this chapter into three sections. In the first section, I provide an introduction of my four study participants: Anne, Jenn, Sarah, and Rachael. In the next section, I discuss the dominant discourses of young adulthood and rurality that participants negotiated when positioning themselves as rural young women. Next, I discuss the dominant discourses of drug use that participants navigated when positioning young rural drug users. I have included direct quotes and larger sections of participant data that I have restoryed throughout my findings, to demonstrate how respondents negotiated the subject positions available to rural young women.

Introduction to Participants

The study participants were four young rural women who lived in a rural community within or surrounding the County of Wildlark: Anne (21), Jenn (24), Sarah (23), and Rachel (25). Anne had recently moved back to her parent’s home in Lakeview. Lakeview had a population of 6,700 and was approximately a 15-minute drive away from the City of Wildlark. Prior to this, Anne had been living in the City with her friends for eight months. She decided that moving home would be a smart financial decision. Anne’s parents are of Irish and British descent. Although she had grown-up knowing she was Catholic, Anne did not consider herself religious. To Anne, living in her rural hometown was preferable to the City because she could enjoy all the
amenities of city life, which were only a short drive away, while still living in a community that had the private and peaceful atmosphere she valued. At the time of our interview, Anne was enrolled at a college in the City of Wildlark, to become a PSW, and she worked part-time at a local nunnery. Although her work took up most of her weekend and leisure time, she still found time to work out and hang out with her boyfriend and friends. Recently, Anne had given up partying and going out in order to pursue a healthier lifestyle and focus on her career and finances. Anne had experimented with a variety of ‘party drugs’ over the past three years. Currently, she uses cannabis infrequently and mainly with her girlfriends.

At the time of our interview, Jenn was in the process of completing her postgraduate certificate in project management, while working part-time at Walmart. Jenn is white, and her parents are a mix of Scottish and indigenous descent. Jenn did not identify strongly with any religion and at the time of the interview she had not explored her indigenous heritage. Jenn had been living with her boyfriend in a house on the lake in her rural hometown for about a year. Jenn was hopeful that soon she would be able to find a job in her new field of study and begin to put down roots. Additionally, she hoped that finishing school would allow her to focus more on her personal life and leisure interests. After school, Jenn hoped she would be less stressed and would have more time for leisure activities such playing guitar. Jenn spent her weekends hanging out with her boyfriend, friends, and family. When spending time with friends, she preferred to partake in cannabis rather than drink alcohol.

When I interviewed Sarah, she was working full time as a manager at a local ice cream store. Sarah lived at her parent's home, which sat on land that her family had been farming for decades. Sarah was Catholic, and her parents were Irish and German, however at the time of the interview Sarah stated that she identified “as Canadian, like very Canadian.” At the time of our
interview, Sarah had plans to return to school in the next month to take a welding course. She was planning to quit her job and invest her time in school with the hope that getting her welding certificate would provide her with more financial benefits later in life. Although Sarah could have chosen to live and work on the family farm, she was hesitant to take up that lifestyle because she did not see herself as the "hardy gaunt farm woman" people often imagine when they think about female farmers. Instead, Sarah had dreams of exploring other cities and living somewhere else before settling down. However, she indicated that ultimately, she wanted to live in a rural community so that she could provide her children with the same "memorable" rural childhood she had growing up. For the most part, Sarah spent her weekends and leisure time hanging out with her friends and boyfriend, who all frequently used cannabis.

Rachel, my fourth participant, had just recently found a job in her field of nursing. Rachel grew up on a native reserve fifteen minutes away from the rural community she currently lived. Rachel self-identified as native and was actively engaged in her nation’s cultural heritage. She considered herself “spiritual” rather than religious. Rachel described the native reserve she grew up on as more “developed” than the rural community she currently resided in because the reserve had more amenities. Although more developed, Rachel still viewed the native reserve as a rural space due to its small population, close social ties, and connection to nature. At the time of our interview, Rachel was living with her boyfriend at his parent’s house, and they were hoping to buy a house of their own within the next year. Rachel hoped they would find a home in the rural township in which they currently lived because it offered the peaceful and connected rural atmosphere they valued. Rachel found it hard to find leisure time while living at her boyfriend’s parents’ house. However, when she was free, she focused on completing errands and meeting up
Rachel had never experimented with “hard drugs.” She had tried cannabis once as a young adult but did not enjoy the experience.

**Dominant Discourses of Young Adulthood and Rurality**

When positioning themselves as young rural women, participants negotiated two interrelated discourses: the rural mobility imperative and the normative life path to adulthood. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the normative life path is conceptualized as a linear path that young adults should take on their way to achieving adulthood (Arnett, 2004). This path begins with attending school, then starting your career, owning a home, and then having a child (Shigihara, 2015). Within this discourse, individuals following the normative path are positioned as adults on the path to success and those who deviate are positioned as failures (Farrugia, 2016). Among young adults the most important criteria for reaching adulthood are thinking independently, accepting responsibility for oneself, and becoming financially stable (Arnett, 2004). These aspects of self-performance are engrained within the normative path for young adults are expected to follow (Shigihara, 2015).

For young women, the normative life trajectory for young adults is further complicated by expectations surrounding when women should bear children (Deegan & Morrison, 2004). Deviating from the normative life trajectory, such as having a child too young, is associated with the performance of a ‘lower class’ subjectivity (Francombe & Silk, 2016), due in part to the overarching belief that participating actively in the marketplace is symbolic of successful girlhood (Deegan & Morrison, 2004). The successful girl in the context of neoliberalism is a girl with a ‘can do’ attitude who makes thought-out decisions about her career and postpones childbearing until after she is settled in the workplace. Within this discourse of ‘can do’ femininity, the idea of early or young motherhood is thought of as tragic and a waste of a young
woman’s potential (Deegan & Morrison, 2004). In contrast, women who have a child young are often constructed as individuals who have made the ‘wrong’ decision, due to their inability to ‘choose’ to have a child at the correct time (Deegan & Morrison, 2004). However, at the same time young women are also faced with the idea that they cannot wait too long to have a child, because not having a child is a bigger ‘failure’ than having one to young (Deegan & Morrison, 2004).

One participant, Jenn, struggled with this discourse and found difficulty in negotiating a subject position that was successful but also reflected her aspirations for the future. Jenn was torn between when she should have a child and the length of time it was taking her to secure a career. Jenn wished to live out a normative trajectory; she hoped in the next few years to establish a stable career, get married, own a home, and have kids. Some of this pressure was enhanced due to her own childhood experience, as she was approaching the age at which her mom had children. Jenn struggled with her expectations of when she should have a child and where she felt she was in achieving career and home stability.

Now that I am 24 it’s a little bit more pressure. I feel like I am at an age where I am supposed to have a lot more figured out, just like a career path, you know marriage is supposed to be coming or something. I think a lot of that just has to do with knowing how young my mom was when she got married. I think she was around my age. It almost feels like for some reason it seems like a time you’re supposed to think about having kids and where you’re going to have your house, just starting your mortgage. I just feel like it’s more of a serious time in my life where I have to be like, okay, it is time to start putting in some roots (Jenn, 24).

Jenn’s experience of young adulthood was that it was stressful because she felt as though she should "have it all figured out" when she indicated that she did not. Jenn felt that by now she should have moved on from school and should be at a stable place in her career. She felt pressure to find a secure and stable path for her future. To Jenn, the age of 24 was on the doorstep of adulthood, a time when she should be "putting down roots" and starting to think about having
children. Because she was still unsure about her future, she was beginning to feel "behind" and felt at risk of being positioned as a failed young adult. Jenn recognized her positioning within the normative life trajectory and highlighted the aspects of her life where she successfully performed the subject position of a young adult on the normative path to adulthood. For example, she prioritized settling down and securing a career prior to having children. In her decision to wait to have a child, Jenn performs the subjectivity of a successful neoliberal girl who is thoughtful about the best decision for her career. Growing up ‘right’ has always been complicated for girls, and discourses of normative young adulthood are often contradictory, making it difficult for young rural women to position themselves as successful young adults coherently within the discourse.

**Negotiating multiple subject positions within the discourse of a normative path to adulthood - “I would rather tell them that I am a student right now than working at Walmart.”**

To position themselves as ‘on track’ to success, participants navigated several subject positions within the discourse of a normative path to adulthood. The lives of the young women in my study were in flux, and many aspects of the normative life trajectory were occurring at the same time, rather than unfolding sequentially on a linear path, as it is imagined in this discourse. For example, in the last year, Anne had moved out with her friends, attended school, met someone she saw a future with, and then moved back home to her parent’s house. Young people, including my participants, rarely live out young adulthood as imagined in the normative life trajectory (Settersten & Ray, 2010). The young women I interviewed struggled at times to perform all of the expectations of successful young adulthood.

For example, Jenn negotiated the subject positions of student and retail employee, and she felt ambivalent about them both. On one hand, a student subjectivity is positive; it aligns
with neoliberal ideals that celebrate working hard and self-investment in one’s future. However, it is also a subject position that one is expected to ‘grow out of’ within the discourse of a normative life trajectory. Further, although it aligns young rural women on the path to success, it is also associated with financial instability. As Jenn explained, she was reluctant to position herself as a student because she felt too “old” to be a student and that she should have been “farther along” at her age.

I don’t know if it’s just because I am in a post-graduate program, I like to think I am a little more advanced than a student but yeah… Maybe with age right now I have a problem with being identified as a student, I almost feel like I need to be a little bit farther in my life <sigh> I don’t know why I have always kind of felt like that. But yeah, I don’t know I guess I am a student if somebody asked me what I am doing I would rather tell them that I am a student right now than working at Walmart. When I was younger, I don’t think I was taking having a career seriously, to be honest. I don’t think I really knew what I wanted to do. I still feel like I am in the same place weirdly enough. Even after all these experiences and changes in my life, I feel like I still, I am still missing what I am supposed to do (Jenn, 24).

Jenn was also reluctant to claim the subjectivity of a Walmart employee because working in retail did not fit with her middle-classed image of a successful young adult. In her interview, Jenn demonstrated agency in shaping how she was positioned in relation to discourses of the normative life trajectory. As discussed in Chapter One, poststructural agency is defined as an individual’s capacity to shape how others view them (Davies, 1991). Throughout the interview, she made sure to communicate that this was not the career she was aiming to end up in on her ‘life trajectory.’ So, for Jenn, the student subjectivity was preferable to retail employee, because while it constructed her as lagging behind it also allowed her to continue to access a subject position that had the potential for success rather than one in which she was constructed as a failure.

At times, participants showed ambivalence towards discourses of a normative life trajectory. Participants struggled to negotiate an affirming subject position within the discourse
of a normative path to adulthood, which caused some to question if the normative life trajectory was really the ‘correct’ choice. Sarah, for example, questioned the legitimacy of a normative life trajectory that included post-secondary education. When discussing if she would consider herself a student, Sarah questioned the benefits of investing in a long-term program given the costs associated with it. Although Sarah planned to attend school in a few months herself, she also wondered if she and her friends made the right choice:

*I mean I don’t know, I wouldn’t consider myself a student yet. When I think of a student, I think of someone like my friends who have been in university for a long time, just they are at a different place than me. I mean I have this friend [Lisa], and she is questioning all her university now and oh my friend [Emily] she is questioning all her university now too. She is like do I really want to do this... Yeah, I mean I think she is like fifty-grand in and she is questioning life like I think that is the worst point to be questioning life dude you had like wayyy before <laughter> (Sarah, 23).*

For Sarah, the subject position of a student was associated with high financial costs and uncertainty. Sarah exhibited agency in her resistance to being positioned as a student and instead be positioned in relation to her job as a retail employee. Through highlighting her job, Sarah demonstrated the value she places on financial stability. By positioning herself as a financially stable young adult, Sarah is able to negotiate the relevant discourses and position herself as a successful young adult.

Along with returning to school, moving back home was another area where young rural women struggled to negotiate an affirming subject position within discourses of a normative life trajectory and mobility imperative. Again, this led some participants to critically question the normative expectations for rural young adults. For example, Anne, who had just moved back in with her parents, pushed back on the normative life trajectory. She constructed her move home as a smart decision due to her ability to save money: as she stated, “it’s nice to stay at home… like the expense of staying at home is a lot better than moving away.” Instead of viewing moving
home as a step back, Anne associated it with making a step toward adulthood that involved taking greater financial responsibility for her life; along with saving money, she indicated that she had decided to no longer spend her money on frivolous activities like going out. Her ability to maintain financial stability allowed her to perform the subjectivity of a young adult who was moving forward rather than behind.

Like Anne, Sarah felt conflicted about her choice to live at home. Feeling the weight of the discourse of mandatory mobility, Sarah thought that she needed to move away from her hometown even though she was quite happy to be working in town and living at home. Her ambivalence about moving away underscored her visions of her future. When I asked her where she wanted to be living in five years, she stated:

_Hopefully moved out but if not, my mom has visions of building a house on the property, and it looks like that vision may come true sooner than originally anticipated. So, I don’t know I might just live there my whole life. See I like that, and then I don’t like that. I kinda want to escape for a little while and see what it is like and then maybe come back to that later on. I don’t know I guess I see myself hopefully moved out, just frigging gone._ (Sarah, 23)

Sarah’s comments show her recognition of the normative expectations of growing up: to be positioned as a successful adult, she needed to move out of her parent’s home for a period of time, even if the arrangement worked well for her. However, Sarah also demonstrated agency in how she positioned herself during this discussion. She recognized how she would be positioned by other young adults if she chose to continue to live on her parent’s farm and therefore emphasized her hope to move out at some point in the future. By emphasizing her desire to move away from the family farm, Sarah positions herself as a young adult, on track to successful adulthood.
Positioning themselves as Young Women within Discourses of Rurality - "I don’t know if that is… because I am an introvert, but it’s just like nicer you don’t stumble on people."

As discussed in Chapter Two, the mobility imperative frames out-migration to post-secondary school as the natural choice for young adults and positions young adults who out-migrate as successful subjects (Farrugia, 2016). In comparison, young rural women who do not independently pursue further education are positioned as passive subjects, who have not taken the time or initiative to invest in themselves (Francombe-Webb & Silk, 2016).

During our interview, Jenn also reproduced the discourse of a mobility imperative when discussing the "two paths" young people from rural communities usually take. It was evident in Jenn’s description of the two paths that those who left the rural area were positioned at a higher status than those who stayed. Jenn reproduced neoliberal discourses that individualized the decision to stay or leave rural places. As she stated, young people stayed in rural places because they were "scared" to leave – a perspective that frames their decision to stay as the wrong choice:

Growing up in Wildlark it’s almost like there is like two different paths people kind of went down. You know there was a lot of people who became successful, then there were some people who were almost afraid to leave that close-knit group and family. And so, they stuck around each other and stayed with each other a little bit longer and then you know eventually woke up one day and realized you know how old they were and they didn’t go to school or didn’t do anything. And I know a lot of friends that didn’t end up going to school, and you know just didn’t end up doing the things they said they were going to do eventually. And I think that some people got scared and just stayed with that close-knit group and never really expanded (Jenn, 24).

When I asked the young women about their choice to stay in their rural communities then and in the future, they drew on both the discourse of rural decline and rural idyll. As discussed in the review of literature, the discourse of a rural idyll constructs rural communities as ideal places to raise children and grow old, due to the belief the rural communities are close to nature, safe and socially connected (Rye, 2006). In comparison, discourses of the rural decline position rural
communities as places without economic or leisure opportunities. Discourses of a rural decline frame rural communities as spaces where young adults struggle to start their careers or live out their young adulthood (Rye, 2006). Participants of this study recognized the presence of this discourse, for example, Sarah stated "so, I just think it is a good community to raise kids, and it is a good place to grow old too because it is nice and quiet. I think in between that it is tough because as a young adult trying to, I am kinda sort of trying to get out of that."

Like the discourses of mandatory mobility and normative life trajectory, discourses of a rural idyll and rural dull also construct young adults as ‘out of place’ in the rural community. However, this was another discourse that participants resisted. Participants were aware of how others positioned them within rural discourse and rejected the assumption that they were out of place in their rural community. Similar to the findings of Cairns’ (2014) study, the participants of this study were heavily invested in the ideals of rurality and their identities as young women were connected to those ideals. In identifying as a rural young woman, they also positioned themselves as individuals who valued the "quiet" and "friendly" atmosphere of rurality. For example, Jenn valued living in a rural community for how it allowed her to “focus on herself” (versus superficial things) and "feel more grounded" than she could when living in the city. Similarly, Rachel discussed how the social atmosphere of a rural community was better suited to her personality. She explained: "I enjoy it more in the township because I am more spread out from my neighbours and everything. I don’t know if that is like more because I am an introvert, but it’s just like nicer you don’t stumble on people." For Rachel and other participants, they felt very much ‘in place’ in rural communities.

To avoid being viewed as ‘out of place’ within their rural hometowns, participants actively challenged the rural-urban binary, arguing that rural communities were not that different
than urban spaces – and in fact, in their opinion, they were better. Participants highlighted how they were still able to access urban resources, leisure, and economic opportunities living in a rural community. For example, Anne said, "I don’t really think it is a big deal in terms of jobs because we are close to Wildlark still and we are close to like bigger towns as well that would have jobs." For Anne, the proximity of her rural town to larger cities meant that she did not see her rural town as in decline. Instead, she saw it as a space where she could achieve successful young adulthood and perform a subjectivity she felt best suited her. By demonstrating that their rural communities were not as isolated as typically constructed, participants demonstrated agency through resisting their positioning as ‘out of place’ within their rural towns.

Participants also positioned themselves as in ‘place’ within their rural hometowns by drawing on affective connections to their rural hometown and drawing on discourses of the rural idyll. Other researchers such as Norman and Power (2015) have found that affective connections to rural communities often impacted young adult’s decisions to leave or stay in their hometown. Like the participants in Norman and Powers (2015) study, ideal memories of rural childhood and emotional connections to their hometown had a strong influence on how the participants in this study envisioned their futures. For example, Sarah discussed how she could not envision having a family somewhere else:

> At the end of the day when I think about having kids and when I think about being married I think about being home, and I don’t know why that is. But I guess it is just maybe it is because I have never really lived anywhere else you know, and I just don’t I have that sort of vision of what it should be like (Sarah, 24).

Although she was not yet ready for a family, her emotional connection to her rural community and rural childhood shaped her plans for the future. Similarly, when discussing where she wanted to live in five years, Jenn explained that she wanted her children to grow up in a safe ‘rural’ neighbourhood:
In five years, hopefully, I will still be living in [Smithville], it is the place I feel home. I just like the freedom I don’t want to worry about my kid walking down the street, you know should just worry about the people in all the houses. I just think you get more of a sense of the people around and who you’re surrounding yourself within these type of communities whereas in bigger communities, like [Wildlark]. I don’t like my mom’s community honestly; she knows their names because she said hi to her neighbor like once but you know she doesn’t know anyone on her street like she doesn’t know anybody, she couldn’t tell you who is living in what house. Living in a small town I just feel more grounded in myself, I feel like in bigger cities um I lost a lot of who I am and didn’t spend a lot of time for me. So, I think it’s important in the sense that I just want to feel connected. I just remember definitely growing up I could point to any house down the street, and I could definitely tell you who lives there. That was very much [Smithville] uh, but definitely a small, loving community (Jenn, 24).

Growing up, Jenn valued the socially connected atmosphere of her hometown and the fact that "everybody knew everybody." For her, the ability to let her child walk down the street without supervision or worry made living in a rural community a preferable option. In contrast to her hometown, Jenn constructed the nearby urban community as an unfriendly place that was socially disconnected. Her description of her rural community drew on the discourse of a rural idyll, and her memories and the affective connection to her hometown drove her choice to start a family there. By elevating rural communities over urban, participants negotiated a subject position for ‘rural young adults’ that was more positive than those constructed in the discourse of rural decline.

**Dominant Discourses of Drug Use among Rural Young Women**

The young women I interviewed had a range of experiences with and opinions about drug use. The participant that had the most experience with drugs, Sarah, had experimented throughout high school but since then had participated less frequently. In contrast, Rachel had only engaged in cannabis use one time, during her youth. Anne explained that all drug use was normalized among her peers within a party or club setting: “It is just more popular now, it’s more normal for people to be doing it.” In comparison, Rachel saw cannabis as a normalized substance but did not think that drugs, such as cocaine, prescription medication, or ecstasy were socially
accepted among her peers. For example, when discussing a party where someone had brought cocaine, Rachel explained that the person was told “we don’t do that here” and thrown out of the party. All participants indicated that they thought that drug use had become more normalized in recent years, however, their opinions differed regarding the type and frequency of drug use they viewed as normal.

The women I interviewed reproduced the discourse of normalized drug use, – a discourse in which drug use is constructed as no longer concentrated within certain youth subcultures, but as part of socially integrated youth’s leisure lives (Coomber, Moyle & South, 2015; Demant, Ravn & Thorsen, 2010). Although the historical accuracy of their view is up for debate, the participants I interviewed perceived that drug use had become more prevalent among young adults in their community, particularly the use of chemical substances such as cocaine. Anne, in particular, discussed how she felt drug use participation was different among her and her older brother’s generation.

Yeah like compared to now, like my brothers were older so I always knew the older kids and like people would smoke weed and stuff, but they weren’t doing coke and doing other stuff like on a regular basis but now it’s like, it’s the hard stuff that’s on a regular basis (Anne, 21).

Although participants saw drug use as more normal and common among their peers in a party or club context, they did not necessarily think that drug use was sensible behaviour for their peers. The discourse of normalized drug use relates to the prevalence of use, whereas assessing the sensibility of young rural women’s drug use involves a moral judgment of a person’s drug use practices. Young rural women draw on discourses of rurality, healthism, young adulthood, gender, and class when evaluating the sensibility of drug use practices. Through this prism, rural young women whose drug use was deemed sensible were positioned in positive
terms, whereas young rural women whose drug use was seen as insensible where positioned negatively.

According to Parker, Williams, and Aldridge (2002), the concept of ‘sensible’ drug use describes the socially accommodating attitudes among young people towards drug use that they consider ‘safe’ and recreational. Making sense of ‘sensible’ drug use involves a rational decision-making process in which young adults distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable drug use. The authors argue that in order for drug use participation to be considered acceptable, it cannot disrupt the user’s chance to become a productive and successful adult. As such, the use of all drugs in a party, club, or special event setting is seen as acceptable and normal behaviour among young adults (Duff, 2005; Smith, Thurston, & Green, 2011). Within discourses of drug use normalization, the use of cannabis has a higher level of acceptability because is viewed as ‘sensible’ due to the assumed lower health risks (Foster & Spencer, 2013; Parker et al., 2002). In comparison, drugs such as cocaine, ecstasy, heroin and prescription medication are seen as less sensible due to the increased financial costs and health risks. Participation in ‘sensible’ drug use is tolerated and accepted by non-drug users and cautious users (Parker et al., 2002).

Participants drew on discourses of ‘sensible' and normalized drug use when negotiating the subject position of young rural women drug users. The women I interviewed constructed young rural women drug users who use drugs in a party or club setting as participating in a ‘sensible' form of drug use. For example, Sarah explained that hard drugs were something she would do at a concert or event, however, it was "something you do very rarely." For Sarah, heavy drug use was a part of what she constructed as a “wild phase” in her life. Now that she was more mature and knowledgeable about drug use, she used drugs only under certain
circumstances. Additionally, drugs were expensive, and using them was only “good” (i.e., sensible) if an individual could "afford" it:

_I did all the other crazy shit when I was in high school and I am cool with that now. But from time to time if I know there is like, I don’t know, a fucking Arcade Fire concert coming up I am going to make the effort to like get some shrooms <laughter>. But like it has to be eaten like all that night. Like that is my logic – like it has to be consumed all that night and like you are going to have a fun fucking night but not frequently right, like that is something you do very rarely. Like I am into like shrooms but if you do it frequently it is not going to be the same. I mean like good for them if they can afford that but I mean like the effects of shrooms are better when you have like maybe a year on that. <laughter> (Sarah, 23)._

Anne also constructed drug use at parties and events as normal. She explained, “I know of like cocaine and molly and LSD… I think that it is something that is really common in [Wildlark] like recently.” In contrast, she constructed drug use that happened outside of these spaces as unacceptable. This is because, as she explained, the purpose of recreational drug use is “going out and having fun,” and using drugs at home or alone did not align with that purpose. Among participants, frequent hard drug use, even within a social context, was seen as unacceptable behaviour. Participants constructed individuals who used drugs frequently as addicts, who were not responsible regarding their drug use consumption.

Anne also associated sensibility with the age of the user. As she explained, recreational drug use was ‘normal’ for young adults due to the lack of responsibility associated with young adulthood. However, she was less accepting of people who continued to use drugs as they grew older. For Anne using drugs was part of the performance of a young adult subjectivity however, drug use did not align with her conceptualization of appropriate adult behaviour.

_I feel like it would be like I don’t know if you saw a forty-year-old doing coke and then like a 20-year-old doing it I don’t know you would be like, it would be more like... I don’t know, I am not sure that I am trying to say but something about being young, I don’t know it’s like more realistic or maybe like normal (Anne, 21)._
Rachel also discussed how age impacted her views of acceptable and sensible drug use. For Rachel, drug use was so widespread in her high school that she had felt stigmatized due her choice not to use drugs. However, as she grew older her choice to abstain from drugs was more accepted, as it was seen as a sensible choice for a person who was older:

*I tried it because I wanted to, and I wanted to understand and so that was a lot better than someone trying to force me or stigmatizing me for not doing it. And I think that just comes with the age, now that I am you know above twenty now and they are all just like, ‘oh so and so doesn’t want to,’ there is now more of like, ‘oh who cares,’ you’re not at that age where it is like, ‘oh she has to do it now.’ So, I don’t view it negatively, but I don’t have the want to go out and buy it (Rachel, 24).*

Rachel’s experience points to the challenges that young women face in constructing a positive subjectivity in rural communities: young rural women can face stigmatization for participating and for not participating in drugs. This makes the subject position of an acceptable young rural women drug user difficult to fulfill.

For Rachel, the subject position of an acceptable rural young women drug user was further complicated by her native identity as well as living on the reserve. During her interview, Rachel discussed the increase in illegal cannabis dispensaries on her reserve since Canada begun considering the legalization of recreational cannabis. The increase of dispensaries on the reserve had increased crime and violence in the community, causing residents and surrounding communities to position drug users in the community as criminals. Further, many of these dispensaries were run by young adults, which Rachel felt caused residents to stigmatize her, even though she did not engage in cannabis use.

*I felt more stigmatized over the whole marijuana issue while I lived on the reserve because of the marijuana shops, the township people are more easy going. But they township the people just are more easy going, I want to believe that the effects of residential schools and everything on the reserve people are a little more keyed up and anxious and more willing to stigmatize other people (Rachel, 24).*
Driscoll (2014) states indigenous young women encounter higher levels of surveillance in rural communities than their white counterparts. This increased surveillance results in less discursive options for young indigenous women to draw on to position themselves positively (Driscoll, 2014). As discussed by Rachel, native people are discursively constructed as excessive users of drugs and alcohol, and Rachel indicated that her identity as a native young woman added a layer of complexity to her being positioned positively in relation to drug use. Rachel was aware of the racialized discourse surrounding drug use in her community and avoided participation in drug use to prevent herself from being positioned by residents in the community as a ‘bad’ young woman. Although Jenn self-identified as indigenous while filling out the pre-interview guide, she did not discuss how her heritage during the interview or how it impacted how she was positioned by others. Similarly, Sarah and Anne, both of whom identify and are identified as white, never discussed how their racialized identity as white young women impacted their drug use, or their construction of recreational drug users. This lends support to the idea that rural space (in Ontario and elsewhere) is constructed as white space (Jaroz and Lawson, 2002). As white women, these participants did not face stigmatization in relation to a racialized identity. They had more discursive space to participate in drug use without being positioned as bad rural women.

Assessing the risks of drug use: physical and social - “I just see that as more dangerous because it’s cooked and chemical.”

Discourses of healthism also factored into constructions of sensible drug use. Similar to discourses of neoliberalism, discourses of healthism individualize responsibility for one’s own health, instead of considering structural factors that may impact an individual’s ability to be ‘healthy’. Within healthism discourses, individuals who are able to maintain good health, and display their ‘health’ through the presentation of an ideal body shape and size, are positioned as
successful individuals (Lee & McDonald, 2010). In contrast, individuals who are considered to be ‘unhealthy’ are viewed as lazy, self-indulgent, greedy, and largely responsible for their inability to maintain a healthy lifestyle (Lee & McDonald, 2010). As such, unhealthy individuals are constructed as the failed other. Wiklund, Bengs, Malmgren-Olsson and Ohman (2010) also make the point that healthism discourses are gendered because they frame female bodies as ‘problematic’ and in need of control and improvement. As such, young women often feel added pressure to continually be improving and monitoring their health (Wiklund et al., 2010). This self-monitoring and improvement is achieved by avoiding excessive behaviour including excessive eating, drinking, and drug use (Wiklund et al., 2010).

How young rural women were positioned in relation to health discourses was dependent on the type of drug they used and the perceived impact it had on their health. For example, the young women in this study rationalized some drug use and condemned others. Anne for example discussed how cannabis was viewed as more acceptable among her peers because it was perceived to have some health benefits. In comparison, drugs such as cocaine were viewed as less acceptable because they did not have any health benefits and people typically just used them to have fun:

*I feel like marijuana is more acceptable just because there is so many like good things about it, whereas cocaine and stuff like that there is, I don’t see like anything really good in it, I don’t know...like some people use marijuana for like health issues or like something like that but you don’t use cocaine for a health issue, like it’s just you usually do it just for fun or something (Anne, 21)*.

Similar to Anne, Jenn was also more accepting of cannabis use over drugs such as prescription medication. Her rationalization for this higher level of acceptability was based off the idea that individuals rarely die or overdose when using cannabis. For this reason, she saw cannabis as the least harmful drug option:
See that’s just it. I think that marijuana right now, since it is so natural it is kind of what is looked at right now as being recreational. Whereas no I don’t think cocaine is okay to be recreational and no I don’t think prescription drugs is okay to be recreational...I just think the more damaging things they do to your body, um I think there has been more proof showing people actually dying or overdosing and you know actually dying from it. Where I don’t think I could tell you a story about someone dying from marijuana or someone dying from overuse, not saying that somebody hasn’t done something stupid after being under the influence of marijuana, like I can’t say that, that has never happened you know (Jenn, 24).

In comparison, the use of hard drugs such as cocaine and ecstasy was more controversial because it was harder to use these drugs in a safe – i.e., healthy – way. For example, Rachel emphasized the importance of people knowing where their drugs come from and how they were produced. For this reason, she viewed smoking weed that was homegrown as better because it was the safer option. In contrast, the “cooked and chemical” component of hard drugs decreased their safety. For Rachel, it was also safer to participate in drug use around people she knew; feeling safe also helped make the drug use more enjoyable. Rachel constructed ‘safe drug use’ or drug use that caused the least amount of harm, as acceptable. Although she is not a drug user herself, Sarah had a socially accommodating attitude towards drug use, if she perceived it to be sensible.

Well, the first time I had actually seen substances at a party, my friends were smoking weed and it was their own like they grew it at the time but they didn’t sell it. And like I thought that was fine you know, that’s really cool I really admired that and they would be a safe place like safe people who would support you. Mhm and that’s why before I was adamant not to try it because I didn’t feel safe cause it wasn’t safe people that I knew well. I have tried it recreationally marijuana and, I think I would have liked to have like less than what I had because I think then I would have probably enjoyed it. I just see that as more dangerous because it’s cooked and chemical and like made in a lab and it could be cross laced. I guess I have just seen so much, like so many effects and so many documentaries that, like people that have done crystal meth. And actually, like we knew some friend’s um and they were addicted and it was like taking over their lives (Rachel, 25).
Along with physical and health-related dangers, participation in drug use was also associated social risks. Although there has recently been a shift in the conversation around the acceptability of recreational drug use, and the beginnings of the decriminalization of marijuana, there remains a sense of anxiety surrounding recreational drug use, particularly in rural communities. Drug use runs counter to constructions of rural communities as idyll, innocent spaces that are highly socially connected (Ni Laoire, 2007). For the young women in this study, the close connections in rural communities and idea that ‘everybody knows everybody’ was an important consideration in their decision to use drugs, because it was so difficult to maintain privacy about a person’s drug use and because of the conservative values that are more dominant in rural communities.

As discussed by Sarah in the narrative below, rural Ontario is typically conservative and as such drug users in the community are constructed by residents as deviant individuals who bring crime into the community. Therefore, drug use runs a high risk of stigmatization. The social consequences of being known as a drug user or having a criminal record made participation in drug use very risky for young adults because it could impact their lives in the economic sphere. As such individuals who participated in discreet drug use, such as in their home or among friends, were positioned more positively than individuals who used in public or flaunted their drug use:

Drug use is dangerous, there are health dangers in addition to the police dangers. You know that if you go to jail for that, that is quite the hefty stay. And then on top of that, and I think this is what motivated me, is my mom would say like, ‘uh you know if you get caught with that, that is this, this, and this on your record and you’re going to have a really hard time getting a job.’ I mean it is Wildlark already and you are going to have a hard time getting a job over the person who has a high school diploma and has no record. Like you think you’re going to get a job after that? There is definitely a stigma around it in the community. I mean rural Ontario anywhere is always going to be
Conservative. Like if they want to judge, you know, that’s cool, that is okay, its fine, go ahead (Sarah, 23).

**Negotiating personal choice and discourses of neoliberalism, gender, and class- “I have a choice like I am making my choice.”**

Participants reproduced neoliberal discourses of choice and individual responsibility when positioning young women drug users. For an individual’s drug use to be viewed as ‘sensible,’ it had to be the result of an informed choice to participate. For example, Jenn discussed how now that she was older and more aware of the effects of drugs on her body, she regarded her drug use as more acceptable than when she used drugs for the ‘thrill’ or in order to ‘fit in,’ as she did when she was younger:

*I think younger I was a lot more scared of drugs and um I didn’t know as much what it was going to do with my body and that was kind of a thrill. Where now like you know, like you know what it is going to do to your body. I guess I just feel like its more acceptable now because my brain is more developed and I just feel more like you know I have a choice like I am making my choice. Whereas when you are younger it is more about fitting in and wanting to do it you know because my friends were doing it, you know I just think you have more options for choice (Jenn, 24).*

Jenn positions individuals who make an informed choice to participate in drug use as acceptable and younger users or young women who engage in drug use due to peer pressure as ‘insensible’ drug users. These findings are similar to Ravn’s (2012), who found that in order to fulfill the identity of a responsible drug user, young adults needed to have knowledge on types of drugs, the appropriate context for use, drug checking, and their position within drug culture. And like the participants in this study, Ravn’s (2012) study found that in general young adults viewed it as wrong for minors to participate in drug use.

Anne also discussed the importance of choice in relation to drug use. Anne constructed drug use as a leisure activity that young people were entitled to ‘choose’ to do, even if that weren’t her own personal choice:
I don’t see a problem with it I just don’t want to do it myself, because just cause I have other things, more important things to be doing or worrying about and to be spending my money on. When I was younger I was pretty like hard-on like the hard drugs, like, I didn’t like them but then I kind of like backed off a little and didn’t care as much about what people did and then now it’s just your choice, basically if you want to do it or not now. It doesn’t matter to me really. I guess just everyone, has their own opinions and their own what they want to do and if they want to do it than they are going to do it, basically like you can’t stop them or anything (Anne, 21).

Anne’s comment about having other “more important things to be doing or worrying about” shows that she constructs drug use not necessarily as a bad activity, but certainly as a frivolous activity that did not assist individuals on the path to adulthood. Anne’s comments are similar to findings reported by Parker (2005), who found that recreational drug use has become ‘unremarkable’ and within normative boundaries. Parker (2005) found that this has constructed drug use as a more acceptable leisure opportunity for youth from a variety of social backgrounds. At the same time, with comments like “if they want to do it then they are going to do it,” we can see how the neoliberal discourses of choice and individualism influence Anne’s perspectives on drug use. Because Anne positioned young rural women as in charge of their own decision making and drug use as an activity they could choose to participate in or not, drug use was an acceptable activity.

Discourses of class and gender intersected with the discourses neoliberalism when participants negotiated the subject position of young rural women drug users. Rodner’s (2005) study on young men and women’s positioning of normalized drug users demonstrated that individuals negotiated discourses of neoliberalism when positioning themselves and other drug users. Rodner (2005) found that drug users highlighted the importance of control and individual choice in relation to their drug use. For example, drug addicts are typically constructed as individuals who lack control over their drug use and are positioned as deviant and weak (Deegan & Morrison, 2004). This logic extended to rural young women, in order to negotiate a positive
subject position within this discourse, young women who use drugs must make informed choices in relation to their use and make sure they do not lose control of their bodies while using.

How young rural women were positioned in discourses of neoliberal femininity was also impacted by expectations of how young women should engage in drug use. When females participate in drug use they are commonly understood as passive actors rather than instigators or independent users (Miller & Carbone-Lopez, 2015). As such young women who participate passively are positioned as normal and young women who are instigators are constructed as performing outside of their gender. The experiences of Sarah illustrate these points. Sarah identified herself as someone who defied gender expectations because it was she who introduced her boyfriend to drugs, rather than the other way around:

*I actually got him into it. I am a bad girlfriend <laughter> No I got him into it though and at first, he was like I don’t like this at all and then he just kept doing it because I kept doing it and eventually he was just like yeah, I like this. And most of my friends are okay with it and if they are not then I am fine with that. Like I don’t need to push them into something they don’t want to do. Um like there are some friends I can drink a whole bottle of wine with, Amanda for example and then there are other friends I can smoke a whole bowl with like a whole gram and those are cool friends too. So basically, like you gotta pick and choose because you can’t like it is kinda like a bad it sends a bad rep when people feel forced into something that they don’t want to do or that they are unfamiliar with. Like if they are comfortable with you and they want to try it for the first time then wow that is a great honour because you are christening them <laughter> and that is exciting but um yeah (Sarah, 23).*

In the above quote, Sarah draws on multiple discourses in her construction and positioning of good and bad rural young woman drug users. On one hand, Sarah exhibited agency in her resistance of traditional discourses of femininity – the passive female to the agentic male – in connection to her drug use; instead, she positioned herself as in control of her drug use. She also drew on non-traditional discourses of femininity, for example, neoliberal femininity, when talking about introducing her friends to drugs. For Sarah, it was important that an individual had
free choice and individual agency in relation to their drug use. As discussed above, individual choice and agency are central to successfully performing neoliberal femininity.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, hard drug use had a higher level of acceptability among young rural women if they could do so without impacting their financial stability – or as Sarah stated, “good for them if they can afford that.” Her comments show how drug use is classed, and a young rural woman’s ability to be positioned positively in relation to drug use is dependent on her financial standing. However, class is not only understood in terms of an individual’s financial position. It also has to do with how well an individual performs middle-class values and expectations (Skeggs, 2005). For rural young women, there is a fine line between being positioned as an adventurous young woman and a dependent addict. Within neoliberal discourse, addictive drug use behaviour is constructed as a symbol of dependency and lack of control (Skeggs, 2005). If an individual performs aspects of a lower-class subjectivity, they face increased scrutiny in relation to their drug use. For example, within neoliberal discourses, dependency, such as addiction, are symbolic of performing a lower-class subjectivity (Skeggs, 2005). At the same time, performing the subjectivity of an adventurous risk taker is associated with being middle-class (Skeggs, 2005). When constructed through a neoliberal lens participating in drug use has the potential to help you perform these qualities of a middle-class subjectivity. However, once you lose the ability to control or self-regulate, risk-taking activities become associated with the working class.

One participant, Rachel had difficulty reconciling drug use with her ideas of success and upward mobility. Growing up, Rachel had always constructed drug use as lower class and a drug user as someone “sitting on the corner smoking a bunch of cigarettes.” However, as she entered college and began to see “people I know and love use marijuana” while also reaching their
educational aspirations, her classed assumptions about drug use began to be disrupted. Her comments below illustrate her struggle to reconcile her changing ideas about what it means to be a ‘classy girl’ in relation to drug use:

*I was seen as like the girl who isn’t fun, like oh she doesn’t drink she doesn’t like to take weed she’s not fun she’s lame we can’t show. But they also like viewed me differently like for example I remember once someone said oh I think you should smoke weed because I have never seen a real girl smoke weed. And I was like oh so and so smoked weed they are girls, and they were like no you’re a real girl. And I am like what does that mean, am I like classy, is that what classy is a person that doesn’t do it. So, I was kinda like looking at myself in my teenager’s years like are their labels to people that smoke marijuana and like why are their labels. And I hadn’t met you know people like, I guess they weren’t, for example, sitting on the corner smoking a bunch of cigarettes being like oh I am going to go smoke weed tonight. That was the people I had ever seen, I had never seen just like a normal everyday person use it, at that point. It wasn’t until I was in my college years where I saw people I know and love use marijuana and it just fit perfectly with what I had believed before. I was seeing these conflicting images but still thinking like you know its okay, it was really hard, it was a weird time. I guess as a kid there was a stigma even as a kid, um a big big stigma and it was kinda weird because I had a dad that talked about it and was like ya, I smoked weed whatever no big deal. He said he didn’t do it much because it took away his drive to want to do anything. And you know when I was like a kid you want to be the purest form of purest good like my dad said he was unproductive and I want to be super productive and super good so I kinda of attached that to it as well (Rachel, 25).*

**Summary**

The findings of this study demonstrated that the young rural women in this study drew on multiple and at times contradictory discourses when negotiating their subjectivity as a ‘respectable’ or ‘successful’ young rural woman. Discourses of neoliberal femininity most prominently shaped how young rural women and drug users were positioned. Participants also reproduced discourses of a normative life trajectory for young adults and the rural mobility imperative in their positioning of themselves as young rural women. Within these discourses, participants negotiated subjectivities that positioned them as respectable young adults, rather than the failed rural other. The subject position of a young rural women drug user was
constructed by the neoliberal discourses of drug use normalization and healthism. However, the subject position of a successful young rural women drug user was difficult to fulfill. In order to successfully fulfil this position, young rural women needed to maintain a neoliberal middle-class subjectivity and only participate in drug use that was considered ‘sensible’ by their peers. However, what was conceptualized as ‘sensible’ drug use differed among participants.
Chapter Six: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how rural young women make sense of recreational drug use in the context of constantly shifting ideas about what it means to be a ‘respectable’ drug user as well as a ‘successful’ rural young woman. The study was guided by the following research questions: (1) Among rural young women, how are rural young female recreational drug users positioned? (2) How do young rural women position themselves in relation to drug use? (3) How do young rural women negotiate broader discourses about rurality, gender, and recreation when positioning young female recreational drug users?

As discussed in Chapter One, normalized drug use occupies an uncertain and ever-changing social position in contemporary society (Shiner & Winstock, 2015). As demonstrated throughout the findings, how ‘respectable’ drug use was constructed by participants was shaped by social, historical, and geographic discourses. How participants viewed the respectability and therefore acceptability of young women’s drug use was dependent on multiple factors. One set of factors had to do with where, when, and what drugs were used: for example, smoking pot with boyfriends at home was acceptable, whereas using cocaine at home and alone was not acceptable. Parker et al. (2002) also found that discourses of normalized drug use construct certain drugs, such as cannabis, as more acceptable than others, such as cocaine and MDMA. Similarly, Duff (2005) and Smith et al. (2011) have argued that the setting that drug use occurs in (i.e. at a party or at home) shapes the respectability of that drug use. And, like the participants in Rodner’s (2015) study, the rural young women interviewed in this study also evaluated the respectability of an individual’s drug use by drawing on discourses of healthism and safety. However, the participants’ ideas about what was safe, healthy, and sensible drug use was shaped
by the unique context of rural communities, especially the close connections among rural residents.

Another set of factors that shaped how rural young women constructed respectable drug use had to do with the characteristics of user. As demonstrated in the findings, the construction of a ‘respectable’ rural young woman drug user intersected with discourses that were racialized, classed, and gendered. For example, rural young women who participated in drug use while maintaining financial stability were constructed as more respectable than rural young women who used drugs but were not financially secure. Researchers such as Pereira and Carrington (2016), Smith (2014), and Measham (2002) have argued that young women draw on discourses of traditional, non-traditional, and neoliberal femininity when engaging in or discussing drug use participation. Miller-Carbone and Lopez (2015), and Driscoll (2014) have also argued that discourses of race, class, and place impact the construction of drug user subjectivities and shape what subject positions a young rural woman can access. And, as argued by Cairns (2014), how subjectivities are constructed for rural young women is shaped and limited by discourses of rurality and neoliberal femininity. However, two discourses that have received less attention in the scholarly literature but had a significant impact on how the young women in this study constructed ‘respectable’ drug use were the discourse of a (middle-class) normative life path to adulthood (i.e. on track or behind) and the mobility imperative. In this study, participants negotiated discourses of a normative path to adulthood and mobility imperative when positioning ‘successful’ yet drug-using young rural women. A young rural woman’s success and the respectability of their drug use was intertwined and constructed through multiple discourses that at times aligned or contradicted each other and demonstrates the fluidity of drug user identities.
Challenging and Reimagining Traditional Conceptualizations of Leisure

As discussed in Chapter One, there has been a tendency in leisure research to focus on leisure that it considered ‘respectable’ or inherently good (Franklin-Reible, 2006; Spracklen, 2013). Activities that fall outside the range of acceptability, such as drug use, are categorized as deviant leisure and constructed as illegitimate (Williams, 2009). The construction of leisure as inherently good ignores the pervasive nature of activities such as drug use within modern culture.

One of my aims in this study is to challenge the traditional conceptualization of leisure as only those activities that we conceptualize as ‘morally good,’ because I do not believe that leisure activities can be classified using a binary of moral/immoral or legitimate/illegitimate. Instead, I argue that we need to examine how our understandings of what is moral or immoral are shaped by discourses that are constantly shifting and as such, our understandings of what constitutes ‘acceptable’ and ‘deviant’ leisure are constructed within a specific context. In so doing, I hope that this study opens-up new ways of thinking about ‘deviant’ leisure. Might it provoke the question: Is any leisure truly deviant? Related to this study, if leisure activities such as drug use are socially integrated into the lives of young people, can we call them deviant and outside of the bounds of acceptability?

Another aim is to disrupt dominant discourses of young women drug users as ‘deviant’ individuals who have fallen victim (Miller & Carbone-Lopez, 2015) to their drug use. Participants in this study did not see themselves or other young women as victims of their drug use, instead they constructed participation in drug use as a leisure practice young woman can choose to participate in. In the future I hope to see further research on drug use that conceptualizes it as a leisure activity among young people, and a context in which they construct their identity. Like Ravn (2012), I believe that studying drug use from this perspective will open
up opportunities for discussion around drug use practices among women and young adults. Conceptualizing drug use as a legitimate leisure activity will provide more insight to drug use practices. Further understanding drug use as legitimate leisure way will inform how prevention policies and treatments are created and implemented.

**Reimagining Rurality and Implications of the Rural-Urban Construction**

When I started this study, I often drew on the discourses I reported on in this study in my own construction of rural young women. As I noted earlier, my views were similar to the women I interviewed: I also believed that out-migrating from my hometown was what I needed to do to become a ‘successful’ young woman because it meant that I would have more education and career opportunities than my peers who had chosen to stay. However, this study has opened my eyes to the multiple ways that rural young women construct successful rural young womanhood. The women I interviewed, all of whom had chosen to stay in their rural community, presented an alternative storyline about young rural adulthood – one in which success was attainable for rural young adults who *stayed*. Rather than constructing their rural communities as isolated and in economic decline, the women I interviewed highlighted how their communities offered them the best of both worlds. Participants viewed their hometowns as tightly knit communities that provided the quiet and peaceful atmosphere they valued, yet they could still access education and economic opportunities because urban life was not too far away.

As I discuss throughout this thesis, cultural narratives of successful rural young womanhood are embedded within discourses of neoliberalism and the mobility imperative. Within these discourses young women are constructed one of two ways: as either successful young adults who left their rural community for further education or employment, or as failed young adults who did not out-migrate and therefore have decreased opportunities to follow the
normative path to adulthood (Farrugia, 2016; Eascott & Sonn, 2006). However, I argue that neither of these constructions accurately represent how rural young women themselves understand their identity within their rural communities. For the participants in this study, rural communities were not isolated or backward. They were communities where they could appreciate the aspects of an idyllic rural lifestyle, while still living near education and career opportunities. In the future, I hope to see more diversity in the representations and cultural narratives of rural communities so that we can continue to break down the rural/urban binary that researchers like Edwards and Mattarita-Cascante (2011) have been calling for. Through constructing the identities of rural young women in more positive and diverse ways, a larger variety of subjectivities become available to rural young women. Similar to any community, rural communities present a multitude of subject positions for young women to fill, and I hope to see more of these represented in common constructions of rural life and rural young women.

As I end this study, it is hard not to reflect on the many ways my thoughts about drug use and female drug users have shifted throughout this research. One lesson learned from this research has been that how young rural women are positioned in relation to drug use is dependent on many aspects of their subjectivity (i.e., age, and economic status) and not just whether or not they use drugs. For participants, interactions with drug use was a way of performing a particular subject position that was both gendered and classed. The use of a feminist poststructural perspective in this study allowed me to see how multiple factors of an individual’s subjectivity intersected to position young rural women drug users in positive and negative ways. This research also demonstrated that the subjectivity of a drug user is not solely based on whether or not an individual uses drugs, but instead how, where, why and what type of drugs they use.
As I discussed in the findings, neoliberal discourse constructs drug users as low-income, addicts, or victims of their drug use. Further, within this discourse drug users are constructed as vulnerable, government-dependent, and marginalized individuals. However, my findings have shown that these constructions are not representative of all drug users. In contrast to common understandings, the young women in my study did not construct rural young women drug users as passive or victims of their drug use. Instead, they positioned rural young women drug users as informed participants who were partaking in a common social leisure activity for young adults. If rural young women were actively making thoughtful choices about their decision to engage in drug use, and engaged in a way that was informed and safe, their participation in drug use was viewed as ‘sensible’ and therefore acceptable. These findings open up new ways of thinking about female drug users within research. Rather than just constructing them as passive participants, research should acknowledge women’s agency in connection to their drug use. Thinking about women’s drug use through this lens would allow researchers to understand better how young women view themselves and others in connection to drug use.

**Drug use as a social and recreational activity: Policy considerations.**

The dominant construction of drug users as lower-class addicts who are dependent on government handouts has shaped public policy documents surrounding drug use. Even in Wildlark County, public policy documents surrounding drug use frequently position drug users as deviant, low-income individuals who fall outside of community norms or do not fulfill a normative subjectivity (Final Report, 2013). Subcultures such as homeless, transgender, aboriginal, gay or individuals with adverse childhood experiences are framed as the most at risk for involvement in substance abuse. Categorizing drug users as individuals who fall outside of societal norms is not uncommon among organizations that take a health-based prevention
approach to substance abuse. However, by excluding drug users who may not fall into the above risk categories, policy documents frame drug use as something that only occurs within marginalized groups. This framing ignores the social and recreational drug use which, as discussed in the previous chapter, has become a part of mainstream culture.

In rural communities, the lack of availability of prevention and treatment centers makes being informed as a young adult even more challenging (Smith & Stanley, 2011). Due to the prevalence of young adult drug use, it is important young adults have the knowledge to engage in drug use in the safest way possible (Council on Drug Abuse, 2011; Gfroerer et al., 2007). The abstinence-only approach currently used in drug use prevention programs is no longer appropriate for informing young adults about participation in drug use. In the future, I hope to see more comprehensive prevention and information resources that do not only target ‘at-risk’ youth. For example, resources should be distributed to all youth in high school regarding how to engage in drug use safely, in a manner similar to how we provide information on safe sex rather than just abstinence. In the future, I also hope to see government resources and public health documents take a broader perspective when discussing drug use. For example, organizations should consider creating resources that acknowledge the social nature of drug use. I believe that this will resonate with young adults and provide them with the knowledge to be as safe as possible during their engagement with drug use. The reality is that drug use is occurring among rural young adults in social and recreational contexts, and it is important that in the future we continue to research it, in order to best inform public policy surrounding prevention and treatment approaches.
Appendix

Appendix A: Pre-Interview Guide

Instructions

All information in the following questionnaire will be kept private and confidential. Please answer the following questions to provide our study with some background information on you. If you are uncomfortable or unable to answer a particular question, do not hesitate to leave a space blank.

1. Age: ______________________________

2. How long have you lived in your community? ______________________________

3. Does your immediate family and/or your significant other live in the same town? ______

4. What is/was your occupation? _______________________________________

5. What are/were your parents’ occupations? _______________________________

6. How would you describe yourself in terms of your identity? (e.g. Gender, family, background, racial identity, ethnic identity, sexuality, subculture, important interests)

7. How would you describe your attitude towards drug use? (e.g. Totally opposed to think it is fine)

8. How would you define recreational drug use?
Appendix B: Interview Guide

Name (pseudonym) of Participant: __________________        Location: _________________

Script:

Hi, how are you today?

Thank you for agreeing to meet me for this interview! My study is primarily interested in
the lives and recreation experiences of young women in rural communities. I am also interested
in how young women who use drugs recreationally are perceived within rural communities in
relation to broader ideas about rurality, gender and drug use. I’m going to be asking you
questions about a few main topics. The first is about life in your hometown and what you think
about being a young woman living in a rural community / small town. The second is about life as
a young adult. The third is about recreation and leisure and what you like to do and why. At the
end, I’ll ask you a few questions that are specifically about recreational drug use and your
thoughts on that. At any point during the interview you can choose to skip a question.

As stated on the study consent form all information discussed throughout the interview
will be kept confidential unless it is requested by a court of law. This means if you are taken to
court regarding drug or custody issues and the information from the interview is subpoenaed to
court as proof of such illegal activity (i.e. you are taken to court regarding drug or custody
issues), I may be asked to turn my transcripts over to the court. As a result, I ask that you refrain
from disclosing any information that may put you at risk legally. For example, if you know
something about drug sales, please do not disclose this information during our interview. It is
more important to me that you avoid putting yourself at risk. Do you have any questions about
what I just said?

Prior to beginning the interview, I would like you to fill out this pre-interview
questionnaire. It will help provide me with some background information on you, and we can
discuss some of it in the interview.

Research Questions

1) Among rural young women, how are rural young female recreational drug users
   positioned?
2) How do young rural women position themselves in relation to drug use?
3) How do young rural women negotiate broader discourses about rurality, gender and
   recreation when positioning young female recreational drug users?

Gender and Rurality Questions

During interviews I can sometimes get a little nervous and rush through some of the questions, if
at any time, you would like to add more information or go back to a question please let me know.
I will be taking a few notes on my interview guide as well to help me keep on track. So, to get
stated today I want to begin by talking about your hometown and what it is like to live here as a
young woman.
1. So first, tell me about (participant’s community).
   a. What’s it like?
   b. How would you describe (participant’s community) to, say, a person who hasn’t been there?
   c. How would you describe the physical features/landscape of (participant’s community)?
   d. How would you describe the social atmosphere in (participant’s community)?
   e. What’s it like living here as a young woman?
   f. Would you say your feelings or perspectives are similar to other young women in town?

2. Would you say (participant’s community) is typical for a town its size?
   a. In what ways is it typical?
   b. In what ways is it unique?
   c. What do you like about living here?
   d. What do you not like?

3. On your pre-interview guide you said you have lived here for (participant’s response),
   talk to me about that?
   a. Did you attend high school in the area?
   b. How would you describe growing up in (participant’s community)?

4. How would you feel if someone were to describe (participant’s community) as a rural community?
   a. Is that an accurate description?
   b. What aspects of it do you think are rural?
   c. What aspects of it do you think are different from other rural communities?

5. People often view rural communities in two ways: One way is in a really positive way, in
   the sense that rural communities are good places to live and raise kids, because everyone
   is friendly and knows one another, and fun things to do in nature are easy to access. On
   the other hand, some people see small towns in a negative way, that they are in a state of
   economic decline and places where there is nothing to do. What are your thoughts about
   this?
   a. How do you view rural communities?

6. Can you think of any movies or TV shows that take place in a community or town that
   you thought did a good job of capturing the life of young woman in small towns? (i.e.
   Pawnee, Parks and Recreation, Corner Gas, Gilmore Girls)
   a. What do you think people get right/wrong what describing rural communities?

Young Adult Questions
So now I want to move onto some questions about what it is like to be a young woman your age
and what your plans for the future are.

6. So you’re now (XX) years old, how would you describe what it is like to be a woman
   your age?
   a. For example, if you explaining it to someone younger than you what would you say?

7. How is your life similar of different for you than it was say, 5 years ago?
   a. In relation to your relationships (with friends, family, significant other)?
i. Do people treat you similarly/differently now?
   ii. In what ways are young men and women treated the same/differently?
   b. Daily life?
   c. Recreation and leisure?
   d. Aspirations?
8. How do you define success?
9. Tell me about where you see yourself in five years?
   a. In relation to your employment?
   b. Relationships? Family?
   c. Recreation and daily life?
10. How would you compare your plans for the future to other young women (or your friends) in your community?
    a. Are they similar or different?
11. Do you envision a future for yourself in **participant’s community**?
    a. How important is it for you to continue to live here?

**Recreation and Leisure Questions**
Now I want to ask you some questions about how you like to fill your spare time and what recreation and leisure activities you participate in.

12. Describe what a weekday night looks like for you?
    a. What are you doing?
    a. Where are these activities held?
    b. Why do you choose to participate in those activities?
    c. What type of people do you usually participate with?
       i. Male/Female
       ii. Age
    d. Do you think the way you spend your leisure time is pretty typical night for young women around here?
13. Take me through a typical Friday or Saturday for you?
    a. Who are you with?
    b. Why is this your chosen weekend activity?
    c. Can you think of any other activities you participate in?
    d. Is there anything you wish you could do but you don’t do?
    e. Is there anything you used to do that you wish you could do now?
14. Would you say that your weekends are typical of other young women in your town?
    a. How about for a young man?
    b. What is similar/different?
    c. What else do people do?

**Drug Use**
Next, I would like to talk about your thoughts on drug use and what you think OK or not OK.

1. On your pre-interview guide you described your attitudes toward drug use as (XX), can you tell me more about that?
   a. What would you say has formed your attitude toward drugs?
      i. Can you think of an example?
   b. Does the drug type/frequency/or reason for use matter to you?
c. How is drug use perceived in small towns?
   i. How about in a big city like Toronto?

d. If you saw a young woman walking down the street smoking a joint, what thoughts would initially come to your mind?
e. Would you feel differently if you saw a young woman smoking a joint at a more private place such as a house party? Or at a festival?

15. How do people (friends/family) in your community think about young men or young women who use drugs?
   a. How similar or different would you say your views are to other people you know, or other young women?
   b. Are there different perspectives out there?
   c. What do you think might be behind the different perspectives?

16. So, we have talked about recreational drug use. What do you think defines acceptable drug use?
   a. Is all recreational drug use acceptable?
   b. What distinguishes acceptable drug use from recreational drug use?

17. Do you think there is anything we have missed?

Thank you for participating in this interview. I appreciate you taking the time to do this. Are you interested in sharing this study information with other young women you know that live in a rural community surrounding [Wildlark]? If so, please take a few of these flyers and pass them along.

I may contact you again at a later time for the purpose of interviews. Once again, let me reassure you that all the information discussed today will be kept confidential, unless requested by a court of law. If you have any questions following the interview feel free to contact me through the study email brittney.patton2016@gmail.ca.

Thank you again, have a great day.
Appendix C: Website Main Page Information

Title: Gender, Recreational Drug Use, and Young Rural Women’s Positioning

Links along the top to: Letter of Invitation and Consent Form

The purpose of my research is to investigate how young rural women make sense of and position themselves in relation to drug use, and how these positions engage with broader ideas about rurality, gender, and recreation. I am interested in learning about young women’s experiences in small communities, their thoughts on recreational drug use and how that impacts the perception of recreational drug users. This will further knowledge on what rural young women perceive as what is okay and not okay in relation to drug use, as well as how those perceptions impact how young women recreational drug users are positioned in rural communities.

What is involved?

- A short questionnaire and one-time interview between 45 minutes to one-hour
- All participants will receive a $10 Tim Horton’s Gift Card as a thank you for their participation

Who can participate?

Young woman who:

- Are between the ages of 18-30 years’ old
- No longer attend high school
- Grew up and have lived in a rural community within [Wildlark] County for the past year (this includes communities in the following Townships: Selwyn, Cavan Monaghan, Otonabee-South Monaghan and Douro-Dummer, Asphodel-Norwood, Havelock-Belmont-Methuen, Municipality of Trent Lakes, North Kawartha)
- As this study is interested in how young women make sense of drug use in rural communities, I am interested in recruiting young women who are involved with drug use in a variety of ways, including not at all.

Sound interesting? Enter your contact information below and I will contact you to set up an interview.

First name: ___________________ Last name: ___________________

Email: _______________________

Thank you for your interest!
Appendix D: Letter of Invitation

(Date of Email)

**Title of Study:** Gender, Recreational Drug Use and Young Rural Women’s Positioning

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Erin Sharpe, Professor, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University

**Principal Student Investigator:** Brittney Patton, Student, Department of Applied Health Sciences, Brock University

Dear (participant),

Thank you for your interest in this research! My name is Brittney Patton, and I am a Masters student from Brock University in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences. You are invited to participate in a research study entitled *Gender, Recreational Drug Use, and Young Rural Women’s Positioning.*

The purpose of this research is to investigate how young rural women make sense of and position themselves in relation to drug use, and how these positions engage with broader ideas about rurality, gender, and recreation. As I am interested in how women make sense of drug use in rural communities, I am interested in recruiting young rural women who are involved with drugs in a variety of ways, including not involved at all.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a 45-60-minute interview that can take place in a location of your choosing. If you agree, I will record the interview using an audio recording device, so that I can transcribe it at a later date. All of the information we discuss throughout the interview will be kept confidential unless it is requested by a court of law. Please take the time to review the attached letter of consent, for more information on the studies confidentiality.

If you choose to participate in this study you will receive a $10 Tim Hortons gift card as a thank you gift. Your participation will be a valuable addition to our research and findings could lead to greater understanding of the relationship between, gender, rural communities, and recreational drug use. Please review the attached interview guide, and consider if any of the questions may cause you emotional distress. If after reading the interview guide, you choose to participate in the study please contact me with some suggested dates and times that we could meet for an in-person interview, as well as some potential locations in your area that would work for you.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca) or my Faculty Supervisor, Dr. Erin Sharpe (905 688-5550 ext. 3989, esharpe@brocku.ca).
study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University’s Research Ethics Board #16-087.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information).

Thank you,

Brittney Patton

Principal Student Investigator Brock University

Brittney.patton2016@gmail.com
Appendix E: Social Media Script for Message to Individuals in Personal Network

Hi, I hope all is well!

I am getting in touch with you because I am conducting research on young women in who live in rural communities within [Wildlark] County and thought you would be a good fit for the study. I am currently working toward my Master’s degree at Brock University and conducting a research study on how young rural women in position themselves and others in relation to recreational drug use. My interest in this research was sparked by the current changes in recreational marijuana legislation and the increase in discussions surrounding recreational drug use.

The purpose of my research is to investigate how young rural women make sense of and position themselves in relation to drug use, and how these positions engage with broader ideas about rurality, gender, and recreation. I am interested in learning about young women’s experiences in small communities, their thoughts on recreational drug use and how that impacts the perception of recreational drug users. This will further knowledge on what rural young women perceive as what is okay and not okay in relation to drug use, as well as how those perceptions impact how young women recreational drug users are positioned in rural communities.

I am looking to recruit young women who are between the ages of 18-30 years old and who are not currently attending high school. Young women must have also grown up and lived in a small town within [Wildlark] County for the past year. As I am interested in how women make sense of drug use in rural communities, I am interested in recruiting young rural women who are involved with drugs in a variety of ways, including not involved at all. If you agree, I will ask you to take part in a 45-60-minute interview in a location of your choosing. I will also give you a $10 Tim Hortons card as a thank you for your participation.

If this sounds interesting, check out my study website at ruralresearch-brittnepatton.weebly.com for more information! If you would be interested in participating or know someone else who might be, please sign up on the website, message me back, or email me at brittney.patton2016@gmail.com. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file number 16-087).

I would love to hear from you!

All the best,

Brittney Patton
Appendix F: Follow-Up Social Media Message If I did not Receive a Response

Hi again,

    I just wanted to check back in and see if you had the opportunity to look at my study website www.ruralresearch.weebly.com, since my last message. If you are interested in participating in the study or know someone else who might be, please sign up on the website, message me back, or email me at brittney.patton2016@gmail.com. I would be happy to answer any questions you have or provide you with further information.

Warm wishes,

Brittney Patton
Appendix G: Script for Talking to Community Members

Hi, my name is Brittney Patton and I am a student from Brock University, conducting research on young women in The County of [Wildlark]. My study is primarily interested in the lives and recreation experiences of young women in The County of [Wildlark]. I am also interested in how young women who use drugs recreationally are perceived in small towns. I am looking to talk to young women, who live in The County of [Wildlark] and are between the ages of 18-30 years old. Since I am primarily interested in how young women drug users are perceived and not the actual drug use practice, it is not required that participants identify as recreational drug users themselves.

I am talking to people in the community and visiting local business’s today, to find out where young women congregate in (township I’m visiting) and how I can get in touch with them. I am also asking if I can hang my flyers in local business, like yours, to spread the word about my study. Would you be open to letting me hang a flyer in your store? Do you have a moment to share your thoughts with me about where young women in (township I’m visiting) spend their leisure time? (If they do not have time to thank you)

If yes: What places do young women typically hang out in (township I’m visiting)? Are there any activities that are particularly popular?

Is there anyone in your network that may be interested in the study? If so, please take one of these flyers and pass it along it will connect them to my study website where they can find more information on my research.

Thank you for your time, I hope you have a great day!
Appendix H: Flyer

Are you a young woman living in rural community?

Study Title: Gender, Recreational Drug Use and Young Women’s Positioning

The purpose of this research is to investigate how young rural women make sense of and position themselves in relation to drug use, and how these positions engage with broader ideas about rurality, gender, and recreation.

I am interested in interviewing young women in rural communities to learn about: their experience as a young woman in a small town, their thoughts on recreational drug use and how that impacts the perception of rural young women who are recreational drug users.

Volunteers will be asked to participate in a one-hour in-person interview.

The interview questions ask about life as a young woman in a small town, recreation and leisure, and thoughts on recreational drug use.

Sound interesting?
Study volunteers should be young women between the ages of 18-30 years old, who are not currently attending high school, and who have lived in the County of [Blank] for at least the past year.

If this is sounds like you, please email me (Brittney Patton, Principal Student Investigator) at brittney.patton2016@gmail.com and I will email you right back to schedule an interview. You can also visit our study website at: www.ruralresearch.weebly.com for more information.

All volunteers will be given a $10 Tim Hortons gift card as a thank you for their participation.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file number XX).

Faculty Supervisor Dr. Erin Sharpe, Brock University
Appendix I: Informed Consent Form

Date: ________________

Project Title: Gender, Recreational Drug Use and Young Rural Women’s positioning

Student Principal Investigator (SPI): Brittney Patton

Faculty of Applied Health Sciences
Brock University
Email: brittney.patton2016@gmail.com

Faculty Supervisor): Erin Sharpe, PhD

Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
Brock University
(905) 688-5550 ext. 3989. Email: esharpe@brocku.ca

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a research study about gender and drug use in rural communities. The purpose of this research is to investigate how young rural women make sense of and position themselves in relation to drug use, and how these positions engage with broader thoughts about rurality, gender, and recreation. As I am interested in how women make sense of drug use in rural communities, I am interested in recruiting young rural women who are involved with drugs in a variety of ways, including not involved at all. Participation involves an interview of approximately 45 minutes to one hour in length, and will take place at a mutually agreed upon location.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary and you should not feel obligated to participate due to personal connections with the Student Principle Investigator. If you do feel obligated to participate, please know you can decline at any time without consequence. During the interview, you may also decline to answer any of the interview questions or skip a question. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time, without any negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw from the study you will still receive a $10 Tim Hortons gift card as a thank you for your participation. If you withdraw I will ask you if the information that you have shared
so far can be included in the study. If you choose not to include this information, it will be destroyed.

CONFIDENTIALITY

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. Shortly after the interview has been completed, if requested I will send you a copy of the transcript through email to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. You will have two weeks to look over the transcript and reply through email and/or skype. I estimate that reviewing the interview transcript will take 30 minutes- one hour. If after two weeks you have not responded, I will reach out to you again over email to remind you of the opportunity for feedback. If I do not hear from you within a weeks’ time I will move forward with the original transcript.

All information discussed throughout the interview will be kept confidential unless it is requested by a court of law. This means if you are taken to court regarding drug or custody issues I may be asked to turn my transcripts over to the court. Due to this, it is my preference that you choose to not tell me anything that you feel may put you at risk legally. For example, if you know something about drug sales, I want you to leave that information out of this interview. It is more important to me that you avoid putting yourself at risk, than give me specific information. Please be aware that I am under obligation to follow mandatory reporting laws. This means that if you disclose any child abuse or child witnessing, I must by law report it to child protective services.

Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. The name of your City and/or Township will not be included in any reports or the final documents. All data will be kept in an electronic file stored on a password protected computer. Hard copies of the data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the Principal Student Investigator’s home office. The Principle Student Investigator will be the only person that will hear the audio recordings of the interviews and after the audio recordings have been transcribed, the recording will be deleted. At the end of the research, all electronic files of raw data will be deleted and all paper records will be shredded using Brock University’s shredding machines. Only the Principle Investigator and Student Principle Investigator will have access to the transcripts and data.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS

Participants will not gain any direct benefits from participating in the study. However, the results from this study will provide new knowledge that is relevant to the scholarly fields of gender, rural, and leisure studies. This research will offer new insight about how young rural women conceptualize recreational drug use in relation to broader discourses of femininity and leisure in a rural setting. This new knowledge is particularly timely, as debates about the legalization of recreational drug use are currently occurring in Canada. Results from this research may be published in an academic journal. If the results are published I will contact you through email, to alert you of what journal(s) the study will be published in.
There are psychological and social risks associated with participating in this study. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, you may experience psychological risks such as feeling embarrassed or worried about how they responded. Also, some individuals may have negative experiences related to drug use, either their own or involving family members, friends, or classmates. The questions in the interview that ask about drug use and attitudes towards drug use may cause you to engage with memories of these experiences in ways that are emotionally distressing. In order to avoid these risks please review the attached interview guide and consider if any of the questions would put you under emotional distress.

Should you experience any emotional distress following the interview please contact one of the services listed below:

**Four Counties Addiction Services Team**
(FourCAST)
Phone Number: 1-705-876-1292
Toll Free Number: 1-800-461-1909
Website: [www.fourcast.ca/](http://www.fourcast.ca/)

**Ontario Mental Health Hotline**
Phone: 1-866-531-2600
Website: [www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca/](http://www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca/)

**Drug and Alcohol Helpline**
Phone: 1-800-565-8603
Website: [www.drugandalcoholhelpline.ca](http://www.drugandalcoholhelpline.ca)

These services provide listening, support, and information on more individual and group counseling within The County of [Wildlark] All services listed above are free and can provide you with immediate assistance 24/7.

As some forms of drug use are illegal and in addition, attitudes toward drug use are often unfavorable, you also face the social risks of loss of status and reputation. This risk is also increased because this study takes place in a small town, and there is a chance that study participants may know one another. Although involvement with drugs is not a criteria for participation, because the study asks about drug use it may be possible that individuals assume that the people who agree to participate are supportive of or active in their use of drugs.

In order to manage these risks, all information and interactions related to the study will be kept as confidential as possible. No names or unnecessary identifying data will be collected. Participants will only be asked to disclose general background information regarding their occupation, age and rural community. Participants will be asked to choose a private location, where they feel we will not be overheard or interrupted by anyone living within the community. If this is not possible within your community an interview can be held over skype.

**ETHICS CLEARANCE**

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Brock University Research Ethics Board (File #16-087). However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the Research Ethics Office, at 905-688-5550 ext. 3035 or reb@brocku.ca.
CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me by email at Brittney.patton2016@gmail.com. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Erin Sharpe, at 905-688-5550 ext. 3989 or email esharpe@brocku.ca.

I very much look forward to speaking with you. Thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Brittney Patton

CONSENT FORM

____________________________________________________________________

I agree to participate in the study described above and have made this decision after reading the information in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

1. With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

☐ YES  ☐ NO

2. I agree to have my interview audio recorded.  ☐ YES  ☐ NO

3. I would like to receive a copy of the transcribed interview.  ☐ YES  ☐ NO

4. I would like to receive a summary of the findings of the study.  ☐ YES  ☐ NO

If you have checked yes to question 3 and/or 4 above, please write your email below so that I can contact you with a copy of the transcribed interview and a summary of the findings of the study. A copy of the study findings will also be available on the study website at www.ruralresearch.weebly.com after August 2017.

Name (Please print): _______________________________

Signature: ____________________________

Date: _______________________________
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1 For confidentiality reasons a pseudonym has been used for the name of the County in the reference list