

Rural occupational transitions:
Transportation, identity, and new geographies

by

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Abstract

Commercial trucking by its nature is a transient occupation, and those involved with commercial trucking can find themselves on the road and away from their homes for extended periods of time. Given the occupation's transitory nature, why have some commercial drivers chosen to call rural America home when any place near a highway should suffice? Through the use of semi-structured interviews, this thesis attempts to explore whether rural truck drivers have any historical or geographical ties to the rural areas that they have chosen to live in. Using qualitative interview approach this thesis endeavored to find whether there are connections to the loss of agricultural or rural manufacturing jobs in a rural driver's community and their decision to enter the occupation of trucking. In this way this thesis has attempted to discern to what extent structural changes in the rural economy over the last 40 years, may have played a role in a person's decision to enter the occupation of trucking. This thesis has also attempted to elicit a phenomenological understanding of how they rural truck drivers understand themselves in relation to the larger American society through the work they perform.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Acknowledgements..... | v |
| Dedication..... | vi |
| Chapter 1 - Introduction..... | 1 |
| Chapter 2 - Literature Review..... | 6 |
| Economic/Structural Changes in Rural America..... | 6 |
| Sense of Place..... | 10 |
| Chapter 3 - Methods and Data..... | 16 |
| Method..... | 17 |
| Participants..... | 19 |
| Data..... | 21 |
| Chapter 4 - Findings..... | 24 |
| Occupation..... | 24 |
| Sense of Place..... | 35 |
| Conflict..... | 39 |
| Chapter 5 - Discussion..... | 54 |
| References..... | 60 |
| Appendix A - Recruitment Flyer..... | 66 |
| Appendix B - Interview Schedule..... | 67 |

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Dedication

This work is humbly dedicated to all the throw away people in society. The ones that everybody needs and nobody wants. May we one day awake from the nightmare of a history that none of us wanted to inherit, yet in which we always find ways to endure. May the wheels of a new history finally roll forward.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Commercial trucking by its nature is a transient occupation, and those involved with commercial trucking can find themselves on the road and away from their homes for extended periods of time. Given the occupation's transitory nature, why have some commercial drivers chosen to call rural America home when any place near a highway should suffice? My research questions for this thesis have centered on two central themes that I have used as my focal points in exploring this initial question. First, to what extent has a lack of occupational choice in rural communities, due to the structural changes in rural economies, been an influencing factor in a person's decision to become a professional truck driver? Secondly, how do rural truck drivers understand themselves and their sense of place in the larger society through the context of their chosen occupation?

Through the use of semi-structured interviews, this study attempted to explore whether rural truck drivers have any historical or geographical ties to the rural areas that they have chosen to live in. A secondary goal of these interviews was to explore whether there were connections to trucking vis-a-vis an occupational or family history, which causally linked their current work as truck drivers, to the fields of agriculture or rural manufacturing. In this way, the study was an attempt to discern to what extent the structural changes that these rural occupational fields have undergone in the last 40 years, may have played a role in influencing a truck driver's present occupational choice. Through the interview process, attempts were also made to elicit a phenomenological understanding of how the drivers understand themselves in relation to the larger American society.

Through my particular line of questioning I had hoped to explore whether rural truckers had a sense of place and self that in some way corresponds to those that have previously been

observed in workers in the occupations of agriculture and manufacturing. For those truck drivers who still lived in the rural communities that they had originally grown up in, attempts were made to explore whether the occupation of trucking had been something that they were intrinsically drawn to through agency, or if they had entered the occupation because it was the only type of work still available in their community. For those rural drivers who lacked historical community ties, attempts were made to explore their personal motivations for being drawn to their particular communities to see if these motivations followed any certain migration pattern or theme. For example, were truckers being drawn to rural areas by the concept of the rural idyll and a pre-conceived sense of community? Rural localities are often times romanticized in the American collective consciousness and cultural narratives which portray the rural as a collection of quaint little homogeneous communities inhabited by amiable people concerned with the wellbeing of their neighbors. Is this romantic notion a reality, and if so had it played a role in the drivers' choice of residence? Had the drivers chosen rural residencies as a temporary means to viscerally escape from the "rat race" of modernity, during the downtimes when they find themselves off the road? Or had these people been drawn to their particular rural location out of economic practicality or necessity?

A central focus of this study was to ascertain the extent to which the globalizing economy has affected a respondent's decision to enter the commercial driving profession, and whether the drivers are cognizant of those larger structural mechanisms. Inhabitants of rural localities are often times constrained by a lack of occupational choice in their community. Major shifts in the economic structure of the United States driven largely by globalization over the last 40 years have led to further limitations on an individual's agency as it pertains to occupational choices in rural places. It was speculated that some respondents would be readily cognizant of the influence

that globalization has had on their lives and livelihoods while other respondents would show less awareness.

The importance of political economy and structural change in this study is based on my own empirical observations that some of the occupational shift towards trucking over the last four decades, especially as it relates to rural trucking, may have been directly tied to the continuing decline of farming as a major occupation as well as the decline in American manufacturing since the 1970s (Lobao & Meyer, 2001; Atkinson, 2012). In the face of these economic hardships, one of the seemingly few occupational choices left to rural people is commercial trucking. Therefore, it is was important to gather an understanding of the rural truck driver's perspective of these mechanisms as they continue to play out in their daily lives and their rural communities.

The target population of this research project was current and former over the road drivers who live in the rural Great Plains region of America. Through the usage of semi-structured interviews, I have attempted to elicit an understanding of how these truckers understand themselves and their sense of place in society through their occupation, as well as to explore the social constructions of identity embodied in the rural professional truck driver. In short, I have attempted to illuminate the phenomenological similarities prevalent amongst those drivers engaged in the occupation of trucking, who hail from the Great Plains region of America. My hope is that this study will provide insight into the ways in which these rural workers understand themselves and their job in relationship to the American society at large.

To say that the trucking industry is a vital component of the American economy would be a monumental understatement, as the industry plays a fundamentally integral role in almost every aspect of the country's economy. Trucking culture itself, touts the central importance of the

trucking occupation to the society at large with slogans and visceral imagery proclaiming truckers to be the heart and the backbone of the American economy. To the layman observer these types of slogans may appear to be nothing more than hubristic industry propaganda or bombastic self-aggrandizing assertions. Upon closer examination, what one finds when exploring the importance of trucking to the American economy is an industry's whose presence is ubiquitous, in both vertically and horizontally integrated configurations, across multiple and seemingly unconnected facets of the economy. A more precise anthropomorphic analogy of what trucking represents to the American economic structure, would not be a heart or a back bone, but the central nervous system of the American economy.

Trucking transports the raw and finished materials of the nation's food systems as well as the manufacturing industries. Trucking distributes the nation's domestic and imported retail goods. Trucking moves the materials that make up the aggregate components of society's infrastructure, i.e., building materials, raw materials, finished goods, energy inputs, material waste. Trucking distributes the vehicles that we drive as individuals as well as well as the fuel that powers those very same vehicles. In our *post-modern society*, without trucks and the people who drive them, neither roads nor buildings would be built; the food we eat would not be produced; the stores we shop in would be full of only empty shelves, and the fossil fuel energy that powers almost all of these mechanisms would lay dormant in the ground. The qualifier in this scenario then is of course the term *post-modern society*.

In our modern society the singular importance of the trucking occupation and industry in regard to the provisioning and transporting of the aggregates of the society as a whole cannot be overstated. Truck drivers themselves are readily cognizant of the role they play in sewing together the material fabric of American consumer society. Truckers are also keenly aware that

the role they play in the society at large, through the work they perform, are by and large overlooked and underappreciated by the society as a whole. This sentiment was succinctly captured in a recent interview appearing in a *New York Times* article covering the trucking industry, written by journalist Trip Gabriel.

“We’re throw away people. Nobody cares about us. Everybody’s perception of a truck driver is we clog up traffic, we get in the way, we pollute the environment. We’re like cops. Everybody needs us, but nobody wants us.” -Greg Simmons, a 27 year veteran driver.

Interestingly, a similar sentiment was echoed by one of the driver participants in this study who gave a similarly succinct answer when posed a question about whether they thought that the society at large, valued rural places.

“(Hesitation)...No. *No*. They have no... The only way people value these communities is if you have ties to them. The world we live in today, in corporate America, they do not see any value in those communities because they don’t participate in any sort of- *unfortunately*- profit model.” Driver #6 [emphasis in the original]

It would seem then that rural truckers suffer a double edged social stigmatization through a devaluation of social status related to their occupation, and a devaluation of social status related to the spatial geographies that they call home. Despite the trucking occupation’s structural importance across multiple facets of the American economy, most especially in rural economies, there remains very little sociological literature on the subject. Therefore this study- though limited in scope- adds to the discipline’s knowledge base, of a largely overlooked and undervalued occupation.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Economic/Structural Changes in Rural America

Analyzing IPUMS-CPS and the University of Minnesota employment data from the years 1978 and 2014, and after eliminating the ambiguously defined occupational categories of *mangers* and *salespersons* not elsewhere classified, NPR reporter Quoc Trung Bui found that as of 2014 the most common job reported in America is truck, delivery and tractor truck driver (Bui, 2015). In examining Bui's data, the most notable increases in the occupational field of trucking occurred in the Great Plains region, as well as the Missouri, Ohio, and Mississippi River Valley Regions that had initially reported farming and machinery operation as the dominant occupations in 1978 (Bui, 2015). Collectively, these regions combine to encompass the greater rural heartland of America colloquially referred to as America's breadbasket. These regions extend from the edges of what is known as the Rust Belt in the East, to the West where the high plains meet the Front Range of the Rockies. The decrease of American manufacturing jobs over the forty-year period encompassing Bui's findings, could be attributed to the increase in competition from offshore manufacturing due to market changes related to globalization, as well as increases automation in the manufacturing process (Portes, 1997; Lobao & Meyer, 2001; Atkinson, 2012).

Recent USDA data shows that between the years 1996 and 2011 alone, that the United States lost 55 % percent of its manufacturing plants, with 57% of those losses occurring in metropolitan counties while the remaining 43% of losses being absorbed by rural counties (Low, 2017). This data represents a dire situation that was absurdly touted by the author as an example of rural manufacturing resilience (Low, 2017). The recent loss of American jobs in rural manufacturing, which had always played an interdependent role with agriculture production in the Midwest, could be a contributor to the increased participation in transportation related

occupations in rural areas (Page & Walker, 1991). The century long decline of farming occupations combined with manufacturing losses that had played a role in supplementing farming incomes act to further limit the occupational agency of rural individuals in these regions (Lobao & Meyer, 2001; White, 2008; Atkinson, 2012; Low, 2017). If one considers the limited employment opportunities and increasing poverty associated with rural communities, it becomes feasible that an increase in transportation occupations could have occurred in these localities based on the economic necessity of rural inhabitants to find viable employment opportunities, or be forced to migrate out of the community (Tickmeyer & Duncan, 1990; Johnson & Rathge, 2006). Over the closing decades of the 20th century, the changing agricultural structures coalesced with the increasing influence of the globalization phenomenon to fundamentally change the consumption and labor patterns of developed societies, even in rural localities (Flora & Flora, 2008). Our contemporary post-modern globalized economy has placed increased reliance on flexible production chains that are in turn fostered by increased efficiencies in transportation chains, to supply society's insatiable appetite for consumer goods.

Increased participation in the occupation of trucking could emerge in rural places largely because the types of jobs that are encompassed by the American transportation industry and that are related to agriculture, cannot be shipped overseas and are in that respect immune to globalization (Bui, 2015; Viscelli, 2016). Simultaneously, globalization coincides with increased production of consumer goods which in turn requires an increased pool of transportation labor to distribute these goods to the waiting consumers in the rural hinterlands. Indeed, Steve Viscelli's recent ethnographic research of participants in the trucking industry found that roughly a third of CDL drivers (Commercial Driver Licensees) that he interviewed had come from rural farming backgrounds (Viscelli, 2016). Viscelli found that drivers from rural areas often times had

previous experience with operating heavy farm machinery and large trucks that made them ideal candidates for *falling* into the commercial driving profession (Viscelli, 2016). Though Viscelli does not state as much in his work, the *fall* factor could possibly align with the findings from previous studies that have found working class youth tend to gravitate towards working class jobs as a structural reproduction of culture, which is fundamental in a capitalist society (Willis, 1979). If the work of agriculture and industrial production have been shown to be intrinsically linked then of course it should follow that so should transportation work, as it serves as the tie that binds the fruits of those labors to the society at large (Page & Walker, 1991).

Michael Carolan's argument in *The Sociology of Food and Agriculture* is that the mechanical revolution fundamentally changed the structural relationship of agricultural production by supplanting what had been a labor-intensive form of production with a capital-intensive form of production dependent upon machinery (Carolan, 2012). Carolan's findings are in line with those of Jarius Banaji, who writing on Kautsky's *The Agrarian Question*, also cites the rise of the use of machinery in agricultural production as being instrumental in the transformation of the structure of agriculture away from a subsistence production model towards a commodity production model (Banaji 1980, p.42). Banaji notes that the rapid adoption and expansion of machinery in agricultural production allowed for substantial increased savings in labor time which had previously been constrained by the production outputs and labor efficiencies tied to the quality and surplus of the available labor pool (Banaji 1980).

Taken together I posit that Carolan and Banaji's findings point to a shrinking labor pool on the production side of agriculture that is highly specialized in the field of machinery operation. This assertion would also align with Johnson and Rathge's (2006) arguments that technological innovation and changing agricultural structures in the Great Plains have allowed

fewer farmers the ability to produce more food, while displacing the surplus supply of farm laborers that have been connected to the farming infrastructure (Johnson and Rathge, 2006). This situation would lend credence to Viscelli's observations that persons entering the trucking profession did so along three occupational vectors that he identified as the push, the pull, or the fall vectors (Viscelli, 2016). Viscelli's finding that rural blue collar workers *fall* into trucking would also be amenable with Willis' observations on the ways in which the working class works to recreate itself through lateral occupational choices (Willis, 1979). Carolan and Banaji's observations of increasing commodity production in agriculture, could be a contributing factor of the growth in the rural trucking labor pool as more drivers are required to move commodities originating in rural areas into the global market chain; meaning the increase in transportation jobs is directly linked to increased production. This situation is especially true in rural areas where the central focus of production is not only commodity crops, but also other natural resources that form the material basis of the global productive capacity (Green & Zinda, 2014)

Despite the trucking occupation's structural importance across multiple facets of the American economy, there remains very little sociological literature on the subject. Steve Viscelli's ethnographic work in *The Big Rig: Trucking and the Decline of the American Dream* largely focuses on larger economic structures of labor exploitation in the American trucking industry in the age of mass deregulation. Rebecca Upton's ethnographic work, *Negotiating Work, Family, and Identity among Long-Haul Christian Truck Drivers: What Would Jesus Haul*, attempts to explore the intersectionality of Christianity and masculinity in the identity formation of trucker drivers. Neither work explores the aspect of truck driving as an occupational anchor to rural communities. Most of the recent academic literature that has been written in regards to domestic issues surrounding the occupation of trucking emanate from the discipline of

economics and focus largely on logistical efficiencies for maximizing profits (Francia et al., 2011; Winebrake et al., 2015). From a sociological standpoint, the truck driving occupation has largely been overlooked, or has simply been written off as an immaterial avenue of exploration. A situation which is slightly confounding from a sociological point of view since it plays an integral part of almost every single commodity chain in the society.

Sense of Place

The reason for focusing on how rural truckers understand themselves is based on an absence of literature regarding how truckers in general, but rural truck drivers specifically, form a sense of self and place. A truck driver's work involves being away from home and community, often times for extended periods, traversing the highways connecting the rural and the urban landscapes, as the demarcation lines distinguishing the urban from the rural continue to fray in the continuing emergence of a global society (Lichter and Brown, 2011). How is it then that these workers are forming a sense of place, and how are they defining home? Is home related to the work they do, to the people inhabiting the places they call home, or is it to particular places themselves? I believe that my research provides phenomenological insight into how these particular rural workers make sense of the world and create a distinctly rural identity, given that they are removed from the direct production of agricultural and manufactured goods that have formed the basis of previous academic inquiries surrounding rural workers and communities.

Commercial trucking by its nature is a transient occupation, and those involved with commercial trucking can find themselves on the road and away from their homes for extended periods of time. Given the occupation's transitory nature, why have some commercial drivers chosen to call rural America home when any place near a highway should suffice? How then do

rural truck drivers, who are largely absent from the places and landscapes that one would usually consider home, construct meta-narratives of what home is?

If one conceptualizes the layers of spatial geography that encompass the social structures of our human existence then the idea of home embodies the nucleus of that existence (Relph, 1976). Home often times, but not always, is representative of one's ultimate sense of belonging, and is dependent upon the personal level of attachment an individual may feel towards the place they call home (Relph, 1976; McHugh & Mings, 1996). Wetherholt (2016: 11) posits that an individual's concept of home cannot be understood until that individual becomes separated spatially from the place, and only then are they able to internalize what home is to them. A person's sense of place is subjective to their personal experience and bond to it, but the place and the person both exist within spatial geography and are therefore a part of the "social and cultural totality" (Norberg-Schulz, 1971).

Place attachment then, is the primary psychosocial bond between a person and a distinct environmental setting (Low & Altman, 1992; Wetherholt, 2016). In this way, place attachment can be understood as being geographical in nature and tied to a specific landscape or spatial setting. The affective bond that is created between people and the landscape setting of a particular place has been defined by geographers as topophilia (Tuan, 1974). The individual's accumulated sensory perceptions of their daily interactions with these landscapes, even through the most passive of experiences with them, works to reify in the individual "a profound sense of place" (Tuan, 1975 p. 161). Attachment to a particular environment or setting then becomes representative of the concept of home to an individual in a physiological way through experience, which often surpasses other conceptual notions regarding sense of place (Tuan, 1975 p. 164; Relph, 1976 p. 40).

Place attachment can also encompass social aspects of family friends and community that also affect the level of attachment felt by the individual through the concept of rootedness (Low & Altman, 1992; Wetherholt, 2016). Rootedness is a vital component of place attachment in the works of Low and Altman (1992) as well as William Wetherholt (2016) because of the role played by the concept in shaping an individual's understanding of community connectedness. Everyday rootedness can be understood as an individual's consciousness of their social surroundings and their position within that particular community (Hummon, 1992). Ideological rootedness occurs in individuals when they are conscious that their social position and status in a particular community is amenable with others in the community, solidifying their ingroup status and sense of belonging to that place (Hummon, 1992).

In *Hollowing Out the Middle*, the Carr and Kefalas (2009) study of outmigration in Ellis Iowa, the author's observations on the *stayers*, socio-economically disadvantaged rural youths simultaneously discounted and embraced by the community, is in some ways analogous to the rootedness phenomenon. For example, the citizens and institutions in the rural community of Ellis indirectly reinforced ideological perceptions of community and occupational familiarity in ways that worked to anchor working class youths to Ellis through structural mechanisms of social class reproduction similar to those observed by Willis (1979). Jeffrey Smith and Jordan McAlister (2015) argue that occasionally an individual's emotional connection and rootedness to a particular place is so strong that that they will remain in a community despite suffering personal or financial hardships by doing so (p. 183). Other studies have also found that the phenomenon of strong place attachment is pervasive in the character of communities across the Great Plains region, but that the levels of rootedness can vary amongst generational cohorts as well as occupational vocations (de Wit, 1997; Draper, 2009; Smith & McAlister, 2015).

Considering these findings, what role does the level of rootedness play in the life of rural truckers and their sense of place, and do these levels vary by age?

For nearly a century, the literature on the central components of rural American identity has largely focused on the relative social stability, social cohesion, and spatial isolation offered by rural communities, with occupational identities centered around agricultural and material extraction based economic activities (Blumenthal, 1932; Sanderson, 1932; Burchfield, 1947; Fox, 1948). Much of this literature was theoretically grounded in Ferdinand Tonnies' (1887) concepts of *Gesellschaft* /*Gemeinschaft*. For Tonnies the concepts of *Gesellschaft* /*Gemeinschaft* explained the perceived interactional dichotomies which distinguished the impersonal social relationships found in urban communities from the more intimate social relationships found rural communities, with the former concept relating to urban society and the latter concept being synonymous with rural society. Subsequently, much of the initial scholarship dealing with the social relationships found in rural communities was framed within the context of *Gemeinschaft*, which in some ways can be juxtaposed with the concept of ideological rootedness.

More contemporary literature that addresses the concept of rural identity still forwards the central roles that sense of place, and perceived social cohesion, play in rural inhabitant's phenomenological understanding of the world, though nothing about these concepts could be considered exclusive to rural areas (Sanders, 1977; Creed & Ching, 1997; Beesley, 1999). The literature leads us to believe that rural inhabitants see in rural America a social landscape that affords them a safe place to raise a family, with good schools, and good neighbors willing to assist one another in times of need (Bonner, 1997). Regrettably, this landscape is often times bereft of sustainable economic activity that would allow for such communities to survive let alone thrive. In the post-productivist communities dotting the landscape of rural America,

commercial trucking does afford an economic means for the raising of a family in such an idyllic location. Unfortunately, participation in the commercial trucking occupation requires the corporeal sacrifice of the driver's temporal and physical proximity to their family, the community in which they reside, and the landscape that encompasses them both.

Geographic identifiers of rural places tend to focus on the universal idea of open spatial landscapes amenable to agricultural production as a major signifier differentiating the rural from the urban vis-a-vis geography (Bunce, 1982; FitzSimmons, 1988). Geographic landscapes combine with cultural context, symbolic interactions, and phenomenology to create a specific meaning of that location that is unique to a particular individual or group's understanding of the location (Berger & Luckman, 1966). The way we define the landscapes that we perceive, is socially constructed from our own experiences of these landscapes (Greider & Gerkovich, 1994). What looks like a quaint little rural town to a lifelong inhabitant of a major metropolitan city just passing through, may indeed be nothing more than a spatially isolated commuter enclave or exurb that is far removed from any idyllic or concrete notions of a rural community. Some of the inhabitants of the commuter enclave may in turn travel to a nearby rural community to do minor business at a post office, convenience store, or café; or to possibly participate in some sort of seasonal festivals all of which gives them the sense of being a rural inhabitant. Meanwhile other inhabitants of the same enclave will work, bank, shop, and school their children in a larger city nearby, and never consider themselves as rural inhabitants based solely on their own social construction of place through meta-narrative (Alkon & Traugot, 2008). Wetherholt, citing the works of Park and Coppack (1994), asserts that in a rapidly urbanizing society, the interactional dynamics involved in distinguishing the urban from a rural landscape, coalesce at the intersection of the scenic, psychological and commercial attributes a place holds

which work together to create a sense of rural sentiment in a particular location (Park & Coppack, 1994; Wetherholt, 2016).

Chapter 3 - Methods and Data

A qualitative methodology was used for this study by collecting data through semi-structured interviews. Rubin and Rubin (2005) describe interviews as structured conversations that are frequently organized by an interviewer in the asking of main questions, follow-up questions, and probes, which are questions designed to explicate more rich descriptions. The decision to use the semi-structured interviewing technique was made due to the necessity of collecting descriptive data relating to the individual occupational experiences and perceptions of the interviewees. The interview is considered to be one of the most effective methods to collect information for answering certain type of research questions, especially in exploring experiences, attitudes and perceptions of people, and the meaning participants attach to them (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, as cited in Berg & Lune, 2012). Using face-to-face semi-structured interviews for this study has also allowed for an open exploration of the ways in which rural truckers construct an identity of who they are by allowing the interviewees to share their individual narratives describing their experiences related to being a rural trucker. This research methodology has allowed me to gather a qualitative insight into the rural truckers understanding of their place in the larger society.

For the sake of this study rural and urban communities have been delineated broadly along population thresholds set by the United States Census Bureau and the American Community Survey (ACS) (Ratcliffe, et al., 2016). Communities reporting over 50,000 inhabitants during the most recent ACS have been considered as urban communities. Those Mid-Western communities reporting less than 50,000 inhabitants have been considered as rural communities for the purpose of this study and truck drivers living in these communities have been the target of this study. Working within these population frameworks, I have explored

through my interviews how truckers from rural communities make sense of themselves, and the work they perform in the construction of their own meta-narratives.

Method

At the outset of this investigation, the issue of the occupational time constraints faced by the targeted research population were identified as being a possible hindrance in the collection of study data. In an attempt to mitigate sampling limitations due to time constraints and to better facilitate a larger sample size, the method of snowball sampling was decided to be a logical strategy for the recruiting of subjects interested in participating in the research study. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique in which research participants are asked by the researcher to identify and referring other potential subjects for the study that meet the particular research criteria (Chromy, 2008; Berg, 2009; Singleton & Straits, 2010). Therefore preliminary interviews were used to garner additional respondents using the snowball sampling technique, expanding the research outward from these initial contacts with rural drivers by utilizing and building upon social networks of referral chains to create the population sample (Lee, 2008; Singleton & Straits, 2010). A drawback of using a networked/snowball sampling method is that the sample may not be truly representative of the population, but given the absence of an exhaustive driver roster listing all of the eligible truckers who would fit the research parameters, this type of study could never have had a truly random sample population (Lee, 2008). Another possible drawback of using a non-random snowball sampling methodology, is the possibility of interjecting sampling biases into the research, which could affect the accuracy of the study findings. These biases arise from using a participant's existing social networks for the recruitment of new study participants, because new study participants may be likely to hold the same views as the previous

participant, and will in turn recommend a participant who may also hold the same views (Singleton & Straits, 2010).

In an attempt to mitigate possible research biases that may have arisen from the use of snowball sampling, additional measures were also taken in effort to recruit a semi-randomized sample population. Initial attempts were made to recruit study respondents by making personal visits to randomly chosen trucking companies that were in close proximity to Riley County, Kansas. Approximately two dozen recruitment flyers (**Appendix A**), broadly outlining the research goals and asking for participant volunteers were printed on stationary carrying the Kansas State University Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work letter head were distributed, along with business cards carrying the investigator's contact information. These flyers were subsequently dispersed to various truck stops, grain elevators, and trucking companies across fourteen Kansas counties. These early attempt were made in the hopes of recruiting participants who met the sampling criteria of being a physical inhabitant of a rural community. It was initially anticipated that by focusing on truck drivers from rural communities in close proximity to Riley County Kansas, drivers would possibly be motivated to contribute to the study out of deep local community pride for Kansas State University, given that there were no other incentives being offered for participation in the study. Soon after embarking on the fieldwork portion of this study, it became evident that anticipating individual acts of participation based on altruistic motivations, would be a generally insufficient approach for recruiting volunteers.

Unfortunately, the field work portion of the study also coincided with the beginnings of the Kansas wheat harvest, meaning that the initially anticipated time constraints faced by the investigator were exponentially greater than had been projected. Another unexpected situation

that repeatedly manifested itself during the course of the fieldwork and distribution of the recruitment flyers were instances of extreme apprehension and in a few cases overt hostility on the part of approached subjects and entities. In one instance the investigator was required to directly meet with the president of one of the randomly chosen trucking company before being allowed to post a recruitment flyer. Seeing this as a possible avenue for driver access, the investigator agreed and returned to meet with the company president at the appointed time. The investigator presented their credentials and provided the company president with the written materials germane to the study as well as an oral outline of the research goals. The company president and the investigator exchanged personal biographies, and observations of the importance of commercial trucking as it related to rural America. When the discussions had concluded the company president stated that he believed the investigators research study had merit, yet he declined to allow the investigator access to drivers from a fear that it may elicit phenomenological reflections and possible ruptures, or in his own words “chase drivers off”. Another company owner was less amiable and simply stated “My driver’s don’t have time for that shit” as he planted the recruitment flyer into his trash can in full purview of the investigator. This interaction was by far the most hostile one encountered by the investigator, as most of the other negative interactions maintained an air of superficial cordiality, though this investigator expresses little doubt that these flyers did not avoid a similar fate of being disposed of, upon his exit from the premises.

Participants

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) defines intrastate trucking as performing trade, traffic, or transportation exclusively in your business’s domicile state (FMCSA.dot.gov). The FMCSA considers a company as interstate trucking business if they are

performing trade, traffic, or transportation; between a place in a state and a place outside of such state (including a place outside of the United States); between two places in a state through another state or a place outside of the United States; between two places in a state as part of trade, traffic, or transportation originating or terminating outside the state or the United States (FMCSA.dot.gov). The importance of this distinction as it relates to this study, is that under FMCSA regulations, licensed drivers must be at least twenty-one years of age to participate in interstate trucking commerce (FMCSA.dot.gov). Kansas law stipulates that an individual need only be eighteen years of age to apply for a Kansas Commercial Driver's license. If this study had focused exclusively on truckers involved in interstate commerce then it would have omitted any pertinent data relating to drivers in the eighteen to twenty-year-old age bracket, many of whom hail from and work in rural areas. Five of the ten drivers in the participant population did self-report as to having entered the trucking profession during this exact time frame in their own lives and attributed those actions to rural proximity, but unfortunately none of the participants recruited for this study fell within that particular demographic. This is unfortunate because they could possibly have constituted a significant portion of the commercial driving workforce in rural Kansas which would have allowed for the exploration of the limited employment opportunities that may be faced by young adults in rural areas and how they make sense of that situation.

The population of my study consisted of seven currently employed truck drivers, as well as three formerly employed truck drivers who had exited the profession within the last 10 years. At the time of the interviews, all participants were currently residing in the rural Great Plains areas encompassing regions of Kansas and Oklahoma. All ten respondents were white males ranging in age from the early twenties up into the late fifties. Nine of the respondents reported to

being born and raised in the United States, with a tenth respondent reporting as to being born and raised in Mexico. Two of the respondents are co-owners of a trucking company. Two other respondents self-identified as owner operators, meaning that they own their own trucks. One of these owner operators, is an independent driver meaning that they drive exclusively for themselves. The other owner operator reported as to being on lease, the commercial driving equivalent of a subcontractor, meaning that the driver has signed a working contract to exclusively haul cargo for a specific client. Two other drivers reported as being involved in part-time commercial driving in addition to their other occupational work. One these drivers is the owner and operator of a large commercial farm, who utilizes his farm's fleet of trucks in the farms offseason so they are not idle capital. The other one of these drivers is a field service manager for a major food supply distribution company. The final active driver respondent is a company driver, which is the trucking industry equivalent of a wage laborer. This driver has no ownership or input into the cargo that is carried by his truck and his earnings and movements are dictated by the company that he drives for. The final three respondents have attested to still being commercially licensed drivers though they have reported that they are no longer directly involved in commercial driving.

Data

Interviews were conducted over an approximately three-month period between the months of June and August of 2017. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner using an interview schedule with open-ended questions in order to allow the participants to freely share their experiences and points of view, while maintaining some structure regarding the topic of the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The finalized schedule of questions used for this study appear in **Appendix B**. Follow up questions related to the initial interview questions were also

used in order to elicit more rich descriptions from the participants. The implementation of these probe questions varied dependent upon the explicit answers given by any one particular participant and were largely deployed in relation to a driver's own personally unique life experience. When agreed to by the participants, follow-up interviews occurred in order to clarify or expand on information that had emerged during the first interview.

Of the ten interviews, four were conducted in person and the remaining six were conducted over the phone. Interviews were administered in locations which were convenient and preferred by the participants. In order to accommodate the schedules of various participants, the interviews occurred at various times of day and on varying days of the week. The locations of these interviews have include the public setting of a restaurant; the semi restricted area of a company office; the private settings of the participants' homes, as well as the cabs of the driver's tractor trailer trucks as they were being driven down the highway. The interviews have lasted between 30-90 minutes and all participant interviews have been recorded audibly, and only after receiving the participant's consent to do so. All interviews have taken place only after the respondents were full briefing of the informed consent protocols, and the proper consent forms had been signed. In the cases of those participants who partook in the study through the use of phone interviews, a thorough explanation of informed consent was verbally articulated to the participants by the investigator, with a particular emphasis on the participant's rights to terminate the interview at any time for any reason. These interviews progressed only after the participants had verbally agreed to the informed consent protocols and had attested to this fact in their audio statements. Extensive written field notes were taken during the course of the interviews to record any initial observations by the investigator of the participant's responses to the question schedule. The field notes also served as an invaluable orientation point to cross reference initial

responses with the recorded audio to discern and accurately report the respondent's answers. These interviews have also been transcribed verbatim and these transcripts are now physically and electronically secured in a locked office. Given that the research topic is based on the intensely personal perceptions of rural identity, extreme caution has been used in regard to any of the information that has been collected which could be construed as sensitive or personally identifying in nature.

The full confidentiality of the research participants has been maintained by securing all audio recordings of interviews, as well as the any compiled notes and transcripts of said interviews. These materials as well as the collected informed consent forms are currently in a locked and protected location. Any and all collected data has been de-identified and participants have been assigned pseudonyms prior to the transcription process. Since this research project involved human subjects, IRB approval was sought and obtained through the Kansas State University's Internal Review Board. Participation in this study has been voluntary and confidentiality of the participants identities has been guaranteed in writing and also verbally when logistically appropriate. All participants have been provided with the outline of this project and were offered a consent form to sign when they choose to participate (Berg & Lune, 2012). The identities of the participants have been withheld from the analysis, and pseudonyms have been used to refer to participants. All data related to this research study has been electronically encrypted and stored on one designated computer, which has also been kept in a securely locked area when not in use. My major professor and I are the only persons who have had access to this data.

Chapter 4 - Findings

During the process of investigating why it was that rural individuals had become commercial drivers and had chosen to call rural America home when any place near a highway should suffice, two dominant (phenomenological) themes, occupation and sense of place, were explored as well as multiple subthemes that acted as aggregate motivational influences on these schema. During the investigation process an unexpected third theme, that of conflict, inadvertently emerged out of the subtheme explorations, so much so that it also had to be addressed in equivalence with the dominant two themes, of occupation and sense of place. The presence or absence of the subthemes had simultaneously tied the two dominant themes together in some instances, but also proved to be oppositional to the dominant themes in other instances which created some phenomenological dissonance. Consequently, the role played by the theme of conflict could not be overlooked and was included in the findings. Therefore, the three major categorical themes used to explore rural driver phenomenology in this study were occupation, sense of place, and conflict.

Occupation

Through the interview process I was able to identify four occupational themes that presented themselves across most of the respondent's responses. These occupational themes included respondent exposure to the operation of machinery at an early age; respondent exposure to the field of agriculture or to agricultural related work at an early age; respondents reporting an affinity for the self-sufficient and autonomous nature of their work in the trucking occupation as well as the opportunity trucking afforded some of the respondents as far as feasibly own their own business; and respondents engaged in trucking directly or indirectly related to agriculture or food production.

Early Exposure to Machine Operation

Eight of the ten drivers interviewed in this study reported having been exposed to machinery operation as well as agricultural work prior to entering adolescence. Respondents reported having learned to operate farm tractors approximately around the age of eight years old, with multiple respondents reporting to have been introduced to the machinery as young as seven years old, with one reporting being six year-old. Of course, the verifiability of such claims is impossible to prove but they must be given credence in light of the fact that the eight respondent's answers consistently fell between the age frame of seven and nine years old, and that the respondent's declarations were nonchalantly made without hesitation and in common parlance. The actual driving of grain and semi-trucks as well as the operation of larger machinery like combine harvesters though, seemed to be a different matter entirely, as the ability and skills to operate these machines were reserved for more mature youths, ranging between ten to twelve years of age. Operation of these vehicles, especially the combine, was to be earned almost as though it was a rite of passage into adulthood.

Of the two remaining participants who reported as to never having been exposed to machinery in an agricultural setting during their preadolescence, one did report as to having experience with operating power sport vehicles such as dirt bikes and ATVs during this same age frame. Only one participant reported as to never having operated any type of motorized vehicle prior to being of legal driving age. Needless to say, all but one of the study participants were experienced drivers in some capacity before they ever earned the right to be licensed drivers, legally sanctioned by their respective state authorities.

“I started driving tractors at eight years-old and I drove a semi at fourteen, but I never did it further than moving it across a field until I was eighteen. So, by the time I took my test [CDL], I knew how to drive better than anybody”. Driver #1

“I drove tractors with my dad at eight. I drove them by myself by nine. I was driving a grain truck loaded with wheat to the elevator by the time I was twelve. When I was in high school we had a driver’s ed [ucation] teacher who had four of us kids raised on a farm. He just let us drive him around all summer. He was like ‘*What’s the use? You guys have probably been driving longer than I’ve been teaching*’ [laughter]”. Driver #5”

From these types of interactions, it is clearly indicative that many of the drivers interviewed did indeed have an early exposure to machine operating skills that are directly attributable to their close geographical proximity to rural agricultural settings, as well as exposure to agricultural work.

Early Exposure to Agriculture and Food Production

The specific types of agriculture work that each of the drivers were exposed to varied dependent upon the geography specific to their personal biography. Many of the participants in the study reported having been born in raised in rural Kansas and Oklahoma, and having similar prepubescent and pubescent agricultural work experiences which pertained to commodity grain production and or animal husbandry. The level of involvement varied amongst the participants but some sort of early work experience in agricultural fields were reported.

“I grew up on a really intimate family farm, where we all pitched in. I can remember having “harvest days” where our schools would let all the kids go home to help with harvest. We had a small dairy farm, and starting in elementary school I had to milk cows twice a day, up until [the age] I was out of the house”. Driver #6

“I grew up on a farm, and my dad had a custom wheat harvesting operation”. Driver #1

“My first job was working on my cousin’s feed yard when I was fourteen”. Driver #4

“My dad sold his portion of the family farm to my uncle and started driving. But I’ve grown up working around that farm helping and what not. When I was in high school I started helping my brother-in-law on his small feedlot”. Driver #8

“I started driving the tractor on the grandparent’s farm when I was eight. I’d drive the hay wagon while my older cousins threw bales. My first real job [outside the family] was at fourteen driving a grain truck for a neighbor”. Driver #7

One participant, who reported to being raised in America’s rural South, had similar accounts as those respondents whom had grown up in the Great Plains. This respondent’s agriculture background also included familiarity with commodity grain production, but their background also included market production of produce foods such as watermelons and cantaloupes. Another participant, who reported growing up in rural Mexico, had early agricultural experiences that were in line with sustenance production of foodstuffs in his home country. This respondent reported being involved in market related agricultural production, only after immigrating to America at the age of sixteen, at which time he began working in the orchards of and vineyards of California, before eventually migrating to the Midwest where he became involved in the meatpacking industry.

Work Autonomy and Entrepreneurship

When respondents were prompted to identify positive aspects of the trucking occupation a majority of respondents expressed a general sense of personal satisfaction that the job of trucking afforded them the ability to work independently of others and without direct supervision. When comparing trucking to previous occupational experiences outside of the industry, many respondents expressed a disdain for work environments where they felt overly scrutinized by direct supervisors or coworkers. During the course of the interview respondents made various statements to the effect that being a trucker meant that they were left alone to do their job, and they were appreciative of that level of autonomy.

“It’s an independent job. You don’t have somebody breathing down the back of your neck all the time. I’ve worked in a factory before and comparing it to that, you’re constantly worried about somebody tattle-taling (sic) on you for something. For the littlest thing. Sittin (sic) behind the wheel of a truck you just gotta (sic) worry about the cars around you and yourself. It’s rather peaceful I guess.” Driver#4

Another theme in the answers that was related to job satisfaction and also coincided with concept of occupational autonomy was the sense of spatial freedom provided by the open road. Specifically, the open rural expanses that most of these drivers must navigate during the course of an average workday. The importance that the impression of spatial freedom creates in the phenomenology of the truckers seemed to transcend any divergences in the individual respondent’s biographies. For example Driver#8, who holds an bachelor’s degree in business from a liberal arts university and who reported to having no prior factory experience, gave a statement on the positive aspects of trucking that was very similar to the statement of Driver#4, a high school graduate.

“It’s something different every day. I just didn’t like the office setting, where you always had someone watching over your back, telling you what to do constantly. With trucking you have somewhat of a freedom. If you want to pull over and check something out, you can. You don’t have to go to your boss and ask for a break”. Driver#8

Multiple drivers gave responses speaking positively of the trucking occupation, because it afforded them the ability to work and be immersed in dynamic landscapes and changing scenery. Of the ten respondents that were interviewed for this study, eight directly made mention in some form that occupation of trucking afforded them a sense of “freedom” and that this sense was also tied in some way to the “scenery”.

A third positive theme that also emerged among the respondents that was also tied to the sense of freedom and autonomy, was what many of the driver’s identified as the ability to *be their own boss*. Many of the respondents reported that the trucking occupation has afforded them the ability for economic opportunity, as owning one’s own commercial truck is the equivalent of owning your own small business. Owning and driving a commercial vehicle comes with greater legal responsibilities and monetary expenditures than those faced by the general driving public. The weekly fuel costs alone can be in the upper hundreds of dollars, occasionally reaching or exceeding the thousand dollar mark for a single semi-truck. General maintenance costs for vehicle upkeep, as well as emergency maintenance costs when dire circumstances do occur, can also run into the thousands of dollars. For these reasons, two of the drivers reported that they would never own their own trucks due to the monetary risks involved and their ability to absorb them if the worst were to occur. For a few of the respondents with the initial capital overhead, these monetary risks were far outweighed by the monetary rewards. For one driver, making the decision to invest twenty five years of savings into assisting his son in becoming an owner

operator, would eventually culminate in the fulfillment of his own immigrant dreams of success. Having come to America at the age of sixteen, this respondent worked in the farm fields of California for a decade before moving to the Midwest to work in the meatpacking industry for another two decades. Investing in his son's dream has now allowed him to realize his own. The initial investment in one semi-truck and trailer has now multiplied into a fleet of trucks carrying the family name. The respondent's success in the trucking industry has also translated to other successful family businesses outside of the industry

“Everything I've done [work], I've done out of necessity. I never imagined that I would one day become a trucker. Or that I would own my own business. Or that I would own that business with my son. I always dreamed of having something that's mine. It has gone better for me [life] to be my own boss than to work for other people. My wife has the stores. We don't have a *boss*, we have *employees* [emphasis in the original]”. Driver #10

For driver #8, who holds a bachelor's degree in business the themes of autonomy and entrepreneurship also merged with a strong sense of family and place that personally tied him to the occupation of trucking in a very intimate way. Driver #8's story embodies an example of some of the push and pull factors that are sometimes felt by drivers who do have family ties to the trucking industry.

“My dad had driven since the 60's. He was an owner operator. He got into trucking because the [family] farm wasn't big enough for three brothers, so he sold his portion to my uncle and started driving, did pretty well. I didn't want to truck, mom pushed college, so I went and got my business degree. My senior year he got cancer, I graduated and he passed away about a year later. During that time we had lots of talks, and that's when I decided I wanted to get my CDL. Carry on trucking... (hesitation), I guess? I had a hard

time after he passed but I eventually went and got it [CDL]. I drove one of my uncle's trucks for about a year until I could save up enough money to buy my own. I've been an owner operator now for almost three years. The crazy thing is, if my dad were still alive I don't know that I would be trucking". Driver #8

Trucking Related to Agriculture, Livestock, and Food Production

All but one respondent reported as being involved specifically in trucking directly related to the fields of agriculture, livestock, or food production. The reported variations of specialized trucking that the drivers are engaged in relating to these fields included commodity grain transportation, custom grain harvesting, livestock transportation, agricultural input transportation, livestock feed transportation, and the transportation and distribution of finished food stuffs. A standard commercial truck is usually a combined system of machinery encompassing a semi-tractor/truck, the portion that is manned by the driver who controls the system's braking and propulsion, and the trailer portion that is connected to the semi-tractor and which bears the system's cargo. The driving portion of the combined commercial truck system is the one that is most associated with the concept of trucking in the popular imagination. For the society at large who may be largely ignorant of the intricacies of the occupation, a trucker is just a person that drives a semi-truck, and any trucker is likely to be interchangeable with another one. The reality of the trucking occupation and the truckers engaged in it, is that specializations within the field require a vast array of skill sets, qualifications, and legal endorsements that differentiate the drivers involved dependent upon the specific industries that the trucking they do may be tied to, and the kinds of cargo that they are tasked with hauling. This means that when speaking of specialization in the occupation of commercial trucking, the differentiation in the job occurs mostly in the trailer portion of the truck and trailer relationship.

All of the rural truckers interviewed in this study were directly or indirectly involved in trucking that was related to the fields of agriculture, livestock, and food production. The level of specialization of each trucker varied by individual, with some respondents reporting incidences of specialization overlaps in their particular work duties. Of all the areas of specialization that were reported by the interview respondents, engagement in the transportation of commodity grains was identified as the cargo that was most widely reported as being hauled. The transportation of grain commodities requires the use of either a grain hopper trailer or an end dump trailer. The grain hopper trailer is a conveyance that has been specifically constructed with the purpose of hauling grain and other dry commodities. The cargo contents of these trailers are emptied via mechanical chutes on the under belly of these trailers, that must be manually manipulated by the trucker outside of the truck's cab. On an end dump trailer, a large hydraulic boom mounted on the tractor and is connected to the nose of the trailer. The operation of the boom is controlled by the truck driver inside the cab, who extends the boom outward raising the entire front frame of the trailer, which allows its cargo contents to spill from a large chute at the rear of the trailer. An end dump trailer is a more versatile type of conveyance than a grain hopper, in that it allows for the hauling of multiple types of dry and wet cargo besides just grains and dry commodities. Seven of this study's driver respondents reported as to having being involved with the operation of tractor trailer systems that used the grain hopper configuration. An eighth driver reported as to having principally driving a tractor trailer system using the end dump configuration.

Truckers who pull grain hoppers exclusively were more likely to accumulate more unpaid time on the road, known as deadhead miles, than the other truckers in the study. The reason for this is that during harvest season grain hoppers are locked into a constant movement of grain

from the smaller satellite grain elevators that lack rail heads, to the larger regional hubs who are located along railheads and river barge terminals. This type of commercial driving is largely seasonal in nature, and is based on the peak time frames encompassing the harvest on the American Great Plains, a season which runs from approximately from May to November. As a consequence, during this time period the grain offload terminals become saturated with a glut of trucks laden with grain waiting to be offloaded. Wait times at these facilities can stretch into multiple hours which are unpaid, a situation that is addressed in the subsequent section dealing with driver conflict. Once a grain hopper driver has successfully offloaded their cargo, they will drive back out to the rural hinterlands empty-deadheading-to pick up another load of grain and repeating this work cycle until the harvest on the Great Plains is complete. During the winter off season, these trucks and trailers will only get limited usage hauling cargo like road salt and dry feed stuffs for livestock production. In contrast, a driver whose truck is equipped with an end dump trailer has the ability on any given day, to transport a load of harvested grain to a central storage terminal, then a load of grain byproduct from a processing facility to a livestock feeding facility, then pick up and deliver a load of crushed limestone which is used as a soil additive for agricultural production.

The Great Plains harvest was an integral factor for many of the drivers becoming commercial drivers at the age of 18, which is the legal age in Kansas when a person can drive commercially within the state's borders. Four of the five drivers who reported becoming licensed drivers at this age, identified the ability to participate in the harvest as being the motivational factor in enter the trucking profession. Two of the driver respondents in particular, Driver #1 and Driver #6 reported to being specifically involved in custom grain harvesting operations.

“My dad had a custom wheat harvest operation. I grew up working in it and eventually bought into it with him and had my own trucks”. Driver #1

“The farm went wrong and we moved to town when I was eighteen. I decided to go on the wheat harvest two years, and I’ve been in it [trucking] ever since”. Driver #6

Custom grain harvesters differ from the previously mentioned conventional grain haulers in that they are solely tasked with the removal of the grain from the field and the immediate transport of the grain to the nearest local grain elevator. Custom harvesting requires truck driving specialization similar to that mentioned in regards to typical grain hauling, but it also includes the additional specialized ability to haul and operate the large machinery required for the harvesting process. The work that drivers involved in custom harvest operations also varies geographically as most custom harvesters will follow the seasonal patterns of the crops being harvested. For example custom wheat harvesters will begin working the wheat harvest which starts in Texas approximately in late May or early June, and they will continue to work following the wheat harvest throughout the summer as the harvest migrates Northward across the Great Plains into the Dakotas and eventually ends in Canada by late August. If a particular custom harvesting operation is diversified for the harvesting of crops other than wheat, for example sorghum or corn, then the whole operation may migrate back to the southern Great Plains and begin again the process of following the harvesting of the next crop as it progresses northward across the plains.

Upon further probing, the one trucker respondent who reported as not being engaged in trucking directly related to the fields of agriculture, livestock, or food production, did in fact have indirect ties to these fields, in that they were occasionally engaged in the transporting of

new agricultural machinery and implements from the manufacturer to the agriculture equipment dealerships.

Sense of Place

Of the ten respondents to this study, four were actually living in the rural communities in which they had initially been raised. Of these four respondents, only two identified as being involved in their local communities in ways that would be typically associated with the concepts of *Gemeinschaft*, or ideological rootedness previously found in studies centered on rural society. The other six respondents reported as to having moved to their current locations for either work related to reasons listed in the previous occupational section, or because their current rural geography met their personal criteria for being physically removed from more urban geographies with higher population densities. During the course of the interviews, the central concept of social solitude as well as sub-themes related to the concept began to emerge as a dominant phenomenological motivations as to why the interviewed drivers had chosen to call the rural Great Plains home. Themes attributable to sense of place given by the driver respondents largely centered on a marked preference for rural localities and residencies centered in rural areas that reify their perceptions of spatial freedom through vast rural landscapes, and feelings of social solitude in the absence of physical proximity to others. Drivers identified rurality as an escape from the perceived intrusions of modernity present in more urban landscapes. Examples of these perceived intrusions included crime, close physical proximity to others, and an aversion to urban landscapes.

Rural Residency, Social Solitude, Spatial Freedom, and Rural Landscapes

When respondents were questioned as to whether they would define themselves as rural people, most answered in the affirmative. When further probed as to why they would choose to identify themselves as rural, many of the respondent answers eluded to a general sense of unease or a feeling of being out of their element with all of the *hustle and bustle* present in urban environments. The perceptions of hustle and bustle can largely be attributed to a respondent's dislike of close physical proximities found in higher population densities. In fact, the term hustle and bustle was directly mentioned by multiple respondents as a pejorative term in their personal descriptions of what they disliked about city life.

“I moved away from rural areas for a while for work. I spent a lot of time in Atlanta. I've spent a lot of time in Fort Lauderdale and Miami. I spent 11 months in Puerto Rico. I've spent a fair amount of time in Cincinnati and New York City. I don't fit in to any of those places. I couldn't stand the *hustle and bustle*, the constant movement [of people] all the time”. Driver #5 (emphasis added)

“Where I live now [in comparison to the larger city he grew up in] there aren't many conveniences. All you've got is a gas station and a couple of stores, no chains [major retailers]. But it is away from the *hustle and bustle*. After living here for two years I can't stand to go back to my hometown. Everywhere you go [in the hometown] there's someone behind you or around you”. Driver #4 (emphasis added)

“I like living in a rural area because there's less *hustle and bustle* [compared to cities]. I love to drive [non-commercial vehicles] and there's a lot less traffic living out here. I love getting into my car and just running down the highway, letting the air run through

my fingers. And I don't have to worry about getting shot or [being a victim of] crime like you do in big cities like Wichita or Oklahoma City". Driver #3 (emphasis added)

During the course of the investigation process, study respondents also identified the physical characteristics of geography as a reason to why they had chosen to call rural America home. Driver interviewees repeatedly gave responses that equated rural geography with spatial and personal freedom. Conversely, urban geography was repeatedly described by respondents as being an encroaching entity that was spatially and personally constraining. Many drivers used words that were physically descriptive of this perception, making it a distinctly visceral phenomenon.

"The city creeps in on ya. (sic) as we're speaking I'm sitting here looking at my deer feeder I came out to fill up with deer feed. I can hunt on our ground and fish and I can only enjoy those simpler aspects of rural living". Driver #1

"I love living in the country and not having any neighbors right next door. My girlfriend lives in town, and I stay with her sometimes. But I don't know, something about being in town.... It feels like its closing in on you. I'd rather be out on my farm. It's quieter and at night I can actually look up and see the stars, cool stuff like that. I don't know, it just feels like I'm free to do what I want". Driver #8

"I like being away from town, with the neighbors right on top of ya. (sic) I've got neighbors but they're not too close, a quarter mile away. I can't see what they're doing and they can't see what I'm doing. I like not having people being in my business every day. I don't want to look out my window and see the neighbor in a speedo". Driver #7

“I can go outside on my acreage and shoot my pistols all day long, I couldn’t do that if I had a house in town. Well I guess I could but there could be some other things that could go wrong with that (laughter)”. Driver #5

“Where I live is alright, but I would have no problem with living where there was no one within ten miles of me. Yea, I don’t like people”. Driver #9

During further questioning respondents were asked if they would ever consider moving to a different location than the rural place that they were currently residing in. If the respondents answered affirmatively they were further probed as to whether the new location would also have to be a rural location. Some of the respondents rejected the idea of moving from their current location, largely because of a sense of rootedness to the places they called home.

“Yeah, I’d be willing to try something different because this is really the only place I’ve lived. But, I’m so close to my family I doubt that I would ever move”. Driver #8

“I’m not going anywhere. My family has farmed this place for four generations. I don’t know if my kids are going to take it over they don’t seem to be too interested in any of it. But me? I’ll never live anywhere else”. Driver #2

Some of the respondents answered that they would be open to the possibility of moving to a different geographical location, given the correct personal and monetary circumstances, but that they would only be willing to move to another rural locality.

“Nope, I’m happy where I’m at! But maybe... if I won the lottery I’d buy a place even more rural”. Driver #7

“I’d be willing to move a little closer for my wife. Maybe within thirty minutes of a town like Wichita or Salina so she could do the shopping. But the only way I’d move that close would be if there were steady freight”. Driver #4

Two of the respondents answered that they would willing to immediately move to an urban geography if the economic opportunity was afforded them.

“I would be willing to move anywhere in Texas or Oklahoma. Anywhere that we could grow our businesses. Rural or urban, it doesn’t really matter”. Driver #10

“I would for a better job opportunity. I’d like it to be in a rural place. We moved back here to help take back over the farming and if I had to go someplace I’d prefer it to be like Montana or someplace like that. But if I was offered the right opportunity and the money was right, I’d move to New York City tomorrow”. Driver #1

The most often repeated themes related to rural sense of place made by the driver respondents during the course of the interviews was the conception of social solitude and spatial freedom afforded by rural landscapes. From a phenomenological standpoint, the supposed close social bonds offered by rural localities mattered very little to the study participants. In contrast, it was actually the social solitude and the spatial distance from others, provided by the expanses of the rural landscapes that seemed to be the driver’s most cherished reason for choosing to live in rurality. The specific reasons given for the embracing of isolation varied slightly amongst the driver respondents running the gamut from the humorous to the slightly mischievous to the benign. Overall, the respondent’s answers carried with them an underlying phenomenological theme that rural isolationism for theses rural drivers, equated a sense of personal freedom perceived to be absent in more urban settings. For many of these drivers living in more populated areas represent restraint, physically, psychologically, and socially.

Conflict

While conducting the interview process an unexpected theme began to emerge throughout the respondent answers. That theme can best be described as conflict. Conflict in the

participant's phenomenology that arises both directly and indirectly from the occupation of trucking. Observed components of this theme include; conflict that arises because of time constraints on the respondents arising from institutional structures unique to the trucking occupation; conflicts that arise through interactional dynamics with other drivers on the road; conflict arising from the dissonance between the societal importance of their work, and their social status within the society; conflict arising from social stigma related to the rural places the respondents call home.

Temporal Conflicts on the Road

A major theme regarding conflict that was present amongst the truck driver's responses were the unique structural constraints imposed upon them relating to governmental regulation of time management. Concerns and conflicts related to the proper management of time permeate throughout our society at large, but the time constraints on the commercial truck driver are unique to their profession because of the governmental regulations that oversee the industry on the federal level. For truck drivers whose autonomous work is the cornerstone of their identity these stringent rules are often internalized as unnecessary governmental intrusions into their daily lives. The strictest and most maligned of these governmental regulations are called the *Hours-of-Service* rules. A latent effect of the *Hours-of-Service* rules is that they adversely affect a driver's ability to engage in socialization not only with family and community outside of the occupation, but also with other drivers while on the road. This set of official guidelines act to govern and account for not only every hour of a truck driver's work day while on the road, but also their days off of the road. The *Hours-of-Service* rules even go so far as to dictate the time parameters for a truck driver sleep pattern. In fact, the issue of a driver's sleep and the role that it plays in driving safety, were the main reason that these rules were originally enacted.

Unfortunately, the rules act as structural constraints on a driver's temporal reality in such a way that they inadvertently act to hamper a driver's job performance and safety in many cases, instead of bolstering it.

The current *Hours-of-Service* regulations are divided into 5 key provisions that are meant to govern the 24 hours schedule of every commercial driver, and are in place to promote public safety. The first provision is the *11 Hour Driving Limit*, which states that a truck driver may drive for a maximum of 11 hours, only after the diver has spent 10 consecutive hours of time off duty. The second provision is the *14 Hour Limit*, states that drivers may not drive beyond the 14th consecutive hour after coming on duty, following 10 consecutive hours off duty, but off-duty time does not extend the 14-hour period. The third provision governs a driver's *Rest Breaks*, and decrees that drivers may drive only if 8 hours or less have passed since the end of driver's last off-duty or sleeper berth period of at least 30 minutes. Provision four, the *60/70-Hour Limit*, decrees that a driver may not drive after spending 60/70 hours on duty in a 7/8 day period respectively and that the driver may only restart a new 6/7 day work duty period if they have remained off duty for a minimum of 34 consecutive hours. And the fifth and final rule is the *Sleeper Berth Provision*, states that drivers who use a sleeper birth must remain in said sleeper berth for at least 8 consecutive hours, with the requirement that a driver spend two other consecutive hours of their day either in the sleeper berth, off duty or in a combination of both. Of all the 5 regulations covered in the *Hours-of-Service* provisions it is the final one related to the consecutive time a driver must spend in the sleeper berth, which seemed to draw the most ire from the trucker respondents in this study.

To confirm that a truck driver is in accordance with the time constraints covered under each of the 5 key provisions of the *Hours-of-Service* rules, a driver must account for each 15-

minute period of their time over the course of a 24-hour work day in a physical record book known as the driver's daily log. Upon the completion of a driver's workday, the driver must sign the log sheet to legally affirm that the data that has been recorded in it is indeed a factual temporal account of both the driver and the vehicle's spatial locations throughout that work day. On a work day that is progress, the time entry in the driver's log must have a data point that coincides with their last recorded action or location. The daily log must be included in a larger logbook that includes, at a minimum, a history of the driver's daily records that encompasses the previous seven consecutive days, whether the driver has worked those days or not. A physical copy of these documents must be in the driver's possession at all times while the driver is on duty, and in their vehicle. To offset some of the constraint imposed with the *Hours-of-Service* regulations, truck drivers have been known to engage in the deviant practice of log book falsification.

Officially, log manipulation is a major violation of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration that is punishable by major fines for companies, as well as fines and/or imprisonment for drivers who are found to have willingly or repeatedly falsified driving logs. Unofficially, the falsifying of logs is a widespread industry practice used by drivers and informally sanctioned by companies largely to maximize the efficient use of time, which in turn increases the profit potential of the truck. The autonomous nature of commercial driving as well as the independent character at the heart of the trucker ethos lend themselves to incidences of this sort of occupational deviance. Though participating in such a highly regulated industry does seem to be at odds with ideological notions of freedom synonymous with trucking, the occasional shirking of the *Hours-of-Service* rules can be understood as individualized acts of

occupational rebellion that mitigate the structural constraints imposed on the trucker's livelihood by the government.

“To make money you have to drive. You can't make money if your truck isn't moving. You had to know when to get around your log book”. Driver#1

Incidences of driver log falsification largely occur because the 8 consecutive hours required under the *Sleeper Berth Provision* in the *Hours-of-Service* regulations do not take into account the multitude of shifting work related dynamics that truckers face in a given day, that in turn affect how their time is effectively spent. These dynamics can take the following forms but are in no way limited to, erratic traffic patterns and roadway congestion, unforeseen issues that arise in the cargo loading and unloading process, and unexpected weather conditions. Any single one of these issues can manifest themselves for a trucker on a given workday, with some unfortunate drivers occasionally having to endure a combination of multiple events.

“Sometimes you can load or unload in 10 minutes but sometimes you pull into a location and you may have to wait for 3 hours or more”. Driver#3

“Traffic, schedule....sometimes you're scheduled to pick something up and then it [schedule] changes and changes all your time”. Driver#7

Prior to 2005, Driver #3 needed only to have taken a 4 consecutive hour rest in their sleeper berth. Driver #3's actions and time during this period that they were waiting to be loaded could then have been legitimately recorded in their driver's daily log, and the driver then would have had 4 hours left in their day to legitimately and legally drive. Interview respondent Driver #1, who was a driver when the rules governing sleeper berth hours for drivers was changed, explained the effect that the rule has had on his own driving habits.

“Before they [government] changed the log books [rules], if you were on duty and stuck for 3 hours you could crawl in the sleeper and use that as sleeper time. Then they changed it and that made it hard to get your miles in. Driving in the big cities with the old rule you could avoid a lot of traffic by pulling over and sleeping. I’d take a nap and shower and avoid the hustle and bustle of rush hour traffic”. Driver#1

Under the 8 consecutive hour’s requirement of the *Sleeper Berth Provision*, drivers are expected to willingly accept the loss of that time without a monetary reimbursement, often because of circumstances beyond their control. As also stated above by Driver #1, “To make money you have to drive” and given a choice between voluntarily losing money or falsify a log to continue driving, many drivers will unapologetically choose the latter. It’s not that any of these drivers want to intentionally violate the law, it is just that they have an empirical understanding of how a one size fits all regulation on an industry as large as trucking, has no real bearing on governing the reality that is their daily life on the road. Nevertheless, in an attempt to combat the continued falsification of driver logs, new legislation requiring that physical driving logs be replaced by electronic driving logs in all commercial trucks is scheduled to be implemented by the end of 2017. Some of the driver respondents feel that these new regulations will only work to increase the amount of truck traffic on the roadway, thereby exacerbating the problems that the regulators are attempting to fix. Namely, tractor trailers trucks and four-wheelers safely sharing an already congested public roadway.

“The electronic logs will never work unless they want ten times as many trucks on the road. Too much freight already moves when it shouldn’t be moving. They just need to change the *Hours-of-Service* [back] so we don’t have to run illegally”. Driver#4

Temporal Conflicts at Home

During the course of the study other examples of temporal conflict also emerged, with these being related directly to driver's socialization with their families as well as their home communities. A reoccurring theme across the respondents' answers was the negative impact that the trucking occupation had on their ability to be active and present participants in the daily lives of their family. When asked to define the concept of home in their own words, the majority of respondents gave answers that were not indicative of a particular rural location or geography, but instead were indicative of their family unit's immediate location. True to the age old idiom, for many of these respondents, home truly was where their hearts were. When the respondents were questioned about what they perceived to be the drawbacks of the trucking occupation, the answers consistently followed a pattern that eluded to the job's long hours and the time spent away from their family.

“Being away from family sucks”! Driver#9

“Being an over the road driver means being away from family. When I was single it was okay, but not after I got married”. Driver#6

“Deadlines and [time] restrictions due to regulation, and being away from family. I didn't mind trucking when I was single. It was okay. But now that I have a family I don't truck anymore”. Driver #1

“I told her... [Wife] I said, you're tougher than I am because you've got to do this [raise their family] on your own most of the time”. Driver #4

The respondent's answers to the average amount of time they were able to make it home in any given week varied dependent upon the type of cargo that the respondent specialized in hauling, and whether or not the respondent was the owner and operator of their particular vehicle. Those drivers who identified as owner operators of their own vehicles were more likely

to make it home at night at least 4 times in a given week. Those drivers who identified as being operators of vehicles that they themselves did not own were more likely to only average 2 nights at home in any given work week. These driver's also reported high incidents of remaining on the road for extended periods, 10 plus days, at least once a month. With such little time to spend when actually home, it is no wonder that community socialization takes on a passive aspect.

“We’ve lived there for two years. My wife is active in the community. She teaches the 6th grade and she coaches softball for 1st and 4th graders. But, I really don’t know anyone in the community”. Driver #1

“I’m not really active. We [business] sponsor a baseball and a softball team”. Driver #3

“I really don’t have much free time. I’ll play a game of fast pitch softball or a pick-up game of basketball when I can”. Driver #8

“I’ve lived here three years and I don’t really go out in the community. The few people I have met seem nice”. Driver #7

“I’m not real active in the community because of all the traveling with my job. Work keeps me on the road”. Driver #5

“I work, I don’t have time for community involvement. Though, I do support my local brewery”. Driver #6

Two of the driver respondents reported high levels of community involvement, but this was largely attributable to their limited roles as commercial drivers and their access to economic and social capital. One of the respondents reported that they no longer drove at all, despite remaining licensed to do so, and the other is the owner of a large multi-generational corporate farm who only drives occasionally. Both respondent’s families are well known and socially established in their respective communities.

“It’s important we [family] go to church. We support two local papers. Donate money towards scoreboards and other stuff for the school. We buy a steer and hog from the local 4-H organization each year to butcher and distribute to our workers as an extra bonus”.

Driver #2

“We own a small business here in town, so yeah we are active in the community. I consider that a big part of family, being active in the community. It’s important because small towns are dying and there aren’t many opportunities here”. Driver #1

It should be noted that for most respondents, community socialization if present was largely passive in nature. Once again this is likely attributable to the temporal and spatial constraints created by one’s participation in the trucking occupation.

Status Conflict

As it has been repeatedly stated throughout this paper, the work performed by truckers is essential for the functioning of society, but this importance has been largely overlooked and devalued by the society at large. The reality of this societal cognitive dissonance is not lost on the hyperaware trucker. The trucker is constantly reminded of their social importance through industry and occupational subculture imagery and symbolism, that the work they participate in constitutes the heartbeat and/or backbone of the nation’s economy. This imagery internally reifies a sense of social status in the phenomenological standpoint of the trucker, solidified through their own empirical observations of their and other trucker’s occupational experiences. Despite this internalized occupational status, the truckers also sees through their daily interactions on the road, a society that does not recognize this status and in some cases willfully disregards its importance to the functioning of the society at large.

The role of the truck driver is not just a matter of moving their freight from destination to destination, but to do so in a hyper-attentive manner that ensures their safety as well as the general public that they share the roadway with. During the course of the interview process a respondent theme that arose time and time again was the interactional conflicts on the roadway between truckers and “four-wheelers”. In trucking culture, the term four wheeler is used pejoratively by truckers to immediately distinguish themselves, as persons who drive eighteen wheeled vehicles, from those persons in the general public that drive vehicles with four wheels, whether they be pick-up trucks, minivans, or cars. The term is most often elicited by truck drivers recounting tales in which they were forced to perform evasive maneuvers to either avoid a collision or to keep from dislodging their cargo. Many times, these types of interactions and the subsequent maneuvers undertaken by the trucker occur without any type of acknowledgment or awareness on the part of the driver of the four-wheeler that an incident has even occurred, let alone the part they may have played in it. Given the sheer amount of drive time entailed in the average truckers work day, a trucker may encounter multiple incidents of these types of situations in a single day, and dozens of encounters over the course of a week.

A certain level of loathing then exists in those involved in the occupation of trucking, towards those who are not. According to the most recent data from Bureau of Labor Statistics, truck driving was the most deadly civilian occupation in 2015 accounting for 745 work related fatalities (BLS 2016). Occupational knowledge of this reality instills in the trucker the idea that the general public does not appreciate the degree of danger faced by those persons engaged in the occupation of trucking. As multiple occurrences of these types of incidents begin to accumulate for a driver, the incidents become internalized by the driver as a general ambivalence on the part of the general public towards the trucker driver’s occupation and existence. These negative

interactions are part of the daily social reality for truck drivers, and multiple driver's articulated their frustrations with the general public's ignorance of that social reality.

"Being in control of that vehicle and all of that weight behind it is difficult. Driving is not an easy task". Driver #9

"Many of us truckers have cameras...and we see it. Cars don't put on their directional signal and break just when they are about to turn. An eighty-five thousand pound truck cannot break in twenty feet". Driver #10

"Four-wheelers don't realize we're eighty-five thousand pounds and that it takes us a minute to get up to speed with all that weight, they're worried about us crashing into them and see us as being in the way. Four-wheelers need to be more aware of us [truckers] out here and what it is we do". Driver #3

"The average driver needs to be educated about truckers. [If they were] maybe they'd understand what we go through". Driver #4

The state of constant hypervigilance present in the trucker can then be directly attributed to private and public safety concerns related to their occupational performance. For a truck driver, occupational performance means social and spatial hyperawareness, which in turn forms the fundamental basis of a truck driver's phenomenology. During the occupational performance of trucking, a trucker must inhabit a state of constant spatial awareness accounting for their own location and actions in physical space as well as the physical proximity and actions of those immediately around them. The driver is also keenly aware through their occupational performance, that the cargo they are tasked with transporting is likely destined to be entered into the larger commodity chains for the societal benefit of those they are sharing the road with. For

the truckers involved in this study, a barren rural highway or a considerate and observant four-wheeler, are the occupational equivalents of just being left alone to do their work.

Unfortunately, the trucker observes through repeated negative daily interactions with the general public, a society that they perceive to be largely ambivalent to the degree of difficulty involved in their occupation, let alone their job's importance in the larger social milieu. In light of this conflict the trucker begins to internalize themselves as being socially undervalued. When the respondents were questioned as to their perceptions of how society viewed them and the work they do, many of the answers carried thematic echoes of the "throw away people" quote from the introductory chapter. The trucker's themselves acutely understand that indeed everyone in society needs them, yet almost nobody in that society wants them.

"Very few people realize what trucks do for this country and what they wouldn't have if it wasn't for truck drivers. Everyone is in such a hurry nowadays that when they get behind a truck going 60mph on a two lane road, all they think is that we're in their way".

Driver #4

"Some people can't grasp the concept that trucks are delivering the goods and freight that they need. Anywhere you go shopping, that [the merchandise] was all delivered there by a truck. All they see is a trucker who is in their way". Driver #2

"There's a lot of people out there [society] that don't like truckers, because your eighty thousand pound, sixty or seventy foot truck is in their way. All you are is a frustration to 'em (sic). Driver #7

"I think it's lopsided, most truckers don't feel appreciated. Not very many people think about how their meal gets to them. I tell people I haul beef but not too many of them stop

and think about the whole process and how many trucks are involved. We're just looked at as being in the way". Driver #8

"I feel like we're underappreciated. We make good money but as far as society, they don't care. They don't care that we're driving trucks that weigh eighty-five thousand pounds and that it takes us a minute to get up to speed and that we can't stop on a dime. But yet they're worried about us crashing them, and they just see us as being in the way'.

Driver #3

"I don't think that people who aren't directly involved in the business [trucking] give a damn. I think they consider them [trucks and truckers] a nuisance. People today just think it's all about them. Trucks are in the way, trains are in the way, people are in their way.

They just don't stop to consider anyone else in their daily doings". Driver #5

"I think that society doesn't understand the value of a truck driver, and they aren't valued the way they should be. I think it's viewed [trucking] as a lower class livelihood". Driver #6

For some of the driver's participating in this study, the stigma surrounding the low occupational status of trucking also combined with the stigma of living in a rural area. Despite rural areas often being the source of the material aggregates that make urban society possible, these geographies and their inhabitants have consistently occupied a devalued position of social status in industrial and post-industrial society. From a phenomenological standpoint, this situation is another example of social cognitive dissonance internalized by rural trucker vis-a-vis their hyperawareness of the role their inhabited spatial geography plays in providing urban geographies with the materials allowing for those urban geographies to exist. For rural truckers the main materials most often being provided are the foodstuffs which are the building blocks of

any civilized society. When respondents were asked about how they thought society perceived the rural places they lived, the answers that were given were very similar to those that the respondents had given regarding their occupational perceptions.

“I think that city people consider anyplace outside of the city as redneck. The majority of these people look at country people as uneducated. I also think that society thinks that only stupid people are truckers. They couldn’t imagine that you might have two degrees. Most people don’t realize where their stuff comes from. It’s the same as with farming, people don’t know where their food comes from”. Driver #9

“I don’t think they [society] care whether these small little town dry up, because they’ll [urban cities] just absorb up those people and increase their own revenue. People don’t understand the importance of trucking or farming and what people out here [rurality] are doing. They don’t give a crap about their food and where it came from or how it got there. Hell, even the damn plate their eating it off of came to them on a truck”. Driver #5

“I’ve known people that lived in the city their whole life, but unless someone has a person they know like family or something living out here, they never think about a rural place. For a city person, if there weren’t a highway that went through a little country town like this one. If they had to take a dirt road to get here, they’d never know you existed”. Driver #4

“The Kansas grain hauling people, they make *no* money. The Kansas livestock guys are a *little* better, but in the *end* you’ll make *no* money doing those jobs... The only way people value these communities is if you have ties to them. The world we live in today, in corporate America, they [society] do not see any value in those communities because they [communities] don’t participate in any sort of- *unfortunately*- profit model. This type

of society as a whole [small towns] is a dying breed. Who wants to stick around once they get out of school? Unless, someone [from the city] wants to buy a ranch out in Montana or some place to hang out on the weekends, they [society] place little value on those types of communities. *Unfortunately*, that's the world we live in". Driver #6 [emphasis in the original]

Unfortunate for who? The respondents themselves seem to know and understand better than anyone else why it is that the work they do and the places they are from have mostly been forgotten by the society at large, yet they participate in it anyway. A modern society enamored with the all the technological bells and whistles and the dizzying menace of hustle and bustle, that the respondent drivers begrudgingly accept and reify through their willing participation in it. A society embodied by a slowly encroaching urban landscape of concrete, glass, steel, and people that somehow feels to them like a constraint upon their own ideas of what a society should be, and their notions of freedom. In the end it is the freedoms, real or imagined, that are what the driver respondents in this study are able to still find in some measure, on the road through their occupation and in the rural places they have chosen to call home. At least for now.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

People involved with commercial trucking find themselves on the road and away from their homes for extended periods of time. Initial research assumptions were that rural commercial drivers would largely give responses that were indicative of ideological rootedness to the particular rural community that they had chosen to call home, because these were the places they had always considered home. It was assumed that drivers would be local people who had found themselves displaced from family farms that had become a part of the agricultural consolidation phenomenon or from the small town factories that had been swallowed up by the economic rationality of globalization. It was expected that rural drivers would be people who were removed from the direct economy of a place, but who had turned to trucking as a way to stay in the small communities to which they were ideologically rooted. These assumptions were based on census data that showed the occupation of truck driving replacing the occupation of farming as the dominant occupation across wide swaths of the Great Plains and the Mid-West over the last 40 years (Bui, 2015).

The direct influence of structural change in rural economics on rural drivers entering the occupation was largely absent. Only one of the ten total respondents identified the loss of a family farm due to agricultural restructuring as being a motivator in their entering the occupation of commercial trucking. That said, the indirect influence of structural changes in rural economies seemed to be readily observable as eight of the ten drivers interviewed in this study reported as to having been exposed to machinery operation as well as agricultural work prior to entering adolescences. This means that these eight drivers were in some way immersed in an agricultural economy at some point in their lives, before something in their social environment or personal biography changed. This represents a fascinating finding that in some ways reaffirms Viscelli's

previous findings that drivers from rural areas often times have previous experience with operating heavy farm machinery and large trucks that made them ideal candidates for *falling* into the commercial driving profession (Viscelli, 2016). The idea of falling into an occupation, could possibly align with Willis' (1979) findings that found working class youth tended to gravitate towards working class jobs as a structural reproduction of culture in a capitalist societies, though more investigation may be needed to clarify this point.

Rural manufacturing loss played no discernable role in the occupational or living choices made by the respondents. None of the respondents reported having any prior experiences or involvement with rural manufacturing prior to entering the commercial driving occupation. This is not to say that rural economic restructuring had no effect on the work performed by the driver participants, it just not that there was no connection to loss of agriculture or manufacturing in rural areas leading to increased commercial trucking participation as originally hypothesized. None of the drivers interviewed reported entering the trucking occupation because of the loss of a manufacturing job. Though conversely, this may be because of the fact that manufacturing jobs did not exist in the communities in which these drivers grew up in, or if they had existed maybe the factories were shuttered before the drivers entered into either the driving occupation or the workforce in general.

Most of the structural connections that did exist, related in some way to the types of driving work performed by the truckers. The majority of respondents reported participating in trucking specializations that were in some way directly or indirectly tied to agricultural production. Most of the work the respondents were engaged with was centered on specialized aspects of the transportation industry related to production or movement of commodities along the entire spectrum of the food commodity chains. Technological innovation and changing

agricultural structures in the Great Plains have allowed fewer farmers the ability to produce more food, while displacing the surplus supply of farm labors that have been connected to the farming infrastructure (Johnson and Rathge, 2006). Given multiple respondents accounts of early exposure to agricultural work as well as machinery operation, I would still argue that many of the respondent's participation in the transportation occupations is linked to their having grown up in rural localities that made those exposures possible. That said, I have been unable to substantiate that rural inhabitants enter the occupation of trucking because of a lack of other viable employment opportunities given the absence of agricultural or manufacturing alternatives in rural communities.

Oddly, the influence of ideological rootedness to a specific community was also largely absent in the participants. Of the ten respondents to this study, only four were actually living in the rural communities in which they had initially been raised. Only three of these four study participants reported any significant responses indicative of firm community rootedness, but even one of these three participants was readily willing to sever community rootedness if afforded the correct economic opportunity. The other six respondents reported as to having moved to their current locations for either work related to reasons, or because their current rural geography met their personal criteria for being physically removed from more urban geographies with higher population densities. For this latter group, the rural places that these respondents had chosen to live largely filled the psychological, scenic, and commercial attributes of rural sentiment posited by Park and Coppack (1994).

During the course of the investigation it was discovered that ideological rootedness played only a minor passive role in the choices of these drivers to live in rural areas. Often times rural places and people have been romanticized by urban inhabitants as quaint little villages

chock-full of congenial folks who exhibit a genuine affection for each other and who are affable to visitors. This romanticized idyll of rurality and community does not seem to exist in the phenomenology of rural inhabitants themselves. The majority of the drivers who participated in this study identified concepts related to environmental topophilia related to rural landscapes as the foremost factors in their preference rural inhabitancy. Few of the drivers mentioned or identified neighborly congeniality or any other concepts traditionally attributed to the ideas of rural community as a motivator in their choosing rural inhabitance. The respondents most identified concepts related with landscapes as their point of connection to rurality. All ten drivers reported biographical histories that included, extended periods in and interactions with, rural environments. These findings align with the assertions of Tuan and Relph as to the powerful role that sensory emersion and interaction in a particular environment play in forming a distinct sense of place in individual (Tuan, 1975; Relph, 1976). These drivers had chosen to call America's rural Great Plains home, because the Great Plains' landscapes *felt* like home

Given the occupation's transitory nature, why have some commercial drivers chosen to call rural America home when any place near a highway should suffice? From the answers given by the truckers participating in this study, the expansive landscapes of rural America afford the drivers a social refuge vis a vis spatial isolation from a society that they see as largely oblivious to the work they engage in, depreciative of the skills that their profession requires, and negligent of the role that trucking plays in the daily functioning of that society. In this way rural truckers could be choosing to call rural America home largely because rural America itself suffers from the same social disparagements and cultural devaluations from the urban society at large. The situation then could be synonymous with the idea that misery loves company, where the constraints and stigma represented by urban social hegemony is blunted for a driver by their

immersion in the rural landscape. Rural inhabitation for truck drivers then represents the cultural antithesis and social repudiation of the encroaching modernity.

Admittedly this study suffers from issues of generalizability attributable to the small sample size of study population who were willing to participate. Every reasonable effort was made on the part of the investigator to increase recruitment participation, but to no avail. Some of this recruitment failure can be attributed to the investigation occurring during the peak of the wheat harvest season on the Great Plains, some of it can possibly be attributed to a lack of incentives for study participation, and some of it can be attributed to a unanticipated unwillingness to participate due to a hostility towards and suspicion of the academic intent of this study. When it was understood by the investigator that they would be working with a smaller than anticipated study sample, it was acknowledged that this situation increased the possibility that network sampling bias could exist, though ultimately respondent referral chains never exceeded two links.

Despite these limitations the research conducted in this study still adds invaluable insight into the trucking occupation and in particular the phenomenology of rural people who are involved with this line of work, an important achievement given the dearth of sociological literature on either subject. Despite the answers given by the truckers in this study, the structure of the commercial trucking industry itself is on the cusp of a rapidly evolving technological transformation largely in the form of automated driving technologies. If we take into account the multifaceted and elaborate role that the trucking industry plays in the functioning of society, it becomes paramount that more social scholarship is positioned to observe how these structural transformations will be implemented and the affects will be felt not only in the labor force but the society that will be sharing the roadway with automated commercial vehicles. Future social

research will be required to investigate how the adoption and implementation of these technologies will affect the current labor force engaged in trucking as well as the economic restructuring and losses that will invariably occur. Specifically what will be the social repercussions of America losing 3.5 million jobs to automated systems, and how will these losses be absorbed? As the trend towards driver automation -both commercially and privately- continues to move towards a new social reality, how well will the American society adapt to relinquishing control of the wheel?

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Appendix A - Recruitment Flyer

KANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY

College of Arts & Sciences
Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work

Attention Rural Drivers,

My name is Dusty Ray. I'm a Graduate Student at Kansas State University conducting research on truck drivers living in rural communities and I would like to request your assistance with this research study. The work I am doing is focused on the hard work that you do, both on the road and at home. I am an ex-trucker myself, with family ties to the occupation and I am still proud to call myself a licensed CDL driver with multiple endorsements.

The research I am conducting involves answering questions pertaining to the nature of the job that you do as well as questions related to the rural communities that you call home. Your participation in this study would strictly be on a volunteer basis. As an ex-trucker I understand the time constraints of the job, so your participation in this study would occur at times that were most convenient for your involvement. Interviews would take approximately 30 to 60 minutes. All information that you would be willing to provide for this study will be kept confidential as per Kansas State University research protocols. Anyone who is willing to participate in this study is encouraged to contact me by no later than July 1st 2017.

Thank you for your time and assistance. I look forward to hearing from you.

Dusty Ray
Graduate Student
Kansas State University
785-223-2055 (voicemail and text are fine)
r2d2dusty@ksu.edu

Appendix B - Interview Schedule

Current Occupation

- How long have you been a trucker? (Probe for changes in job nature over time)
- How did you get into trucking? (Probe for specialization)
- How about the particular type you're doing now? (Probe for change in specialization)
- What are your thoughts about the job you do? (pros and cons)
- How do you feel society views the work you do?
- What are your thoughts on automated driving technologies?
- Do you have any previous agricultural and or manufacturing related work experience?
(type, duration, extent)
- What are your thoughts about those jobs?
- Do you feel like this work was valued/respected by society? Why or why not?

Sense of Place

- What is your definition of rural?
- Do you see yourself as a rural person?
- How long have you lived in rural _____? (Probe for family ties, community history)
- What are your thoughts on your community?
- What would make you consider living someplace else?
- How often are you able to make it home in an average week/month?
- What do you think society does/doesn't understand about where you live?
- Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the work you do, or the place you live?