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Where the Home Fires Burn: The Heart of Geographic Mobility in Rural Southern America

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WHERE THE HOME FIRES BURN: THE HEART OF GEOGRAPHIC MOBILITY
IN RURAL SOUTHERN AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the recent surge of interest in domestic U.S. geographic mobility, this study presents findings on the reasons people choose to move or not move that challenge the predominant explanations of geographic mobility and responds to the need for theoretical expansion. This qualitative study is set in a rural county of Georgia, further situating the findings alongside the rural-urban continuum literature. In-depth interviews were conducted with thirty participants from the rural county that represent three different mobility decisions: people who stayed, left, and returned. The findings suggest that there are multiple connected reasons for mobility including three novel reasons that emerged from the data. Those three novel reasons include: one, psychosocial development which describes individuals grappling with identity formation, seeking intimacy, and generativity as part of their mobility decisions; two, the tension of being known versus anonymity which describes a push and pull within interpersonal dynamics; and three, the centrality of relationship which describes the importance of relationships which is a common thread throughout all reasons for mobility. Additionally, the findings suggest that individuals share a common iterative developmental process as they negotiate different opportunities, challenges, desires, and obligations in their mobility decisions. The findings offer unique contribution to the literature as they represent integrated themes of interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of mobility. The findings

elevate the importance of relationships, a developmental process, and goodness of fit

within reasons to move or not move.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

People have been migrating for centuries. They moved to seek food, shelter, or other vital resources. Mobility among people has been of particular interest to researchers since it was linked to industrialization, a rapidly changing world, and other aspects of modernity (Erickson et al., 2018). After a period of waning interest in domestic U.S. mobility over the past few decades, there is now renewed interest because people are moving for reasons that appear to challenge the predominant theories that explain why people move. This study presents findings on the reasons people choose to move or not move that challenge the predominant explanations of geographic mobility and responds to the need for theoretical expansion.

The current field of geographic mobility has experienced multiple reconceptualizations of key terms and concepts along with shifting domestic U.S. mobility patterns. The term "migration" was used historically to signify the movement of people, perhaps, because it is the same term used to explain the movement of other species. Historical works about human movement viewed migration as fixed, static, and permanent. These ideas have become too narrow to fully explain the nature of mobility as the findings have become more varied and complex. In the 1990's there was a development in the field to recognize the nuance in movement and use the term "mobility" to capture the fluidity and dynamic nature of movements. Mobility is no longer just the mapping human movement and distances, it now incorporates meaning,

stillness or immobility, thoughts, feelings, and complex forces that can enable or hinder movement (Cresswell, 2010).

The shift in conceptualizing mobility began right before mobility patterns in the U.S. began to change. The most recent patterns show a decline in U.S. mobility rates over the past three decades (Kaplan and Schulhofer-Wohl, 2012; Molloy et al., 2011). Almost 20% of U.S. residents changed residences in 1985 and just below 10% moved residences in 2018 (Kosar et al., 2019). This is the lowest rate since 1948 when the U.S. Census began tracking mobility. This decline has also been consistent through business cycles and appears across regions, states, and counties (Kosar et al., 2019). The decline in mobility rate was evident across age, race, gender, income, employment status, marital status, and home-ownership status (Molloy et al., 2011). These facts show that reduced mobility cannot be attributed to any one location, demographic characteristic, or business trend; the decline is widespread. Unfortunately, the available theories of mobility have had limited usefulness in explaining the recent mobility patterns. Specifically, Kosar et al. (2019) found that none of the available theories explain how broad that decline has been across the U.S. and across varying demographics.

Prevalent explanations of geographic mobility are based on multiple theories, concepts, and bodies of literature. Mobility is largely explained with economic theories, life course perspectives, and social network theory. These approaches address many pragmatic concerns, financial gains, cost of living, changes over the lifespan, and reasons that involve loved ones and other relationships. These theories and bodies of literature mainly focus on why people choose to move. Mobility is also examined with more abstract theories, albeit to a lesser degree, such as place attachment and sense of place.

These concepts and bodies of literature address the emotional bonds and significant personal meaning derived from a place and how those emotions and meanings persist over time and in memories. These two bodies of literature are most often used when focusing on why people choose to stay in a certain place.

Economic theories of mobility encompass multiple dynamics such as individual factors including seeking employment or higher incomes to larger structural dynamics such as wage differentials and labor market supply and demand. Economic theories are important, useful, and have had a large presence in the evolution of the field of mobility. However, these theories have assumptions that are too narrow to capture the breadth of complexity in mobility. Economic theories can view mobility as deterministic; that given a certain set of economic conditions, an individual will be compelled to move. Obviously, not all people in the same circumstances choose to move or choose to remain. These theories also conflate the conceptual decision-making process with the physical movement. This can overlook a multitude of reasons people encounter when negotiating a potential move. Other concepts that are typically absent in economic theories such as changes over an individual's lifespan and the other important people in their lives are addressed in other bodies of literature.

Life course perspectives assert that people move for age-differentiated events such as moving away for college during young adult years, moving to support children when starting a family, and moving after retirement during older adult years (Elder & Giele, 2009). This view suggests that mobility patterns and decisions for individuals at age twenty-five are likely to be much different than for individuals at age sixty-five. Life course perspectives expand the understanding of mobility across the lifespan, but the

complexity and variability of how and when these events occur in life is not well defined. For example, mobility decisions may be different for people who experience milestones and life events outside of the expected conventional age ranges than the theory suggests. Additionally, there has been evidence that an individual's mobility decisions are not tied to their own life events but tied to events for the people closest to them (Stockdale et al., 2018), such as a family member needing health care support and caretaking. The application of life course perspectives to the study of mobility often produces inconsistent findings.

Social network theory seeks to explain different aspects of relationships and connections between individuals. The theory argues that people's relationships act to facilitate or inhibit geographical movement. Social networks are important to mobility research because they can explain the linked lives that are a factor in mobility including information on strength of relationships and proximity with other important people. However, the usefulness of understanding a social network is limited because it captures a static and point-in-time representation of relationships which diminishes over time. This is because people's relationships in a network are never fixed or stagnant, they are continually evolving; and, if that person is mobile, then they are engaging in multiple evolving networks.

Economic theories, life course perspectives, and social network theory address important pragmatic concerns along with relational and temporal aspects of mobility. They are typically used to examine why people move instead of why people stay. This is particularly problematic when examining the most recent pattern shift to a decline in

mobility. There are other more abstract theories that are also used in mobility literature: place attachment and sense of place.

Place attachment explains that people become emotionally bonded to a place. Major contributions of this body of literature include the concepts of meaning-making and imbued value of physical location. Scholars suspected that a strong attachment to a place may be a reason that inhibits movement. However, immobility did not always correlate to strong place attachment (Barcus & Braun, 2009). Additionally, the place attachment concept becomes more complex as people move because they manage multiple and conflicting place attachments in their new location and their previous home (Ehrkamp, 2005). The literature shows that the bond between people and places is certainly impacting mobility, albeit in complicated and often contradictory ways. Place attachment cannot adequately explain why people leave a place, nor why they stay in a place.

Sense of place is the most abstract concept in mobility. It argues that a location is experienced in pragmatic, perceptual and existential ways. People imbue a place with value and meaning which is nuanced and very personal. Sense of place is a complex and multidimensional representation of an individual's understanding of a place; it is a lived reality, created by all of our senses which endures over time (Tuan, 1977). The sense of place literature contributes to understanding how deeply personal and unique the experience of place is to every individual. It is useful to understanding complex meaning making associated with a place and why sense of place continues to exist as a person moves across spaces, places, and time. However, these concepts are difficult to operationalize and when sense of place is applied in the literature it loses the gestalt of

the concept. Additionally, it is unclear how one person's sense of place relates to another's sense of place or if they are completely independent of one another.

These five bodies of literature contribute to understanding a wide range of concepts in mobility. An integration of many concepts across theoretical approaches is beneficial and confirmed by recent studies. One such study was performed by von Reichert et al. (2014) who examined multiple mobility patterns and found that the factors shaping mobility decisions included economic related issues, life events, family and social considerations, and physical community connections. However, consistently recent studies conclude that additional factors of mobility need to be explored. The predominant theories cannot account for all observed mobility dynamics. This study is situated within the recent literature that calls for further exploration of reasons for mobility.

This study has limited the geographic scope of mobility to the rural Southeast. This region has a unique mobility history and there is renewed attention on rural areas within recent literature. The Southeast experienced a mass out-migration of African Americans after emancipation who were looking for employment and better living conditions which was called The Great Migration. Later in the 1980's and 1990's many African Americans with generational ties to the Southeast returned in what was named The Great Turnaround. This pattern is notable for many reasons, but one of which is that people were returning to the rural South at a time of very little economic opportunity and leaving Northeast and Midwest urban centers which provided employment and financial security. The motivations for a return to the rural South were more complex.

This event also highlights the rural-urban dichotomy that has been pervasive in past mobility literature and in current popular media. During the rise of industrialization

in Europe, many scholars and philosophers began writing about urban centers of industry and rural countryside and agriculture. The seminal work of Tönnies' Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft was very influential in perpetuating the conceptual distinction between urban and rural. This work perceived rural life to be characterized by coexisting with others and creating a sense of belonging. In contrast, he observed that urban life eroded the goodness of community, resulting and cultural heterogeneity that produced alienation. These ideas were interpreted by Weber and Durkheim, and also used by sociologists of the Chicago School that was dedicated to investigating urban structure. Over many decades these analyses perpetuated the dichotomy of urban and rural existence. These geographical spaces were assumed to have different social and cultural spaces, and more recently economic and political spaces.

Recent bodies of literature examining spatial disparities, poverty, mobility, and rural areas have contributed important information about social, political, and economic dynamics. However, this literature has been used by the popular media to perpetuate a narrative that rural areas are in decline, its people in despair, and stuck with no way out, thereby explaining decisions to stay (Love & Loh, 2020). Over time, this narrative has become the "rural-urban divide" which paints a binary political, economic, and social experience of flourishing urban areas and languishing rural areas (Love & Loh, 2020). This binary stereotype extends to educated, socially conscious, self-aware, and politically liberal people in urbans areas contrasted with poorly educated, narrow-minded, politically, and socially conservative people in rural areas. This is not the reality reflected in recent literature.

The recent findings from various disciplines reveal more complexity than the binary narrative asserted in the popular media. The complexities appear across political, economic, and social dynamics. This body of literature is called the "rural-urban continuum". The reality is that income inequality between rural and urban places converged in 2016 (Thiede et al., 2020). Many rural natives return home after graduating college which challenges the idea of the "brain drain" (Sowl et al., 2022). Racial justice movements are taking place across the South and in rural Appalachia, demonstrating the falsity that the drive for racial equality only exists in "blue" liberal locations (Catte, 2018). Additionally, various rural areas across the U.S. have experienced population growth, rising wages, narrowing wage disparities, more available jobs, higher levels of education, and upward socioeconomic mobility (Florida & King, 2019). The rural reality is far more complex and nuanced and the difference between rural and urban spaces is better described as a "continuum".

This study is situated within the need for theoretical expansion in the field of mobility and alongside the rural-urban continuum literature. This conjunction of interests suggests that there are complex reasons that people negotiate when deciding to move or to stay that are not fully addressed by the available theories. Additionally, a more comprehensive understanding of mobility decisions in the rural Southeast is hampered by stereotypes. This study was designed in response to the need for theoretical expansion while attending to methodological limitations in previous literature. This study aims to answer the following research questions: One, what do rural Southeastern natives identify as the reasons associated with their various mobility decisions? Two, how do they negotiate those reasons in making decisions about mobility? Three, what are the

relationships among mobility decisions and perceived well-being for rural Southeastern natives?

This qualitative study is set in a rural county of Georgia. In-depth interviews were conducted with thirty participants that represent three different mobility decisions. All of the participants were natives of "Copper County", which is a pseudonym created for anonymity. There were nine participants who grew up there and chose to stay (Stayers), ten participants who left the county and have no intention of returning (Leavers), and eleven participants who grew up there, left as an adult, and eventually decided to move back to Copper County and reside there now (Returnees). The age range was from 19 to 79. Each decade of the lifespan was well represented in the total sample. There were 21 females and 9 males. Race was more skewed with 28 White and 2 African American participants. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling. There were two data collection interviews with each participant conducted through Zoom online video application. Each participant had a least two hours of interview data which was transcribed, coded, and analyzed with Thematic Analysis.

Regarding the first research question which asks about the reasons associated with various mobility decisions, the findings suggest that there are multiple integrated reasons for mobility in addition to three novel reasons that emerged from the data. Those three novel reasons include: one, psychosocial development which describes individuals grappling with identity formation, seeking intimacy, and generativity as part of their mobility decisions; two, the tension of being known versus anonymity which describes a push and pull within interpersonal dynamics; and three, the centrality of relationship

which describes the importance of relationships which is a common thread throughout all reasons for mobility.

A major theme from the study was psychosocial development. This theme consisted of three developmental stages: identity formation, seeking intimacy, and generativity. The findings suggest that each stage has substantive content that informs mobility. Additionally, participants appeared to be using their mobility decisions as a way to seek out further development of each stage. The association between identity formation and mobility decisions suggests that people appraise the qualities, values, and norms of a place in relation to their self-concept, or identity, and who they want to be in the future. Congruence or incongruence of that place with personal identity becomes a factor in mobility decisions. In essence, participants were using mobility decisions to assist with seeking of the "self".

The next stage of psychosocial development was seeking intimacy. The findings show evidence that participants are considering romantic intimacy and emotional intimacy in their mobility decisions. The emotionally intimate relationships included the family of origin, spouse or partner, children, close friends, and confidantes. Romantic intimacy was found in dating and spousal relationships. Mobility decisions challenged and facilitated this psychosocial stage. Some people navigated very intentional efforts to build and maintain relationships while others proffered from familiarity over time.

The third stage in this theme was generativity. It was demonstrated by participants who incorporated the desire to give back to family and community and foster the development of others into their mobility decisions. A few participants implied this was one of the main reasons in their mobility decisions. Other evidence of generativity was

observed acts that included helping, giving, and supporting the community. Acts of generativity were directed towards family, close friends, and the wider community. All the stages in psychosocial development occurred nonsequentially across the adult lifespan. This suggests a fluid experience of the stages where a person can move back and forth across the stages throughout life.

The second major theme is the tension of being known versus anonymity. Participants across mobility groups identified and compared the advantages and disadvantages of each experience. Being known in a community provided comfort and connection while anonymity provided autonomy, independence, and freedom from perceived expectations. The disadvantages of being known were gossip and intrusive behaviors. The disadvantages of anonymity were social disconnection and a sense of isolation. This theme highlights differences between people who stay and those who choose to leave. Stayers strongly favored being known in their community, while Leavers strongly favored anonymity. Returnees brought to light that the preference for one over the other can change throughout life.

The third major theme was the centrality of relationship. The common thread of relationship was prevalent throughout the interviews. It was interwoven into the reasons for mobility decisions, the way someone experienced a place, and factors that contribute to or diminish well-being. It was incorporated into what people want for their futures and the futures of their loved ones, the lessons they have learned in life, their special memories, and their fears. The thread of relationship was in every aspect of life, so naturally, mobility decisions were also deeply influenced by relationship.

Multiple dynamics of relationships emerged in the data. Two important dynamics are the drive towards connection and the use of disconnection. Participants were driven toward connection with others. They spent considerable effort building and maintaining relationships. They expressed appreciation and considered their relationships to be most valuable when they were supportive, nurturing, and they could express their authentic selves. They desired to be understood and to understand others. This reciprocal interaction requires vulnerability and authenticity. Disconnection was also seen across all mobility groups. In a simplistic way, concluding a relationship or actively choosing not to maintain it can be disconnection. However, disconnection can exist as a degree of pulling away from a relationship and paradoxically used as a tool to maintain some connection. The findings suggest that participants are using disconnection to preserve themselves and maintain an acceptable boundary in some relationships, giving part of themselves, and accepting part of the other. This retains identity and avoids judgement. Disconnection can be used in this complex way of managing relationships when being fully vulnerable and authentic would have undesirable outcomes.

The second research question asked: How do rural Southeastern natives negotiate those reasons in making decisions about mobility? The findings suggest that individuals are negotiating different opportunities, challenges, desires, and obligations in their mobility decisions. It is a highly individualized process, and each participant experienced iterative development in negotiating their mobility reasons. This means that experience builds over time and past experiences are continually informing the present. As people experience life, they learn more about the world, themselves, and relationships. This iterative development includes present mobility decisions.

The third research question asked: What are the relationships among mobility decisions and perceived well-being for rural Southeastern natives? Findings show that participants identify many contributing and diminishing factors to their well-being which can coexist in the same location. These contributing and diminishing factors are integrated with other mobility reasons. A balance is sought in well-being where there are more contributions than diminishments. Additionally, there is a reciprocal relationship between perceived well-being and mobility. When well-being is perceived to be less than ideal it can become a reason for mobility. When people are located in a place they enjoy and actively choose, it reaffirms things that contribute to their well-being.

The discussion of this study provides a deeper investigation of the findings, analysis, and interpretations. The discussion is framed by four overarching fundamental inquiries that are found across the field of mobility: What makes people mobile? What are the differences between people who leave, stay, and return? Is it helpful to think about stillness as a dimension of mobility? Is being mobile good for people, or stillness bad for people? From these broad overarching empirical lines of inquiry, flows the discussion of the study's findings and where they are situated in the literature. The five major themes in these findings: psychosocial development, the tension of being known versus anonymity, the centrality of relationship, iterative developmental process, and balancing well-being, are discussed in-depth with an integration of the predominant theories, and additional contributing theories, concepts, and bodies of literature.

There are four major conclusions from this study which offer unique contribution to the literature. First, the findings represent interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of mobility. These dimensions add insights about mobility and bring additional theories not

traditionally used in mobility into consideration. A person's inner experience and relational experiences are important and rich with meaning. Interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of mobility are not mutually exclusive, rather they have a reciprocal relationship and develop in relation to one another. As people grow in their relationships this develops and changes a person's self-concept, and vice versa.

The second contribution is that the major themes of psychosocial development, the tension of being known versus anonymity, centrality of relationship, iterative developmental process, and balancing well-being, are all interconnected. Examining individual mobility stories highlights that there is overlap in how these concepts are experienced. For example, all of the concepts are involved in iterative development. Relationship is consistently a feature of all themes and the ways each individual navigates these themes impacts their well-being. The interconnection of the themes illuminates a holistic view of the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of mobility.

Third, relationships are fundamental in mobility decisions. Mobility considerations are embedded in relational contexts, which are essential and valuable to individuals. Relationships also occur on multiple social levels including individuals, families, and communities. The drive for connection one-on-one, with families, groups of friends, and communities is so great that it can supersede the importance of other personal needs, desires, or opportunities. The last conclusion is that mobility is a developmental process. The findings suggest two dynamics of development related to mobility. One, each individual's intrapersonal and interpersonal growth is occurring over time. This changes how they interpret their world and their experiences. Two, when individuals engage with mobility, conceptually and/or physically, they are negotiating

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their reasons in an iterative developmental manner. These two dynamics work together. As people change and develop, they meet subsequent mobility considerations with new perspectives and meanings. This results in highly individualized trajectories of inner experience. This may help to explain why mobility decisions are so individual. Two people with the same circumstances, opportunities, and demographic characteristics, make different mobility choices.

These conclusions contribute to the literature in a few important ways. One, they set a foundation for theoretical expansion that incorporates concepts and theories not traditionally used in examining mobility. Two, the conclusions validate the questions in recent literature about additional factors involved with mobility decisions and that they were likely social and psychological factors. Lastly, the conclusions elevate the social work discipline within the field of mobility due to the focus on relationships and development.

The most significant implication arising from this study is that the dimension of place is important to understanding human nature. This applies to research, social work education, and practice. Place is a context in which people experience their lives. It exists in the past, in memories, in the present physical world, and in the imagined future. Place is integrated with individual intrapersonal and interpersonal growth. It is integrated with what we want for ourselves and our loved ones. Place facilitates and challenges relationships because proximity and distance are not just measures of space, they are tools for emotional connection and disconnection.

Concepts that arise from this study and further critiques of theory help to situate this study within long-standing debates within the social work discipline and among

current strains of contemporary social work literature. The purpose of social work has been debated to focus on individual's needs contrasted with the desire for social change. Both directions are useful, but in different ways. This study does not stand as a contrast to social change, rather, it focuses on exploring common individual reasons for mobility and processes to illuminate possible avenues for theoretical expansion. One manifestation of this debate in social work research is a problem-focused approach to research. Instead, this study explores a phenomenon, it does not identify a social problem that needs to be alleviated. The exploration of mobility reasons in this study utilizes a tradition in social work which prioritizes the perceptions and subjective experiences of individuals to learn more about a phenomenon and to shed light on common human needs, desires, and challenges. Helen Harris Perlman explained the same position within social work practice, "If services to human beings are to fulfill their alleged purposes, they must attend not only to the problems people have but to the people who suffer and struggle to cope with these problems" (Perlman, 1979, p, 11).

Recent social work literature on rural areas has focused on objective measures of well-being which reveal a lack of resources and availability of specialty and mental health care in rural areas. However, the findings suggest there is a significant disparity between objective measures and subjective perceptions of well-being. Further, the disparity reveals strategies and well-being priorities that contribute to the literature. The findings are also situated within foundational social work disciplinary concepts including development, relationships, and goodness of fit. Later chapters discuss these concepts through multiple theoretical perspectives such as psychodynamic and feminist approaches.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

Chapter Introduction

This chapter builds an integrative understanding of geographic mobility concepts, patterns, theories, and terminology. Such an integrative understanding of the literature is necessary to make explicit the complex nature of mobility and the consequential theoretical and methodological choices within this study. This study is situated within the emergent findings on mobility that challenge existing understandings of why people move or do not move and responds to the need for theoretical expansion.

This chapter is divided into three sections: A, B, and C. Section A focuses on those theories that are directly relevant to the study. These include economic theories, life course perspectives, social network theory, the concepts of place attachment, and sense of place. Section A begins with how the field of migration and geographic mobility started with a focus on economic theories. Then recent mobility patterns are examined through economic theory demonstrating that multiple questions are posed by the research and left unanswered. To explore these questions the contributions of life course perspectives, social network theory, concepts of place attachment, and sense of place on mobility are analyzed. The analysis of these bodies of literature lays the groundwork for the conceptual approach of this study.

Section B focuses on the methodological implications of the literature leading to this study. Literature is reviewed on how the term migration evolved into mobility, how

rural and urban concepts have shifted, and how the literature labels different mobility patterns. Section C responds to the theoretical and methodological limitations discussed in sections A and B and integrates additional concepts and assumptions that are pertinent to this study. This section begins with discussing the conceptual approach to this study and introduces the research questions. Then additional theories are discussed that address the gaps in the current understanding of mobility. The theories include Erickson's Psychosocial Development, Relational Cultural Theory, Sense of Community, and Tönnies' Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Altogether, this chapter explains and critiques the mobility literature, highlights the theoretical gaps and methodological limitations in the current literature, and builds an integrated conceptual approach to examine the next steps in mobility research.

Section A - Theoretical Implications of the Literature

Historical Assumptions

Early research on migration focused on the assumption that economic pursuit was the primary reason or driver of migration. Much of the literature about international and domestic migration continues to highlight economic motivation, but research in the past few decades shows that economic pursuit is not always the primary driver of mobility. The seminal works of Ernst Georg Ravenstein, Everett Lee, Michael Todaro, and Immanuel Wallerstein mark important developments in the conceptualization of migration that span a century. Yet, firmly embedded in their theories is the assumption that the movement of people is about human responses to economic signals in other places.

Ravenstein (1885) conducted one of the earliest efforts to understand the movement of people in late nineteenth century England. He identified seven "laws" or generalizations. Ravenstein's seventh law stated that all migration stemmed from economic pursuit. Although he overgeneralized that a higher income was the primary driver of migration and this generalization continued to pervade research, he accurately identified that economic forces are a considerable motivation for geographic movement.

Everett Lee (1966) argued there were more complex economic forces at work in migration. He took an individualistic view of migration and established a framework which included four factors that influenced movement: factors associated with the point of origin, factors associated with the area of destination, intervening obstacles, and personal factors (Lee, 1966). He noted that some factors act to drive people away from their point of origin and other factors pull them towards their area of destination, or vice versa. These became known as the "push-pull factors" which have endured as a way of thinking about mobility. Unfortunately, the individual aspects of Lee's work regarding the personal factors and barriers to movement were largely ignored in subsequent literature which was heavily dominated by economics. The last two overlooked factors, barriers to movement and personal factors, included concepts such as kinship ties, emotional reactions, and multiple other barriers to movement. These concepts are developed in theories later.

Many theoretical innovations in migration started around Everett Lee's time in the mid-twentieth century and continued for decades. This includes neo-classical theories, dual labor market theory, and world systems theory, however, the economic basis for movement continued to be primary. Neo-classical theory is characterized by models that

view individuals' mobility decisions as efforts of rational actors attempting to achieve the highest monetary wage or other form of compensation from their skills. Todaro's (1969) neo-classical work observed that people moved to an urban area from rural areas with the expectation of higher wages but did so with flawed information and then did not always receive higher wages. The dual labor market theory takes a more structural view and argues that migration comes from the innate labor demands of more developed industrial countries and draws migrants from less industrialized countries into low-wage unstable positions (Massey, 1993). Some economic migrants see this as a financial means to an end, planning to return home after a period of funding their families' upward social mobility. World systems theory, pioneered by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, crosses over disciplines. He argued that migration was less about the two branches of the labor market and more about the larger structure of the capitalist market and inequities in global economies resulting in a mobile population (Wallerstein, 2004). While network theory shifts slightly away from a strict micro or macroeconomic view and questions the nature of human relationships involved in this economic pursuit, it assumes that people use their relationships as leverage or capital by maximizing their opportunities and minimizing their risks through information from families, co-workers, and other known individuals (Massey, 1993). Despite changes in unit of analysis, incorporating disciplines in the social sciences, and recognizing the importance of relationships, these theories prioritize different economic forces. Borjas (1989) suggested that economic theories of migration include ideas about labor flows, the skills of workers, and the economic impact in the places of origin and area of destination, but economic theories always see "migration as a human capital investment".

These theories have assumptions which are important to the evolution of the field of migration. One assumption is the deterministic view of mobility, the narrow view that mobility takes place from point A to point B. The theories discussed thus far imply that, given a certain set of economic conditions, an individual will be compelled to move. Obviously, not all individuals in the same circumstances choose to move. Even when individuals acknowledge a move is in their best interests, the action does not always occur. The second assumption is a limited conceptual and temporal boundary around a mobility action. These theories result in a conceptual boundary because they analyze mobility as a single mobile action separate from the cognitive decision-making process involved in mobility. The theories also assume that mobility is finite with a beginning and ending, which creates a temporal boundary in mobility. The third assumption is the role of human agency. Economic theories include a wide range of assumptions about human agency. Neo-classical economic theories assume a very high level of personal agency, the ability to make independent mobility decisions based on personal interest. World systems theory assumes a low level of personal agency, that individuals are manipulated by capitalist structures.

Economic theories and assumptions are important for understanding how explanations of migration evolved. In the next section, additional literature is examined which applies economic concepts to recent mobility patterns. The limitations of a purely economic approach to understanding current mobility are revealed. These limitations raise pertinent questions that are best addressed by multiple other theories which are reviewed later in this chapter.

Complexity and Nuance

Scholars accept that seeking economic gain is a significant factor in mobility patterns. However, this is not a comprehensive explanation of mobility and economic theories do not fully explain more recent mobility phenomenon. The most recent patterns of mobility in the United States show a decline in mobility rates over the past three decades (Kaplan and Schulhofer-Wohl, 2012; Molloy et al., 2011). Almost 20% of U.S. residents changed residences in 1985 and just below 10% moved residences in 2018 (Kosar et al., 2019). This is the lowest rate since 1948 when the U.S. Census began tracking mobility. This decline has also been consistent through business cycles and appears across geographic levels such as regions, states, or counties (Kosar et al., 2019). The decline in mobility rate was also seen across sub-populations within age, race, gender, income, employment status, marital status, and home-ownership status (Molloy et al., 2011). These facts show that reduced mobility cannot be attributed to any one location, demographic, or business trend; the decline is widespread. This recent phenomenon has become a great interest to those who study mobility and a concern to scholars who espouse economic theories.

Some economists and policymakers believe that a decline in mobility will have implications for the labor market and economic growth and that geographic mobility is a key component to achieving upward socioeconomic mobility. Scholars worry that stagnation in mobility will increase poverty, inequities, and further the rural-urban divide. Kosar et al. (2019) recently asked whether poverty and low incomes have shifted away from being a reason to move and have now become reasons not to move. Their study found that people reported considerable psychological and social costs to moving. Kosar

et al. (2019) used mathematical computations to monetize the worth of those costs. The non-pecuniary costs were estimated to be worth over 100% of an annual income on average and the value of proximity to family was about 30% of income. People also felt that the comfort with local social and cultural norms were worth 11%.

Their findings about location preferences, the value of proximity to family and friends, and the comfort of homogeneity in cultural values of the community are supported by the literature, and the social and psychological costs represented by moving are considerable for individuals. The authors acknowledge their contribution to the literature with the use of novel measures and algorithms. However, they report that none of the available theories explain how broad the decline has been across levels of geography and across varying demographics (Kosar et al., 2019).

The study by Kosar et al. (2019) is based on an economic framework and situated in the most recent domestic migration patterns. It provides a theoretical expansion that argues economics along with family, social relationships, and the comforts and familiarity of a community are all important factors involved in mobility decisions. However, this study has a methodological limitation by quantifying psychological and social factors. This limits the understanding of how these factors play a role in mobility. The theoretical considerations posed by Kosar et al. are explored in additional theories that contribute to the understanding of mobility.

Expansion of Many Theories

Clearly, people move or choose to remain for reasons other than economic gain. After decades of an economic approach to migration, unanswered questions about what prompts geographic movement or inhibits movement led to an expansion of many other

theoretical perspectives and bodies of literature, such as life course perspectives, social network theory, place attachment, and sense of place. These four additional bodies of theory are not a comprehensive review of all migration theories; rather, bodies of literature that have particular relevance to understanding domestic geographic mobility in the rural Southeast. They are presented in this order as each body of literature sets up questions or contributions to the next. Altogether, these additional bodies of literature increase the breadth of understanding of mobility, but still the collective evidence is often contradictory and suggests that additional factors must be explored to move closer to a more comprehensive understanding of mobility.

Life Course Perspectives. As research in mobility progressed past the mid twentieth century, many researchers believed that mobility patterns could be further explained by differences in age-differentiated events experienced across the lifespan. Life course perspectives came from a theoretical need to understand social changes, but also a methodological need to understand a longitudinal scope of a social phenomenon (Elder & Giele, 2009). Elder and Giele (2009) developed a model of life course theory that contained four elements: historical and geographical context, social ties, human agency, and variation of timing. The combination of these elements provides a way to examine age-differentiated events that are situated in a social context and occur over time.

Theory of life course has contributed to mobility research by showing that some mobility events occur during times of transition. Examples include the late teens/early twenties with finishing school and leaving the family of origin, and the twenties and thirties when many people choose to marry and raise children. Additional time periods are around sixty-five with retirement, and later, adult children moving to become

caretakers of aging parents (Elder & Giele, 2009). Life course perspectives suggest that mobility patterns and decisions for individuals at age twenty-five are likely to be much different than for individuals at age sixty-five. These examples reflect the four elements of the theory and suggest that mobility has a geographical context, involves individual decision-making that is embedded in family ties, and occurs differently at varying time points during life.

Despite the usefulness of life course perspectives in the study of mobility there are also theoretical and methodological limitations. For example, there has been some criticism that mobility is less associated with those ages and more associated with the events (Stockdale et al., 2018). Mobility decisions still occur for a person who starts a career but continues to live in the family home until middle age, or for the person who does not retire until well into their seventies.

The complexity and variability of how and when these events occur in life is not well defined within life course perspectives. Therefore, mobility decisions may be different for people who experience milestones and life events outside of the expected conventional age ranges than the theory suggests. Most migration studies that employ life course perspectives examine only one particular age range, assuming that those ages capture a representative experience that can be generalized to all individuals in that age range and that the mobility considerations captured in the findings would not be experienced by people in different age ranges. This methodological choice misses the opportunity to explore the experiences of the same life event made at different times in life and how that relates to mobility. As that logic continues, if life experiences are interpreted differently through age as the theory suggests, then the other individuals not

captured in the sample age range would approach mobility decisions differently than people in the same age group. These conceptual gaps result in a narrow understanding of mobility surrounding life events and the methodological limitations constrain the ability to explore those events without a predetermined age range attached to the life event.

Additionally, there has been evidence that an individual's mobility decisions are not tied to their own life events but tied to events for the people closest to them (Stockdale et al., 2018). Examples include a family member needing health care support and caretaking. This is often associated with caring for aging parents, but this also happens when a family member is diagnosed with a terminal condition, had an injury that requires a lengthy recovery, or assisting with child-rearing when a loved one gives birth. Although these occurrences can be explained by the social embeddedness construct of the theory, they contradict the timing construct. The application of life course perspectives to the study of mobility produces inconsistent findings.

Social Network Theory. The critical analysis of life course perspectives prompts the idea that people's lives and mobility decisions are linked to the lives of other people including friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers. This is a natural place to consider how social network theory has contributed to the understanding of mobility. To begin, social network theory is a label used to describe a theory and a type of methodological analysis; both have contributed to the findings that are relevant to mobility.

The conceptual aspect of social network theory seeks to explain different aspects of relationships and connections between individuals and has recently become more widely used to explain relationships and connections between organizations. Social network analysis produces a graphic representation of many individuals (nodes) and a

web of many connections (ties) between them. The theory posits that emerging structural patterns and characteristics of the relationships are more meaningful than the sum of the parts (Freeman, 2004; Wellman, 1981, 2008).

The concept of social networks has been used in the study of migration in multiple ways: to explain how relationships facilitate migration, to explore what about those relationships create successful settlement after migration, and to explore how relationships may inhibit migration. Manchin and Orazbayev's (2018) study findings represent a synthesis of the contributions of social networks to understanding mobility. Manchin and Orazbayev (2018) examined close social networks (friends and family) and broad social networks (associates of similar origin with intention to migrate) and found that both networks influence migration regardless of the migration being local or international. The networks were so influential that together they explained 37% of the variation in the intention to migrate. Additionally, stronger ties at home reduced the intention to migrate away from home.

The theoretical and methodological use of social networks has often been coupled with social capital. Social capital is the idea that people represent resources and social networks explain how those resources are connected. Many migration studies that utilize social capital theory report that successful migration and settlement are facilitated by the engineering of bonding and bridging of capital, a process described by Putnam (2000) as using relationships to maintain or improve a living standard. This view is an extension of economic theory and does not provide an adequately deep understanding of the relational qualities that are a factor in migration, especially when relationships do not provide an economic advantage or result in upward social mobility. For example, while life course

perspectives suggest that people move to be caretakers of aging parents or to try out their independence for the first time by leaving home, social capital does not provide an adequately complex understanding of such of mobility decisions. The coupling of social capital to social networks is very useful when examining international migration, especially when economic gain is the main goal. However, coupling social capital to social networks narrows the conclusions that can be made when applying this theory to non-economic based mobility decisions. This narrow use of social networks in migration literature assumes that people have continuous, stable, and unlimited access to friends, family and social acquaintances (Ryan, 2011). It also reduces people to "bargaining chips" and their relationships to leverage.

Social networks are important to mobility research because they can explain the linked lives that we know are a factor in mobility. Additionally, they provide information on strength of relationships and proximity of the other individual. However, social networks have theoretical and methodological limitations. People's relationships in a network are never fixed or stagnant, they are continually evolving, and if that person is mobile, then they are engaging in multiple evolving networks. This makes the reality of social networks very dynamic (Boyd, 1989), but social network analysis is capturing a static and point-in-time representation of relationships. The usefulness of understanding a particular social network will diminish with time. Ignoring the temporality of a social network constrains realistically deep understanding of mobility.

Place Attachment. Social networks focus on explaining the bonds between people, but what about the bonds between people and places? Place attachment is described as the emotional bond between a person and a place (Florek, 2011; Lewicka,

2011). It is often described as the desire and longing for the comforts and security of home. Place attachment is highly nuanced in the literature and there is considerable debate regarding precise definitions and measurement of this concept (Lewicka, 2011). Some researchers have delineated between the emotional element and the functional element of attachment and use the terms place identity and place dependence (Anton & Lawrence, 2014). Others have used the terms community attachment (Sampson, 1988), rootedness (Tuan, 1977), bondedness (Hay, 1998), or place loyalty (Florek, 2011). Although this is not a comprehensive list, it is certain that researchers have not agreed on a single definition, nor do they operationalize place attachment in similar ways. There is, however, agreement that place attachment is not community attachment nor social capital, and place attachment is about the bond with the place and not the people in that place (Trentelman, 2009). Shared definitions assume that place attachment involves emotions and cognitive processes that link a person to a place. Scannell and Gifford (2010) focused on these shared definitions and created the Tripartite Model of Place Attachments to explain the three dimensions of place attachment (person, place, and process) and the relationships between the concepts that characterize the bond with place.

Place attachment has been used to examine multiple aspects of mobility. Barcus and Braun (2009) made major contributions to the place attachment and mobility literature. They found there were multiple expressions of place attachments, which affirms the differences in definition. They also found immobility did not always correlate to strong place attachment, which was widely assumed in mobility literature. Additionally, they discovered that place attachment and mobility are related, not in the dichotomous way that most of the literature had been assuming but rather across multiple

axes. They created a typology in which mobility varied on spectrums of frequency and distance, whether mobility was chosen or imposed, and place attachment spanned from strong to weak ties. This elucidates the relationship between place attachment and mobility but also demonstrates how complex and multidimensional the concept is.

Place attachment becomes more complex as researchers consider that migrants often manage multiple and conflicting place attachments between their new local place and their previous place or home (Ehrkamp, 2005). Also, migration or movement is sometimes forced, and place disruption has occurred, severing parts of the attachment (Clarke et al., 2018). These ideas prompted Anton and Lawrence (2016) to examine how place attachment differed when people made a positive or negative value judgement regarding moving to another place. They found that place attachment to a current location was stronger if people evaluated the potential move as a negative occurrence. But of those people that viewed moving negatively only half of them argued against a move. This raises questions about incongruent behavior and emotions people have when experiencing mobility.

The literature shows that the bond between people and places is certainly impacting mobility, albeit in complicated and often contradictory ways. Major contributions of place attachment theory include the constructs of meaning-making and imbued value of physical location. However, place attachment also has limitations in the contributions it makes towards a deeper understanding of mobility. Most broadly, place attachment cannot adequately explain why people leave a place, nor why they stay in a place (Bracus & Braun, 2009). The concept is multifaceted and difficult to operationalize when scholars do not have a consensus on the definition. The challenge of temporality is

also present in the concept of place attachment and although it is assumed that attachments evolve over time, this is not explicit in the literature.

Sense of place. The theories discussed thus far, economic theory, life course perspectives, social network theory, and place attachment, take the reader from precisely defined concepts and measurements to more abstract ideas that are more difficult to operationalize. Sense of place is the most abstract of the theories discussed. It was coined by humanistic geographers of the late 1970's. Scholars such as Yi Fu Tuan and Edward Relph believed that the concepts of place were void of philosophical insight and experiential understanding. Both scholars believed that space and place are experienced in multiple ways, pragmatically, perceptually and existentially (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). Sense of place is a complex and multidimensional representation of an individual's understanding of a place; it is extremely nuanced and personal. Sense of place is a lived reality, created by all of our senses that gives a location value and meaning (Tuan, 1977). Sense of place endures over time because it can be "sensed" long after leaving that place. It endures within our memories and our reality (Tuan, 1977). These theoretical contributions address the iterative nature of experiencing place, meaning that interpretations of experiencing place build upon one another, always considering what has come before. The contributions address how deeply personal and unique sense of place is to every individual, and why it continues to exist as a person moves across spaces, places, and time.

When sense of place is applied in the literature it loses the gestalt of the concept. Agnew (2011), points out that mobility literature has used sense of place in very bounded and isolated ways. Additionally, many researchers choose to operationalize sense of place

in very specific ways that are rarely duplicated. Bartos (2013) operationalized sense of place through the use of the five senses. Ngo and Brklacich (2014) chose to define sense of place as a composite of place attachment, sense of community, and place identity. Neurobiological variables were used to examine sense of place when Lengen and Kistemann (2012) identified many specific parts, subregions and cells in the brain involved with phenomenological observations regarding sense of place. Ardoin (2006, 2012) argues that sense of place is not sufficient alone, but should be situated within psychological, sociocultural, political, and economic contexts that influence the experience of place, and believes that the definition of sense of place needs to be more integrated with these larger contexts.

Agnew (2011), concluded from a review of the literature that mobility is an intrinsic quality of place and how it operates. Distinguishing between the ideas of "space" and "place" helps illuminate the concept of mobility as an intrinsic quality of place. Tuan (1977), suggests that space is more abstract than place because space begins as indistinguishable from place, but as we become acquainted with it and imbue it with value it becomes place. The understanding of one concept necessitates the other. Place represents security and stability, which allows us to be aware of space which represents openness, freedom, and risk of space. Space allows movement, and when there is a pause in movement, place is created in that location (Tuan, 1977). The experience of space and place can range from "direct and intimate" to "indirect and conceptual", however, the experience between the two can merge (Tuan, 1977). Altogether, the tension between space and place helps to explain the seeking of both throughout life; to move toward

discovery and the unknown, or towards the familiar and belonging. Mobility seen through the prism of space and place, is a seeking of the "self" through the mirror of a location.

Sense of place theory has made numerous contributions to understanding mobility. It embraces lived experiences both literal and conceptual; the conceptual aspect is absent from many theories. Sense of place also addresses the temporal and personal aspects of mobility and why our notions and feelings towards places persist over time. Additionally, this theory directly speaks to the meaning making involved with place and the values imbued in multiple places. Uniquely, it discusses the unknown aspects that people grapple with during mobility decisions and experiences.

Sense of place theory also has limitations. The methodological limitations are primarily that the theory does not account for which variables represent these abstract ideas and how to operationalize them. A theoretical limitation of sense of place is that the theory is unclear how one person's sense of place relates to another's sense of place or if they are completely independent of one another. Five distinct theories have been discussed, their contributions to understanding mobility and their theoretical and methodological limitations. Now it is appropriate to consider what is missing from these influential and contributory theories.

Additional Factors Related to Mobility

Many recent mobility studies conclude that there are some unexplained factors related to mobility. One such study was performed by von Reichert et al. (2014) who examined multiple mobility patterns including people who never left, "stayers", people who returned to the area after previously moving away, "return migrants", and people who moved away and have not returned, "nonreturn migrants". This study made

considerable contribution to the literature and found that the factors shaping migration

decisions included economic related issues, life events, family and social considerations,

and physical community connections. In these findings there are elements of economic

theory, life course perspectives, social network theory evidenced by the family and social

factors, and place attachment in the physical community connections. Notably, they

found that all of the concepts were deeply intertwined and created interactions with other

factors. Sense of place was also evident when examining the quotes which were deeply

personal, perceptual, and showed people grappling with the tension of place and space.

> "you have to go somewhere else and see something else…and
> learn…what's out there…I think it's a great place to come back to but I
> think it's important that you get out for a while." (von Reichert et al.,
> 2014, p.65).

> "Here you matter. Your family matters, and you can make a difference and
> see that difference." (von Reichert et al., 2014, p.68).

Along with the elements of the identified theories, these quotes show self-

reflection on psychosocial development; that something is learned from mobility that

impacts an understanding of yourself. The reflection includes a sense of personal value in

what a person can offer in their relationships with family and the wider community. In a

broad sense additional factors may include intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects.

Carol Stack's *Call to Home* was very influential in understanding the return

migration of African Americans to the South in the 1980's and 90's. Her ethnographic

work details the motivations and challenges of returnees. What was most notable then

was that people were returning to the rural South at a time of very little economic

opportunity and leaving Northeast and Midwest urban centers which provided

employment and financial security (Stack, 1996). This mobility pattern was obviously

challenging economic theories, instead revealing elements of life course dynamics and

social networks. Sense of place is uniquely visible and reverberates through each

person's story. Throughout the book, deeply personal experiences are intertwined with

the pragmatic, the perceptual, and existential aspects of mobility. Stack unearthed rich

and meaningful intrapersonal experiences that contain conflicting desires, negotiations,

and a developing sense of self. Her informants described interpersonal considerations, a

centrality of relationship that impacted their sense of purpose and their sense of

belonging in the community. More specifically, the quotes show a reflection on

psychosocial development; a changing sense of identity coupled with personal growth

that is continuous and iterative.

> "Many of them told me that not a whole lot had changed in Carolina while they were away. But *they* had changed, and the people they had become found the move back home jolting, confusing, exhausting, even paralyzing. The process of readjustment, however, was not just a long unpleasantness—though it did seem long, sometimes unending. It was also exhilarating. When you have to fight old demons to make a place for yourself in your own home, you learn a lot about who you are and who you want to be." (Stack, 1996, p. 45,46).

> "I've made three hard decisions in my life. First one was leaving home. I was so inexperienced. I had no communication with any outside individual. So I was fearful. I didn't know how to do anything….Then my other hard decision was coming home. Will they accept me? How will they accept me? With open arms and love, or as being a failure?....But being away was the best thing that ever happened to me. It gave me the chance to grow with experience." (Stack, 1996, p. 91).

> "When I moved back, I was extremely disappointed. If I had come here with the same attitude that I left with in my twenties, I would be just like the people that lived here who had never gone anywhere. But I came back different." (Stack, 1996, p. 164).

> Clearly, pragmatic economic concerns, life course events, social ties, and the

bonds created with place all exist within mobility dynamics. But there is also

considerable room to better understand the psychosocial developmental and relational elements of mobility.

Application to this Study

This study is situated within the need for theoretical expansion by examining additional factors related to mobility. This study was developed based on the contributions of the theories reviewed while understanding where the gaps and limitations exist. The conceptual approach taken with this study agrees that economic concerns are an important and pragmatic component of mobility. However, they are not the sole driver of mobility nor an inhibitor of mobility. Life course perspectives argue that mobility decisions vary based on age-differentiated events across the lifespan. It is agreed that individuals negotiate desires and obligations within their mobility decisions differently across the lifespan. However, as Stockdale et al. (2018) reports, this study argues that those differences are more closely associated with life events instead of age. Additionally, those events that trigger mobility decisions may be linked to other people in our lives instead of ourselves. The reality of linked lives is important to this study which is a concept shared with life course perspectives and social network theory. Findings of this study support the assumptions of place attachment theory that emotions and cognitions are associated with the experience of place. Yet, the perceptions we create and the emotions we experience in locations are not always congruent with mobility actions. Likewise, findings here are consistent with sense of place theory arguing that beyond the pragmatic and perceptual experiences of place, there are also existential experiences of place. The lived reality in a location comes with value, purpose, connection, and meaning.

An important aspect of these theories are the assumptions. Many of the assumptions have guided the development of this study. This study rejects the notion that mobility is deterministic. Individuals who encounter a specific set of circumstances that indicate a move would be beneficial or likely, do not always move. The assumptions in this study which are adopted from the available theories include: the temporality of mobility, that mobility involves human agency, mobility exists literally and conceptually, and meaning making is an essential part of mobility. These assumptions are discussed in more detail in Section C. Before further examination of the conceptual approach, additional literature is reviewed that has further methodological implications for this study. An integrative understanding of these implications will complete the foundation for the conceptual approach in Section C.

Section B - Methodological Implications of the Research

Defining Migration versus Mobility

The term "migration" was used historically to signify the movement of people, perhaps, because it is the same term used to explain the movement of other species. Historical works about human movement viewed migration as fixed, static, and permanent. Everett Lee's (1966) "point of origin" and "area of destination" are just examples of this wide-spread view. These fixed and static ideas became linked with the term "migration" in social sciences and have become too narrow to fully explain the nature of mobility as the findings become more varied and complex.

Scholars recently began to critique these assumptions and call for a more fluid and dynamic understanding of human movement, pushing against a ubiquitous use of terms that inferred a beginning and end or a singular direction, terms such as immigration

and emigration. In the 1990's there was a development in the field to recognize the nuance in movement and use the term mobility to capture the fluidity and dynamic nature of movements. Cresswell (2010) explains that this new understanding of "mobility" is the discovery that movement is also intertwined with meaning and not just mapping human movement and distances. Mobility can also encompass stillness or immobility, and people have thoughts, feelings, and physical belongings that move along with them. These thoughts, feelings, and belongings can act to hinder or enable further movement (Cresswell, 2010).

Urban-Rural Focus

Understanding the differences and similarities in the urban to rural continuum are central to this study. Literature has largely focused on urban or rural locations as if they were dichotomous. This section addresses why they were viewed in this way, why urban and rural concepts actually are a continuum, and why this study chooses to focus on the rural Southeast.

Domestic migration internal to the United States has seen trends that echo the rural to urban pursuit and industrialization posited by economic theories. American history is full of people moving to pursue economic opportunities beginning with the establishment of the colonies, the Western expansion, and the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North after emancipation. Patterns of mobility become more complicated in the 1970's and 1980's with the Great Turnaround which saw vast numbers of African Americans leaving urban Northeast cities such as Chicago and New York for the rural familial homelands in the South, in particular Mississippi and the Carolinas. Up until this time people were moving into urban areas and coming from more

rural areas or smaller towns. The Great Turnaround was the first time in an industrialized America that saw large numbers of people leaving urban areas for rural areas, not simply expanding into suburbs as large urban areas grew. Examining these historical events through place attachment, life course events, and sense of place demonstrates that the events were literal and pragmatic but also deeply meaningful to individuals. Perhaps, the Western Expansion and Great Migration symbolized the seeking of opportunity, of discovery, and self-reliance and the Great Turnaround the seeking of belonging, emotional support of family, and a longing to realize something locked in memory.

Patterns in American mobility are more complex than the common and dichotomous categorization of urban or rural. These perceptions are primarily due to persistent historical assumptions. Cloke (2011) believes that Tönnies' distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft was very influential in perpetuating the conceptual distinction between urban and rural. In 1887, Ferdinand Tönnies wrote about the tension between "community" and "society", arguing that in community one has social roles and values based on personal and informal social connections, and in society, one has social roles and values based on impersonal, indirect and formal associations (Tönnies, 2017). This work perceived rural life to be characterized by coexisting with others and creating a sense of belonging. In contrast, he observed that urban life eroded the goodness of community, resulting in cultural heterogeneity that produced alienation. These ideas were interpreted by Weber and Durkheim, and also used by sociologists of the Chicago School dedicated to investigating urban structure. Over many decades these analyses perpetuated the dichotomy of urban and rural existence. These geographical spaces were assumed to have different social and cultural spaces, and more recently economic and political

spaces. The ideas continue within popular culture, but scholars have come to see that the difference is not a dichotomy but more of a spectrum.

Florida and King (2019) have investigated the "myths and realities" of the urban and rural divide in America. They established six key categories to examine disparities: population, jobs, wages, college grads, the creative class, and economic mobility. They found that across each category the reality of the divide was far more complex and nuanced than the common media narrative of rural decline and urban growth. Contradicting the narrative, approximately 45% of rural counties (909 of 2052) had a population growth rate that exceeded the median national rate of growth in 2016. As the population grows, more jobs are required to support that population. Consistent with the common media narrative, 97% of America's job growth was located in urban areas, but rural areas experienced both job growth and job decline. The job growth appears in large rural counties with some measure of proximity to the urban area, but counter to the narrative, some small rural counties without proximity to urban areas also experienced job growth.

There are considerable wage differences all across America with centers of affluence and poverty in every region, but again the reality is more complex than the common media narrative. Large rural counties both with and without proximity to urban places had wages and salaries analogous to counties in smaller urban areas. A compelling fact is that rural areas saw faster wage growth than urban areas between 2001 and 2016. Most rural counties had wage growth above the national average and urban areas had below average wage growth. Additionally, the smallest and most isolated rural counties had the highest wage growth of almost 60%.

Educational status was also examined by Florida and King (2019). It is associated with jobs, wages, socio-economic status, well-being, and political affiliation. Consistent with the common media narrative, 90% of all college graduates live in urban areas, both large and small. This can lead to an erroneous conclusion that people in rural areas are less educated than people in urban areas. However, when college graduates are examined as percentage of the population, they found that in large rural counties without proximity to an urban place, college graduates make up a greater percent of the population than in urban counties that are part of smaller urban areas. Additionally, there are several concentrated centers of highly educated people in rural areas of New Mexico, Colorado, and Alabama.

Florida and King (2019) discuss economic mobility by highlighting the findings of Raj Chetty whose expertise is in intergenerational mobility. There are multiple original studies cited in their discussion (Chetty et al., 2014, 2015, 2018, Chetty & Hendren; 2015; Chetty, Hendren, Kline, & Saez, 2014). Chetty discovered that low-income youth in rural areas have a better chance at upward mobility than low-income urban youth. He also found that upward mobility rates in rural areas were higher than in urban areas, 46% to 42% respectively. Further, upward mobility was inversely associated with remoteness; the closer a location was to an urban or metropolitan area, the more upward economic mobility rate declined. Furthermore, stark differences become apparent when examining rural differences in varying regions of the country. For example, the differences between the Midwest and the South show that in Iowa and the Dakotas, rural areas have greater opportunity for upward economic mobility as compared to urban centers. However, in Georgia and the Carolinas rural areas have much less opportunity for upward economic

mobility than urban centers. In rural areas surrounding Des Moines, Iowa, low-income youth have better upward economic mobility than youth from the urban area. By contrast, low-income youth from the rural areas surrounding Raleigh, North Carolina, have less upward economic mobility than youth from the urban core.

The review of these facts demonstrates that there is not a dichotomy between urban and rural areas in terms of population growth, wage disparities, jobs, education, and upward socioeconomic mobility, but rather a complexity and nuance that is best described as a continuum between the two. Additionally, there are unique features and challenges to rural areas and not all rural areas are created equal. Specifically, the rural Southeast was identified by these scholars as having unique differences in rural characteristics that inherently impact mobility choices and decisions.

Labeling Mobility Patterns

The investigation of rural mobility has been methodologically approached by trying to understand one particular pattern of mobility at a time. This is usually categorized by people who leave rural areas, people who remain in rural areas, or people who return to rural areas after a period of time residing elsewhere (Barcus & Braun, 2009; Erickson et al., 2017; Harrison, 2017; Henderson & Akers, 2009; Stockdale et al., 2018; von Reichert et al., 2014). However, there is an underlying assumption in the literature that these are discrete lifetime events. Very little attention is paid to the concept that a person could consider themselves part of all three groups throughout their lifetime. For example, a person may grow up in a rural area and intend to stay their entire life but be forced to move due to unforeseen circumstances, begin to thrive in the new place and intend to stay, but then later in life long for a return to an area they have much love for.

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This is a more fluid and dynamic concept of rural mobility that has yet to be studied within the literature.

Application to this Study

The literature review in Section B has discussed ideas about the fluid and dynamic nature of mobility, the assumption of temporality within mobility, and the non-dichotomous understanding of what is rural. As terminology evolved from "migration" to "mobility" this included three distinct assumptions: one, that mobility is fluid and always occurring; two, that movement requires periods of stillness and together they create mobility; and three, that if mobility is fluid, dynamic, and constantly occurring, it is also iterative, building on the movements, emotions, perceptions, and decisions that came before. This study uses the term mobility not just because it is the appropriate evolution of the field, but specifically, because these assumptions are intentional in the development of this study.

It was explained that rural and urban areas are not dichotomously different spaces but rather locations that blend into one another, creating a spectrum of rural and urban spaces. Additionally, the rural Southeast has unique features and characteristics geographically, socially, and economically. These differences impact mobility decisions and experiences. Despite this unique geographical region, much of the literature on rural Southeast mobility focuses on the "stuck" pattern, attempting to understand why people stay in the rural Southeast. There is considerable need to understand more about mobility in the rural Southeast.

This study responds to these methodological limitations in three ways. One, by including the geographical, social, and economic contexts within the design of the study

and the analysis of the data. Two, the study is designed with a fluid and iterative understanding of mobility; taking into account that there is a history of mobility and future anticipated mobility that accompanies the current mobility decisions. Three, multiple mobility patterns are examined including stillness. The study includes participants who have remained in a rural area, people who have returned to the rural area after residing elsewhere, and people who have left the rural area and do not intend to return.

Section C - Conceptual Approach

Sections A and B have discussed and critiqued the theoretical and methodological implications of the literature. At the end of those sections, the concepts and assumptions are discussed as they apply to this study. With this integrative understanding of the theoretical need for expansion, the methodological limitations in current research, and contributory concepts and assumptions, a foundation is laid for the conceptual approach. Section C further explains the conceptual approach by identifying and discussing additional theories that support the assumptions within this study and provide analytic guidance. This section provides a deeper examination of missing concepts and assumptions from the existing literature and an integrated view of all contributing theories is depicted with conceptual definitions.

Integration of Missing Concepts and Assumptions

Sections A and B created a foundation to the conceptual approach in this study. Economic, life course, social network, place attachment, and sense of place literature garnered numerous concepts and assumptions that are utilized in the conceptualization of this study. Additional literature on terminology and mobility patterns was examined to

further ground those concepts and assumption within a rural Southeastern context and the methodological choices made within this study. The concepts borrowed from the reviewed literature and maintained within this study include: the fluidity and temporality of mobility, the nature of human agency in mobility decisions, mobility as literal and conceptual, and the incorporation of iterative meaning making.

Additional concepts and assumptions that are missing from the available theories are identified to move towards theoretical expansion. Five additional concepts are identified and discussed in this section. One, theoretical expansion must include multiple social levels. Mobility exists for individuals, their families, communities, and in larger more aggregate patterns of the populous. Dividing each level, as is common in the literature, provides important contributions but limits the understanding of how these social levels interact and influence individual mobility decisions. An integrated view of the social levels may garner important theoretical contribution. Two, adding to the temporal and iterative nature of mobility across the lifespan, further investigation of the psychosocial development of the individual would be beneficial. This would also provide information about intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of mobility. Three, more focus on the linked lives and the complexity of relationships within mobility is necessary for theoretical expansion. This focus should be on the drive towards human connection and belonging. Four, deepen the understanding of the relational dynamics of larger social contexts such as interdependence, membership, and influence on a community level. Five, knowing that rural and urban areas are experienced in a variety of ways, a further examination of the tension between rural and urban experiences and how they are interpreted by the mobile individual is useful for theoretical expansion. Table 2.1 shows

all of the concepts and assumptions present in this study while indicating which theories

contributed to the individual concepts and assumptions.

Table 2.1

Integration of Relevant Concepts and Assumptions in this Study

Theories	Concepts and Assumptions within the Study								
	Fluidity and Temporality	Human Agency	Literal and Conceptual	Meaning Making	Multiple Social Levels	Psychosocial Development	Drive Towards Connection	Relational Dynamics of Larger Social Contexts	Tension in Interpretations between Rural and Urban Experiences
Economic									
Life Course	X			X					
Social Network					X				
Place Attachment			X	X					
Sense of Place	X	X	X	X					
Feminist	X	X			X				
Erickson's Psychosocial Development						X			
Relational Cultural							X	X	
Sense of Community								X	
Tönnies' Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft							X	X	X

The second through fifth identified missing concepts from the available literature on mobility are explored through four additional theories: Erickson's Psychosocial Development, Relational Cultural Theory, Sense of Community, and Tönnies' Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. However, the first missing concept, multiple social levels, is already addressed by an available theory, feminist theory of mobility. This theory was not discussed in the previous literature review because contributions from feminist theory are largely applied to global migration when there are significant disparities between who can access certain professional fields and export labor is a significant portion of the economy. When examining one community in the rural Southeast the disparities become much narrower. A brief discussion of this theory is included to provide further support for this concept and other assumptions.

Feminist Theory. Feminist scholars included individual and social dynamics into mobility studies such as power relations and interactions on multiple social levels such as households and communities. This included the ways politics and economies interact with these dynamics. An example of this is Victoria Lawson's (1998) seminal work examining how gender roles and functions shifted within the household under the changing political and economic environment in Latin America, thereby, influencing who become an economic migrant and where they might go. Feminist theorists believe that migration is best understood by examining power within gender, age, class, race, ethnicity, and political structures. They focus on differences between and within groups arriving at complex understandings of intersectionality (Lawson, 1998; Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016; Silvey, 2004; Yeoh & Ramdas, 2014).

Feminist theories of migration contribute multiple relevant concepts to the study of mobility. The two concepts pertinent to this study are the interaction between multiple social levels and human agency. This study argues that a more comprehensive understanding of mobility must include the interactions between multiple social levels. Individuals interact within families, social networks of friends, coworkers, and neighbors, the larger community, and even with other counties and non-rural locations. The interaction with multiple social levels extends to social and political environments which are a primary focus for feminist theorists of mobility. This concept also works in conjunction with the literal and conceptual aspects of mobility. The interactions between these social levels occur literally in relationships, but also conceptually in perceptions, attitudes, and emotions.

This study views human agency in a similar way to feminist scholars. It is assumed that voluntary mobility decisions in the rural Southeast stem from independent interests and expressions of personal will operating within social, political, and economic structures. Expressions of personal will are somewhat constrained by these structural dynamics, but not so much that significant barriers arise that constrain who moves to where and when. The four remaining concepts are addressed next by theories that have not yet been a focus of mobility research: Erickson's Psychosocial Development, Relational Cultural Theory, Sense of Community, and Tönnies' Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft.

Erikson's Psychosocial Development. Erik Erikson developed a theory to explain how social relationships fostered psychological development across the life span. His theory is presented in eight sequential stages across the lifespan. He believed that

each stage presented an opportunity for an individual to master a psychological task that leads to "ego strength" or psychological development. During each stage a person grapples with the task which is why each stage is labeled as a tension, for example the first stage, "trust versus mistrust". Erickson states that mastery of one stage is required in order to attempt the next stage. Each building upon the psychological skills and virtue of the last (Erikson, 1963, 1982).

This introduction to Erikson's Psychosocial Stages focuses on three stages relevant to the findings. Stage five, six, and seven. Stage five is "identity versus role confusion". In this stage Erikson theorizes that adolescents are grappling with differentiating themselves from who their parents want them to be, and who their childhood selves believed themselves to be, and finding a more differentiated, authentic notion of self. A sense of self is integral to developing identity (Erikson, 1963, 1982). This study defines self as a subjectivity that is constructed continuously and iteratively in relation to the "other", that which exists in the unconscious or exists in other people. Because a sense of self is constructed through continuous experience with the other, the self is never fully complete (Kirshner, 1991). Erikson argues that as teens grapple with their beliefs and values they begin to form an identity. The identity will shape choices, behaviors, and values as we age. Struggling to achieve a unified identity, represented by the "role confusion" part of the tension, leads to difficultly understanding oneself, setting and living up to expectations set by yourself as you age and by society.

Stage six is where young adults navigate "intimacy versus isolation". Young adults are exploring personal relationships seeking intimate, loving, accepting relationships. When this is not achieved it results in loneliness and isolation. This stage

50

builds upon the last because a sense of identity is required. Knowing and accepting yourself is prerequisite for knowing and accepting others. Stage seven is "generativity versus stagnation". This stage posits that people reaching midlife adulthood are now spending some of their energy on others, investing in the growth and welfare of other generations while continuing to develop their careers and families. This leads to a greater sense of purpose and connection with the community. Struggling with this stage can leave people experiencing a loss of purpose, loss of productivity, and loss of accomplishment (Erikson, 1963, 1982).

This theory is used to examine the developmental psychosocial aspects of mobility. This theory acknowledges changes in development across the lifespan but is focused more on the intrapersonal and interpersonal experience of that development instead of the age or age-differentiated events experienced in life.

Relational Cultural Theory. Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) started to emerge after Jean Baker Miller wrote *Toward a New Psychology of Women*. She was joined by Judith Jordan, Irene Stiver, and Janet Surrey at the Stone Center of Wellesley College to form a group of feminist scholars that continued to develop this theory. Initially, their interest in developing a new theory stemmed from their therapeutic work and determining that psychodynamic approaches were not serving their female clients very well. They believed that psychodynamic approaches over-valued an autonomous and independent self, that women were viewed negatively for leaning into relationships for comfort and healing. They were later joined by additional scholars and came to understand that the tenets of their theory applied to all people, not just women (Comstock et al., 2008;

Fletcher & Ragins, 2008; Jordan, 2001, 2008, 2017; Jordan et al., 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997).

RCT has made numerous contributions to understanding the nature of relationships including how to translate key aspects into therapeutic relationships and power dynamics. A major theoretical contribution relevant to this study is understanding the drive towards human connection. The theory postulates that connection with others is essential for personal growth. Connections and relationships work best when there is mutual growth between individuals. These relationships are called "growth fostering" relationships and they result in "five good things": a sense of vitality which they term "zest", clarity about yourself and the other in the relationship, a sense of worth, the capacity to be creative and productive, and the desire for more connection (Comstock et al., 2008; Fletcher & Ragins, 2008; Jordan, 2001, 2008, 2017; Jordan et al., 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997).

RCT states that people grow through having relationships and grow toward further relationships throughout the lifespan. Without mutual growth the consequence is disconnection and isolation. This occurs on individual, community, and societal levels. It is recognized that not all relationships are growth fostering and when disconnection and isolation occurs the opposite of the "five good things" are experienced. Disconnection leads people to feel less understood and disempowered. This can further perpetuate isolation, causing shame, blame, and manipulation of power. Making ourselves vulnerable and empathic we find our way back to authenticity and connection.

This theory, which is in part a reaction to psychodynamic approaches, redefines a sense of self. Psychodynamics tends to separate the intrapersonal and interpersonal

experience, but RCT sees them as reciprocal and bound together. RCT rejects the psychodynamic concept of self as an independent, confined, intrapsychic entity which develops through self-reflection, autonomy, and independence. Rather the self is situated in context and termed "self-in-relation". The self-in-relation develops through growth fostering relationships, giving and receiving empathy, practicing authenticity, and using reflection with yourself and with others. It is through the reflection of the "other" that helps to define yourself in a continual reciprocal manner.

This reconceptualization of "self" is important to understand the complexities of isolation and the relational paradox. RCT defines isolation as a pathological consequence from a lack of connection that is inherently intertwined with power dynamics. Isolation can mean marginalization, oppression, or discrimination. It is important to distinguish the RCT concept of isolation versus aloneness. RCT recognizes that the drive towards connection and growth fostering relationships is not a rejection of all aloneness, nor a rejection of self-reflection and personal identity, rather we come to know more of ourselves through the knowing of others. We have greater self-reflection and self-empathy when we can achieve those in relation to others. It is the reciprocal interdependence of "self" and others that together foster authentic connections.

The relational paradox is that mutually growth fostering relationships do not immediately occur with all individuals, nor do they remain in that state perpetually. It is continual practice of making oneself vulnerable, authentic, and empathic. Not having ideal relationships results in fear, mistrust, further disconnection and isolation, making it that much harder to work back towards connection. Further, disconnection is not just a consequence of having less than ideal relationships, but people paradoxically use

disconnection as a strategy to maintain relationships. Withholding parts of ourselves

allows us to have acquaintances and relationships with boundaries when we are not able

to be fully authentically known by another. The negotiation between connection and

disconnection, togetherness and aloneness, is important to the findings in this study

because the drive towards authentic connection and the negotiation of disconnection are

intricated intertwined with mobility decisions and the experience of place.

Sense of Community. Sense of community is a concept that was primarily

developed by McMillan and Chavis (1986). They described a definition and a theory

explaining the concept and provided examples in differing community contexts. Sense of

community has four main components: membership, influence, integration and

fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The

first component of membership is a feeling of belonging and relatedness. Membership

has five attributes including boundaries, emotional safety, sense of belonging and

identification, personal investment, and a common symbol system. These attributes work

together to help a person identify their membership within a community. The second

component of sense of community is influence, and means a sense of mattering and

making a difference to the group. Integration and fulfillment of needs means that group

members feel their needs will be met by the group through their membership and

participation. Lastly, shared emotional connection means that group or community

members believe they share history, places, times and experiences with one another.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) provided a clear definition, "Sense of community is a

feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another

and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together."

The authors also have a flexible and dynamic understanding of how these components work together. McMillan and Chavis (1986) use examples of community processes in differing contexts and illustrate that context provides varying relationship between these components, but the components always work together. Additional scholars describe sense of community in similar ways, however, Sarason (1986), offered another valuable idea for this concept. Sense of community also has a recognition of interdependence from the community's members and a desire to sustain the interdependence between one another. The conceptual definition for sense of community in this conceptual approach is that members feel they belong, they matter to one another, believe their needs can and will be met through the commitment to the group, and they seek to maintain the interdependence within the group.

It may appear that sense of community is redundant to many aspects of relational cultural theory, but they provide unique understandings for the findings and complement each other. Relational cultural theory speaks more in depth on belonging, emotional needs, and interdependence, while sense of community speaks more to membership and influence. Together they examine multiple levels of social relationships; one-to-one, family or small group relationships, and larger collective relationships with the community.

Tönnies' Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. In Section A of this chapter the theory of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft was briefly introduced. These terms translate to "community" and "society" in Ferdinand Tönnies' 1887 seminal work examining the

social and structural differences between the two. Tönnies presented his examination of these two concepts in dichotomy; understanding one more deeply by the comparison of the other. In Gemeinschaft, which he envisioned as rural life, social roles and values are based on personal, informal, and intimate social connections. In Gesellschaft, which he envisioned as urban life, social roles and values are based on impersonal, formal, and indirect connections (Tönnies, 2017). Tönnies examined many aspects of rural and urban life, but pertinent to this study were his views on relationships. He perceived rural life to represent a coexistence with others, an interdependence that fostered a sense of belonging. Urban life represented a fracturing of natural interdependence, leaving people isolated, alienated, autonomous, and associating with one another for personal gain.

Tönnies wrote that in Gemeinschaft there existed a "binding sentiment of understanding…a special force and sympathy which keeps human beings together as members of a totality" (Tönnies, 2017, p.47). He believed that people joined emotionally by their willingness to share in the "joy and sorrow" of one another's lives. Understanding was more evident in Gemeinschaft because a precondition for this level of vulnerable and authentic understanding was similar disposition, character, and attitudes which was naturally occurring in rural life. By extension, in Gesellschaft, you experience an artificial collection of individuals that are more different and disparate in their interests, attitudes, and character, thereby, creating a distance instead of closeness and a lack of understanding. This concept of a vulnerable and authentic drive towards understanding and connection is taken up again a little less than one hundred years later by relational cultural theory.

In Gesellschaft, individuals are emotionally isolated from one another, creating a tension and guardedness. When people are guarded, they tend to have negative attitudes towards others and this drive towards protectionism results in power struggles with others. This creates a distance despite any similarities and physical proximity. Other results stemming from isolation and guardedness is withholding, less giving of one's time and efforts just for the sake of helping. Instead, any acts of helping becomes something which is owed to the other. This reduces relationships to goods and labor with appraised value. This is reminiscent of the concept of relationships in social capital and other economic theories.

This theory is important for understanding the subjective experiences of rural and urban life. It helps to explain the tension people describe in their social experience of space and place. Each space provides for a different social experience, each with its own interpersonal advantages and disadvantages. Individuals grapple with the tension between those interpersonal advantages and disadvantages which in turn influence their mobility decisions.

Conceptual Depiction

The previous subsection discussed a deeper examination of concepts and assumptions that influence the conceptual approach to this study. Those concepts and assumptions are often shared with other theories. There is overlap in how theories view mobility. A broader view of how those theories overlap is depicted.

Conceptual Depiction – Tire and Hub. The conceptual depiction in Figure 2.1 is illustrated by the structure of a bicycle wheel. The very center of the wheel is the concept *space and place*. The space and place literature has determined that mobility is a function

of space and place. So, mobility is conceptually attached to *space and place*. The conceptual definition of space and place in this model is: location(s) both literal and conceptual. The very outer part of the wheel is the concept of *time*. All of the literature regarding mobility includes some aspect of time, either implicitly or explicitly. Mobility takes place over time, mobility happens at various time points of people's lives, and there is an iterative nature to an individual's mobility which relies upon time. The literature review showed the limitations in previous theories to address the temporal nature of mobility. It is precisely that limitation that underlies this conceptual approach. The conceptual definition of time in this model is: the continual course of existence, the past, present, and future that together are considered a whole. Indication of time in the data will likely be referred to or measured by days, weeks, months, years, and/or decades.

It is important to mention that physics investigates space and time, and the relationship between the two make a whole, called space-time. It is well understood that motion is better understood through space-time. Therefore, the structure of the bicycle wheel maintains that *space and place* along with *time* create a whole which operates together. It is assumed that the purpose of the wheel is to facilitate motion, this means that *time* in the conceptual depiction is moving, and this creates movement in *space and place* (mobility) as well as other related concepts.
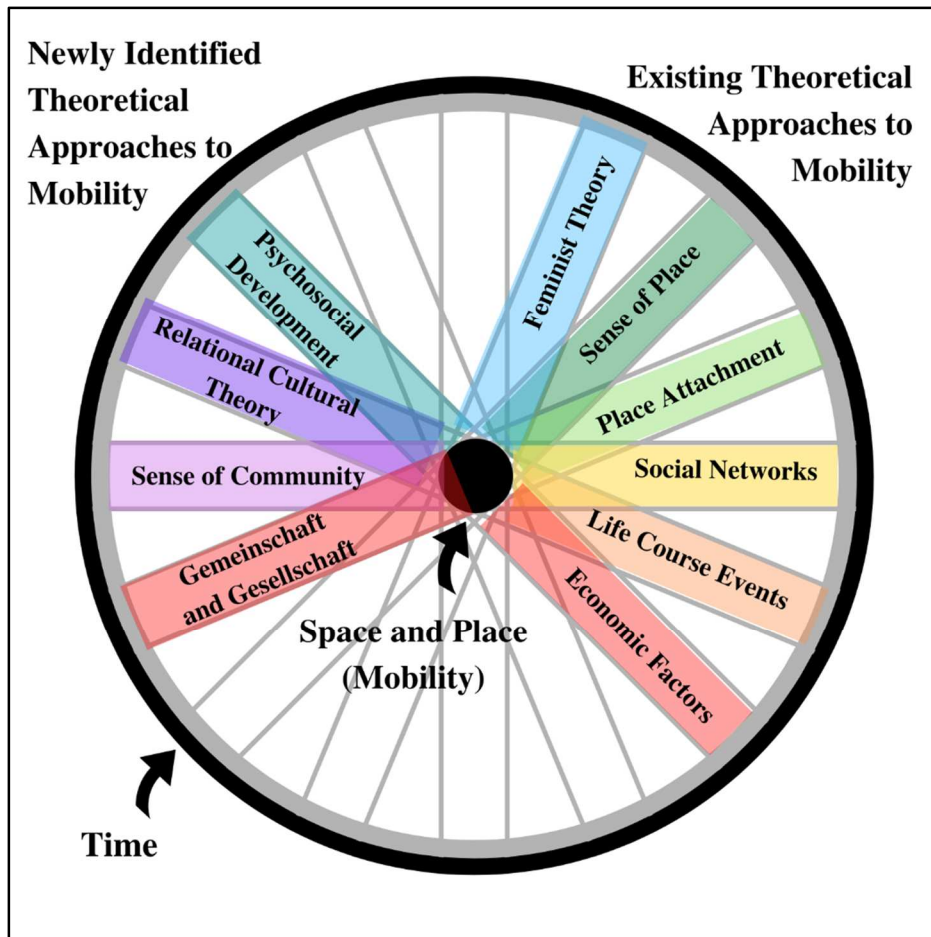
Figure 2.1
Integrated Depiction of Theoretical Approaches of Mobility.

Conceptual Depiction – Spokes. Between *space and place* (mobility) and *time*, lie the other theories and concepts discussed in this chapter. These are depicted by the spokes of the wheel. The spokes of a bicycle wheel intersect and overlap near the hub of *space and time.* This feature is appropriate for the concepts because each theory conceptually overlaps with other theories, and often more than one theory. For example, aspects of social networks overlap with economic theories due to the idea that some relationships are used as resources for personal gain. Social network also overlaps with life course perspectives in addressing the linked lives of events triggering mobility. Place attachment and social networks both involve a type of bond with the person being

mobile. Additionally, place attachment intersects with the perceptual aspects of sense of

place and the phenomenological experience of being in a place. Sense of place is also

linked with economic theories and life course perspectives because sense of place

acknowledges the pragmatic experiences of being in a place.

Conceptual definitions are provided for each theory. The conceptual definition of

sense of place is: an experience of a spatial or conceptual location; pragmatic, perceptual,

and existential, that encompasses all events, relationships, emotions, memories, and

interpreted reality of that location. *Place attachment* is conceptually defined as: the bond

between a person and a place created by cognitions, emotions, behaviors, memories, and

meaning making. *Social networks* are conceptually defined in this model as: the

relationship between people, to include strength, quality, and value of the relationship.

Life course events are conceptually defined as: discrete events in the course of life that

mark transitions or changes in patterns or situations. *Economic factors* are conceptually

defined as: income, employment, housing, expenses, wealth – both liquid and fixed

assets, and contexts including growth and contraction of job markets, overall standard of

living, and perception of opportunity and security.

Alongside the theories on the bicycle wheel are four additional theories that have

relevance to understanding the findings: Erickson's Psychosocial Development,

Relational Cultural Theory, Sense of Community, and Tönnies' Gemeinschaft and

Gesellschaft. There continues to be overlap or intersection with some of these theories,

with each other and the other available theories. All of the theories (spokes) connect

space and place (mobility) with time.

The predominant theories used to examine mobility are featured on the right side of the bicycle wheel and the additional theories that are integrated into this study to address missing concepts and assumptions are featured on the left side of the bicycle wheel. Integrating these theories has the ability to examine multiple aspects of mobility, the individual mobility decisions that are linked to the lives of loved ones, experienced across the lifespan, in pragmatic, perceptual and existential ways, and situated within multiple levels of social interaction. These new additional theories provided guidance for analysis and new contributions to the study of mobility. The integration of these theories and their assumptions directly relate to the methodological choices in this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Chapter Introduction

This chapter begins with the rationale for the research approach. Next, the setting and sample are discussed. The research is set in a rural county of Georgia and the sample consists of thirty participants. Data collection, management, and analysis are discussed in the following three sections. Those sections focus on the in-depth interviews and thematic analysis of the data. Additional sections include community engagement, risks and ethical concerns, and the researcher as a tool. There are dedicated sections to discussing the trustworthiness of the data and the methodological limitations and delimitations. The last section of this chapter is the sample findings.

Rationale for Research Approach

The research objective was to examine factors that individuals identify as being associated with their mobility decisions, how they negotiate those factors, and the relationship between mobility and perceived well-being. The questions were examined using in-depth interviews that allowed participants the opportunity to reflect on and interpret their experiences. Specifically, this means that individuals were prompted by interview questions to reflect on their subjective experiences with mobility and decision making surrounding that mobility. This often entailed thinking about many years of experiences and then explaining their current interpretations from the sum of those experiences.

The approach for this study objective was through the tradition of phenomenology within the interpretivist research paradigm. The main tenet of the approach is that human beings attempt to make sense of their experiences by interpreting them through the mind or consciousness and developing meaning from their experiences (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2011; Patton, 2002). This approach assumes that "variables are complex, interwoven and difficult to measure" (Glesne, 2011, p.9). This precisely encapsulates the complex phenomenon of mobility that is experienced differently among people, occurs continually through time, has proven to be difficult to understand, and is interwoven with many other aspects of life such as financial wealth, family obligations, memories of places, and desires for our futures. In-depth interviews are the most fitting method to capture individual's stories of mobility including how the experiences are perceived, described, judged, and remembered (Patton, 2002).

Research Setting

The location of the study is a rural county in Georgia. The pseudonym "Copper County" is used to provide anonymity. The county-level geographic typology was chosen for the research setting as the best way to contextualize this rural location. Geographic typologies classify a defined bounded space in terms of demographic, social, and economic characteristics. Spaces like neighborhoods and zip codes are often more appropriate typologies for urban locations because of the higher density of population in a certain number of square miles and the resources and amenities utilized by people living in those areas. The day-to-day experiences living in one neighborhood can be very different from another in urban locales. However, in rural areas many people live in the countryside, outside of city or town limits, even though they utilize the same resources,

institutions, and amenities. The county level of geographic typology is therefore more appropriate for examining individuals in a rural place with shared utilization of their resources, institutions, and amenities.

Copper County was selected for its rural location, small population, age and racial diversity, lack of population loss over time, and because it has not been affected by any urban spawl. Additional characteristics that were examined include, population density, rural to urban continuum code, urban influence code, county economic typology, percent of population that is non-Hispanic white, percent of population that is non-Hispanic African American, percent of the population under 18 years old, percent of the population 65 years or older, and percent of the population foreign-born. These criteria are important to examine because community and cultural environment can significantly change life experiences, and in particular, mobility experiences (Flora et al., 2016, Chapter3; Wolch & Dear, 1989). Additionally, they represent possible influencing factors of individual mobility and rural experiences, such as proximity to a metropolitan area or differences in employment industries (Flora et al., 2016; Florida; 2008).

The selected county variables are from the Atlas of Rural and Small-Town America (USDA, 2020), developed by the United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. It contains a composite of information from the U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Bureau of Economic Analysis. Copper County has a small population, under 15,000, with a low population density. This means that many people reside in the countryside and small towns are sparsely populated per square mile as compared to more urban areas. The net migration rate is low in the county,

meaning there are few people leaving the county and few who move into the county. There was no population loss measured over the past two decades.

The county is coded as 6 on the Rural to Urban Continuum Code which means it is "a nonmetro location with an urban population of 2,500 to 19,999 and adjacent to a metro area". This code is a composite variable that includes the population size and proximity to metropolitan areas. In the Rural to Urban Continuum Code, metro counties are coded 1-3, with 1 being the highest in population. Non-metro counties are coded 4-9, and 9 represents the smallest population and no proximity to a metro area. Approximately half of all counties in Georgia are coded as non-metro counties and about half of all non-metro counties are coded 6. In sum, approximately a quarter of all Georgia counties are coded 6 and suggests that the population size and proximity to metro areas are very common for rural places in Georgia.

The Urban Influence Code for Copper County is 6. The interpretation of code 6 is "noncore adjacent to small metro area and contains a town of at least 2,500 residents". This variable classifies counties by their metropolitan, micropolitan, or non-metropolitan status, location and size of the largest place. Code 1 and 2 are metropolitan counties and 3 through 12 are non-metropolitan counties. In this source there are 24 counties in Georgia coded as 6. The Rural to Urban Continuum Code and the Urban Influence Code have been stable at code 6 in Copper County since 2003. This suggests that despite the urban sprawl that often occurs around larger metropolitan areas, this has not affected Copper County.

The county is racially diverse with approximately 55% white and 45% African American. Copper County has a very small percentage of foreign-born residents,

meaning that migration rates in this county do not largely consist of international and economic migrants. Approximately 25% of the population is under 18 years of age, and about 15% of the population over age 65. The economic typology of Copper County is coded 3 which is interpreted to mean that the economy is relatively manufacturing-dependent.

The county attributes and demographics identified provide a geographic and social context in which the findings are situated. Three aspects of this data are important to understanding this rural context: the variables have been stable over time, the variables are similar to other rural counties in Georgia, and there are no significant outliers among key socio-economic variables that would indicate a major influence on mobility decisions such as a large amount of population loss, a sudden shift in industry, or rapid metro sprawl.

Understanding how geographic and social context influences mobility is important; however, mobility decisions are not solely influenced by external community and cultural factors. This study controlled for geographical and social context by focusing on natives from the same rural county. This commonality helps to illuminate the individual contexts and themes that emerge from the findings. Illustrating the larger contexts while focusing on individual contexts and themes was an important and intentional methodological choice.

Research Sample

Controlling for geographical and social context, in this case county of origin, provided an opportunity to focus on varying individual experiences, perceptions, and mobility decisions. Having considerable variance in individuals instead of wider

geographical and social contexts highlights the different ways people engage with and negotiate their mobility decisions. This aim was achieved by recruiting a heterogenous sample of thirty participants. Those participants were all originally "from" Copper County and had one of three different mobility decisions: nine had always stayed in Copper County, ten left the county and now reside elsewhere, and eleven participants left at some point in their lives to live somewhere else and have since returned to live in Copper County.

Participants self-identified whether they were "from" Copper County. This means that there was subjectivity, variance, and fluidity in evaluating where one is from. For example, one participant technically resided just outside the county line in another county while growing up, but went to school in Copper County, her parents worked in Copper County, and they also went to church and participated in social events in Copper County. She evaluated her participation in the community as the main factor in being "from" Copper County rather than physical residence. A few other participants spent their early childhood years in other locations and moved to Copper County while children or adolescents. They judged their important formative experiences to be in Copper County and thereby labeled that county as where they were "from". This subjective evaluation of where one is "from" highlights one of the advantages of examining mobility on an individual level versus an aggregate level which identifies residence, workplace locations, or address associated with tax filings.

Sampling Procedure

The participants were selected with snowball sampling method but with further purposive selection as an effort to achieve heterogeneity in the sample to represent

variety in age, gender, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Sampling began with an individual from Copper County identified through convenience who had previously participated in a pilot study. That participant provided additional contacts for potential participants in this study. After contacting the potential participants, those that volunteered to participate in the study provided contact information for additional participants. The process repeated creating a snowball sample that satisfied the sample requirements. Efforts were made to create new contacts while spending time in the community to develop additional streams of relational networks. However, the snowball sample developed quickly from the original participants before additional networks developed.

Each potential study participant was first screened for suitability based on voluntary mobility decisions being made as adults and where they are from originally. The screening included casual conversation with potential participants about living in their county and the researcher's interest in studying rural issues and mobility. General age group, gender, race, and occupation were also explored so that participants who offered variability in demographics from the rest of the sample could be prioritized for inclusion in the study with the aim of achieving heterogeneity in the sample. After assessing participant interest, which county they are "from", and their mobility decisions, selected potential participants were invited to participate in the study.

Sample Description

The total sample has 30 participants: 11 *Returnees*, 10 *Leavers*, and 9 *Stayers*. The age range was from 19 to 79. Each decade of the life span was well represented in the total sample. There were 21 females and 9 males. Race was more skewed with 28

White and 2 African American participants. Both African American participants were males aged 27. Table 3.1 has details of the gender and race demographics of the participant sample. Data collected on gender and race was intentionally designed as write-in responses to recognize multiple gender and racial identities. Participants self-identified their gender as either male or female, and their race as white, Caucasian, black, or African American.

Table 3.1
Sample Mobility Patterns by Gender and Race

Demographic Characteristic	Returnee		Leaver		Stayer		Total Sample	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender								
Female	7	63.6	9	90.0	5	55.5	21	70.0
Male	4	36.4	1	10.0	4	44.5	9	30.0
Race/Ethnicity								
White	10	90.9	9	90.0	9	100.0	28	93.3
African American	1	9.10	1	10.0	0	0.0	2	6.70

Of the 11 Returnees 7 were female and 4 were male. Their age ranges were 24 to 72 with a mean age of 50.36 and a median age of 54. The 9 Stayers consisted of 5 females and 4 males. Their age ranges were 19 to 79 with a mean age of 51 and median of 54. The 10 Leavers consisted of 9 females and 1 male. Their age ranges were 23 to 75, a mean of age 45 and median age of 42. The Leavers were skewed towards younger ages and more female representation. The group had five participants aged 23 to 31. This is more than the other mobility groups that had two or three participants in their thirties or younger. This was also the only group that did not have an individual in their forties. The other five participants were aged 53 to 75. Table 3.2 details descriptive statistics for age of sample participants.

Table 3.2

*Sample Descriptive Statistics for Age by Mobility Decision*

Mobility Decision	Age $(\bar{X})$	Age *(M)*	Age Range
Returnee	50.36	54.00	24-72
Leaver	45.00	42.00	23-75
Stayer	51.00	54.00	19-79
Total Sample	48.77	53.50	19-79

Demographic information for level of education, profession, and income was also collected to create a composite of socio-economic status (SES). These are common variables used to assess SES. There are multiple variables that have been used to assess SES within the literature, for example, perceived wealth, income relative to the neighborhood, and types of schools attended (American Psychological Association, 2015). For the purposes of this study, the SES variables used common questions that could easily be self-reported by the participants. The participants were predominantly middle-class to upper middle-class. However, assessing SES in rural areas is complex in ways that significantly differ from the complexities in urban locations for two specific reasons. One, many participants owed property and/or land that produced some non-traditional income that was not considered part of their income or salary earned from their employment or revenue accumulated by one individual. For example, many families own many acres of land of which they sell hunting rights in private agreements with other citizens. Some families lease part of their land on a season-by-season basis for cash-crops. Additionally, because the land is typically inherited by multiple members of a family, the revenue from these non-traditional sources is often funneled to different family members at different times in life to shore up the overall well-being of the entire

family, for example, repairing one person's home, sending a grandchild to college, or providing for medical care costs for the aging members of the family.

The second observed dynamic that has impacts on accumulated wealth was reputational value. All of the participants recognized and discussed the "big families" from the county. These were families that had generations of community influence as figures of power and prestige. Being identified as a member of this family kinship group resulted in special recognition, sometimes preferential treatment, and the ability to start new streams of income or businesses without many challenges from the community. In short, their reputational value may have contributed to the ability to create multiple income streams.

Figure 3.1 depicts how the snowball sample was formulated. This diagram is similar to an organizational chart or a family tree. The sample started with the initial contact at the top of the figure. That individual referred multiple participants identified by the individuals connected by lines with the initial contact. The diagram continues to the bottom of the figure with the subsequent participants. Each participant is identified by their pseudonym and their mobility decision indicated by the color of the box around their name. The stand-alone participant depicted in the top-left of the figure was identified while spending time in the community. The individuals she referred as possible participants declined participation in the study.
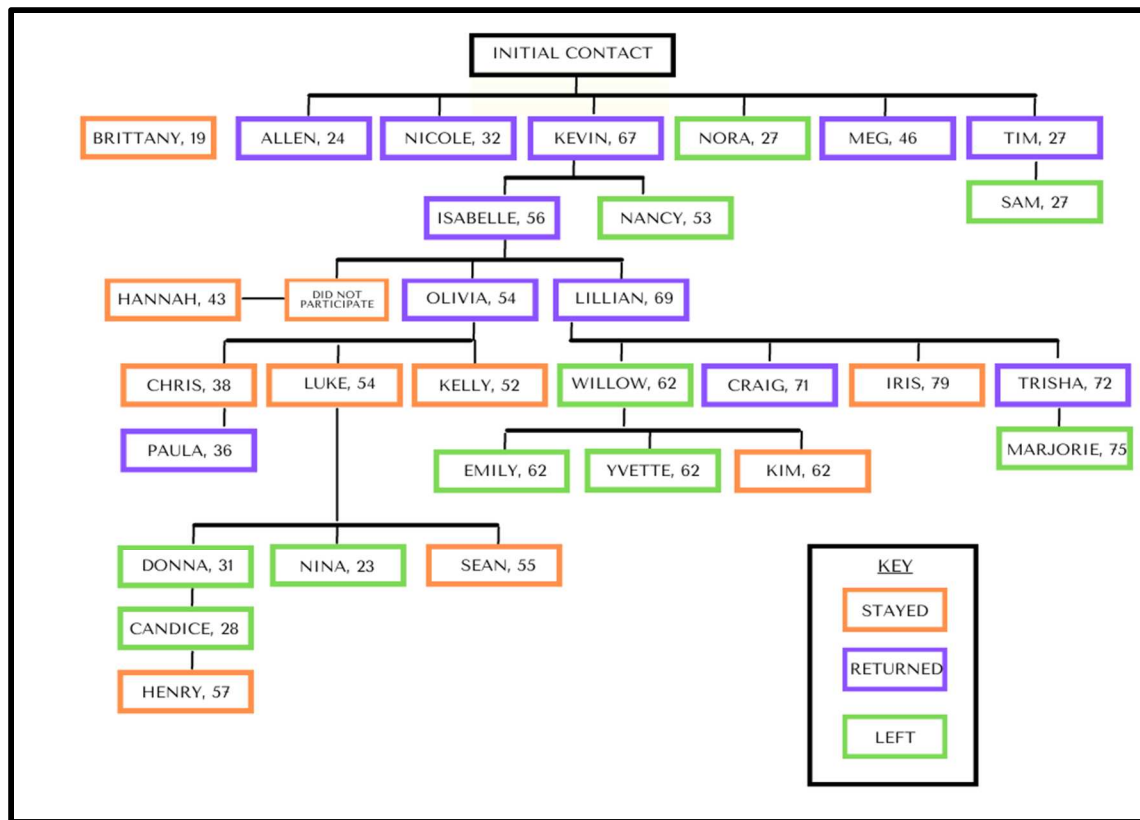
Figure 3.1
Snowball Sample Formulation with Pseudonyms

Data Collection

Data collection began in November 2020 and concluded in June 2021. The following are the steps taken in the data collection process. The steps are categorized in two sections: initial contact and screening, and interviews.

Initial Contact and Screening

Initial contact with participants came from an introduction via text made in the beginning by the pilot participant and subsequently by other participants. This was a group text from the previous participant to me and another potential participant. The text introduced me and the idea of the research. I then separately texted the potential participant to ask if they might be interested in participating in the research and if a short

phone call would be acceptable to discuss more of the study. This text introduction process emerged from participant preference on how to communicate with the people they wanted to refer. I did not direct this process. It was important to me that people honor their relationships and communicate in the ways that felt natural and appropriate to them.

During the brief phone call with the potential participant, I described the study, the procedures including the amount of time likely to be spent in the interview, and other screening information discussed in the above subsection. The potential participants were encouraged to ask questions to help determine if they wanted to participate. An advantage of this brief phone call was that it gave the participant an opportunity to get to know me, why I was conducting the research, and my familiarity with Copper County. This initial discussion resulted in participants feeling more comfortable with what types of questions to expect during the interview and understanding that I was authentically curious about their experiences. Another advantage was that it gave me an additional contact with the participant, to garner more information about their lives and interests, which made appropriate topics to pick up again and begin the interviews with.

The preferred format of the interview was also discussed with the potential participant during the brief phone call. Data collection took place during the Coronavirus pandemic, so extra effort was applied to making sure the participant and I were safe. The participants chose the format they were most comfortable with. Format options presented were a distanced face-to-face interview where the participant and I would be outside in open air and at least 6 feet apart, a video call through the Zoom application, or a recorded phone call. All participants chose video call through the Zoom application as the

preferred method of conducting the interview, with one person choosing a face-to-face follow up interview.

Upon verbal agreement to participate, participants selected a preferred format, provided their email address, and agreed to a day and time for the initial interview. It was important for me to prioritize the busy lives of the participants, so interviews took place seven days a week, days, and nights. I explained to participants during the brief phone call that I anticipated two interviews and what to expect in each interview. I expressed that I wanted the time spent and number of interviews to not be too disruptive to their lives and that I would certainly accommodate their schedules if they required more frequent and shorter interviews. All participants had two interviews except for one person. That participant's follow up interview was interrupted in the middle due to his internet disconnecting. The rest of his follow up interview was rescheduled for another day.

After the phone call concluded I emailed the participant the Invitation Letter, the Demographic Questionnaire (see appendix), and a zoom link for the interview. I encouraged the participants to contact me via phone, text, or email if they had any questions or needed to adjust the schedule. Most of the participants were already familiar with Zoom either through their work or because they learned how to use Zoom for socialization during the pandemic. A few participants were not familiar with using Zoom, so I explained that I would email them a link, and they just had to click the link on their device. The application was free and no additional downloading was necessary. We planned that I would call them on the phone and talk them through the process until Zoom was enabled and functioning. This additional contact to walk them through the

process alleviated any anxiety about technical difficulties. All participants were able to access Zoom without any significant difficulties.

Interviews

There were two data collection interviews with each participant which occurred on different days. Some interviews were a few days apart, some were a week or two apart, depending on participant availability. Each participant averaged a total of at least two hours of dialog over both interviews. The first interview was typically one to one-and-a-half hours. The second interview ranged from forty minutes to an hour and a half. The time in between the interviews allowed for initial analysis steps and memo writing. During this process I compiled some additional questions and topics for the second interview aimed at providing clarification and depth of information from the first interview. The second interview was scheduled at the conclusion of the first interview.

The initial interview utilized semi-structured, open-ended interview questions (See Appendix). This interview format was chosen because semi-structured interviews allow for open-ended questions that can be asked in any order, I could develop new questions during the interview to follow relevant topics that emerge, and there is a focus on depth of information, interpretation, and meanings made from their experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Glesne, 2011). The second interview incorporated any questions that remained from the semi-structured questions that had not yet been answered and additional clarifying and depth-probing questions that were developed upon initial analysis after the first interview. During both interviews participants were given opportunities to discuss anything they felt was relevant to their story, their mobility experiences, the places they lived, and anything else they felt was important to

communicate. Giving participants the opportunity to add anything they deemed "important for me to know" resulted in information that was deeply meaningful to the participants, important to the overall aims of the research, and that information was very insightful and self-reflective. This enhanced the depth of data coming from the interviews, the overall research aims, and the relationships established with the participants.

Prior to beginning the interviews, I had concerns about conducting the interviews via Zoom. I identified that as a clinical social worker I was used to observing body language and other non-verbal cues as part of the communication process. I assumed that if the interviews were conducted online, I would lose that valuable non-verbal information. During the interviews I found that non-verbal information was still observable, and the online format actually enhanced some aspects of natural, authentic, communication from the participant.

I observed three aspects of the online interviews that enhanced the interview process and depth of data collection. First, people were in their own homes and were more relaxed in their own environments than people commonly are in offices or public spaces. For example, many participants were propped up with pillows on their beds, some were at their kitchen tables with coffee, and some were on the porch or enjoying another outdoor space. They chose a comfortable and enjoyable space independently. Second, having a screen in front of them instead of a physical person allowed for subtle behaviors of connection and disconnection. Participants would look away from the screen off into space and around the room when thinking deeply about a topic, thinking through and coming to a conclusion, or having new insights. The ability to disengage from me and the

screen allowed for more of this semi-private cognitive self-exploration. Participants also used connection in their non-verbal cues in similar ways as they would if the interview was in person. For example, people often looked intently at the screen, moved closer to the screen, moved closer to whisper at times, or raised their voices passionately about a topic.

The third aspect of the online interviews that enhanced the research process was that the participants could engage with minor distractions from their environment. These distractions were useful in learning more about their lives and building relationships with them. For example, participants often had pets that would come into view which would be introduced to me on screen and discussed for a moment. Participants would often show me part of their room or home that they were particularly proud or fond of. Sometimes the computer would be taken around to pictures on the wall, antiques, or special projects in the home so they could show me on camera. This again would be discussed a moment. Altogether, this allowed me to join people in their lives, in their private spaces, and to share in the things in their environment that were important to them. It appears that conducting the interviews online did not limit the engagement with participants, and in some ways may have enhanced the overall research aims.

Data Management

Immediately following the interviews, I conducted data management procedures. The video-call interviews were recorded in Zoom. When the Zoom call ended, the recorded file was downloaded to my password protected computer in MP4 format. The file automatically parsed out the audio file from the video file, which was then uploaded

to either *Dragon Naturally Speaking* software, which is also located on my password protected computer, or to *Rev.com* transcription services.

Transcription that used *Dragon Naturally Speaking* begins by a rough automatic transcription of the audio file. There were errors present in the rough transcription file due to natural variation in human voice. I then corrected these errors by editing the transcript while listening to the recorded interview. Transcription that used the *Rev.com* services also began with uploading the audio file. The file was human-transcribed and remained on a secure platform for editing. *Rev.com* ensures confidentiality and privacy in three ways. They keep files private and protected from unauthorized access, their professionals have signed Non-Disclosure Agreements and strict confidentiality agreements, and the *Rev.com* transcribers only complete work on their secure platform (https://www.rev.com/transcription).Upon completion of the interviews, participants received compensation of a $40 Visa gift card. This compensation was funded by the SPARC grant through the University of South Carolina.

Other data management processes that are interconnected with the analysis process are discussed in the next section. These tasks include what part of the dialog was not transcribed and how much of the data was coded. Coding and theme organization were conducted with the use of NVivo 12. This software program is also located on the same password protected computer as the original audio files and transcripts.

Data analysis

The analysis plan includes Thematic Analysis of the transcribed interviews and extensive and reflexive memo writing of the analytic process. Thematic Analysis (TA) is a way to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meanings from qualitative data

(Clarke & Braun, 2017). It is used across varying theoretical and methodological paradigms. TA emphasizes an inductive approach to coding and developing themes and stresses the active role of the researcher as an instrument of analysis. A benefit of using TA is that it is flexible both in theory and in how it can be applied to the lived experiences of the participant sample. TA is the best approach to examine these research questions because it provides flexibility to meet the complex and interwoven concepts in mobility, seeks patterns of meanings from lived experiences, and allows the researcher to have an active role in interpretation.

Braun and Clarke (2006) created six steps to systematize the thematic analysis process. Despite being presented as six linear steps, thematic analysis requires that the researcher use the steps in an iterative and reflexive manner; going back and forth between the steps as needed. Based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of TA analysis I conducted the following six steps:

1. Step one is familiarizing yourself with all aspects of the data by reading the transcripts, rereading, listening to the audio recordings, and documenting initial observations. Between the interviews I listened to the first audio, then the second audio after the interviews were complete. I listened again to each interview to prepare the trimmed audio file. This is where I trimmed audio that was not relevant to the study to have only essential dialog transcribed. The dialog that was trimmed out was typically getting reacquainted, asking about each other's week, discussing small events in their family's lives, weather, etc. I listened again to both interviews during editing of the transcripts to fix errors, words that were

inaudible, and to capture expressions and body language. Each time I listened to the audio I was documenting observations.

2. Step two is coding. Coding in TA is both a method of reducing the data and analyzing the data. The coding stayed very close to the data and included conceptual and semantic understandings of the data. I coded all the data in each transcript even in the case that it presumably did not relate to the research questions. I did this to broaden my analysis making sure I was capturing data that was important to the participants and capture any data that was contrary to the assumptions inherent in the research questions.

3. Step three is searching for themes. In this step codes are organized in meaningful patterns which are called themes. This model of TA analysis requires construction of themes with active interpretation by the researcher. Themes were slow to emerge given the large amount of data in each transcript. I conducted many iterative examinations of the data to build themes that continued to remain close to the data.

4. Steps four and five are reviewing themes and naming themes respectively. These two steps work closely together. In my iterative examination of themes, I determined whether the themes were relevant across the data and started to define the nature of the relationships between themes. I began naming themes based on my interpretation of the data. These two steps were repeated multiple times, working in an iterative fashion, which included discarding some themes, renaming themes, and creating subthemes. The relationships between themes became more defined and evident as I repeated these steps. I wrote detailed

analyses of the final themes and their relationships. For example, people discussed a variety of social interactions in Copper County with the wider community. In the initial rounds of naming and renaming themes, themes emerged such as "sense of community", "community helping", "support", "connection", and "dependability". After further iterative rounds of examining the codes, themes, and the context in which the codes and quotes were nested, I came to understand that many of these subthemes were about community level relationships characterized by a larger theme of "community interdependence and support"

5. The sixth and last step is writing up the analyses. This is what appears in the findings chapter where data extracts are included in the written analysis to create a cohesive and rich explanation of the data. Additionally, I have chosen to present data that provides complexity to the themes or in some ways challenges aspects of the analysis. This offers transparency in the analysis process and attends to any contradictions in the data.

The analytical approach was to examine themes across the groups and then examine those themes within groups. This approach stems from the research questions which aim to identify factors associated with a range of mobility decisions. First, I analyzed themes across the entire sample and themes that had been represented by most or all of the participants in the sample. Codes and themes that had very little representation, meaning only one or two people mentioned a topic, were not included in the final analysis steps.

Then after identifying and defining major themes I examined each theme by the mobility pattern. This within group analysis sought to understand in what ways, if any, the theme varied by each mobility decision. The findings reflect this analytical process by presenting and discussing each major theme first and then the group differences. In the findings there is a psychosocial development theme, the data associated with this theme was also analyzed across age groups to attend to possible age-related differences. Only themes that were discussed by most or all of the participants in each mobility group are presented in the findings. This high threshold for inclusion strengthens the findings.

6. Additional analysis that is not specified in the TA model, but which is standard in qualitative research is the inclusion of analytic memos. I wrote analytic memos during each of the first five steps of the thematic analysis plan. Each of those memos reflects the nature of the analytic task in that step. Additional memos include a first impression memo after concluding the interview and before reviewing the data transcript, and memos that reflect specific challenges encountered with the data.

Community Engagement and Other Experiences

I engaged with the community and the participants in additional ways that provided depth of information in my analysis. I made multiple visits to Copper County before, during, and after the interviews. My initial visit to the county was for a pilot study to meet and spend time with the individual who was the initial starting point of the sample. I visited again as the interviews were beginning with the purpose of getting to know the county more and meeting new people who may have become study participants.

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I visited several more times during the interviews for various purposes. I met with formal and informal community leaders, church leaders, and local business owners. Some of the businesses I visited were important institutions for the participants and residents of Copper County and were mentioned during the interviews. Meeting with these community and institutional leaders gave me additional information about the county, county history, social issues that have been important to the county, and a deeper understanding of the experience of living in this rural area. None of the leaders wanted to officially participate in the study but were very happy to meet with me and discuss a wide range of topics off the record. Several of them said they believed my interest in the county was genuine because I continued to visit, follow up, go to the trouble to locate other important people in the community, but most importantly that I wanted to listen and learn.

Other visits to the county were to meet and spend time with some of the participants. Many participants had asked during the interview if I had been to their county, and I reported that I visited numerous times. They were surprised and very pleased. Many invited me to their homes and wanted to meet me the next time I was in the county. This opportunity allowed me to get to know many of my participants on a personal level. They shared more of their lives with me, introduced me to their families, and became more interested in the research I was conducting. I was most surprised by the level of investment from the participants in the research. Every participant expressed that they wanted to stay in touch to find out the results and read the articles I intended to publish. They voiced that my research felt important to them, they became more visible, that their experiences mattered.

Over time I built relationships with many of the participants and was invited to gatherings, celebrations, and important annual events in the community. I did not expect to build close relationships during this process, but my relationships with them, the time we have spent together has become very important to me. The participants have shared with me their lives, made themselves deeply vulnerable, and trusted me to understand the essence of who they are. This has touched me very deeply. I approach the writing of this dissertation with an immense responsibility to honor and do justice to their stories. I reveal this because it has a particular impact on the way I approach the analysis. My relationships and engagement with the community provide a depth of understanding and an increased level of investment in the analysis process.

Since the conclusion of the interviews, I continue to visit with people with whom I built relationships, attend gatherings, and community celebrations. I have also written letters to my participants updating them on my progress and expressing my gratitude. Several of the participants continue to write to me. I continue to share texts and phone calls with many of the participants. Some of these contacts are updates about their mobility status or major events in life. Sometimes the contact is just friendly maintenance of the relationship.

Risks to Participants and Ethical Considerations

Multiple steps were taken to mitigate the risks to participants. The interviews were completely voluntary, and any participant could stop the interview and participation in the study at any time. Confidentiality was a priority and was maintained by securing the recorded interviews on a password protected computer. Anonymity was a priority and so a pseudonym is used for each participant and the selected county. Additionally, it is

acknowledged that participants knew who referred them to the study due to the text introductions described previously. I never confirmed to study participants if the individuals they referred did or did not complete the interviews. I never discussed one person's interview with another. At times, participants would ask me if someone had explained an event or something that occurred between people. I responded that I would like for them to tell me anything that is relevant to them and their story, and not to worry about any redundancy.

I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) whose clinical skills assist with mitigating participant risk and provide expertise in engaging participants in multiple lengthy interviews, establishing trust, and allowing participants to discuss latent meanings associated with their experiences. My clinical capacity ensured that if any participant became distressed while discussing difficult memories or issues, the interview would stop, and the situation would be assessed for any needs the participant might have. This could include discussion of mental health and counseling resources in the county and/or referral for treatment. Participants received a list of local resources and mental health services should they be interested in further assistance. A redacted version of this resource list can be viewed in the appendix.

Many of the participants voiced that the interview process required them to think deeply about their lives and to be self-reflective. They stated their interview experience was very "therapeutic." As expected, that meant many people were emotional and had tears during parts of the interview. For some participants it was therapeutic because the interviews gave space and time for self-reflection and deep thinking. For others, it was therapeutic because they discussed difficult events from their past, explained how it

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affected them, and how they carried emotional pain, lessons learned, and meaning in their lives. During these parts of the interviews, I prioritized their psychological needs and well-being, achieving progress in the research was no longer the priority. There were two individuals with whom I followed up after the completion of the interviews. One had revealed traumatic experiences for which they were seeing a mental health professional. The other became very emotional and distressed during the interview. For both individuals the events they discussed continued to disrupt their lives and relationships. When I followed up with these two individuals it was not for research purposes but to act in a clinically responsible way.

Researcher as a Tool

In qualitative research it is customary to examine the researcher as a tool; bringing specific characteristics which will be interpreted by participants and act as a lens through which information is received by the researcher. I come to this study as a doctoral student and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. My clinical skills informed the way I approached engaging with participants, building trust, showing empathy, and encouraging self-reflection. It also informed the way I validated emotions, reflected back important information, and made sure to have periods of time with silence and pause to give the participant an opportunity to reflect and add additional information. As a social worker, I value and prioritize building relationships, working towards understanding, empathy, and authenticity. This is evidenced in the way I conducted the interviews, continue relationships, and engaged with the community.

My personal history with mobility is extensive having moved approximately thirty times in multiple regions of the U.S. starting at a young age and international

locations as an adult. This highly mobile life has resulted in a lack of attachment to any one place that I have lived. There is no one location I have ever lived that I call "home"; simply, home is where I live at the moment. I am aware this is counter to most people's experience, exemplified by how easily people respond to the question "where are you from?"

During introductions and initial discussion of the research I was honest and transparent about my background and mobility history. I answered any questions they had about me, my interest in rural issues, and positions on relevant topics. Participants identified very quickly that I was not from the South due to accent or lack thereof. This often prompted questions about what brought me to the Southeast and how I find living here. I was honest and transparent in my answers, believing that authenticity is a necessary condition for building trusting relationships. I also believe that my honesty, vulnerability, and self-reflection modeled expectations for the interview.

Initial discussions with participants always included some inquiry about my interest in rural life. I described my deep fascination for all things rural, my desire to live a rural life in the near future, and the rural activities that I am drawn towards. I explained I approached this research with intense curiosity and wonder. I viewed each person as the expert in their own lives. I would never challenge how they see themselves or their lives, merely go on a journey with them to uncover their thoughts, emotions, and memories. I did not seek power or control in the interviews by interrupting or assuming a conclusion without their explicit confirmation. My questions followed their natural trajectory of topics. I did not redirect their responses; they were allowed to discuss tangential and related topics without interference.

I intentionally stated that I had no interest in politics, but if that was a topic important to them or their story, they could include it in any way they wished. I made this decision because many rural residents expressed that they felt alienated by the national media and by other researchers. The recent political climate in the U.S. made rural areas a target of media attention, political researcher interest, and a popular media narrative that overgeneralized the demographics and political opinions of rural Southeast residents. They all expressed relief and gratitude for acknowledging this recent trend and their hesitancy to discuss any political topics. After establishing trust in the relationship and that I would not probe for political opinions, almost all the participants did not hesitate to discuss their political views, desires, and experiences as it related to their mobility.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Nowell and colleagues (2017) elaborated on the six steps originally developed for TA by Braun and Clarke (2006) with the goal of increasing rigor and trustworthiness. They achieved this by grounding the activities in each step in the trustworthiness criteria set by Lincoln and Guba (1985) which include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, and incorporating audit trails and reflexivity throughout the steps. Each step of TA was conducted with these additional details to ensure trustworthiness; these details have been incorporated in the analysis steps. During step one of familiarizing yourself with the data, trustworthiness is established by having a prolonged engagement with the data, documenting theoretical and reflective thoughts, documenting thoughts about potential themes, keeping well organized archives of data and keeping records of all field notes, transcripts and reflexive journals. In the second step of coding, reflexive journaling, using a coding framework, and having an audit trail of code

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generation will establish trustworthiness. Step three is searching for themes, step four is reviewing themes, and step five is defining and naming themes. The means of establishing trustworthiness in these three steps are diagramming possible theme connections, keeping detailed notes about themes and hierarchies of concepts, and documenting theme naming. During the last step, member checks were performed, a draft of major themes with supporting evidence was provided to participants who volunteered to participate in member checks. We engaged in a discussion of analytical choices and other related topics. The participants who volunteered for member checks reported positive reactions. They believed that the analysis stayed true to their experience. The most common reaction was how much the analysis resonated for them. Altogether these steps were taken to increase the trustworthiness of the data and the analytical process.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries set by the researcher within the study that impact the methodology and the findings. There are two important delimitations within this study. First, only one rural community was chosen as the research setting as opposed to multiple rural Southeast locations. This decision was made as a negotiation of breadth versus depth. Focusing on one rural community with a limited amount of time and financial resources provided for more depth of understanding from the rural experience in this community and the participants.

The second delimitation was the exclusion criteria of participants who experienced an involuntary move. An involuntary move could have been due to an employment transfer, some type of displacement due to an emergency, or any other move

that was not sought after. This became an important distinction when screening Veteran participants. Military service members could potentially move away from their home due to their service obligations, making that an involuntary move. Also, moving to a military base removes or significantly changes dynamics that voluntary movers encounter such as choosing where they want to live, funding that move, locating housing, finding employment, possibly having gaps in income, and establishing new friendship networks. The Veterans in this study had moved to additional locations away from home on their own accord after military service had ended.

Limitations

Study limitations are typically the constraints of the study on the ability to generalize the findings. However, external generalizability which are results that can apply to a larger context, setting, or group is not an aim of qualitative research. Qualitative research is commonly seeking internal generalizability, cases that reflect that group or setting (Maxwell, 2013). It is important to state that choosing depth of information from one rural community limits the study from claiming that findings apply to all Georgia, Southeast, or American rural locations. Additionally, the use of the Rural to Urban Continuum codes demonstrates that there is variance in what is considered rural; one county does not represent all rural places or rural variance. Rural experiences can appear differently in other regions of the United States. For example, the Western U.S. has a significant number of rural places and counties but the topographical geography, natural resources, proximity to urban places, and demographics are quite different than the Southeast. This would likely produce differences in lived experiences and therefore changes in the data.

Limitations that are more applicable to qualitative research that may apply to this study are the small sample size, participant selection bias, and quality of interview questions. Sample sizes in qualitative study are dependent on the research questions, if breadth or depth is more valuable, and the available time and resources (Patton, 2002). When seeking depth of information, a small sample may be adequate if those cases are information rich. In this study there are an average of ten people of each mobility decision and thirty total participants with sixty to seventy-five hours of interviews. Each case was very information rich.

Snowball sampling can produce selection bias with participants being in the same social networks. It is presumed that if people know one another there is a likelihood that they have similar attitudes and experiences. Some participants in this study were close friends, some were related, and other were distantly associated. However, there were significant dissimilarities present in the sample despite having shared social networks. About half of the sample had liberal political and social views, and the other half had conservative political and social views. This disparity emerged within family and close friend networks. Surprisingly, it was advantageous to examine mobility decisions among some family members because it revealed that each person makes a mobility decision based on deeply personal contexts and histories regardless of the support or discouragement from their social networks. Additionally, friends and family members that discussed the same life events expressed that it impacted them in differing ways, they emotionally and behaviorally responded to those events differently, and made differing meanings from those experiences.

Considerable effort was made to include interview questions that used precise language aimed at obtaining information pertinent to the research, and interview questions that were meaningful; that would spark self-reflection and deep thinking for the participants. The questions were open-ended and covered many aspects of life and mobility. Participants were also given multiple opportunities to reflect on other events, decisions, emotions, and memories that were important to them. I encouraged participants to add to the conversation in any way they wished, even when this included tangential topics. The interview questions were designed to seek depth of information and to be inclusive of many topics. This minimizes the use of questions aimed for very specific information within a narrow context.

Lastly, thematic analysis is the best fit for the research questions, yet this analysis approach also has limitations. TA has great flexibility but without a rigorous approach flexibility can lead to inconsistency. I included measures to enhance rigor. For example, paraphrasing and reflecting back interpretations to the participants within the interviews. This provided confirmation and clarification of what participants meant in their responses. Making sure themes appear across data and being clear with deviations within the themes is documented and provides additional rigor and transparency to the study. Finally, member checks performed with participant volunteers of the draft findings enhance rigor and trustworthiness in the findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Chapter Introduction

This study seeks to understand reasons for mobility among natives from rural

Copper County. The study is situated within the need for theoretical expansion in the

field because current mobility patterns have changed and are not fully explained by the

available theories. To answer the research questions, in-depth interviews were used to

engage participants who have left Copper County, stayed in Copper County, and returned

to the county after living away. This chapter has three main sections, and each section

addresses a research question from the study. The first section addresses the research

question: What do rural Southeastern natives identify as the reasons associated with their

various mobility decisions? The findings suggest that there are multiple reasons for

mobility, three of which are novel. Those three novel reasons include: one, psychosocial

development which describes individuals grappling with identity formation, seeking

intimacy, and generativity as part of their mobility decisions; two, the tension of being

known versus anonymity which describes a push and pull within interpersonal dynamics;

and three, the centrality of relationship which describes the importance of relationships

which is a common thread throughout all reasons for mobility.

The second section addressed the research question: How do rural Southeastern natives negotiate those reasons in making decisions about mobility? The findings suggest that individuals negotiate their mobility reasons through an iterative developmental process. This describes a process of how past experiences, interpretations, and meanings accumulate and inform the present. Participant background and personal contexts are explored to illuminate this process.

The third section addresses the research question: What are the relationships among mobility decisions and perceived well-being for rural Southeastern natives? Findings show that participants identify many contributing and diminishing factors to their well-being which can coexist in the same location. Participants seek a balance in their well-being where there are more contributions than diminishments. This chapter focuses on a detailed understanding of the findings that answer each research question. Further analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of the findings are discussed in Chapter 5.

Research Question 1 – What do rural Southeastern natives identify as the reasons associated with their various mobility decisions?

This section presents three major themes that emerged from the data which suggest reasons for mobility: psychosocial development, the tension of being known versus anonymity, and the centrality of relationship. These major themes appear across all mobility groups; however, each mobility decision suggests complexity and nuance in different ways.

Psychosocial Development

During the interviews, participants reflected on their reasons for moving away, always remaining in, or later returning to Copper County. This included the personal

growth they experienced, lessons learned, and evolving perspectives about themselves

and what they want from life. Expressions emerged about the role of identity formation,

seeking intimacy, and generativity in mobility decisions. These three psychosocial stages

have coalesced into the finding's major theme of psychosocial development. These

stages, identity formation, seeking intimacy, and generativity, appear across the adult

lifespan within the sample. For further demonstration, the age of the participant is

included in the quotes below. The three stages appear across all mobility groups but in

ways that suggest that location is assessed to determine if a place can provide what is

needed or wanted to satisfy these stages for each individual.

   Identity Formation. Identity formation is a process by which individuals gain

clarity and definition in their self-concept; an individuated sense of "self" that resonates

and feels authentic to that person. The process of identity formation as it relates to

mobility is examined across the mobility decision groups. Leavers determined that other

locations would provide the stimulus to assist with the identity formation they desired.

Candice and Nina left Copper County after graduating high school. They found clarity in

their identities from the physical separation of leaving Copper County.

> That's what challenged it for me, helped me discover or settle into more of
> my identity. This is who I am, and this is what I want my life to be about.
> It happened more from just separating myself. (Candice, Leaver, 28).

> [regarding her recommendation to leave the rural area] I think it can show
> you a lot about yourself if you don't spend your whole life in a rural
> county. (Nina, Leaver, 23)

> Donna discusses that identity formation was important for developing her own

values which was not always easily achieved while in Copper County:

> It can be hard to figure out where you land on your own two feet, as far as
> values, core beliefs…it's really important and valuable to put yourself in

an uncomfortable situation so that you have to learn who you are. (Donna, Leaver, 31).

Nora, age 27, was self-reflexive in her interview. She engaged in a long discussion about traveling and living in new places, explain that she felt driven to see new things in the world to examine what options she had in life and what might make her happy. I used this opportunity to reflect back to her what I was hearing from her story. I reflected, "It sounds like to me, that in order for you to continue to explore your own identity, you felt like you had to do that maybe in a different place [from Copper County]. She responded, "Yes! I 100% agree.".

Within the group of Leavers there were expressions of identity formation that continued to provide nuance and broaden the concept. For example, several participants described experiences of findings independence.

> Just move out to a big city or just a bigger area than Copper County just to figure out who you are, what you like, what's out there in the world, what you haven't seen before. (Nora, Leaver, 27)

> [regarding have physical distance from family in Silver City] I feel like it helps me to maintain a sense of independent identity. (Donna, Leaver, 31)

Willow and Candice explain that they felt driven towards finding independence and that leaving was part of how they envisioned independence.

> [regarding knowing as a teen she wanted to leave] I looked around and knew I didn't want …to follow the model that my parents…and just "what would I do if I stayed in Silver City?" I knew that there was something out there for me and I didn't know what it was. (Willow, Leaver, 62)

> I just remember thinking, "I don't want to be next door. I want to get away, I want to see more things, I want to figure life out on my own." I just knew that…I wanted to have at least one season where I could figure life out on my own. (Candice, Leaver, 28)

Independence is often associated with identity formation. It helps to differentiate the idea of yourself from others. Identity was also reflected in how Nina wanted to be perceived by others, wanting people's judgements of her identity to be consistent with how she viewed herself.

> I love being able to tell people I'm from a small town. I think it makes me seem more low maintenance… but I think if someone knew I was from a big city, they would think I was not as simple. (Nina, Leaver, 23)

Expressions of identity were consistently presented in relations to the "self", a singular intrapersonal experience, with one exception. Donna spoke about her family identity along with her many reflections about her own identity formation as a factor involved in her leaving Copper County prior to marriage and having children:

> We could still keep our own family rhythms that we developed in [large metro area] since we were so far away. As hard as those years were, I think that they were so important in setting the foundation of us being our own family unit. So we knew that we wanted to still kind of like put a safeguard in that we wouldn't lose our own family identity and sense of unit. (Donna, Leaver, 31).

Returnees also had expressions of identity formation that reflected ideas similar to those of the Leavers. They felt an incongruence between the environment and their identities and continued to expand the concept of this psychosocial stage. Nicole, who described herself as a "city girl" in her interview discussed how she never felt a natural fit between her environment and her identity:

> I didn't fit in too well here I guess, I felt like I was a city kid stuck in the country…And I was just out in the middle of nowhere on a farm with my family. (Nicole, Returnee, 32)

Tim lived in multiple urban cities after leaving Copper County. He described his experience of trying to build a sense of community with the families of new friends:

The reason I am who I am today is because I went through all those tough times and good times with the big family and everything we talked about (Tim, Returnee, 27)

A riveting example of identity formation comes from Isabelle who lived in a large urban city with a career she enjoyed until she chose to return to Copper County in mid-life after living away since going to college. This suggests that identity formation does not only occur in adolescent or young adult years.

I grew up not really having a definite identity and kids in school were always [bullying me], …so I went off to college… and had a life, everything was great, and I was at a point where I got to go big or go home, so I went home…I was finding characters for a long time [in acting], why not find my own character. (Isabelle, Returnee, 56)

Returnees found that initially leaving Copper County influenced identity formation, but additional mobility decisions continued to impact identity. After Isabelle returned to Copper County, she again had to navigate topics of identity and judgements made about her.

When I first came back…I felt like they all wanted me to be [like my] mom. (Isabelle, Returnee, 56)

Expressions of identity from participants who remained in Copper County appear to be different from Leavers and Returners. Stayers are not grappling with their environment being at odds with or not providing what is needed in their search for identity. Stayers find congruence and support between the environment and their identity. Hannah and Henry are examples of this congruence and feeling as if they "fit" in Copper County:

I kind of fit inside that box. So, I guess that I never felt like I needed to go anywhere. I felt comfortable here. I felt like this was my place… Going back to your personality, it totally fits your personality if you like to be laid back and if you want to keep your southern hospitality roots and all of that. (Hannah, Stayer, 43)

I believe that because of where I live and the things that I was exposed to and the people that impacted my life, whether it be schoolteachers, or preachers, or friends, or uncles or aunts or whomever, helped me get to where I wanted to be. And where I wanted to be, was right here in Copper County (Henry, Stayer, 57)

Stayers incorporate expressions of identity in the way they talk about themselves as being "country" "homebodies" or "small-town".

You know I love living in a town where there are five stoplights. I love it!... I became small town pretty quickly. (Kim, Stayer, 62)

I'm a homebody. I'm a family body. (Luke, 54)

[describing her daughter that wants to remain in Copper County] Yeah. She's just a homebody. (Kelly, Stayer, 52)

Generally, Stayers expressed a sense of comfort or contentedness with their locations and how they see themselves fitting in that place.

You have to figure out what you want to do and what makes you happy. You have to make those types of decisions early on so you can figure it out. I just think it's a comfortability thing. I think I really am a creature of habit…I would say comfort means you don't have to worry about being in a position of things are going to be unfamiliar. (Brittany, Stayer, 19)

I ain't even thought about it [moving away]…and I've had no reason really… I didn't need nothing else. I had everything. I had my family. (Sean, Stayer, 55)

But I guess I know where I am. I have a sense of place maybe.
(Interviewer) So when you say sense of place, what does that mean to you?
Well, I know where I am and what to expect usually. (Iris, Stayer, 79)

The expressions from Stayers contrast with Leavers and Returnees. Stayers' identities are confirmed and supported by living in Copper County, whereas Returnees felt an incongruence between the environment and their identity when they initially lived in Copper County. Leaving the county fostered their identity formation in ways they desired. Upon returning, their identities continued to develop but now the environment offers a better fit for their current identities. Leavers felt the same incongruence between

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environment and identity that Returnees expressed. They found validation in their search for identity once they left the county. A sense of congruence or incongruence between a person's identity and location is a dynamic that the predominant theories of mobility have not addressed.

Seeking Intimacy. Intimacy, the second stage in the psychosocial development theme, can be described as physical and/or emotional connection with another person. This is a psychosocial stage that describes development that comes from finding healthy relationships where people can express their authentic identities and garner connection. This psychosocial developmental stage occurs across the lifespan in the sample which is consistent with the other two stages. Additionally, mobility is associated with how people seek intimacy in their relationships. For example, people make mobility decisions to be closer to loved ones at various times throughout life or after committing to a partner or spouse. Seeking intimacy is evident in two ways within the sample: one, mobility decisions that support emotional intimacy with family and other support systems, and two, mobility decisions that support physical and emotional intimacy in a romantic partnership or marriage.

Across the sample, participants discussed the important relationships in their lives which consistently included spouses or committed partners, families, families of origin, and close friends. Donna, Kim, and Allen who represent each mobility group, describe examples of how they grappled with emotional intimacy and mobility.

> It was hard… I also realized how much I leaned on my sisters just because we always had each other growing up…It's hard for me to kind of foster intentional deep relationships because I think for so many years I just leaned on my sisters and we knew each other because we lived in the same house for so long. (Donna, Leaver, 31)

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I would hate to lose regular contact with those people that I am close to, and I feel like if you separate yourself physically it does become harder to maybe... Maintenance. Give those relationships maintenance. (Kim, Stayer, 62)

[My aunt] is someone I spent a lot of time with growing up… I always felt like my mom's favorite is my sister, my dad's favorite is my brother, so I'm a go hang out with my aunt and they will all tell you that I'm her favorite so it's fine. [laughing] So, but her house is somewhere that if I ever had a long day I would go there and hang out and relax and it always seems to calm me down get me back on track. (Allen, Returnee, 24)

In order to maintain this connection with his aunt while he was a few hours away at college, she would often travel to visit with him during those years. Now that Allen has returned to Copper County he has reinvested in this important emotionally intimate relationship.

Yesterday had a little longer day than I expected… I just call and say, "Hey, you want to come eat and hang out for a bit?" And it's just kind of refreshing I guess, to just sit down, chill out and have somebody that thinks everything you do is perfect, to calm your nerves and get you right back to thinking, all right, we're good. We can roll on and it's going to work out…just her presence is calming. *(Interviewer) Is there anyone else that provides a similar thing for you?* Really just her. (Allen, Returnee, 24)

There is agreement across all mobility decisions that emotional intimacy requires an element of intentionality. This nuance is articulated most by Leavers and Returnees. When someone moves locations there is a disruption in their relationships and some participants discussed that intentionally crafting relationships and emotional intimacy took more effort after moving away from Copper County. Donna and Willow, Leavers, are many years away from when they each left Copper County. They both have made additional moves since leaving and continually focus on being intentional in crafting relationships.

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It has been just something that we have to be really intentional about as far as finding our own community and building up friendships from scratch…Learning how to like make a friend and be a friend and there's no familiarity to depend on because everything is brand new…. When I think of the time of my life, where I didn't have to try to make friends because people were generally familiar when I was younger. So, location had a lot to do with that… So, yeah, it's just you have to at some degree decide that it's worth your time to put yourself through that discomfort and inconvenience to hopefully see friendships come to fruition. (Donna, Leaver, 31)

But see, you've got to work at that [building relationships]… When we put our recycling bins out at the same time or if they happen to be walking by while I'm out in my front garden, we will stop and chat… so, we all get to know each other a little bit better but, yet, it's not like we're all buddy buddies. And so, that's one way you really have to make an effort, even if you're a private person. (Willow, Leaver, 62)

Allen returned to Copper County after attending college. He found that he had to be intentional in reestablishing relationships and finding new relationships.

I think it was pretty much what I expected [when I returned]… Some of the relationships I think were a little bit different, so I guess really I expected to come home and my friends from high school will be my friends still. And that wasn't really the case… you kind of grow apart… finding new friends from the county was a little bit different than what I expected to have to do. (Allen, Returnee, 24)

Seeking emotional intimacy can be challenged by different mobility decisions. Leavers and Returnees are faced with establishing new relationships as they seek emotional intimacy in new locations while continuing to maintain or renew intimacy with relationships in past locations. Stayers, on the other hand, can seek emotionally intimate relationships without major disruptions in proximity to the people with whom they are most familiar.

Physical and emotional intimacy is exemplified more by romantic relationships. Finding a spouse or committed partner can be made easier or challenged with different

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mobility decisions. The Stayers' romantic relationships supported their decisions to remain in the county. Of the nine Stayers, six were married, two divorced, and one single. The eight participants who had been married or were still married met their spouses in Copper County.

> I had no reason to leave. I met my wife back in '87 and she went to college. She became a RN and we just stayed here. (Sean, Stayer, 55)
>
> I'm married. My wife, she's kind of the same situation, she grew in Silver City. We actually met in high school, we both went to college. But after college we got married. (Chris, Stayer, 38)
>
> I've been married for 36 years to the same high school sweetheart. (Kelly, Stayer, 52)
>
> I actually met my husband when I was only 16, he was 20 and in college… My mom, having grown up in Copper County, knew his family, and so they agreed for me to date the older guy and then I never dated anyone else. And we got married when I was 19 and he was 23, and 40 some years later here we are. (Kim, Stayer, 62)

Returnees and Leavers grappled with how place was associated with the search for potential partners. Some believed they would have a better chance of finding a partner in a larger more metropolitan area, simply due to more people and people with a variety of interests and backgrounds. Some of the participants discussed that mobility was an extremely important factor when seeking a same-sex partnership.

> It makes it harder to stay here it really does because you know it's slim pickin's and you know if in the next few years, I don't find somebody here, the chances are even getting slimmer, because everyone's getting married or moved away or on their fourth child… the dating scene does play a role in do I want to stay or not. Up to this point I haven't felt enough pressure to say I'm going to move, or I need a change to get there. (Allen, Returnee, 24)
>
> I remember when I was younger, I had no interest in women from Copper County. I didn't feel like they challenged me enough. At this point, I'm not even looking for dating right now. I've dated a good bit of my life. Maybe my standards are too high, but I'm sure the pool is deeper in Atlanta versus Copper County. (Tim, Returnee, 27)

[Large metro city] was just a much better fit for me in so many different ways, and that's not to say I didn't love Copper County. And if I had been straight, and I had a significant other easily I would've moved back. I absolutely think if I had a boyfriend, or a husband, who would've moved to Silver City easily that could've happened. (Nancy, Leaver, 53)

Nicole, age 32, did not intend on returning to Copper County permanently, but finding a romantic partner changed her mind. The interview took place when the relationship was new. Since then, she has remained in Copper County and continued to build the relationship.

I wasn't planning on being here this long. I was just going to stay and help [family] and then things happen, you meet people and find reasons to stay, I suppose. (Nicole, Returnee, 32)

Paula, age 36, continued to date her boyfriend while she lived away for several years. Upon returning, they married immediately.

No, I never considered it [continuing to live away from Copper County] because my husband never considered it at the time. He was a homebody. (Returnee, 36)

Of the eleven Returnees, six of them were married, partnered, or divorced. Of the six partnerships, three of them had met their spouse in Copper County, two before they left and later returned, one after returning. The other three participants met their spouses when they lived away from Copper County. This suggests a variety of ways and locations that Returnees meet their spouses/partners. Of the ten Leavers, two of them met their spouses/partners in Copper County before choosing to leave together. This is important because it validates that there are always multiple reasons people choose to move; never to accommodate only one relationship.

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These findings suggest complexity in seeking emotional and physical intimacy in relationships as they relate to mobility. Concepts of intentionality, familiarity, and how proximity or distance can challenge or facilitate intimacy are important findings. Life course perspectives and Social Network Theory address relationships within mobility. However, concepts of intimacy and intentionality are not addressed by those theories.

Generativity. The third psychosocial developmental stage in the findings is generativity. This theme also appears across the adult lifespan within the sample. Participants fostered generativity by expressing that they wanted to give back to those around them and invest in the growth of others. This included family, extended family, and community. Sometimes this included direct relationships, other times it was through social participation and volunteerism with a larger social group.

Allen and Tim show the importance of generativity as a factor in their mobility decisions. Notably, these two participants are in their 20's.

> But the thing I tried to like tell my friends that have left and haven't come back, is think about the impact you could have on the next generation of rural Copper County children…you come back and change it to make it better for future generations of people from Copper County. And so that's what I tell my old friends that haven't returned, like you could come back and be the change that you want to see here… we need to admit that we have some wrong [here] but let's be the people that fix it. (Allen, Returnee, 24).

> My biggest reasons and aspirations of coming home before the coronavirus was to come home to be with my family and my friends, the people who I grew up with… I just wanted to really kind of give back to... Go visit more of my little cousins, teach them things and just share life experience so I can in a nutshell just give back. Teach them how to read and write and how the real world is going to be if they decide to move away from this place. (Tim, Returnee, 27)

Iris, age 79, has always been highly active in the community with social organizations, social clubs, and volunteer work. She finds these activities to be very

meaningful and fulfilling. She discussed multiple community projects throughout the
interview; here she mentions a few.

> I've always been very active in the community. I've helped start the Junior
> Woman's Club here…I was on the recreation council, I'm a DAR member.
> I'm a Garden Club member…But I've always been real involved in my
> community…I think that having the connection with people in your
> community means a lot…We do have some really great people in the
> community that help a lot of other people and I think that's really a good
> thing. (Iris, Stayer, 79)

Many participants are driven towards generativity and express the meaning it
provides in their lives. There is also evidence of observed acts of generativity from other
people in the community. Acts of kindness, giving, and helping were significant topics
within most of the interviews and could be interpreted as observations of someone else's
generativity. Kim discusses examples of acts of generativity, kindness, and giving from
others in Copper County. In one example she and her family are the recipient of acts of
generativity and giving. In the other example she describes observed acts of generativity
in the county:

> It's things like after my parents… had surgeries and needed therapy and
> they [people in the community] know I work full time. They're like, "How
> can we help you? Can we get your mom somewhere? Do your parents
> need a meal? When's your mom's next doctor's appointment? Are you
> going to be able to get off work?" Or, "Don't worry about getting off work.
> I've got this." Those are huge things, huge things… I've noticed in our
> community when there's a cause, when there's an illness and people find ...
> I mean we even establish funds at our bank, people go by and deposit
> money...you go downtown to little [names of the two local banks] and you
> say, "I want to establish an account for Joe Smith. He's got to have
> surgery. His insurance ran out when he did so-and-so ..." And by golly, it
> happens…If there's a need that's made known there are people to see about
> it and it doesn't have to be your closest friends. It doesn't have to be your
> church family. I think people are very giving here. (Kim, Stayer, 62)

Almost every Stayer and Returnee spoke about these dynamics within the
community and gave examples. Leavers also expressed the same observations in Copper

County. This Leaver, Yvette, age 62, experienced the thoughtfulness and giving of the community when her son was involved in a debilitating accident.

> It was a close-knit community [Copper County]. I mean, like when [my son] had his accident, we were in the hospital in [large metro city] for three months. When we came home, our community had come together and actually completely remodeled our home so that he could come home to a beautiful renovated, accessible home. I don't even know if that would happen in [another city she now resides in], so I love Copper County. I love the people of Copper County, and I can't say enough about community. (Yvette, Leaver, 62)

It is possible that the observed acts of helping and giving are demonstrations of generativity that is part of psychosocial development. It is also possible that these acts are more representative of the relational aspects of a community, sense of community, or community interdependence. These dynamics are addressed again in the theme Centrality of Relationship.

The major theme of Psychosocial Development contains evidence of identity formation, the seeking of intimacy in relationships, and generativity. These three stages of psychosocial development are seen across all mobility decisions. These stages are associated with mobility decisions because Leavers, Returnees, and Stayers approach each psychosocial stage in different ways, each assessing if their location is assisting or inhibiting the achievement of these stages of development. The predominant theories that explain mobility view development in terms of age and age-related events. Psychosocial development in these findings address intrapersonal and interpersonal growth which occur fluidly across the life span.

Being known vs Anonymity. The second major theme is the tension of being known versus anonymity. Every participant, across all mobility groups, grappled with

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the advantages and disadvantages of being known and having anonymity in a community. Being known provided connection and comfort while anonymity provided freedom from expectations, independence, and autonomy. Most participants discussed the advantages and disadvantages to each side of the tension. Each mobility group offered insight into what is means to be known in a community.

> I feel like I know everybody that I see, we're a close-knit community…people have your back, you have support, everyone knows who you are, I know your grandma, I know your granddaddy, I know your aunt and uncle, there's a connection that kind of helps. (Hannah, Stayer)

> Copper County is great because you see everyone, you know everyone, you build tight relationships and bonds. (Sam, Leaver)

> It was small town, but it felt very genuine… People did feel like they cared and everyone kind of knew who you were, and that was like a comforting thing. (Nora, Leaver)

> In the city, you hardly know your neighbors, and to come back here and then to know everybody. To know your neighbors is nice. (Trisha, Returnee)

Leavers shared experiences with anonymity, the other side of the tension.

> You're your own person, and people make assumptions about you, or perceptions, based on who you really are, not based on their perception of what your dad was like, or your mom was like. (Nancy, Leaver)

> I feel like I could be anybody here…Just walking down the street, there are just so many more people everywhere, that... I hate to say you're not special, but you are very much a small fish in a big pond…It's not the same situation where like people know who you are [in Silver City]…But you could remake yourself and no one would really know the difference. (Nora, Leaver)

> It just feels relieving to know, or like you can breathe knowing, "They don't know me. They don't have anything to compare me to because they've never known me (Nina, Leaver)

Primarily expressions of being known or anonymity came in the form of comparisons, showing how individuals assess the advantages and disadvantages of experiencing both regardless of mobility pattern.

> For me, having someone to depend on was more important than having the freedom to do whatever I wanted….It definitely gave me a lot more freedom [living away from Silver City]. It's like you were worried what other people were saying about you or what people were going to think if you did this or that, and that so that made it I guess liberating, you feel freer like you didn't have someone watching your every (Allen, Returnee)

> Somebody said the other day, she said, "you know everybody knows your business," and I said "well that's true and that can be disadvantageous but those are the same people that will show up in your house with the fried chicken in the macaroni and cheese when your grandma dies." She said you're right, she said you're exactly right. So the good really outweighs the bad and she agreed. (Kim, Stayer)

> The community is there, you know the people, and there's some comfort in that, but then the lack of boundaries and privacy is definitely a negative. (Candice, Leaver)

> ***Leavers.*** Members of each mobility group discussed the tension between being known versus anonymity. However, there were differences that appeared depending on the mobility decision. Those who left the rural community tended to favor anonymity more than being known. This tendency towards anonymity can be seen in some of the findings already presented. For example, Nora and Willow make it clear that they favor anonymity.

> No one is scrutinizing your decisions or your choices, that part is a good thing. But there's definitely the aspect of you want to feel like people care about you…So I think to me, it's more positive than it is negative, because it just gives you more independence... You can make decisions… for yourself. You're not necessarily thinking of how others might react to it. (Nora, Leaver)

> In big cities, you worry about your reputation and gossip and things like that, but it's amplified in small towns. (Willow, Leaver)

There was nuance in Leavers' understanding of being known versus anonymity. This nuance provides complexity and a deeper understanding of the theme and how it is experienced and assessed related to mobility decisions. Nina expressed that city size could be a predictor of balance between being know and anonymity. Here, Nina discusses moving to a larger city than the mid-sized city she currently lives in:

> The bigger the city, the more it feels like not a lot of people care about
> you. (Nina, Leaver)

Additionally, Candice chose to gradually introduce herself to more anonymity. Her statement implies the same idea as Nina, that as spaces and population increases, so too, does anonymity.

> [regarding acclimating to large spaces with more anonymity] Whenever I
> visited [small college], I think it just felt more comfortable in some ways.
> I'm sure there's some things about it that felt more similar… you'd walk to
> class and know everyone. Not know everyone, but know most... So I think
> it was just like a... a baby step out into the real world, in a way. (Candice,
> Leaver)

Part of being known in Copper County was intergenerational recognition. Being identified and associated with multigenerational kinship groups further perpetuated being known, and complicated having any anonymity. Donna explains this dynamic:

> It's a double-edged sword, everyone knowing everyone…There were just
> like generational layers I felt like that were everywhere. Everyone's
> parents knew each other, everyone's grandparents knew these other
> people's grandparents…So there is a sense of… security that just kind of
> comes with it. (Donna, Leaver)

Nancy explains that the intergenerational recognition aspect of being known made it difficult to control personal histories.

> The biggest difference with being in a small town is other than the
> anonymity, which is obviously different… what I think are the biggest
> differences, when you live in a small town everyone knows your family.

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They know your history. They may or may not have formed an opinion about your family. Your parents, your grandparents, your great grandparents, your kids. But in [large metro area], in a big city, nobody knows anything about your history. Unless I tell my friends, or people who I meet, about my mom, or my brother, or my grandmother they don't know them, but if I'm in Silver City people know who my grandparents were, and the older people know who my great grandmother was, and many people know my mom. (Nancy, Leaver)

A few participants discussed the developmental consequences of growing up in a rural community that leaned heavily on being known. Sam discusses how this was a positive experience for him despite that he now enjoys living in a large urban city.

Growing up in a rural setting, I feel like for my development, it was absolutely the best because of the fact that I didn't have those outside worries of... I do look at the media sometimes and I see what people go through in the inner city…I grew up in, it's a close knit town. Everyone knows everyone. So if something's going wrong, your family's going to be notified immediately or someone else's parents are going to be notified immediately… everyone works together to build you up. (Sam, Leaver)

Candice, Donna, and Nina express that there were complicated and sometimes negative consequences to growing up with experiences of being known.

So my dad was [a public official]… and I do think that made my experience different, because I felt like all eyes were on me a lot, just because everyone knew him…. I do you think that kind of shapes how you function as a teenager, because you're like, "Okay, this person would definitely talk to my dad." Or, "I want to make my dad proud here." Or, "I want to be a good example for my family here.". (Candice, Leaver)

There are perks and then there are also drawbacks like if there was any kind of family drama. Which we had growing up, people knew about it sometimes before you knew about it. Which is traumatizing. (Donna, Leaver)

So growing up in the school system, it was always like, "You're ----'s sister," or, "The [last name] girls. We know who y'all are."… Because we had the same teachers… So if they taught our older sisters, they'll teach us too. It was kind of a comparison thing there, and that always kind of stressed me out…preconceived ideas, they know your history and your family, so it's like you're never really starting with a blank slate. (Nina, Leaver)

These contrasting experiences of Sam, Candice, Donna, and Nina of what it meant for them to grow up being known by others in the community suggest that individual appraisal of being known versus anonymity during formative years does not equate to seeking one or the other later in life as an adult. Simply, an individual is always evaluating the experience of being known versus anonymity.

Stayers. Participants who remained in Copper County tended to favor being known more than having anonymity.

> Downsides? no, I think that's just it. That's your running joke for a small town. Everybody knows everybody's business or thinks they do… I'd rather have it like this than a big city where you don't know anybody, you don't know who your neighbor is. (Luke, Stayer)

> It is very just Southern, homey, everybody knows everybody, a little bit cliquish... Everybody loves everybody. (Kelly, Stayer)

Participants in this mobility group discusses more of the positive sides of being known. Chris, Hannah, and Iris explain more about the comfort and connection that comes with being known.

> I guess it's just, maybe a comfort thing? You know this person, and you know this family member, and he's a pretty good person. So you just kind of associate this person with it, or... I mean, go the other way, you know this family and they're not such a great people, so you kind of shy away from them. I mean, that could be good or bad? But I guess that's the small town aspect of how things are too. (Chris, Stayer)

> I know everybody. It's a small town. Everybody is very eager to help people, as a community and things like that. (Hannah, Stayer)

> I've always lived either two blocks south or two blocks north, but all my grandparents were from here and just a lot of family connection and I love that part of it. And just knowing who you're working with and you speak to somebody in the grocery store, you know who they are most of the time. (Iris, Stayer)

Chris also believes that a sense of safety is an extension of comfort from being know.

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Just being comfortable because I know so many people… that's just the sense of safety that I really don't think about, but probably 75% of the people I see, I know. I at least know their name. Like, "That's so-and-so. He lives right over there."… that just gives you a sense of safety that everybody... I don't think anybody's really going to bother you because you know them and you know where they live... (Chris, Stayer)

Consistent with other mobility groups, Stayers offer nuances to understanding being known. Brittany and Iris explain that being known comes with certain expectations of interactions in the community. Further, these are interpreted as advantages of being known.

You know who works where. If I need to get a quote on some building materials or any type of tools... I know everyone who works at [local hardware store]. We pretty much all went to school together. So, I can just call one of them and be like, "Can you let me know how much so-and-so and so's going to be? I'm going to come up there and pick it up." And they'll be like, "Cool, I'll get it ready for you." (Brittany, Stayer)

I had a shop for 28 years and being from Silver City and knowing everybody that came in, I didn't have to ask who they wanted to charge it to, I knew all the people, and it was just really unique. That was '60s, 70s, '80s. I knew their family and if they said they were going to do something, I knew if they were really going to do it, or it was just a hot air kind of thing. (Iris, Stayer)

Brittany is the only participant who discussed the advantages of being known in a similar way to social capital, leveraging her relationships to her advantage. She offers two different examples:

Whenever I was 15, I would drive myself to work. I don't have a license. I am able to drive myself to work because… if I get pulled over, I'm in my town. Everyone here knows me, and they're going to be like, we know her. She's a great student, great kid. She's just going to work. She just didn't have a ride today. (Brittany, Stayer)

A great reason to stay for my family… It's all about who you know here… I got a lot of jobs because I knew a lot of people. My kids will be able to get a job. Whereas if I lived in a bigger town, what would be the reason for somebody hiring my child over the next? It would be kind of, "Hey, well, let's look at the references," or something like that. Whereas here it

would be like, "Oh, well I know her mom. Her mom used to work here."
That's a lot of the reasoning. (Brittany, Stayer)

Leavers spoke about intergenerational recognition as something that perpetuated

being known. Stayers agree with this dynamic.

> I pretty much know 90% of everybody here, or I know someone that is
> actually kin to them. (Chris, Stayer)

> I probably know personally, 60% of the people in the county. If I didn't
> know you, I knew of you. Living in a small town everybody knows
> everybody. Or if you don't know that person you know a relative of that
> person. (Sean, Stayer)

Returnees. Participants who returned to Copper County offered compelling

evidence that they deeply understood both being known and anonymity. They show what

it means to grapple with the tension. Returnees express deep insights about being known

versus anonymity, and the way they think about those concepts is grounded in place. This

offers further evidence that location and this tension are connected.

> [The experience of being known] it's not just in a small town, but it's
> magnified in a small town. (Isabelle, Returnee)

> I'm sure in bigger places, you do have your immediate people who live
> right around you, that you can be a community with, but I don't think it's
> quite as easy. I think it takes much more of an effort somehow. It has to be
> more intentional, I feel like, a lot of that just maybe the South, but that's
> just how we are. If you already know each other, or maybe not directly
> know each other, but at least know somebody that knows them, you feel
> connected in a way, so a little responsible. (Olivia, Returnee)

Meg and Lillian express that they grew to appreciate being known more over

time. This change in perspective aligns with their return to Copper County. Additionally,

Meg and Lillian returned to the county at different times in life, suggesting that shifting

to appreciate more of being known can occur at different times in life after living away

for different amounts of time.

When I was younger I kind of enjoyed having the anonymity of not knowing anybody, and then as I got older, I appreciated it more when I did come back. (Meg, Returnee)

At one time I thought, "Okay. If [husband] goes first and I'm in our house in [large metro area], if something happens to me, I could lay here for 2 days."… we knew our neighbors, but they wouldn't have come knocking on the door looking for me if they didn't see me in the yard for three or four days. No. Here [Silver City], if they didn't see you at the grocery store… for two days, they'd be calling and knocking on your door. (Lillian, Returnee)

Consistent with the other mobility groups, Returnees understood the advantages

and disadvantages of being known. Olivia expresses that advantages and disadvantage

often coexist:

It's a good community, everybody looks out for each other, and there's the good and the bad of that, because everybody knows you, and sometimes people know things about me before I even, or [it] may or may not be true (Olivia, Returnee)

Allen expresses an alleviation of stress being in a place where he is known, and he

knows others:

I guess around new people sometimes I feel little out of place… so it takes me a while to warm up to people and so being back here [Silver City] I don't really have to warm up to people because I already know them in some way shape or form. So for me that makes my life a little bit less stressful because I'm not worried about whom I going to meet today, or, so when I say comfortable that's kind of what I'm thinking, I'm not stressing out about [it]. (Allen, Returnee)

Lillian's husband experienced an advantage of being known in ways that were

surprising to him. It is obvious that he was known to others without his awareness.

[My husband] went to this little grocery store… and he was getting ready to pay and he didn't have enough cash and he didn't have the credit card with him and [store owner] goes, "Oh well, just open an account." And [husband] said, "What?" And [store owner] said, "Yeah, just open an account… And [husband] said, "You don't even know me." And he said, "Yeah, I know, but you're married to an [wife's maiden name] So, it's okay." And the same thing happened at the little hardware store. [My

husband] couldn't believe that... He said, "I can't imagine going to a store in [large metro city] and buying a bunch of lumber and them telling me to drive off that they'll send me a bill later. (Lillian, Returnee)

The nuance of intergenerational recognition was discussed by the other mobility groups as a part of what it means to be known. Returnees, Olivia and Isabelle, provide insights into how intergenerational recognition relates to what it means to be known.

You may not necessarily know that person, but you know their family, and that doesn't necessarily mean that they're like their family, but at least you have some connection, and just by knowing something about the person and where they come from, you feel like you know, at least a little bit about them, and I think that does lend some responsibility in some way. It's not like a total stranger, where you really may not feel like you have any responsibility at all for them, other than just humankind. (Olivia, Returnee)

I had the one protection of being a [last name] and then I had the other protection, especially on the school bus of that's ... You know who her big brother is… You know who somebody is before you meet them, because of who their people are… Whenever I talk to my friends and they're like, "How you people? Who you people?" Here, that's the question, the first question. (Isabelle, Returnee)

Lillian's husband again was identified in the community through intergenerational recognition after joining a men's social club in Copper County. His introduction did not go as Lillian expected:

I said, "Well, how did [they] introduce you? Did they say this is Lillian's husband from [another state]?" And he said, "Well, no. Actually, I got introduced as the guy that *John Doe's** daughter married… So, the name Lillian... I mean, that really put me in my place, but the name Lillian didn't even come up. (Lillian, Returnee) * *John Doe is a pseudonym for a previous city official of Silver City*.

An interesting commonality among all mobility patterns was discussing the grocery store as the community setting which challenged the balance between being known versus anonymity. Leavers, Donna, Nancy, and Willow, show their tendency towards anonymity, but at times still enjoy being known.

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When we go to Silver City and if someone needs to run to the grocery store or something, we're just like, "Oh, I don't want to see everyone I went to high school with. I don't want to go, you go." And here it's like we can choose to go to just a part of town that's 10 minutes away and we probably won't see anyone we know. And that's kind of like what you want sometimes… We still run into people that we know in public and that's comforting too in its own way. (Donna, Leaver)

I haven't lived there since 1986 [but] I'm going to run into somebody I know… and I just love that, like chatting with people, so I think that's what it is for me, that sense of community. (Nancy, Leaver)

That's another thing I like about the big city is the anonymity. I can go looking like this to the grocery store and nobody is going to say, "God, why didn't [she] style her hair?" Of course, nobody would fuss. Nobody's going to notice if you have on lipstick, nobody would mind… it's just a whole lot different in the city. (Willow, Leaver)

For Stayers, they lean towards being known and see the grocery store as a setting where they practice being known and knowing others as a way to foster sense of community and relationships.

You go to the grocery store, you see all kind of people you know, the people you went to school with... Or your friends that you graduated with, you see their kids… you know everybody, but then that's a plus and a minus because everybody knows everybody, so if anything happens or anything, gossip spreads pretty quick. (Luke, Stayer)

I like going in the grocery store and I like walking the aisles and I like speaking to people and bumping into them and asking them how their family is. Not gossip, but just learning (Henry, Stayer)

Like meeting someone in the grocery store that I've known for years, or if it's their daughter or son or something, you have something to talk about, you have the connection. (Iris, Stayer)

Sometimes you run into people that you haven't seen in a while and stay and chitchat for 10, 15 minutes. Like you're in a grocery store, you'll have people standing up talking in the grocery store and you have to go around them. (Sean, Stayer)

Returnees have experienced the advantages and disadvantages of being known in the rural community and more anonymity when living away and in larger cities. Meg discusses having a conflicted relationship with being recognized at the grocery store:

I still enjoy anonymity, but I don't have that here really…Sometimes when you go to the grocery store here in Silver City, you don't feel like talking to everybody you walk past. We always joke… now that we're all wearing masks, I pretend like I don't know who anybody is, because I don't feel like after a day of work and communicating all day long, I don't feel like doing that. (Meg, Returnee)

Being known versus anonymity is a tension that each participant grappled with in relation to their mobility decisions. Being known provided connection and comfort while anonymity provided freedom from expectations, independence, and autonomy. Leavers tended to value anonymity more, while Stayers typically valued being known. Returnees discussed the advantages and disadvantages of each experience of the tension. Although participants in each mobility decision had their own preferences, they understood the advantages and disadvantages of both. Being known and anonymity are aspects of interpersonal relationships that arise from proximity or distance to others, relational and emotional connection, and being recognized by others. The predominant theories of mobility typically explore physical proximity or distance in relationships, but these findings suggest there is more complexity in the interplay between proximity and distance with interpersonal relationships that influence mobility decisions.

Centrality of Relationship. The third major theme is centrality of relationship. The common thread of relationship was prevalent throughout the interviews. It was interwoven into the reasons for mobility decisions, the way someone experienced a place, and factors that contribute to or diminish well-being. It was incorporated into what people want for their futures and the futures of their loved ones, the lessons they have learned in life, their special memories, and their fears. The thread of relationship was in every aspect of life, so naturally, mobility decisions were also deeply influenced by relationship.

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The conceptual definition of relationship in this study is a person's sense of emotional bond with another that occurs under a variety of conditions. That sense of bond is reciprocated by another or multiple others, to create a mutually shared experienced that is characterized by varying degrees of emotional closeness or distance, connection and disconnection. This conception of relationship including the desire for connection and coping with disconnection can be seen across all mobility types. However, each mobility group has multiple unique insights that build a depth of understanding of relationships. Many attribute these insights to their mobility decisions.

Stayers. Participants who stayed in Copper County were deeply invested in their relationships, with family, friends, and the community. They discuss how place is intricately tied to relationships, how proximity or distance requires changes in how you maintain relationships, and the temporal aspects of relationships.

Henry, believes that his relationships have been directly tied to his mobility decision to stay in Copper County.

> I believe that because of where I live and the things that I were exposed to
> and the people that impacted my life, whether it be schoolteachers or
> preachers or friends or uncles or aunts or whomever, helped me get to
> where I wanted to be. And where I wanted to be was right here in Copper
> County. (Henry, Stayer)

Kim has no intention of moving away from Copper County and is deeply invested in her relationships there, but she explains how proximity or distance challenges the navigation of relationships. This was also examined as an element of intentionality in relationships.

> I would hate to lose regular contact with those people that I am close to,
> and I feel like if you separate yourself physically it does become harder
> to… give those relationships maintenance. (Kim, Stayer)

Henry believes that positive connections in good relationships are intricately

linked with place:

> If you really don't spend that quality time with a person, you really don't
> know that person. If you have those opportunities for a friend to share with
> you, maybe something that's uncomfortable… you can't develop a
> meaningful relationship or a friendship unless you spend that time
> together. And I think because of the area that I live in, I have that. I don't
> have those other distractions that keep me away from being able to have
> friends… Those things… are the important things in life. Meaningful
> relationships. You've got to put forth effort to have a meaningful
> relationship. (Henry, Stayer)

Another nuance is that connections and relationships are formed from extended

periods of time in places. Luke explains that even casual encounters with people in public

are enhanced and meaningful when there is a known relationship or connection to them.

> You went to school with the people who now run the restaurants. You
> know they're good people... They're honest, hardworking people. It's just a
> whole different mindset here. The way I picture it, you live in a big city,
> you ...You're going to go out to eat. You're not going to know anybody in
> there…You're not going to know anything about the waitresses. You're not
> going to know anything about the owner. It's just going to be business as
> usual. I don't know. It's not going to be the same connection. (Luke,
> Stayer)

Kelly echoes the same sentiment as the previous two Stayers with an explanation

of how extended periods of time in the same place set the conditions for deeper

relationships.

> I think when you have more history with people, you have a deeper level
> of friendship, a different level than, say, somebody that I've only known
> for a couple of years. You've got more loyalty with that person... You've
> done more with that person. They've been through more with me and I've
> been through more with them. (Kelly, Stayer)

Returnees. Returnees had multiple insights on how relationships were intricately

tied to their mobility decisions. They valued relationships just as much as Stayers, but

they have had many disruptions of relationship due to moving. It was the disruptions that

allowed them to formulate deep values about relationships. Tim believed he formed deep

connections with people while living in other places but was missing out on his family

relationships, and this was one of many reasons he chose to move back.

> It was other people had their families in their life while I felt I was missing
> out on my own family and my own life. So that sense of trying to be a part
> of someone else's life. It's nice. It's a blessing… to at least get to know
> them and know that I could share some moments in time with them. But
> again, there's things that are going on in my own family and my own
> home. And I'm missing those, so it's that sacrifice… you have to realize
> that if you move away… you're probably going to be missing out on your
> own thing. So that was kind of that sense of, not belonging. It wasn't really
> mine… (Tim, Returnee)

Isabelle had not formed relationships with some of her extended family prior to

moving away. After returning she found those connections to be a rich source of

fulfillment and learned about what it meant to grow older.

> Leaving I didn't really know, [most of my aunts] really well…so coming
> back and getting to know them, it was fun, my aunt…I would take her to
> [mid-sized city], a trip to the doctor, and then we would go out to lunch,
> and we would talk and she became a human, not some weird old lady that
> scared us all…when they became human it kind of opened me up to the
> possibilities that old age is about… you can have fun and you know, your
> attitude is everything… they were kind of a master class and in graceful
> aging. (Isabelle, Returnee)

Nicole had moved many times and had developed clear ideas about the value of

location versus relationships. Not only were relationships considered during mobility

decisions, but relationships were prized above all else.

> I mean, places don't make you happy, people do. And that's something
> that... Because I'd be like, "Oh, this place just sucks. Let me go somewhere
> else." But it's not the place, it's what you do, who you hang around with
> and the things that make you feel whole…. I realized out of all the places
> and all the things, all I thought about were the people that were there….
> Everywhere I went, I've met people that are my family, that would be the
> people that I would call, who I'd spend holidays with. And I think that
> everything comes back to people. I think we're blessed so that we can

bless others. We go through crap to help other people, either prevent them from doing it or help them get through it, but that's a top for me. Human interactions…it's necessary and everybody seeks that and they need that, and places don't give you that. (Nicole, Returnee)

Some Returnees believed that positive relationships were a draw to return and

possibly that poor relationships could be a deterrent for some people to return.

If I didn't have a good relationship with my family here, especially my dad, that wouldn't have even been a consideration to come back here to work. Obviously, that was a big deal. [This is made in the context that she took over her father's practice]. (Olivia, Returnee)

Honestly most people that have left Copper County haven't really come back… I really think that the folks come back, it's because they have strong families ties and they had a really good childhood here. Whereas a lot of folks… [who] didn't have a really good childhood they didn't have a lot of support, and so they don't want to come back. So, I think for the most part the people who come back it's because they feel comfortable here and have a support group. (Allen, Returnee)

Allen also expressed that relationships are not just experienced on a one-to one or

familial level, they incorporate broader social levels such as community or county.

I remember one of the biggest things that really stuck out to me was, community, sense of community and networks, support, people who I felt understood me, or felt I could trust and go to. Definitely one of the biggest impacts of what I felt I was missing, or I needed while I was away. I would say community is number one. (Allen, Returnee)

Trisha spoke about her neighbor's reactions after she returned. This adds to the

concept because, by definition, relationships are mutually experienced. There are other

people reacting to the disruption of relationships caused by mobility. A For Sale sign had

been on her family's property for a long time, this was the neighbor's reaction when the

sign came down.

When it [the sign] went down, they knew that one of us was coming back, they were delighted. They used to tell me that, "It's just like our family is back.". (Trisha, Returnee)

Leavers. Participants who left explained other important aspects of relationships that were intertwined with mobility, negotiating disconnection and efforts that were required to intentionally build relationships. Donna spoke about intentionality in her relationships in the seeking intimacy subsection of psychosocial developmental. Here she expands on those ideas more broadly as it relates to crafting relationships.

> It's hard for me to… foster intentional deep relationships because I think for so many years I just leaned on my sisters and we knew each other because we lived in the same house for so long. Everyone around you… you're very familiar with them but maybe you don't know them as well as you could. (Donna, Leaver)

Donna had to place additional efforts to crafting relationships in her new location when familiarity could not be relied upon.

> Weeks would go by and I wouldn't have initiated hanging out with anyone that I'd met… Everyone else has their own family, career, and everything else… it's just you have to at some degree decide that it's worth your time to put yourself through that discomfort and inconvenience to hopefully see friendships come to fruition. (Donna, Leaver)

Willow agrees with Donna that intentional effort need to be applied to create new relationships. She also states that in larger cities, more people does not always mean more connection.

> You have to go out and make your new world. And, of course, I've done that since I retired. I've done that through volunteerism… so, I have a great circle of friends, I really do… but that is the thing about the cities. [You're] surrounded by all of these people, you can still be lonely, but you have to make an effort to get out there. (Willow, Leaver)

Leavers also provided insight about managing disconnection in relationships. Donna shared that disconnection helped to establish family identity. Parts of her discussion were in the identity formation section of psychosocial development. Here is an expanded version to explain more about disconnection in relationships:

> We could still keep our own family rhythms that we developed… since we were so far away. As hard as those years were, I think that they were so

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important in setting the foundation of us being our own family unit. So we knew that we wanted to… put a safeguard in that we wouldn't lose our own family identity and sense of unit… we had to lean on each other in unique ways that I feel like we wouldn't have to if we had had a broader support system… We have our little family micro traditions that happen every day. And I feel like a lot of it is because we were…just not very connected for a while. (Donna, Leaver)

Just as the other mobility groups expressed, relationships involve multiple social levels. Yvette discusses family and community relationships. Both levels were vital to her and her family in the face of hardship. The last half of her statement was also examined in the generativity subsection of psychosocial development.

By then, [my son] had had his accident… We had the support of the community. We had the support of my entire family. If we needed my dad to come over and sit with [him] because I had to do something else. There was just people all around that could help us with him. When we came home, our community had come together and actually completely remodeled our home so that he could come home to a beautiful renovated, accessible home. I don't even know if that would happen in [another city she now resides in], so I love Copper County. I love the people of Copper County, and I can't say enough about community. (Yvette, Leaver)

Many of the relational experiences in this section also applied to specific stages of psychosocial development. Those stages incorporate intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics that are conceptually connected with the centrality of relationship. Further analysis of the three major themes, psychosocial development, being known versus anonymity, and centrality of relationship, suggest more integration of the themes. For example, there are developmental aspects of building, maintaining, and concluding relationships. Driving towards authentic connection and managing disconnections are linked to the tension of being known versus anonymity. Additionally, the advantages and disadvantages of being known versus anonymity are expected to be experienced differently across the lifetime, linking the tension to psychosocial development.

Altogether, the three themes detail integrated intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of mobility decisions.

There are multiple reasons that individuals negotiate in their mobility decisions. Many of these reasons are reflected in the predominant mobility theories. The findings suggest that psychosocial development, the tension of being known versus anonymity, and the centrality of relationship are additional reasons considered in mobility decisions that contribute to the literature. A question that arises from examining the reasons for mobility is how people negotiate those reasons. This is precisely the second research question of this study.

Research Question 2 - How do they negotiate those reasons in making decisions about mobility?

Mobility is very individualized. Everyone is negotiating different opportunities, challenges, desires, and obligations. People are constantly weighing pragmatic, perceptual, and sometimes existential reasons for their mobility choices. Amidst that highly individualized process with multiple factors to negotiate, there appears to be a common process, iterative development. This means that experience builds over time and past experiences are continually reinterpreted in the present. With experience comes knowledge and meaning making, which also builds and informs the present. Individuals negotiate their reasons for mobility in a developmentally iterative manner, with the knowledge and meaning making they have accrued in life.

This first example comes from Chris who stayed in Copper County. In multiple areas of the interview, he often returned to some of the same ideas. When he reflected on

his young adult years, he recognized that he was fearful of things he didn't know, that

uncertainty was difficult for him as a young man.

> At a time when I would've left… I was probably too scared to take that risk. So now that I'm in a place where I could leave, our relationships probably, with friends and family kind of keep us here. (Chris, Stayer)

Chris continued to explain what made moving risky.

> Probably fear of the unknown, honestly. Just because I hadn't seen... We would go on vacation to the beach for a week, or to the mountains, or something like that. But I just hadn't been in a culture… or seen another culture. It was probably honestly fear of the unknown. Probably just being uneducated about the world, really. (Chris, Stayer)

He also identified a turning point in his life where he was forced out of this

"comfort zone". He learned that he loved to travel and experience new cultures. In some

ways he felt this lesson came too late for him now that he was emotionally and

financially invested in his current place.

> We bought our home 11 years ago. So we've gradually, pretty much made it exactly like we wanted, to a tee… So it's kind of hard to walk away from that now…We're both established, we both have a pretty decent career at the moment, and it would be hard for us to both walk away and step into a job exactly where we are right now…I think our first international trip was right before we got married, so we'd never really been out the country until then. So, we hadn't experienced a lot of other cultures, and once we started traveling we were starting to set up our life here, so it just didn't work. But yeah, if we had experienced this probably at a younger age, then I don't know that we would've still been here. Because we both love to try new things… So now that I'm in a place where I could leave, our relationships probably, with friends and family kind of keep us here. (Chris, Stayer)

Chris and his partner plan to retire early and continue to travel. When discussing

the possibility of moving once retired he described his love for his home and the sense of

peace that it brings him, but now he chooses to stay, and has let go of fear of the

unknown.

This next example comes from a Stayer, Luke, who feels deeply embedded in Copper County. Throughout the interview he continued to return to three aspects of his life. He spoke about living in Copper County as a precious experience that he holds close to his heart. It came across that communicating the specialness of being in Copper County was very important to him, and a vital component to understanding him. At the same time, he was well aware of the opportunities that other places offer. He described multiple employment, relational, and recreational opportunities in specific places. He also spoke about his marriage and a difficult divorce that was very disruptive to his life and the lives of his children. He said it created and overwhelming amount of "drama".

> *(Interviewer) So, I think what you're telling me is opportunities can come with a cost.* "Yes, absolutely, and that cost is the things that you hold so dear right now, which is that peace, and trusting relationships, and being amongst like-minded people, basically all those things are at risk with greater opportunities. The bigger the pool gets, the more different fish are in there, you know?... I guess I said all that to say how I am. That's just why I want to be around people who think like me, because they don't want drama. They just enjoy the quiet life in the small town, and hanging out with family. That's who we are. That's who I am. (Luke, Stayer)

The iterative negotiation of these experiences resulted in him holding on to Copper County in a way that he believed buffered him against other potential emotionally painful experiences. He interpreted that those opportunities come with too high a cost.

> I know what my values are. I know what's important to me. I'm not going to pretend that they're not just to fit in or get the attention of somebody else. I'm not doing that… I guess a lot of that comes with the trauma [from a marriage and divorce]. Between that and just the natural getting older, slowing down ... I don't know if we become wiser or whatever… things that used to be important aren't as important anymore, and your priorities shift. My priorities now are my family, my kids, my mom, and my peace. (Luke, Stayer)

Nicole, a Returnee, made a very powerful statement about her iterative journey to understanding her "self" in relation to place. It comes in the context of her describing the

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many places she has lived and the difficult, sometimes traumatic, experiences she has endured. Each move was an attempt to move forward in life with healthy relationships and positive experiences. She was well acquainted with loss, grief, disappointments, and heartache. She returned home to Copper County to assist with the family business. This was a difficult decision to make given the conflicted relationships she had with family and previous estrangement in some of those relationships. Her family had cut ties with her when she was a young adult after learning about her sexuality. Her iterative process of negotiating mobility with identity and trauma came down to a moving statement.

> And I've been a lot of places and if I've realized anything... if there's anything that I've learned being in multiple places... I follow myself wherever I go, I can't run away from me. (Nicole, Returnee)

> Olivia, a Returnee, moved away from Copper County for college and then graduate school. She later returned as a professional and married someone who worked in the same field. It was the act of returning as a mature person with a partner and a career that changed how she engaged in the community and how she felt about herself. This suggests an iterative developmental process of intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of life and mobility.

> I guess I had changed a good bit. When I left here, I was very quiet, very reserved, kept to myself pretty much. I had close friends, but I was not an outgoing person at all… but college and [graduate] school, all that forced me to mature somewhat in that arena, because I would have never done this [the interview], Never... I prefer to keep to myself. So, I had grown a lot that way, so I had a lot more confidence, I think when I came back here than when I left. And coming back as a [professional] instead of just a kid, that was different. (Olivia, Returnee)

Another Returnee, Lillian, discusses how her development made her value aspects of Copper County that she did not value when she was young.

It's funny, but the things that I hated about this little town when I was 18
are things that attracted me to it in my '50s. (Lillian, Returnee)

Lillian returned to Copper County after spending many years in another state and

raising her children there. Since her return she has been very engaged in the community

with various social organizations and owning a local business. Her observations about

what it means to grow older have changed over time and influence how she values this

community, which extends to her mobility decisions.

And if you got old in [city in another state]… You'd have to hire a
caretaker… The chances of getting old in my house are a lot better here
than they would be in [city in another state]. The year I turned 65, I broke
my ankle in three places. It was very hard... I couldn't put weight on my
ankle for six weeks. And I mean, I have a husband, but there were still all
these people who wanted to take care of us and brought food…but it was
just amazing how many people came to check on me. People that I didn't
even think I was as close friends. And that kind of thing wouldn't happen
in [city in another state]. Like I said, there were a couple of friends …that
live way far away...They would not be coming by every day. They might
be calling every day to check on me, but anyway, that kind of thing.
(Lillian, Returnee)

Aging in Copper County was a concern shared by many that stayed or returned to

the county. This concept is linked to the iterative developmental process of negotiating

mobility decisions. A Returnee, Isabelle, was also looking forward to aging in Copper

County.

You know, but I'm 20 years in now and I'm figuring it out (laughing) it's
a process and I'm looking forward to being an old lady here. (Isabelle,
Returnee)

Isabelle returned in part to build relationships with extended family members. She

grappled with solidifying her identity and believed that returning to discover her roots

would provide a foundation she felt was missing. She went on to explain she learned so

much about herself and enjoyed life very much by caring for her aging aunts after her

return. She looked forward to developing close relationships with her younger cousins to continue those same types of familial bonds, and to then be on the receiving end of care from younger generations.

> All these old ladies were just, I mean… when they became human it kind of opened me up to the possibilities that old age is about… you can get away with a lot (laughing)… you can have fun and your attitude is everything and… they were kind of a master class and in graceful aging. (Isabelle, Returnee)

Her iterative developmental process after returning was more complex than realizing the joys of aging around family.

> Enough time has you know [elapsed] you find things out… you piece together stuff, and you realize oh yeah my life at 14 is not exactly my life at 56. (Isabelle, Returnee)

She experienced some heartache after losing a friend from youth and grappled with what it meant to return to a place.

> I do think there was a go big or go home [moment], and [an] element of when all else fails, you can always come back to the farm. Growing up, that was such a sign of failure. Even when it was presented to me, it was like, "well, you can always come back to the farm or married"… there's always that safe, non-challenging piece where you can just give in to the inertia of the farm and come here. There's a piece of my brain that's like, is this a failure? Am I wrong? Should I not be here? Should have I given it more of a chance?... I know a lot of people think that's a copout. Maybe it is… but it was what I needed to do at the time. I don't think it's a failure. I guess I did judge it or I have judged it. Or every now and then, at 3:00 in the morning, what am I doing? I judge it. I also think, for whatever reason, here I am, and this is what I'm doing. This is what I did. It's where I need to be now. (Isabelle, Returnee)

Yvette, Leaver, was previously discussed in terms of the centrality of relationship and observations of generativity. She and her family experienced tremendous support from the community in Copper County after her son had a debilitating accident. They

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primarily moved to support a growing business, and she found that move to be very difficult. She had delayed the decision when the rest of her family was in favor of moving. Her hesitancy was in part due to her ties to the people in the community, her attachment to the home and land where they lived.

> So I had a mourning period for about three months where I really did cry.
> and it was really hard. (Yvette, Leaver)

After considerable reflection, time, grieving, and leaning on her faith, she came to the following conclusion.

> Home is where your family is, and we've made another home. We built
> this home (Yvette, Leaver)

This iterative developmental process informs the way she thinks about her mobility now. It informs her sense of place and the value of her family.

Although each of these participants have unique stories and circumstances, they all come to their mobility decisions, imagine future mobility decisions, and reflect on past mobility through an iterative process. This process is developmental in nature because they are continuously reinterpreting their past experiences and incorporating new insights, values, knowledge, meanings, and an evolving sense of "self".

The major theme of iterative developmental process highlights three important concepts in the findings. One, the concept of temporality in mobility. When individuals negotiate their mobility decisions, they are referencing their entire lives, not just the present moment. Two, the iterative developmental process in mobility arises from a holistic understanding of a person's mobility story. Three, there is personal growth and development implied in this process. These three concepts are unique contributions. Not attending to issues of temporality was identified as a limitation in recent literature.

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Focusing on individual aspects of mobility reasons through in-depth interviews assisted in a more holistic view of individual's mobility experiences. Additionally, development is a concept that consistently appears in the findings. Further discussion of these findings and where they are situated in the literature is in chapter 5. The next research question inquires if there is a relationship between certain mobility patterns and better or worse perceived well-being.

Research Question 3 - What are the relationships among mobility decisions and perceived well-being for rural Southeastern natives?

Participants across all mobility groups shared general definitions of well-being. Those concepts included physical and mental health, spirituality, sense of safety, and behaviors that are synonymous with self-care such as good nutrition, exercise, being outdoors, getting sufficient sleep, and having some time for relaxation. There were affective concepts relating to moods or attitudes such as "having peace of mind", a lack of worry, contentedness or satisfaction in life and with oneself. There were notions of resilience and being able to "weather life's difficulties". Relational definitions were expressed that well-being should include good and caring relationships, positive connections with others, and sense of belonging. Despite the consensus across mobility groups about the general definition of well-being, there were nuances in each mobility group about what contributed to and what diminished their well-being.

Stayers

Stayers emphatically believe that living in Copper County contributes to their well-being. In most cases they also deny there are any diminishing experiences to their

well-being. Their expressions of what contributes to their well-being are categorized in three groups, relational, environmental, and affective themes.

The relational experiences include, feeling cared for, being supported by the community, being in a place where people stop by frequently, the ability to help others, and trust built in commerce relationships. Brittany and Hannah exemplify some of the relational well-being expressions:

> I have to go back to the people. It really does help your mental health so much to know that there are so many people who care about you. There are so many people who think about you. (Brittany, Stayer)

> But there have been people in this community, I mean, that… I'm not necessarily friends with and not my family… who have supported me or made a comment about, "I'm supporting you. I'm so glad that you did this." And it's like, "Really? Wow, I don't even know you." But… they're all from Silver City. That's just one example of how people lift. You don't even ask for it. You don't have to ask for the support. People just do. So that's how my wellbeing stays supported. (Hannah, Stayer)

The environmental aspects that contributed to Stayers' well-being were being outdoors which provided enjoyment and mental clarity, and having proximity to beaches, mountains, and even large cities. Here, Chris explains that time outdoors brings him mental clarity:

> I think it would contribute by just the amount of outdoor time… Other people might not like being outdoors, but for me it definitely helps give me mental clarity for sure. So with being here and still having family farms and stuff like that, that we can go to, we spend a ton of time outside. (Chris, Stayer)

Affectively related expressions of contributions to Stayer's well-being included, feeling a sense of pride in the county, feeling content and complete, having plenty of leisure time and fulfilling activities, peace, tranquility, no stress, and a good work-life balance.

> I live in the country, it's so peaceful out here, it's tranquil, and my
> wellbeing is paramount. (Luke, Stayer)

Luke continues with a statement that was similar across the Stayer mobility

group.

> My wellbeing is measured on a zero-stress level, and a peaceful life, and
> surrounding myself with people who I care about and who care about me.
> So that is the good. (Luke, Stayer)

Stayers predominantly reported that their well-being was not diminished at all in

Copper County.

> I don't think there's really a whole lot of downsides for us. (Chris, Stayer)

> I wouldn't say it diminishes by nothing. It don't diminish it [well-being]. It
> don't. (Sean, Stayer)

A few Stayers reported experiences such as gossip, lack of the arts

such as live music, or distance to more organic or specialty foods as

diminishing factors to well-being. Kelly and Iris provide two of those

examples.

> Gossip. I mean, that's the only thing that I can think of but, I mean, it
> doesn't really diminish mine. I mean, that's the only negative thing that I
> can even think about. (Kelly, Stayer)

> I would like to be able to participate in more art things, more music things.
> We go out of town for that pretty much now. (Iris, Stayer)

Returnees

Participants who returned reported similar well-being experiences as Stayers.

Relational, environmental, and affective categories were evident. This included feeling

supported by others, having leisure time, having fulfilling social activities, outdoor

activities, peace of mind, and no stress. Olivia spoke about relational, environmental and affective aspects of well-being:

> I think it [living in Copper County] contributes a sense of community and support, even outside my immediate circle, for sure. It is a good, safe place to exercise or workout. If you want to go out and run, you don't have to be afraid to do so… I feel safe in my home, that definitely contributes to your wellbeing and peace of mind. (Olivia, Returnee)

Two additional concepts emerged that provided complexity to well-being, comparisons and coexistence. Experiences that contributed or diminished their well-being were framed as comparisons to the places they have lived before. For example, having more financial stability due to a lower cost of living, a slower pace of life, feeling safer, being able to choose your friends instead of just having friendships with co-workers, and having no traffic allows for more leisure time and activities.

> Cost of living [is] so cheap. We're able to save more and being that's something that's important to me…As far as with my health… I'd much rather exercise outside. I love being outside when the weather's nice… because I love to go run, walk, ride my road bike. (Paula, Returnee)

> We eat from the garden. That definitely added a lot to my wellbeing… I mentioned before that peace, that calmness… I honestly sometimes feel like I'm one of the luckiest people in the world because I have it. I have peace. (Tim, Returnee)

> I think living in [Copper County] is… stress-free. Stress can be bad and this really is... It's not stressful. (Trisha, Returnee)

The contributing experiences from other places they lived were primarily focused on personal growth. For example, they improved their worldview, they learned a lot about diversity, and improved their confidence from starting a career.

> I wouldn't trade it [living away] for anything in the world, because it certainly helped alter my worldview (Kevin, Returnee)

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[Another state] really… educated me, as far as diversity goes. (Lillian, Returnee)

My wellbeing was influenced in [another state] by my mental wellbeing, my skill sets… being just thrown into the deep end… I really felt I was awoken and just enlightened and could see things (Tim, Returnee)

The other concept that emerged from Returnees was coexistence, that contributing and diminishing factors can coexist as the same time in the same place. Allen discusses how the Copper County community is so connected that it is hard to find time to be alone.

They can do both at times… anywhere can do both times, but I think having a good support group here and having people I can depend on makes my life a little bit less stressful, most of the time. And then I feel like also at times when you want to get away and you want to kind of want to be hidden for a while it's kind of impossible, so it does both. (Allen, Returnee)

Kevin also points out the coexistence paradox.

I'm not going to meet somebody that I'm going to fall in love with when I'm walking around in the woods. (Kevin, Returnee)

Lillian experienced the contribution of social activities and friendships, but also felt something missing at the same time.

Sometimes I miss having an intellectual conversation. That's another thing about a small town. The conversation will revolve around how the kids' football game went last night, or it used to be, "How's Mama doing," but now it's, "How are you doing?" I mean, we joke, who's ailing with what? Sometimes I just want to say, "You know, there are definitely other things to talk about." (Lillian, Returnee)

Additional experiences that diminished Returnee well-being were not fitting into the two predominant religious institutions in Copper County, Baptist and Methodist, and having few mental health resources.

> I'm not going to go to the Baptist Church, I'm not going to go to the Methodist Church… that does not mean that I'm not exploring the spiritual nature or a deeper meaning… (Isabelle, Returnee)

When reflecting on the experiences that diminished their well-being in other places they lived, they reported difficulty building friendships and closeness, traffic, that apartment living felt confining, lack of privacy, and no organic nature.

Tim discusses the coexistence of contributing and diminishing aspects of wellbeing and explained the relational aspects that were diminished while living away.

> It definitely helped my wellbeing in that sense [living away], but I felt like on the same side of the coin, I saw a lot of things and experienced a lot of things alone, just out there in the world where I had to form or build new relationships. I didn't know anyone. I just moved out and literally knew not one person, so it definitely took away from my wellbeing as far as relationships and connections. (Tim, Returnee)

Trisha was one of many participants who discussed city traffic as a diminishing factor to her well-being while also making the comparison between living away and living in Copper County.

> I think in [large metro city] it was the traffic. Having an appointment, trying to get there, not knowing how much time to allow. And that's one of the stress things here is we don't have any traffic. There's never any traffic. (Trisha, Returnee)

Environmental comparisons extended to housing options.

> I strongly disliked living in an apartment. I don't know if that's because … I grew up on a bunch of land like farms… I felt like in [other city]… it

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was a concrete hill…I felt like I didn't have my privacy. I didn't really have my space. (Paula, Returnee)

Leavers

When Stayers and Returnees reflected on living in Copper County and the experiences that contributed to their well-being, expressions were generally categorized in relational, environmental, and affective themes. When Leavers reflected on what contributed to their well-being when they used to live in Copper County most of the expressions focused on family or community relationships. They discussed the connection with family, showing their family and children important places from where they grew up, having a great, easy, and simple childhood, not having stress while growing up, and having good values imparted in childhood. Candice and Donna provide two familial examples:

> I think family... is super great, important… I always leave feeling really emotionally full… there's just that comfort and connection that you feel…in that way, I think that is really a positive for my wellbeing. (Candice, Leaver)

> The enjoyment comes from sharing different places there with [my husband and children] that I grew up around or has been there for decades. I get to like show them this thing, place… it's just good to share those places and experiences with the people that you love. (Donna, Leaver)

Community relational well-being experiences included strong social supports, the strength of relationships, the close-knit nature of the community, the community support during tragedy, their spirituality was supported, and the joy of running into people they once knew.

> It [living in Copper County] fed my spiritual side very much…. being able to have a weekly, if not more, interaction, face-to-face interaction with some of those really important people helped tremendously…. It was a

very simple life, simple lifestyle, and that contrasted with my [corporate] life, which was "go, go, go," high stress"… it was a ... perfect place for grounding. I could just de-stress very easily there. (Emily, Leaver)

I would for sure say the relationships. Whether it's with my family or my friends that I've grown up with. (Nina, Leaver)

When Leavers spoke about the contributing experiences to their well-being in the other places they now live, responses were primarily focused on amenities. Candice and Sam discuss being able to buy organic and natural products as an important amenity:

There's a local health food store… There's lots of like the farmers' market, the grocery stores, places that support the way that we like to eat and take care of our bodies. (Candice, Leaver)

I would say contributing to my wellbeing is it has a lot of natural products like grass-fed meat products… I can go to… Sprouts, I can go to Whole Foods… When I'm in Copper County… I'm not eating a lot because they don't have those same products, those organic products that I use to cook with. (Sam, Leaver)

Donna and Nina discuss environmental well-being amenities with access to a variety of outdoor activities and living in a dog-friendly city.

There's a lot of opportunities to be outside, which is really important for all the people who live in our house. We all really enjoy and get a significant sense of health from being outside... the beach trails, the creeks, anything. (Donna, Leaver)

We usually go hiking and take our dog, or go to a lake nearby and play with him in the water. (Nina, Leaver)

Marjorie was one of a few Leavers who spoke about cultural amenities such as the arts, symphony, and musicals.

Mainly the fact that we found it as easy as we did to do things like see a Broadway play… we have the good arts center… Our symphony has been first rate. We've… brought in speakers all over the world, and that has been very stimulating. (Marjorie, Leaver)

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Access to specialty medical services beyond general practitioners was also important.

> Medical care? Phenomenal… I've got great physicians, great physical therapists… it was one of the biggest benefits of moving here, was just having access to that without driving an hour or more. (Emily, Leaver)

Yvette is very connected to her faith. She found that her spiritual well-being was greatly enhanced in her new city. She goes into detail about what that contributed to her well-being.

> Spiritual well-being, I think prior to going into [current church], which is a non-denominational church… I just feel like I missed out on a lot spiritually in Copper County, because I went to a Baptist church mostly, and it was a lot of curriculums type things. It wasn't shepherding people. It wasn't discipling people. It wasn't teaching us the Word, and what we're supposed to do with the Word, and how to live. I don't know. I'm sad that I didn't get that until I moved to [a mid-sized city]. (Yvette, Leaver)

For Leavers, the aspects that diminished their well-being in Copper County were directly tied to the experiences they sought out to enhance their well-being in their new locations. Diminishing experiences were a lack of organic foods, an abundance of processed and unhealthy foods, having only two main churches to attend, few social opportunities for young families, and a greater distance to specialty physicians.

Candice previous discussed how the organic grocery amenities contributed to her well-being in her new location. She contrasts that statement with her experience from Copper County.

> It's really important the food that we eat and what I feed my family, and that is so not a priority for my parents [who live in Copper County], at all. They just eat a lot of processed things, and they don't care about organic things and...My parents, when they come here, they think I'm absolutely

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insane for choosing certain things organic or looking at the quality of
meat. (Candice, Leaver)

Candice, like Yvette found spiritual well-being to be diminished in Copper county

and greatly enhanced in their new locations.

> Obviously, there's lots of churches, but they're kind of all the same type of
> church [in Copper County]. Like our church here, our church is amazing,
> but just what it offers even for young families, there's not really anything
> like that in Silver City. (Candice, Leaver)

Emily spoke about the contribution of the medical services in her new location,

but when compared to her explanation of how her and her husband's well-being was

greatly diminished in Copper County the gravity of the situation is illuminated.

> But it's the medical side of well-being. So we struggled a little bit because
> [my husband] had kidney disease. He went on dialysis and needed a
> transplant… and it meant we had to drive great distances to get to where
> our doctors were that knew our cases or to the ones that had the expertise.
> It lacked a lot there [in Copper County], but I will say the physicians who
> were there went above and beyond. Yeah, but that was a big of a
> challenge, just because ... I can't tell you how many times we had to drive
> back and forth to [city three hours away] because that's where the
> transplant clinic was where he had to go every week and then every two
> weeks, and then every month, and eventually it was every six months, but
> that was a lot of stress on us to have to go that far to have that kind of
> support for the transplant. (Emily, Leaver)

Leaver's diminishing experiences of the places they now live echo the relational

and environmental themes that Returnees had in other locations. Diminishing relational

experiences were the lack of support and feeling less connected.

> I think emotionally, it can be harder here because of the lack of support.
> (Candice, Leaver)

> We have to be really intentional about as far as finding our own
> community and building up friendships from scratch… Learning how to
> like make a friend and be a friend and there's no familiarity to depend on
> because everything is brand new… It maybe diminishes it because it is

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hard, and there is a season where you don't have a lot of friends, and you don't have that network. So, you're trying to build that up, that can be lonely, and take a long time really. (Donna, Leaver)

I'm not as involved with my family, like going to ball games and seeing them at church. I miss that…. I'm a little bit disconnected from my family in that way, and friends. If I was in Copper County, I'd probably be going to ball games sometimes with my girlfriends that had grandchildren out there playing ball. (Yvette, Leaver)

The lack of connection included family and friends, but also spiritual support community.

Spiritually in terms of the church…It's not the same feeling…I don't feel like I am committed in the same way that I was [in Copper County]… that is a core part of me, growing up with a grandfather who was a pastor. It's just a core part of me… That's a big, big gap in my life right now and I feel the hole. (Emily, Leaver)

Emily continues to discuss that lack of connection and support can be worrisome in times of emergency.

I've got a broader range [of things to do in larger city]. I'm just doing them by myself, which is the downside to it, but I have nobody here… I have my girlfriends, and my son once in a while, but it's not the same as having your whole core family surrounded by all of this lifelong friend group… that was ... something that would catch you if you fall or something you could rejoice in something good, or you could be there if they lost a family member and be able to hug and support them… That part is really not good for me… my best friend, who doesn't live that far from me, I know she would do anything for me, but she can't be the one making medical decisions for me if something happens. (Emily, Leaver)

A variety of diminishing experiences for well-being included environmental factors including cost of living, traffic, and water quality.

Well, it's kind of is expensive. (Donna, Leaver)

The only thing that we hear people complain about around here is traffic. But we always remind them that we came from an area where traffic started with a capital T. (Marjorie, Leaver)

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I'm a faucet drinker, so I don't drink [large city's] faucet water. But when I'm back home I can drink the faucet water. (Sam, Leaver)

Typically, people think of amenities and more activity options as an advantage or draw to a larger city. Nora made one comment that there are so many options of things to do, that it makes you feel like you are wasting time in life if you don't do them all.

There can just be stimulation overload sometimes… it's just way more fast-paced and it's easy to get lost in it… it kind of goes back to the thing of me feeling like I'm wasting time, because… there's so many things I could be doing. I can't pick anything. Like, I'm going to sit here. (Nora, Leaver)

Sense of Safety

Safety was a topic that consistently emerged when people spoke about their well-being. Most of the Stayers and Returnees spoke about their perceptions of being very safe in Copper County. The Returnees then contrasted that sense of safety to when they lived in other places and did not feel safe. People commonly think of urban areas and large cities as having significant crime, but only one Leaver spoke about her anxiety of feeling unsafe.

For Stayers feeling safe stemmed from the secluded or rural environment and knowing most of the people around them. Hannah speaks about feeling safe in Copper County:

Your well-being to me is safety. Your safe place. And if you feel comfortable in your surroundings… I feel safe in Silver City. I feel like Silver City has my back (Hannah, Stayer)

Chris speaks about the secluded nature that results in safety.

The majority of the time I leave my house unlocked. I leave the keys in
my vehicle… I'm the only one here sometimes… I live in a kind of
secluded area. (Chris, Stayer)

Chris continues to explain that knowing those around you make you feel more

protected.

Just being comfortable because I know so many people. I guess that's just
the sense of safety that I really don't think about, but probably 75% of the
people I see, I know. I at least know their name. Like, "That's so-and-so.
He lives right over there."… I guess that just gives you a sense of safety
that everybody... I don't think anybody's really going to bother you
because you know them, and you know where they live. (Chris, Stayer)

These Returnees spoke about safety as comparisons between Copper County and

places they used to live, which were both mid-sized cities. Meg first speaks about her

sense of safety in Copper County:

I am more thankful now that I'm here [in Silver City] than I probably ever
was before… we don't feel unsafe at any time… We don't have a lot of
crime, there's not a whole lot to steal (laughing) but we also all know each
other… just the peace of mind to know that if I walked down the street.
For example, and it was getting dark, I wouldn't be scared for my safety. If
my husband's out of town and it's just the girls and me at home, I'm not
scared of someone breaking in or anything like that. (Meg, Returnee)

Meg follows up by discussing the lack of safety she felt when she lived away in a

mid-sized city.

I definitely didn't feel safe you know if I were to walk my dog after dark
or that kind of thing [in mid-sized city]. There was a lot more violence
there was a lot more danger especially for a young woman, in fact… a girl
a law student very close to my age was murdered in her home… It was all
over the news, we were all scared… Previous to that in the neighborhood
where I lived, we had a serial rapist so there were definite specific threats I
guess you could say. (Meg, Returnee)

Olivia had contrasting statements as well, first her sense of safety in Copper County, followed by her lack of safety when living away.

> It is a good, safe place to exercise or workout [in Copper County]. If you want to go out and run, you don't have to be afraid to do so. (Olivia, Returnee)

> I had to definitely watch coming in and out of the school late at night [in mid-sized city], there was usually a security person around even if you had to walk to your car… I was always careful to try to have somebody around because the school was not in the greatest part of town. So, you really did have to be conscious of safety there and of course, lock your cars and lock your house. (Olivia, Returnee)

Nora, a Leaver, speaks about the prevalence in crime, and expresses she is anxious about her safety.

> Up here [in large metro city], anything you do there's like a higher chance there's going to be a lot of people there… I feel like I am more paranoid…Sometimes I'm spooked… but there's just so much going on sometimes, and I feel like I have anxiety. Not all the time, but I have anxiety that I never had before… that is one thing I did not ever have, even when I was back home [in Copper County]…I was not anxious, like I am here. (Nora, Leaver)

Participants across all groups of mobility decisions shared many concepts of well-being. When the participants reflected on how place is associated with their well-being, expressions were typically categorized as environmental, relational, and affective concepts of well-being as well as sense of safety. Comparisons between groups suggests that appraisal of well-being in a place is consistent with their mobility decisions. Stayers believed that their well-being was enhanced by living in Copper County and denied that there were any significant diminishing factors for their well-being. Returnees and Leavers could identify contributing and diminishing factors in multiple places. Returnees, as consistent with their mobility decisions, believed that living in Copper County

contributed more to their well-being than other places, and that diminishing factors were present but less significant. Leavers believed their mobility choice led them to places that contribute to their well-being. They were able to find contributing factors to their well-being that matched what they reported was diminished by living in Copper County.

There were two insights from this data that offer further evidence for integration of the major themes in the findings. When Returnees spoke about what contributed to their well-being when living in other places, many of them spoke about the things they learned about the world or themselves. This offers further evidence of the iterative developmental process that is involved with mobility decision making. Leavers found that they missed the relational aspects of living in Copper County the most. This integrates well-being and the centrality of relationship within mobility decision making.

Summary

The first research question asked: What do rural Southeastern natives identify as the reasons associated with their various mobility decisions? Three major themes were found, psychosocial development, the tension of being known versus anonymity, and the centrality of relationship. These concepts are interconnected and provide insight into the intrapersonal and interpersonal factors associated with mobility decisions. Between group comparison suggests that there is nuance and complexity in how individuals incorporate these themes in their mobility decisions.

The second research question asked: How do they negotiate those reasons in making decisions about mobility? Findings suggest that there is an iterative developmental process to mobility decisions which are highly individualized. The third research question asked: What are the relationships among mobility decisions and

perceived well-being? The findings suggest that mobility decisions and appraisal of what

contributes to or diminishes well-being reciprocally support one another. Consistent

across all the findings, there is complexity and interconnection. The next chapter has a

deeper discussion of the findings, analysis, their interpretations, and how these

contributions are situated within the literature.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Chapter Introduction

This chapter provides a deeper investigation of the findings, analysis, and interpretations. The discussion is framed by four overarching fundamental inquiries that are found across the field of mobility: What makes people mobile? What are the differences between people who leave, stay, and return? Is it helpful to think about stillness as a dimension of mobility? Is being mobile good for people, or stillness bad for people? From these broad overarching empirical lines of inquiry flows the discussion of the study's findings and where they are situated in the literature. The five major themes in these findings are: psychosocial development, the tension of being known versus anonymity, the centrality of relationship, iterative developmental process, and balancing well-being. These themes are discussed and situated within a broad range of literature. This chapter highlights this study's contributions to theoretical expansion.

What makes people mobile?

There are multiple reasons why people choose to move or not to move from the locations they currently live. This is evident in the multiple predominant theories that are used to explain various aspects of mobility. These findings indicate there are additional reasons to be considered that are not present in the current literature. This includes that mobility is a developmental process; relationships at multiple social levels are very important in mobility and integrated with other reasons; and mobility reasons span from

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pragmatic to existential, as they relate to people and places. These findings are further illuminated by multiple scholars and bodies of literature such as Erik Erikson, Relational Cultural Theory, life course perspectives, sense of place, and sense of community. Additionally, an important finding relevant to theoretical expansion is that reasons for moving are integrated with one another.

Mobility is a Developmental Process

An important conclusion of this study is that mobility is a developmental process. Individuals are not only growing older, but they are also experiencing intrapersonal and interpersonal growth. This is discussed with the findings of psychosocial development. Additionally, people are engaging with their mobility decisions over time as they experience life in changing ways. This is discussed with the findings on the iterative developmental process. These findings are consistent with aspects of Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental theory, life course perspectives, and sense of place literature. Threaded throughout these findings and related bodies of literature is the concept of temporality. Mobility exists throughout the lifespan and throughout history. Each person is growing, developing, and moving through time concurrently with historical time.

Psychosocial Development. A major theme from the study was psychosocial development. This theme consisted of three developmental stages: identity formation, seeking intimacy, and generativity. The findings suggest that each stage of psychosocial development is a consideration in mobility decisions. Additionally, participants appeared to be using their mobility decisions as a way to seek out further development of each stage. For example, participants sought locations that could help them discover new parts

of their identity or to support their current identity. Mobility facilitated and challenged the stage of seeking emotional and romantic intimacy. The desire for generativity and giving back to others was appraised against location and where that drive for generativity was invested.

Identity Formation. The association between identity formation and mobility decisions suggests that people appraise the qualities, values, and norms of a place in relation to their self-concept, or identity, and who they want to be in the future. Congruence or incongruence of that place with personal identity becomes a factor in mobility decisions. In essence, participants were using mobility decisions to assist with seeking of the "self". The relationship between mobility and identity formation is highlighted when examining across mobility groups within the study. Participants who experienced a congruence between their identity and their location chose to stay. This congruence was exemplified by a perception of goodness of fit between participants and rural Copper County. The qualities or values typified in the county resonated for them and mirrored their own qualities and values formulated during identity formation. Participants who experienced some type of incongruence between their identity and their location chose to be physically mobile, either leaving or returning. The incongruence was felt when the qualities and values associated with Copper County or other location did not entirely resonate for those individuals. This was not a rejection of those qualities or values, but a feeling that there were other locations that could provide the qualities and values that would support a more fully formed identity that resonated and felt authentic to each person. Mobility was then attempted in part to explore additional qualities and values exemplified in another place.

Returnees moved multiple times. This implies that Returnees experienced incongruence, moved, found more congruence with identity, and then over time experienced incongruence again, but in the new location. This "cycle" of identity and place congruence and/or incongruence for Returnees incorporates one especially significant finding in identity formation. Evidence of identity formation occurred across the adult lifespan. This is important for three reasons. One, it helps to explain the relationship between identity formation and returning mobility decisions. Two, it is one way that this theme is interrelated with iterative development. Three, it integrates the concept of temporality because identity (in)congruence is continually engaged by a person, it is not a concrete milestone to be passed and never engaged with again. The continual engagement with identity is reflected in how people define themselves differently as they age. As they have new experiences in life, this becomes incorporated into how they think of themselves. Likewise, this initiates a continual appraisal of their location and if there is congruence between who they are now, with who they desire to be. For Returnees from the study, they once experienced incongruence with their identity while living in Copper County, they chose to move away, but over time as their identity continued to evolve, they found themselves again with identity incongruence in their other location. They eventually decided that Copper County would best provide what was desired for their latest identity iteration.

There is some consistency between the finding's concept of identity formation and Erikson's theory of Psychosocial Development. Erikson described a stage of development linked to adolescence as the search for understanding the "self," developing a "self" that is more fully defined and differentiated from peers and caregivers (Erikson,

1963, 1982). His theory is not typically linked to mobility, but his theory illuminates psychosocial aspects of how mobility is a developmental process. It was an important finding that psychosocial stages occurred across the lifespan. Erikson linked his psychosocial stages to age ranges. Despite the fact there much debate in the literature about whether he intended the age ranges to be interpreted in this strict manner (Ochse & Plug, 1986), he was assuming that development is successive and one-directional. Isabelle, a Returnee, is an example of fluid movement back and forth through developmental stages across the lifespan. She returned to Copper County in midlife when she was ready to discover a new part of herself. The fluidity of stages in the findings suggests that people continually engage with their psychosocial development, and that developmental need can intersect with mobility.

Seeking Intimacy. The next stage of psychosocial development was seeking intimacy. The findings show evidence that participants are considering romantic intimacy and emotional intimacy in their mobility decisions. The emotionally intimate relationships included the family of origin, spouse or partner, children, close friends, and confidantes. Romantic intimacy was found in dating and spousal relationships. In this stage, the mobility group differences emerged between those that had been physically mobile, Leavers and Returnees, and those that had not, Stayers.

Leavers and Returnees expressed how they needed to be intentional about initiating, building, and maintaining relationships. This suggests that being physically mobile presents disruption in some relationships and that lack of proximity can be a challenge to maintaining emotional intimacy. Additionally, Leavers and Returnees grappled with where they might be more likely to find a romantic partner. Those mobility

groups expressed various reasons why a larger city might be a better place to find a romantic partner such as being exposed to more people with varied interests and less restrictive sexual norms. However, the analysis shows that Leavers and Returnees met their partners in a variety of locations regardless of mobility decisions. This includes a participant who met their same-sex partner in Copper County after returning.

Stayers were the only group that did not address having to be very intentional about building or maintaining relationships. Instead, they focused on the advantage of familiarity. By staying in the same community, familiarity with those around them continued to grow over time. There were no physical distance disruptions to their current relationships and proximity was never a challenge. Many Stayers met their spouses in the county, suggesting again that proximity and familiarity were an advantage in seeking emotional and romantic intimacy.

The evidence of this stage continues to align with the view that psychosocial stages are more fluid, and a person can go back and forth between the stages throughout the lifespan. Participants were continually investing in emotionally and romantically intimate relationships. This investment spanned physical distances and required more intentional focus for those that were physically mobile. Allen is an example of mobility and seeking emotional intimacy. He is a Returnee in his twenties, he had a close relationship with his aunt when growing up, continued that relationship when he was away at college, and continues to invest and rely upon this relationship since he returned to Copper County. Trisha, a Returnee in her seventies, is an example of how mobility is related to seeking romantic and emotional intimacy in a partner, while also demonstrating that partners were found in a variety of locations. Trisha married her high school

sweetheart after graduating in Copper County, they moved away together, never spoke about returning, but around retirement age she became a widow. She later met and married her second husband, who had never lived in Copper County, and they moved there together. This suggests that seeking intimacy was part of Trisha's decision to leave her former location and return to Copper County, and a reason for her current husband to leave his former location.

Erikson argued that intimacy was associated with young adulthood when people are beginning to seek new relational sources of intimacy as they become less dependent on primary caregivers (Erikson, 1963, 1982). The findings here reflect a more fluid and continuous engagement with intimacy in development. Many of the participants found their spouses or partners in young adulthood as suggested by Erikson's theory. However, some divorced, were widowed, remained single, and went on to foster new romantic relationships or marriages. Regardless of relationship status, all the participants explored romantic relationships, representing physical and emotional intimacy, and close friendships, representing emotional intimacy, beginning in young adulthood. Participants continued to build on the insights garnered from these experiences and apply them to their relationships across the life span.

An important nuance in the findings of this psychosocial stage was the concept of intentionality. Leavers and Returnees expressed how they had to be very intentional about building and maintaining relationships, that distance and physical mobility were challenges to intimacy. The focus on being intentional and grappling with the challenges to intimacy are more deeply understood with Erikson's view that when intimacy cannot be formed there is a risk of experiencing isolation (Erikson, 1963, 1982). The physical

distance and disruption experienced by Leavers and Returnees which challenged intimacy in relationships could be interpreted as the awareness of and response to the risk of isolation. The disruptions to their emotionally and romantically intimate relationships increased feelings of isolation and further efforts had to be taken to move closer towards intimacy than those without disruptions. Leavers and Returnees put more effort into establishing new relationships, maintaining existing relationships in multiple locations, or resurrecting relationships from places they previously left.

Generativity. The third stage in this theme was generativity. It was demonstrated by participants who incorporated the desire to give back to family and community and foster the development of others into their mobility decisions. Two male participants in their twenties implied that generativity was one of the main reasons for their return to Copper County. Other evidence of generativity was observed acts that included helping, giving, and supporting the community. Acts of generativity were directed towards family, close friends, and the wider community.

Consistent with stages of identity formation and seeking intimacy, this stage was also experienced across the adult lifespan, reflecting a more fluid and continuous experience of psychosocial stages. However, it is unclear from the evidence in this stage how generativity is related to mobility. There were only two participants who alluded to generativity associated with their mobility decisions. They were both young adult males who had returned to Copper County. Many of the other participant-observed acts of generativity presented in the findings were more associated with place, the experience of Copper County. There is a conceptual difference between place and mobility. Place is a static physical location and mobility is the movement through space or from one place to

another. This raises the question if there is something about the specificity of Copper County that heightens the sense of generativity.

Across group differences illuminate that observed acts of generativity may be more closely associated with the experience of one location rather than mobility decisions. Stayers and Returnees provided much of the evidence for generativity associated with place. This may be because their families were in the county and community participation in Copper County was highly valued. Leavers also alluded to observed generativity in descriptions of volunteerism and community participation in their new locations, but often it was situated within crafting relationships, social engagement, and desiring support. Generativity is a theme that may appear more related to mobility given a larger sample size due to the indication from the two young adult males. Also, the relationship between generativity and mobility or place would become clearer with more targeted interview questions.

Similar to the identity formation and seeking identity stages of development in the findings, there is some consistency between this stage and Erikson's stage generativity versus stagnation. He describes this stage as when a person turns their attention and efforts away from crafting their own lives, and towards investing in the lives of others (Erikson, 1963, 1982). Erikson theorized a total of eight stage of psychosocial development. This raises questions about other developmental stages that might have an association with mobility.

Iterative Developmental Process. The question of what makes people mobile raises the question of how individuals engage with mobility decisions. The findings suggest that individuals are negotiating different opportunities, challenges, desires, and

obligations in their mobility decisions. It is a highly individualized process, and each participant experienced iterative development in negotiating their mobility reasons. This means that experience builds over time and past experiences are continually informing the present. As people experience life, they learn more about the world, themselves, and relationships. This iterative development includes present mobility decisions. Implicit in the iterative developmental process is the concept of temporality. This concept is also embedded in psychosocial development and Erikson's theory of Psychosocial Development.

Iterative development was evident from a synthesis of details in the interviews and their situation within larger contexts. The synthesis included expressions of important meanings, events, lessons learned, and developmental insights made at different ages in life, situated within a holistic view of their mobility stories and personal history. A selected review of participants' iterative developmental process from all mobility groups illustrates this theme. For example, Chris, a Stayer, was motivated to remain in Copper County in part by fear of the unknown, which he interpreted as keeping him safe from the risks that come from physical mobility. Over time he let go of that fear, but chose to stay, because he had become more invested in the community, his home, life, and family that he loves so much. Luke, a Stayer, became more invested in Copper County as life progressed as a way to buffer against the emotional pain of difficult relationships.

Returnees, Nicole and Isabelle provide other examples of iterative development. Nicole, a Returnee who had estranged and strained relationships with family, doubted if she would remain in Copper County after returning to help her family in need for a period of time. The integrity of her self-concept and her well-being were at the forefront of her

mind when she suspected she would leave again. She has since decided to remain in Copper County, enjoys improved relationships with her family, and found a committed relationship. Isabelle, a Returnee, encountered a transition point in life while living in another state. After returning she discovered parts of her identity through intentionally deepening her bonds with extended family, her family land, and the community. Leavers Yvette and Nancy also had unique iterative developmental processes. Yvette, a Leaver, resisting leaving Copper County, but eventually embraced it after becoming closer to her faith and community following a family tragedy. Nancy lets the Leaver part of her identity coexist with the Stayer in her heart. She loves Copper County and has a strong attachment and sense of place associated with the county but knows she will never return because the life she has built and enjoys requires her to live in her current urban location.

The concept of iterative development is incorporated into many different bodies of literature that have relevance to these findings about mobility. Erikson's theory posited successive and iterative psychosocial development. Beginning from birth and continuing throughout the lifespan, each stage required resolution so that the next stage could build upon the last (Erikson, 1963, 1982). Iterative development is also assumed in Relational Cultural Theory (RCT). The theory reasons that people learn more about themselves when they are better able to know and connect with others, spurring iterative development in relationships. As the "self" develops and grows, so too do relationships, and vice versa. It was labeled "self-in-relation". (Comstock et al., 2008; Fletcher & Ragins, 2008; Jordan, 2001, 2008, 2017; Jordan et al., 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Erikson and RCT are not typically used to explain mobility. However, life course

perspectives provide insight into these findings in suggesting the significance of iterative development and the concept of temporality.

Developmental Concepts Related to Life Course Perspectives. Life course perspectives assert that mobility is associated with age-differentiated life events. As life progresses people engage with mobility decisions differently due to developmental age. Some of the participants moved in ways that are typical of life course perspectives. Several participants moved away for college education. A few participants moved after retirement. However, it was the context of their story that provided more and important information about the psychosocial development happening simultaneously with those events.

Findings were examined across age groups, young adult, middle adult, and older adult. Themes were more closely tied to psychosocial development, instead of the expected ages when events occur, for example, Isabelle, who moved back to Copper County in midlife to refocus on identity. There was no age-related event that triggered her return. Tim, a Returnee moved back to Copper County as a young adult to better participant in the development of young nieces, nephews, and cousins. He had a strong desire for generativity. Again, there was no age-related event that happened around his return.

These findings challenge the traditional view of life course perspectives that mobility is associated with age-related events, or even age-related events of loved ones, as suggested by Stockdale et al. (2018). Emily, a Leaver, moved based on a decision made for her son with an effort to enhance his psychosocial development. Her son was in middle school at the time. She and her husband wanted him to have the experience of

moving, making new friends, and broadening his worldview. This decision considered a loved one's psychosocial development, but it was not prompted by an age-related event as life course perspectives suggest.

The findings discussed in this section are united by developmental and temporal concepts. Development focused on psychosocial stages that were fluid and could be encountered throughout life as opposed to concrete, successive stages, or age-related events. Mobility reasons were negotiated with an iterative developmental process. Past experiences are accumulated, interpreted, and inform the present perceptions and responses in life and to mobility decisions. The findings are illuminated by scholars and theories not typically used in mobility, Erikson's Psychosocial Development and Relational Cultural Theory. Additionally, they provide complexity to life course perspectives of mobility.

Relationships at Multiple Social Levels are Fundamental in Mobility

Another conclusion from the findings is that relationships are fundamental in mobility decisions. Relationships exist on multiple social levels such as individuals, families, and communities, and are integrated with other mobility reasons. The importance of relationships must be emphasized as participants found their relationships to be essential and valuable. The drive for connection one-on-one, with families, groups of friends, and communities is so great that it can supersede the importance of other personal needs, desires, or opportunities. The findings suggest that relationships were important to all participants regardless of mobility decision. Relationship was a concept threaded throughout the interviews, interwoven into mobility considerations, the way people experience a place, and their perceived well-being. Relationships were embedded

in special memories, the lessons people learned through life, and the desires they had for their futures. Relationship was a central part of the tapestry of life and related to mobility in multiple ways.

Participants conceptualized relationship as an emotional bond that was shared with another and made them feel connected, sustained, and valued. They were driven towards connections where they could be vulnerable and express their authentic selves. When they faced potential judgement and needed to defend their vulnerability, they utilized a degree of disconnection in relationships. This conceptualization of relationship is further illuminated by Helen Harris Perlman and authors of Relational Cultural Theory.

Helen Harris Perlman, in her 1979 book *Relationship: The Heart of Helping People*, wrote that relationship is an emotional bonding with another and a sense of "alliance, kinship, belonging together" arises from their "mutually shared experience". She further argued that a good relationship adds to personal experiences, is "nurturing" and "…both persons involved feel sustained, loved, gratified, given to, helped, and freed to experience their selfhood and to realize their potential." (Perlman, 1979, p. 23). One of the important findings here was the reciprocal connection between interpersonal and intrapersonal factors in mobility. The conceptualization of relationship deepens the understanding of the reciprocal nature between "self" and others. Perlman adds to this understanding by asserting that "[relationship] respects and nourishes the selfhood of the other at the same time it provides a sense of security and at-oneness." (Perlman, 1979, p. 24). This is a similar conceptualization to Relational Cultural Theory's "mutually growth fostering relationships" (Miller & Stiver, 1997). RCT characterizes relationship by a drive towards connection, while managing disconnection. Perlman agrees, observing that,

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"These two sides of relationship, the push toward union with another and the pullback to ensure self-ownership, continue throughout our lifetimes." (Perlman, 1979, p. 33)

Relationship Dynamics. Multiple dynamics emerge in the association of relationship with mobility: proximity/distance, intentionality, time, relationship disruptions, the drive towards connection, and the use of disconnection. These dynamics appear across multiple mobility groups, but nuance and complexity arise from examining mobility group differences. The first two dynamics, proximity/distance and intentionality are integrated within the centrality of relationship theme. When Leavers experienced greater distances from their important relationships, they spent additional efforts to maintain them. Stayers had greater proximity to many of their important relationships and expressed how crucial that physical closeness was for them. Proximity provided the opportunity to build familiarity or acquaintances, whereas people who left had to be very intentional about crafting new relationships. All participants spoke about intentionality in some aspect of their relationships, but it was a particular focus for Leavers in new places who could not rely on familiarity. This dynamic of relationship is integrated with seeking intimacy in the psychosocial development findings.

The third dynamic, temporality, was implicit in relationship dynamics. This concept continues to be important throughout the findings. Across mobility groups, participants acknowledged that relationships change over time, not always because of mobility, but because people grow, change, and age. They recognized the ways they have changed over their lifespans, and they discussed relationship changes, triumphs, and heartaches that accompany life. RCT expands on growth within relationship and asserts that individuals "grow through and towards relationships" across the lifespan. This

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dynamic suggests that the centrality of relationship is integrated with development. An interesting temporal dynamic that emerged from the Stayers was when they were asked about any possible reason that would make them move away from Copper County even though they voiced not wanting to move, they indicated that it was relationships. The only foreseeable reason to force a mobility change that was not desired was to support children or grandchildren or be a caretaker for someone they were close to.

The fourth dynamic was relationship disruptions. This dynamic was experienced more by Leavers and Returnees. In one way, distance creates a disruption, but increasing amounts of time also creates disruptions. Leavers and Returnees face managing relationships in previous places and in current places. The older a person becomes they may be adding additional places to their management as well as newly established relationships to their existing relationships. This again incorporates intentionality on the part of the Leaver or Returnee. They spend time thinking about how much time and effort they have to devote to fostering or maintaining those relationships, across distance, and how they want to accomplish that in meaningful ways.

Across all mobility decisions, the participants discussed the fifth dynamic, driving towards connection. They spent considerable effort building and maintaining relationships. They expressed appreciation and considered their relationships to be most valuable when they were supportive, nurturing, and they could express their authentic selves. The drive towards connection is further illuminated by the main tenet of Relational Cultural Theory. RCT states that people want to be understood and to understand others. This reciprocal interaction requires vulnerability and authenticity.

Interestingly, mobility decisions did not always reflect the places where participants had the most supportive connections. A few Returnees went back to Copper County in the face of strained and estranged family relationships. Most Leavers chose places to go where they did not know anyone. This may indicate a few nuances in the drive towards connection. One, people can be adaptable in their relationships even while driving towards connection. Conditions change as people grow and change. Accepting change may highlight the ways people continue to drive towards connection under unfavorable or less than ideal conditions. Two, people are not afraid to confront ailing or absent relationships. This indicates hope, resilience, and a continual devotion to driving towards connection. Additionally, confronting those ailing relationships is integrated with the assumption that people can adapt. Three, people can also prioritize self over relationships at different times in life. Connection is highly valued, but when participants left Copper County, they intended to focus on seeking parts of themselves for a period of time.

The integration of relationship with other reasons to move was an important finding. Findings suggest that centrality of relationship is integrated with psychosocial development. Identity formation, seeking intimacy, and generativity required social interactions and relationships for growth and movement among the stages. This integration is consistent with RCT's assertion that connection is essential for personal growth (Comstock et al., 2008; Fletcher & Ragins, 2008; Jordan, 2001, 2008, 2017; Jordan et al., 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997). As participants negotiated identity formation, they were attempting to clarify their self-concept. RCT describes this as "clarity about self and other" which is a result when people drive towards connection within "mutually

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growth fostering relationships". When participants negotiated the seeking of intimacy, they were addressing their worthiness and capability to love and be loved. This is consistent with another positive result from driving towards connection in RCT, "sense of worth". As relationships develop and are integrated with psychosocial development, people have a desire for more connection, which is another consistency with RCT.

The last dynamic in centrality of relationship was the use of disconnection. Disconnection was seen across all mobility groups. In a simplistic way, concluding a relationship or actively choosing not to maintain it can be disconnection. However, disconnection can exist as a degree of pulling away from a relationship and used as a tool to maintain some connection. RCT calls this the relational paradox. The findings suggest that participants are using disconnection to preserve themselves and maintain an acceptable boundary in some relationships, giving part of themselves, and accepting part of the other. This retains identity and avoids judgement. RCT states that disconnection can be used in this complex way of managing relationships when being fully vulnerable and authentic would have undesirable outcomes.

Leavers and Returnees spoke in detail about the use of disconnection. Donna, a Leaver, spoke about having some disconnection from her family of origin in order to build her family identity while living away. Lillian and Kevin, Returnees, spoke about maintaining some distance or a degree of disconnection with people they have known most of their lives in Copper County. These are people they know well and share history with, but relationships which they could not share their most vulnerable and authentic selves without putting themselves at risk of judgment and disapproval. Stayers also spoke about disconnection but more implicitly. For example, when Stayers spoke about the

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grocery store as a place where they could catch up with people, practice knowing others and being known, they often asked each other about family, health, work, leisure or community activities, and other known individuals. They used this social opportunity to continue their relationships and to express support of one another. They reserved critical judgements, disagreement, more vulnerable expressions of emotions, and deeply personal information for either "family" or people they were "close to". This unspoken boundary in vulnerability and sharing of oneself is also a use of disconnection.

Participants who sought disconnection from their relationships and used mobility to assist in that disconnection expressed feeling empowered. Leaving helped them focus on themselves in ways that resulted in personal growth. This is inconsistent with other parts of RCT that state disconnection leads people to feel isolated, less understood, and disempowered, causing shame, blame, and manipulation of power (Comstock et al., 2008; Fletcher & Ragins, 2008; Jordan, 2001, 2008, 2017; Jordan et al., 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997). The use of disconnection in the findings was not pathological or self-destructive as the theory suggests but used to continue intrapersonal and interpersonal growth. The growth-oriented view in the findings suggest there is an important nuance that might be better described as aloneness. Aloneness can be used to focus on the "self", prioritize personal growth, resolve emotional pain, and then allow individuals to begin to invest in mutually growth fostering relationships when they feel they have something to contribute to relationships.

Multiple Social Levels of Relationship. Findings here suggest that the dynamics of relationship including, connection, disconnection, and drive towards connection, applies to individuals, families, and communities. Multiple social levels of relationship

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are an important assumption in this study and is shared with RCT, sense of community literature, and Social Network Theory. RCT authors shed light on the flow of connection between and among the different social levels. Miller and Stiver (1997) state that when people feel more connected and understood, having resolved their own uses of disconnection, they come to better understand others, their use of disconnection, and desires to connect. This lays the foundation for people to realize their impact on the larger community.

Along with the dynamics of relationship that exist between individuals and small groups, findings suggest that within the larger community of Copper County, bonds and acts of giving were relationally important. People from Copper County shared a perceived bond with the larger community. McMillan and Chavis (1986) described bonds in the sense of community literature as a sense of relatedness and belonging that work in conjunctions with shared emotional connection to characterize community membership. In the findings, bonds were described differently across mobility groups. A sense of bondedness was expressed by many Stayers who assumed that other people who remained in Copper County were similar to them in values, expectations, desires, and needs. This bond was extended to Returnees because they shared history and kinship with Stayers. It was also interpreted by Stayers that something in Copper County was worth coming back for. The act of returning honored the county and its people, which led to strengthened perceived bonds between Returnees and Stayers.

Leavers were also bonded in ways to people in Copper County, through shared experiences, history, and kinship. Examples of their perceived bonds are plentiful throughout the interviews. Many people spoke about how they knew or were related to

historical figures in the county. Many people spoke about high school football games and dances that they and others attended, and the "rec center" a recreational and community center that was a central meeting place for the youth of the county for many decades. They spoke about the same creeks, rivers, and dirt roads. These perceived bonds spanned across mobility groups and united natives from Copper County. However, those bonds diminished with time and distance. Stayers felt the closest bonds with other Stayers, then Returnees, and last, Leavers.

Bonds explicitly included intergenerational recognition. When people from the county asked, "who are your people?", they were attempting to link that person to their kinship group or other known associates. Many participants acknowledged that intergenerational recognition was an important social interaction in Copper County. This importance is consistent with the identification attribute of membership in McMillan and Chavis' model of sense of community.

There was evidence of how invested the participants were in Copper County residents. Stayers and Returnees spoke about acts of community giving, helping, and support. This involved known and unknown community members. Leavers confirmed this special devotion that Copper County residents had towards community support. Participants emphasized in the interviews how important this dynamic was to understand them, their experiences, and community. They spoke about acts of giving and support as if they could be counted on, guaranteed to happen, but never expected. This made participants feel a greater sense of connection, that they mattered to each other, they were worthy of help, and should they ever fall on hard times, the same acts they performed for others would be given in kind. McMillan and Chavis (1986) describe this dynamic as

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"integration and fulfillment of needs" among community members and is a main component of their theory. Sarason (1986), had a similar interpretation of this dynamic and labeled it "interdependence" among community members.

Relational Concepts Associated with Social Network Theory. Social Network theory also provides a relational focus on why people move. The findings are consistent with parts of the theory and inconsistent with other parts. Participants primarily discussed social networks when discussing family trees or in ways that suggested community interdependence, helping, giving support, or desires for connection. This is representative of the linked lives that social network theory seeks to explain (Manchin & Orazbayev, 2018), but when framed as reasons for mobility the conclusions are more complex. Most of the people that moved away from Copper County, the Leavers and the Returnees, chose cities and colleges where they did not know anyone, nor had any family previously attended that college or lived in that city. There was no previous link to those locations and no social ties to be relied upon. Nine out of the ten Leavers initially moved to a location where they did not know anyone or had any previous familial connection. As the theory suggests, all Returnees had some family still in Copper County when they returned. However, two of the eleven Returnees moved back to Copper County when there were strained or absent relationships with family who lived in the county, which validates a criticism of the theory that not all relationships are continuous, stable, and advantageous (Ryan, 2011). One returnee, Nicole, returned to the area with strained and conflicted relationships with family. Another returnee, Isabelle, returned after most of her primary family members had passed but she wanted to get to know extended family that she previously had little contact with as she was growing up.

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Social capital is a concept often linked with social network theory, but the findings show that only one participant, Brittany, spoke about leveraging her relationships in the community to find employment and potentially jobs for her future children. Although relationships were extremely important to the participants, there was no evidence of using relationships to improve economic or social status as social capital suggests (Putnam, 2000). This raises interesting questions about relational leverage. Perhaps participants are using their relationships to leverage their personal growth and drive towards connection. It may be a plausible idea because the findings suggest a reciprocal relationship between interpersonal and intrapersonal growth. If this were true, it would expand the concept of social capital to include relational benefits.

Findings suggest that relationships are fundamental and essential to mobility. They are a priority at multiple social levels, one-to-one, family, and community. Relational Cultural Theory and Helen Harris Perlman illuminated the importance of and dynamics in individual relationships. Sense of community literature illuminated the support and interdependence between individuals with their community. Social Network Theory is a relational theory used in mobility research. Altogether, this literature illuminates the depth, importance, and complexity of relationships in mobility.

Mobility Reasons Span from Pragmatic to Existential

There are a wide range of complex reasons that prompt mobility. The findings suggest that reasons for mobility span from pragmatic to existential and relate to people and places. For example, participants considered pragmatic reasons such as cost of living in various locations or job promotions in other places that would provide a higher income. They also considered caring for an aging family member or continuing a family

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business. Participant's existential reasons included where they felt more sense of belonging and where they had purpose. Multiple other reasons fall between concrete, pragmatic reasons on one end of the spectrum and abstract, existential reasons on the other end of the spectrum.

Pragmatic Reasons. Pragmatic concerns are important because they are the building blocks of self-sufficiency and being able to support yourself and your family. These reasons are typically the focus of economic theories. The findings suggest that pragmatic reasons are considered in mobility, but not always in ways consistent with economic theory which asserts that better economic conditions elsewhere are a reason to move, and very poor economic conditions can constrain mobility. In each mobility group, individuals spoke about employment, financial, or economic considerations for leaving, staying or returning. The complexity in the data is that there were just as many expressions saying that jobs or finances were a reason for staying as there were for going. Additionally, people who found economic reasons to leave, later found economic reasons to return. Consistent with economic theories, some Leavers and Returnees found a lack of career choices in Copper County to be reasons to leave. However, several Returnees found their ideal career in Copper County, and this was part of their decisions to return. Multiple Stayers had job opportunities elsewhere during their careers but chose not to move. They reported those jobs would have given them higher incomes, or a career trajectory where they could achieve a higher rank in their field.

A degree of human agency is an important assumption in these findings. The participants were never forced into their mobility decisions for financial reasons, nor prevented from making the decision they wanted due to financial distress. Participants

were free to consider multiple reasons and come to a decision based on their independent interests and expressions of personal will. However, human agency operates within larger economic, political, and social structures. These structural dynamics shape and constrain human behavior to a degree. For example, participants recognized that cost of living was relatively low in Copper County. Stayers expressed this was a consideration that supported staying, and Returnees found it a reason to move back to Copper County.

Economic or financial reasons did not always rise to the top as the prevailing reason for mobility. Rather, those reasons were integrated with many additional reasons. For example, there was evidence of integration with development. Many participants' economic and financial considerations tended to shift from gaining employment in young adulthood to saving for retirement and managing debt in middle adulthood. This suggests integration with age-differentiated events as life course perspectives assert. However, this developmental view was not always age-related. The youngest participant, Brittany, a Stayer aged 19, met with a financial planner once a month to plan for future children, her future wedding, and student loans. Despite her age she was interested in saving and financial planning which is typically associated with individuals older than 19. This suggests complex integration of reasons negotiated for mobility. The findings provide complexity to economic theories of mobility because those considerations were not exclusively reasons to stay, or reasons to leave, but considerations integrated with all mobility reasons throughout the lifespan.

More Abstract Reasons. Findings suggest there are also reasons for mobility that are more abstract and existential. Participants grappled with attachments to places and to

people. They also developed special and personal meanings about specific places. Embedded in those places were memories of joy and heartbreak.

Some participants were very attached to Copper County. Many Stayers and Returnees discussed an emotional bond with the county which is consistent with definitions of place attachment in the literature. Several Leavers also had attachments to the county. For example, Leavers Nancy and Yvette had strong attachments. For Nancy, the attachment is part of her identity and how she thinks of herself. She has pride in describing where she is from and continues to call it "home" despite that she has no plans to move back. Yvette's attachment comes from deep ties to the people who organized and responded to help her family after a terrible tragedy. Her attachment includes family land and a home that was difficult for her to part with.

Place attachment to Copper County was found across mobility groups. This suggests that place attachment is not always a reason to stay nor a lack of attachment a reason to leave. This is consistent with findings from Barcus and Braun (2009), who examined staying mobility patterns in the rural Southeast. Lack of attachment also emerged in the findings. Some individuals grappled with not feeling attached to Copper County and what that possibly meant. Nora, a Leaver stated she felt bad for not being attached to any place. She recognized that others had a "draw and affection" for where they were from. The complexity of attachment broadened when Nancy, who has strong attachment to the County pondered if her attachment was more to the people instead of the place. She acknowledged that family members who live in Copper County will eventually pass away, so her perceptions of Copper County may change when those people are gone. Integration of mobility reasons has been a consistent and important

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finding. Here, Nancy is an example of the integration of place attachment with the centrality of relationship. The integration with relationship is consistent with Barcus and Braun (2009) who found relationships to be significantly intertwined with place attachment.

There are additional abstract and existential reasons to move associated with place. Findings suggest that there is a uniqueness to rural sense of place which includes land and homes owned over multiple generations, fields, ponds, and dirt roads that hold special meaning and memories. The uniqueness is consistent with the view that sense of place is a highly individualized context (Relph, 1976, Tuan, 1977), and in this case a shared rural context. Additionally, rural sense of place was found across all mobility groups. Chris, a Stayer, has a special connection to and memories of his grandfather's farm. He said it was hard to put into words but proceeded to describe details of the land with the words "important," "satisfaction," "subconscious," and "accomplishment". Yvette, a Leaver, talked about "wonderful memories" of her grandmother's home and pecan orchard. Her sense of place included sensory memories with smells of coffee and bacon. These memories come back to her when she visits the county. One feature of rural sense of place that emerged from the data was the meaningfulness of dirt roads. Dirt roads were important across all mobility groups. Many participants included dirt roads as being significant to their formative years and were central concepts to their memories of Copper County. Isabella, a Returnee, lingered on her thoughts about dirt roads and said it was something she "needed", that it was fulfilling in some way.

A few of the participants shared vulnerable and emotionally difficult experiences tied to homes and land, which is consistent with the literature. Tuan (1977) wrote that the

emotions and memories tied to a place are not always positive experiences, but they remain important and formative (Tuan, 1977). This was true for Donna, a Leaver, who shared a vulnerable memory and emotions tied to her childhood home. It was still painful to discuss, and she cried during the interview. As an adult she still did not know the entire story about why they had to move so abruptly; it was too painful for her to discuss with other family members.

An important finding from examining the spectrum of pragmatic to existential reasons reveals their integration with the relationships. In pragmatic considerations participants negotiated questions about if their spouse could find a job in the location they were thinking about. Did they want to move to be closer to specialty medical care that a family member needed? Would living in location with a higher cost of mean they could not afford private school for their children? Likewise, rural sense of place often included important people in their memories of important places. The examples of Chris and Yvette included grandparents, their homes and their land. The loss of Donna's family home was such a difficult memory she could not discuss it with family to learn more about what happened. Centrality of relationship was a major theme, and so essential that it often superseded the importance of other opportunities or desires considered in mobility. The integration of relationship with other findings is important for a holistic understanding of the reasons individuals negotiate in mobility decisions.

The first question asked what makes people mobile. A synthesis of the findings suggest that mobility is a developmental process, relationships are fundamental in mobility, and they exist on multiple social levels. Additionally, reasons for mobility are integrated with one another and span from pragmatic to increasingly abstract and

existential reasons. Several bodies of literature, theories, and scholars were integrated into the discussion and helped to illuminate the findings. This included literature traditionally used in mobility research and other literature that illuminated a depth in the findings which may provide direction for theoretical expansion of mobility.

What are the Differences Between People Who Go, Stay, or Return?

Another fundamental question in mobility seeks to understand the differences among mobility decisions. Each of the major themes in the findings: psychosocial development, the tension of being known versus anonymity, centrality of relationship, iterative developmental process, and balancing well-being, were experienced across all mobility groups. However, the themes were experienced differently across the mobility groups and suggest nuanced ways that the groups differ.

In general, the difference found here is that a mobility decision is a matter of goodness of fit at any given point in an individuals' life. People are continually appraising if there is a good fit between their self-concept and what they want and need from life with the location they are in. A favorable appraisal results in staying and an unfavorable appraisal results in moving. This is a simplification of the complexity, and the integration of reasons has been important in the findings, but this offers a useful starting point in discussing the components that make up an appraised goodness of fit.

In the previous section, identity formation was a significant part of psychosocial development linked with mobility. When there was congruence between identity and location this supported a decision to stay and when there was incongruence it supported a decision to move. Identity formation was found across the lifespan, and this suggests that goodness of fit is continually appraised. As an individual's identity evolves over their

lifespan, they may determine that goodness 0f fit has changed. These concepts are integrated with the iterative developmental process that has been discussed.

Another major theme incorporated into the appraisal of goodness of fit is the tension of being known versus anonymity. Participants across mobility groups identified and compared the advantages and disadvantages of each experience. Being known in a community provided comfort and connection while anonymity provided autonomy, independence, and freedom from perceived expectations. The disadvantages of being known were gossip and intrusive behaviors. The disadvantages of anonymity were social disconnection and a sense of isolation.

Examining the differences across mobility groups suggests that participants tended to favor either being known or anonymity for the advantages it provided them while acknowledging the negative aspects. Leavers tended to favor anonymity while acknowledging that sometimes it could result in a sense of isolation. They also recognized that the benefits of being known could mitigate isolation and increase social interactions. Leavers appreciated the independence and autonomy they experienced; being able to act based on their needs and desires without having to consider modifying their behaviors to appease the expectations or inquiries of others. Leavers expressed that the benefits of anonymity far outweighed any benefit of being known and found anonymity in more urban locations.

In contrast, Stayers heavily favored being known in their community and they either denied any disadvantages or only reported gossip as the disadvantage to being known. Some Stayers admitted that anonymity was something experienced in larger more urban places. This was experienced during travel or secondhand knowledge from family

members that moved away. Those that spoke about anonymity could not envision wanting that type of social environment. They received gratification and fulfillment from being known in Copper County. It was comforting and a joy to experience.

Returnees were well acquainted with both experiences, having anonymity and being known. Their expressions of anonymity were primarily in context of living in other more urban locations, while being known was in the context of living in Copper County. Returnees highlighted the complexities of advantages and disadvantages including that these experiences can coexist in the same locations. This mobility group slightly preferred being known over anonymity at this particular point in their lives. When they left Copper County, they desired anonymity more and then upon returning to Copper County, desired being known. This demonstrated another complexity discussed by Returnees, that preference for one over the other could change during the lifespan.

The significance of these findings is highlighted by Tönnies' concepts of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, conceiving "community" and "society" as a dichotomy (Tönnies, 2017). They were in many ways opposites of one another and the understanding of one term deepened the understanding of the other. This is the same for being known versus anonymity. Being known was preferred by Stayers and the experience of it largely occurred in Copper County. This is synonymous with Tönnies' explanation of Gemeinschaft as it symbolized rural life with personal and intimate connections. Likewise, Leavers preferred anonymity and mostly experienced this in larger urban places, similar to Gesellschaft which Tönnies described as urban life with more impersonal and indirect connections.

Being known versus anonymity, just as with Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, is a spatial and a relational experience. These are interconnected. In a rural environment you have familiarity with many of the people encountered. There are fewer people in a rural area and thus a higher percentage of them will be known to any resident. This results in an experience of being known by others and knowing others. In an urban location, there are many people in a small area of land, many of them are strangers and so a smaller percentage are known to each other. This results in an experience of anonymity.

Participants expressed social and emotional experiences of being known that were consistent with Tönnies' ideas about Gemeinschaft. Stayers spoke about the comfort they felt from being known. Part of this was believing that most other community members were like-minded, with the same values and outlook in life. They also assumed this like-mindedness would draw people together and they felt called to support one another. This is similar to Tönnies' argument that in "community" there is reciprocal understanding and sympathy between people that acts to unite them. He stated that mutual understanding of one another required people to be authentically interested in each other's lives and that this is more easily achieved if people are similar in interest, attitudes, and experiences (Tönnies, 2017). This continues to be true for Leavers, who were drawn towards urban locations. They specifically did not want to be in an environment of like-mindedness, they were searching for people with a diversity of backgrounds and interests, which exists in Tönnies' notion of "society".

Participants expressed social and emotional experiences of anonymity that were inconsistent with Tönnies' Gesellschaft. In seeking anonymity, participants appreciated the freedom and independence it gave them. Tönnies had a more negative view of

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Gesellschaft, stating that the "artificial aggregate of human beings" who were in close proximity to one another but lived very separate lives, were socially isolated because of their diverging interests and backgrounds. He argued that this separation perpetuated further isolation. People inherently were suspicious of one another because they lack the innate understanding of one another (Tönnies, 2017). He suggests this results in keeping a level of disconnection and emotional distance from others. Although, social disconnection was confirmed as a disadvantage in anonymity, Leavers perceived the benefits far outweighed the downsides. Leavers and Returnees expressed that anonymity gave them room for personal growth, to be able to express a more authentic "self", and time to envision a life defined by their own desires of who they wanted to become instead of what other desired of them.

Yi Fu Tuan's theory on space and place provides additional insight into the contrast between being known and anonymity. He suggests that the abstract concepts of space and place "require each other for definition. From the security and stability of "place" we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of "space", and vice versa. The experience of being known is similar to Tuan's experience of "place" with comfort and security. The understanding of "place" illuminates "space" or anonymity, which provides freedom and openness.

People seek being known or anonymity in the same way they sought mobility which supported their identity formation. They chose a location with appraised goodness of fit, where they could thrive and meet their needs. If those needs change, then the draw for more anonymity or more being known will be associated with their mobility decisions. Being known versus anonymity is integrated with other themes beyond

psychosocial development. Integration with centrality of relationship is suggested in the findings. Choosing a place where you can enjoy more of being known is similar to driving towards connection with others. Choosing a location with more anonymity is similar to managing disconnection in order to remain true to yourself.

Summarizing People Who Leave. People who choose to leave a place are, in part, seeking an aspect of themselves they estimate would best be facilitated in another location. The seeking involves identity formation and other psychosocial stages and more anonymity so they can explore other parts of themselves without the constraint of social expectations. Leavers, in essence, are seeking intrapersonal and interpersonal growth and utilize moving to facilitate that growth. Iterative development, which is the process of how individuals negotiate their mobility decisions is an important aspect of understanding people who leave. They are leaving at one particular point in their lives when they have appraised goodness of fit to exist elsewhere. Each individual is constantly in a process of iterative development, so as Leavers experience life, grow, and evolve, their mobility decisions will negotiate different reasons with new understandings of themselves and what they want from life.

Summarizing People Who Stay. Findings suggest that people who stay are genuinely happy where they are. Participants found congruence between their identities and Copper County. The county exemplifies qualities and values that resonate for stayers. They also find joy and fulfillment from being known in the community. Most of them denied any disadvantage to being known other than a little gossip. They found their well-being to be supported in Copper County. Their well-being was boosted by the natural environment, their relationships, and a lack of stress and worry. They drew significant

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meaning and memories from family land and homes owned over multiple generations. Altogether, their appraised goodness of fit was met in Copper County.

This view of what makes a person stay focuses on subjective appraisals, perceptions, and attitudes. This is different from much of the mobility literature that examines economic, political, or social factors that constrain movement. This assumes that movement is either the standard, or always desired over staying in place. This study has acknowledged that individuals operate within those structural dynamics, but the findings suggest that perceptions and goodness of fit can be powerful and positive reasons that support staying.

Socio-economic status and income have been related to mobility patterns, and in particular low SES to staying in rural areas (Lichter et al., 2022; Thiede et al., 2020). The participants are middle to upper-middle class and believe that having some income provides more freedom in mobility decisions. Specifically, that a person could save for a potential move, or plan for the costs such as a deposit on a new apartment, buying new furniture, the cost of a moving truck, or costs associated with traveling to the selected location to find housing and employment. Participants believe that people living in poverty would have a difficult time executing a desired move because of not having flexibility in saving. When it is already hard to make ends meet, the additional costs may constrain movement, especially when living on a low fixed income. Their perceptions are consistent with literature that historically, poverty was greater in rural areas (Thiede et al, 2020), and low income often translates to less mobility (Lichter et al., 2022).

Literature examining spatial disparities, poverty, mobility, and rural areas have contributed important information about social, political, and economic dynamics.

However, this literature has been used by the popular media to perpetuate a narrative that rural areas are in decline, it's people in despair, and stuck with no way out, thereby explaining decisions to stay (Love & Loh, 2020). Over time, this narrative has become the "rural-urban divide" which paints a binary political, economic, and social experience of flourishing urban areas and languishing rural areas (Love & Loh, 2020). This binary stereotype extends to educated, socially conscious, self-aware, and politically liberal people in urbans areas contrasted with poorly educated, narrow-minded, politically, and socially conservative people in rural areas.

Dishearteningly, participants were aware of this popular narrative and stereotype. It made most of the participants suspicious of my intent in the research. All of the Stayers and many others initiated conversations about this before continuing with the interviews. Participants felt angry, disappointed, and exhausted with the negative stereotype of rural areas and people who choose to stay. This was not their experience of choosing to stay or living in a rural area, nor was it reflected in the sample findings. Although I did not specifically ask participants about their political or social views, this information was shared within other contexts and topics that were important to them. There were several participants who were politically liberal, even progressive, and several that were politically conservative. Their social views aligned with their political views. Many of the participants fell somewhere in between these political and social opposites. This wide range of views is exemplary of a continuum that is consistent with recent literature.

Literature from various disciplines have labeled this the "rural to urban continuum". This reflects that recent findings are more complex than the binary narrative asserted. The complexities appear across political, economic, and social dynamics.

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Thiede et al. (2020) found that income inequalities between rural and urban areas converged in 2016 because urban areas had widening income inequality. Sowl et al. (2022) found a complex interplay of factors when examining college graduates who later returned to their rural home; they did not find the simplistic "brain-drain" narrative that has been in the popular media. Catte (2018) explored racial justice movements in rural Appalachia, demonstrating the falsity that the drive for racial equality only exists in "blue" liberal locations. The study findings are situated alongside the "continuum" literature by suggesting complex integration of reasons that motivate mobility. Further, that understanding mobility decisions to stay is hampered by stereotypes.

Summarizing People Who Return. People who choose to return are engaging in a complex evolution of reasons for leaving. Returnees started as Leavers and then continued to engage in iterative development the same as all others. While living in another location, they eventually came to a decision in their search for congruence between identity and location and goodness of fit, that going back to their rural home would satisfy what was needed. It is the appraisal of what is needed that sets Returnees apart from Leavers. Returnees believe that what they need or want is located in the place that once was hindering their growth or opportunities. Whereas Leavers may make multiple moves but never return back to Copper County. Their search for congruence and goodness of fit leads them to new locations. Returnees are led to a place that embodies dynamics that were once interpreted differently. What was once a hindrance is now a benefit. Returnees preferred being known over anonymity but explained the advantages and disadvantages of each. They also recognized their preference was just at this period of their lives. Perceptions and interpretations are mutable, which is why returning

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mobility decisions suggested nuance and complexity to each reason for mobility. Returnees are a prime example of iterative development because they have many iterations that coincide with changes in location.

Discussing each mobility group is important for two reasons. One, it addresses a fundamental question in mobility about what makes people go, stay, or leave, Two, it provides a close examination of how the personal experience of the themes differs for each group. Despite the draw to linger in comparisons across groups, the findings suggest that much is shared across the groups. Further, the shared nature of the themes becomes a contribution to a holistic understanding of mobility. The differences explored in this section are relevant to mobility but not predominant when asking what reasons people have for mobility.

Is it Helpful to Think of Stillness as a Dimension of Mobility?

The term migration evolved into mobility in response to theoretical expansion that included concepts of temporality and fluidity. Movement was considered the standard in mobility research, the point of interest. Lack of movement was interpreted as empty of value. In the past two decades researchers have incorporated the concept of stillness into mobility; recognizing that a pause or constancy of staying in place has value and is an integral part of fluid movement (Cresswell, 2012). This inclusion is reflected in the literature with the use of the term "(im)mobility". This is the current accepted term in academic literature, but "(im)mobility" implies a binary experience of moving or not moving. Recent findings and findings within this study suggest that stillness deserves more integration into mobility concepts.

The findings here suggest that all mobility groups were engaging with psychosocial development, relationships, and balancing well-being in their mobility decisions. What separates those who stayed from those who moved, was simply the literal, physical movement. The other aspects of mobility were part of a conceptual process, thinking about and imagining another place; conceptually negotiating multiple reasons, obligations, and desires. The findings suggest that all participants, including Stayers, engage in conceptual mobility, being aware of, pondering, and considering other locations. Returnees and Leavers engage in conceptual and literal mobility. Their conceptual process precedes a physical and literal move.

The separation of the conceptual and literal aspects of mobility are recent contributions to the field of mobility. Zittoun and colleague developed a "sociocultural psychology" framework of mobility in which the conceptual aspects of mobility, called "symbolic mobility" is separated from the literal aspect called "geographical mobility" (Pedersen & Zittoun, 2021; Zittoun, 2020). They found that individuals engage in the symbolic, conceptual aspects of mobility. Sometimes this leads to a geographical move, and sometimes this leads to remaining in the same place. Further, they found in case studies that people who stay are engaging in a rich conceptually mobile life.

Separating conceptual mobility from physical mobility is helpful in three distinct ways. One, it helps to solidify stillness as a valuable aspect of mobility and honors the assumption of fluidity in the evolution of the field. Two, it helps to understand more about the differences between mobility decisions and patterns. Three, it points to why mobility very individualized. Two people in the same place with similar upbringing, demographic characteristics, opportunities, and obligations can make two different

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mobility choices. The inner experience of conceptual mobility, and their iterative development help to reveal where they diverge from other mobility groups.

Is Being Mobile Good for People, or Stillness Bad for People?

The last fundamental question about mobility ponders what types of mobility are a benefit for people. Due to mobility's disciplinary origins in the biological sciences, the concept of "migration" assumed that movement was evolution, adaptation, bettering one's conditions, or survival. This assumption inherently meant movement represented positive well-being outcomes and staying represented poor well-being outcomes. The findings in this study suggest that well-being is more complex and highly subjective.

In the interviews participants examined what contributed and/or diminished their perceived well-being (PWB) in the locations they have lived. They spoke about the physical environment, their relationships, and affective states which include emotions, perceptions, and attitudes. Details of their joy, stress, and worries emerged in context of their daily life and cumulative experiences in a location. Included in these details were existential concepts about belonging, meaning, and purpose. The literature describes these as hedonic, evaluative, and eudaimonic dimensions of subjective well-being (Graham et al., 2018).

Three general conclusions about PWB emerge from the findings. One, expressions of PWB are integrated with the other themes important in mobility decisions. Two, there is a reciprocal relationship between PWB and mobility. When well-being is perceived to be less than ideal it can become a reason for mobility. When people are located in a place they enjoy and actively choose, it reaffirms things that contribute to

their well-being. Three, a balance in PWB is desired with more contributing than diminishing factors.

The first conclusion is that PWB is integrated with other themes that are important in mobility decisions. Well-being was integrated with iterative development because the assessment of well-being changed over time and with experience of new places. The contributions to well-being that participants desired were integrated with identity formation and the life a person envisioned for themselves. Whether a person enjoys the freedom of anonymity or the connection that comes from being known is integrated with how a location contributes or diminishes their well-being. Well-being was integrated with centrality of relationship. For example, disruption of relationships or perceived conflict diminished well-being, while experiencing a sense of belonging, community interdependence, and having people to rely upon contributed to well-being.

The second conclusion is that PWB appears to have a reciprocal relationship with mobility. This conclusion is better understood through examination of differences among mobility groups. Each mobility group's perceived well-being reflected their mobility decisions, and the place they chose to live reinforced the contributing factors that enhanced their well-being. Stayers found tremendous contribution to their well-being by living in Copper County. The had peace of mind, no stress, sense of belonging, and loved the outdoors. They also denied any diminishing factors with few exceptions. This assessment of PWB reinforces the decision to stay in Copper County. When Leavers discussed their reasons for leaving Copper County, they were looking to explore their identities, discover new interests, and felt that other locations would be a better fit. Those were exactly the things they found to contribute to their well-being in the places they now

live. Additionally, the lack of certain amenities diminished their well-being in Copper County, and those amenities were available and contributed to their well-being in their current locations. This confirmed their mobility choices, and the choice reflect what they wanted to contribute to their well-being. Returnees, who experienced leaving and returning to Copper County found their lives enhanced in both locations. Contributions and diminishing factors were complex but interestingly, Returnees expressed how contributing and diminishing factors can coexist at the same time. Not every experience of a place is entirely good or bad, it is the balance that needs to tip towards contribution for a place to feel as if it enhances perceived well-being.

The coexistence of contributing and diminishing factors sets the conditions for the third conclusion that tipping the balance of PWB towards more contributing than diminishing aspects is most desired. This conclusion may appear obvious, but there exists an array of contributing and diminishing factors in places which are continually evolving and assessed by people who are growing, aging, and changing. The balance of PWB can be an ever-shifting target. There is no perfect location that has all the contributors to well-being and none of the diminishing factors. The aim is to have more contributing than diminishing factors to well-being that fit each person's preferences. If there is not, mobility is just one way to address that imbalance. Kevin, a Returnee recalled the book and movie *The Prince of Tides*, where the first line is "Geography is my wound." He identified with that phrase because there always seemed to be something missing in any location he had lived. The pertinent question for him, was could he live without that thing. He went on to describe a poem he had come across that perfectly described his thoughts. That the perfect place was where you could walk out your back door and have

the woods, ponds, animals, and dirt roads. Then you could walk out your front door and have cinemas, bistros, shopping, and nightlife. When Kevin was a young adult, he left Copper County and found most of his contributors to his well-being in a large urban city. Over time, the balance shifted, and his well-being became diminished. He chose to return to Copper County, found significant contributors to his well-being, knowing, and accepting, that perfection was not reality.

Summary

The first overarching line of inquiry in the field of mobility probes what makes people mobile. A synthesis of this study's findings and analysis suggest that mobility is a developmental process, that relationships are fundamental in mobility reasons, and reasons span from pragmatic to more abstract. The discussion of the developmental process includes stages of psychosocial development as reasons associated with mobility decisions and that individuals negotiate their reasons with an iterative developmental process. These findings suggest that development associated with mobility is more complex than age or age-differentiated events. Development includes interpersonal and intrapersonal growth that is continuous over the lifespan.

An important finding in this study is that relationships are fundamental in mobility. The importance of relationship is greatly integrated with other reasons for mobility. Additionally, important relationships that influence mobility decisions exist on multiple social levels including individuals, families, groups of friends, and communities. Relationships are so essential that they often supersede considerations of personal needs, desires, or opportunities in mobility decisions. Reasons for mobility went beyond development and relationships to include other reasons that spanned from pragmatic to

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more abstract. These findings are situated within and provide depth and complexity to the predominant theories of mobility while making the case that other theories, concepts, and bodies of literature can be beneficial in examining mobility.

The second overarching line of inquiry in the field of mobility probes what makes people go, stay, or return. Comparing mobility patterns is a common way of examining mobility motivations and outcomes. In this study, the major themes were evident across all mobility decisions, and subtle nuance and complexity to each theme emerged from group comparisons. Individuals are primarily seeking a location with an appraised goodness of fit between their self-concept and the qualities and values represented by the location where they can also thrive and meet their needs. If the appraisal of goodness of fit changes, then that is one motivation for moving. In these findings, Stayers were very satisfied and felt a congruence between themselves and Copper County. Leavers felt an incongruence between themselves and Copper County, and later found more congruence in the locations they chose to reside. Returnees experienced an evolution of shifting congruence. They once felt incongruence with Copper County, they moved away, found more congruence with their new locations, but over time they continued to develop, and their needs and desires shifted resulting in incongruence with where they lived. They then determined Copper County was the best place to meet their needs and the latest iteration of "self".

The third overarching line of inquiry in the field of mobility probes if it is helpful to think of stillness as a dimension of mobility. The findings in this study align with recent literature that separates physical mobility from conceptual mobility. All participants were engaging with and negotiating mobility reasons as part of conceptual

mobility. Only Returnees and Leavers also chose physical mobility to accompany their conceptual process. Understanding this separation is valuable to theoretical expansion in the field of mobility.

The last overarching line of inquiry in the field of mobility probes if moving is good for people and if staying is bad for people. The findings in this study suggest that well-being is complex and highly subjective. There are factors that subjectively contribute and diminish well-being, and they coexist in any location. This relates to mobility in a complex way because the interpretation of contributors and diminishers changes over time promoting a potential reason for moving.

The discussion of these findings highlights the contributions made to the literature, while situating those contributions within overarching interests in the field of mobility. This discussion argues that concepts and bodies of literature not traditionally used to examine mobility can assist with theoretical expansion that is needed in the field of mobility. Additionally, addressing the stigma associated with staying mobility decisions will help to expand the field of mobility and the rural to urban continuum literature. The next chapter begins with the conclusions of this study followed by implications and recommendations.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Chapter Introduction

This chapter begins with the conclusions of the study. There are four major

conclusions and together they offer unique contribution to the literature. Next, the main

implication of these findings is that place is an important dimension for understanding

human nature. This implication applies to research, social work education, and social

work practice. There are several recommendations for further research followed by a

discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with final

thoughts; an act of self-reflexivity which is important to social work research.

Conclusions

The analysis suggests that mobility reasons are complex with themes and

concepts that are interrelated and often work in tandem. An integrated understanding of

the findings builds a more holistic view of how an individual negotiates mobility

decisions. The in-depth examination of individual mobility reasons has resulted in four

conclusions. First, **the findings represent interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of**

mobility. These dimensions add insights about mobility and bring additional theories not

traditionally used in mobility into consideration. A person's inner experience and

relational experiences are important and rich with meaning. Interpersonal and

intrapersonal aspects of mobility are not mutually exclusive, rather they have a reciprocal

relationship and develop in relation to one another. As people grow in their relationships this develops and changes a person's self-concept, and vice versa.

This reciprocal relationship leads to the second conclusion, that **the themes of psychosocial development, the tension of being known versus anonymity, centrality of relationship, iterative developmental process, and balancing well-being, are all interconnected**. Examining individual mobility stories highlights that there is overlap in how these concepts are experienced. For example, all of the concepts are involved in iterative development. Relationship is consistently a feature of all themes and the ways each individual navigates these themes impacts their well-being. The interconnection of the themes illuminates a holistic view of the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of mobility.

The next conclusion is that **relationships are fundamental in mobility decisions**. Mobility considerations are embedded in relational contexts, which are essential and valuable to individuals. Relationships also occur on multiple social levels including individuals, families, and communities. The drive for connection one-on-one, with families, groups of friends, and communities is so great that it can supersede the importance of other personal needs, desires, or opportunities.

Understanding the significance and value of individual considerations enhances knowledge about mobility decisions and processes. The last conclusion is that **mobility is a developmental process.** The findings suggest two dynamics of development related to mobility. One, each individual's intrapersonal and interpersonal growth is occurring over time. This changes how they interpret their world and their experiences. Two, when individuals engage with mobility, conceptually and/or physically, they are negotiating

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their reasons in an iterative developmental manner. These two dynamics work together. As people change and develop, they meet subsequent mobility considerations with new perspectives and meanings. This results in highly individualized trajectories of inner experience. This may help to explain how weighing the factors influencing mobility decisions is so individual. Two people with the same circumstances, opportunities, and demographic characteristics, make different mobility choices.

These conclusions contribute to the literature in a few important ways. One, they set a foundation for theoretical expansion that incorporates concepts and theories not traditionally used in examining mobility. Two, the conclusions validate the questions in recent literature about additional factors involved with mobility decisions and that they were likely social and psychological factors. Lastly, the conclusions elevate the social work discipline within the field of mobility due to the focus on relationships and development.

Implications

The most significant implication arising from this study is that the dimension of place is important to understanding human nature. This applies to research, social work education, and practice. Place is a context in which people experience their lives. It exists in the past, in memories, in the present physical world, and in the imagined future. Place is integrated with individual intrapersonal and interpersonal growth. It is integrated with what we want for ourselves and our loved ones. Place facilitates and challenges relationships because proximity and distance are not just measures of space, they are tools for emotional connection and disconnection.

Research implications are numerous but there are two main directions of thought stemming from the concept that place is an important dimension of human behavior: One, investigating the ways in which the experience of place influences human behavior: and two, investigating how human behavior imbues place and space with value and meaning. The first empirical pursuit would ask questions about the association between place, or movement through space (mobility), and an array of human behavior topics. How does place facilitate human development? How does being mobile influence specific motivations? Does the physical environment encourage certain emotions? Other questions might include what attributes of place facilitate creativity, kindness, or social conformity?

The second empirical pursuit would ask questions about how people imbue the physical environment with meaning. Questions such as: how do people come to feel belonging in a variety of places? What are the things that make a place so special that it persists in memories in the same ways a treasured family member does? Places of significant tragedy signify great horror, brutality, death, and sacrifice, for example, the location of the Twin Towers, Pearl Harbor, Auschwitz, Normandy Beach, and Gettysburg. Does the meaning of those places change over time? What are the reasons people preserve those meanings over many generations? Elevating place as an important dimension of human behavior seeks additional ways to understanding of how people experience, make sense of, and create meaning in their lives.

There is an additional implication for research that is specific for social work. These findings add place as a dimension to the notion of "goodness of fit" as it relates to mobility. This means that when assessing the compatibility between a person and their

social environment, the importance of location has bearing on this symbiotic relationship. Further, that place informs development and relationships in ways that prompt people to consider goodness of fit in their mobility decisions.

These findings have implications for social work education. Recognizing place as an integral context which influences human behavior would add other concepts and theories into social work education that improve the understanding of human nature and students' future clients. Social work students are currently educated on how location and the environment impact health, mental health, access to resources, and socio-economic status. This study implies that broadening the application of place and mobility in social work education would allow students to better understand their clients' development, relationships, and important values. Additionally, a critical element of effective clinical work is to gain an understanding of the client. Adding place and mobility as another element of assessment deepens the understanding of a client's experiences in life.

The importance of place and mobility could be integrated into multiple social work education competencies. Elevating place and mobility in social work education not only offers students a greater understanding of human behavior it helps to situate their clients and their work within a greater context. Place and mobility are dimensions of engagement and assessment with individuals, families, and communities (Competencies 6 & 7). Place is an important aspect in policy and advocacy due to local governmental structures and state legislatures (Competency 5). Spatial disparities and the rural to urban continuum are vital aspects of engaging with topics of diversity (Competency 2). Place and mobility are already topics in environmental justice but including then in social work education could link those topics of general welfare to the well-being of individuals

(Competency 3). There are a considerable number of theories that explore place and mobility. Those theories are typically introduced in electives such as international social work or working with refugees. However, with the current emphasis on critical examination of topics, there is room to include Feminist theories of mobility into discussion of spatial disparities, intersectionality, and issues of power between people and places (Competency 2 & 4) (CSWE, 2015). Additionally, field education has always be an important part of social work education. Bridging the importance of place and mobility from the classroom to field would enhance students' ability to make use of these concepts in practice.

Social work practice could also benefit from engaging with place and mobility as an important context in multiple interventions. Currently, place and mobility are topics that social workers typically use with specific populations or issues. For example, these are integral topics when working with migrants, refugees, and other displaced people. Social workers also delve into concepts of place when working with people to resolve traumas. Specifically, the intrusive recollection of a place can be part of trauma. However, this study implies that place and mobility are important in developmental and relational contexts. For example, Structured Life Review and Reminiscence Therapy are two evidence-based interventions (EBI) that guide individuals through their past, memories, and life events (Haight & Haight, 2007; Woods, 2018). Structured Life Review is aimed at reassessing life events in order to make meanings or new meanings from past experiences. Place and mobility add another dimension to this EBI which has importance for development through the lifespan and meaning making. For example, a client might be prompted to talk about when they raised their children. Those prompts

could include describing the house, yard, school, and town they were in at the time and how those places were integral to the meanings they made. Reminiscence therapy aims for individuals to utilize their long-term memories for social engagement while living with cognitive decline. Place and mobility are embedded in so many important aspects of life experience and is enduring as a long-term memory. This allows individuals to share memories of places as ways to connect. For example, in this study many participants discussed the "old rec center" in Copper County. This was a place where important events happened such as prom and other high school celebrations. Discussing this place could bring people together with a shared sense of history.

Place is an important dimension to understanding human nature. Mobility is the action related to place, such that it describes movement through space, from one place to another. Incorporating these concepts in research enhances theoretical expansion of many fields. Place and mobility currently have a small place in social work education, but integrating these concepts into theory, policy, and direct practice can provide additional ways for students to understand their clients and to be effective social workers. The integration of place and mobility into evidence-based interventions gives social workers another way of helping clients to better understand their experiences in life and the meanings they have made.

Recommendations for further research

The next steps in research are to address the methodological limitations of the study and to further explore the themes that emerged in these findings. It is important to conduct similar interviews with samples that represent greater racial and economic diversity. Based on indications from this study's participants, there may be additional

reasons that emerge for participants living with a lower socioeconomic status. Additionally, there are important historic mobility patterns for African Americans in the rural Southeast such as the Great Migration and the Metro Turnaround. The legacy of these decisions may be influential for current mobility reasons of African American natives to Copper County. Further exploration of the findings should include larger sample sizes, additional rural locations, and additional interview questions that would better explore the major themes. These themes may be particular to Copper County, or some themes may be shared with other rural communities. Additionally, rural geography varies across the United States. Other rural regions have greater distances to amenities and resources. This could potentially change how they experience their place and their reasons for mobility.

There is another mobility decision that was not examined in this study, people from urban places that chose to move to Copper County having never been there before. These are the "outsiders" that participants discussed. This mobility decision was not included in the study primarily due to limited time and resources. I also suspected that there may not be many people with this mobility decision in the county and identifying them would require additional recruitment strategies. Over the course of the study, I discovered that there were many "outsiders" and several of them were interested in future participation of research. The inclusion of this group may offer additional reasons for mobility or perhaps parallel Leavers in many ways.

There is a need in the literature for more understanding of why people stay. In particular, a focus on perceptions, subjective well-being, and the important meanings made in their locations. This could potentially add to the rural to urban continuum

literature and explore rural resilience and thriving. The separation of conceptual and physical mobility is an interesting and promising direction for understanding staying mobility decisions. Incorporating these concepts into study design could potentially deepen this direction in mobility studies.

A particular interest for further research is the centrality of relationship in mobility and the developmental process. These concepts are a focus in social work as well of a great personal interest. I found these themes to be very compelling. There was a considerable depth of information about relationship and development that was unexpected. Additionally, there were no interview questions that specifically targeted this information. It emerged from simply asking about all the things people thought and cared about in their mobility decisions. Knowing that these concepts may be involved in mobility, I am greatly anticipating being able to explore these areas with additional research.

I have discussed ongoing relationships with many of the participants. It is my hope that I can continue to stay in contact with the participants and obtain longitudinal information about their mobility decisions, reasons, and negotiations. This study suggests that mobility is a developmental process, examination of many years is the best way to investigate that developmental process in their individual mobility decisions.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

Among multiple strengths in this study, four important strengths stand out: inclusivity, temporality, depth, and relationship. The first strength is that the study was successful at capturing a wide range of aspects in participant's lives. The study utilized

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in-depth interviews with an average of two hours of analyzed dialog per individual. The interview questions asked about many dimensions of their experiences, asking open-ended questions prompting participants to express what was subjectively important in their reflections. The study participants had three different mobility decisions, they represented a variety of adult ages from 19 to 79, and they considered mobility at different ages, during different decades, for different reasons. The methodological choices resulted in findings that were inclusive of people's lives and mobility experiences. Participants spoke about their intrapersonal growth and challenges, important relationships on multiple social levels, heartaches, disappointments, successes, belonging, purpose, and future desires. This approach let participants explore and reflect on their lives for many relevant mobility reasons. The result was an inductive view of findings instead of factors predetermined from a theoretical framework. The inclusive and inductive approach was necessary to answer the broad question of what reasons people have and negotiate in their mobility decisions.

The second strength of the study was a focus on temporality. The literature states that a narrow temporal window of examination could be a limitation theoretically and methodologically. A broad view of temporality was chosen in this study which successfully responded to limitations of previous studies. The participants had a wide range of ages, they confronted their mobility decisions, or multiple mobility decisions, at different ages, and physical moves took place in multiple decades. They reflected on memories of past mobility, discussed current mobility negotiation, and imagined potential future mobility desires or options. The attention to temporality in this study highlights this conceptual dimension of mobility. Prioritizing temporality provides a holistic

understanding which is representative of how an individual approaches mobility decisions, integrated with past, present, and future conceptions.

The depth of information in the findings is the third strength in the study. The interviews averaged two hours for each person which garnered considerable depth in the findings. In the interviews, participants could slowly develop and articulate an idea. They often revisited the same idea multiple times which allowed the individual to parse through their thoughts. Part of my training as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker which fit well with this methodology, was that I learned when a client states something more than once, or comes back to a concept multiple times, it is important and should not be dismissed. Allowing the participants time to sit with their thoughts resulted in well-thought-out ideas, articulation that built a more precise understanding over the course of the interview, and further meaning making for the individual just by their participation in the study. The act of articulating their thoughts was important for the participants. Many of them expressed they have never put those thoughts or feelings into words before. Several participants stated that the interviews felt very therapeutic, they were able to revisit and make sense of many experiences, positive and negative, that felt unresolved.

There were two unintended consequences of the in-depth interviews that made analysis a challenge but continued to foster depth in the findings. One, evidence of themes was embedded in context and personal meanings which provides a greater understanding of a concept but takes more effort to distill during coding and analysis. Two, thoughts that were revisited were not linear and the multiple articulations had small differences. This required piecing together topics and statements, some interpreting while in the interview, and confirmation from the participant in order to have clarity. Despite

these challenges, multiple verbal iterations offered depth of information which was valuable in answering the research questions.

Relationship is the fourth strength in this study. It is important for qualitative methodology and social work research. In approximately two hours, which is a relatively short period of time, I was able to build relationships with the participants. There was a period of time in the beginning where participants wanted to know more about my personal investment in studying rural geographic mobility and Copper County. My choice to be authentic and transparent in my answers built trust in the relationship. Some participants came to a decision point where they stated something to the effect of "now I feel comfortable sharing with you, because there is a lot of judgement out there". Once trust had been built it set the foundation for vulnerability and discussion of deeply personal and emotionally painful topics. I met this evolution in the relationship with empathy, understanding, and without judgement, fulfilling my part in building relationship. If the information had simply been recorded without the give and take from both parties, a relationship would not have developed, and more personal topics may not have been shared.

The relationships built with participants have continued to flourish after the interviews finished. Many participants have continued contact with me, updating me on county news, family successes, their new mobility choices, and generally choosing to continue our meaningful relationship. Mobility effects people's lives in deep and meaningful ways. Sharing discussions of mobility in a relationship provides opportunity for people to feel understood by one another. This aspect of mobility cannot be explored through survey data or even brief structured interviews.

Limitations

There are four limitations discussed: lack of racial diversity, a limited range of socioeconomic status, the snowball sampling technique, and sample size. Racial diversity is a limitation in this study despite efforts to be inclusive. Potential participants that represent racial diversity were engaged in the community and referred by participants, however, after initial discussions many chose to decline further participation in the study. The most important reason to have a racially diverse sample was to be inclusive of all people's experiences, especially when the county demographics are approximately 55% white and 45% African American. In anticipation of better recruiting of a diverse sample in future studies, I met with local church leaders in Copper County of a church that had a racially integrated congregation. As per the participants, most churches were attended by mostly segregated populations. Church leaders offered valuable insights and techniques about engaging in a rural community with varying racial demographics.

The participants were middle-class to upper middle-class. Including participants with economic diversity would potentially broaden some of the themes. As reported in the findings, participants believed that having low income or a small fixed income would complicate the ability to achieve a desired move. It raises questions about if the considerations are the same but executing the move is constrained. Or, if there are additional considerations that are exclusively associated with lower incomes. In discussion of the findings, a question was raised about the integration of social network theory and the centrality of relationship. Could people with low incomes be utilizing relationships as a resource more than people with higher incomes?

Ideally, this study would have had perfect ratios of demographic characteristics in a heterogenous sample. However, the sample was recruited with a snowball sampling technique with additional efforts to recruit a range in demographic characteristics. One disadvantage to this technique is that everyone in the sample has some kind of social connection. It could be assumed that people associate with others that share social views or perceptions. This appeared to occur between some of the participants. However, there were politically and socially liberal participants and conservative participants in about equal numbers. Although this is an advantage for exploring reasons for mobility it may not have been representative of the county. It is my impression that about half of the sample would have known or have heard of one another. Some participants referred a family member or close friend, while others referred a someone they didn't know very well but though they might have an interest in the research process.

Sample size is often discussed as a limitation in research. This is typically because sample size is related to generalizability. In qualitative work sample size is a reflection of choosing breadth or depth of information (Patton, 2002). This study prioritized depth of information on broad and inclusive topics. Given the same amount of time and resources, a larger number of people in a sample will aim to achieve breadth of information and a smaller number of people will aim for depth of information (Patton, 2002). Depth of information was achieved with this sample of thirty participants divided into three mobility groups of nine Stayers, ten Leavers, and eleven Returnees. This suggests the sample size was adequate for the aims of the research questions, but a few more participants in each mobility group could add to the trustworthiness of the findings.

Additionally, generalizability is related to sample size. Quantitative research is typically seeking external generalizability, results which can apply to a larger context, setting, or group. Qualitative research is commonly seeking internal generalizability, cases that reflect that group or setting (Maxwell, 2013). The challenge is to have a variety of cases in the sample that represent the variation of mobility decisions from Copper County natives. There was variation of the evidence presented in each theme. Sometimes this variation was within a mobility group, other themes had variation across groups. This suggests some internal generalizability, however, there can always be improvements in recruiting a sample with heterogenous experiences.

Critical Analysis of Theory

Additional critiques of where the findings are situated within the social work discipline and the approach to this study merit explication. The first critique is about the implications of a sample that lacks racial and economic diversity. As discussed in the limitations, a more ideal sample would have included more African American participants and other participants with lower socioeconomic status. This would have been more inclusive and representative of the county population demographics. The lack of racial and economic diversity in the sample precludes me from making conclusions on how race and class shape the reasons for mobility. The absence of this information does not deny that race and class influence experiences, interpretations, and meaning making, rather, the information is not present in the findings.

During the interviews topics of race were discussed. This included experiences of being in school during integration and to what degree are the current businesses, social clubs, and other social institutions integrated. Topics of social norms and behaviors

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regarding race were also explored. These topics garner a better understanding of the history of the county, participants' experiences during the Civil Rights movement, and current racial relations. However, none of these topics answered the research questions. Thus, the information was not presented. Additionally, the two African American participants were males in their mid to late twenties, college educated and very successful in their professions. One was a Returnee, the other, a Leaver. I asked them if their race or race relations in any way was incorporated in their reasons for mobility. They both denied race had shaped their experiences with seeking to leave Copper County, and for one man, the decision to return. They also reported that they did not have difficult racial experiences growing up, rather they had racially integrated groups of friends and mentors. It would be an unwarranted conclusion that race does not influence reasons for mobility based solely on comments from only two participants who are very similar across demographic characteristics. However, their comments cannot be ignored; they are the experts in their own lives. Perhaps, race does not always influence mobility reasons in a deterministic way. Additionally, the information from most of the participants surrounding topics of race suggests that there are generational differences in experiences of race in the rural Southeast that are worth exploring in further research.

The second critique further situates this study within a long-standing debate in the social work discipline. The purpose of social work has been debated to focus on individual's needs contrasted with the desire for social change. Both directions are useful, but in different ways. This study does not stand in opposition to social change, rather, it focuses on exploring lived experience and common individual reasons for mobility and processes to illuminate possible avenues for theoretical expansion. One manifestation of

this debate in social work research is a problem-focused approach to research. This study explores a phenomenon, it does not identify a social problem that needs to be alleviated. The exploration of mobility reasons in this study utilizes a tradition in social work which prioritizes the perceptions and subjective experiences of individuals to learn more about a phenomenon and to shed light on common human needs, desires, and challenges. Helen Harris Perlman explained the same position within social work practice, "If services to human beings are to fulfill their alleged purposes, they must attend not only to the problems people have but to the people who suffer and struggle to cope with these problems" (Perlman, 1979, p, 11).

An example from the findings that demonstrates the advantages of learning more about a phenomenon from individual experiences is the balance of well-being. Recent social work literature has approached the study of well-being with a problem-focus and utilized objective measures of well-being. This body of work has contributed to concepts such as food deserts and lack of mental health and specialty medical care in many rural areas. However, the findings here suggest that subjective well-being paints a very different picture of daily rural life. The participants were largely very happy with their location and reported excellent well-being while still acknowledging goods, services, and amenities that were lacking. The disparity between subjective and objective well-being is where further investigation may prove enlightening. Many of the participants are utilizing strategies to increase their well-being that should be incorporated into the rural well-being literature. For example, several of the participants used an organic produce delivery service and organic meal delivery services to improve their access to fresh organic foods. Most of the participants visited doctors in a larger city about an hour and a half away.

They created networks of people and friends who took turns driving. For routine visits this resulted in a fun day trip of other activities and during more urgent visits, there was always a trusted person who could be a reliable driver that day and on short notice. Examining phenomena and problems are both useful, together they drive towards a better understanding of people and the conditions in which they live.

The third critique is about the theories chosen to further analyze the results. I have already acknowledged that Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental theory, Relational Cultural Theory, and the concept of sense of community are not traditionally used to examine mobility. Further discussion helps to illuminate analytical choices and situates this study within contemporary social work perspectives. During analysis the stages of psychosocial development began to coalesce slowly. This is appropriate in Thematic Analysis and results in interpretations that stay close to the data. At first, identity formation was obvious, then over time, seeking intimacy and generativity began to emerge. I recognized these stages as three similar stages of psychosocial development as theorized by Erik Erikson. I chose this theory to illuminate the findings precisely because it remained close to the data and described the stages more fully. I intentionally discussed that the stages in the findings appear across the adult lifespan counter to how Erikson presented his theory of stages. My findings regarding no specific age ranges in development are consistent with cross cultural critiques of Erikson's theory (Ochse & Plug, 1986) and add to the critical debate of the stage theory of psychosocial development.

Erikson's work was situated in psychodynamic traditions which have been criticized for lack of gender, racial, and economic diversity in the development of

psychodynamic theories and applications. Despite the lack of inclusivity during development, Erikson's theory on psychosocial stages remains very close to the data and how participants described those experiences. This makes the inclusion of his theory an appropriate choice. The criticisms of psychodynamics and lack of diversity have not been ignored in the theoretical choices made in this study. Relational Cultural Theory was developed by a group of feminist scholars and practitioners in direct response to psychodynamic perspectives. They found psychodynamic approaches in practice did not fully explain the female experience and at times pathologized social strategies that women relied upon for coping and resilience (Comstock et al., 2008; Fletcher & Ragins, 2008; Jordan, 2001, 2008, 2017; Jordan et al., 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997).

This theory was chosen primarily for the same reasons as Erikson; it stayed close to the data and described participant experiences in relationships with the pull towards authentic connection and navigating the vulnerability required to achieve that connection. The inclusion of this theory is benefitted by the fact that RCT was developed in response to criticisms of psychodynamics and continued use of RCT over the past decade has focused on inclusivity. The choice to include theories from two distinct traditions, termed theoretical triangulation (Denzin, 1989), strengthens the trustworthiness of the findings in two ways. One, it demonstrates that my analytical interpretations remained close to the data. Two, the findings were truly inductive without any theoretical framework imposed upon development of themes in analysis. I did not seek to explain the data with the most popular or contemporary theories.

There are aspects of RCT that have not been discussed in this study. The elements of the theory presented are specifically related to the findings and further illuminating

those dynamics. Other elements of the theory discuss the concept of power within relationships, in particular, for people of any minority status including race, gender, and sexuality. This element of the theory has been expanded and applied more in the past several years matching the interest in inclusivity in social research. RCT has been useful in analyzing the drive towards connection in relationships and could potentially be useful in examining racial and class differences in reasons for mobility. This element of RCT shares concepts with other contemporary perspectives in social work such as Critical Race Theory which examines racial experiences and power dynamics.

A final critique of participants' process of reflecting on mobility decisions during the interviews that have already come to pass suggest there may be some post hoc rationalizations made about the reasons for mobility, the consequences, and what was positive or negative about those experiences. Most people use post hoc rationalizations in their reasoning; creating reasons after reacting to something which are the best explanations for their reactions. Without the ability to ask questions prior to a physical move and then again after the move is complete, questions will remain about whether the reasons stated are a true representation of perspectives prior to physical moves and thus the impetus for those moves. Despite the inability to untangle this reasoning strategy from the data, most of the participants were able to report previous perspectives separate from current reflections. For example, a participant might say when they moved away for college, they were really thinking about all the interesting people they could meet and how exciting it would be to make new friends and date. Then after time had gone past, they realized they had more in common with people in the new urban location, they had not expected they would be better understood in another place. It is important to be

transparent about the possibility of post hoc rationalizations, but this example highlights that all reasoning is important in how people make sense of their lives and experiences. Obtaining an objective truth from one particular point in time does not reflect how we interpret our lives as time passes.

Final Thoughts

My intention when I set out to conduct this study was to ask good research questions that were the next best questions stemming from the literature. I suspected that participants would discuss some of the same ideas already reflected in the research. I was not expecting to find indications of additional considerations. After the first few interviews I was stunned and excited about the topics participants were discussing. They were trusting, vulnerable, deeply insightful, and self-reflective. I did not know yet what themes might emerge, but I was deeply moved and invested.

I thought I would encounter some participants who had a few pragmatic reasons for their mobility decision and no additional considerations. I assumed that not everyone engaged with mobility in deeply meaningful ways. I was either wrong or I magically ended up with thirty participants that were deeply insightful, thought about their lives in pragmatic and existential ways, and had great capacity for self-reflexivity. I have since concluded two things. One, that mobility and the places we choose to be are deeply meaningful and impact many aspects of our lives, and so greatly that it shifts what we think of ourselves and others. Two, that people have extraordinary lives. Some participants told me they had "simple boring lives". Absolutely, not true. I think that if life unfolds in ways we predict, we assume that means it is boring or simple. I extend this conclusion to the general populous. Individuals typically focus on their own lives, needs

and obligations, while wishing we had more hours in the day. This is not self-centered but attempts to maintain self-sufficiency. In doing so, we can underestimate how extraordinary our lives are and the lives of people around us.

I was so deeply moved by peoples' experiences and how much they were sharing with me. They allowed themselves to be authentic, vulnerable, and share their joys and heartaches with me. I became overwhelmed with a sense of responsibility to hold, share, and honor their stories. I have been profoundly changed by this experience and my life made much richer. I will be forever grateful for this experience and being able to share a few hours of the participants' extraordinary lives.

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APPENDIX A

INVITATION LETTER

My name is Mariah Moran. I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Social Work at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying geographic mobility in the American rural Southeast. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me virtually for an interview about your experiences with moving or not moving from Copper county Georgia.

In particular, you will be asked questions about your experiences and decision-making surrounding moving away from Copper county, returning to Copper, or remaining in Copper county. There will be an initial meeting and then a follow up meeting approximately a week later depending on your schedule. The meetings will take place on Zoom at mutually agreed upon times and should last about an hour each. The interview will be recorded in Zoom so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The recording will only be reviewed by members of the research team and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

You will receive $40 for participating in the study. This funding is provided by the SPARC grant from University of South Carolina.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at 706-254-2529 or mm66@email.sc.edu or my faculty advisor, Dr. Naomi Farber at naomif@mailbox.sc.edu.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me to set up a Zoom meeting for a time that is most convenient for you.

With kind regards,

Mariah Moran, LCSW
706-254-2529
mm66@email.sc.edu

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

The following are few basic questions to better help me understand you. This information will remain confidential and does not in any way shape the interview. The purpose of this information is to make sure I interview a variety of individuals who have had multiple types of experiences with geographic mobility.

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Gender:
4. Race:
5. Occupation:
6. Level of Education: (please select one)
    a. Some high school
    b. Highschool diploma/GED
    c. Some college
    d. College – 4-year degree
    e. College – Graduate studies
7. Level of income (annual):
    a. Less than $30,000
    b. $30,000 – $39,000
    c. $40,000 – $49,000
    d. $50,000 – $59,000
    e. $60,000 – $69,000
    f. $70,000 – $79,000
    g. $80,000 or more
8. Mailing Address:

    _____

    (This will not be shared and is completely confidential. It allows me to send you the $40 Visa Gift card which compensates you for your time dedicated to the interview. Your time is very much appreciated!)

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Opening question, appraisal of place, perceptions, iterative perceptions of place:

    o Returned – Can you tell me about living in Copper county? What is it like? And how is it in comparison to when you lived there before?

    o Left – Can you tell me about living in Copper county? What was it like? And how was it in comparison to the place you live now?

    o Stayed - Can you tell me about living in Copper county? What is it like?

- Reasons for mobility decision, building biographical nature of mobility, perceptions and other concepts:

    o Returned - Can you tell me about leaving Copper? What was that like?

        ▪ Can you tell me about coming back to Copper county? What was that like?

    o Left - Can you tell me about leaving Copper? What was that like?

    o Stayed - Can you tell me about a time that you might have considered leaving?

- Focusing on reasons/factors, negotiations will begin to emerge here:

    o Returned - Can you tell me about your biggest considerations for returning?

    o Left - Can you tell me about your biggest considerations for leaving?

- Stayed - Can you tell me about your biggest considerations for remaining in Copper?

- Focusing on reasons/factors, and shifting negotiations:

  - Returned - Can you tell me if any of those considerations would influence you to leave Copper again?

  - Left - Can you tell me if any of those considerations would influence you to return to Copper again?

  - Stayed - Can you tell me how any of those considerations might influence you to leave Copper?

- ** Specific to those who stay:

  - There is an argument among academics that people in rural places sometimes intentionally decide to remain there, others might feel stuck there, and others think it just works out that way unintentionally. Can you weigh in on this argument? Where do you stand within these ideas?

- Social network/linked lives/family:

  - ALL - Who are the important people in your life?

- Social network/linked lives:

  - Returned - Can you tell be about how your relationships played a role in leaving and returning to Copper?

  - Left - Can you tell be about how your relationships played a role in you leaving Copper?

  - Stayed - Can you tell be about how your relationships played a role in you remaining in Copper?

- Interaction in the community, employment, institutional involvement:

  o ALL - Can you tell me about the things you do in Copper County? These are your main activities, anything from employment to leisure, to any other activities you engage in.

  o Left – Same question for current location

- Place attachment/ shifting bonds with place:

  o ALL - What specific places in Copper County are important to you? Any places that hold a special meaning or memory for you?

- Perceptions of well-being:

  o ALL - What does the idea of well-being mean to you?

- Perceptions of well-being:

  o Returned - Can you tell me about how living in Copper contributes to and/or diminishes your well-being?

    ▪ Can you tell me about how living in the other places you lived contributed to or diminished your well-being?

  o Left - Can you tell me about how living in Copper contributed to and/or diminished your well-being?

    ▪ Can you tell me about how living in your current location has contributed to or diminished your well-being?

  o Stayed - Can you tell me about how living in Copper contributes to and/or diminishes your well-being?

- Perceptions and rural comparisons:

  - ALL - Can you tell me if there is anything different about Copper than other rural counties?

  - ALL - Can you tell me about the ways in which your experience of Copper is similar or dissimilar to other people who live here?

- Reflection facilitated by externalizing the mobility decision:

  - Returned - Would you recommend someone to return to their rural county? Why?

  - Left - Would you recommend someone to leave their rural county? Why?

  - Stayed - Would you recommend someone remain in their rural county? Why?

- Reflection, negotiation of reasons, expected vs. unexpected outcomes:

  - ALL - If you had to do it all over again, would you? Would you change anything? Why?

- ALL – Is there anything else that you think is important to your story that I should know?

APPENDIX D

COPPER COUNTY RESOURCES

1. Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL)

    1-800-715-4225

    This is a statewide toll-free call center for people to access all types of mental and

    behavioral health services. The phone number operates 24/7 and has the capacity

    to screen and assess callers for the most appropriate types of services. If

    experiencing a mental health crisis, call this number. If you are not sure where to

    get other mental health services, call this number.

2. *Copper* Behavioral Health Services

    Address: Phone:
    XXX   XXX-XXX-XXXX
    This is *Copper* county's outpatient behavioral health clinic. This location is

    appropriate if you are seeking an appointment to speak to a psychiatrist or a

    counselor.

3. XXX Medical Center – *Copper*

    Address: Phone:
    XXX   XXX-XXX-XXXX
    This is the county hospital and emergency room.