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# The Geography of Stuck: Exceptions to Brain Drain in West Virginia

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**The Geography of Stuck:  
Exceptions to Brain Drain in West Virginia**

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In partial fulfillment of  
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in Sociology

by

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## ABSTRACT

The Geography of Stuck:

Exceptions to Brain Drain in West Virginia

By Lindsay Heinemann

Brain drain, also known as “human capital flight,” can be defined as “the mass emigration of technically skilled people from one country to another country” (Weeks, 2008, p. 250) or one state to another state. This theory surmises that highly skilled people or those with high education levels are more likely to migrate from places with little to no economic opportunities to places with better economic and job opportunities. West Virginia has largely been a state with few high paying or prestigious job opportunities. So why do highly educated people stay in West Virginia? Using census data and personal interviews, I will explore why highly skilled people stay in a state that boasts one of the poorest economies. The people who stay are the exception to the rule. I will determine if those who stick around, especially in the more rural parts of the state, do so because of social capital and family reasons, and possibly pride in the state. I will also focus on immobility and local identity, especially that of the Appalachian. I want to determine why the brain drain theory does not apply to them

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“Neither Mix Nor Intermarry: Let Deep Roots Grow  
If you do not MINGLE you will Cease to Progress”  
Angel, *Angels in America*

Huntington, West Virginia was recently ranked number 45 in community connectedness, meaning the city excels at connecting its citizens to one another, both physically and socially (Smart Growth America, 2014) Contrarily, the latest Well-Being Index (Gallup, 2014) announced that Huntington-Ashland, W.Va-Ky.-Oh. is now the most miserable metropolitan area in America (Zeveloff, 2014). Last year the Huntington metropolitan area came in second to Charleston, West Virginia but managed to gain the number one spot this year, leaving Charleston at number two (Zeveloff, 2013). The Well-Being Index measures a variety of factors including health, work environment, and access to basic necessities (Zeveloff, 2014). Currently the top two most miserable cities in the nation are located in West Virginia, which leads to the question, why do people stay in an area that has proven to be miserable and does not provide for many professional career opportunities?

Demography, the scientific study of human populations, is relevant when discussing why people decide to stay in the place they were born or make the decision to migrate elsewhere. Many factors are involved in this decision. According to “push-pull theory, some people move because they are pushed out of their former location, whereas others move because they have been pulled, or attracted, to another location” (Weeks, 2008, p.252). Push-pull factors will be discussed, as well as some fundamental aspects of demography as they relate to West Virginia, such as population size, population structure (how many males and females there are of each age), and population characteristics (what people are like in a given place, in terms of variables such as education, income, occupation, and family and household relationships).

Generally speaking, changes in the number of employment opportunities have little effect on outmigration; however, that does not necessarily mean the decision to leave or stay is based on noneconomic reasons (Lovejoy, 2006). West Virginia has historically been isolated from the rest of the country and immigration was previously economically motivated (Black, McKinnish, Sanders, 2005). Historically, people migrated to the state for the opportunity to mine coal. However, the increase in the use of automated technology has led to a stark decrease in coal mining jobs in West Virginia (Charleston Gazette, 2013).

The purpose of this research is to critically examine the population that decides to stay in an area that, according to recent research, has little to offer in the way of jobs and recreation. The main questions this research asks are: (1) Why do people not leave an area that has little to offer and has been proven to be a “miserable” environment? My sample population for this study are those who are highly educated, i.e., earned a bachelor’s degree or higher, and live in the same state or region that they grew up in. According to the brain drain theory, however, people who are highly educated tend to leave regions that have no major metropolitan area and few job prospects, like the state of West Virginia.

Chapter two explores previous literature on the subjects of West Virginia’s history, economy, and resources. It also examines the demographic patterns in West Virginia as well as the psychology, identity, and connection that people feel to the state. Chapter three introduces the theoretical perspectives used in this research which include brain drain theory (human capital flight), place attachment theory and how it effects entrenched nonmovers’ desire to migrate, and social capital theory and how it relates to one’s decision to move or stay. The brain drain theory section will focus on previous literature regarding the theory, as well as how brain drain theory corresponds to those who decide to stay in West Virginia. The section on place attachment will

focus on why one decides not to move and how their physical and emotional attachment motivates that decision. The section on social capital theory also focuses on one's desire to leave or stay in an area, this time focusing on how people living in rural areas may have stronger bonds with one another, reaping more benefits from these social attachments than those in urban areas. Chapter four presents the research methodology which includes 20 in-depth interviews conducted in the Huntington Metropolitan Area. A correlation analysis will also be discussed as it relates to age, class, gender, and the location of each of the respondents and how that can be related to the following chapter's analysis.

Chapter five provides the results of the interviews and develops themes based on responses from the participants (i.e., *Great location, Stuck*) and relates the emergent themes with the theories discussed in chapter two. An overview of all the themes and their descriptions will be provided followed by a detailed correlation analysis regarding the findings. Chapter six delves into the discussion and conclusion focusing on the findings, the implications of the study, significance of the study, limitations, and directions for further research.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

In this chapter, the history, geography, and resources of West Virginia and Appalachia will be discussed. It is important to focus on the history of the area, so as to get a better understanding of the current economic and social situation in West Virginia. What's past is prologue, meaning history plays a vital role and sets the context for the present direction of the state and of the Appalachian region. West Virginia is famous for its rugged terrain, beautiful mountains, and bountiful resources. All of these characteristics of the state influence how native West Virginian's are taught to feel about the state and also majorly influence the economy of the state. The demographic and economic patterns of West Virginia will also be discussed. Demography is destiny, so it is important to discuss general characteristics of any given place if one is going to grasp how those characteristics affect its citizens. The Appalachian identity as a psychological phenomenon, as well as a sociological construct will also be discussed.

#### **History, Geography, Resources**

West Virginia is located in the Appalachian highlands and is home to some of the most rugged land and hills in the United States, giving West Virginia its nickname- the Mountain State. West Virginia holds a unique place in the United States, for it is the only state entirely within the Appalachian region. The Appalachian Mountains are a vast mountain region ranging from Northern Alabama to parts of New York and Canada. Appalachia, as a geographical and psychological location, varies depending on who you ask. West Virginians tend to draw maps of Appalachia that center around West Virginia, while Kentuckians draw maps that center around Kentucky (Cooper, Knotts, & Elders, 2011).

West Virginia was formed on June 20, 1863, after it separated from Virginia during the Civil War. The main reason for the separation from Virginia was over slavery. In West Virginia, slavery was not seen as a “sacred cow in this mountainous region, where land was unsuitable for large farms. Instead, the western counties were building a diversified economy around manufacturing” (Swick, 2013, p. 61 ), so slavery was not viewed as something pertinent to the state’s economy. While some delegates favored the immediate formation of a new state, others believed the act would constitute an act of revolution against the United States. However, President Lincoln declared the admission of the new state of West Virginia to be both constitutional and expedient. West Virginia was the 35<sup>th</sup> state admitted to the union and originally included 48 counties. In 1866, Congress added two more counties to the state, Berkeley and Jefferson, resulting “in generally the same boundary as the present state” (Census, 2010).

Despite West Virginia becoming its own state in the mid-nineteenth century, Appalachia was not recognized as a distinct sociocultural region until the latter part of the nineteenth century. During the 1870s the region began to be popularized through what has been termed the local color movement. Two distinct stereotypes of Appalachians occur in popular media and academic scholarship- one romantic and the other degrading. Billings, et al. (2000) suggested that:

“romantic images portray mountain women as enigmatic but talented people who make beautiful quilts... and are characterized as the quiet caretakers of an idealized rural mountain way of life. In contrast, degrading stereotypes of Appalachian women are tied up with four popular caricatures in cartoons, television, and film: Daisy Mae, the star of the Li'l Abner cartoon strip; her

latter-day Daisy counterpart in the television series *Dukes of Hazzard*; and Ellie Mae and Granny Clampett of the *Beverly Hillbillies*...” (p. 229).

Authors used subjective terms such as *isolated, quaint, independent, self-sufficient, violent, poor, simple, and strong* to describe the region’s residents. It was a time when writers and other visitors from outside the region began to give Appalachia its distinctive reputation (Raitz & Ulack, 1984). More recently, portrayals of Appalachians in popular media tend to miss the mark or become sensationalized. Some of these portrayals are viewed as offensive. For instance, in a 2009 television documentary, Diane Sawyer portrayed small towns in Kentucky as “boarded up towns the coal industry had forgotten” (Rosenberger, 2009). The documentary then went on to portray the youth of Appalachia as extremely poor and suffering from “Mountain Dew mouth”- an oral problem that comes with drinking too much Mountain Dew and having access to little or no dental care. Appalachians are also frequently portrayed as hillbillies, a stereotype that is characterized by such degrading traits as engaging in incest, being toothless, shoeless, and being incredibly poor and isolated.

Appalachia, and thus West Virginia, remains a fascinating area, geographically and sociologically, because of its rugged terrain, mountainous scenery, coal mining, poverty, and unique culture. Few areas of similar size have as many resources as West Virginia. Coal deposits lie under about two thirds of West Virginia’s land, making the state the second most coal-producing state in the nation (Edwards, Asbury, & Cox, 2007) and the number three natural gas producing state (Weinhold, 2012). Appalachia “remains a contradiction in America: a region rich in natural resources yet a land of great poverty” (Edwards et al, 2007, p. 20). The generally rugged nature of the Appalachian terrain has tended to impede or divert settlement and development (Raitz & Ulack, 1984).

One of the most precious resources in West Virginia is coal. The coal industry in West Virginia is annually responsible for \$70 million in property taxes, \$214 million in coal severance tax, and \$3.5 billion of the gross state product (West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety, and Training, 2005). Throughout the past century, the coal industry has been one of the largest employers in the state. However, over the past 50 years, the number of people employed by the industry has steadily declined. In 1948, there were 125,000 coal miners in West Virginia, but in 1999, that number had dwindled to only 15,000 (Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, 2001). Despite the reduction in jobs, the coal industry still contributes significantly to West Virginia's economy, particularly because in many parts of the state no other industry has been able to take its place. West Virginians have had a love-hate relationship with coal throughout the past century. Dependent on the industry for jobs and for its contributions to the economy, many people in the state are extremely loyal to coal (Bell, 2009). Loyalty to coal is part of West Virginia's historical narrative. Many people across the state are involved in the production of coal, or have a close friend or family member who is employed by a coal company. Bell (2009) suggests that:

“West Virginia has endured a long history of exploitation at the hands of outside interests, particularly the coal industry. As the second-leading coal producer in the United States (behind Wyoming), West Virginia's economy, and identity, have historically been tied to coal. Many residents argue that coal's influence in the local and state politics of West Virginia has allowed the industry to engage in highly destructive and unjust mining practices that have destroyed the health, safety, and livelihoods of many residents living in the southern coal-producing region of the state” (p. 633).

Appalachia lagged behind almost every other region in the United States in regards to technology, employment, urbanization, and income. Its debilitating poverty was officially recognized in the 1960s with the passage of the Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1965. This act came about after Appalachia was properly identified as a region socially and economically apart from most of the rest of America (Raitz et al. 1984). According to a report by the 1964 President's Regional commission "rural Appalachia lags behind rural America; urban Appalachia lags behind urban America; and metropolitan Appalachia lags behind metropolitan America"(Raitz et al. 1984, p. 24, ).

### **Demography and Economic Patterns**

West Virginia is currently home to 1.8 million people. Ninety-four percent of the people in the state are white, making it one of the whitest states in the nation. The black population is a meager 3.5 percent, while the national figure is 12 percent. Huntington's black population, however, is higher than the rest of the state at 8.6 percent. Ninety-four percent of West Virginians classify themselves as white, while the national white population hovers around 78 percent. Only 17 percent of West Virginia residents have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, which is below the national percentage of twenty-eight. West Virginia is one of the poorest states in the nation, ranking sixth overall and having a median income of \$39,550. The national average for family income is \$52,762. The Huntington, Ashland tri-state area, where most of the respondents were found, is the second largest metropolitan area with a total population of 49,160. Huntington and Charleston are currently ranked numbers one and two for the nation's most miserable cities and are also consistently in the top five for high rates of smoking, obesity, depression, and mental illness.

Previous research suggests that modern Appalachian migration has little to do with economic opportunities even though historically migration in Appalachia was tied to job opportunities (Mann, 1996). The unemployment rate in West Virginia is lower than the national unemployment rate, and appears to be getting better. Nationally, the unemployment rate is at 7.6 percent while West Virginia's is at 6.1 percent and has a 15<sup>th</sup> place ranking. This seems surprising, but West Virginia appears to be unaffected by the national economic crisis, in regards to unemployment, as its unemployment rate has steadily been between 5 percent and 6.1 percent since 1998, with the exceptions in the years 2006 and 2007, when it dropped as low as 4.3 percent. Even then, the national rate was at 4.4 percent. The unemployment rate jumped to 8.4 percent in 2009, while the national level spiked to 9.9 percent (all of this data is from Work Force West Virginia, 2010).

West Virginia's population is older than most other states, with a percentage of 16.8 being over 65 years of age, making it a gray population. Persons living in West Virginia that are under 18 years of age is 20.7 percent while the national percentage is 23.5 percent. The sex of the state is almost evenly split, with 50.7 percent of the population being female, which is only .01 lower than the national percentage.

The top employers in the state of West Virginia are Wal-Mart, West Virginia United Health System, Charleston Area Medical Center, Inc., Kroger, and Consolidation Coal Company (WFWV, 2010). This shows a trend toward service sector jobs, as mentioned earlier. It also appears that coal companies and other manual labor jobs are not as big of an employer as they once were.

## **Psychology/ Identity**

The characteristics discussed above, such as poverty, isolation, stereotypes, and employment opportunities have led to the formation of a specific Appalachian identity. Sociologist John Shelton Reed calls regional identity “the cognitive entity that people use to orient themselves” (Reed, 1983, p 11). Reed also recognized that regional identity does not always perfectly overlap with actual political or geographical boundaries and that the criteria for membership within a group has more to do with how one identifies oneself than with actual spatial and physical location. Identity associated with “Appalachia” dates to the late 1800s when non-Appalachians discovered that “the existence of a strange land and peculiar people in the Southern mountains could not be understood in terms of contemporary conceptions of America as a unified and homogenous national entity” (Shapiro, 1978; p.10). It appears that Appalachian identity is stronger than identity with the Old South and less than identification with the New South (Cooper et al; 2011). In fact, the New South and southern Appalachian identity are in competition with one another with those who geographically reside within both areas simultaneously (Reed, 1983). Cooper et al (2011) found that those with higher education levels are positively associated with higher levels of Appalachian identification. For example, they suggest “educated people may be less concerned with the negative stereotypes of Appalachia and therefore more likely to identify strongly with the region” (Cooper et al; 2011, p. 82). Also noted (Cooper et al, 2011; Reiter et al; 2010) is the importance of population density and that those living in rural areas are more likely to identify as Appalachians.

## CHAPTER III

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter first discusses brain drain theory. Using rational choice, brain drain theory asserts that most young people will migrate away from their home town to areas that have more to offer economically and socially. Is this the case for West Virginians, too?

This chapter will then discuss place attachment and how that effects entrenched nonmovers' desire to migrate. We may learn that place attachment is a major reason why people decide not to move away from their family or the region they grew up. Ties to place, family, and often pride in the state are common themes discussed with many of the participants in this study.

Social capital, or the idea that one can gain tangible or intangible resources from one's social network, is another main reason people decide not to migrate. Many of the people in this study were born and raised in the same area, therefore they may have strong ties with most of the people in their community. They may find it easier to network, gain access to resources, and even feel safe if they stay in one region their whole lives.

#### **Brain Drain Theory**

Most demographic theories and literature pertaining to migration tend to focus on why people migrate and who is prone to migration. Who migrates has become increasingly clear in the literature. Those who migrate are usually young adults who are not currently married or who have smaller families. Women and men migrate at the same rates, although women are increasingly apt to migrate on their own (Weeks, 2008). If one chooses to migrate within his or her own country, where and why do they move? About one fifth of migration within one's home country is due to job transfer, while one tenth of migrants move closer to their relatives (Ibid.).

This raises an interesting point, though, if one is moving closer to relatives (i.e. parents and siblings), what forced them to emigrate (move away) in the first place? Usually, as stated above, it is a job transfer or relocation to an urban area, where most of the jobs are. Most migration is rural to urban. The urban transition states that most people are moving to cities for jobs or a better life, and most of the nation's residents do reside in an urban area. An urban area is defined as a city containing at least 50,000 people.

We live in a fast-paced world, which has seen an increasing trend toward urbanization. Young, educated people are increasingly attracted to hip, big cities that have lots to offer its residents in terms of jobs, nightlife, and entertainment. Carr and Kefalas (2009) suggest rural states such as North Dakota and West Virginia share an unsettling problem: too many young people in their twenties and thirties are leaving... this hemorrhaging of people, specifically the younger generation, is hollowing out many of the nation's small towns and rural communities" (p. 1). Newspapers such as *The New York Times* blame rural out-migration on young people wanting a chance to live in a hip, urban area and suggest that it is possible that this rural out-migration is a natural and inevitable occurrence and "the consequence of progress" (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, p. 2) Perceiving this exodus of young intellectuals as inevitable omits an important group of people- those who choose to stay in the state they were born, despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that there is no major urban area in their state.

Large-scale emigration of a large group of individuals with technical skills or knowledge is discussed by brain drain, or human capital flight theory. This theory asserts that highly educated people move to areas that have abundant economic opportunities, political stability, a developed economy, or better living conditions. Originally, brain drain theory was used to describe emigrants moving from post-war Europe to North America and Indian scientists who

moved to Europe. Brandi (2001) argues that early studies on (brain drain) were performed when the main concern was the brain drain from Europe to the United States. Subsequently, focus was on the movement of professionals and skilled workers from the Third World to industrialized countries, in connection with the political and economic interest in North-South relations” (p. 75). For the purpose of this study, brain drain theories will be applied to internal migration, which is migration that occurs within the same country.

Goldscheider (1971) defines migration “as a permanent change in residence. It involves the ‘detachment from the organization of activities at one place and the movement of the total round of activities to another’” (p. 64). Internal migration has historically been thought of as voluntary in “the sense that people are choosing to migrate or not, often basing that decision on economic factors” (Weeks, 2008, p. 265). This can also be seen in one of the most frequently-cited explanations for migration, known as the push-pull theory. Push-pull theory postulates that some people move because they are pushed out of their former location, while others move because they have become attracted to someplace else (Weeks, 2008 ). This attraction to the “other place” may be a better career, living arrangement, or better social opportunities.

Ravenstein (1889) concludes “pull factors were more important than push factors:

‘Bad or oppressive laws, heavy taxation, an unattractive climate, uncongenial social surroundings, and even compulsion (slave trade, transportation), all have produced and are still producing currents of migration, but none of these can compare in volume with that which arises from the desire inherent in most men to better themselves in material respects.’ Thus Ravenstein is saying that it is the desire to get ahead more

than the desire to escape an unpleasant situation that is most responsible for the voluntary migration of people...” (Weeks, 2008, p. 272).

Migration is seen as a way for people who have spent much of their time pursuing various goals to be used as a strategy where even more goals, such as higher education or a better job, might be attained (Weeks, 2008 ).

Brain drain theory echoes Ravenstein’s conclusions. People who are highly educated or technically trained tend to move to westernized urban areas where it is easier for them to find careers and make a living wage, while enjoying the benefits of living in such a place. However, the brain drain is particularly “bleak for rural America, where in any given year, more than six percent of America’s nonmetropolitan bachelor’s degree holders migrate to a metropolitan area” (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, p. 5). Thus, these areas are losing young, educated people at a rate higher than they are gaining them. In fact, “only West Virginia loses a larger percentage of its college graduates to outmigration...” (Carr & Kefalas, 2009 p. 5). Changes in the number of employment opportunities have little effect on outmigration; however, that does not necessarily mean the decision to leave or stay is based on noneconomic reasons (Lovejoy, 2006). West Virginia has historically been isolated from the rest of the country and immigration was previously economically motivated (Black, McKinnish, & Sanders, 2005). Historically, people migrated to the state for the opportunity to mine coal.

One would assume that as the coal and industry related jobs are declining in the area, more young people would take the opportunity to move elsewhere. Rational choice and brain drain theories indicate that highly educated people will leave their home state to find better opportunities for work. However, this study may find that citizens of West Virginia, and more broadly Appalachia, have contradictory expectations for themselves and their work lives. This

means that many residents may tend to ignore rational choice theory for leaving their home and therefore place more emphasis on the attachment they feel to the state and thus their home and less emphasis on obtaining a prestigious career.

## **Place Attachment**

As Hammar and Tamas (1997, p. 14) state “all disciplines have, within their frameworks, focused on the explanandum ‘why do people migrate?’, neglecting the twin question ‘why do they not migrate?’” (Barcus & Brunn, 2010, p. 281). This paper mainly focuses on the second question and entrenched nonmovers who “have no desire to move and no expectation of moving and who do not migrate” (Weeks, 2008, p. 273). In understanding the question of why people do not move and choose to stay in the place they were born and raised, it is critical to investigate place attachment, place elasticity, and immobility theories and literature.

It is important to be able to define what exactly “place” is. According to Gustafson (2001), the concept of place is frequently used to represent a “spatial entity” that is personally or culturally recognized as substantial or meaningful. Place can therefore range from one’s home to one’s nation or even continent. Barcus and Brunn (2009) insist that the individual’s proclivity to move or not to move over the span of his or her life is in some way linked to their “sense of place attachment” and is “often overlooked in the migration and mobility literature” (p. 26). They cite place attachment as an “inhibiting factor(s), significantly reducing the likelihood of migration as the intensity of place attachment increases” (Barcus & Brunn, 2009, p. 26). Place attachment “can be viewed as ‘bonds between people and places based on affection (emotion, feeling), cognition (thought, knowledge, belief) and practice (action, behavior)’ ... (and can) reflect connections to specific places, including the social and familial networks within a particular place, or be more symbolic, as in attachment to particular types of landscapes” (Gustafson, 2006;

Barcus & Brunn, 2010, p. 283). Thus, people may become cognitively, emotionally, or behaviorally attached to the place where they were raised. This attachment may come in the form of almost a romantic nostalgia for their area (i.e. finding the scenery aesthetically favorable). Or, they may become attached to certain family members or friends, making migrating seem irrelevant. At its very core, place attachment is simply a bond between people and place.

Historically, in rural areas, migration occurs in response to some sort of labor demand, and usually spawns an emigration to an urban area (Boyle, Halfacree, & Robinson, 1998; Barcus & Brunn, 2009). However, the “importance of amenities and location-specific capital, such as friends or family members, have also been incorporated into migration models and theories suggesting that non-economic migration incentives, such as natural and social amenities or the presence of family and friends can influence a migrant’s choice of destination or decision to move from one location to another” (Barcus and Brunn, 2009, p. 27). Barcus and Brunn (2009) assert that those living in declining regions, such as the Great Plains or Appalachia, are the “least prepared or inclined to migrate” (p. 27).

Gustafson (2001) proposes that place attachment may imply that one has deep roots planted within their town or country, but that they also have a feeling of security and a sense of place. Because of this attachment to home and unwillingness to migrate, one does not have the ability to experience different cultures, people, and places. Thus, attachment may “represent imprisonment and narrow-mindedness” (Gustafson, 2001, p. 680). While mobility and migration may “signify freedom, opportunities, and new experiences,” once one migrates, they may experience loss and “uprootedness” (Gustafson, 2001). On the other hand, one needs to have the finances, needs, desires, and legal ability to be able to migrate in the first place. The ability to migrate incorporates a magnitude of complexities and privileges that not every individual is

awarded. Barcus and Brunn (2010) speculate that the boundaries of a place may be evolving and actually hold some elasticity. Place elasticity is a “new conceptualization of place attachment made possible by innovations in communication and transportation technologies” (Barcus & Brunn, 2010, p. 284). It allows those who actually do have the ability to migrate to further distances to maintain close attachments to both people and place, even though they are not physically in the same region.

This line of analysis leads to the conclusion that perhaps place attachment, family, and friends are inordinately important to West Virginians. It is conceivable that many young people in the state have grown so close to their home and family that leaving the area is not even an option for most of them. It is possibly viewed as a sort of heresy.

### **Social/ Cultural Capital**

There is a physical remoteness that has defined Appalachia throughout history, which has influenced rural Appalachian identity and attachment to place. Although 60 percent of Appalachians reside in metropolitan areas, there are a significant number of towns with low population densities (Barcus & Brunn, 2009). Within these rural areas, residents are able to become attached to place through “strong or extensive social networks, leadership roles in churches, schools and other organizations...” (Barcus & Brunn, 2009, p. 28). Thus, a culture that has extensive social capital and makes regional identity a salient, substantive piece of one’s character will experience significantly lower outmigration than cultures that don’t (Barcus & Brunn, 2009; Fielding, 1992).

Through social capital, people are able to “gain tangible and intangible resources not through their personal human capital but through their social interactions and connections with

others” (Bell, 2009, p. 635). People are able to derive economic and social benefits by way of the social connections they possess. Social capital highlights the importance of community and the effect it has on individuals as well as the group. These benefits can include greater wealth, better functioning labor markets, a stable economy, lower levels of crime, and a more transparent and effective government (Claridge, 2004).

Previously Putnam (1995) and more recently Bell (2009) describe social capital as “the features of social organization, such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Bell, 2009, p. 632). Social capital can be used as an important resource for residents of any given area and may provide access to basic societal needs such as jobs, safety, and childcare (Bell, 2009). Rural areas tend to possess larger supplies of social capital than other more urban areas (Bell, 2009). West Virginia, the second most rural state in the union should score on the above-average side of social capital. However, according to Bell (2009), that is not necessarily the case as it exhibits the eight lowest level of social capital in the nation. Bell (2009) insists that this is because the coal industry has damaged coal-producing towns’ ability to store social capital and thus their ability to fight exploitation and injustice.

Social capital is a resource for those who are able to “make roots” in the space they inhabit. Residents are able to gain access to resources, network, and advance in their social circle or career if they are also able to gain the trust of those around them. Moving may inhibit one’s ability to gain social capital or be regarded as a burden to those who have been able to amass a certain social circle and all of the benefits that come with it. Moving, therefore, is almost viewed as problematic or moot. And those same people ask themselves why would I move when I have the necessities of life in my own comfortable pocket of the globe?

## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to gain new perspective on why some people do not emigrate from communities that have little to offer in terms of economic mobility, urban areas, and quality of life. The main question this research asks is: Why do people not leave an area, specifically West Virginia, which has little to offer and has been proven to be a “miserable” environment?

The selection of respondents was purposive and questioned the very core of the brain drain theory. This means I selected respondents who had their bachelor’s degree or higher and were currently working in the tri-state area. Thus, no retirees or housewives or househusbands were permitted to take part in this study.

A total of twenty interviews were conducted to determine why some educated people are entrenched nonmovers and what factors contribute to people staying in their home state. The respondents come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and different towns and cities from around West Virginia. In accordance with IRB approval of this study, all interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed.

#### **Data Collection Activities**

##### **In-depth Interviews**

In-depth interviews provided the rich data needed for this study, as opposed to a survey or a questionnaire. Although they may be time-consuming, they allowed for the depth and breadth needed for this research, making respondents able to go into detail about their lives, jobs,

families, and places of residence. Semi-structured interviews allowed for follow-up questions and a more conversational dialogue. An interview guide was arranged preceding the interviews to ensure the most relevant questions were asked in relation to the study's purpose. Topics covered included travel, friends and family ties, job opportunities, feelings about West Virginia, and overall life satisfaction (see Appendix A). Although not specifically asked in the interview guide, the respondents' observed sex and race, and marital status were noted in each of the interviews.

West Virginia respondents were interviewed over the past year (May 2012-September-2013). They were located through friends via a snowball technique and interviewed at the time that was convenient for the respondent and at a place that was convenient for the respondent. Most respondents were interviewed in public settings or at the respondents' residence.

### **Respondent Characteristics**

The majority of the respondents are between the ages of twenty-six and fifty years old. The respondents range in age from twenty-three to fifty, with the median age of the respondents being thirty-one. All of the respondents are white, so this is not representative of West Virginia's population according to the census, but it is fairly representative of the stereotypical demography of Appalachia, as few people of color are represented in much of the literature. The average income of the respondents is \$53,400. While the average income of West Virginia is \$39,550. Thus, on average, these respondents earn over ten thousand dollars more than the average population of the state. The marital status of the respondents is twelve are single and eight are married, as the government legally defines married. Most of the respondents, however, are in long term, serious relationships.

The overall demographic information puts the majority of respondents as single and white. The interviews were evenly split between ten women and ten men. Most of respondents have earned, or are working on earning, their Master's degree or some sort of higher education degree, such as a Juris Doctorate. The occupations that the respondents are currently working in are health (nutrition, medicine, and nursing) (n=3), forensic science (n=4), teaching (n=4), service sector (n=2), government (and nonprofit) (n=2), science (computers) (n=1), law (n=1), and media (n=3). The twenty respondents interviewed provided important perspectives on the reasons why some people have no interest or desire to move, despite poor economic opportunities, and why others simply refuse to leave. All of the respondents were born or are from West Virginia or the Greater Huntington Metropolitan Area, except for one who was born in Pennsylvania, but migrated to the Huntington area at a relatively young age, and has lived in West Virginia for over thirty years now. This person, for the sake of this research, is thus considered a West Virginian.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

### **In-depth Interviews**

Interviews lasted an average of fifteen minutes and were then transcribed and coded using an emergent themes technique to capture other issues that may surface apart from those highlighted by the theoretical frameworks. Data analysis procedures were situated in the proposed research question and theoretical perspectives introduced in chapter three. Interviews were then coded and analyzed with those criteria in mind. They were read and re-read and then coded and categorizations were developed to support each theme. As evidence was found, it was put into a document for later coding. For example, if multiple respondents mentioned feeling

stuck in their area, “feeling stuck” became a theme and supporting quotes were put into that category.

### **Bivariate Correlation**

Each individual participant was then coded and placed into an excel spread sheet, which then made it possible to run a correlation analysis on the characteristics of the participants. For example, if a respondent mentioned feeling safe in their area, they were given a positive score of 1. If they did not mention anything about safety, they were given a 0. If they mentioned feeling scared or unsafe, they were given a score of -1. Then, a bivariate correlation was run in order to get a deeper sense of who stays and why. My primary investigator also read and re-read my coding to confirm the participants’ responses for the bivariate correlation were coded and analyzed correctly.

The result section also explores the connections between these themes using a simple correlation technique. For this purpose, the presence of a theme in an interview was coded as affirmative/ positive (1), neutral/ no views (0), and negative views/ stance (-1) and then assigned to each respondent. Each respondent, therefore, has a specific response set and these sets were used in this correlation.

## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSIS

My study attempts to answer the following question with respect to the research question proposed in this paper: Why do some people choose not to leave an area that has been proven to be a “miserable” environment and has no major metropolitan area? The area this research is evaluating is West Virginia and more specifically, the Huntington Metropolitan Area. To understand why one would choose to stay in the region, analysis of interviews was guided by the research question as well as the three theoretical perspectives introduced in chapter three. As may be recalled in chapter three, the theories being used to examine nonmovers in West Virginia are brain drain theory (human capital flight), place attachment theories, and social capital theories. Both positive and negative reasons for staying in the state arose, although there were fewer negative reasons as to why one would stay in the area.

After careful analysis and coding, two overarching themes emerged: Those who feel stuck in West Virginia and those who feel West Virginia is a great place to live. These two themes will be discussed in detail below.

#### **Feeling Stuck**

Many of the respondents took on a cynical attitude toward the Huntington-metropolitan area and West Virginia as a whole. One of the respondents, a thirty-one year old male born and raised in Huntington lamented: “I consider Huntington a black hole of unrealized potential. So it has this ability to kind of suck you in and then you’re stuck”. Another male, a twenty-seven year old echoes his statement: “Huntington is either a starting place or a stopping place”. Without mentioning explicit reasons, these two respondents expressed a feeling of stuck, yet committed

to being stuck in the state, as illustrated by the first respondent who applied to a doctoral program at Marshall University, anchoring himself in West Virginia for another six years. Other respondents name reasons that cause a feeling of stuck and make Huntington an unattractive place. One woman, who is currently making solid plans to move permanently away from the area, said she thought Huntington was “alright” but she felt a “little stagnant here”. “I wish there was more to do”, explains a thirty-year-old male who works in Information Technology in Huntington. These respondents are the ones who feel stuck in the state.

Feeling Stuck - the feeling that Huntington, and the surrounding areas don't offer opportunities, is a first theme that was derived from the interviews. The perceived lack of opportunities, both economic and recreational, contributes to if one feels stuck in the state. This is then coupled with the idea that it is difficult to migrate from West Virginia, paired with a particular sense of inertia or dormancy from the respondents. The feeling of stuck may also be interpreted as feeling stagnant or inert. Some subjects felt they were inactive in Huntington, or that Huntington was itself immutable, thus in a way, blaming Huntington for their own inertia. A few respondents said they felt stuck and might consider moving but their spouse or partner wanted to stay, so they also felt as though they had to stay in the state. Even if they personally felt like leaving, they did not have a choice in the matter. Family obligations kept them in the area.

#### *Future Intentions to Move and Past Moves*

Alongside these descriptions of feelings about Huntington, every one of the respondents was asked if they had intentions to leave West Virginia in the past, if they had ever considered leaving West Virginia before, and if they had intentions to leave in the future. Many of the respondents had no interest in leaving the state, and stated feeling perfectly content in West

Virginia. Fewer than half of the respondents expressed immediate intent to leave the state. Those who felt stuck in the state had intentions to leave, but were not making immediate plans to get out. Those who feel that West Virginia is a great location had little or no intention of leaving. The responses to this question indicate an interesting gender difference: Most of the women who were interviewed decided that they had almost no intentions to leave the state, while most of the younger men had intentions to leave in the future. However, before they had specifically been asked about intentions to leave, many of the respondents said they had no intention in the earlier part of their lives as the following examples show.

A twenty-two year old woman is set on staying here, despite having a bachelor's degree and the fact that she is working on her master's degree. She explains: "I have thought about it before but growing up I thought of what I wanted to do and what kind of career I wanted and I always thought of it like what can I do in West Virginia? How can I make a living and stay here?"

While she did not have any intention to move, the next example shows that some respondents did have plans to leave. A twenty-six year old male had plans on leaving in the future, but not any time very soon. He says: "I had no plans. I just intended on graduating and somehow a job would fall into my lap. And that's somewhat what happened. I got my first degree and I didn't know what to do with myself so I got my second one. And then I guess my plan actually came into fruition." But what about those who do not even consider looking for new jobs?

When asked if he had any intentions to leave the state, a thirty-seven year old male responded:

Intentions to leave, um, no purpose, you know, not on purpose. It's just everything worked out. I didn't purposefully try to stay in West Virginia

and I didn't purposefully try to leave West Virginia. College was cheap enough. I had the opportunities that I was looking for and I essentially got a job while I was still in college in West Virginia.

These sentiments are echoed by a forensic scientist in the Huntington area:

No. None whatsoever. I never really thought about it to be quite honest. But at the same time I just I think I know whenever I was looking into school past my undergrad I did look at other places. It just so happened that Marshall had this forensic science program that was years ago, so it was newer, and it just all worked out for me I never had to leave.

Unlike the two men above, a few respondents described possibly moving in the future, but they have not actually investigated further employment opportunities outside of the state. The following statements from a few of the respondents evidence this. A thirty-two-year-old male states "Possibly. It really depends on employment and school. I was really close to leaving before I got my current job. I honestly didn't want to, I kind of like Huntington. I mean I'm not opposed to living somewhere else. Depending on where. It really just depends. I can really only stay here if I have decent employment. Which is hard to come by in the area." And a thirty-year-old woman adds in relation to leaving the area: "Not really. It was convenient to stay. I didn't think about moving. I thought well maybe I'll move eventually." She is another respondent who fits into the *stuck* category. It is clear that most of the respondents have had no interest in even investigating economic opportunities elsewhere. In fact, they those who migrated to Huntington from other towns believe it is a great place to live. The theme of past moves indicates this concept clearly.

These various considerations and non-considerations of moving are captured in the theme *Future Intention to Move* and the theme *Past Moves*. Those who have future intentions to move are those who feel stuck in the state. Interestingly enough, those who feel stuck are predominantly younger males. They lack a positive identity with the state and are less close to

their families than their female counterparts. Those who planned to move are also the ones who were born and raised in Huntington. Being from Huntington is a major factor describing whether one feels stuck in the state or not, because those who are not from Huntington decidedly do not feel stuck.

## **Great Location**

After considering the theme of *stuck*, we will now turn to the other overarching theme of *great location*. A thirty-six year old woman with children and a professional career as a DNA analyst thinks West Virginia is a great location, especially after moving here from a much smaller town:

I just think that it's comfortable in a way. I mean I'm set in my ways a bit. I don't like change all that much so I think my personality might have something to do with it as well. But again, I'm not, I'm more of a slow moving person and I don't like the speed of the big city. I really don't. I've been there, not crazy about it. It's neat to visit but, hey, this is the last place I would want to live. So, I mean, Huntington I like it, as compared to the small town I grew up in. that was way too slow. Like that was slow motion. This is more average to me so I was like that's what appeals to me is that it's not too fast and it's not too slow. So, I can maintain.

She goes on to say that Huntington is a great size. It's not as big as New York City, or as small as the rural hollows, so it is the perfect size for her. Most of those who moved to Huntington from a different, smaller town felt Huntington was perfect for them. A twenty-two year old woman, moved to Huntington from Ravenswood says:

The important things are here. Growing up in West Virginia, I felt like there was a lot of people I was around that wanted to get out, but I never felt like that. And I don't know, I'm still around people like that and I get why you would want to. Obviously people are going to want to leave to make more money somewhere else. But, when people say things like it's boring, maybe I'm not interested in the things that... I'm not bored here. Like the things that I'm interested in doing are the things that I can do here easily.

Another DNA analyst felt the same way about West Virginia:

I like that I'm close to my family and my daughter. I like that we have four seasons. I like that a lot. I can't imagine being some place where it's hot all the time or cold all the time. I like the full range of stuff. I like that West Virginia has still got like small town flavor but pretty much, well from where I lived in Morgantown I was an hour and a half from Pittsburgh or three hours from D.C. and here we're just close to Columbus so I can take day trips to big cities and do that fun stuff but then still come back.

Enjoying the outdoors and the seasons is another topic that was brought up by many of the respondents. A thirty-three year old male nutritionist describes: "I like the slower pace and I like how easy it is to find some kind of exercise here. We got tons of different places to exercise. Beautiful places to exercise all over West Virginia. So that's one of the main reasons I like it here."

These description of Huntington and West Virginia are in stark contrast to the theme of being stuck discussed before. They are summarized in the second theme "Great Location". Great location is nominally defined as perceiving West Virginia as a great place to live. Factors contributing to great location are believing the weather is nice; thinking there are many opportunities for activities; and having job satisfaction.

Respondents cited enjoying the weather in West Virginia, the parks, the people, and had a positive association with the state as a whole. This can be illustrated by responses from a thirty-two-year-old male: "...there is a good sense of community. There are a lot of good people. One thing about it being a fairly small town is that all the people who sort of are interested in the same things know each other but it's a diverse enough group of people that I don't get super tired of hanging out with them"; and a thirty-one-year-old male: "I like the people around here. They've always been friendly, and it's a good place. I just wish there was a little more going on." WV04, a thirty-eight-year-old woman says she "...can't imagine being some place where it's

hot all the time or cold all the time. I like the full range of stuff. I like that West Virginia has still got like small town feel.”

In addition, identity and feeling pride were mentioned often among those who believed that Huntington is a great place, thus underscoring the importance of Appalachian or West Virginian identity as pointed out by Bell, (2009), and Carr & Kefalas (2009). This is clearly shown by responses from one of the respondents, who states he would not want to drive a car with an Ohio or Kentucky license plate, only a West Virginia one. And also by three other respondents, who believe the state has improved significantly, both economically and recreationally.

#### *Move to Huntington*

Those who moved to Huntington were much less likely to feel stuck in the state and think it's a great location. Overall, the majority of those who moved to Huntington from other West Virginia towns believe it is a great place to live. Stating that their “ideal choice” was to stay in the state was a common theme for many of the respondents. The majority of those respondents are older women who have satisfying careers. They also possess a strong positive identity with the state, meaning they are more likely to feel pride in West Virginia, or Appalachia as a whole. They tend to be closer to their families than their male counterparts. Those who feel stuck in the state have a strong desire to travel more; conversely, those who do not feel stuck do not have a weaker desire to travel more. Most importantly, perhaps, is that those who feel that West Virginia is a great location have no future plans to move outside of the state. Past moves is important because it highlights the fact that there is internal migration in West Virginia. Respondents who moved from a more rural area to Huntington believe that the city is a great place to live, often described it as a “perfect” location- not too big or too small, just right.

After considering their past intentions, what remains to be seen is why they do not feel the need to look outside of the state for opportunities for job growth. The next section will highlight, and perhaps provide confirmation on why some do not move. Using data from the interviews, the following will provide a look into how attached one feels to the place.

### *Attachment to Place*

Many of the respondents felt that Huntington and the surrounding areas were great locations as discussed before. That is, they felt that West Virginia had so much to offer, including good careers, tolerable weather, outdoor activities such as hiking and skiing, and many entertaining activities for the weekend. These factors, combined with how one feels about the place they were raised, contribute to place attachment. According to Hoey (2010), place is an essential part of the construction of personal identity. Where one migrates to, and “plants roots”- in conjunction with the “local character” of the place, is an important part of how one forms their own personal narratives in life (Hoey, 2010). As mentioned in the third chapter, Barcus and Brunn (2009), insist that the one’s proclivity to move or to not move is directly linked to their “sense of place attachment” (p.26). Those who feel attached to their place are much less likely to move away.

### *Aesthetic Appeal*

A forensic scientist feels attached to the scenery and the outdoor activities that West Virginia has to offer. He says: “I like the mountains. I do like the scenery. We camp; we take advantage of the outdoor activities so if we ever had to leave I would miss that.” He then adds: “I do like the small town-ness of West Virginia. I like the atmosphere, I like the, I guess I’m kind of proud of the state. So specifically it would probably be the outdoors. We ski in the wintertime.

We go boating in the summer time. We camp in the summer time. So it's living close to something like that." A large part of place attachment is feeling a connection to the geography and weather of your specific area. Many respondents, including three forensic scientists and a professor, all mentioned enjoying the weather of West Virginia and appreciating the way the area has all four seasons.

Another respondent, a nutritionist and veteran, believes West Virginia is "the perfect mix of everything". He goes on to say: "I like the slower pace and I like how easy it is to find some kind of exercise here. We got tons of different places to exercise. Beautiful places to exercise all over West Virginia. So that's one of the main reasons I like it here... West Virginia has always been pretty awesome to me".

### *Feeling Pride*

These aspects were grasped by the theme great location theme mentioned above. In addition, Feeling pride and a sense of identity with the state of West Virginia were other recurring themes that connect to place attachment. A thirty-three-year-old forensic scientist says: "So, I have a lot of pride in our work ethic and seeing how hard my dad worked in the mill. Yeah, so there's a lot of pride..." This is echoed in a thirty-one-year-old male's statement: "West Virginia gets a bad rap, because I have no idea why, but we are picked on for some reason. But I think in the last couple of years West Virginia's picked it up and I think we are doing a lot better." One person even admitted to not wanting to move outside of the state because he could not imagine having Ohio license plates, and another respondent, a lawyer, said he felt connected to Huntington because he is such a big fan of, and proud of, Marshall football.

Some respondents, however, also expressed negative feelings about West Virginia that can be seen as the flip side of the coin 'pride' and 'identification'. This was seen in statements such as one from one man, who said that liking Huntington does not necessarily mean he likes West Virginia. "I guess I still have quite a few resentments about the state but I don't necessarily mind it anymore. I'll put it that way. [Resentments are] the fact that it's so backward and far too conservative for my taste". When asked how she felt living in the state a thirty-year-old female laments:

Fine, but somewhat depressing at the same time. I think that sums it up. I don't want to say that it's terribly depressing. It's been fine up until now. Now I feel like I should have gone away to school. I haven't usually felt that it's depressing here up until the last couple of years or so. I am not attacking this place, but it's just that there are cooler places to live.

The theme of social relationships can be also be illustrated by a twenty-two-year-old woman:

The important things are here. Growing up in West Virginia I felt like there was a lot of people I was around that wanted to get out, but I never felt like that. And I don't know, I'm still around people like that and I get why you would want to. Obviously people are going to want to leave to make more money somewhere else. But, when people say things like it's boring, maybe I'm not interested in the things that they are interested in. I'm not bored here. Like the things that I'm interested in doing are the things that I can do here easily.

A thirty-one-year-old male says:

when I was younger it was really boring and one of the reasons I originally moved was because it was boring and I wanted to move as far away as possible which was the other end of the country. I don't know if it's age or if it's that Huntington has gotten little bit cooler, I think it's a combination of both, I honestly kind of enjoy it.

### *Feeling Safe*

Feeling safe was an important aspect of why respondents chose to stay in the state of West Virginia. It was described as "local" and "close-knit" by a twenty-six year old woman who

migrated to Huntington for school. She has a romantic fondness for her home-town on the eastern part of the state, stating that she had always felt safe there. Another respondent, a thirty-year old woman states: “In my area you don’t really have to worry about crime and stuff like that. It’s pretty safe, well parts of it”. She, along with two other respondents, all mentioned a feeling of comfort living in the state of West Virginia. “I mean, it’s home, right? I’m comfortable here” says a thirty-eight-year-old woman. This idea is echoed by the nutritionist: “But the family that we’re nearby down here and the atmosphere and the safety... I have three kids so that kind of trumps needing to live near a big city”. Women were also more likely than men to feel safe in their location, leading them to believe Huntington and the surrounding area was a great location. Safety was actually a recurring important matter among women, as can be shown by the responses from four other respondents, as they all cited feeling “safe” and “comfortable”. They not only felt comfortable in their city but also in West Virginia as a whole. Women were either more likely to actually feel safer in their location than men or were just more likely to acknowledge the fact that safety was an important characteristic of the region to them. Comfort and safety are indistinguishable from one another. If one feels comfortable in one’s surroundings, they intrinsically feel safe as well.

### *Community*

A sense of community (and closeness with the people) was another theme that was acknowledged by many of the respondents. So many of the respondents mentioned the friendliness of the residents and their closeness to their friends as one main reason why they decided to stay in the state. A thirty-two-year-old government employee states:

That’s one reason that I like living here. Nice sense of community. Having lived other places, it’s nice living somewhere where you know a lot of people and have a lot of good relationships... Yeah, but the tradeoff is that

there is a good sense of community. There's a lot of good people. One thing about it being a fairly small town is that all the people who sort of are interested in the same things know each other but it's a diverse enough group of people that I don't get super tired of hanging out with them. . .

And a thirty-one-year-old restaurant worker explains:

It's the people. There aren't a lot of things to do in Charleston, so it's basically just a large group of friends that kind of keeps the scene going. The friend scene and given that there is so much talent in our scene there even though we have a low population. All these articles going on around the internet about how poorly Charleston and Huntington have been scoring. There are a lot of things when I read those articles that I agree with, but at the same time it's like it doesn't feel like it's that bad.

Two others echoed others' responses about the friendliness of the people in the area:

"They've always been friendly, and it's a good place" and: "The people. The friendliness of the people, and that's the, I think the number one thing." And another respondent points out: "It's the people. There aren't a lot of things to do in Charleston, so it's basically just a large group of friends that kind of keeps the scene going". A twenty-five-year-old woman likes the fact that Huntington is small and "everyone helps everyone".

### *Family Closeness*

Family closeness was another oft-mentioned theme. Traditionally, Appalachia has been an area where family is the most important thing in one's life. Most of the respondents acknowledged being "extremely close" to their families. Many of them even lived with their parents during their college years. If they did not live with them during those years, they made the effort to go home to see their parents every other weekend. One respondent, a twenty-nine-year-old forensic scientist states: "No, I had no desire. I'm kind of a homebody. I like being

around family, so it's good. And my husband's from here too so it was nice." When asked why he had lived here his whole life, a thirty-seven-year-old professor responded with: "I would say family". When asked why he had come back to live in Huntington permanently one man said: "What made me come back to West Virginia and stay here was my family." And a twenty-two-year-old tutor and graduate student says family and friends are the main reason she is still here: "My family and my friends are here. I don't really... pretty much everything I want out of life is here. I could get a better job if I left, but I would lose so many more things."

A thirty-two-year-old male concludes the people are one of the most important factors in him staying in Huntington: "That's one reason that I like living here. Nice sense of community. Having lived other places, it's nice living somewhere where you know a lot of people and have a lot of good relationships".

### **Relationship between Stuck and Great Location**

The next section illustrates the connection between the two overarching themes of *great location* and *stuck* and compares these responses to other socio-demographic characteristics. This discussion is based on the outcome of a simple correlation analysis between the themes. For this purpose, all themes were recoded into numerical values, assigned to the individuals, and correlated (see data and methods section). Table 5.1 shows the outcome of this analysis. A value above zero indicates positive associations such as between the perception of stagnancy and future migration intentions (.63) and a value below zero that a theme and a characteristic are opposed – such as that older respondents were less likely to perceive stagnancy (-.40). The closer the values are to  $\pm 1$ , the stronger is the association. Values between 0 and  $\pm .2$  can be considered very weak.

**Table 5.1. Correlation between themes and individual socio-demographics (own data)**

	“Stuck”	“Great Location”
Male	0.22	-0.31
Age	-0.40	0.33
Income	-0.26	0.20
Past moves	-0.34	0.16
Travel experience	-0.35	0.41
Future travel plans	0.40	-0.25
Migration Intentions	0.63	-0.58
Safety	-0.04	0.02
Community	0.00	0.16
Family Closeness	-0.15	0.19
Family Ties	-0.29	0.50
WV Identity	-0.32	0.25

Table 5.1 shows that *stuck* is repeatedly experienced by male respondents, younger individuals, and among respondents with lower incomes. Stuck is also less common among those who moved in the past or travelled. At the same time, those individuals who feel stuck are more likely to have plans to leave the area. In addition, individuals who are stuck have also weaker family ties and a less strong Appalachian identity.

*Great location*, by contrast, is named more often by women, older respondents, and individuals with a higher income. Respondents who consider the Huntington area a great location are also more likely to have travelled in the past and moved to Huntington from a different location in West Virginia. In addition, they have fewer intentions to move in the future. In contrast to those who feel stuck, individuals who consider it a great location have also strong family connections and positive Appalachian identity and some ties to the local community. The topic of safety is not connected to the perception of *Great Location* or the theme of *Stuck*.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to answer the question of why people stay in West Virginia, despite the state having no major city and few job opportunities. After considering the connections between interview data and emerging themes in regards to the research question in the previous chapter, the relevance of these findings with veneration to the theories of place attachment, social capital, and brain drain are discussed in this concluding chapter. The core of this discussion is the two characteristics described as the feelings of *stuck* and *great location*. It should be noted that these two characteristics are opposites of one another. One either feels stuck in their place or they feel content, even happy, and think it is a great location.

The feeling of stuck may also be interpreted as feeling stagnant or inert. Some subjects felt they were inactive in Huntington, or that Huntington was itself immutable, thus in a way, blaming Huntington for their own inertia. This can be seen clearly through the response of a respondent when he describes Huntington as a “black whole of unrealized potential. So it has this ability to kind of suck you in and then you’re stuck”.

What is particularly interesting is the age and gender divide when it comes to who feels stuck and who feels that Huntington and the surrounding area is a great location. Men are more likely to feel stuck than women. Younger people are more likely to feel stuck as well. Older adults are more likely to think Huntington is a great location. This is probably because of self-selection. Those who feel stuck in their twenties might have moved away and those who thought it was a great location might have decided to stay.

Family ties and close friendships are critical factors that contribute to the decision to stay or leave an area. As pointed out earlier in Chapter three, people are able to derive economic and social benefits by way of the social connections they possess. They are able to do this through social capital, which is where people “gain tangible and intangible resources not through their personal human capital but through their social interactions and connections with others” (Bell, 2009, p. 635). This is relevant to the importance of family ties and friendships, as those who have stronger interpersonal connections are more likely to be happier and stay in their region (Bell, 2009, and Ek-lem, 2001). The feeling of *great location* is clearly connected to some emotional attachment to the area, which underscores the importance of place attachment theory (Barcus & Brunn, 2009, 2010; Gustafson, 2001; Hoey, 2010; Windsong, 2010).

In summary, those who felt that where they were living was a great location, as mentioned earlier, were older, female, travelled, have a positive identity with West Virginia or Appalachia, have strong family ties, and moved to Huntington from a rural area. Appalachian identity is unspecific but commonly perceived as an “us versus them” philosophy, as well as feeling connected to the state’s heritage and traditions, landscape and economy.

Apart from these contributing factors, the desire to stay in the Huntington area was deliberate for many of the respondents and is connected to their own sense of identity and self. Stating that their “ideal choice” was to stay in the state was a common theme for many of the respondents. As Hoey (2010) points out, “the desire to deliberately root selfhood in an actively cultivated sense of place, rather than in the domain of work, in what we might call “career,” is a basic motivation of lifestyle migrants” (p. 251). Giddens (1985) noted that humans are able to consciously alter their place in the social structure and have that humans have agency and can make deliberate choices. While many of the respondents stated feeling happy with their career,

they also mentioned that they would want to stay in West Virginia regardless of the economic opportunities. The older women who were interviewed were the most content living where they were living. The women interviewed cited immense job satisfaction as a reason why they were happy to live in West Virginia. Most had professional jobs, mainly as forensic scientists, which enabled them to experience something challenging and exciting almost every day. Three female participants and one male participant all expressed being satisfied with not only their job, but also the environment surrounding them.

Social capital, as described in Chapter three, can be described as “the features of social organization, such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Bell, 2009, p.632). The connections residents of a given area attain with other people often have beneficial consequences. They are more likely to feel safe; feel as though they have a social safety net; and are able to gain access to resources they would not have access to without those connections (Bell, 2009). We apply social capital theory to explain and understand the research question as it pertains to the responses from the interviewees. This theory is reflected in the respondents’ answers, which show recurring themes of safety, community, and family closeness and ties.

So far, we have seen that the inertia is influenced by place attachment as well as social capital and can also be seen as deliberate choice among the respondents who consider Huntington a great location. What can be said regarding brain drain theory and migration? Brain drain theory says that if you are educated you will move to better opportunities and the migration literature says that young people move. Young people did move to Huntington for better opportunities such as school or a new career choice. Some were moving to Huntington to

become better educated so they could move out of the state and some moved to Huntington and stayed because of the opportunities that were afforded to them after they graduated college.

Older adults who stayed did so because they like the location and they weren't looking for work elsewhere. The exception to brain drain theory is clear here, because many older adults decided to stay in Huntington without looking for job opportunities elsewhere. Brain drain theory surmises that educated people will look for jobs in bigger, urban areas, yet many of the respondents had no desire to look elsewhere for work. Brain drain theory also states that young people are moving to better opportunities in bigger locations. This is true for a few of the respondents. They had already made plans to move to the west coast or to another country at some point in their lives, but many respondents were still completing a graduate degree or had no desire to leave the job they were in at the moment. A twenty-two-year-old woman said she was set on staying in West Virginia and that she thought about what she could do as a career while staying in the state. She clearly has been set on staying in the state her entire life, so brain drain theory does not necessarily apply to her. She is the exception. Part of being the exception to the brain drain theory suggests that one may never even have thought about leaving before. It has never been seen as much of an option. Not looking for work elsewhere was a common theme from the respondents. As brain drain theory asserts, those who can get better jobs elsewhere will move. Brain drain theory asserts that humans make rational choices based on the real or perceived costs and benefits of moving from one place to another. However, of the participants who were interviewed, few of them decided to stay based on so-called rational or logical reasons. Many decided to stay for emotional and personal reasons, such as family, friends, and simply liking the area. Other respondents had never even thought about leaving the state, thus making brain drain theory contestable or even irrelevant with regards to them.

Perhaps the most important finding within the themes of *stuck* and *great location* is the discovery that those who moved to Huntington from a rural location are more content with their jobs, happier, and more likely to think Huntington is a great location to live than those who are from Huntington. Believing that Huntington is a great location because one moved there from somewhere smaller can be illustrated through this quote from a thirty-six-year-old female forensic scientist: “So moving to Huntington was like the big city to me which is so embarrassing. But it is true. This is like the size I- I like this. I like that it’s not New York City so it’s at my level...”

West Virginia, therefore, is not inert. There is internal migration happening, mainly from the rural hollows- the valley between two mountains- to the larger city of Huntington. Borrowing language from Carr and Kefalas (2009), I have termed this phenomenon *Hollowing out the Hollow*. Meaning the bright, young, educated populous are leaving the rural areas of West Virginia in droves and inhabiting the bigger cities of Huntington and Charleston. Many of West Virginia’s citizens may not be leaving the state, but many of them are certainly leaving their home towns in search of a better life. Thus, the theoretical implications of this study, focusing solely on West Virginians, are that social capital and place attachment frameworks offer more explanatory power in terms of why people are not leaving West Virginia, while brain drain theory offers limited evidence, contrary to what may have been expected. In sum, migration is happening within the state of West Virginia, but few people are actually leaving the state. Most of the migration occurs from the rural areas to the larger cities.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This study has provided evidence and contributed to migration literature by discussing and analyzing why people do not leave an area which is proven to be “miserable” and has little to

offer in terms of career opportunities. However, this study does have its limitations. The most apparent limitation is the number of people who were interviewed. Only twenty respondents participated in this study, so this is an incredibly small number, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings of this research. Also, every person who was interviewed was white, which does not reflect the current racial demographic of West Virginia. Future research should include a broader demographic, including a larger sample, more racially diverse sample, and economically diverse sample, so the findings could then be generalizable. Future research should also focus on if West Virginia is in fact a unique population, or if one would get similar responses from different people across the United States.

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## **Appendix A- Interview Guide**

Tell me about your past. Where did you go to high school? When? Where did you go to college?

When? Did you stay in WV or go out of state?

How old are you?

How much is your family income?

Have you traveled? Where have you been? Do you have any desire to travel more? Why have you been to those places?

What do you do for a living?

How long have you been here? How come for that long?

How does it feel living here?

Did you have any intentions to leave in the past? If so, what made you stay? (Have you ever considered leaving?)

Have you ever been offered or came across a better opportunity for work elsewhere?

Do you have any intentions to leave in the future? How are you preparing for this? Do you expect it to be emotionally grueling?

Did you have any colleagues who left? How did that feel?

Did you have any friends who left? How did that feel?

In general, are you satisfied with your life right now? If you could change a part of your living situation, would you? Why?

What do you like about your job? What keeps you coming back?

Are you close with your parents? Siblings? Friends?

How many close friends do you have here? How many do you have elsewhere? Where do they live and for how long have you known them?

How many hours a week do you spend with your family?

What were your plans for the future when you were in college? How did they change? Did you meet your expectations?

When you were in college, how often did you go home? Why?

What about West Virginia (or your specific town) appeals to you?

## Appendix B- IRB Approved Consent Form

### Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study



Marshall University IRB

Approved on:	02/29/12
Expires on:	02/28/13
Study number:	314239

#### Migration in West Virginia

Markus Hadler, PhD, Principal Investigator

#### Introduction

You are invited to be in a research study. Research studies are designed to gain scientific knowledge that may help other people in the future. You may or may not receive any benefit from being part of the study. Your participation is voluntary. Please take your time to make your decision, and ask your research investigator or research staff to explain any words or information that you do not understand.

#### Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to gain insight the reasons some people choose to stay in West Virginia and others leave the area.

#### How Many People Will Take Part In The Study?

About 40 people will take part in this study. A total of 60 subjects are the most that would be able to enter the study.

#### What Is Involved In This Research Study?

A guided interview comprising about 15 questions will be conducted. It will take about 20 minutes.

#### How Long Will You Be In The Study?

The interview will take 20 to 30 minutes in total. You can decide to stop participating at any time.

The study investigator may stop you from taking part in this study at any time if he/she believes it is in your best interest; if you do not follow the study rules; or if the study is stopped.

### What Are The Risks Of The Study?

There are no known risks to those who take part in this study.

### Are There Benefits To Taking Part In The Study?

If you agree to take part in this study, there may or may not be direct benefit to you. We hope the information learned from this study will benefit other people in the future. The benefits of participating in this study may be: Providing new knowledge and insights in the field of social research and sociology.

### What About Confidentiality?

We will do our best to make sure that your personal information is kept confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Federal law says we must keep your study records private. Nevertheless, under unforeseen and rare circumstances, we may be required by law to allow certain agencies to view your records. Those agencies would include the Marshall University IRB, Office of Research Integrity (ORI) and the federal Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP). This is to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety. If we publish the information we learn from this study, you will not be identified by name or in any other way.

Subject's Initials

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### What Are The Costs Of Taking Part In This Study?

Page 2 of 2

There are no costs to you for taking part in this study. All the study costs, including any study tests, supplies and procedures related directly to the study, will be paid for by the study.

### Will You Be Paid For Participating?

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

### What Are Your Rights As A Research Study Participant?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or you may leave the study at any time. Refusing to participate or leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide to stop participating in the study we encourage you to talk to the investigators or study staff first.

### Whom Do You Call If You Have Questions Or Problems?

For questions about the study or in the event of a research-related injury, contact the study investigator, Markus Hadler at (304) 696 2799. You should also call the investigator if you have a concern or complaint about the research.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Marshall University IRB#2 Chairman Dr. Stephen Cooper or ORI at (304) 696-4303. You may also call this number if:

- o You have concerns or complaints about the research.
- o The research staff cannot be reached.
- o You want to talk to someone other than the research staff.

You will be given a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

**SIGNATURES**

You agree to take part in this study and confirm that you are 18 years of age or older. You have had a chance to ask questions about being in this study and have had those questions answered. By signing this consent form you are not giving up any legal rights to which you are entitled.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject Name (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject Signature

Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Person Obtaining Consent (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Person Obtaining Consent Signature

Date

Subject's Initials

\_\_\_\_\_