EXPLORING THE REFLECTIVE EXPERIENCES OF DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

IN 4-H: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Cherise Marcella Mbaye

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2019

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how adults, who grew up as disadvantaged children, were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H program located in rural southern Virginia. The research question central to the study was, "How do adults who grew up as disadvantaged children describe their experiences in a local 4-H program within rural southern Virginia?" The theory guiding this study was Markus and Nurius' (1986) "possible selves" theory (p. 954). I collected data from 11 participants via interviews, focus groups, and replicas of artifacts. Post data collection, I used preset and in vivo coding to analyze the data and identify major themes using Moustakas' modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Moustakas, 1994). Six major themes emerged from data analysis: (a) 4-H experiences provide exposure to diversity, (b) 4-H participation builds character, (c) 4-H experiences provide a foundation for building life skills; (d) 4-H experiences influence present and future identity, (e) 4-H experiences provide new opportunities, and (f) education is essential to success. Adults, who grew up as disadvantaged children, perceive their experiences in the local 4-H program positively. These experiences creating a lasting impact on participants' lives. The study's implications may aid in the continuous improvement of the 4-H program and encourage youth to get involved in the 4-H program.

Keywords: 4-H program, socioeconomic status, poverty, rural communities, possible selves

Acknowledgments

I thank God for seeing me through this process. I thank him for every willing participant and individual that he placed in my path to encourage me when I wanted to give up. My support system throughout this process has been amazing. I would like to especially thank my sons, Cameron and Aaron. They are wonderful young men, who have been so patient with me and even took an interest in work. I would also like to thank my parents for consistently encouraging me to follow my dreams. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Bradshaw, Dr. Barton, and Dr. Coleman for their leadership and guidance throughout this process.

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Grade Point Average (GPA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Research Question (RQ)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Extracurricular activities add value to the learning process. These activities typically provide a safe environment for students to socialize and develop critical skills for personal, social, and professional development (Laughlin, 2014). For students living in poverty, these activities may also serve as an outlet, away from the many challenges they endure on a daily basis (Laughlin, 2014). Extracurricular activities offer experiences that allow youth to envision the "unexplored possibilities" of life (Greene, 2001, p. 7). While much research has been conducted relative to extracurricular activities and the benefits of such programs, a review of the literature has exposed a gap in regard to the influences of specific extracurricular programs and activities in the context of students living in poverty (Balyer & Gunduz, 2012).

Poverty is associated with several adverse outcomes in terms of social and academic development (David, 2014; National Center for Children in Poverty, 2014). These adverse effects linger into adulthood and may lead to criminal activity, inability to cope, poor wages, and essentially the perpetual and vicious cycle of poverty from generation to generation (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2014). Currently, "21% of children in the U.S. live in poverty" (Jiang, Granja, & Koball, 2017, p. 1). Locked within the minds of these children, there may be the cure for cancer or the solution for world peace. Without proper nurturing and an environment conducive for development, these ideas will remain locked away. With stakes so high, there is a dire need for research to better understand how specific extracurricular activities influence the lives of socioeconomically disadvantaged youth. The 4-H program, which focuses on youth development, allows youth to explore a host of activities while building character and promoting social development (4-H Organization, 2016). Extracurricular programs, such as 4-H,

empower participants to envision the endless possibilities for their future (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the structure for a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study that explores the experiences of adults who grew up as disadvantaged children in the 4-H program. This chapter discusses the background of the study, states the problem and purpose of the study, outlines the study's significance, provides research questions, and concludes with a summary.

Background

Historical Overview

Poverty affects many children within the nation. According to Jiang et al. (2017),

Among all children under 18 years in the U.S., 43 percent live in low-income families and 21 percent – approximately one in five – lives in a poor family. This means that children are overrepresented among our nation's poor; they represent 23 percent of the population but comprise 33 percent of all people in poverty. Many more children live in families with incomes just above the poverty threshold. (p. 1)

Families living in poverty often experience difficulty in providing the basic necessities for their children (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2014). These families are usually most concerned with ensuring there is food on the table and adequate clothing for family members (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2014). Due to a lack of resources, students living in low-income homes are not afforded as many opportunities in comparison to those who live above the poverty line. These students often find it difficult to thrive academically and developmentally; without a solid foundation, unfavorable adult outcomes typically plague those who live in poverty (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2014).

The National Center for Children in Poverty (2014) states, "Research is clear that poverty is the single greatest threat to children's well-being" (p. 1). As a result of this finding, "indicators of child well-being" were developed and have been studied for quite some time (Laughlin, 2014, p. 70). Researchers hope that the information gained from these studies will encourage program administrators and policy makers to focus on improvements that benefit low-income families and children. Promoting the welfare of these children today offers them a better opportunity to succeed as they transition to adulthood (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2014). Measures include the amount of time children are allowed to watch television, school engagement, parental interaction with children, and the quality of childcare received (Laughlin, 2014; National Center for Children in Poverty, 2014). In addition to these measures, a key indicator of student well-being is participation in extracurricular activities (Laughlin, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). The benefits of extracurricular activities have long since been recognized by researchers (Laughlin, 2014). Exploration of these activities not only have the potential to aid in academic success, but also encourage physical strength for participants in sports, artistic abilities for participants in music or dance, business and cognitive skills for participants in school clubs, all while developing unique skills essential to successful adult outcomes (Laughlin, 2014).

Grades are important when assessing a student's academic success, but participation in extracurricular activities also serves as a success indicator (Laughlin, 2014). "Examining activities other than attending classes provides a more complete picture of academic experiences than considering grades alone. Participation in extracurricular activities can influence how a child makes the transition to adulthood" (Laughlin, 2014, p. 7). Extracurricular activities

provide structure and essentially supplement the academic learning experience, while promoting student development (Laughlin, 2014). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014),

> Fifty-seven percent of children between 6 and 17 years old participate in at least one after-school extracurricular activity. The report found that children were more likely to participate in sports (35 percent) than clubs or lessons like music, dance and language (both around 29 percent). (para. 1)

Socioeconomic status plays an essential role in whether or not a student participates in extracurricular activities (Kao & Salerno, 2014). The U.S. Census Bureau (2014) further noted that poverty hindered students from participating in extracurricular activities. This is likely attributed to the fact that families who live in poverty are unable to provide the transportation and equipment required for participation in these activities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Given that socioeconomic status impacts participation in extracurricular activities, which influence academics and the transition to adulthood, one may also assume that low-income students who are not given the opportunity to participate in these activities do not perform as well as their counterparts, who are afforded these opportunities (Kao & Salerno, 2014).

Society-At-Large

Socioeconomically disadvantaged students who defy the odds and participate in extracurricular activities experience a wealth of benefits (Arndt, Rothe, Urban, & Werning, 2013). Hayes (2014) conducted a qualitative study which examined the potential benefits of participation in extracurricular activities; the study concluded that there were several skills/benefits that were gained as a result of participation. Such skills include but are not limited to the ability to manage one's time, leading by example, projecting a positive attitude, communicating effectively, building valuable relationships, and the ability to create and achieve

long term goals (Adamczyk, 2012; Hayes, 2014). Given the detriments experienced by those

living in poverty, gaining the aforementioned skills may be critical to attaining new

opportunities, which provide the vehicle to a life of an upper socioeconomic status, a life out of

poverty (Erikson, 2007).

Previous research has examined the benefits, skills, and experiences associated with

extracurricular activities, but a gap in the literature remains (Balyer & Gunduz, 2012; David,

2014; Hayes, 2014). Research previously conducted has not closely examined these activities on

an individual basis, in the context of those living in poverty (Balyer & Gunduz, 2012). The

extracurricular activity for which this study was conducted was bounded to the 4-H program.

The 4-H program offers a broad range of activities for school-aged students, which allow

participants to gain a wide array of skills, critical to academic and personal success (David,

2014). Declared as one of the nation's most prevalent positive youth mentoring organizations,

the program currently services "six million" youth throughout the nation (4-H Organization,

2016, p. 1). 4-H Clubs, camps, nutrition programs, public speaking contests, talent shows, fair

exhibits, etc., are but a few of the many activities 4-H sponsors to enrich the lives of the nation's

youth (4-H Organization, 2016).

Theory

Center to the issue is how impoverished youth, who are exposed to 4-H, view themselves.

These images of self can motivate or discourage cognitive and social development while

impacting adult outcomes (David, 2014; Hartas, 2011; Markus & Nurius, 1986). As a result, the

theory underpinning the research is Markus and Nurius' possible selves theory. The theory

asserts that individuals maintain a current self-concept or understanding of who they are and

images of who they may become in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). These future images

are defined as possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible self images may project positive images of who or what the individual wants to become or negative images of who or what he does not want to become (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). These images serve as motivation to achieve or refute the manifestation of the images that the individual creates. The theory is relevant to the research because present and future images of self are generated based upon a plethora of factors, to include circumstances, environment, and exposure, to name a few (Anderman & Anderman, 2009; Markus & Nurius, 1986). I sought to determine how individuals who grew up with a low socioeconomic status (circumstance), in rural southern Virginia (environment), were impacted by their exposure to a local 4-H program and essentially how experiencing this phenomenon influenced their adult lives.

As previously mentioned, those who live in poverty are often limited in their experiences and the environment in which they live (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2014). Children affected by poverty who have the opportunity to participate in a dynamic, diversified program, such as 4-H, are exposed to new ideas, concepts, and environments. This exposure ultimately influences their worldview and how they view themselves presently and futuristically (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This study sought to give voice to adults, who grew up as disadvantaged children, explored the world of 4-H, and were influenced by their unique experiences. The hope is that these voices will encourage younger generations living in poverty to defy the odds and explore their positive possible selves, helping them understand that by adjusting their actions today, the possibilities of who they can become in the future are endless and the chains of poverty can be broken.

Situation to Self

Growing up in a family of six was not always easy, but it provided the framework to mold me into who I am presently. My family members and I are not strangers to hard work. My father often worked overtime at a local factory while my mother maintained the home. However, work did not end there; our family business was to chop and supply wood for those with wood burning stoves. My father, being a savvy mechanic and engineer, often built the things we needed for the family business. For example, he built the mechanical wood splitter. Reflecting on my childhood, I recall receiving free lunch at school. This indicated that our household had a low-income. Yet, I do not remember going without the necessities, nor many of the things that children desire. I suppose this was because our house was filled with love, the Spirit of the Lord, and resourceful parents who always made a way for their children. My experiences as a child have essentially made me the person that I am today: a Christian, a hard-worker, and one with a determined spirit.

Although there was always work to do, my parents always demanded high grades, a side job to earn my own money (once I was of age to work), consistent church attendance, and participation in some form of extracurricular activity. For me, these extracurricular activities included piano lessons and membership in the local 4-H club. When I became a part of the 4-H club, I immediately recognized that I was unique, as there were few African Americans in the 4-H program. Other than this initial observation, race never mattered. I began to understand that the 4-H program was founded upon principles that not only encouraged but celebrated diversity. It was through my experiences in 4-H that I won several public speaking competitions, learned how to ride horses, canoed, fished, and built life-long relationships. 4-H helped me understand

that there is so much in life to be experienced. This is an understanding that I may not have gained in the absence of participation in 4-H.

My motivation for conducting this study was simply to encourage others who may be limited by their circumstances and give voice to those who have overcome obstacles through continuous improvement and value-added programs. Throughout the research process, the social constructivism paradigm framed the study. I relied heavily on the participants to articulate their unique experiences in the 4-H program, based upon their social and cultural norms (Moustakas, 1994). Ontologically, I assumed that one's social context heavily impacts the perception of his experiences. Epistemologically, I assumed that the interpretation of the phenomenon is subjective. This assumption is made because every researcher is different and may be guided by dissimilar belief systems. With me, I brought my axiological belief that God is sovereign and His word provides guidance for my life. This belief system guided the study and ensured that the study was conducted morally, ethically, and to the best of my ability.

Problem Statement

Previous studies suggest that students typically describe extracurricular activities positively (Kort-Butler, 2012; Oosterhoff, Ferris, & Metzger, 2017). Extracurricular programs allow students to explore a variety of activities, to include sports, music, 4-H Club, etc. (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Lawson & Lawson, 2013). These activities become an avenue for socioeconomically disadvantaged students to discover the world around them and identify their unique gifts and talents, presenting them with opportunities that may not have existed in the absence of these activities (Laughlin, 2014). Exploring these activities enables students to visualize their potential as well as images of self in both the present and future tense (Stevenson

& Clegg, 2011). Discovering one's possible selves potentially aid in personal development and building self-confidence (Stevenson & Clegg, 2011).

The problem is that while studies have generally suggested that extracurricular activities provide exploration of possible selves, increase self-confidence, and offer positive educational benefits, these studies have focused on extracurricular activities as a whole. There is little research related specifically to the 4-H program in the context of rural youth who are socioeconomically disadvantaged (Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Sharp, Tucker, Baril, Van-Gundy, & Rebellon, 2015). Better understanding how participants were influenced by the 4-H Program added to the body of literature by identifying benefits of the 4-H program and opportunities for improvement (Lerner & Lerner, 2015). As a result of this gained understanding, the administration of the 4-H program may be strengthened and participants may experience greater benefits (Scholl, 2014).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how adults, who grew up as disadvantaged children, were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H program within a rural southern Virginia county. For the purpose of the research, a disadvantaged child was generally defined as an individual who grew up with unfavorable circumstances, more specifically of a low socioeconomic status, as determined by scoring in the lower third of the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status (Hollingshead, 1975; Roth, Malone, & Brookes-Gunn, 2010). 4-H experiences were defined as membership in the local 4-H program, a minimum of two years. Two years was selected as the criteria because previous research indicates that acclamation and immersion into extracurricular activities minimally require this length of time (Hayes, 2014; Roth et al., 2010). The theory guiding this

study was possible selves, coined by Markus and Nurius (1986), as it examines how positive activities and experiences encourage positive self-concepts, influencing motivations and personal success (Houser, 2016).

Significance of the Study

Investigating the 4-H experiences of those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged in rural communities is truly a noteworthy study for several reasons. Poverty has long since been associated with increased crime rates, poor academic performance, and poor social development (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2014). Perhaps by understanding the experiences of those who once lived in poverty and overcame the associated challenges through participation in 4-H, others coping with the same unfortunate circumstances may be encouraged to participate in the program or other well-structured extracurricular activities (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2014).

While several studies have independently examined the holistic benefits of extracurricular activities and the negative outcomes associated with low socioeconomic status, little research has been conducted specific to rural youth of low socioeconomic status and the impact of their participation in 4-H; this generates a gap in the literature and a need for research in this specific area (Assaraf, 2011; National Center for Children in Poverty, 2014; Sharp et al., 2015; Williams & Bryan, 2013). Research findings may serve as a basis for understanding the benefits of the 4-H program and assist in defining opportunities for program improvement, thereby strengthening the administration of the 4-H program, improving the benefits for participants, and adding to the body of literature (Durlak et al., 2010). In addition, by understanding how the program influences the nation's youth, valuable insight may be obtained to assist other organizations in developing positive, structured youth programs.

In terms of theoretical significance, there is little existing research that examines the possible selves theory in the context of impoverished youth (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Williams & Bryan, 2013). This provided an additional application of the theory, relative to those who experience poverty (Williams & Bryan, 2013). The study's findings may help researchers better understand how impoverished youth see themselves presently and futuristically and how these images may motivate or deter the vicious cycle of poverty (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Furthermore, the research may shed light on additional factors which influence possible selves images, extending literature relative to the theory.

Research Questions

The research intended to give voice to adults who grew up as disadvantaged children in the 4-H program. In light of the purpose of this study the following questions framed the research:

1. How do adults who grew up as disadvantaged children describe their experiences in a local 4-H program within rural southern Virginia?

Research question one served as the central research question. Hershbery, DeSouza, Warren, Lerner, and Lerner (2013) conducted a study entitled "Illuminating Trajectories of Adolescent Thriving and Contribution of Words of Youth: Qualitative Findings from the 4-H Study of Youth Development." The study focused on the positive experiences of those who participated in the 4-H program for an extended period of time. The study concluded that the 4-H program provided exponential benefits in terms of self-worth and positive behaviors (Hershbery et al., 2013). The underrepresented voices in the study were those who lived in poverty and in rural locations, hence, the basis for the central research question (Hershbery et al., 2013).

2. Did participation in 4-H change self-perceptions of adults who grew up as disadvantaged children? If so, how?

According to Markus and Nurius (1986), an individual's experiences influence his or her "hopes, fears, and fantasies" (p. 954). From these "hopes, fears, and fantasies," individuals develop possible selves; these are images of themselves in the past, present day, and future (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). These possible selves become motivation for the individual's present and future actions (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The essence of this question sought to determine how the 4-H experience shaped the participants' possible selves.

3. Were adults who grew up as disadvantaged children impacted by positive or negative experiences within the 4-H program? If so, how?

As previously stated, the possible selves theory concludes that the images of self are largely based upon an individual's "hopes, fears, and fantasies"; thus, possible selves may also be negative (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). Just as positive possible selves serve as motivation for positive actions, negative images of self may motivate an individual to behave negatively (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The intent of this research question was to determine how, if at all, negative experiences in the 4-H program impacted the participants' possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

4. According to adults who grew up as disadvantaged children, how, if at all, did participation in 4-H influence their lives?

Williams and Bryan (2013) conducted a case study which concluded that positive social and family relationships, school-related practices, personal testimonies, and participation in extracurricular activities were essential to the success of "high-risk" African American males (p. 297). Despite their circumstances, these African American men were determined to complete

high school and college (Williams & Bryan, 2013). All of the men in the study attributed their success to positive influences during their secondary education and keeping in mind who they could become. The men's visions served as a motivation to successfully complete their education (Williams & Bryan, 2013). This question sought to determine if the 4-H program served as a motivational tool for the participants.

Definitions

The terms below are relevant to the study and have been defined in consideration of the reader.

1. *4-H Experiences* - Participation in the local 4-H program for a minimum of two years (Hayes, 2014).

2. *Disadvantaged* - Having unfavorable circumstances or conditions that limit the probability of success (Anderman & Anderman, 2009).

3. *Distortion* - Being misled or having the wrong impression (Erikson, 2007).

4. *Self-concept* - The sense of being unique and differentiated from others; being aware of who one is as an individual (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

5. *Self-schema* - Ideas and beliefs that one has about himself. These ideas and beliefs guide and organize information processing and how the individual views himself and the world around him (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

6. *Motivation* - The reasons why an individual chooses to behave and act in a particular manner (Anderman & Anderman, 2009).

7. *Social Context* - "general environment or circumstances that are the social framework for interpersonal and individual behavior" (N., 2013, para. 1).

8. *Socioeconomic Status* - Pertaining to one's social and economic position relative to others, based mainly upon income and education (Van Der Merwe, 2014).

Summary

Those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged are often negatively impacted by their circumstances and status, yet there are many individuals who have overcome these challenges and are now productive citizens. Several studies have been conducted on such individuals and have concluded that their success is due to a variety of factors (Williams & Bryan, 2013). One such factor is participation in extracurricular activities (Williams & Bryan, 2013). Participation in such activities has been linked to several valuable benefits that contribute to student development and personal success (Keser, Akar, & Yildirim, 2011). This lack of research has generated a gap in the literature.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how adults who grew up as disadvantaged children were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H program in a rural southern Virginia county. The theory guiding the study is the possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The study is significant because little research has been conducted specific to rural youth of low socioeconomic status and the impact of their participation in 4-H, generating a gap in the literature and a need for research in this specific area (Assaraf, 2011; National Center for Children in Poverty, 2014; Sharp et al., 2015; Williams & Bryan, 2013). The results of the study added to the body of literature pertaining to the benefits of extracurricular programs, more specifically the 4-H program, and may ultimately encourage youth who are currently experiencing poverty to get involved in structured extracurricular programs. By doing so, these youth may gain insight to who they are as individuals and the possibilities of who they may become in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In summary,

Chapter One presented an overview of the topic, followed by background information relative to poverty, extracurricular activities, and previous associated literature. In addition, Chapter One also includes the situation to self, the study's problem statement, purpose statement, and the significance of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The guiding research questions sought to explore the reminiscent experiences of adults who grew up as disadvantaged students while participating in the 4-H program. Furthermore, the research questions aimed to examine how, if at all, these experiences may have shaped their adult lives. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do adults who grew up as disadvantaged children describe their experiences in a local 4-H program within rural southern Virginia (Hershbery et al., 2013)?

2. Did participation in 4-H change self-perceptions of adults who grew up as disadvantaged children? If so, how (Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

3. Were adults, who grew up as disadvantaged children, impacted by positive or negative experiences within the 4-H program? If so, how (Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

4. According to adults who grew up as disadvantaged children, how, if at all, did participation in 4-H influence their lives (Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

These research questions intended to bring the participants' 4-H experiences to life and essentially discover how these experiences shaped views of themselves, past, presently, and futuristically. The theoretical framework grounding this study resides in constructs which include self-concept, motivation, and distortion; consequently, the possible selves theory was the foundational basis for the research (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Previous research indicates that children of a low socioeconomic status are "disproportionately exposed to factors that may impair brain development and affect cognitive, social, and emotional functioning" (Child Trends, 2015, p. 2). As a result, from an educational perspective, these children are classified as at risk for truancy, poor test grades,

behavioral/emotional abnormalities, the inability to focus, and high school dropout (Child Trends, 2015; Robinson, 2014). These less than favorable outcomes do not cease within the educational arena; they are carried into adulthood (Robinson, 2014). According to a study conducted by Cambridge University, children from the lowest socioeconomic status were found to be over twice as likely to be convicted of "violent crimes" as their wealthier counterparts (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2015, p. 1). Furthermore, being raised in poverty increases the adult risk of poor health and lower wages, thus, creating a repeating cycle of low socioeconomic status (Bulanda & McCrea, 2013; Child Trends, 2015). There is hope, however, because many raised in poverty have overcome adversity and gone on to become functioning, productive citizens (Perrino et al., 2014; Williams & Bryan, 2013). Previous research indicates a positive correlation between overcoming adversity associated with low socioeconomic status and student participation in constructive extracurricular activities such as sports, mentoring, music/band, theater, and 4-H (Kuntz, 2013; Maria, 2013; Nasser, 2013). Much is known about extracurricular activities as a whole in terms of benefits, how they may influence youth development and impact youth trajectories; however, little research exists specific to how participation in 4-H influences youth development and trajectories, exposing a gap in the literature (Assaraf, 2011; David, 2014; Sloan, 2012). The intent of the Literature Review section is to review the literature relative to the research, and in doing so, provide the framework for a phenomenological study which addresses the gap.

Chapter Two reviews scholarly literature pertaining to the theoretical framework as well as other topics relative to the research. Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory will be the focus of the first section within the literature review, followed by related literature. The

related literature section focuses on extracurricular programs, the significance of socioeconomic status, as well as the 4-H program.

Theoretical Framework

Originated in 1986 by Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius, the possible selves theory emphasizes the relationship between both present and future self-concept (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). "While current self-concept focuses on who one is now, by focusing on the future, possible selves allow for self-improvement, malleability, and personal growth" (Anderman & Anderman, 2009, p. 695). The theory suggests that while an individual may be born with a low socioeconomic status, through continuous improvement, he does not have to become a product of his environment and he may change his status in the future (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). One major theme of the possible selves theory "is the conceptual link between cognition and motivation" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). "Possible selves are the cognitive components of hopes, fears, goals, and threats, and they give the specific self-relevant form, meaning, organization and direction to these dynamics" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). For example, in the present day, a young person living in poverty may not be doing well academically. Her dreams, goals, and ambitions are stifled by the challenges associated with living in the projects. However, as she is exposed to successful mentors and new, exciting opportunities, she begins to realize that she has the potential to become a nurse and a productive citizen within her community (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The motivation created by her vision is so powerful that she begins to take steps to achieve this goal, studying biology, visiting hospitals, and caring for her ill family members. The possible selves theory is important to the research because it asserts that present self images influence one's actions in the future. The theory also

suggests that possible self images aid in the understanding of one's perceived identity and how one may be viewed by others (Goffman, 1956; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Preceding research examining outcomes of socioeconomically disadvantaged students largely report negative findings (Hartas, 2011). Students from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes are more likely to experience teen pregnancy, drop out of high school, earn poor grades, and fail to adjust in their adult lives; thus their children are more likely to live in poverty as well (Hartas, 2011; Herman, Huffman, Anderson, & Golden, 2013). The possible selves theory, however, suggests that while socioeconomic status may be influential, other factors such as environment, experience, and human interaction largely impact the possible selves projected. Once projected, these possible selves images produce motivation within an individual to achieve the desired possible self or avoid negative possible selves images (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

The 4-H program provides youth with valuable mentoring, enjoyable activities, skills, and character building, as well as youth/adult interaction in a safe environment (David, 2014). These meaningful exchanges provide socioeconomically disadvantaged youth with experiences that they may not have otherwise received in the absence of participation, therefore, potentially building character, self-esteem, and essentially the images of positive possible selves, despite their current condition (David, 2014; Hong, Chen, & Hwang, 2013; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Possible Selves Theory Factors

Possible selves uniquely impact development, particularly during adolescence. According to Prince (2014),

> How young people conceptualize and cognitively represent their futures – as full of positive potential and constraints and negative possibilities – bears influences on their developmental trajectories. Adolescence is a developmental period when future thinking

becomes increasingly salient. Future self-concepts, or possible selves, are self-relevant

cognitions of enduing goals, aspirations, hopes, fears, and threats that function as a

framework and guide for individual identity development. (p. 1)

The manner in which youth view themselves significantly impacts development trajectories

(Markus & Nurius, 1986; Prince, 2014). This concept has been confirmed via prior research

(Anderman & Anderman, 2009; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Prince, 2014). One's future self is

largely dependent upon his or her current identity and the elements associated with this identity

(Hartas, 2011; Markus & Nurius, 1986). The depth and breadth of identity factors are vast and

are often subjective, ranging anywhere from uncontrollable factors such as culture, gender,

environment, and genetics to more influential factors such as education, social relationships,

religion, etc. (Prince, 2014). For the purpose of this study, the research focuses on two salient

factors relative to one's current and future identity, social context and more specifically physical

environment.

  Social context. The social context is essentially the "general environment or

circumstances that are the social framework for interpersonal and individual behavior" (N., 2013,

para. 1). The social context is comprised of every situation, circumstance, life experience,

relationship, education, and virtually every factor that is contributory to an individual's behavior;

it is through this context that one gains knowledge of self and essentially present and future

identity (Markus & Nurius, 1986). For example, if one's social environment consists of wealth

and highly successful family and friends, it becomes very easy for one to envision himself being

wealthy and successful. This is because the individual is accustomed to seeing and experiencing

wealth and success in his surroundings (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). On the other hand,

those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged may have difficulty envisioning themselves as successful, wealthy, productive citizens, as their social context paints a very different image.

Low-income youth are often exposed to negative social contexts. According to Anderman and Anderman (2009):

> Some social contexts provide easy access to role models and reminders to focus on school while other context rarely provide these cues. Minority, low-income, and rural youth may be less able to imagine school focused possible selves or to sustain these possible selves if their contexts include few models of overcoming the barriers to success or are rife with stereotypes that are not congruent with school focused possible selves. (p. 696)

As pointed out by Anderman and Anderman (2009), low-income and rural youth are often stigmatized, which serves a setback for envisioning themselves positively. This position is critical to the research because the intent of the study was to examine these individuals specifically and essentially determine if participation within the 4-H program impacted their ability to envision positive possible selves (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). While all are created as humans, social context varies greatly from individual to individual, hence, the uniqueness of personalities, dreams, fears, aspirations, traits, skills and identity (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Rural, low-income youth have a distinctive social context which uniquely influences present and future identity.

Locality influences mentality. Nested within social context is the physical locality or environment in which one occupies; locality serves an essential role in terms of one's mentality and thus present and future identity, or possible selves (Prince, 2014).

Place is an important element of youth identity development and future self-concept. Social hierarchies are deeply embedded within the US society, promoting intergenerational inheritance of social status and assets in a highly systematic and deterministic fashion. For marginalized and underserved youth, future possibility is shaped by historically entrenched, structural, and systematic inequalities. Inequalities manifest in complex ways, including place experiences, and are thus critical to consider in relation to future self-concept. (Prince, 2014, p. 699)

Both the educational system as well as youth development programs have largely focused on activities, building skill and providing new opportunities, all of which serve a critical role in youth development and the projection of positive future possible selves (Prince, 2014). The possible selves theory argues, however, that the physical environment in which these activities take place is equally critical in terms of youth development and future self-identity (Prince, 2014). Environments that are cared for exhibit esthetic appeal and reflect worth, pride, and commitment in both the physical environment and in its inhabitants. Conversely, environments that are not well cared for reflect a lack of worth, pride, and commitment in both the physical environment and in its inhabitants (Prince, 2014).

Imagine entering a dim, cold, school with graffiti-covered lockers, film-covered windows, and armed guards posted at the end of every hall. One may experience emotions such as fear, defensiveness, doom, and gloom in this environment (Prince, 2014). This emotional response is consistent with the place identity theory, created by Proshansky. Proshansky (1978) argued that self-identity contained "positively and negatively valence cognitions (including affects, symbolic meanings, and beliefs) about one's physical environment, accruing from an individuals' environmental past, or memories that arise from experiences within physical places

over time" (Prince, 2014, p. 700). This assertion is significant to the study; it confirms that both the rural locality as well as the physical location in which participants experience 4-H activities influence both present identity as well as future possible selves. Furthermore, the concept sheds light on negative outcomes associated with living in poverty and being raised in rural locations.

Those who live in poverty are consistently surrounded by an environment of lack. Due to limited resources, poverty-stricken families typically do not possess luxury homes, cars, and appealing clothes. As a result, poverty constantly generates negative images; coupled with a society that focuses on materialist wealth, those living in poverty are prone to developing negative images of self, presently and futuristically (Proshansky, 1978). Secondarily, negative outcomes have been associated with youth living in rural locations (Snyder & McLaughlin, 2010). Rural youth are more likely to drop out of high school and more likely to attempt suicide than their urban counterparts (Caldwell, 2015; Snyder & McLaughlin, 2010). These differences may very well be attributed to a lack of activities and opportunities available in rural communities versus urban communities (Snyder & McLaughlin, 2010). Negativity breeds negativity, creating generational cycles of poor self-image, missed opportunity, and lack. While difficult, this cycle can be broken by consistently replacing these negative images with positive images and by providing a steadfast support system, which offers additional opportunities, encouragement, and guidance (Prince, 2014; Proshansky, 1978).

The possible selves theory is paramount to the research, as it provides the foundation for better understanding how participants' 4-H experiences shaped self-concept, as well as how they saw themselves in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The findings of this research aid in the understanding of how these images of self influenced participants lives (Markus & Nurius,

1986). Furthermore, the study's findings extended the theory's application to impoverished youth and how images of self impact adult outcomes.

<div align="center">**Related Literature**</div>

The study sought to determine how adults who grew up as disadvantaged children describe their experiences in a local 4-H program within rural southern Virginia. This study's findings provided a fresh perspective from those who have experienced 4-H in the context of being socioeconomically disadvantaged in a rural location. These perspectives may aid in the development and strengthening of extracurricular activities. Furthermore, the study provides validation of the 4-H program's structure and youth benefits. Because little research exists specific to 4-H experiences in the context of rural, socioeconomically disadvantaged youth, the perspectives of these underrepresented voices help fill the gap in the literature. The related literature section examines parallel studies and history relative to extracurricular activities, rural youth of low socioeconomic status, and the 4-H program. This information serves as a foundation for the study.

Benefits of Extracurricular Activities

The educational system intends to provide students with knowledge and skills that will allow them to be productive citizens, compete in a demanding global economy, and interact socially in a manner conducive for building relationships (I Riba, Fonseca-Pedrero, Santarén-Rosell, & Urraca-Martinez, 2015; Sloan, 2012). For all intents and purposes, extracurricular activities are thought to complement this process while allowing the student to engage in learning within an inviting environment (Assaraf, 2011; Dunstan & Todd, 2012; Sharp et al., 2015). Through extracurricular activities, students are often exposed to pleasurable experiences and new environments, all while socially and educationally developing (Balyer & Gunduz,

2012). Balyer and Gunduz (2012) conducted an ethnographic study which analyzed the effects of structured extracurricular activities on students' social and academic development. The study found that high school students perceived improvements from both a social and academic perspective as a result of participating in extracurricular activities (Balyer & Gunduz, 2012). Balyer and Gunduz found that exposure to new activities during the school day led to students being more interested in attending school; students felt their day was more enjoyable and ultimately they felt more engaged in core curriculum studies.

In addition to this finding, Balyer and Gunduz (2012) concluded that exposure to extracurricular activities was positively impactful to those who exhibited negative or risky behaviors. This finding is significant to the research because students who live in poverty are more likely to demonstrate negative or risky behaviors than their middle to upper-class counterparts and those who live in rural locations are also classified as at risk for negative behaviors (Assaraf, 2011; Balyer & Gunduz, 2012; Williams & Bryan, 2013). According to Balyer and Gunduz,

> Extracurricular activities are strategic tools that help diminish effects of negative behaviors. They represent one such strategy that potentially builds resilience in adolescents by supporting pro-social behaviors, engagement with school and related activities, constructive academic performance, and growth in subjective well-being. (p. 5)

Learning is not simply regurgitating information but a process that requires engagement and interaction (Wozniak, Lollis, & Marshall, 2014). Extracurricular activities have the potential to create engagement within a social setting, producing a climate conducive for learning, socially and academically. Balyer and Gunduz (2012) found that as students were exposed to extracurricular activities and elective course studies, they began to think about how the newly

found skills, obtained in these activities and courses, may benefit them in the future. This study is significant to the research because it not only demonstrates the importance of extracurricular activities, but it begins to open up dialogue about how these activities may shape participants' possible selves.

Student development. Problem solving, critical thinking, social responsibility, and leadership are all vital skills or traits relative to academia as well as adulthood (Cicchetti, Natsuaki, Smokowski, Guo, & Roderick, 2014; Hong et al., 2013). These are also traits which may be acquired through participation in extracurricular activities. Hong et al. (2013) conducted a study in which creative thinking was examined as a result of participation in an extracurricular activity club. The study found that through participation in a team oriented robotics club, students experienced heightened problem solving skills and as a result, exhibited improved confidence and essentially motivation to achieve common goals (Hong et al., 2013). "As people work, play, think and solve problems together they demonstrate an accumulated set of habits and values" (Hong et al., 2013, p. 52). The study demonstrated that enhanced problem solving, confidence, and motivation can be achieved through structured extracurricular activities (Hong et al., 2013).

On the contrary, however, not every extracurricular activity produces optimal results (Hong et al., 2013). Assaraf (2011), examined an unsuccessful science club which failed to produce "meaningful learning" experiences for students (p. 595). The study found that the program failed to achieve its primary objective due to several factors which included inadequate teaching methods, lack of student participation, negative student-teacher interaction, and the lack of perceived authority (Assaraf, 2011). One critical element of this study, however, is the socioeconomic status of the participants involved. Participants in the study were isolated to the

"lower third of the State of Israel's socio-economic scale" (Assaraf, 2011, p. 595). The importance of this study is that it implies that not all extracurricular activities are equal and there are critical elements required for program success; hence, the need for specialized research specific to each extracurricular activity. Assaraf demonstrated that the socioeconomic status of participants and administrators certainly plays a role in the success or demise of such programs. The study illustrates that a highly engaged approached is necessary especially when participants are of a low socioeconomic status (Assaraf, 2011).

  Losing and extracurricular activities. While extracurricular activities and related competitions add value, not every extracurricular activity experience is pleasant to youth. These activities also expose students to an undesirable but character building experience: losing (Martins, Honorio, Cardoso, & Duarte, 2014). There is pride, joy, and a feeling of accomplishment associated with winning, along with a positive present and future image (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In contrast, when youth are exposed to loss, they experience feelings of intimidation, inferiority, and disappointment, which often can lead to negative images of self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). While the experience of losing seems detrimental at that particular time, this experience actually teaches several life lessons.

  In a society where everyone wants an award for simply participating, extracurricular activity competitions teach youth that in life, there are wins and losses (Martins et al., 2014). In essence, wins are celebrated and awarded, losses are not. Relative to the possible selves theory, the negative experience of losing can actually yield either negative or positive results (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Environments which exhibit a strong support system, comradery, and trust, enable the participant to understand that there is something to gain from a loss, a lesson learned, an opportunity for improvement (Martins et al., 2014). In this particular environment,

participants often gain motivation to achieve a future win (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The negative effect of loss may become a fear of repeating the loss, which in turn becomes a future self-image of winning (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Conversely, in non-supportive environments, the fear of losing again could generate such a powerful negative possible self that the participant removes himself from future competitions (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

One study, which analyzed students' motivation to practice sports in school, confirmed the aforementioned. The study, utilized the *Motivation Questionnaire for Sports Activities* as well as the *Survey of Motivation for Absence of Sport Activity of Vasconcelos*, determined that there were several reasons that youth were motivated to practice and participate in sports (Martins et al., 2014). Among these reasons were enjoyment, socializing, and health; however, the primary reason youth participated in and practiced sports was competition, the thrill of winning (Martins et al., 2014). The researchers found that after youth experienced loss, the motivation to practice increased; this was because the youth associated practice with sharpening skills and increasing their potential to win (Martins et al., 2014). In some other cases, youth who experienced loss were less motivated to participate and practice. The fear and disappointment associated with loss actually generated a negative possible self and discouraged youth from further participation (Martins et al., 2014). This study is important to the research because it demonstrates how negative possible self images are generated as a result of participation in extracurricular activities as well as how these negative images may be used to motivate or demotivate future actions (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Given that the 4-H program offers several competitive opportunities such as public speaking, cattle showing, talent shows, etc., the research would be incomplete if the impact of negative experiences such as losing competitions was not

explored; these negative experiences have a profound impact on present self-image as well as future possible self images (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Martins et al., 2014).

   Self-actualization and extracurricular activities. As students participate in extracurricular activities, building new social relationships and skills, confidence is gained and the student learner is placed on the path to self-actualization (Ivtzan, Gardner, Bernard, Sekhon, & Hart, 2013; Maslow, 1968). Students who are exposed to new experiences through extracurricular activities develop a sense of security and begin to realize that there is more to life than what they see in the confines of their homes, schools, and local communities (Maslow, 1968). Such new experiences open the doors of possibility and provide visions of who the student may become in the future (Ivtzan et al., 2013).

   Human development occurs over time and is strongly influenced by life exposure. It

   seems logical that the relative ambiguity of adolescence, and consequent transitions (e.g.,

   to different residential and social environments), inspire and cultivate increased

   awareness, broadening knowledge base of the world and greater creativity in the

   individual. (Van Der Merwe, 2014, p. 196)

   Knowledge is certainly power. It stimulates growth, maturity, and essentially leads to better decision making (Van Der Merwe, 2014). Van Der Merwe (2014), conducted a qualitative case study which supports this argument. The intent of the research was to identify the perceived benefits of extracurricular programs for pupils who were classified as "high risk learners for school dropout, due to the constraining conditions prevailing in their socioeconomic environments" (Van Der Merwe, 2014, p. 196). A purposeful, convenient sample was taken among five South African schools in which students of low socioeconomic status primarily attended the schools (Van Der Merwe, 2014). The study's participants included school

administrators, extracurricular program coordinators, and coaches. Interviews were used to collect data for the study (Van Der Merwe, 2014). In terms of perceived student development benefits, the study offered several valuable findings:

1. At-risk students who participated in extracurricular programs gained additional relevant skills and generally abstained from risky behaviors such as substance abuse (Van Der Merwe, 2014).

2. Those who participated in sports-related activities were perceived to be healthier and make healthier eating choices than those who did not participate in such activities (Van Der Merwe, 2014).

3. Students who participated in extracurricular activities were said to have increased self-esteem, and these students typically generated a sense of comradery within the school system, thus, positively influencing other students within the school (Van Der Merwe, 2014).

4. "High risk learners, due to their exposure to antisocial behaviors in environments with multiple societal problems related to economic disadvantage, are less like to drop out of school when they participate in an extracurricular activity" (Van Der Merwe, 2014, p. 196).

These benefits of extracurricular activities are priceless to all students, but even more so to students living in poverty. According to Van Der Merwe, "Learners from low socio-economic (SES) backgrounds, where parents are trapped in poverty, are often prone to involvement in antisocial behavior" (p. 197). Antisocial behavior is detrimental to social and personal development; this is because social skills and interaction serve as the foundation for building friendships as well as professional relationships (Van Der Merwe, 2014). Through participation

in extracurricular activities, however, this risk may be mitigated as participants learn and interact with others, gaining a sense of comradery, as found in the study.

Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students

As previously stated, students of a low socioeconomic status face a myriad of challenges and negative odds throughout their academic career and into adulthood (Assaraf, 2011; Simpkins, Delgado, Price, Quach, & Starbuck, 2013; Williams & Bryan, 2013). The academic challenges that students of low socioeconomic status encounter are compounded by a flawed, inequitable educational system in the United States (Nieto, 2015). "It has always been the marginalized in our society rather than the privileged who have advocated for change, for a piece of the pie, and for more equitable educational outcomes that might lead to better lives" (Nieto, 2015, p. 216).

In terms of challenges, the table below (see Appendix A: Permission to Use Data from the Childhood Poverty Status Table) demonstrates that individuals who experience poverty during their youth are less like to complete high school and college than those who never experienced poverty (Ratcliffe, 2015). In addition, these individuals are less likely to be consistently employed by the age of 25, yet more likely to conceive premarital children as teens, and more likely to be arrested by the age of 20 than their upper class counterparts (Ratcliffe, 2015).

Table 2.1

At-Risk Factors by Childhood Poverty Status

| | | | Among Ever Poor | |
	Never poor	Ever poor	Not persistently poor	Persistently poor
Educational attainment				
High school diploma by age 20	92.7	77.9***	83.3	63.5***
Postsecondary enrollment by age 25	69.7	41.4***	47.6	22.8***
Completed college by age 25	36.5	13.0***	16.2	3.2***
Consistently employed ages 25–30	70.3	57.3***	63.6	35.4***
No premarital teen birth	96.0	78.0***	83.0	64.4***
Never arrested by age 20	84.2	76.3**	74.8	81.5

Source: Author's tabulation of PSID data.
Notes: Tabulations are weighted and include children born between 1968 and 1989. Statistical significance for the "never poor" and "ever poor" data columns is based on the difference between individuals who are never poor and those who are ever poor in childhood. Significance for the "not persistently poor" and "persistently poor" data columns is based on the difference between individuals who are ever poor but not persistently poor and those who are persistently poor in childhood.
*$p < 0.1$ **$p < 0.05$ ***$p < 0.01$

Note. Reprint of the table "Educational Achievement, Employment, Nonmarital Childbearing, and Criminal Justice Involvement by Childhood Poverty Status" from "Child Poverty and Adult Success," by C. Ratcliffe, Urban Institute, p. 3. Copyright 2015 by Urban Institute. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix A).

The literature implies that well-structured extracurricular activities have the potential to impart knowledge, build team work, enhance social development, improve academic performance, improve community engagement, and build student confidence, thus improving adult outcomes (Assaraf, 2011; Simpkins et al., 2013; Williams & Bryan, 2013). While structured extracurricular activities will not resolve all issues associated with youth poverty and low socioeconomic status, it would stand to reason that participation in strong, well developed extracurricular programs could potentially minimize some risks associated with the unfavorable status (Assaraf, 2011; Williams & Bryan, 2013). However, human beings are complex creatures, and the same exact exposure among multiple individuals to a well-developed extracurricular

program can potentially yield completely different perspectives and influence each one very uniquely (Assaraf, 2011).

Williams and Bryan (2013) conducted a qualitative case study among eight successful African American high school graduates; all participants were products of single-parent homes who had directly or indirectly experienced poverty, prolonged unemployment and crime. The study sought to determine which factors enabled these participants to successfully complete high school despite unfavorable circumstances (Williams & Bryan, 2013). Through the use of interviews and focus groups, the researchers found that there were several factors that contributed to the academic success of the participants. These factors included the following:

- Social support networks (which may include clubs)

- Extended family networks

- Sharing personal stories of hardship

- Positive mother-child relationships

- Supportive school-based relationships

- Participation in extracurricular activities (Williams & Bryan, 2013, p. 293).

Amongst the contributory factors listed in the study, relative to the research topic at hand, extracurricular activities once again proved to be valuable in creating successful outcomes. In addition, the study found that "supportive school-based relationships and social support networks" may be implicitly obtained through participation in extracurricular activities (Williams & Bryan, 2013, p. 293). This conclusion is drawn based upon the fact that most extracurricular activities occur in a group/social setting where positive relationships may be built (Simpkins et al., 2013).

Relative to the possible selves theory is the factor of "sharing personal stories of hardship" (Williams & Bryan, 2013, 297). Williams and Bryan (2013) found that when successful adults who had lived in poverty as children spoke with the mentors, it encouraged them and motivated them to overcome the adversity they faced. By seeing that there were people who had overcome these unfavorable circumstances, participants began to see themselves, not as victims, but overcomers (Williams & Bryan, 2013). One participant of the study commented:

> I was part of an after-school program where we played chess, professional and college football coaches would come speak to us. I mean these were people who came from the same disadvantaged background as me and actually did something in their life and came back to the same hood to encourage us. Those experiences really gave me the motivation to do better, if not for me, then someone else. (Williams & Bryan, 2013, p. 295)

The aforementioned quote demonstrates the need for strong, supportive adult role models, particularly in the lives of impoverished youth (Williams & Bryan, 2013). These role models have the ability to build supportive relationships with students, generally regarded with sincerity like none experienced previously. While role models can be found within schools, churches, and throughout the community, this particular study homed in on role models found through participation in extracurricular activities. Another participant in the study stated:

> My basketball coach and track coaches really influenced my grades or whatever. . . [they] were more like father figures and they really pushed academics. . . If I had to come to them about anything, a problem or anything they were always there and then again, they were also there to correct me when I was wrong. They kind of helped me grow into a man . . . so they were my biggest influence. (Williams & Bryan, 2013, p. 294)

Socioeconomically disadvantaged students and identity. The transition from elementary school to middle school is difficult for many students. As students transition to middle school, many experience diminished academic performance; this is especially the case for inner city youth of low socioeconomic status (Schwartz, Cappella, & Seidman, 2015). "Developmental psychologists posit such declines are due to a poor fit between the needs of early adolescents – industry, identity, and autonomy – and the environment of their new schools" (Schwartz et al., 2015, p. 307). These same psychologists suggest that extracurricular activities may serve as a shock absorber for youth; these activities provide both a haven and a supplemental development setting (Schwartz et al., 2015).

Schwartz et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal study that explored the association between various extracurricular activities and academic performance. Participants in the study were limited to inner-city, middle school students of low socioeconomic status (Schwartz et al., 2015). Survey data from three waves of the *Adolescent Pathways Project* were utilized to conduct the study (Schwartz et al., 2015). The study concluded that students of low socioeconomic status, who participated in two extracurricular activities, experienced a slight improvement in GPA, grade point average (Schwartz et al., 2015). Conversely, the study found that involvement in three or more extracurricular activities negatively impacted the participant's GPA (Schwartz et al., 2015). This finding indicates that students become overwhelmed when faced with too many activities that divide their attention. The same can be true for students living in poverty faced with focusing on academics and an undesirable situation in their home (Williams & Bryan, 2013). Furthermore, the study concluded that the impact of GPA depended largely upon the specific extracurricular activity in which the student participated (Schwartz et al., 2015). Surprisingly, students who participated in religious extracurricular activities were

poorer academic performers than their counterparts, whereas athletic participation significantly positively influenced academic outcomes (Schwartz et al., 2015). Finally, the study concluded that inner-city students of low socioeconomic status who participated in community-related extracurricular activities saw the greatest benefit in terms of academic results (Schwartz et al., 2015). According to Schwartz et al. (2015),

> Youth may be developing new senses of themselves, their role in the community, and their ability to excel in pursuits such as school. Activity settings theory states that through shared activities, participants develop common meanings that influence their cognitive and behavioral development. The community participation items in this study related to neighborhood betterment, youth organizations, and community volunteering. These activities may enhance youth's sense that they can enact positive change in their neighborhood and influence their environment. Community participation may alter youth's sense of themselves (identity) as able to change settings and outcomes (industry and autonomy): key early adolescent developmental needs. (p. 317)

Parallel to the current research, the study examined a key benefit (improved academic performance) of extracurricular activities in respect to low-income youth. The study also indicates that there are specific extracurricular activities that pose greater benefits for low-income youth (Schwartz et al., 2015). In terms of academic performance, inner-city youth of low socioeconomic status were most positively impacted by community-based extracurricular activities. This phenomenon may be attributed to the youth visually seeing that they can make an impact not only in their own lives, but in their communities and world as well, giving one a better sense of who he is presently—his present self—and ultimately who he may become in the future—his future possible self (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Schwartz et al., 2015). Given the

parallels, this study sets a strong foundation for the current research. 4-H is considered a community-based extracurricular activity and may therefore be impactful to youth identity, academic performance, and ultimately the lives of rural, low socioeconomic status youth (Schwartz et al., 2015).

History of 4-H in the United States

The 4-H Organization provides information on the history of the program. As noted by the *4-H Historical Timeline*, 4-H has served in integral role in American history as well as in the development of ground-breaking agricultural practices (4-H Organization, 2001). For early American settlers, farming not only provided sustenance and income for their families, it was regarded as a way of life (4-H Organization, 2001; Rosenburg, 2015). This, however, changed during the late 1800s as factories were being introduced in larger cities (4-H Organization, 2001). Rural youth began to abandon family farms in search of industrial jobs in cities. Due to the lack of potential farmers, the economic balance of the nation was upset; society feared a shortage of food and other agricultural derivative products (4-H Organization, 2001).

Albert B. Graham of Springfield, Ohio, recognized the need to promote occupational agriculture within the school system (4-H Organization, 2001; Rosenburg, 2015). Graham wanted to inform youth of the importance of agriculture and provide them with information relative to good agricultural practices (4-H Organization, 2001). He hoped that as students learned more about agriculture, they would take an interest in occupational farming (4-H Organization, 2001). In the early 1900s, Graham formed an after-school club to convey agricultural information. Due to the agricultural nature of the club, it was affectionately entitled "The Tomato Club" and later "The Corn Growing Club" (4-H Organization, 2001, para. 9). While the club was initially informal, Graham added structure to also teach the youth proper

business etiquette: "Graham formed a club of boys and girls with officers, projects meetings, and record requirements. He sought the assistance of the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station and Ohio State University. His clubs are considered the founding of 4-H" (4-H Organization, 2001, para. 6).

As publicity grew surrounding these agricultural clubs, schools and community groups began to partner with clubs to sponsor agricultural contests, such as the *Corn Growing Contest*, hence the name of the clubs (4-H Organization, 2001). Young participants were tasked to raise corn. Upon harvesting, the crop was judged and the winner received a monetary prize. The contests were very popular, and as a result, more Corn Growing Clubs were started throughout the Midwest as well as the Southeast regions. Over time, the contests expanded and included the display and judging of livestock and domestic products, such as hand-sewn clothing and baked goods (4-H Organization, 2001; Rosenburg, 2015). Meanwhile in Iowa, Captain E. Miller began to modify the dynamic of the Corn Growing Club by incorporating additional instructional tools (4-H Organization, 2001; Rosenburg, 2015).

> Miller's plans fostered many of the teaching tools of today's 4-H program, including life skills and learning-by-doing through projects, group meetings, and exhibits. Community service projects provided active learning interaction between youth and adults and encouraged youth to set and accomplish goals. (4-H Organization, 2001, para. 16)

Throughout the country, other club administrators capitalized on Miller's learning-by-doing model and incorporated various curricula into their programs, such as canning, cooking, sewing for young women, and livestock exhibits for young men. These clubs helped youth realize their potential and provided training for agricultural occupations as well as the management of the home (4-H Organization, 2001).

Quite interestingly, during a time of segregation and unequal gender rights, The Corn Growing Club encouraged equal gender participation as well as participation among various racial groups, more specifically, African Americans (4-H Organization, 2001; Rosenburg, 2015). Thomas Campbell is credited with promoting the Corn Growing Club among Southern African Americans (Rosenburg, 2015). This advancement provided African American youth with a wealth of agricultural knowledge and gave them opportunities to participate in contests hosted by the organization (4-H Organization, 2001).

Great strides were made from a food and agricultural perspective; various methods of crop maintenance were identified to protect crops from diseases and canning methods had greatly improved, enhancing the preservation of food (4-H Organization, 2001). Along with these new developments, improved livestock practices had also been identified (4-H Organization, 2001). The benefits of the Corn Growing Clubs were recognized, as these practices were taught to youth participants who then applied them on their family farms. Rural youth had once again begun to take an interest in food and agriculture (4-H Organization, 2001). Recognizing the potential and benefits of the Corn Growing Clubs, county agents and club administrators began to work together to develop a proposal that was to be taken before the United States Congress (4-H Organization, 2001). The proposal described "a cooperative venture between county officials, the state land-grant college and the federal government. At the heart of this cooperative venture were the agricultural products for young men and women" (4-H Organization, 2001, para. 22). Although Congress did not acknowledge the proposal, club administrators, county agents, and college administrators began to work among themselves to ensure that the clubs were promoted and sustained throughout the country (4-H Organization, 2001).

As the club continued to grow across the nation and evolve, the name of the club was eventually changed to 4-H (4-H Organization, 2001). The four leaf clover, with an "H" on each leaf became the club's insignia (4-H Organization, 2001). The United States Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act in 1914; this act authorized the Cooperative Extension System and recognized the 4-H program on a national level (4-H Organization, 2001; Rosenburg, 2015). The authorization of the Cooperative Extension System ensured that the 4-H program received the resources and funds required to sustain the program throughout the years (4-H Organization, 2001).

The Evolution of the 4-H Program

Today, the focus of the 4-H program has evolved tremendously while maintaining the founding principles of the program. Whereas rural agriculture was the focal point during the program's humble beginnings, 4-H has now expanded to emphasize a variety of life skills. A program that was once dedicated to rural youth now serves youth within inner cities, suburbs, and rural localities alike (4-H Organization, 2016). While the 4-H program has expanded in terms of location, the program still focuses on many of the values and principles established at its inception (Hamilton-Honey, 2017).

> 4-H is the nation's largest positive youth mentoring organization, empowering six million young people in the U.S. In partnership with 110 universities, 4-H life changing programs are research-backed and available through 4-H clubs, camps, afterschool & school enrichment programs in every county and parish in the U.S. 4-H is the youth development program of our nation's Cooperative Extension System and USDA. (4-H Organization, 2016, p. 1)

Purpose and objective. It is incumbent for every organization to identify its purpose and objective (4-H Organization, 2016). In doing so, it allows the organization to align its daily activities with its purpose (4-H Organization, 2016). The purpose of the 4-H program is to help youth "grow and develop to their fullest potential" (Ohio State University, 2016, p. 8). The program uses the Learn by Doing Model to provide youth with meaningful experiences. These experiences allow youth to take what they have learned in theory and apply it in the world around them (Ohio State University, 2016).

This purpose is made evident throughout 4-H literature and via program practice. The 4-H motto: "To make the best better" (4-H Organization, 2016, p. 1), is a reminder for youth to excel beyond their perceived limits. The 4-H pledge focuses on using the head, heart, hands, and one's health to make the world a better place (4-H Organization, 2016). The pledge is recited during each club meeting. It reinforces the principles of the 4-H program and encourages youth to live by them daily (Cassels, Post, & Nestor, 2015). The 4-H creed expounds upon the pledge and demonstrates how the aforementioned head, heart, hands, and health may be utilized in practice to achieve fulfillment as a productive citizen. The motto, creed, and pledge are lived out via a host of activities, curriculum, contests ,and projects sponsored by the 4-H program. Examples of these include but are not limited to public speaking contests, talent shows, nutrition curriculum, camps, conferences, community clubs, county fair exhibits, community services projects, etc. (4-H Organization, 2016).

Demographics. Nationally, 4-H involves youth ages 5–19 in elementary, middle, and secondary schools. Diversity is celebrated within the program. Of the six million youth serviced by the 4-H program, 52% are female while 48% are male (Virginia 4-H, 2017). In terms of ethnicity, Virginia 4-H (2017) reported the make-up of the organization consists of Caucasians

(62%) and African Americans, Hispanics, Asian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaskan, which account for 38%. Capitalizing upon volunteerism, the 4-H Organization manages projects and outreach via program officials and a large volunteer base. Throughout the U.S., there are over 563,000 4-H volunteers (Virginia 4-H, 2017). This large network serves as the fabric of the organization's being, as volunteers dedicate their time and access to resources for the development and mentoring of youth across the country.

4-H Study on Positive Youth Development

Given its history, networks, and developments, 4-H is a highly organized, structured program (4-H Organization, 2016). The organization seeks to positively impact what it calls the 5Cs for every individual that partakes in the program. The 5Cs are outlined below in Figure 2.1.

THE "5 CS" OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT	
"C"	**DEFINITION**
COMPETENCE:	Positive view of one's actions in specific areas, including social and academic skills.
CONFIDENCE:	An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy.
CONNECTION:	Positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in exchanges between the individual and his or her peers, family, school, and community and in which both parties contribute to the relationship.
CHARACTER:	Respect for societal and cultural norms, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity.
CARING:	A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.

THE FIVE CS LEAD TO A SIXTH C – CONTRIBUTION	
CONTRIBUTION:	Contributions to self, family, community, and to the institutions of a civil society.

Figure 2.1. Depiction of the Five Cs of Positive Youth Development. From *The Positive Development of Youth: Comprehensive Findings from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development*, by R. Lerner & J. Lerner, 2015, Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University, p. 10. Copyright 2015 by National 4-H Council. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix B).

The 4-H Organization applies its formula for success which incorporates "skill building, long-term caring adults, and meaningful leadership" to achieve the desired outcomes (Lerner & Lerner, 2015, p. ii). Figure 2.2 below visually outlines 4-H's Formula for Success.

Figure 2.2. Depiction of 4-H formula for success. From *The Positive Development of Youth: Comprehensive Findings from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development*, by R. Lerner & J. Lerner, 2015, Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University, p. ii. Copyright 2015 by National 4-H Council. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix B). When properly executed, the formula not only yields desirable outcomes in terms of the 5Cs but also improves "contribution" or citizenship and "reduces risky behaviors" (Lerner & Lerner, 2015, p. ii).

The 4-H *Formula for Success* proposition was tested via the *4-H Study of Positive Youth Development* (Lerner & Lerner, 2015). The longitudinal study followed the lives of 5th grade 4-H participants through 12th grade. Involving more than 7,000 student participants, the study spanned across all but eight states in the U.S. (Lerner & Lerner, 2015, p. 13). The intent of the study was to determine how the 4-H program impacted the lives of participants. Researchers

hypothesized that by gaining the 5Cs (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring) through 4-H involvement, participants gain the 6th C, which stands for contribution. Once participants understand the concept of contribution, they give back to "self, family, community and to the institutions of a civil society" (Lerner & Lerner, 2015, p. 10). One major concept of the study is based upon the notion of "plasticity" (Lerner & Lerner, 2015, p. 9). In other words, youth are not simply a product of their home environment, but they may also be influenced by other environmental factors within their schools, social clubs, and other areas of involvement (Lerner & Lerner, 2015; Markus & Nurius, 1986). This concept is critical because it implies that well-structured extracurricular activities, such as the 4-H program, have the ability to positively influence the lives of socioeconomically disadvantaged youth. This positive influence may potentially generate positive possible selves and ultimately promising adult outcomes (Lerner & Lerner, 2015; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Study findings. The *Positive Youth Development Study* found that 4-H involvement may play a significant role in positive youth development trajectories (Lerner & Lerner, 2015). The study found, in comparison to their peers, 4-H participants were more likely to participate in science related programs outside of school, be active in their communities, live a healthier life, and be less likely to partake in risky behaviors such as drugs, alcohol, premarital sex (Lerner & Lerner, 2015). Furthermore, the study reported that participants perceived improvements in each of the 5 Cs as a result of 4-H participation (Lerner & Lerner, 2015). Throughout the study, the researchers determined that these optimistic results were in part due to the "structured out-of-school time learning, leadership experiences, and adult mentoring that young people receive through their participation in 4-H" (Lerner & Lerner, 2015, p. 1). The *Positive Youth Development Study* is significant to this research because it demonstrates the impact of

participation in the 4-H program over a sustained period of time and begins to open up dialogue about how the 4-H program may be impactful to those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

4-H: Community Involvement and Engagement

4-H's Learn by Doing model offers youth the opportunity to get involved in their local community through community service. The intent of utilizing this model is to engage youth at an early age, build important relationships with peers and local leaders, and help participants gain a sense of ownership and accomplishment (4-H Organization, 2016). The Learn by Doing model and community involvement are imperative to the research because this effective combination fosters active involvement and further gives youth an opportunity to explore who they may become in their communities in the future (4-H Organization, 2016). In an effort to determine how "youth voice" affected ownership and engagement within a service-oriented youth program, more specifically the 4-H program, Cater, Machtmes, and Fox (2013) conducted a phenomenological study (p. 1). The study included six, purposefully sampled youth participants (Cater et al., 2013). An equal number of participants were selected in each of the following categories: "high intensity involvement, medium intensity involvement, and low intensity involvement" (Cater et al., 2013, p. 4). Each level of involvement was based upon the participants' tendency to be vocal during activities as well as the length of time/attendance the participant was involved with the 4-H program. The primary data collection method was interviews (Cater et al., 2013). The data concluded three major findings (Cater et al., 2013), which are presented under the next three headings.

Independence and encouraging adult mentors. Generally, the participants perceived their thoughts and opinions were of value by the adults who facilitated the club. They strongly

believed their views contributed to the success of their organization (Cater et al., 2013). As participants' perception of value increased, vocalization and involvement increased as well (Cater et al., 2013). The study found that the supportiveness of the adult mentors within the group set the tone for the club and provided the trust and stability needed for participants to freely express themselves (Cater et al., 2013). In essence, the adult mentors of the group provided realistic future possible selves for the participants. "Discussion provides a way for both youth and adults to achieve clarity and to bring meaning to the experience" (Cater et al., 2013, p. 11). As the adults provided a suitable environment and generated meaningful exchanges, participants undoubtedly gained a sense of present and future identity (Cater et al., 2013).

Youth voice cultivates engagement. Participants in the study noted that as their group worked together and built social relationships with one another, pride and commitment dramatically increased because the club was a safe haven for their group (Cater et al., 2013).

> Trust undergirds this process and the more trust that youth have in themselves, the adult learners, and their peers, the more willing they are to engage in the decision making process. As youth recognized the importance of their work, attendance and active participation in the program became much more important to them. (Cater et al., 2013, p. 10).

If a safe haven generates dramatically increased pride and commitment conversely, one would argue that a volatile environment, bounded by poverty, would accomplish the inverse (Cater et al., 2013). This finding implies that a trusting environment may potentially mitigate the negative effects of those living in poverty by providing students with something that they lack in their homes: stability and trust (Cater et al., 2013). One point to keep in mind: the lack of stability and trust for children living in poverty is not necessarily a reflection of the parents in the home but a

product of financial instability and being unsure of what the future holds (Cater et al., 2013). It is often difficult for individuals to envision a positive situation if they have not been exposed to one (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Williams & Bryan, 2013). 4-H and other positive extracurricular activities may provide a means of stability and trust for students, enabling them to gain a sense of pride and commitment, as found in the aforementioned study (Cater et al., 2013).

  Peer advocacy. Those who were perceived as more involved within the group found themselves encouraging others who were minimally involved (Cater et al., 2013). Essentially, involved participants gained a sense of leadership and empowerment to engage others, whereas those who received encouragement began to see their peers as advocates (Cater et al., 2013). Collectively, the group recognized their profound concern for their peers as well as members in their communities; this was evident through their community service activities (Cater et al., 2013). The study and its findings are profoundly relevant to the current research as the study utilized the phenomenological approach to better understand how 4-H participation influenced youth voice, ownership, and engagement (Cater et al., 2013).

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Summary

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  Consider the challenges today's youth are faced with: peer pressure, the temptation of drugs, sex, alcohol, rigorous educational requirements, etc. Now envision coping with these challenges while living in poverty. Impoverished youth may ultimately feel as if failure is imminent. Often, the only possible self they can envision is the one that they are accustomed to seeing every day in their community, an image shackled in the bonds of lack, repeating the cycle endured by their parents and those before them. There are grave consequences to such images, as these youth become everything they feared they would become. These consequences are not

limited to those directly impacted, but to society as a whole, as crime infiltrates the nation and another generation is born into poverty.

Morally and ethically, something must be done to reverse this trend. Impoverished youth must begin to see the possibilities of who they may become; the motivation to achieve this outcome will follow. The 4-H program is a youth mentoring and development program (4-H Organization, 2016). As declared by its motto, "To Make the Best Better" (4-H Organization, 2016, p. 1), the program encourages youth to push past perceived barriers and better themselves to reach their fullest potential. Exposure to a plethora of activities, camps, contests, etc., allows youth opportunities that they may not have otherwise experienced, thus allowing them to explore the possibilities of who they may become.

Chapter Two began with an overview of the chapter, restating the research questions and giving a brief synopsis of both the theoretical framework and related literature. The theoretical framework section described, in detail, the possible selves theory. The possible selves theory declares that the mental images one has of himself in the future motivates his actions to achieve or avoid these images (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The theory is applicable to the research because the experiences gained in 4-H may potentially enable participants to envision new possible self images. The related literature section followed the theoretical framework. Within this section, I noted significant studies and information relative to the benefits of extracurricular activities, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and the 4-H program. These studies provide a foundational understanding of how extracurricular activities are perceived by those in various contexts. Throughout the related literature section, the stage is set for the research project. The chapter concluded with a summary.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how adults who grew up as disadvantaged children were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H program in a rural southern Virginia county. For the purpose of the research, a disadvantaged child was defined as an individual with unfavorable circumstances, more specifically of a low socioeconomic status, while 4-H experiences were defined as membership in the local 4-H program for a minimum of two years (Anderman & Anderman, 2009; Hayes, 2014). This chapter explicitly describes the methods utilized to conduct the study and ensure the integrity of the data. The chapter begins speaking to the design of study, followed by research questions as well as information relative to the participants and setting. The second half of the chapter includes discussions pertaining to data collection and data analysis and concludes with trustworthiness of the study.

Design

In *Phenomenological Research Methods,* Moustakas (1994) noted George Hegel's definition of phenomenology as "knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience" (p. 26). Phenomenology examines one's lived experiences. Transcendental phenomenology, coined by Husserl, "emphasizes subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experience and provides a systematic and disciplined methodology for derivation of knowledge" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 45). In order to capture the essence of the phenomenon, one must remove personal bias and focus solely on the subjects' acts and emotions, a process known as epoche (Moustakas, 1994).

The study employed a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological approach. The transcendental, phenomenological approach was appropriate for the study because I sought to understand the lived 4-H experiences of several participants who endured poverty in a rural community (Moustakas, 1994). I bracketed my thoughts, opinions, and beliefs throughout the process; this enabled me to capture the essence of the phenomenon for the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing is critical to the transcendental, phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994).

Rooted in the purpose statement of the study are the participants who have a story to tell regarding their communities, their socioeconomic status, and their lived experiences in the 4-H program. Previous researchers have overlooked these participants and their stories; subsequently, my goal was to give voice to these participants, hence the selection of this particular design (van Manen, 1990). In utilizing this particular method, I gained a deep understanding of each participant's experience and the phenomenon via deep, thick, and rich descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through deep, thick, and rich descriptions is at the core of the phenomenological approach, which supports the appropriateness of the methodology for this study (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The proposed study is guided by four research questions (RQ):

RQ1: How do adults who grew up as disadvantaged children describe their experiences in a local 4-H program within rural southern Virginia (Hershbery et al., 2013)?

RQ2: Did participation in 4-H change self-perceptions of adults who grew up as disadvantaged children? If so, how (Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

RQ3: Were adults who grew up as disadvantaged children impacted by positive or negative experiences within the 4-H program? If so, how (Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

RQ4: According to adults who grew up as disadvantaged children, how, if at all, did participation in 4-H influence their lives (Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

Setting

The study took place in Southern County (pseudonym), Virginia. The population within Southern County is (redacted) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). In terms of ethnicity for the location, (redacted) are Caucasian, (redacted) are African American, (redacted) are American Indian, and (redacted) are Hispanic & Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017, Race and Hispanic Origin). The median household income for those in the county is (redacted) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017, Income & Poverty). From an educational perspective, (redacted) are 25+ and have obtained a High School Diploma, while only (redacted) have obtained a Bachelor's Degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017, Education). The leading industries within the county are health care and manufacturing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017, Economy). Southern County, Virginia, was selected as the site of choice due to its rural locality and its relatively low median household income in comparison to other counties in the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Based upon these characteristics, the maturity of the 4-H program within the county, and its rural locality, the location provided information-rich participants to study the phenomenon.

Participants had the option to meet face-to-face in the Southern County Community Center (pseudonym) or via telephone/Skype web conference for interviews and focus group sessions. All interview and focus group sessions were audio recorded. The Southern County Community Center was initially selected because it is centrally located within the county, providing easy access to the participants (see Appendix C: Permission to Utilize Facility).

Furthermore, the facility offered a variety of private and group settings for interviews and data collection. The facility is relatively new, with very accommodating staff, which allowed the participants to feel at ease during the data collection process.

Participants

Participants were selected from the rural, Southern County (pseudonym) 4-H program in southern Virginia. Currently, the 4-H program in Southern County consists of participants in grades 4–12 (Anonymous, personal communication, April 20, 2015). All students within the district are enrolled in the 4-H program during the fourth grade because the program supplements academic curriculum and is integrated into the school day. Participants included in this study were limited to those who participated in 4-H activities, external to the school day, as opposed to students who were auto-enrolled in the program through the school system. These activities included but were not limited to community clubs, camps, and competitions. All community clubs in the county are facilitated by adult volunteers at the direction of the county 4-H Administrator; 4-H camps and competitions are facilitated by both adult and teen volunteers throughout the state.

According to the Virginia Cooperative Extension (2016), during the 2015–2016 academic year, (redacted) teens were enrolled in the local 4-H program and (redacted) 4-H participants participated in 4-H camp. Consistent with National Demographics, the majority of participants in the local program are Caucasian (64%), with minorities accounting for approximately 36% of the population (Virginia 4-H, 2017). In terms of gender, the local 4-H program is equally balanced (Virginia 4-H, 2017). I sought to select approximately 10–15 relevant participants, or until data saturation was reached, with a goal of variation in terms of gender and race (Moustakas, 1994). In regard to the number of participants, Moustakas (1994) has advised that

this sample size for phenomenological studies is satisfactory. Patton (2015) suggested that the number of participants be based largely upon the study's objectives, resources, and allotted time. My estimation of participants for the current study took into account the suggestions of both well-known researchers, giving consideration to validity, resources, the time allotted to complete the study, as well as my objective to accurately capture the phenomenon.

The participants for the study were identified utilizing purposeful sampling, more specifically snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). I worked with the county 4-H administrator to identify potential participants based on previous 4-H involvement. The 4-H administrator sent me a list of potential participants along with their email addresses via email. I received a commitment from the 4-H administrator to provide this information as well as permission to contact potential participants once the study received IRB approval (See Appendix D: Permission to Contact). These potential participants recommended other individuals for the study.

Procedures

Pilot Testing

Creswell (2013) asserts the importance of well-constructed interviews during the data collection phase of qualitative research. The foundation of well-constructed interviews lies within the structure of interview questions, which seek to unveil the essence of the phenomenon. The structure and content of the interview questions are critical to the research (Creswell, 2013). Due to the importance of the interview questions, Kvale (2007) suggested pilot testing interview questions with either a small participant group or subject matter expert to ensure interview questions generate information-rich responses and enable the researcher to study the phenomenon in depth. During such pilot tests, subject matter experts or the small group of

participants give the researcher valuable feedback, allowing the researcher to slightly modify the interview questions for maximum effectiveness (Kvale, 2007).

Upon completion and defense of the study's proposal, I submitted the appropriate documentation to receive Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at Liberty University (see Appendix E). I utilized pilot testing for all preliminary individual and focus group interview questions once IRB approval was complete. A total of three participants were enlisted to conduct the pilot study. The sample size of three was selected because it is approximately 20% of the study's total sample (Kvale, 2007). I worked closely with the local 4-H administrator to identify potential participants. The 4-H administrator sent me a list of potential participants along with their email addresses via email. I received a commitment from the 4-H administrator to provide this information as well as permission to contact potential participants once the study received IRB approval (See Appendix D: Permission to Contact). These potential participants recommended other individuals for the study. Once potential participants were identified, they were contacted via personal email with a scripted message, Email Invitation for Participation (Appendix F), noting a general description of the research, the purpose of the study, participant criteria, an invitation to apply for the study, as well as my contact information. In addition, the email invitation sent to potential participants included the Informed Consent Form (Appendix G), which had to be signed and returned to me prior to taking part in the study. Participants for the study were limited to those who were socioeconomically disadvantaged as children and participated in the 4-H program for a minimum of two years within rural Southern County, Virginia. For the purpose of the study, socioeconomically disadvantaged participants were defined as those who score in the lower third of the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2014). See Appendix H for

permission to use the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status. Once I identified qualified pilot study participants, the data collection process began. I noted responses to all interview and focus group sessions and sought candid feedback from participants in regard to the relevance and wording of the questions. As a result of feedback, interview and focus group questions were slightly modified (Kvale, 2007). The modified interview questions were then entered into the appendix of the manuscript and resubmitted for final approval via the IRB application process.

Once the study received final IRB approval (see Appendix E), I continued with the next phase of the study which was participant solicitation and selection. Detailed information concerning participants is located within the Participants section of the manuscript. I worked with the local 4-H county administrator to identify potential participants. Once potential participants were identified, said participants were contacted via personal email with a scripted message, Email Invitation for Participation (Appendix F), noting a general description of the research, the purpose of the study, participant criteria, an invitation to apply for the study, as well as my contact information. In addition, the email invitation sent to potential participants included the Informed Consent Form (Appendix G), which had to be signed and returned to me prior to taking part in the study. Participants for the study were limited to those who were socioeconomically disadvantaged as children and participated in the 4-H program for a minimum of two years within rural Southern County, Virginia. For the purpose of the study, socioeconomically disadvantaged participants were defined as those who score in the lower third of the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status (see Appendix J: Hollingshead Four Factor Index). Participants were intentionally limited to this specific criterion in order to accurately understand and describe the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Participant Qualifiers

I took measures to ensure the participants selected for the study had experienced all elements of the phenomenon. Relative to the study, these elements included participation within the 4-H program for a minimum of two years within rural southern Virginia and having experienced less than favorable socioeconomic status. Participants were asked to provide information relative to their experiences in the 4-H program via the Demographics & 4-H Involvement Questionnaire (Appendix I) and to complete the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status (Appendix J).

4-H participation. In an effort to select the most information rich participants, I collected qualifying data relative to the participants' 4-H experiences. Potential participants were asked to self-report, via the Demographics & 4-H Involvement Questionnaire (Appendix I), name, age, affiliation with the 4-H program, county of participation, the number of years involved, along with corresponding dates, as well as any 4-H specific activities/contests they may have participated in. Participants were asked to provide their signature on the Demographics & 4-H Involvement Questionnaire, certifying that all information provided was correct and complete to the best of the participant's knowledge.

Socioeconomic scale. Participants were required to demonstrate eligibility based upon prior socioeconomic status. I used the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status to determine if the potential participants did indeed experience less than favorable socioeconomic status during their youth. Data from the scale were collected via the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status form (Appendix J). The Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status was developed by August B. Hollingshead (1975). Though developed over 40 years ago, the scale or variations of the scale are still widely used,

specifically in both the medicine and public health fields (Barratt, 2006; Cirino et al., 2002). The scale is multidimensional because it assesses four factors to determine the socioeconomic status of the participant (Hollingshead, 1975). These four factors include "education, occupation, sex, and marital status" (Hollingshead, 1975, p. 1). While sex and marital status are noted, the score is generated via numerical assignments for both education and occupation. From an educational perspective, the scale assigns a score of 1–7 based upon the highest educational level completed (Hollingshead, 1975). From an occupational perspective, the scale assigns numerical values of 1–9 based upon occupation. To determine a total score of the household, the participant's occupation is weighted by five and the educational level by three; if both the husband and wife are employed, scores are calculated separately then averaged to generate the household's total score (Hollingshead, 1975). Totaled scores may range from eight to 66, assuming that higher scores indicate an upper class while lower scores indicate lower class status (Hollingshead, 1975). Given the scope of the study, participants responded to the survey based upon the education and occupation of their parents during the participant's youth. Participants with an overall score of 27 and below were considered for the study. This value was chosen because it represents the lower third of the socioeconomic scale and, thus, those who were more likely to have experienced the phenomenon from a socioeconomic perspective (Hollingshead, 1975).

Participants who met the study's requirements relative to socioeconomic scale and 4-H experience were accepted into the study; participants were notified via email with the Letter of Acceptance (Appendix K). Those who did not meet the study's requirements also received notification via email with the Letter of Rejection (Appendix L). Once all qualified participants were selected and acknowledged their willingness to participate, the data collection phase followed. Data were collected through individual interview sessions, focus group sessions, and

collection of artifacts; specifics regarding data collection may be found with the Data Collection

section of the manuscript. Data analysis followed and is described in detail within the Data

Analysis section of the manuscript.

Independent Consultant Review. Shenton (2004) recommends examination of the

research project by individuals other than the researcher. "The fresh perspective that such

individuals may be able to bring may allow them to challenge assumptions made by the

investigator, whose closeness to the project frequently inhibits his or her ability to view it with

real detachment" (Shenton, 2004, p. 67). Incorporating expert feedback into the research

ultimately strengthens the credibility of the final report (Shenton, 2004). As a result of this

recommendation, I enlisted the assistance of an independent consultant who is well versed in the

qualitative research process and a 4-H subject-matter expert (see Appendix M: Independent

Consultant Confirmation). At the conclusion of the research project, I emailed the independent

consultant a copy of the draft report. The independent consultant reviewed the following

sections of the draft document: Data Analysis, Limitations, Recommendations for Future

Research, and the Conclusion. The independent consultant provided feedback to me via email. I

made the necessary updates and the final written report was generated and validated. Several

methodologies were utilized to ensure trustworthiness of the data throughout the process, as

detailed within the Trustworthiness section.

The Researcher's Role

My essential role as researcher in the study was to accurately capture the voices of those

who had experienced poverty and participated in the 4-H program in Southern County, Virginia.

This is a phenomenon that I have experienced which has positively influenced my life. I

understand that every individual has varied perceptions based upon environmental, family, and

other factors. Bracketing, for this reason, was critical, so that I did not allow my own voice to bias the study, hence, the utilization of the transcendental phenomenological methodology. I fully recognized that my role was to discover the essence of the phenomenon exclusively for the participants, even if their experiences completely contradict my own.

Due to the rural nature of the locality, I recognized some of the participants within the study. This recognition was limited to simply knowing a family member of the participants or making some educational connections, as there is only one high school within the county. In an effort to minimize the perception of bias and improve trustworthiness of the study, I eliminated participants to whom I was related or with whom I had a close friendship.

Data Collection

In order to capture the essence of the participants' lived experiences, data must be collected. Data triangulation, the technique which validates data via a crosscheck of at least two other sources, is critical to the credibility of the research (Moustakas, 1994). I utilized three forms of data collection to achieve data triangulation. The initial stage of this process was individual interview sessions. Secondly, I conducted two separate focus groups with the participants. Finally, throughout the course of the research, artifact replicas were collected. I sought to include photographs of participants' 4-H awards, newspaper write-ups, high school yearbooks, 4-H memorabilia, 4-H related posters, and projects, or any item of substance that the participants related to their lived experiences. I chose to conduct individual interviews first because it allowed participants to express their thoughts and opinions without potentially becoming biased by other participant responses during the focus group sessions. Focus group sessions were conducted secondarily for this reason, but also to allow participants to expound on their initial thoughts, as new thoughts may have been provoked by hearing others speak about

their experiences. Replicas of artifacts were provided by the 4-H administrators at the conclusion of the interview and focus group sessions.

Interviews

Upon final IRB approval, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with 11 participants until data saturation was reached (Moustakas, 1994). Semi-structured interviews include both "open ended and more theoretically driven questions, eliciting data grounded on the experience of the participant as well as data guided by existing constructs in the particular discipline within which one is conducting research" (Galletta, 2013, p. 1). In addition, semi-structured interviews incorporate the use of probing questions to gain a more in-depth understanding of the participant's experience (Galletta, 2013). For these reasons, researchers deem the use of semi-structured interviews appropriate for qualitative research (Galletta, 2013). More specifically, semi-structured interviews were appropriate for my research because I sought to gain an in-depth understanding of how the participants described their experiences in the 4-H program and how these experiences shaped their lives.

All interview sessions were audio recorded and later transcribed by me. Each interview session consisted of 15 open-ended questions about being of low socioeconomic status, participation in the 4-H program, and essentially how these experiences influenced who the participants are today. Participants were given a choice of face-to-face interviews in the Southern County Community Center (see Appendix C: Permission to Utilize Facility) or via telephone/Skype web conference. The duration of each session was approximately 30 minutes. I began each interview session with a scripted message detailing the interview process (Appendix N: Introduction to Interview/Focus Group Script). After the interview, participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts and/or audio recordings to ensure the data reflected their

own thoughts. I emailed transcripts to each participant. Each participant had one week to contact me regarding any discrepancies. Participants were encouraged to schedule follow-up sessions, if needed, to modify responses.

Below are the interview questions. Each question was carefully selected to reflect the initial purpose of the study and answer the supporting research questions (Creswell, 2013). Interview questions 1–8 were designed to provide an in-depth description of the socioeconomic status and locality of participants, who are at the center of each research question. Gaining an understanding of how socioeconomic status and locality impacted each participant aids in the understanding of how their 4-H experiences impacted their trajectories. Interview questions 9–15 focus on the participants' 4-H experiences and how these experiences perceivably impacted their adult lives, giving insight into each of the four research questions.

Open-Ended Interview Questions (Appendix N)

Experiences Relative to Socioeconomic Status and Location

1. Whom did you live with when you were a child (Hollingshead, 1975)?

2. Where did your parent(s)/guardian(s) work when you were a child (Cater et al., 2013; Hollingshead, 1975)?

    a. What were your parent(s)/guardian(s) job title(s) (Cater et al., 2013; Hollingshead, 1975)?

3. How, if in any way, did their job influence you as a child? As an adult (Cater et al., 2013; Hollingshead, 1975)?

4. Please describe how your family's financial situation impacted you as a child (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Robinson, 2014; Williams & Bryan, 2013).

a. How did your family's financial situation influence you as an adult (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Robinson, 2014; Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

5. How do you describe your life currently (Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

6. Please describe your experiences growing up in the country (Voigt, Talbert, McKinley, & Brady, 2013; Wozniak et al., 2014).

7. How, if at all, did growing up in the country influence your life (Dunstan & Todd, 2012; Wozniak et al., 2014)?

8. How, if at all, do you think your life would be different if you grew up in the city (Dunstan & Todd, 2012; Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

Experiences Relative to the 4-H Program

9. Please describe your experiences in the 4-H program (4-H Organization, 2001).

10. What do you remember most about these experiences (Why?) (4-H Organization, 2016)?

11. Please describe how, if in any way, the 4-H program was helpful (4-H Organization, 2016; Balyer & Gunduz, 2012).

12. Please describe any negative experiences you had in the 4-H program (4-H Organization, 2016; Balyer & Gunduz, 2012; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

13. Please describe how, if in any way, these experiences have influenced you (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

14. Aside from 4-H, what other extracurricular activities did you participate in as a child (Balyer & Gunduz, 2012; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

15. What influence, if any, do you think these activities had on your life (Williams & Bryan, 2013; Wozniak et al., 2014)?

Focus Groups

The focus group allows the researcher to interact with several participants at the same time (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, it allows participants to interact with others who have also experienced the phenomenon of being socioeconomically disadvantaged and those who have participated in the local 4-H program. The hope was that in an environment of their peers, the participants felt more comfortable discussing their thoughts and experiences relative to the phenomenon. Once all individual interviews were conducted, there were two semi-structured focus group sessions conducted. Similar to the semi-structured interview, the semi-structured focus group allows probing questions to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences, but in a group setting (Galletta, 2013). As a result, researchers have also deemed the semi-structured focus group appropriate for qualitative research (Galletta, 2013). Once all individual interviews were conducted, the participants selected one of two focus group sessions to attend. Participants had the option of meeting in the Southern County Community Center or via telephone/Skype web conference. Each was expected to last approximately two hours. The focus group was facilitated by me; I began each focus group session with a scripted message detailing the focus group session process (Appendix N: Introduction to Interview/Focus Group Script), after which I prompted the group with questions contained below. Questions 1–7 focus on the participants' perception of self and are based upon the constructs of the possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986). These questions were designed to answer the following research questions:

RQ2: Did participation in 4-H change self-perceptions of adults who grew up as disadvantaged children? If so, how (Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

RQ4: According to adults who grew up as disadvantaged children, how, if at all, did

participation in 4-H influence their lives (Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

Questions 8–13 focus on the 4-H experiences of each participant and were generated to provide

insight into each of the four research questions. The sessions were audio recorded and

transcribed by me.

Open-Ended Focus Group Questions (Appendix P)

Possible Selves Perspectives

1. What influenced your personality as a child (Kort-Butler, 2012; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oosterhoff et al., 2017)?

2. How, if at all, does how you see yourself impact who or what you will become (Lerner & Lerner, 2015; Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

3. What impact, if any, does growing up in a financially constrained home have on the way an individual sees himself (Arndt et al., 2013; Bulanda & McCrea, 2013)?

4. Tell me about some of the problems you faced growing up (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

5. What impact did these problems have on how you saw yourself then and now (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

6. Who or what did you want to become when you were a child? And why (Cater et al., 2013; Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

    a. At what point did you make this decision (Cater et al., 2013; Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

    b. What motivated you to achieve this goal (Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

7. What impact, if any, did participation in 4-H have on who or what you wanted to become (Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

4-H Program Perspectives

8. What activities and competitions did you participate in throughout your 4-H membership (4-H Organization, 2016; Cicchetti et al., 2014)?

    a. Which one do you remember most? And why (4-H Organization, 2016; Cicchetti et al., 2014)?

9. What negative experiences, if any, did you have during your participation in the 4-H program (Dunstan & Todd, 2012)?

10. Based upon your experiences, how can the 4-H program be helpful to today's children (4-H Organization, 2016; Durlak et al., 2010)?

11. As a child, how did you see your 4-H mentors (Erikson, 2007; Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

    a. What do you remember most about them (Erikson, 2007; Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

12. What is the single most important thing you learned through participation in the 4-H program (David, 2014)?

13. What skills did you learn or develop through participation in 4-H (David, 2014; Hayes, 2014)?

    a. How, if at all, have these skills helped you throughout your life and now (David, 2014; Hayes, 2014)?

Artifacts

Replicas of artifacts were collected during the data collection phase of the research. While artifacts are typically used with the ethnography approach to illustrate culture, the method is deemed appropriate for this study, as the 4-H program has its own unique culture (Creswell, 2013). I sought to collect photographs of participants' 4-H awards, newspaper write-ups, high school yearbooks, 4-H memorabilia, 4-H related posters, and projects relative to the

phenomenon. Original artifacts were not available; I utilized replicas provided by the local 4-H Office. The purpose of collecting artifacts was to better help the reader understand the culture of the program and the common lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). More specifically, the collection of artifacts was intended to aid in the description of the participants' 4-H experiences and add insight to the following research question:

RQ1: How do adults who grew up as disadvantaged children describe their experiences in a

local 4-H program within rural southern Virginia (Hershbery et al., 2013)?

Data Analysis

Data analysis is critical to the research: "Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings" (Patton, 2015, p. 43). Through this process, the essence of lived 4-H experiences and low socioeconomic status were identified. Interviews, focus group, and artifacts were analyzed via a thorough data analysis process. I chose to utilize Moustakas' modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method to analyze the data (Moustakas, 1994). This particular method consists of seven steps that guided me through the data analysis process. These steps include the following: evaluation of each transcribed statement, documenting critical statements, horizontalization, clustering, synthesizing, reflection, and creation of textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

Throughout the data analysis process, I bracketed my thoughts and opinions relative to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) referred to this process as epoche. The epoche process enabled me to analyze the data in an unbiased manner (Moustakas, 1994). As a result of unbiased data analysis, the study's findings reflected the lived experiences of each participant (Moustakas, 1994).

At the conclusion of each interview and focus group I transcribed the data. I utilized the ATLAS.ti computer program to store data and assist with data synthesis. Post transcription of each interview and focus group session, I uploaded the file into the ATLAS.ti software program. As each file was uploaded, I assigned preset codes to the data. Preset codes were established once the final interview and focus group questions were pilot tested and approved by the IRB. These codes were generated based upon anticipated, categorical responses gathered from interview and focus group questions. Preset codes included categories such as emotional response, successes, financial challenges, future identity, present identity, and positive interactions. Throughout the interview process, I compared newly transcribed data with previously transcribed data. This enabled me to identify emergent codes and determine when data saturation had been reached (Moustakas, 1994).

After reading the transcriptions several times, I began to identify critical statements relative to the phenomenon. Critical statements provide valuable insight in regard to the participant's experience (Moustakas, 1994). During this step, each statement relative to the phenomenon was considered to be of equal value, a process known as horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). These statements were flagged in the ATLAS.ti software program. Once all statements were identified, I began to identify themes in which the data would be categorized. A theme was attached to each of the statements identified in the horizontalization process. This process, which organizes the data by theme, is known as clustering (Moustakas, 1994). Synthesis is a process in which data are analyzed and combined (Moustakas, 1994). As I synthesized the data by examining the content and number of times a theme was identified, major themes emerged (Moustakas, 1994).

Once the data were clustered and synthesized, I used major themes to generate a textural description of the phenomenon, which described what the participants experienced (Moustakas, 1994). I then carefully considered the textural description of the phenomenon; this process is called reflection (Moustakas, 1994). After the reflection process, a structural description was also generated, describing how the phenomenon was experienced (Moustakas, 1994). At this point, I coded artifacts structurally or texturally. Artifacts that describe what the participants experienced were utilized to supplement the textural description (Moustakas, 1994). Artifacts that describe how the participants experienced the phenomenon were utilized to supplement the structural description (Moustakas, 1994). The process of defining textural and structural descriptions is achieved through imaginative variation, analyzing the phenomenon through various participants' viewpoints (Moustakas, 1994).

Lastly, once textural and structural descriptions were generated, these descriptions and artifacts were used to generate a composite description of the participants' lived experiences relative to low socioeconomic status and participation in the 4-H program within a rural community (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a critical element to the research study (Creswell, 2013). I utilized several strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. These strategies also ensured the integrity of the research process.

The Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status: Validity and Reliability

While validity and reliability are typically not a concern of qualitative inquiry, socioeconomic status is an important factor in the study (Creswell, 2013). The majority of tests used to measure socioeconomic status are quantitative in nature (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). The

Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status, which is a quantitative index, was used during the study to ensure participants had experienced the phenomenon of being socioeconomically disadvantaged. As a result, I have included information relative to the validity and reliability of the index.

A high degree of reliability, "the extent to which an experiment, test or any measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials and validity, the degree to which the test or any measuring procedure assesses what it claims to measure" (Carmines & Zeller, 1979, p. 12) is critical to research instrumentation. The intent of the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status is to measure an individual's socioeconomic status (Hollingshead, 1975). The scale is particularly important to the research because the results derived from the assessment were used as one of the determining factors in deciding if an individual qualified as a participant for study.

Validity. Widely utilized in the fields of psychology and medical research, the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status is considered to be "one of the most commonly used to measure socioeconomic status" (Cirino et al., 2002, p. 148). The indices of scale include "education, occupation, sex, and marital status" (Hollingshead, 1975, p. 1). According to Marks, McMillian, Jones, and Ainley (2000) occupation, education, and family structure are and have historically been strong measures of socioeconomic status. This would indicate that the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status is highly valid in terms of construct validity; the very essence of socioeconomic status hinges on the occupation/income, education and family structure of the individual(s) relative to others in society (Marks et al., 2000).

Reliability. In a study, Cirino et al. (2002) established interrater reliability of the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic status. The study (*N*=140) not only established interrater reliability amongst individual participants but among family structure groups as well, differentiating between "one-wage earner families (n=65)" and "two-wage earner families (n=75)" (Cirino et al., 2002, p. 150). The researchers concluded that interrater reliability for the scale was significant. Cohen's kappa coefficient was used to demonstrate the measure of reliability. The K value for the total sample of 140 was .68, indicating an 89% agreement; "two-wage earner families (n=75)" was .82, indicating a 96% agreement; and "one-wage earner families (n=65)" was .56, indicating an 80% agreement (Cirino et al., 2002, p. 150). In light of previous research relative to the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status, the scale is valid in terms of constructs and deemed statistically reliable, hence the selection of the instrument for the research at hand.

Credibility

Internal validity, assurance that the study assesses what it proposed to, is critical to research. In terms of qualitative research, internal validity, or credibility, deals with the realistic nature of the findings (Shenton, 2004). Credibility, in effect, is critical to the trustworthiness of study (Shenton, 2004). There are several methods that may be utilized to support the credibility of the research (Shenton, 2004). Relative to this research, I have employed the following methods.

Bracketing. Bracketing, the hallmark of the transcendental phenomenology, was utilized to demonstrate the validity of both the data collection and data analysis process (Moustakas, 1994). Through the consistent process of reflexivity, I honestly examined my own thoughts, values, and opinions, relative to the research and identified areas of potential bias (Moustakas,

1994). As these ideas were generated, I documented them in a reflexivity journal (Moustakas, 1994). The journal was re-examined and considered throughout the research process to minimize the possibility of researcher bias.

Member checks. In an effort to reduce researcher bias, validate the transfer of the data, and clarify participant views, member checks were used (Moustakas, 1994). Member checks allow the study's participants the opportunity to review the data from their perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). Low socioeconomic status is a sensitive subject. It was critical both morally and ethically that the perspectives of the participants be reflected accurately during the study. Members were asked to provide feedback on both the transcribed data as well as the final report in order to validate data transfer as well.

Peer review. My credibility is reflected through the final report. Credibility was validated via peer reviews (Moustakas, 1994). I utilized my committee, one peer, and an independent consultant (see Appendix M: Independent Consultant Confirmation) to review the information contained in the final report. This process was an incremental, interactive one in which feedback was given throughout the research process and during the write up of the final report. Peer reviews are critical to developing credibility with the readers and peers in the field of study (Moustakas, 1994).

Triangulation. Data from the participants, including interviews, focus groups, and artifacts, were triangulated to reduce researcher bias and confirm the conclusions drawn in the data analysis process (Moustakas, 1994). During this process, I used all three forms of data collection to corroborate, confirm, or readjust emergent themes (Moustakas, 1994). All of the aforementioned strategies are suitable for qualitative research and are appropriate for this study (Moustakas, 1994).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability of the study refer to the study's ability to generate the comparable results "in the same context, with the same methods, and with the same participants" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). Shenton (2004) describes three methods which improves the dependability of the study. Below, I have outlined these methods as well as the relative actions taken to ensure the current study has taken these methods into account.

1. Ensure "the research design and its implementation" are covered (Shenton, 2004, p. 71).

I have devoted sections of the manuscript to research design as well as the procedures. These sections describe, in detail, the proposed research design and why is it best suited for the study. In addition, proposed procedures are discussed at length within the Procedures section, allowing for replication of the study.

2. Describe, in detail, the data collection process (Shenton, 2004).

According to Shenton (2004), addressing the particulars of the data collection process within the manuscript improves the reliability of the study. Relative to this research, the data collection process has been described at length, carving out individual sections dedicated to interviews, focus groups, and the collection of artifacts. The list of questions for both the interviews and focus groups has been provided within the manuscript and I have described the artifacts which were collected for the study; providing such detail enhances the study's reliability (Shenton, 2004).

3. Utilize parallel data collection methods (Shenton, 2004).

Theorists argue that credibility and dependability are closely related (Shenton, 2004). The implementation of credibility methods often lead to an assurance of reliability (Shenton,

2004). One such technique includes the use of parallel data collection methods (Shenton, 2004).

In the current study, I utilized both individual interviews and focus groups, which are considered

to be parallel data collection methods (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability

Transferability, the degree to which the findings can be generalized, is a unique requisite

for qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). Every variance concerning environment, individuals,

era, etc., affects how the phenomenon is understood and perceived (Shenton, 2004). The

phenomenon is highly contextual; therefore, prior to generalizing the study, one must fully

understand the context of the research (Shenton, 2004). In an effort to help the reader understand

fully the context, Shenton (2004) argues that there is critical information that must be conveyed.

This information includes locality, participant limitations, the quantity of participants, "data

collection methods," length and quantity of data collection sessions, and the time period in which

the data were collected (Shenton, 2004, p. 70). Throughout the manuscript, I have made

concessions for the majority of the data required. The location for the research is in rural

southern Virginia. I included 11 participants, reaching data saturation, to collect data via

interviews, focus groups, and artifacts (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). In later chapters, I

fully address requirements concerning the length and quantity of data collection sessions as well

as the time period in which data were collected (Shenton, 2004).

<div align="center">

Ethical Considerations

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I conducted the research in an ethical manner. I adhered to all guidelines set forth by

Liberty University and obtained permission to conduct the study from my dissertation committee

as well as Liberty's IRB (see Appendix E). I ensured that the nature and intent of the study were

fully disclosed through the use of the Informed Consent Form (Appendix G). Through the

Informed Consent Form, participants were made fully aware of the voluntary nature of the study as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

In an effort to protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used for participants, locations, and specific programs. Prior to collecting data, each participant was assigned a unique code name or pseudonym. A separate, password-protected document was kept, linking the participant to this unique code name. This document as well as any data collected during the research process was stored on a secured, password-protected computer system, to which only I have access. Files generated and collected during the data collection process contained only pseudonyms for identification purposes. In addition, artifact replicas were photographed but all identifying information was redacted. All data collected for the study will be stored for a period of three years. After this period of time, I will permanently delete these files.

It is my moral and ethical duty to ensure the research is free from personal bias. I sought ethical guidance from committee members throughout the research process. In addition, proven qualitative methods such as bracketing, reporting multiple perspectives, and independent reviews were utilized to ensure that one-sided results were not reported.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how adults who grew up as disadvantaged children were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H program in a rural southern Virginia county. The study employed a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological approach. The transcendental, phenomenological approach was appropriate for the study because I sought to understand the lived 4-H experiences of several participants who endured low socioeconomic status in a rural community (Moustakas, 1994). In addition to

the central research question, three additional research questions relevant to the study were posed. I collected data from approximately 11 participants (reaching data saturation) via interviews, focus groups, and artifacts which were analyzed to capture the essence of the phenomenon. Member checks, peer reviews, and triangulation were utilized to ensure the integrity and trustworthiness of the study (Patton, 2015).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how adults who grew up as socioeconomically disadvantaged children were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H program within a rural southern Virginia county. This chapter begins with a description of the three pilot study participants, followed by the results of the pilot study. In addition, the chapter provides a description of the actual study's participants. This study gives voice to 11 adults who grew up as socioeconomically disadvantaged children as they described their experiences in the Southern County 4-H program. All 11 participants were African Americans; five were male, while six were female. The participants were between the ages of 18–50. All participants, including those in the pilot study, had previously participated in the 4-H program for a minimum of two years and scored a 27 or below on the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status. The chapter then presents themes that were developed as a result of data analysis and provides responses for research questions. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Pilot Study Participants

The purpose of the pilot study was to acquire candid feedback regarding the quality of the interview questions as well as the focus group questions. The pilot study included three participants who met the aforementioned criteria. All participants in the pilot study were African American females between the ages of 18–50. Coincidently, all three participants were single mothers who still reside in Southern County. Each of the participants recalled participating in the 4-H program for at least two years or more.

Table 4.1

Pilot Study Participant Demographics

Participant	Years in 4-H	Age Group	Gender	Ethnicity	Hollingshead Four Factor Scale Rating
Brittany	2	35–50	Female	African American	27
Mary	2	18–34	Female	African American	27
Nicole	2	35–50	Female	African American	27

Brittany

Brittany is a military veteran. After retiring from the military, she began working for a company that specializes in information technology. Brittany is a single mother of three children. She lives contently and comfortably, with minimal stress. During her youth, Brittany was raised by both her mother and father in a Christian-based home. She attributes her strong work ethic and character to her upbringing and her relationship with Christ. It is her desire to provide a warm Christian home to her children and instill the ethics she learned as a child in them. Raised in the country, Brittany enjoyed playing with friends outdoors and living the country life. Though her family had a modest income, she had the opportunity to participate in softball, school competitions, and the 4-H program. While in 4-H, Brittany attended 4-H summer camp and participated in 4-H sponsored talent shows. Brittany is an advocate of 4-H and acknowledged that the program helped her grow and develop skills such as leadership and persistence. Brittany firmly believes that while upbringing, financial status, and locality may impact how one sees himself, that each individual has the ability to charter his or her own path in life. She firmly believes that each experience affords an individual a chance to make a decision

about how the experience will impact the future. Brittany did, however, conclude that sometimes multiple negative experiences may limit one's ability to see himself in a positive light.

Mary

Mary initially agreed to meet me in person, then decided that it would be best to conduct the interview over the phone.   Mary is a single parent. She has one son, who lives with her. Mary lives a very busy life. Aside from raising her son, she works full time as a teacher's aide and is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in nursing. Mary conveyed her love of caring for children and those who have fallen ill throughout the interview. Her caring ability is accredited to her mother, who stayed home to care for Mary and her siblings when they were young. Mary believes that growing up in a single income household may have been difficult for the family, but her parents never let on to having financial constraints. She believes that while living the country life is a blessing, it also limited accessibility to activities as a child and jobs as she got older. Mary's mother encouraged her to participate in 4-H as a child, perhaps as a means to make more activities available to her. Through the 4-H program she learned how to canoe, fish, and speak publicly in front of large crowds. She enjoyed attending 4-H summer camp and hopes that one day her son will find joy in attending as well.

Nicole

Nicole was happy to find time in her busy schedule to participate in the interview. She was taking a quick study break from her college course and had some time before picking up her teenage girls from cheerleading practice. Nicole was delighted to share her experiences in the 4-H program. Her favorite memory in the program was participating in the talent show with her friends, dancing to Salt N Pepper's "Push It." Nicole sees herself as a go getter; she completed

her associate degree last year and is in the process of completing her bachelor's degree. Education is important to Nicole; she regularly sits down with her girls and helps them plan for their future, and college attendance is always discussed during these conversations. Nicole believes that participation in extracurricular activities, such as 4-H, gives youth the opportunity to see the world through a lens, different than the one to which they are accustomed. Nicole believed that involvement in 4-H helped her gain confidence to speak and perform in front of others. Being involved in 4-H also helped her develop leadership skills, which she uses daily in her home and in her career.

Pilot Study Results

The purpose of the pilot study was to gather candid feedback relative to the proposed interview and focus group questions. During the pilot study, I conducted individual interviews with each qualified participant. Each interview consisted of both the proposed interview questions as well as focus group questions. The participants answered each question based upon their own personal experiences. At the conclusion of the interview, each participant verbally provided initial feedback concerning the quality and relevance of each question. Brittany, Mary, and Nicole all suggested that socioeconomic status is a sensitive topic and felt that some of the questions should be reworded in consideration of this sensitivity. At the conclusion of each conversation, the participants were asked to provide specific feedback about the interview and focus group questions in writing. As a result of their feedback, I reworded verbiage in the Interview/Focus Group Script (Appendix N). The original verbiage stated: "The information collected will be used to better understand how adults, who grew up as needy children, were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H program in rural Southern Virginia." I changed the word "needy" to "socioeconomically disadvantaged." In the open-ended interview questions

(Appendix O), the following questions were changed: Question 4 was changed from "Please describe how you felt growing up in a home with little money" to "Please describe how your family's financial situation impacted you as a child." Question 4a was changed from "Why did you feel this way?" to "How did you family's financial situation impact you as an adult?" I also reworded question 3 in the the open-ended focus group questions (Appendix P), which previously stated, "What impact, if any, does growing up with little money have on the way an individual sees himself?" to "What impact, if any, does growing up in a financially constrained home have on the way an individual sees himself?" After changes were made, I requested a change in protocol from the IRB and received approval shortly thereafter. The updated appendices were added to the manuscript.

Participants

The study focused on the reflective experiences of 11 previous socioeconomically disadvantaged children in the Southern County 4-H program. The 11 interviewees all previously participated, for a minimum of two years, in the 4-H program and scored a "27" or below on the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status. All interviews were conducted over the phone, and the focus group sessions were conducted via Skype web conferencing and teleconference, as the participants preferred these methods. As adults, the 11 interviewees now reside in various locations. The following table lists the participants' demographics, including the years they actively participated in 4-H, the age group to which they belong, their gender and ethnicity, and their overall score on the Hollingshead Four Factor Scale (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Participant Demographics

Participant	Years in 4-H	Age Group	Gender	Ethnicity	Hollingshead Four Factor Scale Rating
Anthony	6	35–50	Male	African American	27
Ella	3	3550	Female	African American	27
Jacob	4	18–34	Male	African American	27
Jennifer	2	35–50	Female	African American	27
John	2	18–34	Male	African American	27
Julie	4	18–34	Female	African American	24.5
Leah	9	35–50	Female	African American	24
Mark	13	35–50	Male	African American	25
Mike	2	35–50	Male	African American	27
Shelia	4	35–50	Female	African American	24.5
Tamara	7	18–34	Female	African American	24

Anthony

Anthony is a 41-year-old male. He is married with two young children. Anthony currently works as an Information Technology Manager. His wife is a dentist. Anthony describes his family as a typical middle-class American family. As a child, Anthony grew up in a two-parent home. His father worked as a furniture assembler, while his mother was a homemaker. Growing up in a rural area afforded Anthony the opportunity to develop a good

work ethic at an early age. He reported that he worked hard in the garden, pulling tobacco, and doing household chores. He laughed when he said, "Growing up in the country and doing those types of things made me very aware of what I wanted to achieve in life. I knew I didn't want to continue to do those types of things" (Anthony, personal communication, February 25, 2019).

Anthony participated in the Southern County 4-H program for a total of six years. During this time, Anthony belonged to a local 4-H community club, attended camps, conducted presentations, and participated in 4-H consumer events. Anthony reports that his involvement in 4-H broadened his perspective and gave him the opportunity to meet people from diverse cultures. Anthony's experiences in 4-H taught him how to show respect and "how to be a good human being" (Anthony, personal communication, February 25, 2019).

Ella

Ella has worked in the field of education for 20 years. The 41-year-old leads a busy life as a wife, mother of a young son, and director in her school district. Ella began her career as a classroom teacher. Throughout her tenure, she has been promoted several times. Growing up, Ella was raised in a two-parent household along with her two older siblings. Both of her parents worked at local factories as operators. She reported that her parents provided for all of the family's needs and some of their wants. At an early age Ella recognized that her parents were hard workers. Ella attributes her work ethic and grit to her parents. She reported that she never wanted to work as physically hard as her parents because she saw the toll that was taken out on their bodies. She always knew that she would attend college. Ella is currently pursuing her doctoral degree in education.

During her youth, Ella enjoyed rural living. She enjoyed being close to her large family and being able to play with cousins. She reflected on the 4-H program in her rural community.

She reported that she remembered many of the lessons she learned from 4-H extension agents, such as learning about different types of trees. Ella recalled her favorite experience in the 4-H program was participating in the 4-H talent show. Ella said, "My cousin and I did an act together *Parents Just Don't Understand*. I was actually Will Smith and he was the mom" (personal communication, February 7, 2019). She laughed at this memory. During that year, Ella and her cousin won first place at the school and county level and then performed at the regional level. In hindsight, Ella believes that her experiences in 4-H helped her develop confidence and showed her some of the various opportunities that existed; it helped her understand that she had choices.

Jacob

Jacob is a husband and father of three. He is currently employed as a truck driver. He enjoys spending time with his family and in his spare time, he frequents car shows. Jacob was raised in a single-parent household; his mother worked as an operator at a local factory to support the family. As a child, Jacob thoroughly enjoyed living in the country. He reminisced on the times that he and his friends creatively made up fun games to play as children. Jacob reported that everyone seemed friendlier in the country as opposed to the more urban area he lives in now.

Jacob was first introduced to the 4-H program in the fifth grade. He later became more involved in the program when friends from church invited him to join their community club. Over a span of four years, Jacob participated in presentations, culinary art events, fishing, camping, and hunting events sponsored by the 4-H program. His favorite memory in the 4-H program was attending 4-H camp. This event was most memorable because 4-H camp introduced him to many different people with diverse backgrounds. Jacob reported that as a child, he was shy and participating in these events helped him overcome his shyness.

Conducting presentations in front of groups reportedly helped Jacob develop leadership skills that he has been able to build upon throughout his life.

Jennifer

Jennifer is an account manager for an insurance company. She is a wife and mother of one child. Jennifer enjoys spending time with family, traveling, shopping, and television shows. She grew up in a two-parent household with one sibling. Jennifer's father worked as a transportation laborer and her mother initially worked as an operator at a textile factory. Later in life, Jennifer's mother was promoted to a factory supervisor. She recalled how her parents worked well together to ensure the household ran smoothly. Jennifer recalled that while her father financially "may not have had much to work with back in the day," he was a saver (Jennifer, personal communication, February 12, 2019). Quite the opposite, Jennifer described her mother as a spender, but she believed her parents' financial habits balanced one another. She described growing up in a rural area as a "humbling experience" (Jennifer, personal communication, February 12, 2019). She appreciated the rules and values she learned in her rural community, but she also appreciates the amenities she now enjoys in a more urban area.

Jennifer was first introduced to 4-H when a teacher at her elementary school handed out a pamphlet about 4-H camp. Even at a young age, she knew that the $100 cost for camp may present some difficulties for her family, but her parents made provisions for her to attend. Jennifer reportedly attended 4-H camp for two years; she also participated in the school's 4-H club. Camp was her most memorable experience during her time in the program. While she could not recall the classes that she took at camp, she could remember friends she had met. She stated, "I just remember it being my own experience, it wasn't something I experienced with my mom or dad" (Jennifer, personal communication, February 12, 2019). She felt that the

experiences in 4-H camp gave her a sense of independence and helped her become comfortable with exploring new things.

John

John is married with three children. As a child, he was raised by both his grandmother and aunt. His aunt worked as an operator at a factory to provide for John and her own child. As a child, John reports that his family was not as financially fortunate as others, but that he always had everything he needed and some of his wants. He stated, "My aunt made sure we were good, regardless if she was good or not" (John, personal communication, January 19, 2019). His aunt's drive to provide for the family encouraged him to be a provider for his family as he got older.

John grew up in an area where drugs and violence were prevalent. In an effort to keep him away from the drug scene, his family kept him involved in church, sports, and other activities. One of these activities was 4-H. John could not recall exactly how long he was involved in 4-H, but he was sure it was a minimum of two years. He recalled attending community club meetings and 4-H camps. John's favorite memory in the 4-H program was meeting new people. He laughed when he talked about how being around girls his age was also a plus. Being involved in the 4-H program helped John realize that there was more to life than the drugs, violence, and negativity that he saw every day. John believed that being involved in the 4-H program changed his life's trajectory and helped him become the person that he is today. Today, John is committed to giving back to the community and frequently coordinates outreach programs for socioeconomically disadvantaged youth in areas known for drugs and violence.

Julie

Julie is a single mother of two young sons. In her current role, she is a school counselor at one of the schools in her district. In her spare time, she enjoys reading and traveling, when

finances allow. Julie grew up in a two-parent household along with her sister. Her father worked at a cable company while her mother provided day care services. During her youth, she did not suspect financial difficulties as her parents provided everything that she and her sister needed. Later in life, she realized that her parents did have financial difficulties during her youth. Julie saw life in the country as limited, but it provided shelter from exposure to risky behaviors. While she enjoys raising her sons in a more rural area, she is sometimes concerned that the lack of activities and educational options may hinder them.

Julie was introduced to the 4-H program by friends she met at church shortly after she moved to the area. She spent a total of four years in the program. During these years she participated in the community club, 4-H camps, All Star Club, 4-H Congress, and fashion events. She was particularly interested in fashion events as a teen. She also recalled volunteer activities, like helping vendors set up for the community holiday bazaar and serving as a teen leader at 4-H camp. Being involved in the program helped Julie understand how important it was to give back to the community and "lend a helping hand" (Julie, personal communication, February 3, 2019). As she grew older, she served as a 4-H volunteer to help youth share in the same great experiences that she had. In her current role as a school counselor, she teaches her lessons on the principles of character that she learned in the 4-H program.

Leah

Leah works in the education field. She enjoys the opportunity to work with teens who have special needs. She does her best to ensure her students are successful after high school. Her students are not college bound, so she helps them find trade-related resources to prepare for their adult lives. Aside from her career, Leah is a wife and mother of two active girls. She enjoys spending time with family and supporting her girls in their many activities. The

importance of spending time with family was instilled by her parents when she was a youth. As a child, Leah lived in a two-parent household, along with her sister, her paternal grandparents, and her aunt. Her father worked as a machine operator in a textile factory to support the family, while her mother took care of the home. At a young age Leah knew that her father worked long, hard hours to provide for the family. She resolved at an early age that she would attend college to obtain a non-labor-intensive job. Leah enjoyed the fact that her mother was available to spend time with her and her sister; Leah wanted to provide the same for her children. Growing up in a rural environment provided both the "worse and best" experiences for Leah (Leah, personal communication, January 19, 2019).

While Leah recognized that money was scarce in their household, her parents always "made a way" for Leah and her sister to be involved in 4-H related activities (Leah, personal communication, January 19, 2019). Leah participated in the 4-H program for a total of nine years. During her involvement, she participated in public speaking, presentation competitions, attended 4-H camp, rifle camp, 4-H Congress, as well as the Citizenship Focus Convention. Leah vividly remembers being the only African American at some of the events she attended. Even though she recognized there were none to few African American involved at some of these events, she was very comfortable attending. She said, "It was okay because no one acted better than anyone" (Leah, personal communication, January 19, 2019). Leah reported that 4-H taught her that it is okay to be different. She has carried this lesson with her through adulthood and embraces diversity.

Mark

Mark is a husband and father of one young child. He described his family as a typical middle-class family. He is currently a production manager, while his wife works as process

manager. Mark holds a master's degree; he jokingly stated, "I didn't want to get out of school, I really didn't want to work" (Mark, personal communication, March 7, 2019). Mark's humor kept the interview on a light note. During his childhood, Mark lived with his grandparents while his mother supported the family as a laborer. Mark reported that he has a strong work ethic, which is attributed to his grandparents and growing up in the country. Mark firmly believes that growing up in a rural area builds character that cannot generally be obtained by growing up in the city or a more urban area. He has an appreciation for hard work that he demonstrates in his current role and in all that he does.

Of all the participants involved in the study, Mark was involved the longest in the 4-H program: 13 years. Even after he transitioned into adulthood, he continued to participate in the program at the college level. He proudly reported that he attended National 4-H Congress, an honor held by only a small percentage of 4-H members. Throughout his years in 4-H he reported that he had participated in presentations, conservation education, several camps, consumer education, community club, and honor club. Mark stated, "There wasn't much that I didn't do in 4-H" (personal communication, March 7, 2019). Mark felt that his involvement in 4-H gave him a heart for people and a genuine desire to help others. He also felt that African Americans were underrepresented in the 4-H program, but this never intimidated him as an African American male. Mark reported that his involvement with 4-H provided him with a different lens to see people and the world around him.

Mike

Prior to the interview, Mike acknowledged that the thought of doing an interview made him nervous. After the close of the interview, he told me with a smile "that wasn't too bad" (Mark, personal communication, March 10, 2019). Mark is a father of one child. He works for

an engineering company on swing shifts. In his free time, he enjoys spending time with his daughter and traveling. On his days off, he catches up on household chores and tries to enjoy life. As a child, Mike was raised in a single-parent household by his mother. Mike's mother worked as a machine operator at a textile factory. Her provision for him motivated him to be the provider and strong male role model in his daughter's life.

Mike found rural life boring as a youth. He reported that there was little to do. This posed an issue for Mike. Like John, Mike grew up in an area that had become drug and violence infested. During elementary school, Mike was introduced to the 4-H program by an adult volunteer. He reported that he participated in several community centric activities while being a member of the 4-H after school club. He recalled learning how to put together picnic tables, painting, and roadside pickup. For Mike this was hard work, but he learned skills that he had not previously been exposed to. Mike saw 4-H as a way to escape the temptations that he faced daily, such as being involved in drugs, fighting, or other crimes. He remembered skipping a 4-H meeting to visit someone he thought was a friend. Little did he know, his friend had just stolen a park bench. Although Mike was not involved in the crime, he happened to be sitting on the bench with his friend when the police arrived on the scene. As a result, Mike was charged with theft. Mike knew if he had gone to the 4-H meeting that day, this event would have never transpired. During the remainder of his two years spent in the 4-H program, Mike decided to attend all meetings. He knew that the meetings provided a safe haven with positive people. Mike's favorite memory of 4-H was receiving free meals after completing a community project.

Shelia

Shelia is a mother of four children, and at the time of the interview, she also had three foster children. Currently enrolled in graduate school, Shelia hopes to complete her master's

degree and obtain a license in professional counseling in the near future. Shelia grew up in a two-parent household with her sister. Her father worked at a cable company, while her mother provided childcare services. As a youth, her family never talked about finances; Shelia only knew that all of her needs were met. She applies this philosophy with her children because she does not want her children to be concerned with the family's finances. She believes that children should be "shielded" from adult issues (Shelia, personal communication, February 21, 2019). Shelia is not originally from Southern County; she moved to the county with her family during her teenage years. Although she could not relate to her classmates who talked about "pulling tobacco," she found the rural lifestyle to be slower paced and enjoyable (Shelia, personal communication, February 21, 2019).

Shelia was introduced to the 4-H program by friends of the family. She participated in the 4-H program for a total of four years. Throughout her membership she was involved in a community club, attended consumerama events, 4-H Congress, and attended 4-H camp three or four years (Shelia could not recall the exact number of years she attended camp). Her final year of camp she remembered it being really hot, but outside of this experience, her experiences in 4-H were pleasurable. She reported that being involved in the 4-H program gave her a sense of identity. During her 4-H involvement she was able to connect with a diverse group of people. These connections helped her recognize the differences between her and her peers and ultimately helped her understand who she was an individual. She also believed that her involvement in the community helped her become more aware of the needs in the community. As a result, she is willing to lend a helping hand to meet these needs as an adult. She hopes that her children find this same sense of community as they grow older.

Tamara

Tamara has a master's degree and currently works as an executive assistant. Tamara describes her life as a basic life. She grew up in a two-parent household, along with her sister and members of the extended family. Her father provided for the family as a factory operator, while her mother was a homemaker. Tamara felt that her family was secluded, as they lived in a rural area. Living in a rural area, however, afforded her an opportunity to explore outdoors. Tamara believes that living in a rural area provided her with life skills that she could not have obtained if she grew up in a more urban area.

Tamara was involved in the 4-H program for a total of seven years. Her family fully supported the program and encouraged her and children of family friends to participate in 4-H. Her family was responsible for starting a community club. As a member of the club, she participated in 4-H camp, gun safety camp, as well as rifle camp. As she became older, she was inducted into the 4-H Honor Club, where her involvement evolved to more community service projects. Tamara believes that through her participation in 4-H, she gained leadership skills and the ability to develop others.

Results

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how adults who grew up as disadvantaged children were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H program in rural southern Virginia. Data were collected and analyzed from interviews, focus groups, and artifacts (replicas). Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was used to analyze data collected from interviews and focus groups. Photographed artifacts (replicas) were used to illustrate the 4-H culture. I used Atlas.ti Cloud to organize data and assist in the data analysis process. This section discusses the process of developing themes, describes

each theme generated, and applies these themes to answer each of the four research questions, which are listed below:

1. How do adults who grew up as disadvantaged children describe their experiences in a local 4-H program within rural southern Virginia (Hershbery et al., 2013)?

2. Did participation in 4-H change self-perceptions of adults who grew up as disadvantaged children? If so, how (Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

3. Were adults who grew up as disadvantaged children impacted by positive or negative experiences within the 4-H program? If so, how (Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

4. According to adults who grew up as disadvantaged children, how, if at all, did participation in 4-H influence their lives (Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

Theme Development

Participants' lived experiences were captured through interviews, focus group sessions, and the collection of artifacts. The collection of data was described in detail. Data were then analyzed and themes were developed to describe how adults who grew up as disadvantaged children were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H program in rural southern Virginia.

Interviews. The primary source of data collection was one-on-one interviews. The interview questions focused largely on the participants' upbringing, thoughts concerning identity, and their lived 4-H experiences. Each interview consisted of 15 open-ended semi-structured questions. Each participant was given an option to have a face-to-face interview at a designated location or to meet via teleconference or Skype/web conferencing. All participants chose teleconference. Many expressed this was mainly due to busy schedules and family life. A total of 11 interviews took place over the course of approximately six weeks. All interviews were conducted and concluded within 30 minutes. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed

by me. I then conducted member checks by sending each participant a copy of the transcription. Participants were given seven days to respond. Per member feedback and non-response, no corrections were required.

Focus groups. At the conclusion of all one-on-one interview sessions, I scheduled two focus group dates. Two dates were scheduled to accommodate scheduling conflicts and encourage maximum participation. During the first focus group session, two participants joined by teleconference, per their choice. The first focus group session lasted approximately 25 minutes. During the second scheduled session six participants joined by teleconference. The second session lasted approximately 45 minutes. All but three of the original participants were able to attend one of the two sessions. I was pleased with the attendance. During each focus group session, I asked 13 semi-structured, open-ended questions, again concerning the participants' upbringing, thoughts concerning identity, and their lived 4-H experiences. Each group was very passionate and offered unique insights. At the conclusion of each focus group, I transcribed the session. I then conducted member checks for the transcription; in like manner as the interview transcription, no corrections were required. In addition, member checks were conducted on the final written report, and no corrections were required.

Artifacts. Artifacts are typically used in ethnography studies; however, they are deemed appropriate for phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013). My intent was to illustrate the culture of the 4-H program and help the reader better understand the participants' lived experiences. I originally intended to collect artifacts from participants relative to their 4-H experiences. None of the 11 participants were able to provide artifacts relative to their 4-H experiences. For many participants, their 4-H membership occurred 20 years or more ago, and participants concluded that original artifacts may be impossible to obtain. As a result, I worked

with the Southern County 4-H administrator to obtain photographs of 4-H memorabilia relative

to the participants lived experiences. These artifacts included but were not limited to

presentation awards, talent show awards, photographs of the 4-H campground, the 4-H Clover,

community club meeting notes, etc. The artifacts that were collected were based on the events

and memories presented by the participants during interviews and focus groups, as well as the

availability of items at the 4-H Extension Office. The 4-H administrator provided several

relevant artifacts which were photographed by me. I gained written permission from the 4-H

administrator to use these photographs for the research (see Appendix Q: Permission to Use

Artifact Images).

  Data analysis. The Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method utilizes the full transcript from each

interview and focus group session (Moustakas, 1994). After all data had been transcribed and

member checked, I uploaded the documents into Atlas.ti. After the focus groups, I identified

five preset codes for data analysis. These codes included the following: identity, social

interactions, opportunities, skill building, and culture. I thoroughly reviewed each transcription

and identified statements relative to the phenomenon. I coded these statements with the initial

preset codes that were established. As data analysis continued, emergent codes were identified

and applied. During this process, each statement was valued equally (horizontalization). I then

began to cluster and synthesize codes. Throughout the process, I utilized journaling to ensure

that my own thoughts did not generate bias relative to the research. This was very important to

the data analysis process. Journaling my thoughts helped me conduct analysis in an unbiased

manner. Because I had previously participated in the 4-H program as a socioeconomically

disadvantaged youth, bracketing my thoughts helped me focus on the participants lived

experiences as opposed to my own. As a result of the data analysis, several themes emerged

which describe the participants' experiences relative to the phenomenon and answer each of the four research questions. Below, Table 4.3 outlines each code and the code's frequency within the data set.

Table 4.3

Data Codes and Frequencies

Code	Frequency
Opportunity	49
Experiences	43
Work Ethic	39
Camp	39
Development of Self and Others	38
Different	36
Past and Future Self-Perceptions	28
Learning to Work Effectively	27
Exposure to Various People and Genders	25
College	25
Character	24
Influence	24
Leadership	24
Discovering Individual Strengths	24
Positive Learning Experiences/Activities	22
Community Involvement	18
Confidence	17
Student Participation	16
Teaching as a Career	16
Social Interaction	15
Negative Experiences	13
African American Involvement (Minimal)	11
Exposure to New Cultures	11
Possibilities	11
Financial Insight Gained from Parents	9
Overcoming Shyness	9

Rural Life Perspectives	8
Building Skills for Success	6
Values	5
Independence	5

At the conclusion of coding the data set, data synthesis took place. During this process, the codes were grouped and themes emerged. Below, Table 4.4 outlines six themes and the codes associated with each theme.

Table 4.4

Emergent Themes

Emergent Theme	Associated Codes
4-H Experiences Provide Exposure to Diversity	African American Involvement (Minimal)
	Exposure to New Cultures
	Different
	Exposure to Various People and Gender
4-H Participation Builds Character	Character
	Community Involvement
	Values
	Development of Self and Others
	Rural Life Perspectives
	Work Ethic
4-H Experiences Provide a Foundation for Building Life Skills	Building Skills for Success
	Financial Insight Gained from Parents
	Social Interaction
	Learning to Work Effectively
4-H Experiences Influence Present and Future Identity	Confidence
	Past and Future Self-Perceptions
	Independence
	Influence
	Leadership
	Overcoming Shyness
	Discovering Individual Strengths

4-H Experiences Provide New Opportunities	Experiences
	Negative Experiences
	Opportunity
	Possibilities
	Camp
Education is Essential to Success	College
	Positive Learning Experiences/Activities
	Student Participation
	Teaching as a Career

4-H experiences provide exposure to diversity. Exposure to diversity is believed to improve racial and gender relations, enable social change, and broaden one's perspective (Urban & Trochim, 2017). All of the study's participants were African American and offered unique insight relative to their exposure to diversity within the 4-H program. During the interviews, 10 of the 11 participants perceived that their experiences in the 4-H program provided exposure to both gender and racial diversity. Mark compared his cross-gender interactions in the Boy Scouts with the 4-H program and said:

> One of the differences between 4-H and the Boy Scouts was that you learn to deal with different cultures and both sexes. In Boy Scouts, you only learn how to deal with boys and you learn how to deal with boys from a camping standpoint. In 4-H you learn to form relationships. (Mark, personal communication, March 7, 2019)

Mark believed that his experiences in 4-H provided not only gender and cultural diversity, but broadened his perspectives.

> It (my experience) helped me realize that people speak different than I do. My family tends to think a certain way. A lot of events and places that we went to, we did with different people and different ideas. A lot of them were rural ideas, but you got to

interact with different people with different ideas. (Mark, personal communication,

March 7, 2019)

Relative to the possible selves theory, exposure to diverse people and thinking enables

individuals to see how others think and operate (Markus & Nurius, 1986). These glimpses of

others' identity enable individuals to see the possibilities of who they may become in the future

(Markus & Nurius, 1986). Exposure to diversity also enables individuals to embrace various

cultures and genders, generating feelings of comfort in the presence of those who are of the

opposite sex or diverse cultures (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

      4-H participation builds character. Character pertains to the moral attributes of an

individual that guides behavior and influences decision making (Urban & Trochim, 2017).

"Character development for youth is increasingly being recognized as critically important"

(Urban & Trochim, 2017, p. 14). Data collected throughout the interviews and focus groups

demonstrated that involvement in the 4-H program strengthened participants' character. All 11

participants conveyed that their parents or guardians possessed a strong work ethic. Their

guardians' work ethic coupled with shared family values and rural experiences, such as working

on the farms and in gardens, provided each of the participants with a strong foundation for

character development. Through these experiences, participants learned the value of hard work,

being fair, giving back to the community, and how to develop one's self and others. The strong

work ethic and provision of the participants' parents shielded participants from financial

constraints in the home. Jennifer spoke of her family's finances and how her parents provided so

she could attend 4-H camp: "A pamphlet went out about the summer camp that they (4-H)

offered. At that age, I recognized that 100 dollars was not cheap. I went home, telling my

parents that I wanted to and they made it possible" (Jennifer, personal communication, February 12, 2019).

Participation in 4-H built upon the participants' foundational character. John spoke of his childhood in a single-parent household and how his mother's work ethic influenced him. He further reflected on his work experiences in the 4-H program and how these experiences helped him learn how to work.

Just being a single parent, she motivated me to do what I was supposed to do. . .
Experiencing things (in 4-H) and taking on responsibilities, like cleaning up, learning how to put together picnic tables, or porches, painting, and just regular stuff. . . Things I wasn't even interested in until I actually experienced it. (John, personal communication, February 9, 2019)

Character encompasses the ability to selflessly see others' needs and provide for them (Urban & Trochim, 2017). Relative to providing for the needs of the community, Tamara talked about her most memorable community service project in the 4-H program. "One sticks out in my mind; we picked an elderly person and raked their leaves in the fall. I think that sticks out the most because my parents taught me the value of helping others" (Tamara, personal communication, February 19, 2019). Tamara elaborated on how her participation encouraged her to give back to the community as an adult. She has worked with charitable organizations that provide business clothing to those less fortunate and another that benefits African American students at her alma mater. These activities helped her feel fulfilled and engaged in the community.

4-H experiences provide a foundation for building life skills. Parallel to building character, participants perceived that experiences in 4-H helped them build life skills. There is a distinct difference between these two themes. While 4-H experiences built upon an already

existing foundation of character, these same experiences provided the foundation for building

life skills. These skills included, but were not limited to public speaking, social interactions,

problem solving, and adaptability. These skills equipped participants to successfully navigate

family life, social interactions, and careers. Nine of the 11 participants discussed how influential

public speaking in the 4-H program was and how it helped prepare them for adulthood. Julie, a

school counselor, is often required to speak publicly; she talked about how the 4-H program

prepared her to present well: "It also taught public speaking. So, I think all of that has kind of

led up to where I am now. I have to be able to teach and stand up in front of other teachers"

(Julie, personal communication, February 3, 2019).

 Leah, a school teacher who speaks publicly on a daily basis, echoed the value of learning

how to speak publicly in 4-H:

> I can say that it helped me . . . like the presentations and like speaking in front of people.
>
> That prepared me for speaking in front of my classroom and in front of my colleagues
>
> because I've always done it. I used to be nervous, but that (4-H) prepared me and it
>
> wasn't something I had to do for the first time when I became a teacher. (Leah, personal
>
> communication, March 27, 2019)

Leah shared several fond memories of her experiences in the 4-H program. During 4-H public

speaking competitions, each speaker is awarded a ribbon. Figure 4.1 is an image of an award,

similar to one that she may have won during her youth (see Appendix Q: Permission to Use

Artifact Images).

Figure 4.1. Second place 4-H ribbon award. Used with permission (see Appendix Q).

Concerning social interactions, all 11 participants concluded that 4-H provided opportunities to socially interact with others. Ella vividly remembered working with a group of girls in preparation for their act in the 4-H talent show. She spoke about how this experience allowed her to socially interact with others and how the experience empowered her:

I mean when I think of the experience of working with the girls' group. . . I mean we

made up our own song. We felt so empowered that we made up our own song and outfits

and everything. We took it to a whole other level and here we were little girls doing this.

It was really a lot of fun. I mean ever so often those memories will resurface on

Facebook and make their rounds. It was funny and we have a really good positive

memory in working on that. (Ella, personal communication, February 7, 2019)

Ella's experience with the 4-H talent show also sharpened her problem solving skills. She and

her team used the limited resources that they had to develop their act, determine an appropriate

outfit, and develop a schedule to practice in preparation for the show.

In each of the aforementioned experiences, the participants learned how to adapt to things

that they had never experienced before. Presenting publicly was something that was new to them

at some point in their lives. Through continued participation, they each adapted to these

experiences. The ability to adapt is also a very valuable skill that enables one to be flexible and

open to change (Hayes, 2014). As they adapted, they gained new skills that have been beneficial

throughout their lives.

4-H experiences influence present and future identity. A major theme, consistent with

the possible selves theory, is the notion that 4-H experiences influence present and future identity

(Markus & Nurius, 1986). Concepts related to this theme that emerged through data analysis

included confidence, independence, and leadership. Previous research indicates that those born

with a low socioeconomic status are more likely to have low self-esteem, less likely to graduate

high school, and often face a myriad of challenges throughout childhood and adulthood

(Ratcliffe, 2015). While, three of the participants openly admitted that they were shy and two

participants experienced growing up in a drug-infested neighborhood, all 11 are presently

productive citizens. Each individual has a strong sense of ethics and values. While their present

identity cannot be fully attributed to their participation in 4-H, their experiences in the 4-H program undoubtedly influenced who they are.

Confidence, independence, present and future self-perceptions, and leadership were reoccurring codes relative to this particular theme. Jennifer believed that her experiences in the 4-H program helped develop her confidence and independence. As she gained a sense of self, she understood that she could change her life's trajectory and create her own future:

> 4-H helped with independence. It helped get you out of your normal routine. During the summer, I would be home looking at TV, doing chores, playing outside, and it wasn't like I had a structured curriculum. At 4-H, we did. (Jennifer, personal communication, February 12, 2019)

When asked how her experiences in 4-H influenced her, she stated, "I think pretty much all my life, all the way up until now. I don't have to follow what someone else does" (Jenifer, personal communication, February 12, 2019). Jennifer's involvement in the program helped her see herself as a leader and not a follower. She realized that she could take responsibility of her life and make choices that led to accomplishing her goals.

John, who grew up in neighborhood full of drugs and violence, believed that being involved in the 4-H program helped him see the possibilities of who he could become in the future:

> Awe man, it really opened my eyes, really. Coming from the area that I came from where it's always negativity from the drug scene, the fight scene. Seeing how it's more to life outside of that. It opened my eyes to everything is not violence, everything is not . . . I mean, just because you live somewhere does not mean that you have to be a part of that. It made me realize that I'm bigger than my situation. My situation is not the person

that I am. My situation is going to build me up to be better than my situation. That's

what 4-H done for me. (John, personal communication, February 9, 2019)

John, who is now a husband and father, is very active in his community. Through church

outreach, he and his wife now visit underserved youth in the community and help them

understand that they do not have to become a product of their environment.

4-H experiences provide new opportunities. New opportunities served as a catalyst for

participants to see themselves in a new or different way during their childhood and their adult

lives. Though there are several avenues in life to experiences new opportunities, all 11

participants described how the 4-H program provided new, unique opportunities that that they

may not have experienced otherwise. New, positive opportunities not only serve as motivation

for future identity but also provide youth an avenue to explore various activities. During the

interview, Jacob spoke of his new experiences. "When I was in 4-H, I did presentations, culinary

arts events, fishing, hunting, and camping" (Jacob, personal communication, March 18, 2019).

Prior to participating in the 4-H program, Jacob had not experienced many of the aforementioned

activities. 4-H provided a safe, supportive environment to explore new activities and the world

around the him. This avenue was particularly important to the participants because their families

may not have had the financial means to provide these activities outside of the 4-H program.

Even if funds were available, time constraints may have posed an issue. All 11 participants

discussed how hard their parents worked and how long work hours created missed opportunities

for family time.

While all 11 participants saw some value in growing up in a rural location, they also felt

that living in a rural locality was limiting in terms of opportunity. 4-H involvement provided an

opportunity to travel outside of Southern County and experience new locations. Visiting these

new places enabled participants to see that there was more available than what was experienced

in their small hometown. Sheila talked about her travel experience within the 4-H program.

"One of my best experiences was when I went to the state congress and did the consumerama.

State congress was the most memorable experience" (Shelia, personal communication, February

21, 2019). Below shows a photo of the location in which state congress was held (see Appendix

Q: Permission to Use Artifact Images).

Figure 4.2. 4-H participants forming the 4-H clover at 4-H Congress. Used with permission (see

Appendix Q).

Place experience is an important factor for the development of youth identity (Prince,

2014). The experience of visiting new places and experiencing new opportunities connect with

this concept. New experiences and locations help broaden one's perspective and shape worldview (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Prince, 2014).

Education is essential to success. Education is essential to success. This theme unexpectedly emerged during data analysis. Throughout the interviews and focus groups, all 11 participants acknowledged that involvement in the 4-H program taught them something. Their experiences within the program provided an education of sorts, often without the use of formal coursework or books. Six of the 11 participants recognized at an early age that receiving higher education would enable them to achieve less physically demanding careers in comparison to their parents/guardians. These six participants have achieved or are in the process of achieving master's degrees or higher levels of education. Interestingly, of these six, five have ties with the education system or plan to become employed in the educational system. The value of education was stressed during both individual interviews and focus groups. 4-H involvement provided educational experiences that participants perceived were helpful. While these experiences were not explicitly defined as educational, in context, these experiences provided new learnings. Participants applied what they learned to improve the lives of others and themselves.

For several participants, the desire to learn and grow did not begin with involvement in the 4-H program but in their rural homes. Leah, whose father worked long hours during her childhood, said,

> I never wanted to work 12 hours like my dad. Never. He worked from eight until eight and I always vowed that I would not work a 12 hour job. . . I didn't know where I wanted to go to college. I knew I wanted to go to college, it wasn't a matter of if I would go. My mom, she knew how important education was and she always knew that we would go (me and my sister). (Leah, personal communication, January 19, 2019)

Leah completed graduate school and while her motivation to gain a higher education started in her home, she utilized 4-H as a learning tool to help achieve this goal and succeed in life.

Tamara shared a similar story. "I knew my dad worked really hard and long hours for not a lot of pay. I knew I didn't want to do that. I knew that college was to be my answer" (Tamara, personal communication, February 19, 2019). As a child, Tamara did not recall what she wanted to be in life, but she knew one thing was certain: "I just know that I knew that I wanted to grow up and never go back to my hometown. So whatever I had to do to make that happened, I knew that I was going to do it" (Tamara, personal communication, February 19, 2019).

In each of these instances, consistent with the possible selves theory, Leah and Tamara used their fears as motivation to achieve an alternative outcome. In each instance, education was believed to be the key to a successful future. 4-H provided exposure to colleges and universities. This exposure helped participants make decisions about their future. As I thought about this particular theme, I realized that 4-H provided both informal and formal education. Through presentations, camps, and other activities, participants learned new skills. 4-H experiences helped participants better understand themselves and the world around them.

Research Question Responses

The research sought to answer four research questions. The central research question sought to describe the 4-H experiences of once socioeconomically disadvantaged children in rural Southern County, Virginia. The remaining three research questions were a subset of the central question. The second research question sought to describe how, if at all, did participation in 4-H change self-perceptions of participants. Research question three intended to gain insight concerning the impact of participants' experiences in the 4-H program. Lastly, research question four sought to determine how participation in 4-H influenced the lives of the participants. Each

research question was designed to gain a deep understanding of how participants perceived their experiences in the 4-H program.

Research Question One. How do adults who grew up as disadvantaged children describe their experiences in a local 4-H program within rural southern Virginia (Hershbery et al., 2013). Research question one served as the central research question for the study. All 11 participants generally describe their experiences in the 4-H program positively. None of the participants could recall a negative experience during their involvement in the program. When asked about any negative experiences in the program, Julie responded, "I can't remember any. If I had any, I must have blocked them out. All of my experiences were pretty good" (Julie, personal communication, February 3, 2019). In addition to describing experiences as generally positively, the following themes aid in answering this research question:

- 4-H Experiences Provide Exposure to Diversity

- 4-H Experiences Provide New Opportunities

Throughout the focus group sessions and interviews, there was much discussion about the limitedness of rural living. All 11 participants perceived that living in a rural area limited their exposure to diverse people. Participants describe their experiences in 4-H as positive, unique opportunities to interact with people of diverse cultures and genders. This exposure to diverse groups of people gave participants a glimpse of the world outside of their small community and challenged prevailing mindsets. Given that the 4-H program is all inclusive, participation in the program exposed participants to demographically different people. Leah spoke of her experiences relative to diversity:

> It's sometimes hard for me to talk about because when you grow up . . . When you're the only black person, a lot of times it's kind of hard. So at my job, I'm the only black

person on the leadership team. I'm the only black person in the room. I think 4-H

prepared me for that because there were times when there were only two or three of

someone the same color. That's hard for a younger person. Sometimes it's hard for an

adult; but just to know that even though you're the only one, there's no difference. I

think that it (4-H) taught me that it's okay to be the only one, it doesn't mean anything

different or bad. It just means that we are all like one, we are all together. (Leah,

personal communication, January 19, 2019)

Exposure to diverse people helped participants recognize that diversity is a strength. In Leah's

case, exposure to diversity at an early age prepared her to confidently function in an environment

where a lack of diversity existed. It was evident throughout the data collection process that there

was a genuine appreciation for the exposure to diversity that 4-H provided.

In addition to providing exposure to diversity, participants perceived that their

experiences in 4-H offered them new and exciting opportunities that they had not previously

experienced. Similar to diversity exposure, these new opportunities helped shape participants'

worldview and gave participants motivation to set and achieve new goals. All 11 participants

perceived that growing up with financial constraints and in a rural location limited exposure to

new opportunities. As a result of this limitation, goal setting may be inhibited for youth. Leah

said, "If someone doesn't know things exists, they don't know what to reach for" (personal

communication, March 27, 2019). All 11 participants believed that their involvement in 4-H

bridged this gap for them because the program provided a multitude of activities and afforded

them the opportunity to travel.

Throughout interviews and focus group sessions, participants highlighted their new

experiences in 4-H. Nine of the 11 participants experienced leaving home semi-independently

for the first time to attend 4-H camp. This new experience enabled participants to function

independent of their families and encouraged them to explore a new environment in the safety of

trusted teen and adult mentors. For Jacob, John, and Jennifer, camping was their most

memorable experience in the 4-H program. However, camping was only one of many activities

that participants experienced for the first time. Jacob said, "When I was in 4-H, I did

presentations, culinary arts events, fishing, hunting, and camping" (personal communication,

March 18, 2019). The consensus among participants is in the absence of 4-H, they may not have

had the opportunity to experience such activities.

Research Question Two. Did participation in 4-H change self-perceptions of adults who

grew up as disadvantaged children? If so, how (Markus & Nurius, 1986)? While 4-H

participation cannot be fully attributed to changing self-perceptions of adults who grew up as

disadvantaged children, 4-H participation certainly influenced participants' self-perceptions.

The following theme will be used to further expound upon the answer for this research question:

- 4-H Experiences Influence Present & Future Identity

While participants implied that their upbringing, interactions with others, and several

other factors influenced their personality and self-perceptions growing up, they acknowledged

that participation in the 4-H program did influence childhood and adult self-perceptions.

Throughout interview and focus group sessions, participants focused on ideas like confidence,

overcoming shyness, and independence. In terms of confidence, participants expressed that

being given an opportunity to participate as a youth helped them gain confidence that they may

not have had previously: "Just the confidence piece. Here's a task, you can do it. Here is

knowledge, you can obtain it. You can use it later" (Ella, personal communication, March 27,

2019). Confidence serves an important role in developing present and future self-perceptions

(Markus & Nurius, 1986). Leah demonstrated this point: "We had to sew a dress and for the first time, I felt like I was included. . . We dressed up. For the first time, I felt fly" (Leah, personal communication, March 27, 2019). The confidence that participants gained during involvement in the 4-H program helped them develop positive self-perceptions during their youth. This sense of confidence was carried into adulthood and helped participants confidently pursue dreams and goals. For Anthony, the program helped him explore the possibilities of who he could become: "I think it was a great avenue of just showing me that you don't have to stay where you are. To get anywhere, just be open-minded" (Anthony, personal communication, February 25, 2019).

Jacob and Tamara expressed how participation in 4-H helped them gain confidence and overcome shyness. Both participants attributed their level of confidence to the public speaking competitions they participated in during their 4-H involvement. "Before 4-H, I was basically shy, I mean honestly, if I didn't participate, I probably wouldn't be doing this interview right now, I'd be too shy to do it. It helped me come out of my shell" (Jacob, personal communication, March 18, 2019). While public speaking was new to them, both participants felt more comfortable speaking publicly due to the support they received from peers and adult mentors. For Jacob and Tamara, 4-H involvement helped them project confidence and overcome shyness.

For several of the participants, 4-H participation influenced independence levels. As participants were involved in activities, specifically those away from home, they began to see themselves as more independent young adults. This independence transferred into adulthood. 4-H camp and state congress afforded participants an opportunity to be independent. Jennifer talked about how camp helped her gain independence: "I feel like that (camp) gave me

independence. It made me feel that I could be without my parents for a full week during the summer. It was very exciting" (Jennifer, personal communication, February 12, 2019). Anthony acknowledged that 4-H helped prepare him for adulthood: "4-H allowed me to experience life away from home in a controlled environment. So when I did leave home, it wasn't a shock to me" (Anthony, personal communication, February 25, 2019). Gaining independence as youth helped participants transition from their parents'/guardians' home to college, careers, and adulthood in general.

Research Question Three. Were adults who grew up as disadvantaged children impacted by positive or negative experiences within the 4-H program? If so, how (Markus & Nurius, 1986)? Participants were impacted by their experiences in the 4-H program. None of the 11 participants, however, reported any negative experiences during their 4-H involvement. Relative to the impact of positive experiences, the following themes are utilized:

- 4-H Participation Builds Character

- 4-H Experiences Provide a Foundation for Building Life Skills

Nine of the 11 participants were involved in some form of community service while in the 4-H program. Being involved in community service impacted participants because it allowed them to see the needs of others, connect with those in need, and meet the needs. Community service induces compassion, empathy, and generosity (Urban & Trochim, 2017). As participants were involved in community service, they experienced these attributes, which build character. For Shelia, the impact was so significant that she wanted to work at a homeless shelter when she was young. Tamara and John regularly give back to the community presently; they both attributed their desire to do so to their involvement in community service projects while in the 4-H program.

In addition to building character, participants were impacted by the life skills that they learned/expounded upon in the 4-H program. While 4-H mentors and counselors were available to assist and guide, participants were given autonomy to make choices concerning the activities they participated in. The autonomy to do so helped participants develop skills such as project management, decision making, social interaction, and teamwork. Ella reflected on her decision to participate in the talent show and what she gained from the experience:

> I mean nobody like made us do it. We chose to. It really gave us confidence and provided us an opportunity to be on stage for someone that was young and in a rural area. I mean to perform and go on to future competitions, to interact with others, to cheer other people on. It's just a lot of life lessons. (Ella, personal communication, February 7, 2019)

During Ella's experience she and her team made a decision to participate and coordinated all of the tasks required for execution of their performance. She and her team essentially managed a multi-step project while in elementary school.

All 11 participants conveyed that they were impacted by the social interactions experienced during participation in 4-H. Interactions with others aided in the development of social skills as well as teamwork. 4-H activities provided an opportunity to interact with new people at different events. Participants often built relationships with other youth during activities. Several participants gained friendships through these interactions: "You learn to form relationships, some of the people that I met in 4-H, I still talk to" (Mark, personal communication, March 7, 2019). Participants conveyed that the social skills that were developed during 4-H participation are regularly utilized in their homes, careers, and personal relationships.

Research Question Four. According to adults who grew up as disadvantaged children, how, if at all, did participation in 4-H influence their lives (Williams & Bryan, 2013)? The following theme is used to answer this research question:

- Education is Essential for Success

All 11 participants are successful, productive citizens with various levels of formal education. While they may have different levels of formal education, each of the 11 participants implicitly described the importance education. They equated their experiences in 4-H to learning experiences, which contributed to each of their success stories. This description is consistent with 4-H's Learn by Doing model, which teaches youth through practical application (4-H Organization, 2001). In addition, for some participants, 4-H helped them see the possibilities concerning external educational opportunities: "Going to 4-H kind of opened your eyes to education and other opportunities in life that could be offered to you. One thing about 4-H is it allowed me to go to different educational venues" (Anthony, personal communication, February 25, 2019).

While 4-H involvement cannot solely be attributed to the decision to work in the educational field, it influenced this decision for five of the participants. 4-H participation can, however, be attributed to participants educating their students and children on the benefits of the 4-H program. The knowledge learned through the program was so significant to Ella, Julie, and John that they encourage their own children and other children in the community to participate in the program. John left these final thoughts during our interview session:

For anyone who is hearing this, who has kids or friends of family that are not involved in 4-H, get them involved in 4-H. Push them to get in it so they can see that there is more to

life than what they are typically used to seeing. (John, personal communication,

February 9, 2019)

4-H participation influenced participants' educational decisions and through the Learn by Doing

model, influenced various areas of participants' lives. These various areas are described and

woven throughout each of the themes. This influence is not limited to the lives of the

participants, but to those with whom they have chosen to share their experiences.

Independent Consultant Review

The manuscript was reviewed by an independent consultant, who is a subject matter

expert in the field of 4-H. The independent consultant highlighted both grammatical and APA

errors within the manuscript. I corrected these errors prior to forwarding the finalized

manuscript to my chair. In addition, the independent consultant was asked to provide candid

feedback relative to the following sections of the manuscript: Data Analysis, Delimitations and

Limitations, Recommendations for Future Research, and the Conclusion. This portion of the

manuscript outlines the independent consultant's review relative to the aforementioned sections.

The independent consultant acknowledged that the six major themes identified, as a result

of data analysis, were consistent with Lerner and Lerner's *Positive Youth Development* study

(2015). She noted, "4-H professes to help young people develop their head, heart, hands, and

health; not for themselves, but to have the ability to give back to family, their club, their

communities, their county, and their world" (Independent Consultant, personal communication,

June 28, 2019). She found that the lived experiences of the participants demonstrated this

concept, as "many found themselves giving back to their families and their communities"

(Independent Consultant, personal communication, June 28, 2019).

In terms of Delimitations and Limitations, the independent consultant agreed that both

the lack of racial diversity of the sample population and the lack of participant memory were

limitations of the study. These were both limitations that I noted. While she concluded that

there were few African American studies relative to 4-H, she noted that a more diverse sample

population would have strengthened the study. The independent consultant found participants'

lack of memory to be a plausible limitation. Through her years of experience, she found that 4-H

participants often forgot the specifics of their experiences; however, she found the study's

participants' stories "felt real and authentic" (Independent Consultant, personal communication,

June 28, 2019).

Regarding Recommendations for Future Study, the independent consultant's review

implies the need for maximum variation in future studies. In addition, she concluded that

conducting the study in a more urban location would allow for result comparisons of locations.

My conclusion encourages youth to get involved in the 4-H program and 4-H administrators to

promote and strengthen the program so that youth may experience the benefits associated with

involvement. The independent consultant acknowledged that the "results will add value to the

field of positive youth development and will encourage my colleagues to keep striving to offer

high quality opportunities, as they make such a difference in the lives of the youth we serve"

(Independent Consultant, personal communication, June 28, 2019).

Summary

Chapter Four described the lived experiences of participants who grew up as

socioeconomically disadvantaged youth in a 4-H program within a rural southern Virginia

county. The chapter began with descriptions of each pilot study participant, followed by the

results of the pilot study. The study's 11 participants were then described. Through interviews

and focus group sessions, participants shared their perceptions concerning their upbringing, identity, and their experiences in the 4-H program. Artifact replicas were photographed to depict the culture of the 4-H program as well as to enhance the description of participants' lived experiences.

Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was used to analyze data collected from interviews and focus groups. Preset codes were initially used to code the data, and new codes were added throughout the data analysis process. Coded data were then categorized and themes emerged. Six themes emerged at the conclusion of data analysis. These themes were then used to answer each of the four research questions. In general, participants described their experiences in the 4-H program as positive, influential experiences that encouraged character development and skills necessary to become productive citizens. 4-H provided participants with new experiences that enabled them to see the possibilities of who or what they could become (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The chapter then outlined the review of the study, conducted by an independent consultant, and concluded with a summary.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

While youth extracurricular programs have generally been regarded positively in terms of development, the research that supports this notion has focused on extracurricular activities as a whole, as oppose to specific extracurricular activities. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how adults who grew up as disadvantaged children were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H program in a rural southern Virginia county. Chapter Five will offer a summary of the study's findings and present discussion of findings relative to empirical and theoretical literature. In addition, the chapter will provide empirical, theoretical, and practical implications of the study, delimitations and limitations, followed by recommendations for future research; the chapter will conclude with a summary.

Summary of Findings

The study aimed to answer the central research question, as well as three supporting research questions relative to participants' lived experiences in the 4-H program. Through data analysis, six themes were identified and utilized to answer each of the research questions. The identified themes are as followed:

- 4-H Experiences Provide Exposure to Diversity.

- 4-H Participation Builds Character.

- 4-H Experiences Provide a Foundation for Building Life Skills.

- 4-H Experiences Influence Present and Future Identity.

- 4-H Experiences Provide New Opportunities.

- Education is Essential to Success.

The central research question sought to determine how adults who grew up as disadvantaged children described their experiences in the 4-H program. To answer the central research question, the following two themes were used: 4-H experiences provide exposure to diversity and 4-H experiences provide new opportunities. 4-H participants described their experiences in the 4-H program as positive, distinctive opportunities that fostered an understanding and appreciation of diversity. Participants conveyed that these opportunities to interact with diverse groups of people helped them build and maintain future relationships with people across gender and cultures. 4-H offers a wide variety of activities that socioeconomically disadvantaged youth may not have had the financial means to experience otherwise. As a result, participants described their experiences in 4-H as new opportunities to explore activities and the world around them.

Research question two addressed the impact of 4-H experiences on participants' self-perceptions. To answer this research question the following theme was used: 4-H experiences influence present and future identity. Participants' present and future identity were influenced by a variety of factors throughout their lives. One of these factors included experiences within the 4-H program. Confidence was a reoccurring topic throughout interviews and focus groups. Two participants perceived their experiences in 4-H helped them gain confidence and overcome shyness. Participants began to see themselves as more independent individuals. This sense of independence was a result of doing new and autonomous activities in the 4-H program. Confident and independent future self-images became reality for participants in their adult lives, as each of the 11 participants leads productive lives.

The impact of positive and negative experiences in the 4-H program was the focus of research question three. Two themes were utilized to answer this research question: 4-H

experiences build character and 4-H experiences provide a foundation for building life skills.

Participants perceived that their community service involvement in the 4-H program helped build

character and their ability to empathize with others. Two participants attributed their current

community involvement to their experiences in 4-H during youth. In addition to character,

participants developed life skills as a result of participation in 4-H. These skills included but

were not limited to project management, decision making, social interaction, and teamwork. The

character and life skills developed in the 4-H program have helped participants become

contributing adults in their homes, careers, and communities.

The final research question focused on the influence that 4-H participation had on

participants' lives. Education is essential for success is the theme that was used to answer this

research question. Participants saw their experiences in 4-H as learning experiences that

influenced post-secondary education decisions, careers, and other life decisions. 4-H's Learn by

Doing model supports education by providing meaningful learning opportunities to its

participants. These learning experiences aided adults in becoming holistically successful in their

adult lives.

Discussion

The theoretical framework grounding this phenomenological study is Markus and Nurius'

(1986) possible selves theory. Several previous studies were examined relative to extracurricular

activities, rural youth of low socioeconomic status, and the 4-H program. This section discusses

the connection between the possible selves theory, empirical research, and this study's findings.

Empirical Literature Discussion

The benefits of extracurricular activities were one focus of the literature review.

Extracurricular activities are thought to aid in the learning process (Assaraf, 2011; Dunstan &

Todd, 2012; Sharp et al., 2015). Previous research concluded that extracurricular activities

support social development, academic performance, problem solving, critical thinking, social

responsibility, and leadership (Balyer & Gunduz, 2012; Cicchetti et al., 2014, Hong et al., 2013).

Parallel to the current study, character, confidence, leadership, social interaction, and the

importance of education were identified as benefits obtained through 4-H participation in

interviews and focus group sessions. These benefits were particularly helpful to participants who

grew up as socioeconomically disadvantaged youth. Balyer and Gunduz (2012) asserted,

"Extracurricular activities are strategic tools that help diminish effects of negative behavior" (p.

5). This concept was demonstrated by both John and Mike who grew up in areas infested by

drugs and violence. Both participants voiced that involvement in 4-H kept them active and away

from the drugs and violence that surrounded them daily.

    Rural, socioeconomically disadvantaged youth face numerous challenges (Assaraf, 2011;

Simpkins et al., 2013; Williams & Bryan, 2013). As a result, rural socioeconomically

disadvantaged youth are more likely to drop out of high school, less likely to attend college, less

likely to be employed as adults, yet more likely to have children out of wedlock (Ratcliffe,

2015). This was far from the reality of the 11 participants in this study. All 11 completed high

school, six had either achieved or were in the process of achieving master's degrees, and one

participant was pursuing her doctorate degree. In addition, each participant was gainfully

employed, and several acknowledged they were in healthy relationships. The disparity between

previous research and the participants' lives was largely attributed to their upbringing in the

home. The role of 4-H participation was influential in participants' lives and built upon an

already strong foundation. 4-H provided participants an opportunity to interact with peers and

mentors, extending participants' network. Their success stories are consistent with the findings

of Williams and Bryan's (2013) study, which concluded that several factors, to include extended networks and participation in extracurricular activities, contributed to the academic success of socioeconomically disadvantaged youth in single-parent homes. While the current study was not limited to single-parent homes, participants did face challenges as a result of being socioeconomically disadvantaged.

The study's findings indicate that an individual's social context significantly impacts youth trajectories and images of possible selves. While low income youth are more likely to experience negative trajectories and images of self, positive experiences and moral guidance serve a strong deterrent against negative outcomes. These experiences and moralistic interactions are likened to the seeds of the sequoia tree. Initially, these experiences may seem small and insignificant, but over time these experiences take root and produce significant results. Childhood is a critical period in terms of learning and developing confidence, self-esteem, and other capabilities that influence adult outcomes (Wozniak, Lollis, & Marshall, 2014). Creating a positive social context during childhood years positively influences adult outcomes. Despite the negative trajectories typically associated with low income youth, the 4-H program provides a positive social context for participants. This positive social context counteracts the negativity experienced by low income youth. The study's findings indicate that any positive experiences at home, school, extracurricular programs, etc. are important for all youth, specifically those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Concerning the literature on the *4-H Study of Positive Youth Development*, 4-H participation fosters competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Lerner & Lerner, 2015). Fostering these attributes then leads to participant contribution (Lerner & Lerner, 2015). Consistent with these findings, participants in the current study acknowledged learning

new things in 4-H, establishing new levels of confidence, connection with diverse people, building character, and empathizing with those in need. The experiences in 4-H did indeed lead to contribution for several of the participants. Two participants are presently actively involved in community service, while four either work directly with youth in the school system or intend to work with youth.

Theoretical Literature Discussion

Markus and Nurius' possible selves theory serves as the theoretical framework for the study. The possible selves theory asserts that one's identity consists of a present perception one's self and multiple possibilities of who one may become in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Future possible selves are formed from one's "hopes, fears, goals and threats" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). These future possible selves then serve as motivation or a deterrence to achieve these visions of one's self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The findings of the study reiterate the possible selves theory. Every participant perceived that 4-H involvement exposed them to new experiences with new people. Through these activities and social interactions, participants began to realize that there was more to life than they were exposed to in their homes and local communities. This exposure gave participants motivation to achieve a future self. Future selves for each participant looked quite differently. For Ella, Leah, Tamara, Anthony, and Mark, this future self pursued education beyond high school. Tamara and John's future selves gave back to the community. Mike's future self lived a productive life, one in which he provided for his family. Each participant now lives out these once future selves. While 4-H participation cannot be solely attributed to participants achieving future selves, it certainly had an influence.

The study's findings expound upon the possible selves theory. First, socioeconomically disadvantaged youth who are consistently exposed to positive role models, behaviors, and

activities draw strength and encouragement from future self images. This encouragement further motivated participants to achieve positive future selves. Secondly, in addition to one's "hopes, fears, and fantasies," simple exposure to new activities and diverse groups of people have the ability to influence both present and future selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). Throughout interviews and focus groups, participants continually talked about their new experiences in the 4-H program and how these experiences influenced decision making and present social interactions. Lastly, possible self images are particularly important for those who are disadvantaged or experience some form of inequality; possible selves have the ability to positively influence life's trajectories (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Implications

Youth, 4-H administrators, and education policy makers may benefit from the data analysis and findings of this study. Each of the six themes: (a) 4-H experiences provide exposure to diversity, (b) 4-H participation builds character, (c) 4-H experiences provide a foundation for building life skills; (d) 4-H experiences influence present and future identity, (e) 4-H experiences provide new opportunities, and (f) education is essential to success, provide insight to the study's implications. This section discusses the empirical, theoretical, and practical implications of the study's findings.

Empirical Implications

Empirically, the study's findings corroborate much of the reviewed literature relative to extracurricular activities. *The Positive Development of Youth: Comprehensive Findings from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development* suggested that 4-H involvement positively influenced the lives of participants (Lerner & Lerner, 2015). The study attributed this positive influence to the structure of the 4-H program, supportive adult mentors, and positive activities for participants

(Lerner & Lerner, 2015). The present study is consistent with these findings, as participants alluded to the significance of the program's structure, mentors, and activities in both individual interviews and focus group sessions.

The study's findings imply that while socioeconomically disadvantaged youth may be at risk for poor outcomes, educational experiences provided by 4-H may aid in achieving more favorable outcomes. For instance, the life skills and character built in the program aid in securing and maintaining employment. The inability to secure and maintain employment is a negative outcome typically associated with youth of low socioeconomic status. This notion supports the self-actualization theory. The theory asserts that as youth grow and develop, they gain a heightened awareness of the world around them and themselves (Van Der Merwe, 2014). As youth gain this sense of knowledge and awareness, they are better equipped to actively participate in society (Ivtzan et al., 2013).

The ability to function autonomously allows youth to gain a better understanding of their own identity and their capabilities, despite social status. 4-H provides a safe environment conducive for this autonomy. Throughout the interviews and focus groups, I observed stories of youth functioning independently in talent shows, public speaking events, and overnight camps. These opportunities allowed youth to participate in the same activities as their upper social status peers. 4-H and similar programs tear down racial, socioeconomic, and other barriers, allowing youth to be who they are as individuals. This freedom fosters the journey to self-actualization (Ivtzan et al., 2013). While the 4-H program has evolved, based upon participant perception, the program has remained true to its purpose. Previous research indicates that the 4-H program fosters youth voice, ownership, and engagement (Cater et al., 2013). To these attributes, I would also add a sense of identity.

Theoretical Implications

New opportunities and experiences were the most common codes identified in the data. These new opportunities and experiences served as a catalyst for development of present and future possible selves. As a result, the findings of the study confirmed Markus and Nurius' possible selves theory. Participants demonstrated the "conceptual link between cognition and motivation" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). Ella, Leah, Tamara, Shelia, and Julie all acknowledged how hard their parents physically worked and determined at a young age to obtain a postsecondary education so that they would not follow in their parents' footsteps relative to physical labor. The threat of working a laborious job fueled their motivation to achieve college degrees and non-labor intensive careers.

Involvement in 4-H allowed participants to interact with diverse groups of people. This interaction exposed participants to various thought processes across social statuses, cultures, and genders. Consequently, participants were exposed to the possibilities of who they could become in the future. Similarly, the activities that 4-H provided enabled participants to envision what they could become in the future. Being exposed to positive possibilities reinforced positive present identity and positively influenced participant trajectories (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Relative to the notion that rural youth may see themselves and their environment negatively due to a perceived lack of opportunity, participants did perceive a lack of opportunity in their rural locality. Conversely, however, because participants were rooted in homes that exhibited strong family values and were afforded new opportunities through 4-H and other extracurricular programs, positive self-perceptions were exhibited. This further strengthens the possible selves theory because it maintains that present and future selves can be impacted by events that allow an individual to see one's self in a positive manner. These implications point to

the importance of promoting positive environments and involvement for youth; positive present and future self-perceptions are generated as a result.

Practical Implications

In terms of practical application, there are several take-aways for youth, 4-H administrators, and educational policy makers. Relative to youth, specifically rural youth of a low socioeconomic status, the 4-H program is a youth development program which may be beneficial for personal, social, and professional development. Participants felt strongly about the influence that 4-H had on their lives. So much so, John urged youth to become involved in the program to experience the programs benefits (John, personal communication, February 9, 2019). Youth, who take this step to become involved, may find that 4-H offers a plethora of activities. These activities include but are not limited to camps, public speaking contests, talents shows, consumer events, culinary arts events, and community clubs (Hayes, 2014). These activities help youth develop a sense of identity and explore the possibilities of who or what they may become in the future.

Concerning 4-H administrators and educational policy makers, there are significant benefits associated with 4-H participation. 4-H administrators and educational policy makers should collaborate to determine how the 4-H program can be further integrated into the school system to provide these benefits to more youth. 4-H's Learn by Doing model will provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate, in practice, lessons learned in the classroom (Hayes, 2014). This practical application may enhance the student's learning experience and ultimately academic outcomes. 4-H administrators may consider increasing promotion of community clubs and activities to engage youth outside of the school environment.

4-H administrators should also consider conducting membership drives at Title I schools. Targeting Title I schools will enable 4-H administrators to reach a large population of low income youth. Membership drive content should be specifically tailored towards rural, low income youth. To create this content, 4-H administrators may consider soliciting assistance those who previously participated in the program and were impacted significantly. The inclusion of testimonials and story sharing by these individuals may help youth connect with the vision of the 4-H program. In addition, 4-H administrators should consider working with local businesses to gain support via funding and volunteers. Businessmen and women can provide insight regarding the ever changing business landscape. Sharing this insight may be helpful to 4-H administrators as they develop curriculum and this insight may give youth ideas about who they would like to become in the future. Many local businesses actively seek out ways to give back to the community, donations from these businesses could be used to sponsor low income youth for 4-H camps and other 4-H activities.

As the 4-H program grows and positively impacts youth lives and communities, 4-H administrators are encouraged to share this impact with local, state, and national policy makers. Policy makers are then encouraged to grant additional funding to support the growth and development of the program and youth across this nation. Another major focus should be to develop the 4-H program in areas of the country where it does not currently exist. 4-H administrators may consider collaborating with other program administrators to develop best practices. These best practices should then be cascaded to all 4-H clubs.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations for the study were applied to focus specifically on the lived experiences of previously socioeconomically disadvantaged youth in the 4-H program. The sample population included participants who were over the age of 18. Participants must have experienced the phenomenon of being socioeconomically disadvantaged as youth, as defined by scoring in the lower third of the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status, and participated in the 4-H program within Southern County for a minimum of two years. In order to determine if participants met the two-year participation criteria, they were required to document and self-certify involvement. These boundaries were established to solicit and obtain information-rich participants for the study.

One limitation for the study is the sample population. Although my intent was to achieve maximum variation in terms of gender and race, all 11 participants were African American. The majority of participants who met the requirements for the study were solicited via snowball sampling, which may have influenced the race factor of the sample. In terms of gender, the population was somewhat balanced with five males and six females. Relative to the sample population, another limitation was the degree to which participants experienced being socioeconomically disadvantaged. While all participants met the study's criteria, the majority of the selected participants scored in the upper twenties, relatively close to the criteria cut-off.

In addition to the sample population limitations, participant memory was also a limitation for the study. While the majority of participants vividly recalled their experiences, for some, these experiences occurred over 20 years ago. Over time, participants may recall memories differently, or not at all. To combat this limitation, participants were asked to provide data via two different collection methods, in individual interviews as well as focus group sessions. The

two methods allowed participants an opportunity to respond individually and collaboratively. The collaboration of the focus group may have prompted additional thoughts or memories that were not captured in the interview. In addition, member checks were utilized, which enabled participants to modify/correct data previously collected.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Future Research**</div>

A transcendental, phenomenological study was conducted to determine how adults who grew up as disadvantaged children were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H program within a rural southern Virginia county. In consideration of the study's findings, limitations, and delimitations, I make some recommendations for future study. The first recommendation is to conduct a case study on a specific 4-H club. The case study approach provides a "systematic investigation of a single individual, group, community or some other unity in which the researcher examines in-depth data relating to several variables" (Heale & Twycross, 2018, p. 7). Utilizing the case study approach would allow the researcher to sample participants who experienced the same or similar 4-H activities under the direction of shared adult mentors.

In addition to recommending the case study approach, another recommendation for future studies is achieving maximum variation. While achieving maximum variation in terms of race and gender presents challenges, a diverse sample may yield different results. Updating the participant criteria for selection is also a recommendation for future studies. For the purpose of this study, participants were bounded to participating in 4-H for a minimum of two years and scoring 27 or below on the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status. I would recommend increasing the minimum number of years in the 4-H program and lowering the maximum scoring of the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status from 27 to 24. Modifying these criteria will yield participants who spent a longer amount of time in the

program and who have experienced being socioeconomically disadvantaged to a greater degree.

Lastly, I recommend conducting the study in more or less rural locations and urban areas to

determine how locality influences participants' perceptions.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how adults

who grew up as disadvantaged children were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H program in

a rural southern Virginia county. Socioeconomically disadvantaged youth are predisposed to

negative social, academic, and adult outcomes (Nieto, 2015). While socioeconomically

disadvantaged youth may experience negative outcomes, positive reinforcement in the home and

structured activities, such as those provided by 4-H, may positively influence trajectories

(Markus & Nurius, 1986). Through interviews, focus groups, and artifacts the unique

perspectives of participants who had experienced this phenomenon were voiced.

Four research questions were posed that sought to determine how participants described

their experiences in the 4-H program and how these experiences influenced present and future

possible selves. Six themes emerged that were used to answer each of the four research

questions: (a) 4-H experiences provide exposure to diversity, (b) 4-H participation builds

character, (c) 4-H experiences provide a foundation for building life skills, (d) 4-H experiences

influence present and future identity, (e) 4-H experiences provide new opportunities, and (f)

education is essential to success. Participants generally described their experiences in the 4-H

program positively as these experiences provided new opportunities and broadened horizons.

Participants presently utilize skills developed in the program, such as leadership, social

interaction, project management, and decision making.

4-H is a youth development program that offers a wide variety of ways for youth to get involved (Hayes, 2014). The implication of the study, for youth, is simply to get involved! The benefits of the program are noteworthy. Youth may develop long-lasting relationships and skills that help on life's journey. The implication for 4-H administrators and educational policy makers is to continue to promote 4-H, specifically for socioeconomically disadvantaged youth. In addition, they should continuously improve program curriculum and activities in school and out of school. The work of 4-H administrators, mentors, and volunteers has made a difference in the lives of participants and has the ability to do so for the current and future generations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Permission to Use Data from the Childhood Poverty Status Table

RE: Permission Request

Hi Cherise,

You have permission to use the table you are requesting, Let me know if there is anything else you need.

Good Luck!

From: Mbaye, Cherise [mailto:cmbaye@liberty.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, July 19, 2016 7:35 PM
Subject: Permission Request

Good Evening,

My name is Cherise Mbaye. I am currently a Doctoral student at Liberty University and in the process of writing my dissertation. My topic is: "Exploring the Reflective Experiences of Disadvantaged Children in 4-H: A Phenomenological Study". The "Child Poverty and Adult Success" article, published by Urban Institute has been very helpful in the development of my study. I am writing in hope of gaining permission to use the following Table, contained in the article, in my manuscript:

-Educational Achievement, Employment, Nonmarital Childbearing, and Criminal Justice Involvement by Childhood Poverty Status (percent)

Your website indicates that permission may be gained at copyright.com, however after searching for the article on the website; I am unable to find any information on the article. I hoped that you may be able to point me in the right direction to gain permission.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,

Cherise Mbaye

Appendix B: Permission to Use Images

The following communication grants permission to use the images titled "4-H Formula for Success," "The Five Cs Of Positive Youth Development," and "The Five Cs Lead to a Sixth C-Contribution."

Fw: 4-H photos/images for college project

Mon 4:26 PM
Mbaye, Cherise

Inbox

You replied on 7/25/2016 5:02 PM.

3 attachments (631 KB)   Download all   Save all to OneDrive - Liberty University

Hi Cherise -- per your request -- here are the images related to the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development. Please credit: National 4-H Council and the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University in your school work.

Thank you,

✿ 4-H GROWS HERE

It was my pleasure to speak with you today. I certainly appreciate your time and your willingness to help. My name is Cherise Mbaye. I am currently a Doctoral student at Liberty University and in the process of writing my dissertation. My topic is: "Exploring the Reflective Experiences of Disadvantaged Children in 4-H: A Phenomenological Study". "The Positive Development of Youth: Comprehensive Findings from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development" has been very helpful in the development of my study. I am writing in hope of gaining permission to use the following images, contained in the report, in my manuscript:

-"4-H Formula For Success"
-"The 5Cs of Positive Youth Development"
-"The Five Cs Lead to a Sixth C-Contribution".

I certainly appreciate your time and your feedback.

Regards,

Cherise Mbaye

Appendix C: Permission to Utilize Facility

Action Items

Cherise

I read your request for use of the art room here at ████████████████████ for your focus group sessions, and i am happy to inform you that we would be happy to provide you with a time slot that works best for the two of us. Once you have put everything into a time frame, please call and we will lock in your date. Thanks for selecting your community center for this project

From: "Mbaye, Cherise" <cmbaye@liberty.edu>

I hope that you are well. I spoke with ██████ earlier today and she asked that I email you concerning a request. As you may know, I'm currently a student at Liberty University. In the upcoming months, I plan to conduct a study to determine how adults, who grew up in low income homes, were impacted by their experiences in the local 4-H Program. I will be collecting data from the participants via interviews and two focus group sessions (approximately 7-8 people in each session). I am writing because I would like to request permission to meet participants at the ████████████████████████████████. The actual study may be several months away because I must receive approval from Liberty's Institutional Review Board. Prior to doing so however, I must demonstrate that I've obtained permission to meet participants in a public facility. I greatly appreciate your consideration. If you have any questions of me, please feel free to give me a call at 919-219-7512.

Regards,

Cherise

Appendix D: Permission to Contact

Action Items

Good afternoon, Cherise.

It is good to hear from you & hope you are well. I will be glad to assist you with locating some participants for this study and get you in contact with them. I hope you will keep me in the loop with your findings. It's always good to hear the results of the efforts put into programming.

Best wishes!

From: Mbaye, Cherise <cmbaye@liberty.edu>
Sent: Thursday, June 7, 2018 11:08 PM

My name is Cherise Mbaye, I am currently a Doctoral student at Liberty University. I am conducting a phenomenological study of 4-H experiences from the perspectives of those who once were financially deprived. I am writing to request your assistance for the following:
1) Identifying potential participants for the study
2) Providing email addresses for potential participants
3) Granting me permission to contact said potential participants
Potential participants must be adults, who participated in the ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ during their youth for a minimum of two years. To be accepted into the study, participants must also have experienced less than favorable socioeconomic status during their youth.

I anticipate the study beginning in the next few months, once I have received approval to conduct the study via Liberty University's Institutional Review Board. I would certainly appreciate your commitment to assist in the near future. I look forward to your response.

Regards,

Cherise Mbaye

Appendix E: IRB Approval Letter

IRB, IRB

Fri 1/11/2019 10:17 AM

To:Mbaye, Cherise <cmbaye@liberty.edu>;
Cc:Bradshaw, L. Daniele (Education Specialist) <ldbradshaw3@liberty.edu>; IRB, IRB <IRB@liberty.edu>;

Dear Cherise Marcella Mbaye,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases are attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

The Graduate School

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

Appendix F: Email Invitation for Participation

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Cherise Mbaye, I am currently a Doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University. I am conducting a phenomenological study of 4-H experiences from the perspectives of those who once were financially deprived. The purpose of this email is to request your participation in the study. You were selected as potential candidate because you may meet the study's criteria, which includes: being an adult (age 18+ years old), previously participating two or more years in the local 4-H program, and being of a low socioeconomic status during youth). I ask that you please consider participating in the research study. Your unique perspective may help others better understand the benefits and opportunities for improvement relative to the 4-H program and may lead to Program improvement; ultimately enhancing program benefits for the youth of today.

If you agree to participate in the study, you must first complete the *Informed Consent Form* and return it to me. You will then be asked to complete the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status (thirty minutes) and the Demographics & 4-H Involvement Questionnaire (thirty minutes). The Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status and the Demographics & 4-H Involvement Questionnaire will be used as screening tools to ensure you meet the criteria for study. If you are selected as a participant, you will then be asked to participate in an one-on-one interview (one and a half hours), a focus group (one and a half hours), review transcribed data from interview and focus group sessions for accuracy (two hours), provide artifacts relative to your experiences in 4-H (one hour), and review data in the final report for accuracy (one hour). Artifacts may include: 4-H awards, newspaper write-ups, high school yearbooks, 4-H memorabilia, 4-H related posters, and projects related to your experience. Questions asked in the interview and focus group session will be related to:

1. 4-H participation and unique experiences within the 4-H program
2. 4-H influence on adult outcomes
3. General youth experiences

Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

*Interview sessions will be scheduled at your convenience and may take place at the ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮, by telephone or Skype web conferencing (based on your preference).

Focus Groups will take place at the ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or Skype web conferencing (based on your preference).

To participate, complete and return the consent document to me. To return, you may print, complete, scan, and email the document back to me. If you prefer, you may also mail the completed consent document to me. If you choose to mail the document to me, please email me and I will provide the mailing address that you should send the document to. Once the consent document is received, I will send you an email with the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status and the Demographics & 4-H Involvement Questionnaire attached. These may also be returned to me in the same manner as the consent document.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please complete the consent document and return it to me. The completed consent form must be returned to me prior to you completing the screening documents (The Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status and the Demographics & 4-H Involvement Questionnaire).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, please feel free to contact me at cmbaye@liberty.edu.

Again, thank you for your consideration,

Cherise Mbaye

Appendix G: Informed Consent Form

CONSENT FORM
Exploring the Reflective Experiences of Disadvantaged Children in 4-H: A Phenomenological
Study
Cherise Marcella Mbaye
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of 4-H experiences from the perspectives of those who were once financially deprived. You were selected as a possible participant because you may meet the study's criteria, which includes: being an adult (age 18+ years old), previously participating two or more years in the local 4-H program, and being of a low socioeconomic status during youth). Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Cherise Mbaye, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to determine how adults, who grew up as needy children, were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H Program in ████████████ ██████ In addition, the study seeks to determine how, if at all, participation in the 4-H Program changed the way participants viewed themselves in the present and in the future.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1) Complete the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status (thirty minutes).
   a. Disclose personal information (such as demographics).
   b. Disclose information pertaining to your parents' occupation(s).
2) Complete the Demographics & 4-H Involvement Questionnaire (thirty minutes).
3) Take part in an audiotaped interview session, which lasts approximately one and a half hours.
   a. Answer questions about your experiences in 4-H.
   b. Answer questions about your upbringing.
   c. Answer questions about your thoughts concerning identity.
4) Take part in one of two audio/video taped focus group sessions, which lasts approximately one and a half hours.
   a. Answer questions about your experiences in 4-H.
   b. Answer questions about your upbringing.
   c. Answer questions about your thoughts concerning identity.
5) Review interview and focus group transcripts and/or audio recordings for accuracy (two hours).
   a. Provide feedback about any inaccuracies within one week.
6) Provide artifacts related to your 4-H experience (one hour). Artifacts may include: 4-H awards, newspaper write-ups, high school yearbooks, 4-H memorabilia, 4-H related posters, and projects. I will photograph these artifacts and redact all identifying information.
7) Review the manuscript to ensure the information does not pose a risk to you (one hour).

* Screening data collected from individuals who are not selected for the study will be permanently deleted (if electronic) or shredded (if paper documents). These documents will be deleted or shredded once disqualification status is determined.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include:
1) Helping others understand the benefits of participation in the 4-H Program.
2) Helping the researcher better understand and document the opportunities for improvement relative to the 4-H Program, which may lead to program improvements and enhance programs benefits for the youth of today.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. I cannot, however assure that other participants will maintain your confidentiality as a result of your participation in the focus group.

As another measure to protect the identity of the participants, all data collected will be stored on a secured, password protected computer system and may be used future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Focus groups will be audio/video recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password protected computer system for three years. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the 4-H Program. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed

immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Cherise Mbaye. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 919-219-7512. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. L.Daniele Bradshaw, at ldbradshaw3@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Investigator

Appendix H: Permission to Use the Hollingshead Four Factor Index

Fw: Permission to Utilize the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status

Mbaye, Cherise

Wed 7/20/2016 3:26 PM

To: Mbaye, Cherise <cmbaye@liberty.edu>;

████████████████████████

Sent: Sunday, March 6, 2016 9:43:49 PM
To: Mbaye, Cherise
Subject: Re: Permission to Utilize the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status

Dear Cherise Mbaeye,

Thank you for writing. Yes you have my permission as head of the ███████████████████ use this Index. There is no charge. I wish you luck and insight with your scholarship.

████████████████████████

On Sun, Mar 6, 2016 at 7:17 PM, Mbaye, Cherise <cmbaye@liberty.edu> wrote:
Good Evening Sir,
I hope that this email finds you well. My name is Cherise Mbaye. Currently, I am a doctoral student at Liberty University. I am writing in hope that I may find information on how to go about requesting permission to use the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status as a tool to conduct research for my dissertation. The scale would be utilized to determine if the candidates for the study experienced the phenomenon of being socioeconomically disadvantaged during their youth.

Any guidance you may offer would be greatly appreciated.

Regards,

Cherise Mbaye

Appendix I: Demographics & 4-H Involvement Questionnaire

Demographics & 4-H Involvement QUESTIONNAIRE

The information contained in this questionnaire will be utilized to determine eligibility to participate in the research.

Name *(Last, First, M.I.):*		☐ M ☐ F	**DOB:**
Highest Level of Education Achieved	☐ Some High School ☐ High School Diploma/GED ☐ Some College ☐ College Degree ☐ Some Graduate School ☐ Graduate Degree ☐ Some Post Graduate ☐ Post Graduate Degree		
Race:		**Occupation:**	

4-H Involvement

Have you participated in the 4-H Program for a minimum for two years within ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇? ☐ Yes   ☐ No

Please check all 4-H Clubs in which you have been involved (within ▇▇▇▇▇▇).	☐ Community Club	☐ After School Club
	☐ In School Club	☐ Project Club
	☐ Horse Club	☐ Other (Please describe)

Please list any 4-H activities, camps, competitions, etc. that you have participated in (to the best of your ability, please also indicated the year in which you participated in this activity).

Year	Activity

CERTIFICATION OF TRUTHFULNESS & SIGNATURE

I certify that all of the information furnished on the *Demographics & 4-H Involvement Questionnaire* is true and completed to the best of my ability. I understand that the information provided on the questionnaire will be used solely for the purpose of the research project.

Applicant
Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix J: Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status

Hollingshead four factor index of socioeconomic status

The information contained in this questionnaire will be utilized to determine eligibility to participate in the research.

Name *(Last, First, M.I.):*	**Gender**	☐ M ☐ F

*Parental Socioeconomic Information Instructions: The next section of this form will ask questions about your parents'/guardians' demographic information. Please answer each question as if this was during your childhood.

PARENTAL SOCIOECONOMIC INFORMATION

Using the selections to the right, please describe the home you grew up in. "My parent/guardians were_____"	☐ Married and Living with Spouse ☐ Never married, divorced, separated, or widowed	

MARRIED AND LIVING WITH SPOUSE

If you checked "Married and Living with Spouse", please indicated who worked outside of the home, as well as their occupation. Please be very specific regarding the occupational title. *If you indicated "Never married, divorced, separated, or widowed, please skip to the next question.	☐ Father	☐ Mother
	Occupational Title:	Occupational Title:
	Highest Level of Education Completed: ☐ Less than seventh grade ☐ Junior high school (9th grade) ☐ Partial High School (10th or 11th Grade) ☐ High School Graduate (whether private preparatory, parochial, trade, GED, or public school) ☐ Partial College (at least one year) or specialized training ☐ Standard College or University Graduation ☐ Graduate Professional Training (Graduate Degree)	Highest Level of Education Completed: ☐ Less than seventh grade ☐ Junior high school (9th grade) ☐ Partial High School (10th or 11th Grade) ☐ High School Graduate (whether private preparatory, parochial, trade, GED, or public school) ☐ Partial College (at least one year) or specialized training ☐ Standard College or University Graduation ☐ Graduate Professional Training (Graduate Degree)

NEVER MARRIED, DIVORCED, SEPARATED, OR WIDOWED

If you checked "Never Married, Divorced, Separated, or Widowed", please indicated who worked outside of the home, as well as their occupation. Please be very specific regarding the occupational title.	☐ Father/Male Guardian	☐ Mother/Female Guardian
	Occupational Title:	Occupational Title:
	Highest Level of Education Completed: ☐ Less than seventh grade ☐ Junior high school (9th grade) ☐ Partial High School (10th or 11th Grade) ☐ High School Graduate (whether private preparatory, parochial, trade, GED, or public school) ☐ Partial College (at least one year) or specialized training ☐ Standard College or University Graduation ☐ Graduate Professional Training (Graduate Degree)	Highest Level of Education Completed: ☐ Less than seventh grade ☐ Junior high school (9th grade) ☐ Partial High School (10th or 11th Grade) ☐ High School Graduate (whether private preparatory, parochial, trade, GED, or public school) ☐ Partial College (at least one year) or specialized training ☐ Standard College or University Graduation ☐ Graduate Professional Training (Graduate Degree)

CERTIFICATION OF TRUTHFULNESS & SIGNATURE

I certify that all of the information furnished on the *Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status* is true and completed to the best of my ability. I understand that the information provided on the questionnaire will be used solely for the purpose of the research project.

Applicant Signature: _____

Appendix K: Letter of Acceptance

Dear Sir or Madam,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the study entitled *EXPLORING THE REFLECTIVE EXPERIENCES OF DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN 4-H: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY*. After review of preliminary data, which included the "Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status" and the "Demographics & 4-H Involvement Questionnaire", it has been determined that you meet the criteria for participation in the study and have been accepted as a participant.

As described within the *Informed Consent Form*, during the next phases of the study, you will be asked to:

1) Take part in an audiotaped interview session, which lasts approximately 1-1.5 hours.
   a. Answer questions about your experiences in 4-H.
   b. Answer questions about your upbringing.
   c. Answer questions about your thoughts concerning identity.
2) Tape part in an audio and videotaped focus group session, which lasts approximately 1-1.5 hours.
   a. Answer questions about your experiences in 4-H.
   b. Answer questions about your upbringing.
   c. Answer questions about your thoughts concerning identity.
3) Review interview and focus group transcripts and/or audio recordings for accuracy.
   a. Provide feedback about any inaccuracies within one week.
4) Provide artifacts related to your 4-H experience. Artifacts may include: 4-H awards, newspaper write-ups, high school yearbooks, 4-H memorabilia, 4-H related posters, and projects.
5) Review the manuscript to ensure the information does not pose a risk to you.

*Interview sessions will be scheduled at your convenience and may take place at the ███████ ███████████████████, by telephone or Skype web conferencing (based on your preference). Focus Groups will take place at the ███████████████████████████ or by teleconference (based on your preference.

Please respond to this email with your availability for an interview and focus group session. Once I receive your response I will confirm a date, time, and location for the interview and focus group session via email.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is *Cherise Mbaye.* You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to *contact her at 919-219-7512 or via email at cmbaye@liberty.edu*.

Thank you for your participation,
Cherise Mbaye

Appendix L: Letter of Rejection

Dear Sir or Madam,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the study entitled *EXPLORING THE REFLECTIVE EXPERIENCES OF DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN 4-H: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY.* After review of preliminary data, which included the "Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status" and the "Demographics & 4-H Involvement Questionnaire", it has been determined that you do not meet the criteria for participation in the study; as a result, no further action will be asked of you relative to the study.

Again, thank you for your willingness to participate. If you have any questions or concerns, you may reach me (Cherise Mbaye) via email cmbaye@liberty.edu or via phone *919-219-7512*.

Regards,

Cherise Mbaye

Appendix M: Independent Consultant Confirmation

Sent: Tuesday, January 16, 2018 1:24:31 PM
To: Mbaye, Cherise
Subject: Re: Research Independent Consultant

Hello Cherise,

I will be happy to assist with your efforts.

On Wed, Dec 20, 2017 at 2:30 PM, Mbaye, Cherise <cmbaye@liberty.edu> wrote:

I hope that you are doing well. My name is Cherise Mbaye, I am currently a Doctoral student at Liberty University. I am conducting a phenomenological study of 4-H experiences from the perspectives of those who once were financially deprived.

The purpose of the study is to determine how adults, who grew up as needy children, were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H Program in a rural ▮▮▮▮▮ county. In addition, the study seeks to determine how, if at all, participation in the 4-H Program changed the way participants viewed themselves in the present and in the future.

I am currently seeking an Independent 3rd Party Consultant to review the thoroughness of the research as well as the following sections within the final document: data analysis, limitations, recommendations for future research, and the conclusion of the study. ▮▮▮▮▮▮ suggested that I reach out to you.

▮▮▮▮▮▮ You are certainly a subject matter expert relative to 4-H. I would be honored if you considered reviewing my completed study and offering feedback, which I hope to conclude late 2018.

Please let me know if you are interested in reviewing my study in its final stages. If so, please also let me know how much you will charge to review and offer feedback.

Regards,

Cherise Mbaye
919-219-7512

Appendix N: Introduction to Interview/Focus Group Script

Hello, I am Cherise Mbaye. I want to first thank you for agreeing to participate in the study which is entitled: EXPLORING THE REFLECTIVE EXPERIENCES OF DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN 4-H: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY. The information collected from you will be used to better understand how adults, who grew up as socioeconomically disadvantaged children, were influenced by their experiences in a 4-H program in rural ███████████ In addition, the study seeks to determine, how if at all, participation in the 4-H program changed the way participants viewed themselves during their involvement in the 4-H program and in the future.

The [Interview/Focus Group] that I will be conducting today will take approximately one and a half hours. The session will be audiotaped. During the session you will be asked questions about:

- Your experiences within the 4-H program
- Your upbringing
- Your thoughts concerning identity

During the session, you are free to not answer any question, if you choose not to. Please note, pseudonyms will be used on the data I collect, so others will not be able to identify you. [I cannot, however, assure that other participants will maintain your confidentiality post the focus group].

Please provide as much information as possible for each question.

Do you have any questions of me?

(If there are questions, researcher will address them.)

If there are no questions concerning this process the session will now begin.

(Researcher begins asking questions)

Appendix O: Open-Ended Interview Questions

Open-Ended Interview Questions

Experiences Relative to Socioeconomic Status and Location

1. Whom did you live with when you were a child (Hollingshead, 1975)?

2. Where did your parent(s)/guardian(s) work when you were a child (Cater et al., 2013; Hollingshead, 1975)?

    a. What were your parent(s)/guardian(s) job title(s) (Cater et al., 2013; Hollingshead, 1975)?

3. How, if in any way, did their job influence you as a child? As an adult (Cater et al., 2013; Hollingshead, 1975)?

4. Please describe how your family's financial situation impacted you as a child (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Robinson, 2014; Williams & Bryan, 2013).

    a. How did your family's financial situation influence you as an adult (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Robinson, 2014; Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

5. How do you describe your life currently (Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

6. Please describe your experiences growing up in the country (Voigt, Talbert, McKinley, & Brady, 2013; Wozniak et al., 2014).

7. How, if at all, did growing up in the country influence your life (Dunstan & Todd, 2012; Wozniak et al., 2014)?

8. How, if at all, do you think your life would be different if you grew up in the city (Dunstan & Todd, 2012; Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

Experiences Relative to the 4-H Program

9. Please describe your experiences in the 4-H program (4-H Organization, 2001).

10. What do you remember most about these experiences (Why?) (4-H Organization, 2016)?

11. Please describe how, if in any way, the 4-H program was helpful (4-H Organization, 2016; Balyer & Gunduz, 2012).

12. Please describe any negative experiences you had in the 4-H program (4-H Organization, 2016; Balyer & Gunduz, 2012; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

13. Please describe how, if in any way, these experiences have influenced you (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

14. Aside from 4-H, what other extracurricular activities did you participate in as a child (Balyer & Gunduz, 2012; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

15. What influence, if any, do you think these activities had on your life (Williams & Bryan, 2013; Wozniak et al., 2014)?

Appendix P: Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

Possible Selves Perspectives

1. What influenced your personality as a child (Kort-Butler, 2012; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oosterhoff et al., 2017)?

2. How, if at all, does how you see yourself, impact who or what you will become (Lerner & Lerner, 2015; Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

3. What impact, if any, does growing up in a financially constrained home have on the way an individual sees himself (Arndt et al., 2013; Bulanda & McCrea, 2013)?

4. Tell me about some of the problems you faced growing up (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

5. What impact did these problems have on how you saw yourself then and now (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

6. Who or what did you want to become when you were a child? And why (Cater et al., 2013; Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

   a. At what point did you make this decision (Cater et al., 2013; Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

   b. What motivated you to achieve this goal (Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

7. What impact, if any, did participation in 4-H have on who or what you wanted to become (Markus & Nurius, 1986)?

4-H Program Perspectives

8. What activities and competitions did you participate in throughout your 4-H Membership (4-H Organization, 2016; Cicchetti et al., 2014)?

   b. Which one do you remember most? And why (4-H Organization, 2016; Cicchetti et al., 2014)?

9. What negative experiences, if any, did you have during your participation in the 4-H program (Dunstan & Todd, 2012)?

10. Based upon your experiences, how can the 4-H program be helpful to today's children (4-H Organization, 2016; Durlak et al., 2010)?

11. As a child, how did you see your 4-H Mentors (Erikson, 2007; Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

    a. What do you remember most about them (Erikson, 2007; Williams & Bryan, 2013)?

12. What is the single most important thing you learned through participation in the 4-H program (David, 2014)?

13. What skills did you learn or develop through participation in 4-H (David, 2014; Hayes, 2014)?

    a. How, if at all, have these skills helped you throughout your life and now (David, 2014; Hayes, 2014)?

Appendix Q: Permission to Use Artifact Images

Re: Permission to Use Images

Yes you have permission. Best wishes!

Sent from my iPhone

On Mar 26, 2019, at 9:47 PM, Mbaye, Cherise <cmbaye@liberty.edu> wrote:

> Good Evening ⬛
> I hope that you are well. I wanted to thank you for your help in identifying and photographing artifacts for my study. Please confirm that I have your permission to use the following images for my dissertation.
>
> <image001.png>
>
> Thank you so much,
>
> Cherise Mbaye

Permission to Use Images

Mbaye, Cherise
Tuesday, March 26, 2019 at 9:47 PM
Show Details

Good Evening ⬛
I hope that you are well. I wanted to thank you for your help in identifying and photographing artifacts for my study. Please confirm that I have your permission to use the following images for my dissertation.

file-12.jpeg file-13.jpeg file-14.jpeg file1-8.jpeg file1-9.jpeg

file2-4.jpeg file2-5.jpeg file3-4.jpeg file3-5.jpeg file4-1.jpeg

file4.jpeg file5-1.jpeg file5.jpeg file6-1.jpeg file6.jpeg

file7.jpeg file8.jpeg file9.jpeg file10.jpeg