

Alaska Coastal Community Youth and the Future

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The proposed project was conducted between 2008-2011 to study the perceptions of youth in Alaska's coastal communities on their lives today, their goals or aspirations about the future, and to examine community in- and out-migration from their perspective. Specifically, the research situated the position of youth aged 16-24 in the current "economic uncertainty" of coastal Alaska in how they might respond or be responding to changes in their communities' economies. Research questions included: 1) How are Alaska's coastal community youth responding to economic change in their communities? 2) What are their aspirations for future opportunities for work, education, or training? 3) What are the ways schools and the State of Alaska can respond to youth culture and current economic opportunities to foster healthy coastal communities of the future?

Background

Northern coastal communities face both socioeconomic constraints and opportunities now and in the future. Specifically in Alaska, coastal communities are experiencing a "graying of the fleet" and a lack of entry-level opportunities for young people. Many young people in these communities have been enculturated into a fishing lifestyle, a cultural and spiritual connection to the sea and its resources, and have a strong "sense of place" (Jones 1999; Eisenhower et al 2000) and a "social embeddedness" (McCay 2000) connected to their home communities. Their enculturated beliefs and values come into conflict, however, with barriers to upward mobility in traditional occupations and from the pressures of a global economy demanding specialists rather than the generalists (Young 1998) northern coastal community residents have always had to be to survive in their home areas. They are increasingly obligated to leave home for higher education, training, or work and many communities of Alaska are suffering the effects of "The Brain Drain"(Hadland 2004) or high levels of out-migration among youth.

The research was conducted in five Alaska fishing communities which included Sitka, Petersburg, and Craig in Southeast Alaska and Kodiak and Ouzinkie in the Kodiak Archipelago. Focused group interviews were conducted with 88 coastal youth, aged 16-24.

Methods

A structured focused group interview of 30 questions was administered with groups of high school juniors, high school seniors, and groups of 18-24 year olds. Participants self-selected into the focus groups and participating minors were required to bring a signed copy of the consent/assent form from their parents/guardians. Participants were also administered a brief demographic questionnaire and participated in an occupational ranking exercise. Focus group discussions were digitally recorded, transcribed, and subject to content analysis in Atlas ti, qualitative data analysis software. Descriptive statistical functions in SPSS were used to analyze questionnaire data and the occupational ranking data

collected. The occupational ranking data were also subject to cultural consensus analysis functions in Anthropac software which yielded some exploratory results.

Findings

On Community

In focused group interviews, coastal youth describe Alaska fishing communities as small and “close-knit.” Because of the small size, geographic remoteness, and interconnectedness of their communities, coastal youth possess tremendous social capital; a kind of wealth based upon the strength of their kin and social networks. Coastal youth also demonstrate a connectedness to their physical environment and to the place of their home communities through various activities in which they engage, i.e. fishing, hunting, hiking, 4-wheeling, and camping. These experiences are rooted in their enculturation practices and within family life.

While the study participants assert their communities were appropriate and good places to spend their formative years, many of them question whether or not they themselves or their future children should remain in their home communities once they reach high school age. They recognize their communities are isolated and subject to paralyzing winter weather conditions. They highly value their summer activities but they acknowledge boredom among some youth during the long, dark and cold winter months inevitably leading both youth and other community residents towards drug and alcohol use. The angst and restlessness they experience with small town life is compounded when they realize through various media conduits and trips outside their communities that they are also a part of a rapidly growing global youth culture defined by consumerism and recreational experiences they then greatly desire.

They earnestly discussed solutions to some of their communities’ problems. The primary solution was a call for communities to invest in youth centers and activities to keep young people away from the lure of drug and alcohol abuse. They called attention to a lack of housing for young people starting out in life and think other infrastructure improvements such as better roads and updated schools would improve the quality of local life. Finally, they are fully aware of the limitations of their undiversified economies. They admit communities need to consider how to develop other sources of revenue outside of the fishing industry although they themselves are ambivalent about leading this charge.

On Education

In the focus group discussions on coastal youth educational experiences, strong social ties were again illuminated as the sociocultural context through which youth learn and develop. The Petersburg school stood out among the others as a place where students and teachers have deep, personal connections and where the teachers are long term residents of the community. However, the majority of Alaska rural schools, including several of those the study participants attend, are overwhelmingly plagued with teacher turnover or lack of resources to cover all the subjects students need at once. Students themselves are painfully aware of these issues and express concern how a school’s lack of offerings might affect them in the future. Improving or standardizing the math curriculum in rural schools is a

pressing issue for youth as well as having access to vocational offerings and other useful electives to prepare them for their post-secondary life.

On Employment

By ranking a list of 20 occupations and engaging in a discussion about those rankings during the focused group interviews, study participants demonstrated Alaska coastal youth are generally “hands-on” people who have an affinity for vocational work or skilled trades. They award high ranks to Alaska outdoor work or work related to it such as air piloting, fishing, and mechanics. Other vocational trades or skill based work include art, health care occupations, teaching, and cosmetology. There is a clear gender divide with young men favoring the former and young women favoring the latter although the young women interviewed are much more cohesive in their preferences.

One important observation is that although youth may afford respect to traditional local vocations such as fishing, they might not see themselves pursuing this line of work in the future as expectations for a college education rise in addition to numerous barriers to entry in those traditional occupations. Coastal youth were quite clear in their general disdain for fish processing because of the low pay, poor working conditions, and worker exploitation by processing companies. On average, they do not like entertaining the idea of tourism-based economies for their communities in the future although they grudgingly admit tourism brings in much needed revenue. In general, they dislike the disruption of tourist crowds in the summer and are reluctant to share the uniqueness of their home communities with strangers who know very little about Alaska or coastal community residents’ way of life. Finally but most importantly, coastal youth do not see themselves working in occupations in which they are required to sit at a desk in an office as they describe themselves as active, outdoorsy, and hands-on. This self-definition, however, necessarily must be at odds with an increasing expectation for coastal youth to attend college where the focus is on training for professional and arguably, desk bound occupations.

On Community In- and Out-Migration

Findings support conclusions in other studies that the experiences and perspectives of contemporary rural youth have a strong gendered component. In Alaska, mobility of rural populations is currently characterized by gender differences and perceived opportunities differ between men and women. Young women are more likely to move away from home communities and seek higher education as gender roles change in rural areas while young men are more likely to remain in or return to rural areas because of the importance of subsistence and outdoor work and activities to them. However, there is evidence to support the existence of return or circular migration practices in rural Alaska (Lowe 2010) and more complicated and sociocultural dynamics at play.

The findings of this study then raise the need to further describe and understand changing social structure in Alaska’s rural and coastal communities. Understanding these dynamics is at the heart of understanding how Alaska’s rural communities will cope with socioeconomic change and what type of

policy recommendations could be made to address current and future challenges communities face in maintaining their long term viability.

On the Future

Currently, expectations for young people in rural Alaska to pursue higher education are increasing as either opportunities or interest in traditional occupations such as fishing diminish. Focus group discussions demonstrate coastal youth are encouraged by well-intentioned adults to pursue paths toward “useful,” “promising,” or stable, high paying careers such as engineering and health care whether or not the young person has an interest in or adequate academic preparation for those fields. The study participants themselves are of course unclear about their future direction, an issue common to many youth, whether Alaska residents or not. Study participants do know that they need to experience the world outside their home communities although are in many cases, uncertain about their future place of residence or career path. They’ve seen older siblings and peers have those experiences they desire in college or elsewhere only to return home to coastal Alaska; or conversely, educate themselves out of a job at home preventing them from returning.

Discussion and Policy Recommendations

If coastal youth themselves had the power to direct policy to for their future development, they would make their communities and state invest in them in the form of healthy activities during their youth, in providing adequate and equal access to educational opportunities, and guidance in choosing a life path that attends to their cultural affinities and cultural realities. A statewide discussion on the efficacy of current rural post-secondary education needs continuing attention. Career and educational counseling is also an area youth themselves see as an area for improvement in their lives. Finally, today’s youth do require access to the global community, which in practical terms could be articulated in faster internet service and in sustaining travel or study abroad opportunities for youth.

Social capital or community interconnectedness as one of the study population’s clear and positive attributes along with life-long commitment and investment in place-based communities, can enable youth to assume leadership, citizenship, and stewardship community roles in the future. Considerable focus should be placed on understanding changing gender roles, aspirations of young women in coastal communities, and attendant changing social relations and structure. Educational offerings and preparation for youth should provide access to opportunities that might help youth realize goals outside of their community but should also be culturally connected to the locality if they want to stay there (i.e. sensitive to a “hands-on” or vocational orientation as well). Finally, policymakers (especially local policymakers) should support the constructive ways the connectedness in these communities happens. When asked what youth would do to improve their communities, they overwhelmingly wanted youth or recreational centers where they had a safe and fun place to exercise those social connections. Surely at least that particular goal can be highlighted as an attainable one in fostering healthy coastal communities of the future.

Presentations:

An overview of the project was presented at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association in San Francisco in 2008 and preliminary findings were presented in conjunction with the PI's project on Alaska rural-urban migration at the annual meetings of the Alaska Anthropological Association in Juneau in 2009. Findings were also presented at the Alaska Sea Grant College Program's 2011 International Wakefield Fisheries Symposium entitled, "Fishing People of the North: Culture, Economies, and Management Responding to Change" for which the PI served as a steering committee member. The PI presented findings from the current study while co-chairing a panel entitled "Reconsidering the Coastal Community in the 21st Century" and a paper called: "Place-Based Social and Human Capital Among Alaska's Coastal Community Youth."

Publications

This report will be listed in ISER's report catalog and made publicly available through ISER's website and through its distribution list.

During the summer of 2012, the PI will submit an article for publication based on the findings detailed in this report with a more extensive academic literature review in the flagship journal of the Society for Applied Anthropology, "Human Organization."

Other Funded Proposals

Work on the Coastal Community Youth project has resulted in two additional research projects and expansion of the PI's research agenda in the topical areas of economic development and social change in Alaska rural coastal communities. One project was initiated in 2008 during the financial crisis when the Anchorage School District experienced an influx of new students from rural Alaska. The study examined rural to urban migration in Alaska by surveying new students and their families in the Anchorage School District.

The second project called "Education and Community Viability in Western Alaska," wholly informed by the Coastal Youth study, was recently funded by the National Science Foundation as a three year project. The Coastal Youth data are largely qualitative and collected at a small scale. The NSF project will expand the Coastal Youth study with a more rigorous and wider-reaching research design to specifically examine the relationship between educational opportunities, youth culture, and Alaska community viability of the future. The project also targets an older population of coastal residents, particularly those in the 20-30 year age range. The project is designed to help identify the most effective strategies and pathways to success youth in Alaska's coastal communities have employed and the ways in which this success may benefit their home communities.

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Research questions included: 1) How are Alaska's coastal community youth responding to economic change in their communities? 2) What are their aspirations for future opportunities for work, education, or training? 3) What are the ways schools and the State of Alaska can respond to youth culture and current economic opportunities to foster healthy coastal communities of the future?

Focused group interviews with youth in fishing communities of Southeast Alaska and the Kodiak Archipelago demonstrate how coastal youth possess a high degree of social capital because of the small size, geographic remoteness, and interconnectedness of their communities. The interviews demonstrated how coastal youth are "hands on" people; interviews and ranking exercises reveal a cultural affinity toward outdoor and/or vocational work.

As opportunities in traditional occupations such as fishing diminish, coastal youth are encouraged to pursue higher education but they report themselves or their peers attending college for often only a short period of time, returning home far in advance of completing their degrees. Those who do earn degrees, must sometimes leave home permanently to pursue careers unavailable at home. Young women are more likely to move away from home communities and seek higher education as gender roles change while young men tend to remain in or return to home communities because of the importance of subsistence and other outdoor activities and work.

Overall, youth demonstrate a connectedness to their physical environment and to the place of their home communities; characteristics important for assuming leadership, citizenship, and stewardship community roles in the future. The research reveals the critical importance of not only future diversified economic development opportunities for coastal communities, but also the strength of social and cultural ties for community empowerment and development. Workforce and community development initiatives in coastal communities need the kind of input youth themselves provided in this study in the form of activities and places for youth to go, diversified educational opportunities, directed and locally derived counseling on career and life paths, and in sustaining means to access the greater world through technology and travel/study abroad opportunities.

The following first details the background to the research problem, the study communities, and study population. It describes data collection and data analysis methods employed in the project, and presents findings. Findings are organized by thematic areas derived from the focus group discussions and coastal youth perspective on: Community, Education, Employment, Community In- and Out-Migration, and Future Aspirations. Finally, policy recommendations are outlined, with priority given to youth comments and perspective.

Background

Challenges for Northern Coastal Communities

Northern coastal communities face both socioeconomic constraints and opportunities now and in the future due to a range of variables which include: first, increasing enclosure/rationalization of fisheries, which can result in a decrease in the number of local fishermen and permits. Increasing enclosure also exacerbates conflicts over coastal vs. offshore control of resources and it forces specialization and thereby difficulties for local fishermen to adapt economically to environmental change. Coastal communities also face pressures from overfishing and climate change. On the one hand, climate change might result in potential increases in fisheries production, but also on the other hand might influence difficult to predict changes in fisheries range extensions. Coastal communities across the north must contend with the globalization of markets and of the fishing industry and the expansion of the processing industry. In Alaska, for example, a powerful processing industry tends to attract migrant rather than local labor because of low wages and difficult working conditions. In addition, in most northern fishing communities there is very little value added processing occurring locally and a move to centralization of landings and fish auctioning which further add to the process of de-localizing fisheries. There are potential opportunities in the development of other coastal industries, i.e. tourism, shipping, and oil and gas development, but the potential for local involvement in these industries is varied. Finally, coastal communities across the north face rural development/depopulation issues and the outmigration of youth, a key theme the current research addresses.

The Alaska Context

Specifically in Alaska, coastal communities are experiencing a “graying of the fleet” and a lack of entry-level opportunities for young people. Many young people in these communities have been enculturated into a fishing lifestyle, a cultural and spiritual connection to the sea and its resources, and have a strong “sense of place” (Jones 1999; Eisenhauer et al 2000) and a “social embeddedness” (McCay 2000) connected to their home communities. Their enculturated beliefs and values come into conflict, however, with barriers to upward mobility in traditional occupations and from the pressures of a global economy demanding specialists rather than the generalists (Young 1998) northern coastal community residents have always had to be to survive in their home areas. They are increasingly obligated to leave home for higher education, training, or work and many communities of Alaska are suffering the effects of “The Brain Drain”(Hadland 2004) or high levels of out-migration among youth.

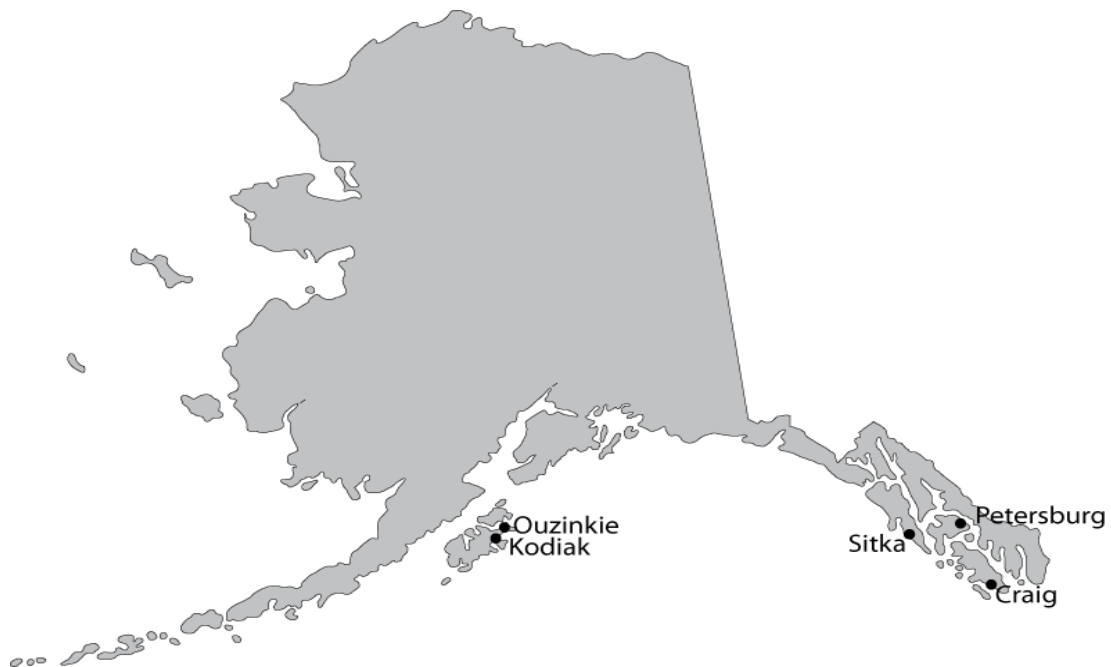
The long-term goal of this project and the research agenda it has enabled is to link youth culture with plans for workforce and curriculum development to help better prepare young Alaskans to adapt to their changing economies, circumvent the “brain drain”, and encourage the development of future environmental and community stewards. The research will provide information to the state departments of education and workforce development currently addressing workforce development needs with new grants, programs, and opportunities. The pressing goal is to not only to provide young

people with these new tools but to package them in a way that culturally articulates with the current reality of today's youth.

As noted above, the challenges Alaska youth face are not unique but common to residents of coastal communities worldwide. In identifying similar problems Atlantic fishing communities were facing twenty years ago, Hanson et al argued: "New approaches to coastal communities are urgently needed, i.e. inquiries focusing on *their* needs, *their* values, and *their* aspirations" (1984:240). In Alaska, new approaches to sustaining rural communities require integration of a local vision with global economic change.

In this context, the current project was undertaken to profile the perspectives of coastal community youth in Alaska to provide information to state, community, industry, and education leaders to be used in addressing the needs of Alaska's young people and in achieving goals for maintaining viable communities of the future through training and work opportunities.

Figure 1. Map of Study Communities



Study Communities

The five study communities included in this project are located on the Gulf of Alaska: Sitka, Petersburg, and Craig in Southeast Alaska and Kodiak and Ouzinkie in the Kodiak Archipelago. See map in Figure 1. Initially, the research was proposed to be conducted in multiple sample communities along Alaska's

entire coastline. Pre-proposal reviewers thought the geographic scope of the project too large and asked for a limitation of one or two regions and therefore the study was limited to a sample of Gulf of Alaska fishing communities as the PI had already completed similar work on this topic in some of the Southwest communities. The number of communities included was also limited by the scope of the award.

Community criteria for selection included communities that fit the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery and Management Conservation Act's definition of a fishing community as "a community which is substantially dependent on or substantially engaged in the harvesting or processing of fisheries resources to meet social and economic needs and includes fishing vessel owners, operators, and crew, and United States fish processors that are based in such community."¹ The communities selected both fit this definition and have largely single-sector economies in which primary economic activities are fishing, fleet services, and/or fish processing. The study was to include "hub"-scale communities such as Sitka and Kodiak (i.e., >1000 residents) and "village" scale communities, such as Petersburg, Craig, and Ouzinkie (i.e. <1000 residents). The economies of Sitka and Kodiak are more diversified than the other three communities primarily due to the tourism industry in Sitka and the presence of a Coast Guard base in Kodiak.

There are other differences between the communities included in the study. Physically, three of the study communities are located in Southeast Alaska where lush rainforests dominate the coastal landscape. Laying 600 miles to the northwest of the Southeast communities, Kodiak and Ouzinkie are also situated within the tree line but are characterized by a more exposed coastal landscape than the protected bays and coves of Southeast Alaska's Inside Passage. Sitka is a picturesque regional hub community of fishermen and artists with a thriving tourist industry. The local tribal government represents 4000 individuals of Tlingit, Haida, Aleut, and Tsimpsonian heritage. Petersburg is a unique colony of fishing families of originally Norwegian descent. Craig is a commercial fishing community on Prince of Wales Island where a mixed population of non-Alaska Natives and Alaska Natives (of Tlingit and Haida descent) reside. Kodiak is the hub community for the Kodiak Island archipelago villages with a diverse population of Alutiiq residents, Coast Guard personnel and their families, and non-Alaska Natives from the rest of Alaska and the United States, the Philippines, and Mexico, to mention a few points of origin. Kodiak is primarily a commercial fishing and processing center with an industrial harbor and a multi-species fleet. Ouzinkie is a small, Alutiiq village located on Spruce Island, 12 miles north of the city of Kodiak.

Study Population

The *study population* included 88 youth from the 5 coastal communities of Sitka, Kodiak, Petersburg, Craig, and Ouzinkie who participated in focused group interviews. Participating youth self-selected into focus groups and were not randomly sampled for inclusion. The data collected on participating youth cannot be considered statistically significant or representative of coastal community youth populations

¹ 16 U.S.C S 1802 (16).

as a whole. However, they serve as exploratory data to help organize future policy planning for coastal communities.

Figure 2. Study Population Demographics

<i>Study Community</i>	Sitka	Kodiak	Petersburg	Craig	Ouzinkie	
Community Pop	8,627	6,626	2,973	1,101	170	
<i>Study Participants</i>						total
Female	13	10	12	5	4	44
Male	11	14	4	12	3	44
total	24	24	16	17	7	88
<i>Ethnicity</i>						total
Euro-American	14	15	13	9		51
Alaska Native/Native Amer	8	1	2	5	7	23
Multi-ethnic		2		2		4
Latino	2	1		1		4
Asian		4				4
Pacific Islander		1				1
Unknown			1			1
total	24	24	16	17	7	88
<i>Place of Birth</i>						total
Alaska	19	15	6	9	7	56
Washington	1	1	8	4		14
Oregon	1	2	1	2		6
Other Western U.S. States		1		1		2
U.S. Midwest	1		1			2
U.S. East		2				2
U.S. South	1			1		2
Outside U.S.		3				3
Unknown	1					1
total	24	24	16	17	7	88

Gender Participants were evenly split along gender lines but the sample composition varied from community to community: 44 male participants and 44 female participants for the study population as a whole. More young women (12) than young men (4) were interviewed in Petersburg. More young men (12) than young women (5) were interviewed in Craig.

Age Average age of participants was between 17 and 18.

Ethnicity A little more than half of participating youth (57%) reported a primary ethnicity of Euro-American and 26% reported an Alaska Native/Native American ethnicity. The remaining 17% reported

themselves as Multi-Ethnic (5%), Latino (5%), Asian (5%), Pacific Islander (1%), and No Response (1%). Alaska Native respondents primarily reside in Sitka and Ouzinkie. Asian respondents were primarily of Philippine origin and reside in Kodiak.

Place of Birth The majority of respondents (63%) were born in Alaska. The economic and cultural ties residents of Southeast have to the urban centers of Seattle and Portland are noticeable in the 16% of respondents born in Washington, and 7% in Oregon. Interviews also demonstrated seemingly stronger ties between Southeast Alaska communities and Pacific Northwest cities than to Juneau or Anchorage.

Methods

The research team drew its qualitative methodological approach from previous research the PI has conducted in the Aleutians East Borough (AEB) examining real and potential socioeconomic impacts of crab rationalization. Focus groups were conducted with AEB high-school aged students in small communities. Interview questions were designed for the students to describe their lifestyle today and how they view future opportunities in work, education, or training. This approach proved to be an effective way to quickly access local youth culture in a context of limited funding and time for the research.

Informants in the current project included secondary-level (junior and high-school seniors) and post-secondary level (age 18-24) informants. Informants who were minors were recruited through community schools. Post-secondary level informants were recruited through announcements posted in the community and by convenience sampling methods. All minors included provided a permission form signed by their parents allowing children to participate. We also added to the AEB methodology by increasing our focus on out-migration issues. In the interviews, youth were given name tags with numbers on them which we used to personally identify the participants to ensure the anonymity of their comments and to allow them to speak freely. They were offered a \$15 incentive for participation. Using focused group interviews, a short demographic questionnaire, and an occupational ranking exercise the research team further investigated the findings generated from the AEB study which included:

- Youth originating in Alaska's coastal communities value outdoor and subsistence activities and especially those that involve a relationship with the sea. They value occupations with which they are familiar in their own communities such as air piloting, fishing, construction/trades, city or entrepreneurial business.
- Despite these values, because of both changing economic conditions and cultural influences from outside their home communities, coastal community youth are leaving home after high school to seek higher education and opportunities outside the fishing industry.

- Many youth return to their home communities without completing their training because of lack of adequate preparation for higher education or because of a loss of social support networks. Those who are successful in completing post-secondary training tend not to return to their home communities which is resulting in Alaska's current "Brain Drain" dilemma.

Traditionally, thorough anthropological field studies have required long stays within communities to effectively engage in participant observation of the study population's life. In Alaska, long-term ethnographic fieldwork in rural communities is extremely costly in both travel and per diem expenses. We proposed video ethnographic methods for school aged informants to minimize the cost of a proper ethnographic study but to be able to involve the study community in representing itself and add richness to the focus group data by providing a more holistic representation of local ways of life. This aspect of the project was never fully realized due to constraints in fully funding this component in the form of the PI and a videographer consultant working with youth to develop the videos. We were forced to leave a great portion of this project component up to the students and their teachers which proved to be an unrealistic expectation on our part. We did receive two student videos from Petersburg and Craig although they took the form of further school based student interviewing which only reinforced comments and issues addressed in the focus group discussions.

Data Analysis Methods

Focused group interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and coded for content using Atlas ti qualitative data analysis software. Questionnaire data were tabulated. The occupational ranking exercises were analyzed by deriving frequencies in SPSS and also subjected to consensus analysis techniques in Anthropac. Consensus analysis, a formal mathematical model, is a quantitative method similar to factor analysis and unique to anthropology. It is used to demonstrate shared knowledge held by a group of people about a particular cultural domain or in other words, culture itself. While the method is powerful, there are few published texts on its use and although the PI has had training in it, a conference workshop assisted in applying the methodology and the "informal" cultural consensus model to the occupational ranking exercises used in the focus groups. The informal model is used with ordinal data (rather than the dichotomous responses required by the formal model) and is run through a factor analysis in a statistical software package.

Cultural consensus demonstrated a trend among Euro-American young women in the coastal youth study in affinities towards particular types of employment and future aspirations that might not be realized in the home community. This finding is important as it corresponds to the currently accepted understanding that young women in rural Alaska communities are more likely to out-migrate than young men. This finding has implications for the need to further describe and understand changing social structure in Alaska's rural and coastal communities. There was also a slight trend among Alaska Native males towards trades. However, these results are only tentative because the interview instrument was not designed for consensus analysis nor was the sample adequate for the analysis. The exercise proved useful for hypothesis development, however, and assisted the PI in developing a broader research agenda on the topic at hand with two additional research projects: one on rural-urban

migration in Alaska among families with school aged children (Lowe 2010) and one currently in progress funded by the National Science Foundation on scholarship outcomes for youth from the CDQ regions of Western Alaska. These projects will be discussed in further detail below in the “Products from the Research” section of the report.

Findings

On Community

To start the conversation in the focused group interviews, youth were asked to comment on how their community is different or special from other places. Youth completed this task in a round robin fashion and there was a general level of concurrence on some matters but participants also strove to offer distinct and individual answers and as such were inclusive in their responses and in their descriptions of their home communities.

Positive Community Attributes

Across the study communities, youth overwhelmingly agreed about the strong interconnectedness between residents of their home communities. In many instances, youth described their communities as “close knit” and how this particular cultural attribute might distinguish their communities from others. These deep social ties are grounded in the enculturation² experiences of coastal youth. At the center of these experiences is family life expressed in extended family structures and multiple generations—traditionally coalescing around a coastal and commercial fishing lifestyle which today is rapidly in flux. In all communities, youth acknowledged the value of childhood in coastal communities but expressed some ambivalence about whether or not they should remain in their communities during adolescence and into adulthood.

The following interview excerpts from all of the study communities demonstrate youth perspective on the interconnectedness of their communities:

I think Sitka is a lot more socially close knit than anywhere else in the state. –Sitka Senior

We can stay here with family members and friends. –Ouzinkie Junior

I have to say how connected the people are here with each other. –Kodiak 18-24 year old

The good thing about this community is that we can all depend on each other. –Petersburg Senior

² Enculturation is the process by which children learn how to be a member of the society in which they live.

Number 66: Plus that we're so close-knit that when someone does die, there's a huge connection--we all get together...so that's good.

Number 58: There's a huge support system.

–Petersburg Seniors

I could never imagine walking through a school and not knowing who somebody is. –Petersburg Senior

The interesting thing about Craig is that is a close-knit community, considering the diversity of people. Everyone knows everyone. Everyone knows me.

–Craig 18-24 year old

I agree that Craig is unique and everybody knows each other. But also, that it provides a support base for everyone here. You know if you are having a hard time someone can help you. So, I guess that we all look out for each other in a sort of way.

–Craig Senior

Coastal youth understand the isolation of their communities is what draws them together and the common enculturation during their childhood. In most of the communities, respondents remarked on the feelings of safety they experience at home among family members and other community residents, demonstrated here in the words of one Petersburg resident:

I was born and raised here, my great grandparents came here from Norway, so I have had plenty of generations here, and now I have a family here as well. It is definitely a lot different for me now that I have a family here because I look at it in a whole new light. As a kid growing up here, I think that we are very sheltered. But now that I am older, I love that because we look at people differently. We automatically assume people are good even if they are not. Everyone just seems to be good people even if they make bad choices, everyone is from good families, good people, and we have always had the same friends. We have pictures of us as babies lying on blankets with like 20 babies---things like that that get us all together when we are young, and then you go up and all through classes and high school and sports are huge here. That really gives a sense of family. And now that I have my own family it is so safe here. My kids can play in the front yard when I am doing dishes and I can look out the window and it is not a big deal. We couldn't run down the street when it is too dark outside and that is a huge difference and other places aren't like that. And there is always people there to help. It is just a good place to be.

-Petersburg 18-24 year old

Here, the respondent emphasizes the importance of family—an observation echoed throughout the interviews and study communities. Family connections were a particularly important aspect of life for youth in Ouzinkie, the smallest of the study communities and the only Alaska Native village included in the study.

Family is also the conduit through which coastal youth experience and learn to appreciate the beauty of their natural environment by participating in outdoor activities in the course of family life and their childhood, eventually extending to outings with friends. For all the respondents but chiefly the youngest (high school juniors), the very important local outdoor activities such as subsistence fishing and hunting were conducted among family members over others.

It just kind of seems like a family activity. Everybody gets on the boat or goes to the dock or whatever you do, and you grab the fishing poles and sit there and cast and you just kind of sit there and listen to old music.

-Sitka Junior

In addition to strong social ties and enculturation experiences, youth discussed the beauty of their physical environment as a positive community attribute and as their own connection to a sense of place.

The thing I enjoy the most about Sitka is just the nature and how beautiful it is and even when it's raining you can always find something just wonderful in nature to look at.

-Sitka Junior

Our landscape is a lot different than the lower 48.

-Sitka Senior

I think one thing special about Kodiak is just the climate, the environment.

-Kodiak 18-24 year old

I think the wildlife is beautiful.

-Kodiak Junior

I love our beaches.

-Kodiak Junior

They experience their unique environment through outdoor activities that are also situated within family life from a young age. They described a wide range of activities that include fishing, hunting, boating, four-wheeling, hiking, camping, and snow sports.

The thing about Sitka that I like is that it is on an island. So you would think that there isn't that much to do here, but the amount of things you can do outside—whether it is subsistence fishing or hunting--the opportunities are just overwhelming. You could spend a lifetime and not get everything done here.

-Sitka Senior

What I really like about this community is that there is a lot of stuff to do in the outdoors, especially on the water.

–Sitka Junior

Just hunting and fishing because I do a lot of that.

–Ouzinkie 18-24 year old

Four wheeling and outdoor activities. And going up the creek. And jet skiffing, and regular skiffing, snowboarding and sledding.

–Petersburg Junior

Youth were also asked if they saw themselves raising their own families in their home communities in the future. The response was positive in all the communities, particularly for the early years of a child's life which they themselves treasured as a central element to their own identities. Once their future children had reached their own current ages, however, there was more indecision about whether or not remaining in the home communities would be beneficial. This indecision will be discussed further below in the section on negative community attributes which some respondents identified as alcohol and drug use and which others identified as a lack of access to wider opportunities. Respondents fully recognized the advantages and disadvantages of the isolation of their home communities. Their positive comments about their childhood experiences were mixed with their current restlessness to explore a world outside. The following two interview excerpts demonstrate these sentiments:

Focused Group Interview with Ouzinkie Juniors

Interviewer: Would you say that Ouzinkie was a good place to grow up?

Number 29: Growing up, but not as a teenager.

Number 27: Yeah.

Interviewer: Why is it bad as a teenager?

Number 29: Bad influences.

Interviewer: Bad influences from kids within in the school or other . . . ?

Number 29: From outside of school.

Number 27: Outside.

Interviewer: Outside of school? What kind of bad influences?

Number 29: Drugs and alcohol, smoking.

Number 27: Drinking.

Focused Group Interview with Craig Juniors

Interviewer: If you had a family in the future, would this be a good place to raise your kids?

Number 82: Maybe for a little bit.

Number 82: Just so they could see what everything else is like.

Number 86: Yeah, maybe for part of the time. Not the whole time though.

Number 81: Their younger years.

Number 82: Like maybe through elementary schools or something.

Interviewer: But maybe not high school?

Number 85: But you will have better opportunities for better colleges if you move down south because then you are in state for that college. It is lower tuition down south.

Number 81: And see what the rest of the world is like.

Negative Community Attributes

While the majority of coastal youth interviewed described their communities in positive ways, they also outlined negative community attributes and suggestions for improving their communities. They saw disadvantages to the small sizes of their communities and the adverse consequences of community gossip for individuals. They themselves were highly critical of community politics and questioned the priorities of their city councils that might rather be focused on providing constructive projects such as activities and teen centers for youth than what they saw as political games played by charismatic adults. Focus group participants expressed fatigue and frustrations with the limitations they experience from inclement weather conditions, especially in the winter when they feel there is a lack of activities for youth which leads to drug and alcohol use. As connected as they are to their families and fellow community residents, they also revealed themselves as global citizens who are connected to the rest of the world through media and travel. They feel they require greater access to what they describe as “the real world.”

Social Sanctions in a Small Town

Coastal youth feel a high level of interconnectedness is also a disadvantage to living in a small, remote community. They expressed how easily one could earn a bad reputation that would follow the person through life. Some longed for the anonymity a larger place would provide them. Others wanted to find new romantic partners that to whom they weren't related or whom they'd known their whole lives. The following excerpts demonstrate coastal youth concern with small community social dynamics:

Probably one of the worst things about Sitka is it's easy to build a negative reputation and it's hard to lose it.
—Sitka 18 to 24 year old

Interviewer: How do you feel when you leave Ouzinkie to go to Kodiak or Anchorage? Is it exciting or do you prefer being in Ouzinkie?

Number 29: I find it as a relief.

Number 27: I find it exciting, bigger place, more things to do.

Interviewer: Why do you feel it's a relief when you go someplace else?

Number 29: Because I don't know anybody and nobody's in my business all the time. You don't have a life when you're here.

—Ouzinkie Juniors

You're related to everyone, so it's, like, hard to get a boyfriend.

—Ouzinkie Junior

I think people invest too much of their time into other people and not, like, a hobby. Because that's why people tend to not like this island so much because they say there's so much drama.

—Kodiak 18 to 24 year old

Number 57: Another thing about living here is that everyone knows you. It's a good thing but it's a bad thing.

Number 66: I don't think it's the worst thing.

Number 57: It's not the worst thing but it goes both ways. Because like if you get in trouble, see we all know, everyone knows about it.

Number 56: It's kind of a gossip train, yeah.

-Petersburg Seniors

Sometimes everyone knows everyone - because once you get in trouble, everyone knows about it. Like the whole island.

-Craig Junior

From the perspective of coastal youth, small town social dynamics are intimately related to small town political dynamics. During the occupation ranking exercise, the occupation of "mayor" was given a low rating across the communities. Youth expressed dissatisfaction with their communities' political processes, sometimes describing them as high school social dynamics writ large; imbued with "drama" or "corrupt." They also questioned budget spending priorities as the following interview excerpts demonstrate:

Interviewer: Why doesn't anyone want to be the mayor?

Number 32: There's just a whole bunch of political drama and I don't want to say corruption, but that's pretty much what it boils down to.

Number 36: That's a good word, that's the word I was looking for earlier.

-Kodiak 18 to 24 year olds

It was just ridiculous and it's like come on! This is not a big issue, let's focus on the community. And I think I would just steer it away from this drama—it's like the popular adults, you know, fighting! It just kills me.

-Petersburg Senior

Well, I think with the city council, I mean, it is in a sense, it is high school, it is a popularity contest.

-Petersburg 18 to 24 year old

Number 64: Sometimes it is really depressing though when you pay so much in city sales tax and then not see that those tax dollars are going for good things. You see that the city is buying new equipment every

single year. And it is not just a single piece of equipment, it is like four new dump trucks, five new plow trucks, and two new... I mean, c'mon guys! Why are you buying so much stuff every single year - where is our money going? I just don't feel like they are using it to the best of their abilities.

Number 75: Like the children's playground just got re-done after how many years?

Number 59: Years! Since we were like babies.

Number 75: I would rather have things that you see - things that are good for the community.

Number 59: They really do need to do something for the younger kids.

Number 64: There is no gymnastics. There are no basketball camps.

-Petersburg 18 to 24 year olds

Winter Weather and Boredom

Adding to the problem of small town gossip are what coastal youth described as long and difficult winters. Youth noted many summer activities kept them occupied during the months of reasonable weather, but winters are experienced as boring times when there is a lack of wholesome activities. Youth associated this boredom with the prevalent use of alcohol as well as recreational drugs which included marijuana and cocaine in some communities, but also other drugs such as crystal methamphetamine and heroine in other communities. Overall, most youth interviewed in the focus groups expressed concern over this trend:

There's nothing in the wintertime for, I don't know if youth is the right answer, but for people, yeah, I'll say the youth, the youth to do. It's like everything shuts down in the winter just because it gets dark.

-Kodiak 18 to 24 year old

Number 37: I think it was a good place to grow up because I basically lived in the outdoors, but, I mean, the wintertimes, you know, the kids now there's temptation for alcohol and drug abuse here because there's nothing to do in the wintertime.

Number 39: There's middle schoolers who are pregnant.

Number. 37: They're trying to get more activities for schools especially, you know, for the kids to do instead of going and drinking...

-Kodiak 18 to 24 year olds

There isn't a lot for people to do, but if you are into hunting and fishing and outdoors you are okay. If you don't do those things, you can fall into the wrong people, and drugs. Drugs are a big problem here.

-Sitka Junior

Number 90: The worst thing about Craig is actually, the downfall is, its size too. Because a lot of kids find that nothing is really going on in town and they find another means of just having fun. Drinking, drugs, and stuff.

Number 95: I would probably agree that maybe a lot of people that maybe don't want to live here and do live here because of family or work or they are younger and still in school, and when school is done they are out of here. But for now they are stuck here. So they are stuck here and there are a lot of problems drinking, drugs, that sort of thing to keep their mind off of their dislike for a small town.

-Craig 18 to 24 year olds

This feeling of being isolated in a small town also contributes to boredom and resonated in descriptions of youth angst:

There's like nowhere to go. You can't just like go and drive like to the highway, and like to the mall. You're kind of just stuck.

-Sitka Junior

Number 55: Nowhere to go.

Number 48: Nowhere to go.

Number 50: It's isolated.

Number 48: Isolated, yeah.

-Kodiak Seniors

Number 66: We're so isolated...

Number 56: Yes.

Number 66: It's so hard to get out of town. You have to like take this ferry or get on the plane.

-Petersburg Seniors

Secluded, it is kind of a good thing and a bad thing. Like there isn't a McDonald's on the island. It is like we almost feel like we are cut off from the rest of the world sometimes.

-Craig Juniors

Access to the "Real World"

Across the study communities, youth commented on how their isolated communities were not in the "real world." Despite their recognition of being isolated, they also demonstrated in the interviews they are very much global citizens connected to what they perceive as the "real world" through media and traveling for school functions and vacations. The mannerisms and outwardly appearance of coastal Alaska youth mirror their mainstream contemporaries outside of Alaska—particularly in the Southeast Alaska communities where travel outside the community seems more frequent and more of an influence on youth than in the Kodiak communities. Coastal youth interject American colloquialisms and Californian affectations into their speech with ease; an affectionate "Dude" when speaking to a friend, or descriptions "like" riddled with "like" verbal "like" tics. Coastal Alaska youth depend on the internet to connect them with the outside world--they need it for shopping, social networking, and taking online courses although complain the internet connection is too slow in many communities. Traveling for school sports or other school related activities is vitally important to Alaska coastal youth. These trips are opportunities for them to meet different people their ages and to establish and reinforce connections with other Alaska communities. They want to keep up on the fashions, movies, and electronics crazes, go out to eat and drink fancy coffee, and they'd like to have access to services that are "open 24/7" which seemed to be the mark of modernity for coastal youth. They want to be able to participate in a wide range of sports, arts, and other activities.

Interviewer: Would you say that this town was a good town to grow up in?

Number 82: Kind of. You get to know everyone, but I think that if you grew up in a big city, you would have more of an idea of what the rest of the lower 48 is like.

Number 81: It is really protected.

Number 86: It is almost not the real world to a point.

-Craig Juniors

Number 79: They have no movie theatres here.

Number 72: There are no like big joints like Starbucks or anything here, or malls.

Interviewer: Is that a good thing or a bad thing would you say?

Number 72: Bad thing.

-Craig Seniors

We don't have malls and it's hard to get away easily. You know, it's so expensive to take, you have to take a flight to go somewhere.

-Sitka 18 to 24 year olds

Slow internet.

-Sitka Senior

Well, I play basketball all of the time. I played it in Mt. Edgumbe, I play here. But I wouldn't mind trying other sports like soccer or anything like that that we don't have here.

-Ouzinkie Senior

Number 50: Clothing stores. Because we always have to travel to Anchorage to go shopping.

Number 51: Yeah, a lot of clothing stores.

Number 50: Maybe another movie theater.

Number 48: Entertainment centers.

Number 48: And they could get some restaurants in there, too. I mean, we're getting tired of the ones we have here. McDonald's has just been here for too long. We need, like, an Olive Garden or something. We're good on pizza but nothing else.

-Kodiak Seniors

If you want to go to a mall here, you are out of luck.

-Petersburg Junior

I think that it is really important to vacation and get off the island frequently because there is just way too much to do and way too much to see. And never experiencing McDonald's food, or anything. You think that the things that those in the lower 48 tend to take for granted, we treasure, not being able to experience any of it on the island. So it is very different in that aspect on being able to have resources that are open 24 hours a day.

-Petersburg 18 to 24 year olds

Interviewer: What is about other places that makes them more fun?

Number 82: There is just more stuff to do. Because since you have lived here all of your life you have done everything you can do pretty much. When you go other places you can go to water parks, theme parks and stuff. Go to the movies. Just a lot more fun stuff. Like when we travel for sports trips we always go to a movie and we just get to hang out with our friends and do a lot of other stuff that we don't have here.

-Craig Junior

Suggested Improvements for Communities

When asked to provide solutions for community problems, youth in most communities felt better youth centers for teenagers was a necessity; somewhere they could go and participate in activities with their friends—especially during periods of bad weather. They also suggested infrastructure improvements and economic development ideas to attract youth to stay in their home communities.

Youth Centers and Activities

I would try to, like, develop some kind of program for youth because there's a lot, like, of kids, that, like, don't care and, like, get into the system, or just don't really make something of their lives, so I think it would be good if they had more things to do.

-Sitka Junior

I would get a new gym.

-Ouzinkie 18 to 24 year old

I think we need a bigger rec center.

-Kodiak Junior

I'd probably say, like, a rec center or something. Somewhere for people to go and kind of hang out because there's really nowhere to just go and do something, especially when the weather is bad, you can't just go to the park and play basketball.

-Kodiak Senior

Number 69: No place to like hang out with friends, like indoors.

Number 65: We get kicked out of everywhere we start hanging out.

Number 69: Yeah, we used to hang out at the gym, but you can't anymore unless you pay.

Number 65: Yeah, you aren't allowed to be in the gym unless you pay. And we used to always hang out there.

-Petersburg Juniors

Number 90: What I would start with is more youth activity. Because from what I have noticed, everyone that I have grown up with, everyone in classes above me, even above them, everyone, after high school when people are done hanging out with each other and half of the friends leave and the other half stay and sink into a slump and aren't able to get out of it. Maybe some kind of programs to help them. I don't know if they have them up in Juneau and stuff. There is not enough of anything either helping kids either get out of here or finding something fulfilling to do here. I know everyone has pretty much been turning to pot and stuff that aren't able to get out of here and don't have a certain drive to move forward. So just more recreational stuff and programs to help students after they are done with high school.

Number 95: I know I have always liked going to Ketchikan because they have that nice rec center, and it is pretty cool compared to what we have. 'Cause you can go there just about any time. And I know that something like that is just unaffordable for Craig to build it or maintain it, to operate it. So I know there is a lot money issues with a smaller town. But I think that more youth activities and programs, whether it be sports or career based. I think that would be one thing I would concentrate on.

-Craig 18 to 24 year olds

In addition to physical structures for recreational centers, in most of the communities youth focused on describing suggested infrastructure improvements for their communities. They are particularly concerned about a lack of local housing, road improvements, and improving the ferry system for greater and what they saw as cheaper access to the outside world in contrast to flying. These sentiments are summarized in the words of one Ouzinkie youth:

I would rebuild the store, make more roads for more houses for people to come in, have a ferry dock be made, some little apartments for tourism, and a coffee house.

-Ouzinkie Junior

Housing

Many of the 18 to 24 year olds noted they had to continue living with their parents after high school as it was difficult to find a place to rent in their communities or even to buy for those who had started to think of home ownership.

It seems like the kids that come back from college, it is kind of hard for them to stay in Sitka. It is hard to buy a house; it is hard to rent for cheap. There aren't that many job opportunities for those with a college degree.

-Sitka Senior

Like, my cousin, she's living in my grandmother's house who passed away last year. And she's trying to find a place and there's no houses here because they're all taken.

-Ouzinkie Junior

I mean, the cost of living is what's killing everybody. I mean, I have a friend that's retired from two different jobs, getting two retirement checks, and he still has to work just to support, you know, his house and everything else. Land here is getting expensive. To buy a house now, I can go down to the lower 48 and buy a house for \$125,000 and up here it's a quarter of a million, you know and upwards for the same house. And it's killing people.

-Kodiak 18 to 24 year old

I think it is hard for people to find apartments or houses that they want to rent.

There isn't an apartment complex. I mean, there used to be but now it is being torn down for one house.

And the banks still look at us like we are little kids still. I think that is the hardest thing for our age group, I feel like, because I feel that we are in-between what is considered real adults and a kid. We are adults and we have to make adult decisions, but we are looked at as children still.

-Petersburg 18 to 24 year olds

I would like to buy a place here sometime. One thing that comes to mind is a duplex where you could live in half and rent half or something like that. Because there is a lot of people here that can't afford to buy a place or build a place and they need to rent.

-Craig 18 to 24 year old

Roads

We seem to have, like, a lot of pot holes and ditches and everything in the roads. -Sitka Junior

Build some more roads. -Sitka 18 to 24 year old

Fix the roads because there's too much puddles. -Ouzinkie Senior

Fix the roads. They are horrible. -Kodiak Senior

I think the roads are really bad, too. But they need to fix the high school. -Kodiak 18 to 24 year old

Paving more roads would be nice.

–Craig Junior

Number 79: Pave the roads.

Number 80: Get rid of the potholes.

-Craig Seniors

Local Economic Development

Finally, coastal youth were asked how they themselves would solve their community's problems if they were sitting on their respective city councils. In many cases, they offered creative solutions that attended to tourism development, hiring locally, alternative energy projects, and suggestions for recycling programs as a source of revenue. They seemed to recognize tourism development in particular as a needed solution to economic development and diversification problems although the Southeast youth, having more experience with tourists than their Kodiak contemporaries, were more wary of the local repercussions of expanded development in tourism. Most communities saw tourism development as a necessary evil.

Number 35: I hate to say it, but I would try and increase tourism. It's a good way to make money for a community that needs it. There isn't enough downtown, there isn't enough money downtown being spent, people who make money save it, or they go and spend it somewhere else with fishing.

Number 36: In my opinion, it all comes back to spending money wisely. That, and the increase in tourism. If you had the increase in tourism, you'd have more money coming in to fix the high school, you'd have more money to improve the road maintenance.

-Kodiak 18 to 24 year olds

-They are in the middle of the street, take pictures, and walk right in the street as you are driving.

-It is amazing that they don't even think about things.

-I had to take my driving test on one of the biggest tourism days in town. I sat at one crosswalk for 20 minutes. One man was just standing there taking pictures.

-That is what the tourists are like everywhere you go.

- Well, it is kind of hypocritical. Because without the tourists this town could probably not survive. It just wouldn't happen. It is just something we have to live with.

-People that just step off of the boat. Just don't go downtown when the ships are in. Nobody really sees the true Alaska if they are just on Lincoln street in Sitka.

-I worked on a charter boat subbing in. And some of the things that they did and said were just unbelievable. I can't believe people are that ignorant.

-Yeah, like "where are the igloos?"

-Yeah, or like "what elevation are we at?"

Or like, "is that Russia?"

Once I got the question, "Do you take American dollars?"

(everyone laughs)

Yeah, we realize we need them, just we would really rather not see or hear them.

-Sitka Seniors

Community Positive Attributes, Negative Attributes, and Suggested Improvements

In focused group interviews, coastal youth describe Alaska fishing communities as small and "close-knit." Because of the small size, geographic remoteness, and interconnectedness of their communities, coastal youth possess social capital; a kind of wealth based upon the strength of their kin and social networks. Coastal youth demonstrate a connectedness to their physical environment and to the place of their home communities through various activities in which they engage, i.e. fishing, hunting, hiking, 4-wheeling, and camping. These experiences are rooted in their enculturation practices and within family life.

While the study participants assert their communities were appropriate and good places to spend their formative years, many of them question whether or not they themselves or their future children should remain in their home communities once they reach high school age. They recognize their communities are isolated and subject to paralyzing winter weather conditions. They highly value their summer activities but they acknowledge boredom among some youth during the long, dark, and cold winter months inevitably leading both youth and other community residents towards drug and alcohol use. The angst and restlessness they experience with small town life is compounded when they realize through various media conduits and trips outside their communities that they are also a part of a rapidly growing global youth culture defined by consumerism and recreational experiences they then greatly desire.

They earnestly discussed solutions to some of their communities' problems. The primary solution was a call for communities to invest in youth centers and activities to keep young people away from the lure of drug and alcohol abuse. They called attention to a lack of housing for young people starting out in life and think other infrastructure improvements such as better roads and updated schools would improve the quality of local life. Finally, they are fully aware of the limitations of their undiversified economies.

They admit they need their communities to consider how to develop other sources of revenue outside of the fishing industry although they themselves are ambivalent about leading this charge.

On Education

In the same manner as in their comments about their communities, youth summarized strengths, weaknesses, and suggested improvements in their education experiences. Overall, students are satisfied with small school size and teachers in coastal community schools but less satisfied with course offerings, demonstrating a general theme involving “access”: access to varied courses tailored to personal interests and abilities and access to extracurricular activities and associated travel. The kinds of educational experiences and opportunities coastal youth want are at once reflective of their desire for vocational training they can employ in their home communities but also demonstrative of their role in a developing global youth culture in their desire for electives like foreign languages. Similar to local social ties, coastal youth draw and depend upon the social capital they experience with this kind of connectedness to these wider networks. In coastal communities, we currently see a new cultural expectation for young people to pursue higher education as opportunities in traditional occupations such as fishing diminish.

Positive Attributes of Education

The small size of schools and the strong connections between students were again emphasized in the discussions of educational experiences just as they were emphasized in the discussions about communities. They valued the strength of their social ties to their classmates and they recognized how their small class sizes afforded them individual attention from their teachers. Travel to other communities for activities such as sporting events or academic competitions was a vitally important aspect to their educational experiences. In more than one community, the individual access to laptops was also a critical feature of their educational experience which helped them exercise their ties to the outside world—but perhaps not enough, as some complained of being restricted access to some aspects of the internet from their school laptops.

Social Context of Education

Coastal youth placed high value on their ability to experience their formal education in the company of friends and family in a small school setting. This characteristic was emphasized much more than the actual content of their learning or any other aspect of the educational experience. They remarked on the absence of the kind of cliques one might find at bigger schools and in some cases, described close connections to their teachers who are able to provide individualized attention to their students. The positive feelings toward teachers was very apparent in Petersburg and the sense that this community doesn’t experience the kind of teacher turnover prevalent in other Alaska communities; that the teachers were long term residents and members of the community rather than strangers from outside of it.

Because our classes are so small, there's a good chance that one, if not more of your friends is going to be in your classes all day.

-Sitka Junior

Well, we're all kind of close knit, that's a good thing, I guess.

–Ouzinkie Senior

You pretty much know, not everyone, but you know a good majority of people in the high school...There's not really a lot of problems with everyone.

-Kodiak Junior

Number. 49: Communication, because all of your friends are at school.

Number 53: You know everybody.

-Kodiak Seniors

Just like knowing everyone. You can see everyone at once.

-Craig Junior

Just being able to socialize with other people.

–Craig Seniors

Student-teacher relations.

-Sitka Senior

Number 52: The teachers. I like the teachers.

Number 48 Yeah, there's a lot of great teachers.

-Kodiak Seniors

Number 66: And then we have good teachers too.

Number 61: It's really easy to get along with them.

Number 58: Yeah. And some of them even went to school with like our parents. They know everything about us.

Number 56: It's basically good because since it's a smaller community, smaller classes, that you actually get to go...

Number 57: One on one

Number 56: One on one with the teachers a lot more and you actually you get to relate to the teacher a lot more than in a really big classroom you don't get to talk to 'em or anything...

Number 58: And they're like our friends, they know us.

Number 56: ...it helps you learn.

Number 63: You like wave to them when you're downtown and they drive by.

-Petersburg Seniors

I think our school is good. Being able to talk to all of the teachers individually. They know your name and stuff like that. You get a lot of individual help. For our school to improve on, I think we do pretty good.

-Craig Seniors

Youth also described the importance of school related travel outside of their communities for sporting events but also for music, art, academic competitions and field trips to places like Washington, D.C. and AVTEC vocational school in Seward.

Number 60: It is fun to go on planes and travel whenever you go somewhere instead of just driving.

Number 68: Yeah, traveling with school. After a while you get to know everyone else, and all the other southeast towns.

-Petersburg Juniors

Yeah, probably the sports too. Because without the sports and travel, probably most people would move to somewhere else that had sports because that is pretty much what keeps people going here.

-Craig Juniors

Number 72: Traveling is pretty cool - meeting people in other towns and stuff.

Number 80: Yeah, you pretty much know people in other towns.

-Craig Seniors

Negative Attributes of Education

Comments about the positive and negative social attributes of a small town extended to small schools as well in some cases, i.e. that gossip and other forms of social control occur in the school setting just as much as they do within the larger community. There were also a number of comments regarding deteriorating physical infrastructure of the schools in the Kodiak region and complaints of an old structure and overcrowding in the Kodiak high school. Teacher turnover seemed to be a problem in the smallest places like Ouzinkie and Craig where teachers' expertise was also perceived as being spread too thinly across subject areas. The number one negative school experience for coastal youth was, however, the lack of diversity in course offerings. Across the communities, youth were also particularly concerned about their problems with mathematics.

At a lot of schools, there's, like, a lot of AP classes that you can take your junior and senior year and here we have three of them. So, I mean, you can take one or two your junior year or one or two your senior year. But it's not, like, you don't have as many opportunities here to take high-level classes that are interesting. A lot of the classes are just kind of geared towards people who don't, or only kind of want to be there, instead of really want to learn something.

-Sitka Junior

Well, just the math system we have. It is integrated. It causes a lot of problems when you are trying to go places and they ask what your math background is and you say, well, I took math 3 and 4, and they don't know what that means. They have to sort through it.

-Sitka Senior

There's not many options, like, there's some classes that they call Independent Studies, that some teachers, like, I'm in a class that a teacher can't even really help with. Because there's, like, a math teacher, there's a math class and there's no one person that is actually specialized in math.

-Ouzinkie Senior

-We don't enough diversity in our classes, like, options for other classes we might want to take.

-College isn't, like, group math. It's individual. Core math is all group work, So, like, you could do good on an assignment and then you take a test and you don't even know what to do.

-Kodiak Juniors

I guess there could be more options. We have a lot of online classes. In a bigger school you'd just have more options of classes and diversity and stuff with teachers. 'Cause I don't work well online so I basically just have to stick to what they teach.

-Petersburg Senior

-I think there should be more electives.

-One of the bad things about the school is that the electives are really limited to what the teachers can do. And a lot of the time what happens is that teachers move up here and discover that they don't like it and move again.

-Craig Juniors

Number 79: I hate math because I suck at it.

Number 72: I don't like math.

Number 76: Worst is probably math.

-Craig Seniors

Suggested Improvements in Education

When prompted for suggestions on how shortcomings of their educational experiences could be improved, youth comments centered on curriculum and course offerings. Students wanted a standardized math curriculum that would help them in college or in other settings. They also wished for more electives such as vocational classes and languages.

Different math program. Get us on the same math program that all the other schools around the country are on so we could get into college easily.

-Sitka Seniors

-I think we need different types of math, instead of just that core. If you don't take a core math, you have to take it through the college or learning center. The format is dumb.

-And then not enough language, like, we only have Spanish, right?

-Well, next year we're getting Italian. And was it French, too?

-I want French.

-Yeah, but multi-cultural, it doesn't teach it, the whole language.

-Kodiak Juniors

Art and music class...P.E. for high schoolers.

-Ouzinkie Senior

I'd get more teachers to specialize in each of the classes that they need. And I'd want a shop because...I remember when I was in middle school we had shop classes and stuff, and it just kind of dwindled. Now they turned the shop into a cafeteria.

-Ouzinkie Junior

Number 68: Change the curriculum.

Number 67: I think that we could definitely have some more electives, we have the options of taking a certain amount of elective classes each year, but we are kind of limited on the variety of classes.

Number 69: Electives are like woodshop, Spanish, art...

Number 60: Chemistry is an elective.

Number 69: And like band.

Number 60: I had to take band because I had to take something else.

Interviewer: And what kind of electives would you like?

Number 69: Like different language classes.

Number 60: We only have Spanish. There used to be a German teacher, but she is retired, she only substitute teaches sometimes.

-Petersburg Juniors

Number 83: Like some kind of engineering, like mechanical would be cool. So like an auto shop class. I guess there was one a couple years ago I guess, but, there is construction this year, but I want an engineering class.

Number 82: Last year there was auto shop. But the auto shop teacher moved away, so we don't have it anymore.

-Craig Juniors

Number 80: Auto shop.

Number 79: A better auto shop.

Number 70: Economics or like a psychology class.

Number 80: We need like a zero hour workout. Just for like lifting weights.

Number 70: More languages would be cool.

-Craig Seniors

I think it would be really cool if Sitka had more, like programs that offered locals of any age for more growth. Like, they just put in that vocational center and I heard about that and I just think that's really good for people, you know, who aren't going to school and can't go to school so they're not stuck in Sitka like trying to do a minimum wage job and they're not going to get anywhere and like can't afford to go to school.

-Sitka 18 to 24 year olds

Education Positives, Negatives, and Suggested Improvements

In the focus group discussions on coastal youth educational experiences, strong social ties were again illuminated as the sociocultural context through which youth learn and develop. The Petersburg school stood out among the others as a place where students and teachers have deep, personal connections and where the teachers are long term residents of the community. However, the majority of Alaska rural schools, including several of those the study participants attend, are overwhelmingly plagued with teacher turnover or lack of resources to cover all the subjects students need at once. Students themselves are painfully aware of these issues and express concern how a school's lack of offerings might affect them in the future. Improving or standardizing the math curriculum in rural schools is a pressing issue for youth as well as having access to vocational offerings and other useful electives to prepare them for their post-secondary life.

On Employment

Coastal youth interest in vocational studies and work was also apparent in the focus group discussion on employment preferences and job opportunities in which they expressed an affinity for “hands-on” work. Participants were asked to rank a list of twenty occupations in order of value/prestige according to their individual preferences and then these preferences were discussed within the group. See Appendix D for the list of occupations chosen for the exercise. These occupations were chosen as representative of jobs available to coastal community residents. Figure 3 shows the average ranks for these occupations for the group as a whole.

Figure 3 Coastal youth Occupational Ranking



In analysis, the data were stratified by group as a whole, by community, by gender, by ethnicity, and by sub-region. For the group as a whole, findings demonstrate a cultural affinity toward outdoor and/or vocational work, such as fishing, mechanics, carpentry, air piloting, and culinary arts, but also other self-directed work such as teaching and owning a small business. Occupations with lower ranks were perceived to be associated with a lack of personal power or boring, including: fish processing and office work. Jobs in tourism were also given a low ranking as well as mentioned previously, and work in local government was generally undesirable due to youth recognition of the heady nature of small town politics. This analysis also revealed gender differences and a marked cohesion among young women in their answers although their comments about work during the group discussions were often overshadowed by interests and preferences of the young men in the group, i.e. in which the young men overwhelmingly wanted us to know their interests did NOT include hairdressing.

Tier I: Artist, Pilot. Mechanic/Welder, Health Care, Store/Business Owner, Fisherman, Teacher, Construction, Chef/Cook

I would want to be one of them (Mechanic/Welder or Construction Worker) because they're somewhat high paying and it's a hands on job and something that you could maybe do something, maybe make something for yourself, or fix your own car or something.

-Ouzinkie Senior

A good thing to get in here would be, like, diesel mechanics. There's not very [many] mechanics here. My dad has to fly people in a lot.

-Kodiak Junior

Number 95: One that I didn't write down is an electrician. Electrician is pretty high demand around here.

Number 90: And plumbing.

-Craig 18 to 24 year olds

But if I were to really pick something that I'm passionate about, probably a teacher. Something that's more hands-on.

-Sitka 18 to 24 year old

What they allow us to do in class is pretty cool, too, like culinary arts you get hands-on. -Kodiak Senior

I would want to be a graphic designer or something in the art path. -Kodiak 18 to 24 year old

Health care was an attractive field for many of the study participants, particularly the young women. Sitka is a regional hub for health care services with two hospitals: Sitka Community Hospital and SEARHC (Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium), a non-profit tribal health consortium serving 18 Alaska Native communities in the region. Nursing is a particularly popular occupation for young women from coastal communities. In smaller communities, such as Ouzinkie, there is a sense among youth that a career in health care would be a means for youth to give back to their communities and assist in solving some of the social and health problems rural Alaska communities face such as substance abuse problems and high cancer rates. This sentiment is increasingly echoed among young women in the larger NSF study the PI is currently conducting on the life experiences of coastal youth from Western Alaska.

I guess, like, a counselor type thing, like, talking to kids about not drinking and drugs and stuff. I see a lot of alcoholism here, and I don't see that much drugs, but I want to help other people, you know. I don't want the kids in the future to be, like, addicted to things like that.

-Ouzinkie Junior

I decided to be a radiation oncologist because my family has a long line of cancer, like, my dad had it and my grandmother had it and my dad's brother had it, and just, like, a whole bunch of people in my family had it and I want to know why and help other people.

-Ouzinkie Junior

Tier 2: Computers, Biologist, Hairdresser, Charter Boat Operator

Gender differences in occupation selection are both traditional and amplified in Alaska coastal communities. Lacking specific data concerning this particular phenomenon, one can only hypothesize it derives from the heightened masculinity associated with commercial fishing and/or coastal trades. In many Alaska coastal communities, and particularly the more remote locations, gender roles are very clearly defined and young women in coastal communities seem to be attracted to traditionally feminine occupations such as in education, health care, and cosmetology. Despite the joking in focus group discussions about hairdressing as an occupation and the desire of young men to distance themselves as much as possible from what they see as this feminine pursuit, this is a hands-on trade for women in coastal communities:

-Well, a lot of people that have graduated from here have gone to school for like cosmetology.

-Well, they might not all go to college but they do go to like a vocational or trade school.

-Petersburg Seniors

Number 59: Most people go for trades because they go to school for one or two years and realize how much they miss it here, most of our friends will come back or have already come back and so they want degrees that they can use here. So you are either a teacher, a nurse, doctor, fisherman...

Number 75: Fish and Game.

Number 59: Forest Service, and that is it. Do hair. A lot of our girlfriends do hair.

-Petersburg 18 to 24 year olds

A lot of women gravitate towards the beauty jobs...they were kind of groomed to be more girly girl coming from here. So that is what they like.

-Craig 18 to 24 year old

There was some interest among youth in biology as an occupational pursuit and some participants were children of locally based scientists. However, like mathematics, many participants reported struggling in science classes.

Interviewer: So 62, biologist is low down on the list too?

Number 62: Yeah. I would not want to become a biologist.

Interviewer: You don't want to work for Fish and Game?

Number 62: Oh god, no. It's not my cup of tea. I don't know, I don't like jobs where you like have to, I dunno...

Number 57: Sit around.

Number 62: Sit around and then I don't really like, I don't know...

Number 57: Like research type of thing.

Interviewer: (laughs)

Number 58: We're active.

Number 62: Yeah, I'm active.

Number 57: Gotta work with your hands more.

-Petersburg Seniors

As discussed above, Kodiak participants were more amenable to tourism related occupations than participants from Southeast Alaska who feel overwhelmed by the presence of tourists in their communities in the summertime. Youth explained charter boat industry operators are generally based in places outside of Alaska and are not considered locals contributing to the viability of Alaska communities. At the time of this research, commercial and charter fishermen in Southeast Alaska were also waging an intense battle over allocation rights to dwindling halibut stocks.

Number Four: Well, it gets a really, really bad name in Sitka because almost all of the charter boat operators come in from out of town and then, you know, do their thing, then leave again and take the fish.

Interviewer: And they don't employ local people really?

Number Four: They employ a few local people, but mostly it's college students who come up here as well in the summer. And I think the other reason they get a bad name is they're not regulated as much as everything else. So it's just kind of like, "we get to do what we want because we have more money than most people."

-Sitka Junior

They are important and everything but I don't necessarily like them. Like with fisherman there is the whole charter boat/commercial fishing thing going on. Most of the charters are for tourists. Most of the charter boat operators are what I would sort of consider a tourist because they are only here during a couple summer months.

-Craig 18 to 24 year old

I think guide is my last choice, because I hate the tourists here, and I have bad thoughts about that.

-Sitka Senior

Interviewer: Would you like it if there were more tourists coming in to visit?

Number 25: Yeah.

Interviewer: Would that be good for your community?

Number 20: It would be good, well, we only have one charter business now really. But, yeah, it would be good for a charter. People could start their own charter businesses and stuff like that.

-Ouzinkie Senior

-It'd be good for local businesses.

-Like when you go to Sitka it's ridiculous. You can't even, like, drive down the road, there's so many people. They'll be, like, five cruises in town at once with like, 500 people.

-That's how Homer is.

Interviewer: So you don't want that, you don't want your community to look like that?

-That would kind of ruin the summer.

-Kodiak Juniors

Number 58: Crowds in general are okay but crowds of tourists, that's bad.

(others agree)

Number 66: All their anoraks!

Number 58: Their cameras!

Number 62: They're just kinda, I dunno, they're pretty dumb, they're just retarded actually. Like they just always come and ask you questions, like you're on the boat and you don't really wanna talk because you've been up since four in the morning and then they like come down and they're all "duh, duh, duh.." And they're all asking like super dumb questions, you're like, yes, we actually do this, this isn't a show.

-Petersburg Seniors

Tier 3: Guide, Post-Office Clerk, Fish Processor, Harbormaster

Tier 4: Office Worker, Mayor, Longshoreman

At the bottom of the rankings were fish processing and office work. Subsequent discussions following the ranking exercise revealed most did not know what a longshoreman was and therefore this occupation was consigned to the bottom of the list.

Fish processing is generally seen as demeaning work performed for low pay in poor working conditions. Coastal youth also expressed resentment toward processing companies bringing in foreign labor at low wages; feelings which are added to a certain level of xenophobia towards outsiders.

-I have done that since I was old enough. Eight hour days, sometimes 12 hour days, and you just stand there covered in slime. It is not fun and very repetitive. Low paying.

-We have the opportunity to go out and catch the fish, why would we stay behind and process the fish?

-Sitka Seniors

No. 24: *Yeah, there's a lot of foreigners.*

No. 22: *I think it's because they have different work standards and they can get away with a lot of stuff.*

No. 21: *Yeah, they can work them longer for longer hours, cheaper, and without paying them overtime. And it's cheaper, they can house them. And it's all really cheap.*

-Sitka 18 to 24 year olds

You go to a cannery and it's mostly minorities that are coming from different countries that, you know, they're working in there and they're working 80 hours a week and that's their life.

-Kodiak 18 to 24 year old

They pay a lot. It would be a good summer job but I wouldn't want to do it the rest of my life.

-Kodiak Junior

Because fishing you have to work very, very hard for the money you do get and the fish processors work just about as hard as you, but they probably make a fraction of what the fishermen make.

-Kodiak Senior

My mom wouldn't let me work there because the people they hire down there. Because when we were younger there was like one year that they brought up people that just got out of prison to try and rehabilitate them. So my mom was like no.

-Petersburg 18 to 24 year old

Across the study communities and gender lines, coastal youth also expressed an aversion to working behind a desk in an office. They asserted they are outdoors, active people and prefer hands-on work:

I like to be outdoors, I don't like, I don't really want to be in an office, I don't think.

-Ouzinkie 18 to 24 year old

I don't like the idea of sitting at a desk all day.

-Sitka Junior

I also wouldn't like an office job.

-Sitka Senior

I just don't want something that's boring. I want something that's new and interesting and like that I, I don't know, I just see myself sitting in a cubicle or something and that's so unappealing to me. I want to be in charge of my days beyond an office.

-Sitka 18 to 24 year old

As my worst, I picked office worker because I can't stand being stuck inside. That would drive me AWOL.

-Kodiak 18 to 24 year old

Interviewer: One thing I see here at the bottom is office work and mayor, kind of desk jobs that aren't so appealing?

90: More monotony in those jobs. I put mayor kind of high on my list because you could actually affect change is what I like about that. I put it number 8. I am not a fan of just sitting at a desk.

-Craig 18 to 24 year old

I don't think it would be fun to sit in a cubicle all day.

-Petersburg Senior

Interviewer: And No. 43, why did you pick post office clerk as the worst?

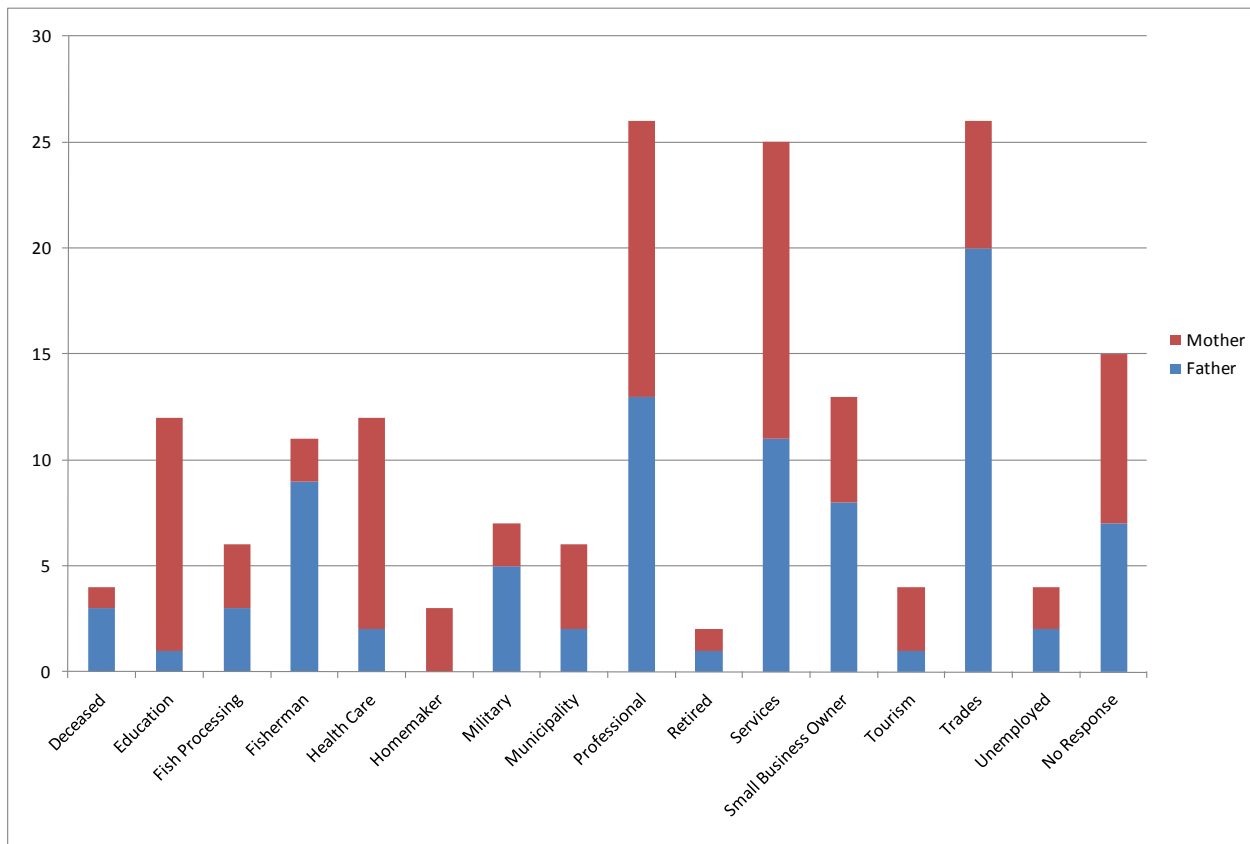
Number 43: Because it's kind of like at school, you're always sitting down, so, I mean, when you're fishing or something you're using your hands.

-Kodiak Junior

Parents' Occupations

Like fishing, jobs requiring technical skills were prevalent among parents' occupations and in youth interviews. The data demonstrate the regional hub communities of Kodiak and Sitka have more opportunities for professional work. They also show more fathers than mothers are: deceased, fishermen, military, small business owners, and working in trades. More mothers than fathers are: educators, health care workers, homemakers, working for municipalities, and in tourism related jobs. There were a strikingly low number of parents working in tourism related jobs, however, substantiating comments by youth regarding a general disdain for this type of work, tourists, and control of the tourism industry by non-Alaska residents. Although the study locales are traditionally considered fishing communities, a low number of respondents' parents were actually working in the fishing industry.

Figure 4. Coastal Youth Parent Occupations



Fishing as a Vocation for Coastal Community Youth

Although the majority of youth interviewed gave high ratings to fishing as an occupation and most had some experience working either on fishing boats or in the processing industry, it was not an occupation that coastal youth saw for themselves in the future. This was a particularly prevalent sentiment among the high school participants whereas the 18-24 year old participants were either fishermen themselves or still connected to fishing in some way through family and other social relations. High school students appeared to be influenced by a growing expectation for college attendance. In most of the communities, younger participants described how youth would get “stuck” in the fishing lifestyle in which opportunities for advancement were currently minimal considering the barriers to entry for youth, i.e. high cost of quota share. Participants often spoke about grandfathers who owned the boats and the quota and for whom they’d worked as deckhands which exposes generational changes occurring in the industry. Many spoke of fishing in the summer and as a means to make money rather than a vocation. Some younger coastal youth also confess to disliking commercial fishing work.

- I think with today's standards, it is a pretty good idea to go to college, everyone kind of pushes it.

-Unless you want to spend the rest of your life on a fishing boat...

-Yeah, you get sucked into that and people don't get out.

-Sitka Seniors

Number 21: And you usually have a lot of money in taxes that you owe. That's like a big problem. I have a lot fishing, you know, my brother fishes, my boyfriend fishes, and a lot of my friends do and, like, when they don't, when they're sick of fishing, you know, they've been doing it their whole life, like since they were little and they're in their late 20s, mid 30s now and they're kinda wanting to do something else but then they realize they don't know how to do anything else. And most fishermen who try to get a land job end up going to construction and they end up not liking that so they end up going back fishing. Yeah, 24 was saying, you can't do that forever. It's always good to have a backup plan, maybe like some stocks invested or some kind of degree you can fall back on that's a little less...

Number 24: Intense.

Number 21: Yeah, less, less of a strain on your body.

Number 24: It's kind of a barrier because once you get older and you have, you know, you're older and your worn out, your body's not in physical shape so it's like okay, I don't really have an education, but I still have a family to feed. It's, you know, I mean, I've been to the job center here and a lot of the help that they offer is to, like, fishermen who need something else to live off of. I mean, that's nice that they train those, but don't really, like, in school they don't really tell you. They don't really tell you you're going to get old, you know, you might want to back yourself up with another career when you can't do it. I mean, that's the downfall of fishing and construction.

-Sitka 18 to 24 year olds

Interviewer: If people graduate from high school, are they going to be able to find a job in fishing if they want to fish?

Number 95: I think that your opportunities would be better in a place like Sitka or Petersburg, than in Craig.

Interviewer: To get a deckhand job?

Number 95: Right. It is really expensive to do your own boat type of thing. But a career deckhand, or for a period of time, you would be better off where there is a bigger fleet.

-Craig 18 to 24 year old

Number 20: I fished for a year, I didn't really like it.

Interviewer: You didn't?

Number 20: I was a fisherman. I just don't like being that dirty or anything like that. And I just don't, and fish processor, I know how much money they make, they don't make much money at all.

-Ouzinkie Senior

I have just always been fishing since I was a little kid and I have never really like commercial fishing all that much. I am always on the boat and it has never been something that has interested me.

-Craig Junior

Interviewer: And 84 you don't want to be a fisherman either?

Number 84: No. I don't like fishing.

Interviewer: Is your family involved in that?

Number 84: Just my grandpa.

-Craig Senior

Interviewer: Let's see. You put post office clerk and hairdresser. Post office clerk doesn't appeal because?

Number 80: I don't want to sit around making minimum wage. I have been working on a fishing boat every summer, so I am used to making a lot of money and being outside.

Interviewer: Would you consider being a fisherman in the future?

Number 80: No, I don't like fishing. It is decent money though.

Number 86: Yeah, um, I don't want to work on a boat as much. Yeah, I don't like fishing as much as everybody else does but I mean, I could live with it but it's not something I really wanna do at all.

-Craig Seniors

Number 35: Unless they can figure out a way to try and keep some of the fishing money in town. Because the way IFQs are and they way people just make a bunch of money and leave, it's, there's no money getting recycled.

Number 37: Even IFQs, I mean, there was a better chance with small boats, you know, the family boats.

Number 35: Yeah, they made way more money than...

Number 37: Yeah, they can go out and they can catch a lot of fish and they can make a lot of money and now it's how much fish you've caught over the years, is how much quota you get so if you were a small boat, a family boat, that was making, you know, \$100,000 a year to support your family, well now you can only make \$20,000 a year fishing, and you know...

Number 35: They got single people that own three boats, all the boats have capped on everything. The way they made IFQs is any one person could own half a percent of the total quota. So 20 people could in theory own all the fishing rights to crab and halibut in all of Alaska. It's just ridiculous. And I know so many people that don't even spend a penny of that, except for what their crew might have in town. A lot of them live down south and never even come to Alaska. They get so much money.

-Kodiak 18 to 24 year olds

I saved my money for a long time and then I got a loan through the state of Alaska, because they have a commercial fishing loan program. And that is how I did it. I had good experience fishing with my dad, since I could go. He helped me out a lot as far as work on the boat. You really have to lot of help for money saved up to get into it.

-Craig 18 to 24 year old

Current and Future Employment for Coastal Community Youth

By ranking a list of 20 occupations and engaging in a discussion about those rankings during the focused group interviews, study participants demonstrated Alaska coastal youth are generally "hands-on" people who have an affinity for vocational work or skilled trades. They award high ranks to Alaska outdoor work or work related to it such as air piloting, fishing, and mechanics. Other vocational trades or skill based work include art, health care occupations, teaching and cosmetology. There is a clear gender divide with young men favoring the former and young women favoring the latter although the young women interviewed are much more cohesive in their preferences.

One important observation is that although youth may afford respect to traditional local vocations such as fishing, they might not see themselves pursuing this line of work in the future as expectations for a college education rise in addition to numerous barriers to entry in those traditional occupations. Coastal

youth were quite clear in their general disdain for fish processing because of the low pay, poor working conditions, and worker exploitation by processing companies. On average, they do not like entertaining the idea of tourism-based economies for their communities in the future although they grudgingly admit tourism brings in much needed revenue. In general, they dislike the disruption of tourist crowds in the summer and are reluctant to share the uniqueness of their home communities with strangers who know very little about Alaska or coastal community residents' way of life. Finally but most importantly, coastal youth do not see themselves working in occupations in which they are required to sit at a desk in an office as they describe themselves as active, outdoorsy, and hands-on. This self-definition, however, necessarily must be at odds with an increasing expectation for coastal youth to attend college where the focus is on training for professional and arguably, desk bound occupations.

On Community In-and Out-Migration

In a study tracking over 16,000 15-16 year old Alaskans through their post-secondary education and lives over an eight year period between 1994 and 2002, Hadland (2004) found that approximately 38% of these youth leave Alaska after high school and do not return. He notes that there are regional differences in the out-migration rate and that the largest out-migration rates are occurring in Southeast Alaska.

In the focused group interviews conducted for the current study, youth were asked about their residence plans for the future. Most of the high school students had plans to leave their home communities, at least in the short term for college. Similar to youth in many places, Alaska coastal youth demonstrate a restlessness and desire for new experiences away from their home communities and look forward to these experiences after high school that now almost always include college or some kind of post-secondary training—even if youth don't actually end up going or if they eventually return within a year. There is a recognition among many of the study participants, particularly among the older 18 to 24 year olds that there is no substitute for home and the connections they have to it and so not all are completely definitive in their plans to move away permanently but rather in that they need to try something different for a period of time.

I think Sitka will always be my home base because I have family here and just like certain opportunities and plans here. But I just think it's, in order for me to enjoy life to its fullest, I'm going to have to find a balance between being here and taking advantage of here and what else the rest of the world has to offer.

-Sitka 18 to 24 year old

Personally, I don't really feel like I'm going to live here in the future. Perhaps maybe when I get really old, maybe I'll retire here, because there's not very many opportunities here to make money or a higher education or anything.

-Ouzinkie Junior

-I highly doubt I'm going to live here as an adult. I mean, there's just not as many opportunities here as there are in many other places. And, I don't know, I think I'd like a change from Sitka.

-I think I'll leave for awhile and I'm, I don't know, I'd like to come back, but I'm not so sure that will end up happening just because, like, my brother, he just says, you know, "get out and you'll see, you'll get it, you'll understand." So I don't know what, I'm not sure.

-Sitka Juniors

-There are a lot that really hate Sitka and can't wait to get off, but half realize it was a mistake and want to come back and those that love it here and won't ever leave.

-Come back but explore for a little bit.

-Go out and see the world.

-It is hard because there aren't as many job opportunities here as there are in other places.

-I am not coming back.

-Number 18: Hard to say.

-Sitka Seniors

Number 24: It's almost like, it's like a fantasy what's going to be on the other side, the grass is going to be greener. But you get down there and you don't realize that you're going to be homesick.

Number. 21: Yeah, you miss this place once you get out. I mean, I have travelled and have been gone for months at a time and I really do miss this small town.

Number 22: Well, sometimes living here all your life doesn't really prepare you for what it's really going to be like when you're nobody in some big place.

Number 21: Yeah, nobody knows you.

-Sitka 18 to 24 year olds

Don't get me wrong, I love this place and it'll never change. It's just I'm getting kind of sick of it after I've been living here my entire life and I'm just sick of it.

-Ouzinkie Junior

Interviewer: And where do you want to go when you leave?

Number 28: Anchorage.

-Ouzinkie Senior

Interviewer: And you, No. 30, when you graduated, what did the girls do and what did the boys do?

Number 30: Everybody just left, went to Kodiak.

Interviewer: Everyone was in Kodiak?

Number 20: Lived in Kodiak or Anchorage. Nobody goes that far, I guess.

-Ouzinkie 18 to 24 year old

Number 32: I'm going to go up to Anchorage for a year or two, just for college and after that, who knows?

Number 35: I'll be coming back every summer for sure. And I don't know, I could see myself living here at some point.

Number 36: Population has been increasing but that's only because the Coast Guard has had two larger boats at Kodiak and become home port. I see Exxon Valdez, if and when they pay out, I see a lot of people leaving. Like you [No. 35] said, the fish are moving north because the water's warming up and I think a lot of it is that people just can't afford to live here anymore. Get the hell out of dodge while they can and still have money in their pockets because it is just so expensive that a guy running a fishing boat, unless he finds fish, you're just going to lose. And I foresee the population of Kodiak going down drastically real soon.

-Kodiak 18 to 24 year old

-I will come back during the summers to fish, just to make money.

-I like living here, but I like to get out and see the rest of the world too.

-Craig Juniors

I am really excited to leave and go out to the real world. But like when you are gone for at least two weeks you get this feeling of like wanting to come home. It is like your home. It is weird how you can be attracted to such a small place.

-Craig Senior

This will always be home, regardless of where I go, this will always be my home. But it would be nice to get out for awhile and try experiencing living, you know, life for a couple of years in the real world and then probably I'll eventually miss this place and want to come back. But I don't know, as long as I visit here, like, you know, frequently and oftenly, I can probably stand being away from it and living somewhere else.

-Sitka 18 to 24 year old

Findings also support conclusions in other studies that the experiences and perspectives of contemporary rural youth have a gendered component (Glendinning et al 2003). In Alaska, mobility of rural populations is currently characterized by gender differences and perceived opportunities differ between men and women. Young women are more likely to move away from home communities and seek higher education as gender roles change in rural areas while young men are more likely to remain in or return to rural areas because of the importance of subsistence and outdoor activities to them (Hamilton and Seyfrit 1994; Huskey et al 2004; Martin 2009). The data from the coastal youth study indicate Alaska Native young men valuing outdoor and hands-on related work the most of all groups and suggest this group will be more likely to remain at home. However, the choices contemporary Alaska rural youth make today require further systematic study in order to identify the sociocultural implications of these varied patterns of migration and occupational pursuits.

Girls usually go off to college. Guys stay here and fish or do other things.

-Craig Senior

-More girls go to college, because a lot of guys drop out of high school.

-I think a lot of guys see the fishing business as very profitable and you don't need any kind of education with that. A lot of guys hop on a fishing boat in the summer rather than get ready for college, versus girls.

-Sitka Seniors

Number 59: It is insane, because people our age fishing, make...

Number 75: Way too much money.

Number 59: \$100,000! Like that is more than my parents make. That is an insane amount of money for a 20 year old to make. And they are like, why go to college, why do that when I make more than my teachers?

Number 64: It finally hits them when they are about to go. Well, I also think because it is a fishing community, they go fishing with their parents that is where they get their money, why do they need an education?

Number 59: And 90% of the boys in our classes didn't go to school

Number 64: And are fishing now.

Number 59: Or if they did, they were back by Christmas.

-Petersburg 18 to 24 year olds

Number 22: A lot of the men that I've seen grow up in this town, they never went to school but they're doing just fine. I mean, they're doing fishing...

Number 21: They've learned trades or something.

Number 22: ... yeah, exactly. But it's like when you see your girlfriends in the store, it's, like, all downhill.

Interviewer: So you think there's more of a push for girls to go to school than guys?

-Yeah.

Number 21: Yeah, because there's more you know...

Number 22: Male trades.

Number 21: Yeah, there's more jobs here for males that you can make a lot more money as to where there's not so much for girls. Like construction is a big thing and fishing here. You don't need a degree to do construction. You don't need to go to college for construction or fishing. Those are the two things that make you a lot of money.

-Sitka 18 to 24 year olds

Number 34: More girls go to school, continue.

Interviewer: And do they usually stay here and go to school or get out of here?

Number 37: A lot of them go up to Anchorage.

Number 34: No, a lot of them leave. Yeah.

Interviewer: Any other trends or differences?

Number 36: I think a lot that leave, a lot come back. Especially ones that haven't been exposed off the island. Because it's such a culture shock.

Interviewer: So in contrast, what do the boys do then?

Number 32: So unprofessional.

Number 35: It's actually all in the mind frame and gone to college and tried and half of them come back and gone fishing. Made more money doing that than the ones who go to college. They come back and see how much money they can make and how good it is and it's hard for them to say no.

No. 37: A lot of them go into, like, construction and mechanics.

-Kodiak 18 to 24 year olds

Number 75: I don't know, think of five random people in your head and think of which ones, if any of them have four year degrees.

Number 59: I think a lot of the girls...

Number 64: The girls do excel...

Number 59: A lot of the girls in our classes did go to school and they did do at least something - they have got some sort of degree. Whether they will use it or not, cause they came back, probably not. But the boys they go to school, there is a couple or not really, they all come back.

-Petersburg 18 to 24 year olds

In smaller communities such as Ouzinkie and Craig, the female flight problem is most likely more pronounced than in the larger communities that have more variable in and out movement. Comments

from both Ouzinkie and Craig demonstrate young women from the smallest communities either tend to leave home permanently or get pregnant soon into their post-secondary years. For this study, we lack adequate information about this trend, especially concerning whether or not these young women are single mothers returning to live with parents or are single heads of households. Further study should explore the outcomes of female flight, changing gender roles, and new family structures and dynamics.

Interviewer: What do the boys usually do?

Well, in the last couple of years, people went to college and a lot of girls did and they didn't even make it through their first year usually and they had babies. And the guys go fishing and then go to Danger Bay. So pretty much I think everybody moves around here...Three of the seniors last year got pregnant.

-Ouzinkie Junior

I don't know what the population is, but I am guessing that there are a lot more males my age than females my age. It is just not a place where females want to be. They don't come here for any reason. And then like one thing I see, if you are a single guy, your choices are girls your age here, because she has a kid or a lot of young girls here do. Or there are a lot of females my age, but they have problems, like drinking problems or drug problems and for a single guy who is looking for a girlfriend it is not a good place to look.

-Craig 18 to 24 year old

Should They Stay or Should They Go?

Findings support conclusions in other studies that the experiences and perspectives of contemporary rural youth have a strong gendered component. In Alaska, mobility of rural populations is currently characterized by gender differences and perceived opportunities differ between men and women. Young women are more likely to move away from home communities and seek higher education as gender roles change in rural areas while young men are more likely to remain in or return to rural areas because of the importance of subsistence and outdoor work and activities to them. However, there is evidence to support the existence of return or circular migration practices in rural Alaska (Lowe 2010) and more complicated and sociocultural dynamics at play.

The findings of this study then raise the need to further describe and understand changing social structure in Alaska's rural and coastal communities. Understanding these dynamics is at the heart of understanding how Alaska's rural communities with cope with socioeconomic change and what type of policy recommendations could be made to address current and future challenges communities face in maintaining their long term viability.

On Future Aspirations

In the study communities, focus group discussions demonstrate how going to college has become a logical life path for rural youth despite some underlying questions about the actual utility of a college education. Coastal youth feel pressure to go to college from parents, friends' parents, and teachers. In many cases, study participants will be first generation college students in their families although some participants' parents had attended college but had not finished. Few parents of interviewed youth had college degrees.

The study demonstrates a shared vague perception of the future among coastal youth and a lack of guidance in understanding options for post-secondary education or training which illuminates social changes occurring in coastal Alaska. Coastal youth are influenced by practical advice of their elders; to pursue a "useful" or "promising" field such as engineering or nursing.

Despite all of the uncertainty they face either elsewhere or back at home, most coastal youth interviewed know they are ready for a change and to experience the world outside their home communities. They do take note, however, of older siblings' and peers' experiences in how the decision between returning home and remaining abroad is complex.

Is College the Answer?

One school administrator was concerned with the research team discussing anything but the college option with students because that particular school had a policy to make every one of its students college bound. The administrator felt the vocational path was associated with the drug and alcohol use the students discussed with us as prevalent in coastal communities. There is nothing in our data to suggest this observation to be true but it could be a question for further study. Alcohol and drug abuse are prevalent throughout the state of Alaska, in both rural and urban settings, and throughout arctic territories and countries. Whether or not career path is correlated with drug or alcohol abuse, is not a question this study can answer. The participants themselves do not make this correlation but rather linked these behaviors to boredom in times of bad weather. Their comments rather focus on an evolving cultural expectation for college attendance that most likely derive from a combination of limited economic opportunities at home and a desire for access to the outside world:

Neither of my parents went to college so they really want me to go but there isn't like a decided thing that I should do, it's really up to me. But they want me to go, they want to help me as much as they can.

-Petersburg Senior

A lot of pressure to go to college, just because my family struggles so much with money and it seems, like, all the time, we're trying to find another way to get more for this or that. So, I get a lot of pressure

to go to college and be able to get a really good job and, you know, be really stable, and just do better is basically a roundabout way of saying it - it's just to do better.

-Sitka Junior

My dad has been working labor intensive jobs since he was very young, he worked on a farm, then in this fish business, and now construction and it is just now that he has finally got a job as a manager and he wants to make sure that I don't do the same thing with my life. He wants me to go to college or get a job at some sort of white collar. So I won't be throwing out my back at age 30 like he did.

-Sitka Seniors

-There's a lot of pressure to go to school and always be obtaining this degree and come back only at Christmastime or summer time. When people see you otherwise, they're like 'oh, are you done going to school? What is your degree? What are you doing? Why are you here? It's so odd of you.'

-I don't think the men are too driven. And if they are it's because their parents are pushing them. And for women it's almost like they're expected to take off. In fact, it is. You know, like, even I ran into this problem like even if, well I am going to school and even if I tell people I am going to go school here, they're like well, when are you really going to get off this rock?

-Sitka 18 to 24 year olds

My mom would want me to go to college.

-Ouzinkie Senior

-Go to college.

-Yeah, there's a lot of pressure to go to college.

-From the school.

-From my parents, too.

-Kodiak Juniors

-My dad keeps bugging me about going to college and at least completing four years of school.

-My mom just wants me to go to school and get, like, a degree.

-Kodiak Seniors

I was never really pushed to do one thing or another; I was always given a lot of suggestions or possibilities. Thoughts from them, my parents. I know that they wanted me to go to college, and probably finish college, which I didn't.

Craig 18 to 24 year old

One junior interviewed explained how he was interested in pursuing an engineering degree in the future and how he had already picked an engineering school where a relative was attending college. Later in the interview, however, we discovered this particular student did not like math nor did he like working with computers. Although he was focused on engineering as a career path, he seemed to be unclear on what engineers do. Overall, the study demonstrates a shared vague perception of the future among coastal youth and in some cases, inadequate guidance in understanding options for post-secondary education or training for what are now numerous first generation college students. Participants discussed how adults encouraged them toward “useful” paths of study or “promising fields” which at the time of this study included areas such as engineering and health care:

What Are the Options?

There isn't a whole lot of knowledge about different areas, I mean, I remember going through school we didn't have a counselor or anything to do with, to apply for college, when I was a senior. We didn't have anybody there to help guide us or show us websites or places to go. I mean, you really had to search on your own if that was your desire. Senior year, the biggest thing in your mind is get me out of here. It is like you need somebody to help you focus on your next four years. I mean, you are going to be the one buying your groceries, it is a big lifestyle change. And I don't think this town really prepares you to be an adult.

-Petersburg 18 to 24 year old

Like when I graduated, nursing was huge. I am going to school for nursing right now and everyone is like constantly tells you, that is a great field to go into. Whereas I have a friend going into interior design and here, people are like, interior design, what are you going to do with that? There are so many houses here in town. But I can't see that person coming back here to live because of the choice that they make. That person is going to have to go down south and find something to do.

-Petersburg 18 to 24 year old

-The only person in my family that went to college was my mom. So they are kind of like, if you are going to go to college or get a job, make sure it is in something useful. So nothing like art, which I am really into. So they want me to do something like become a nurse, but all of my friends want me to do art. So there is that kind of pressure.

-My parents just want me to do something that is useful. They want it to be their money's worth with college.

-Yeah, neither of my parents went to college and my dad thinks it is a really stupid idea, so they are kind of like if you go to college you better make it useful.

-Sitka Seniors

I'm going to go to college and I'm not sure what I'm going to do.

-Kodiak Junior

I don't want to really go to college, but, I want to see the world, and I don't know what I'd do first, if I'd go to school or travel or, I don't know.

-Kodiak Junior

Leaving Home and Life Experience

During one visit to a Southeast community, the research team encountered an electrician in his early 30s who was interested to know why we were in town. We explained we were researchers from UAA and were studying the life paths of young people in coastal communities. He shared his own experience which had involved two years at the University of Alaska Fairbanks until he left college to pursue a career as an electrician, following in his father's footsteps back home, and helping to run the family business. He was clear on what he considered the advantages of attending college for a young rural person who needs to get out and see the world and to experience a larger social setting. The social experience of college was the most important aspect of the experience to him whereas he was frustrated with all of the unreasonable academic demands placed on a college student such as the requirements to take "useless classes like anthropology, sociology, etc..." As social scientists, this was our favorite anecdote from the research—not only because the PI is an anthropologist (a fact unknown to the electrician) but also because of this perspective of an older community resident who had explored the different options between college and trades and found the path most suitable for him. His narrative also demonstrated the need for coastal youth to experience something outside of their home communities before making that choice.

I'm hoping to graduate at least a little bit early. I, as much as I love it here, I am looking forward to getting out kind of soon just to see what else is there. I'm definitely coming back. I don't know, the idea of traveling is definitely, I kind of have my mind set on that, it's really what I want to do.

-Sitka Junior

I am going to spend a year just traveling. I have a bunch of money saved up.

-Sitka Senior

Right now, after school, I'm just leaving Kodiak, and I'm just going along on an adventure, I guess.

-Kodiak Senior

Yeah, I'm going to college, but I imagine I'll be back maybe to fish in the summer or get some other job in the summer. But then after I graduate from college, I'm gonna travel a lot so...I always wanna come back to Petersburg, I like Petersburg, but I guess I'll just have to see what it's like. I used to think I wanted to raise a family here but that's a long ways away.

-Petersburg Senior

Number 64: Have you noticed that though? I mean in our classes, those kids that are in college, they still have no clue what they want to be and they are close to graduating!

Number 59: They go get their degrees, but what is next?

Number 75: Or they just come back and start fishing with their parents.

Number 64: It is like they are right back and like they have never left.

Number 75: In this town because you get pretty far with just fishing. Like my brother, he went to college for a bit, and dropped out, and dropped out in the first semester just drinking too much and he comes home and has a job with Mom and Dad and he doesn't need to go get more education. And my Dad doesn't pressure him because he is a good worker. He is going to take over the business, so it isn't really a push. I think a lot of the families want their kids to stay here and take over the family businesses.

-Petersburg 18 to 24 year olds

My sister Jessica, she's like thirty and my brother in law Josh and stuff, they have two kids and they don't like it down south as much and they want to move up here 'cause it's a better environment for raising kids and stuff and like next door to them, somebody's taking prescription drugs, they're all drug addicts over here and da, da, da, they don't let 'em go out on the road and stuff-it's like not that nice. And you know up here, everyone's nice so they want to move up here but my brother can't get a job here...He's an engineer. And my sister had a major in architect and design.

-Petersburg Senior

My sister went to college last year and she was really excited to live in Seattle, because we weren't really familiar with the big city and she really liked it at first, but then she started missing it here, just the love and comfort from all of your friends and everyone that knows you. And, not much happens here. There was kind of a lot of crime in Seattle.

-Petersburg Junior

I don't think people realize that they love it here until they are out of here for a while.

-Petersburg 18 to 24 year old

Alaska Coastal Community Youth and the Future

Currently, expectations for young people in rural Alaska to pursue higher education are increasing as either opportunities or interest in traditional occupations such as fishing diminish. Focus group discussions demonstrate coastal youth are encouraged by well-intentioned adults to pursue a path towards "useful," "promising," or stable, high paying careers such as engineering and health care whether or not the young person has an interest in or adequate academic preparation for those fields. The study participants themselves are of course unclear about their future direction, an issue common to many youth, whether Alaska residents or not. Study participants do know that they need to experience the world outside their home communities although are in many cases, uncertain about their future place of residence or career path. They've seen older siblings and peers have those experiences they desire in college or elsewhere only to return home to coastal Alaska; or conversely, educate themselves out of a job at home preventing them from returning.

Discussion and Policy Recommendations

Discussion

Findings demonstrate that Alaska fishing communities are small and tightly knit; coastal youth possess tremendous social capital because of the small size, geographic remoteness, and interconnectedness of their communities. These social connections, along with life-long commitment and investment in place-based communities, can enable youth to assume leadership, citizenship, and stewardship community roles in the future, provided there are sufficient economic opportunities. Overall, coastal youth demonstrate a connectedness to their physical environment and to the place of their home communities. The research reveals the importance of not only economic opportunities, but also the importance of the strength of social ties for community empowerment and development.

Hanson et al (1984) identified two vitally important mechanisms for maintaining coastal community viability: 1) balancing in- and out-migration and 2) fostering occupational pluralism. There is evidence that a gradual rural to urban migration in Alaska has begun (Huskey et al. 2004, Martin, et al. 2008;

Howe 2009; Huskey et al. 2009; Lowe 2009; Windisch-Cole 2009; Lowe 2010) but migration studies in Alaska indicate a considerable amount of this movement could be considered circular in nature and that many Alaskans lead a dual existence; one in rural Alaska and one in urban Alaska, as a strategy to address economic pressures but also one that sustains important ties to family, culture, and sense of place.

A study on coastal community youth in Tasmania demonstrates rural youth who leave their communities for higher education experience a change in their “tastes and preferences, their personal and political outlook and their lifestyle choices” (Gabriel 2006:39). The study also demonstrates, however, how a period of being away from home communities oftentimes results in a newfound appreciation for the natural physical beauty of rural home areas. Looker and Dwyer critique the “single pathway of university study” (1998: 6) that many students experience at the secondary level. They recommend more flexibility in approaches to schooling that strengthen alternate training to the university path; and potentially those that might help youth remain in their home communities.

Focused group interview data demonstrate a shared vague perception of the future among coastal youth and a lack of guidance in understanding options for post-secondary education or training for what are now numerous first generation college students. Many coastal youth are currently encouraged to pursue higher education and their experiences in this pursuit are varied. Focused group interview participants report themselves and their peers attending college for only a short period of time, often returning home far in advance of completing their degrees. Those who do succeed in completing a post-secondary degree must often leave their home communities permanently to pursue careers not available at home. We have also learned from this study young people in remote fishing communities are a part of a developing global youth culture. Similar to local social ties, coastal youth draw and depend upon the social capital they experience with this kind of connectedness to these wider networks.

Policy Recommendations

There are process policy recommendations which include giving youth a voice in discussions of problems or challenges and empowering them to not only help find the solutions but to act on them. One of the focus group exercises was for youth to imagine themselves a city council or school board member and to think of ways they would solve problems. Just providing them this context for roles in decision making invigorated the discussion and helped participants focus on the most pressing issues. The content of the policy recommendations emerging from this study, therefore, come from coastal youth themselves. From the analysis of their comments, several key phrases emerged which youth repeatedly used to describe themselves to guide the focus of the policy issues. We understand Alaska coastal youth see their communities as “close-knit,” they see themselves having an affinity for “hands-on” work, and that somewhere outside their home communities is a “real world” they have yet to experience.

On the community level, study participants were pragmatic in their observations about the needs of coastal youth: across the study communities, youth noted a lack of teen and youth centers that could keep them occupied during the winter months in which they experience boredom, cabin fever, and

when they can be rather distracted by activities involving drug and alcohol use. For their educational needs, they are insecure about their academic abilities, particularly in mathematics and called for a review of the current math curricula used in rural schools and the standardization of these curricula with other programs outside Alaska. They also want a greater diversity in their choice of electives which might either provide them with the means to securing employment in their home communities, i.e. in vocational trades or in pursuing career paths outside of Alaska, i.e. with foreign language ability. On the topic of employment, the ranking exercises and subsequent discussions reveal Coastal youth to be on average, both experiential and social learners, describing themselves as “hands-on” people. They express an affinity for vocational skill based work, work such as air piloting, mechanics, fishing—occupations generally preferred by the young men interviewed and teaching, nursing, and cosmetology as occupations generally preferred by young women interviewed.

Women of Euro-American heritage were most cohesive in their responses, followed by Alaska Native men. Euro-American women preferred professional occupations requiring college level training whereas Alaska Native men preferred trades. However, these gender based cultural consensus results are tentative and could only be used for hypothesis development as the sample was small and also a convenience sample. Focus group discussions do substantiate other research that has highlighted the worldwide female flight from rural regions and how out-migration is gendered, i.e. more young women are leaving rural communities to pursue higher education and opportunities outside the community than young men. The discussions also demonstrate the possible reasons for this increased female flight, i.e strong gender stratification and traditionally defined gender roles, perhaps unacceptable to some of today’s young women who understand there are other options for them outside of their rural communities.

In sum, if coastal youth themselves had the power to direct policy for their future development, they would make their communities and state invest in them in the form of healthy activities during their youth, in providing adequate and equal access to educational opportunities, and guidance in choosing a life path that attends to their cultural affinities and cultural realities. As a practical and achievable recommendation, youth activity centers and programs in rural communities could undergo further development in tandem with drug and alcohol abuse mitigation programs. A statewide discussion on the efficacy of current rural post-secondary education needs continuing attention. Career and educational counseling is also an area youth themselves see as an area of improvement for their lives. This focused guidance should originate from perhaps externally trained but long term community residents themselves rather than school personnel who may only be temporary or short term residents in remote communities. Considering attrition rates for college attendance, the decision to go to college should be carefully considered and planned at a time of rising student loan debt and a global youth unemployment crisis. Finally, today’s youth do require access to the global community, which in practical terms could be articulated in faster internet service and in sustaining travel or study abroad opportunities for youth. These recommendations are not offered to overshadow any existing community programs of which we were introduced to many excellent examples during our community visits but should rather serve as a collective statement for guidance from youth themselves.

Social capital or community interconnectedness as one of the study population's clear and positive attributes along with life-long commitment and investment in place-based communities, can enable youth to assume leadership, citizenship, and stewardship community roles in the future. Considerable focus should be placed on understanding changing gender roles, aspirations of young women in coastal communities, and attendant changing social relations and structure. Educational offerings and preparation for youth should provide access to opportunities that might help youth realize goals outside of their community but should also be culturally connected to the locality if they want to stay there (i.e. sensitive to a "hands-on" or vocational orientation as well). Finally, policymakers (especially local policymakers) should support the constructive ways the connectedness in these communities happens. When asked what youth would do to improve their communities, they overwhelmingly wanted youth or recreational centers where they had a safe and fun place to exercise those social connections. Surely at least that particular goal can be highlighted as an attainable one in fostering healthy coastal communities of the future.

Products from the Research

Presentations:

An overview of the project was presented at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association in San Francisco in 2008 and preliminary findings were presented in conjunction with the PI's project on Alaska rural-urban migration at the annual meetings of the Alaska Anthropological Association in Juneau in 2009.

Over the course of a year between 2010 and 2011, the PI served on the Alaska Sea Grant steering committee for the Wakefield symposium held in September 2011 in Anchorage. The PI helped develop the symposium theme: "Fishing People of the North: Culture, Economies, and Management Responding to Change." The PI co-chaired a panel under the Coastal Communities in Transition theme called: "Reconsidering the Coastal Community in the 21st Century." The session will included a range of papers addressing the themes presented in the following panel abstract:

Increasing restricted access in fisheries, the rising cost of living in northern rural areas, and the single sector economies of many coastal communities have increased coastal community vulnerability to short and long-term resource and market instabilities. Barriers to upward mobility in traditional occupational roles cause many communities to currently suffer effects of brain drain but they are also at once characterized by a strong sense of place shared among residents; a "social embeddedness" (McCay 2000) connected to home communities. This panel will explore the concept of "community" across the coastal North and how its residents adapt to socioeconomic and environmental change, sustain or reject coastal livelihoods, and the disparate methods employed in adjusting to new and changing political and economic realities. Fleets, processors, labor pools, and coastal communities themselves are increasingly divergent entities with distinct goals, constraints, access to resources, political power, economic

opportunities and alternatives ranging from subsistence strategies to tourism to energy development. By exploring new approaches to diversification, cooperation, and mitigating conflict, these papers will address and expose how coastal communities might be innovating in ways that contribute to community viability.

The PI presented findings detailed in this report from the Coastal Community Youth project in a paper entitled: "Place-Based Social and Human Capital Among Alaska's Coastal Community Youth."

Publications

This report will be listed in ISER's report catalog and made publicly available through ISER's website and through its distribution list.

During the summer of 2012, the PI will submit an article for publication based on the findings detailed in this report with a more extensive academic literature review in the flagship journal of the Society for Applied Anthropology, "Human Organization."

Other Funded Proposals

Work on the Coastal Community Youth project has resulted in two additional research projects and expansion of the PI's research agenda in the topical areas of economic development and social change in Alaska coastal communities.

The first was a project initiated in 2008 during the financial crisis when the Anchorage School District experienced an influx of new students from rural Alaska. The study examined rural to urban migration in Alaska by surveying new students and their families in the Anchorage School District (Lowe 2009; 2010). The study revealed a high rate of student mobility within the state and a growing concern with the ability of Alaska's rural schools to adequately prepare students for a likely different way of life than that of their parents.

It demonstrated how youth and their families experience difficulties in transitioning to urban life, Difficulties in transition were the most mentioned topic in the open-ended comment area of the survey; particularly for Alaska Native respondents and for those families with high school aged children. These respondents report some children leaving Anchorage to go back to their communities after only a short time because of the hardship in transitioning due to cultural differences. The problems older students face in adjusting to the new setting are logical as their enculturation experiences are more firmly rooted than those of younger children added to the problem of having to leave their established social networks behind (Elder et al, 1996).

In November 2010, the PI submitted a research proposal to the National Science Foundation's Arctic Social Sciences program. This proposal entitled, "Education and Community Viability in Western Alaska" was wholly informed by the Coastal Community Youth study findings. This project was recommended for funding in July 2011. The project examines education and community viability in Western Alaska by

identifying a cross-section of youth and young adults across the Bering Sea region who have pursued post-secondary educational opportunities facilitated by the Community Development Quota (CDQ) program. The overarching research question is: Do opportunities in post-secondary education for youth contribute to the viability of Bering Sea communities and way of life? "Viability" is defined by the degree to which a community can balance in- and out-migration, sustain a context of livelihood diversification, and create bridges to resources external to the community.

The Coastal Youth study has been a first step in gathering information about the life of Alaska's younger generation. As a project that used focused group interviews, the data are largely qualitative and collected at a small scale. The NSF project will expand the Coastal Youth study with a more rigorous and wider-reaching research design to specifically examine the relationship between educational opportunities, youth culture, and Alaska coastal community viability of the future. In addition, this proposal targets more "at risk" populations which lack some of the opportunities residents have in coastal communities with more developed fishing economies such as those in Southeast Alaska and on Kodiak Island. The PI anticipates the project as designed will help identify the most effective strategies and pathways to success youth in Alaska's coastal communities have employed and the ways in which this success may benefit their home communities.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol (High School)

Focus Group Protocol (High School)

Introduction:

- Hi everyone, thanks for coming. My name is Marie and this is Meghan and we are researchers at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. Please call us by our first names.
- We came out here to talk to you today about your lives, your town and what you think about the future. These group discussions are part of a study we're doing to try and understand how changes in coastal economies affect peoples' lives. We're interested in what you have to say and think it's important.
- We are going to record our conversation because otherwise, there's no way we will remember what everyone had to say. Only we will hear this recording and it will be deleted when we don't need it anymore. Our discussion will be anonymous, that is, I won't ask you for your names while recording.
- Everyone will get a number instead which I am going to pass out to you now. We do it this way so you can feel free to talk and not worry that you will get in trouble for what you say.
- I'll be asking you some questions, but there are no right or wrong answers—just feel free to talk about whatever comes to mind.
- Try and wait until someone else finishes talking before you say something otherwise it gets hard to hear on the recording.
- I know you guys are probably busy and have a lot of things to do so everybody will get \$15 for taking the time to come here today. Our discussion will last about 1.5 hours.
- OK, let's get started. First, we'll go around the table; please say your number, how old you are and then tell me one thing about your town that you think makes it special in comparison to other places.

Interview Questions/Activities

1. Round Robin

2. Were all of you born and raised here?
3. Pick up on any comments made about community life
4. How do you guys feel when you leave here? Is it exciting? Or do you prefer being here?
5. What are top three things about living here? **(Gauge agreement)** Flip chart. Rate.
6. What are the three worst things about living here? **(Gauge agreement)** Flip chart. Rate.
7. Let's say you guys were the city council, the council quit and left you guys in charge. Let's go around the table again and tell me what you think you would improve about your town.
8. **Follow up on their ideas.**
9. Ask for suggestions on how to do it.
10. Let's have the same discussion about school, best, worst, improvements. **Follow up on their ideas.**
11. What kinds of things do you do when you're not in school?
12. Seasonal activities? Outdoor? Do you fish? Hunt?
13. If yes, what for?
14. If yes, do you fish and hunt with anyone else? With whom?
15. Do any of you work after school or in the summers?
16. If you could be anything, what would it be?
17. Do you feel any pressure from your family, teachers, or friends to follow a particular life path?
18. I'm going to give you a list of 20 jobs which I would like you to rate from best to worst (1 is best and 20 is worst). Please write your number at the top.

19. Collect papers; Find the best and worst for the group. Why? **Engage them in discussion about this.** Any others?
20. Which of these jobs do not exist here?
21. When kids graduate from high school, is there a difference between what girls usually do and what guys usually do?
22. Do kids usually stay here or go somewhere else?
23. Do kids who leave ever come back or do they usually leave and stay out?
24. How about you guys? Will you leave or will you stay?
25. If you are going to leave for just a time or forever, where will you go?
26. Do you have any plans for the future?
27. **If you get a lot of responses about college, ask:** How many of you will be first generation college students in your families? **
28. Would you say **this town** was a good place to grow up? If you have kids now or in the future would you want to raise them here?
29. **Summarize their overall comments for reactions/additions.**
30. **Compliment and thank them. More pictures?**

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol (18 to 24 year olds)

Focus Group Protocol (18-24)

Introduction:

- Hi everyone, thanks for coming. My name is Marie and this is Meghan and we are researchers at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. Please call us by our first names.
- We came out here to talk to you today about your lives, your town and what you think about the future. These group discussions are part of a study we're doing to try and understand how changes in coastal economies affect peoples' lives. We're interested in what you have to say and think it's important.
- We are going to record our conversation because otherwise, there's no way we will remember what everyone had to say. Only we will hear this recording and it will be deleted when we don't need it anymore. Our discussion will be anonymous, that is, I won't ask you for your names while recording.
- Everyone will get a number instead which I am going to pass out to you now. We do it this way so you can feel free to talk and not worry that you will get in trouble for what you say.
- I'll be asking you some questions, but there are no right or wrong answers—just feel free to talk about whatever comes to mind.
- Try and wait until someone else finishes talking before you say something otherwise it gets hard to hear on the recording.
- I know you guys are probably busy and have a lot of things to do so everybody will get \$15 for taking the time to come here today. Our discussion will last about 1.5 hours.
- OK, let's get started. First, we'll go around the table; please say your number, how old you are and then tell me one thing about your town that you think makes it special in comparison to other places.

Interview Questions/Activities

1. Round Robin
2. Were all of you born and raised here?
3. Pick up on any comments made about community life
4. How do you guys feel when you leave here? Is it exciting? Or do you prefer being here?
5. What are top three things about living here? (**Gauge agreement**) Flip chart. Rate.
6. What are the three worst things about living here? (**Gauge agreement**) Flip chart. Rate.
7. Let's say you guys were the city council, the council quit and left you guys in charge. Let's go around the table again and tell me what you think you would improve about your town.
8. **Follow up on their ideas.**
9. Ask for suggestions on how to do it.
10. What kinds of things do you do in your free time?
11. Seasonal activities? Outdoor? Do you fish? Hunt?
12. If yes, what for?
13. If yes, do you fish and hunt with anyone else? With whom?
14. Do you work? What do you do? Do you feel there are enough job opportunities here?
15. Do you feel or have you felt any pressure from your family, teachers, or friends to follow a particular life path?
16. If you could be anything, what would it be?
17. I'm going to give you a list of 20 jobs which I would like you to rate them **in your own opinion** from best to worst (1 is best in your opinion and 20 is worst). Please write your number at the top of the page.

18. Collect papers; Find the best and worst for the group. Why? **Engage them in discussion about this.** Any others?
19. Which of these jobs do not exist here?
20. When kids are done with high school, is there a difference between what girls usually do and what guys usually do?
21. Do people usually stay here or go somewhere else?
22. Do people who leave ever come back or do they usually leave and stay out?
23. How about you guys? Will you leave or will you stay?
24. If you are going to leave for just a time or forever, where will you go?
25. Do you have any plans for the future?
26. Would you say **this town** was a good place to grow up? If you have kids now or in the future would you want to raise them here?
27. **Summarize their overall comments for reactions/additions.**
28. **Compliment and thank them. More pictures?**

****Before they leave, get names and addresses (emails for further info?) to send checks to.**

Appendix C: Focus Group Questionnaire

Coastal Community Youth Focus Groups Questionnaire

Number: _____

Community: _____

1. Age: _____

2. Sex (circle one): Male Female

3. Ethnicity: _____

4. Place of Birth: _____

5. Education (Circle highest level)

High School

Technical Training

Some College

4-Year College

6. Years lived in community: _____

7. Does your family live in the community (circle one)? Yes No

8. Father's Occupation _____

9. Mother's Occupation _____

Appendix D: Occupational Ranking Worksheet

Coastal Community Youth Focus Groups

Number _____

Community _____

Rate this list of jobs from #1-20 with #1 being the best and #20 being the worst:

- _____ Mechanic/Welder
- _____ Teacher
- _____ Health Care Worker (Doctor/Nurse/Dentist/Health Aide)
- _____ Guide
- _____ Mayor
- _____ Biologist
- _____ Store/business owner
- _____ Chef/cook
- _____ Fisherman
- _____ Post office clerk
- _____ Longshoreman
- _____ Artist
- _____ Harbormaster
- _____ Charter boat operator
- _____ Office worker
- _____ Pilot
- _____ Fish processor
- _____ Computers (Programmer, Software engineer, Systems Analyst, etc.)
- _____ Construction worker
- _____ Hairdresser

Is there any other job not listed here that you could see yourself doing? If so, please write it here:

_____.

Appendix E: Consent/Assent Form

CONSENT/ASSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION

Topic: Alaska Coastal Community Youth and the Future, 2008

Principal Investigators: Dr. Marie Lowe, Ph.D. University of Alaska Anchorage
Meghan Wilson, MS. University of Alaska Anchorage

Funding Agency: Alaska Sea Grant College Program

Purpose of Interview: We want to learn about youth in Alaska's coastal communities – their lives today, their goals or aspirations about the future and community in- and out- migration. We would like you to participate in a group interview or focus group that will take about one and a half hours long. During the focus group, we will ask you and the other people present about your life in the community and about how you see your future. For example, we will ask you about future goals or what kind of job you'd like to have, if you have any plans to get technical training or go to college, plans for family, about your school experiences and what you like to do in your free time. You will get \$15 as a thank-you for participating.

Risks/Benefits: There are no known risks or benefits for coming to this focus group talk. Your name will be confidential. The interview will be taped so we don't miss anything you say, but we won't identify you by name in any reports or presentations we make. The recordings and transcripts of the focus group will be kept at UAA's Institute for Social and Economic Research. Dr. Marie Lowe will be in charge of them while she is working at the Institute and if she leaves, the information will be destroyed.

Your Rights: If you want to participate in this focus group it is up to you (and your parents if you are under 18) to decide. You can change your mind and withdraw from the project at any time. Please contact Dr. Douglas Causey at the UAA Office of Academic Affairs at

907-786-1921 if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Contact: If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Marie Lowe at the University of Alaska Anchorage, 907-301-5135 or marie.lowe@uaa.alaska.edu.

PERSONAL CONSENT/ASSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION

Topic: Alaska Coastal Community Youth and the Future

2008

Agreement to use focus group interview for research (please check all that apply and sign):

___ I understand what I am being asked to do.

___ I agree to participate in the focus group.

___ I give the research team permission to take digital photographs of me to be used in presentations and publications on the project.

PRINTED NAME _____

AGE in years _____

SIGNATURE _____

PARENT SIGNATURE _____

(Only necessary if the participant is under 18 years old.)

A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep

Name: _____

Address: _____

