

**Texas 4-H Members' Sense of Community**

Emily R. Perdue  
P.O. Box 6108  
Office G210  
West Virginia University Extension Service  
Agricultural Sciences Building  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6108  
(304) 293-2708  
[emily.perdue@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:emily.perdue@mail.wvu.edu)

James R. Lindner  
5058 Haley Center  
Auburn University, AL 36849-5212  
(334) 844-4434  
[jrl0039@auburn.edu](mailto:jrl0039@auburn.edu)

Gary E. Briers  
Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications  
Texas A&M University  
2116 TAMU  
College Station, TX 77843-2116  
(979) 862-3000  
[g-briers@tamu.edu](mailto:g-briers@tamu.edu)

Kirk C. Edney  
Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications  
Texas A&M University  
2116 TAMU  
College Station, TX 77843-2116  
(979) 458-2306  
[kc-edney@tamu.edu](mailto:kc-edney@tamu.edu)

Harry N. Boone  
P.O. Box 6108  
Office 4418  
Agricultural Sciences Building  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6108  
(304) 293-5451  
[Harry.Boone@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:Harry.Boone@mail.wvu.edu)

## Texas 4-H Members' Sense of Community

### Introduction

A study by Tuft's University and the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development (Lerner, Lerner, & Colleagues, 2013) found that 4-Hers are four times more likely to actively contribute to their community, two times more likely to be civically active, and five times more likely than their peers to graduate from college. Brennan, Barnett, & Baugh presented the need for program developers to better understand the role of youth in community development (2007). Extension programming like 4-H "plays a vital role in engaging youth through interactions with the local community" (Brennan, Barnett, & Baugh, 2007,p.1).

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of community engagement and youth leadership life skills development on Texas 4-H members' sense of community which fits within research priority six; vibrant, resilient communities of the American Association of Agricultural Education National Research Agenda (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016). The findings presented in this abstract are part of a larger study. One of the main objectives of the study were to determine participants' sense of community.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based upon McMillan Chavis' theory of sense of community. Sense of community is defined as the feeling community "members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p.9). Community can refer to either a territorial or physical community such as a neighborhood or a relational community such as a professional organization or church (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The theory of sense of community includes four essential components: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

### Methodology

Survey research methodology was used to conduct this study. The target population for this study included members of the Texas 4-H & Youth Development Program who were enrolled for the 2015-2016 year. Cochran's (1977) formula for continuous data was used to calculate sample size. Stratified random sampling was used to select equal numbers of participants per strata (in this case grade level). This sampling technique is used when researchers want to look at differences among strata (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorenson, 2010).

The Tailored Design Method for developing and distributing an electronic survey was employed for this study (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). The questionnaire was administered using Qualtrics. The research instruments in this study have been previously developed. The survey had three sections: sense of community, career and educational aspirations, and leadership life skills. A pilot test was conducted with members of the Texas A&M University Collegiate 4-H Club. Reliability of the scale was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The alpha level for the pilot test was .801 and .800 for the formal study. A reliability of .80 generally acknowledged as an acceptable rate of internal reliability (Bryman, 2012). Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, 23.0). This

portion of survey used a seven-point Likert scale with responses ranging from “Strongly Disagree = 1, Moderately Agree = 2, Disagree = 3, Neither Agree nor Disagree = 4, Agree = 5, Moderately Agree = 6, and Strongly Agree = 7” and consisted of 12 statements. The scale was interpreted as follows: strongly disagree = 1.00 – 1.49, moderately disagree = 1.50-2.49, disagree = 2.50 – 3.49, neither agree nor disagree = 3.5 – 4.49, agree = 4.50 – 5.49, moderately agree = 5.50 – 6.49

## Results and Findings

Table 1  
*Participants’ Sense of Community*

Items	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I feel a strong connection to the community where I live.	163	5.17	1.56
I feel my relationships with my neighbors are very valuable.	163	4.90	1.48
I have many places and friends to go to for help in my neighborhood.	163	4.87	1.56
I have many friendships with adults in my neighborhood.	163	4.78	1.60
The adults in my neighborhood serve as role models.	162	4.75	1.52
My relationships with my neighbors have helped me to be a better person.	163	4.63	1.48
I know my neighbors very well on a personal basis.	162	4.57	1.81
Considering the residents in my community, I personally know most of them.	163	4.47	1.67
I communicate with my neighbors at least once a week.	162	4.30	1.69
I do not know many neighbors well.	162	3.65	1.74
I spend quality time with my neighbors at least once a week.	163	3.64	1.61
I do not feel a strong sense of connection to the community where I live.	163	2.98	1.70

*Note.* Overall  $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = .90$ . *Scale:* 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Moderately Disagree*, 3 = *Disagree*, 4 = *Neither Agree nor Disagree*, 5 = *Agree*, 6 = *Moderately Agree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*.

Table 1 describes participants’ overall sense of community and attachment. Respondents agreed that they feel a strong connection to the community where they live ( $M = 5.17$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ) and disagreed that they *do not* have a strong sense of connection ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ).

## Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Respondents in this study agreed that they have valuable relationships with neighbors and adults in their territorial neighborhood, see adults as role models, and have a strong connection to their community. However, they neither agreed nor disagreed that they communicate or spend time with their neighbors or know them well. Although they feel they have valuable relationships in their community, this does not seem to impact their connection to their community. Therefore, future research should study what aspects of relational communities (e.g., 4-H, youth groups, school, clubs, etc.) impact connectedness. Do relationships within their peer groups and other relational communities have more of an impact on connectedness than relationships with adults? This study only included current Texas 4-H members. It is recommended that future research studies compare current, former, and non-4-H members in both rural and urban environments.

References

- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., & Sorenson, C. (2010). *Introduction to research in education* (8th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Brennan, M. A., Barnett, R. V., & Baugh, E. (2007). Youth involvement in community development: Implications and possibilities for extension. *Journal of Extension*, 45(4).
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Cochran, W. G. (1977). *Sampling techniques* (3rd ed.). NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (4th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Lerner, R. M., Lerner, J. V., & Colleagues. (2013). *The positive development of youth: Comprehensive findings from the 4-H study of positive youth development*. Chevy Chase, MD: National 4-H Council.
- McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14, 6-23.
- Roberts, T. G., Harder, A., & Brashears, M. T. (Eds). (2016). *American Association for Agricultural Education national research agenda: 2016-2020*. Gainesville, FL: Department of Agricultural Education and Communication.