Exploring Locavores’ Perceptions of Place and Mobility

BY

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THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2016

Chicago, Illinois

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This thesis is dedicated to my husband, without whom it would not have been possible.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my committee, I would like to thank you for lending your time and energy to my
development as a graduate student and a researcher. I truly appreciate everything you have done.
Adrienne, thank you for the constructive conversations, for your flexibility and responsiveness as
I changed direction many times, and for the excellent advice on how to start working and stay
working. Rachel, of course, you have gone above and beyond what could be expected of a
professor, a mentor, and a friend, and I am so thankful to you for the guidance and support you
have continued to provide me since the moment I met you seven years ago. Andy, taking
COMM500 with you was a wonderful start to my graduate life, and I have appreciated your
continued encouragement of my many, varied projects, as well as your advice on how I could
make my “big ideas” not only more manageable, but also far more interesting.

I would also like to thank my participants for so generously volunteering their time to a
stranger, for very little personal gain.

Finally, I can’t say enough to thank my husband, Tim, for his incredible patience, for his
willingness to act as a sounding board for my most unformed and possibly absurd ideas, and for
his ongoing emotional support, especially when I was feeling the most discouraged. I certainly
could not have done this without you.

Thank you for everything.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Globalization and the Space of Flows</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Banal Cosmopolitanism and the Glamorization of Mobility</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Eco-Localism and Locavorism</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Conscious Consumerism</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. METHODS</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. A Qualitative Framework</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Study Population</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Sampling</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Interviews</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Coding and Analysis</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Ethics</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. ANALYSIS</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Perceptions of Spatial Scales</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. People</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Opportunity</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Entertainment</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Lost Pleasures</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Perceptions of Mobility and Immobility</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Glamorized Mobility and Cosmopolitanism</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Roots vs. Wings</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Smaller-Scale Living as a Pathway to Sustainability</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Structural Barriers ................................................................. 73
2. Sociocultural Barriers ........................................................... 79
D. Reduced Travel as a Pathway to Sustainability ................................. 84
   1. Strong Resistance ............................................................... 87
   2. Social Status Impact ......................................................... 91
V. CONCLUSION ........................................................................ 94
   A. Limitations ......................................................................... 103
   B. Future Directions ................................................................ 104
APPENDIX A ............................................................................. 106
CITED LITERATURE .................................................................. 109
VITA ......................................................................................... 115
**LIST OF TABLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>PARTICIPANTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF URBAN AND NON-URBAN PLACES</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>PARTICIPANTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF MOBILITY AND PEOPLE WHO MOVE</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>PARTICIPANTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF IMMOBILITY AND ASSOCIATED PEOPLE</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>RESPONSES TO THE IDEA OF LIVING IN A SMALLER-SCALE PLACE IN ORDER TO LIVE MORE SUSTAINABLY</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>OPPONENTS’ REACTIONS TO THE IDEA THAT PEOPLE SHOULD TRAVEL LESS IN ORDER TO HELP THE ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td>SUPPORTERS’ REACTIONS TO THE IDEA THAT PEOPLE SHOULD TRAVEL LESS IN ORDER TO HELP THE ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFM     Alternative Food Movement
LFM     Local Food Movement
GPS     Global Positioning System
ICD     Informed Consent Document
IRB     Institutional Review Board
SUMMARY

This is a qualitative study that uses semi-structured, in-depth interviews to investigate perceptions of urban vs. non-urban places, as well as more “rooted” and more “mobile” lifestyle practices, among a group of Chicagoans who have a self-reported interest in “locavorism,” or the practice of eating locally-sourced foods. Locavorism can be understood as one component of a larger “eco-localist” movement, which seeks to encourage the “relocalization” of human social life by transforming social structures to accommodate smaller-scale communities and economic systems, in order to counteract myriad destructive aspects of global capitalism, and, ultimately, to encourage both environmental sustainability and grassroots democracy. Many locavores consequently believe that by engaging in the “conscious consumerist” practice of “eating locally,” they are participating, at least in some small way, in an important activist effort.

As “conscious consumerism” practices such as locavorism rise in popularity in wealthy, capitalist nations like the United States, scholars have pointed the lack of similarly widespread support for other forms of civic engagement and environmental activism, which may actually be more effective than behaviors such as locavorism. In order to understand this discrepancy, researchers have highlighted the fact that conscious consumerism takes a hyper-individualized approach to addressing various issues, and that it consequently aligns itself with the tenets of neoliberalization that underlie global capitalism. Indeed, by suggesting that consumers should take responsibility for widespread environmental problems that are, in fact, caused by global capitalist systems, the practice of conscious consumerism has been said to deflect blame from institutions and to discourage people from pursuing much-needed structural change.

In conversation with such analyses, this inquiry investigates the possibility that, in addition to the other known factors contributing to the popularity of conscious consumerism, it
may also be the case that locavorism is a particularly attractive form of eco-local activism because it does not interfere with certain mobile and/or urban lifestyle choices that have become increasingly necessary and desirable amidst globalization.

To contextualize this argument, I have provided an overview of the macro-level structural changes associated with globalization, including the concentration of human activity in what Castells (2010b) has described as the “space of flows,” and what Sassen (2005) has described as “global cities.” As these structural changes occur, individuals are not only compelled to chase economic opportunity into urban areas, but they are also compelled to be increasingly mobile (Urry, 2007). Moreover, arising from these structural changes are accompanying “mythologies” (Barthes, 1972) that serve to normalize the social activities and ideologies that are necessary to perpetuate the status quo of global capitalism. The influence of such mythologies can be seen in the fact that “cosmopolitan” experiences now appear commonplace (Beck, 2003), and that experiences of physical mobility have become “glamorous” and desirable (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006). As these discourses emerge, an ideal social identity begins to crystallize: That of a young, mobile urbanite (Cohen & Gossling, 2015). Thus, in addition to opting for urban and mobile lifestyles due to structural, economic imperatives, individuals may also be pushed toward these lifestyles as a means to perform a desirable social identity, or to gain social status and prestige.

This study suggests that these structural and ideological realities likely assert an influence on people as they negotiate their participation in various aspects of social life, including eco-local activism. Because some threads of eco-localism argue that individuals should become more “embedded” or “rooted” in smaller-scale places, I suggest that there is likely to be a conflict between the wider eco-localist project and people’s impulses to be urban and mobile. While
becoming more “rooted” or less urban might *not* appeal to individuals who are, nonetheless, somewhat eco-conscious, it is possible that conscious consumerist practices such as “eating locally” will be acceptable because they are less disruptive to urban/mobile lifestyles.

To investigate this possibility, I engaged in semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 10 locavores living in Chicago, in order to explore how they think and feel about urban vs. non-urban areas, as well as more rooted or more mobile lifestyles. My data ultimately demonstrated that non-urban areas and less mobile lifestyles were indeed seen as undesirable to many (but not all) participants, as a consequence of both structural and ideological factors. Furthermore, my data revealed that although participants demonstrated some interest in pursuing smaller-scale lifestyles (i.e., residence in non-urban areas), for the purpose of recapturing certain pleasures denied to them by city life, the participants rather forcefully expressed that they had no interest in traveling less frequently.

Although my findings are not generalizable, my results suggest the possibility that there are other self-described, urban “locavores,” who, like my participants, may be interested in supporting eco-localism through their consumption behaviors (i.e., “eating locally”), but who will be thoroughly unreceptive to eco-localist projects that celebrate “rootedness” (i.e., less mobility). Consequently, the results of this study may be useful to anyone who seeks to communicate with a broader audience of locavores, or perhaps even other “conscious consumers,” in order to engage those people in broader activist efforts. Finally, the results also provide fruitful pathways for future research, including quantitative inquiries that could supplement and complicate my findings.
I. INTRODUCTION

Most broadly, this study situates itself in a larger discussion of conscious consumption practices and American eco-local activism amidst globalization, in which unprecedented access to rapid transportation technologies and electronic communication media have contributed to profound alterations in human social systems and in the human experience of space. More specifically, this study collects and analyzes perspectives of mobility, multi-scale lifestyle choices, and environmentalist ideals among American, urban “locavores,” or urban residents who consciously choose to purchase and consume foods that have been “locally” produced.

This study is a qualitative, phenomenological inquiry that does not seek generalizability but rather explores the ways that people understand and explain their lifestyle choices in light of certain social trends that may exert competing influences on them. The self-reported views of the study participants will consequently be discussed in relation to the following: (a) The structural and ideological changes associated with globalization that render mobile, cosmopolitan, and/or urban lifestyles socioeconomically desirable (or even necessary); and (b) A rising discourse of “eco-localism”—as visible in the popularity of local food movements (LFMs)—which celebrates smaller-scale, more “local” lifestyles as a means to combat the myriad ills of global capitalism.

The insights gained from this research will contribute to a body of scholarship that investigates people’s own understandings of environmental issues and activism as globalization continues to transform social and spatial realities. In particular, this study focuses on the thoughts and behaviors of individuals living in the United States—a nation that is one of the most significant contributors to global environmental crises (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2015). Consequently, the results of this particular study may be useful for activists, non-profit organizations, policymakers, and anyone else with an interest in engaging American
citizens in response to ongoing crises, including such things as climate change, deforestation, declining wildlife, ocean acidification, and desertification (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014; Martin, Kneeland, Brooks, & Matta, 2012; McLellan, 2014; United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2014).

This project was inspired by a personal experience that I will briefly share. Slightly over one year ago, I accompanied an acquaintance (an unmarried, white man in his early 30s) to Whole Foods Market in Chicago, where he needed to purchase groceries. As we were shopping, I noticed that he was interested in ensuring that his food purchases were “local,” if possible, or that they at least came from small-scale food producers whose practices where environmentally sustainable. He explained that he preferred to “eat locally” whenever he could, and he expressed both an admiration and a fondness for small-town, self-sufficient communities, where people understood the importance of local politics and careful natural resource stewardship, in terms of both community and environmental health. It seemed to me that he was describing the premises of eco-local environmentalism, and I wondered, given his apparent support for such a thoroughly eco-localist lifestyle, why he didn’t live one. I asked: “Do you think you’d ever move to one of those smaller towns, somewhere beyond the city, and maybe put down roots there?” He laughed at this idea and simply said, “If that means living there for a long time, then no way—that small-town life just wouldn’t work for me. Plus, I mean, nobody wants to be a townie…”

His comment that “nobody wants to be a townie” stuck with me, and I reflected on our exchange quite a bit. Ultimately, I concluded that, among the myriad lifestyle changes that one could make to accommodate eco-localist ethics, “eating locally” was the most attractive to my acquaintance for two important reasons: (a) It did not interfere with his ability to be a rather
transient urbanite, who could travel or relocate at any time, for any reason, and (b) It did not interfere with his desired social identity—which, specifically, was to not to be a “townie.”

In light of these observations, I decided to design and conduct an exploratory research project to begin investigating urban locavores’ thoughts and feelings regarding their lifestyle choices. I approached this project with an awareness that locavores might simultaneously hold two seemingly conflicting beliefs, including: (a) The belief that it is important, for whatever reason, to live (or appear to live) a mobile/cosmopolitan lifestyle, and (b) That encouraging more rooted, smaller-scale lifestyles is, for whatever reason, important for society. I wondered: Do locavores experience a tension between these beliefs? If so, how do they reconcile that tension? In their own words, what do they think of small-scale, rooted people and lifestyles, as compared to more urban, mobile, or cosmopolitan people and lifestyles? When confronted with the idea that eco-localism’s goals might be achieved not only by “eating locally,” but also by travelling less often or living in smaller communities, how do they respond?

I thus pose the following research questions:

RQ1: How do American, urban locavores discuss various scales of spatial experience (small-town vs. urban), including the people in those spaces?

RQ2: How do American, urban locavores discuss varying degrees of mobility (more rooted vs. more mobile), including their perceptions of people who engage in more or less mobility?

RQ3: How do American, urban locavores respond to the idea of residing in a smaller-scale place as a means to realize eco-localist ideals?

RQ4: How do American, urban locavores respond to the idea of traveling less frequently—especially by plane—as a means to realize eco-localist ideals?

Of course, I am not the first person to wonder about the depth and form of locavores’ investments in the broader project of eco-localism. As I will show more thoroughly in the literature review, a collection of scholarship on conscious consumerism has highlighted the fact
that popular discourse on eco-local food systems (e.g., books by Michael Pollan) have fostered cynicism or distrust in systemic resolution to political and environmental issues, instead encouraging highly individualized forms of activism (locavorism), which, it is theorized, may ultimately detract from eco-localist ideals by simply reinforcing the very neoliberal philosophy that underlies and perpetuates global capitalism (e.g., Guthman, 2007).

Furthermore, scholars have shown that individualized, consumption-based activism can lead to social segmentation, thus encouraging a process by which individual identities become conflated with consumption habits—e.g., local foodies, organic foodies, and people who apparently don’t care—which can obscure the systemic inequalities that give wealthier people more power to buy expensive, “ethical” foods (DeLind, 2011). Furthermore, the conflabulation of individual identity and consumption behaviors can be co-opted by corporate food producers (Adams & Shriver, 2010), who may brand products as “local” or “organic” in order to reach new, niche markets with allegedly more ethical foods, even though regulation is often lacking, or they meet only bare-bones sustainability standards (e.g., Guthman, 2004).

Ultimately, this body of literature reveals the following: (a) Locavores’ levels of engagement with—and “reflexivity” about—their conscious consumption behaviors is widely varied; (b) Popular rhetoric about locavorism can discourage support for the institutional accountability that eco-localism desires; and (c) “Citizen-consumers” are likely to experience an ideological tension between their feelings of social responsibility (inherent to citizenship) and their pleasure-seeking, self-interested desires (inherent to consumerism) (Johnston, 2008).

Indeed, locavores cite myriad reasons for their interest in local foods, many of which are not related to social responsibility, but rather to the personal pleasures of consuming the product, including freshness and better taste (Zepeda & Leviten-Reid, 2004).
In conversation with these analyses, my project suggests that locavores may also be drawn away from deep engagement with eco-localism due to the fact that certain structural and ideological forces associated with globalization have strongly linked economic stability and social status to mobile and cosmopolitan lifestyles (Castells, 2010b; Cohen & Gossling, 2015; Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2006; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006). Thus, in addition to the factors cited above, I investigate the possibility that locavorism is a particularly popular component of eco-localism because “eating locally” does not require people to stop traveling or to live outside of cities. Indeed, it is possible to “eat locally” without “settling down” or “being a townie,” and I think it is worth exploring how that circumstance relates to the depth of locavores’ engagement with eco-localist ideals.
II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There are several threads of scholarship that substantiate this inquiry. First, I will review literature on globalization and mobility to show that globalization has brought about macro-level changes in social systems, which (a) compel people toward more mobile, cosmopolitan, and urban lifestyles, and (b) have contributed to a status-based distinction between those who live such lifestyles and those who do not. I will then review literature on eco-localism and conscious consumerism to show that locavorism is a highly “individualized” form of eco-local activism that can leave some locavores confused about how to address systemic problems, ultimately resulting in myriad behavioral inconsistencies. Finally, I suggest that an interest in mobile and cosmopolitan lifestyles may constitute an as-yet unexplored factor in some locavores’ lack of engagement with the broader project of eco-localism, despite their willingness to “eat locally.”

A. Globalization and the Space of Flows

From varying disciplinary perspectives, researchers in recent decades have noted that modern transportation and electronic media technologies are, among other things, changing the relationship between human beings and the spaces in which they conduct their activities. The processes by which human social life—including relevant cultural, economic, and political systems—are changing can be collectively be understood as “globalization.” Among other things, globalization is characterized by the emergence and intensification of what Appadurai (1996) has referred to as “flows,” or the continuous movement of money, migrants, images, and languages (to name a few material and non-material things) across wide expanses of space, as facilitated by rapid global transportation systems (e.g., air travel) and networks of electronic communication technologies (e.g., the Internet and the World Wide Web).
The emergence of “global flows” has led Castells (2010a, 2010b) to discuss the ongoing transformation of spatial experience in terms of two main spatial realms: (a) the “space of flows,” which “organizes the simultaneity of social practices at a distance, by means of telecommunications and information systems,” and (b) the “space of places,” which “privileges social interaction and institutional organization on the bases of physical contiguity.” Importantly, Castells notes that the “space of flows” has gained increasing prominence as human society has experienced, through the latter half of the 20th century and the early 21st century, a shift from “industrial society” to what he calls a globally-networked “information society.” A key characteristic of the global information society is that the cultural, economic, and political activities of the world’s most powerful actors now take the form of information production and knowledge exchange, which primarily occurs in the “space of flows.”

Among the consequences associated with the rise of the information society and the transfer of key social activities into the “space of flows” is a phenomenon that Giddens (1990) terms “disembedding,” or the severing of certain aspects of human life from their pre-modern, physical-spatial restraints. “Disembedded” forms of social experience occur in an abstract and somewhat “placeless” fashion, as, for example, two people who are situated on two different continents can still communicate in “real-time” through e-mail or mobile phones. Importantly, as technological innovations expand the “space of flows” and allow for more and more human activity to become “disembedded,” people are also increasingly able to conduct certain activities without as much concern for spatial restraints, such that many modern experiences are defined by fluidity, and by increased mobility through and between places (Sheller & Urry, 2006).

Despite these developments, it is not the case that physical “places” have become structurally irrelevant in the globalized era and within the “information society.” As Sassen
(2005) has noted, the massive transition from industrial forms of society to the globalized information society has been accompanied by a “re-scaling” of “the strategic territories that articulate the new system” (p. 27), ultimately resulting in the rise to prominence of what she calls “global cities.” Crediting various neoliberal economic policies with weakening the nation-state as a “spatial unit,” as well as with fueling the creation of deregulated global markets, Sassen explains that the operations of modern corporations have drastically expanded and increased in complexity, thus necessitating an outsourcing of their “central functions” to an “agglomeration” of various “specialist” agencies (e.g., marketing and legal firms). Sassen refers to this “agglomeration of firms” as the “corporate services complex,” and she explains that such complexes are spatially situated in “an expanding network of global cities” that also typically function as major “nodes” in networks of global finance, such as New York, Tokyo, and London.

In summary, the core socioeconomic activities of the information society occur in a “space of flows” that refers to not only to the digital spaces through which information moves electronically, but also the geographically-situated “global cities” in which flows overlap, and where the “control functions” of modern society form “a whole infrastructure of activities, firms, and jobs…[that are] necessary to run the advanced corporate economy” (Sassen, 2005, p. 31). Castells (2010b) explains that these cities are “information-based, value-production complexes, where corporate headquarters and advanced financial firms can find both the suppliers and the highly skilled specialized labor force they require” (p. 415). Of course, as people congregate in these “mega-nodes,” certain necessary lifestyle and service industries must expand to support the “individual self-gratification of the much-needed upper-level management professionals,” including everything from “good schools for their children to symbolic membership at the heights of conspicuous consumption, including art and entertainment” (Castells, 2010b, p. 416).
Thus, both the economic and cultural centrality of certain massive urban areas is enhanced by an intensifying network of global capitalist systems, such that major cities continue to offer “the greatest opportunities for personal enhancement,” including the likelihood of finding work, either (a) in one of the exploding “managerial, professional, and technical positions” that variously direct, support, or execute the core operations of the information society, (b) as a social service provider (e.g., in the realms of healthcare and education), or (c) in the expanding pool of clerical and retail jobs that is continually swelling (Castells, 2010b).

The consequences of these societal shifts are monumental and have profoundly modified the underpinnings of human experience in a way that complicates an individual’s ability to resist globalization processes, or to “opt out” of more cosmopolitan or “global” experiences in favor of “smaller” or intensely “local” lifestyles. As socioeconomic opportunities and activities continue to concentrate in “global cities,” and as the production and transfer of information increasingly becomes the basis for the acquisition of wealth and power, certain lifestyle choices are likely to become either structurally untenable (in terms of economic livelihood), or significantly less desirable (due to their perceived negative effects on a person’s social status).

For example, a person may now feel discouraged from buying a home in a small, rural area and pursuing employment in the declining sectors of agriculture or manufacturing (Castells, 2010b, p. 239), since this decision fails to present the most promising path to financial stability and prosperity. Similarly, a locavore who is ethically inclined to challenge the harmful aspects of globalized capitalism may be deterred from related forms of activism—such as opting out of air travel, volunteering and voting in local politics, or even attempting to invigorate “local life” in a small community—simply because these smaller-scale, less mobile, and more “localized” activities would require too much of an economic sacrifice. In short, locavores may feel that
certain “localist” lifestyle choices are wholly impractical and may too radically compromise their ability to maintain a sufficient livelihood, in ways that “eating locally” does not. Indeed, there is nothing about the idea of “eating locally” that requires a person to be non-urban or less mobile.

Moreover, in addition to the underlying structural realities that may influence a locavore’s willingness to engage deeply with “localist” endeavors beyond locavorism, I am also interested in the ideological forces—arising from and supporting the structural realities—that may compel people toward more “cosmopolitan” pursuits. Specifically, I am interested in exploring the notion that certain lifestyle decisions may be more appealing to locavores due to the perceived symbolic value of various types of places in social identity construction and performance processes (Goffman, 1959). Indeed, as Gustafson (2001) has noted, “the ways in which people relate to places – mobility/cosmopolitanism or immobility/localism – [has] become an important expression of social stratification” (p 5). To better understand how this distinction between “mobility/cosmopolitanism” and “immobility/localism” has arisen and how it functions, I will now discuss the normalization of cosmopolitanism and the glamorization of mobility.

B. Banal Cosmopolitanism and the Glamorization of Mobility

As Hannerz (1990) explains, “the cosmopolitan-local distinction” arose in the social sciences in the mid-20th century as sociologist Robert Merton (1957) sought to describe “patterns of influence” in American small towns, where “the cosmopolitans of the town were those who thought and lived their lives” on a large scale, rather than “purely within the structure of the locality” (p. 237). Hannerz goes on to explain that to be cosmopolitan actually entails a complex tapestry of experiences and attitudes, including experiences of “detachment” from and “nostalgia” toward one’s local “home,” a deep interest in and celebration of global-scale cultural diversity, and feelings of “competence” as one “moves about in the world” (p. 239). Hannerz’s explanation evokes an image of a spatially-mobile individual who is open-minded about
multicultural, global experiences. To this point, Hannerz ultimately asserts that cosmopolitanism is “above all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other” (p. 239). By implication, perhaps, “localism” could be understood as a contrasting perspective—or, at least, it may connote the absence of mobility, spatial detachment, and multicultural experience.

Beck (2003) explains that the ongoing intensification of globalization has contributed to what he describes as “cosmopolitanization,” or a process by which people’s identities and views become more global in scale, ultimately to the point that “cosmopolitanism” is normalized. The normalization of cosmopolitanism could be seen be both positively and negatively, depending on how cosmopolitanism is understood. The image provided above of an open-minded and worldly “cosmopolitan” individual is a rather positive one. This person, who is willing “to engage with the Other,” seems likely to be humanitarian, or at least aware of global inequalities, global crises, and planetary risks, perhaps with an interest in addressing such problems. Related to this image of a person “in tune” with global issues is Beck’s (2006) discussion of “cosmopolitanism” in the “world risk society.” He claims that the inter-connection of human societies and human activities worldwide results in the “globalization of risk,” as seen with the emergence of climate change and global terrorism. Beck argues that the ongoing intensification of (and increasing discourse about) such global risks results in widespread “cosmopolitanism,” in which an individual’s personal identification with a nation-state gives way to forms of global awareness and self-identification that are necessary for the understanding and management of global threats.

From a somewhat different angle, however, “cosmopolitanism” has also been described as “one of many liberal discourses which run through the mythology of globalization...[offering an] opportunity to buy into a way of life and a lifestyle that is modern and desirable” (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006, p. 124). In this formulation, “cosmopolitanism” is understood not as a globalized
sense of belonging or outlook on social responsibility, nor as an acute consciousness of global risks, but rather as an ideological force that symbolically encourages beliefs and behaviors that will support the status-quo of global capitalism. Related to this view, Szerszynski and Urry (2002) have articulated how cosmopolitanism can be understood as a sociocultural ideology in which spatial mobility, global knowledge, and multinational personal connections constitute enviable markers of modernism and high social status.

Common among these perspectives, and important for this study, is the idea that people who possess a cosmopolitan orientation, or who engage in cosmopolitan lifestyles, are spatially “situating” their experiences and social identities on a global scale. They are participating in “globalized” cultural, economic, and political activities of various kinds, for various reasons, and with various consequences. For the purposes of this study, I am not interested in determining which of the above perspectives on cosmopolitanism is most “correct,” but, rather, I wish to acknowledge that experiences of cosmopolitanism are becoming more commonplace as globalization progresses, whether they manifest as global citizenship behaviors, fears of global terrorism, or aspirations toward globe-trotting, hypermobile lifestyles.

To illustrate the extent to which cosmopolitanism is becoming commonplace, Beck (2003) has discussed the emergence of “banal cosmopolitanism,” for which he turns to food culture in order to provide an illustrative example:

…our consumption is the consummation of a global process of production. The workers of the world may not yet be united but their food certainly is. Foods now found side by side at the neighbourhood supermarket used to be separated by great distances. This is banal cosmopolitanism in a nutshell. It is the expression and the means of an everyday culinary eclecticism that is celebrated in cookbooks and treated as the most normal thing in the world on TV cooking programmes. Here world society comes into the kitchen and literally melts in the pot. (pp 21-22).

In this rich explanation, Beck highlights the fact that the globalization of food systems has enabled highly “eclectic” consumption experiences, in which, for example, products from all
over the world can be combined on a supermarket shelf, where their proximity is not only “celebrated” but is also implicitly understood as “the most normal thing in the world.” Of course, the apparent normalcy of a cosmopolitan shopping experience obscures the constellation of functions that make it possible—namely, a globalized system of production, processing, and transport that, in addition to enabling pleasurable, “eclectic” consumption experiences, have also been shown to contribute to environmental devastation and human rights violations (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014; Shelton, 2002).

In a similar vein, scholars in the realm of mobility studies have noted that globalization processes have ushered in an era of unprecedented mobility (Cresswell, 2010; Edensor, 2001; Franklin & Crang, 2001; Urry & Larsen, 2011), such that experiences of far-off places have become an increasingly “necessary” and “normalized” aspect of modern life (Urry, 2000). Franklin and Crang (2001) explain:

> It can no longer be considered such a shattering blow to have to leave one’s natal soil…It is unrealistic, perhaps, to expect to find work and settle down where one’s parents and grandparents live. As migration becomes normative, it takes on an air of excitement as stories circulate of the life to be had in other locations…(p. 11).

Notably, the “excitement” associated here with spatial mobility is not necessarily shared by everyone. It is easy to imagine situations in which mobility can be painful or traumatizing. To this point, some scholars call attention to the difference between voluntary and involuntary mobility experiences, with examples of the latter including labor migrations, the forced marches of soldiers, and the relocation of refugees (Adler, 1989, p. 1370; Franklin & Crang, 2001). However, consistent with the above discussion of “banal cosmopolitanism” in the supermarket, the “normative” perception of spatial mobility seems to be one that celebrates its pleasures while obscuring its “dark side,” particularly by circulating only the most exciting narratives about modern travel practices (Cohen & Gossling, 2015).
As the global capitalist system engrains itself more deeply, some scholars are arguing that its associated mobile/cosmopolitan lifestyles are being “mythologized” (per Barthes, 1972) by the myriad booming industries—transportation, communication, tourism, and technology—that have a vested interest in ensuring the continued prominence of global capitalism (e.g., Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006). Specifically, these discourses operate by “assigning status and network capital to travel, and ascribing anti-status or reduced capital to the less mobile” (Cohen & Gossling, 2015, p. 14), ultimately participating in the promotion of “a carefully managed cosmopolitan lifestyle predicated on the mythology of super-elite, global citizenship” (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006, p. 105).

Even if a discursive “glamorization” of mobility/cosmopolitanism is occurring, the important question remains: Do people actually seem to be affected by it, and do they participate in it? To explain this, it is important to know that while physical mobility has certainly increased (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2015; Urry & Larsen, 2011), so too have “virtual” and “imagined” mobility, in which people are able to “travel” without physically moving (Urry & Larsen, 2011; Urry & Lash, 1994). When engaged in virtual and imagined mobility, individuals experience a simulation of physical-spatial movement through high-fidelity media images, typically via the World Wide Web. Epitomizing this phenomenon is the fact that it is now possible for an individual who is seated at a stationary computer desk to “tour” the famous Machu Picchu historical site in Peru through a realistic simulation offered by Google “Street View” (Coldwell, 2015). When a person engages in virtual and imagined travel, he or she enters into what Appadurai (1996) has called “mediascapes,” or fluid mosaics of images that depict “fantasies that could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement” (pp. 35–
Appadurai suggests here that exposure to mediascapes can excite a person’s imagination and ultimately shape his or her desires, including the desire for mobility.

Consistent with his point, Jansson’s (2002) work offers evidence that imagined travel through mediascapes will not replace corporeal travel, as might seem possible, but will instead encourage it. His qualitative inquiries have shown that an impulse to engage in physical-spatial travel has increased in response to what he calls the “mediatization of tourism experience.” Drawing on data from a series of interviews in Sweden, Jansson argues that the mediatization of travel ignites imaginative processes “in which people’s desires for new first-hand experiences are intensified… [such that] the longing to appropriate landscapes and socioscapes on location increases” (2002, p. 441). Notably, Jansson’s point here echoes Appadurai’s observation that mediascapes can construct objects and places of desire, and he ultimately states that people can “experience the spiritual joy promised by the image of certain goods and activities,” even if they have no prior experience of those goods and activities (2002, p. 436). Thus, whether or not an individual has actually traveled to a given place, the repeated representation of that place’s desirability in mediascapes can cultivate a desire to experience the “real thing” for oneself.

Of course, the fact that media representations of mobility can enhance mobility desires is significant only if mobility experiences are both commonly and positively represented in media—and, indeed, recent scholarship suggests that this is true (Cohen & Gossling, 2015; Good, 2013; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Prominent American news sources such as The New York Times “portray 21st-century global mobility as a trend that is at once novel and recognizable,” offering desirable images not only of the “enduring” leisure experiences of the 20th century, but also of the “post-tourist” global tourism experiences sought after by those who view traditional tourism as highly scripted or “commodified” (Good, 2013).
Furthermore, everyday people are participating in the “mediatization” of mobility and cosmopolitanism by using social networking technologies (such as Facebook) to post pictures from their far-off vacations, or by using global positioning system (GPS) technologies to broadcast their real-time physical presence in socially-desirable or “elite” locations (Cramer, Rost, & Holmquist, 2011; Wang & Stefanone, 2013). Such behaviors suggest that at least some people are indeed affected by the “myths” associated with mobile/cosmopolitan lifestyles, and, furthermore, these people appear to be leveraging their mobile/cosmopolitan experiences in social exchanges as a form of “impression management” and “selective self-presentation” (Wang & Stefanone, 2013, p. 452). It is possible, then, that at least some locavores will attempt to render themselves more socially acceptable or desirable by symbolically associating with mobility and cosmopolitanism, and by disassociating from people, places, or activities that are deemed oppositional—including, perhaps, smaller-scale places and more “localist” lifestyles (see Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996 for an explanation as to how places are used in identity processes).

Thus, in addition to the aforementioned structural forces that may push people toward more mobile/cosmopolitan lifestyles, there are also ideological forces working to establish these lifestyles as normal and desirable. This reality is particularly important for my study, because, as the following section will show, the practice of “eating locally” is premised, to some extent, on a “localist” ethic that seems ideologically opposed to excessively mobile/cosmopolitan lifestyles. Indeed, for many people, the impulse to “eat locally” supposedly stems from a desire to resist the ills of global capitalism by reinvigorating smaller-scale, more localized political economies, which are believed to encourage grassroots democracy and environmental sustainability.

Given that at least some locavores have accepted, however deeply, these eco-localist ideals, I wonder: Do they experience a tension between localist ideals and the myriad forces—both
structural and ideological—that might compel them toward more mobile, cosmopolitan
lifestyles? If so, how do they reconcile these tensions?

I believe that an initial answer to these questions can be reached by gathering locavores’
self-reported thoughts and feelings on both mobile/cosmopolitan and immobile/local lifestyles
and experiences. By attempting to understand what varying scales of experience might mean to
locavores, as well as varying degrees of mobility, perhaps it will be possible to shed light on
their preferences—and possible frustrations or inconsistencies—in relation to the possible
tensions outlined in the above literature review. For this reason, I ask the following question:

RQ1: How do American, urban locavores discuss various scales of spatial
experience (small-town vs. urban), including the people in those spaces?

RQ2: How do American, urban locavores discuss varying degrees of mobility
(more rooted vs. more mobile), including their perceptions of people who
engage in more or less mobility?

C. Eco-Localism and Locavorism

Despite the picture I may have painted thus far, it is certainly not the case that global
capitalism has gone unchallenged. In fact, the American environmentalist movement offers a
legacy of rhetoric intended to encourage the revitalization of smaller-scale, localized person-
place relationships, in response to the environmentally-destructive effects of global production
and consumption. Concerns about the apparent “disembedding” forces of modern life have been
a point of emphasis since the 1960s—roughly the advent of the American environmentalist
movement—and there is a strong thread of environmental thought suggesting that small-scale
spatial experience is a necessary precursor to pro-environmental behavior (Heise, 2008).

At what may be an extreme end of such environmental imaginings are early calls for
near-spiritual connections to nature, such as those suggested by Lovelock (1979) in his writings
on the “Gaia hypothesis,” or the notion that the “biosphere is a self-regulating entity” with which
people should closely coordinate the rhythms of social life. Although the idea of personal alignment with a near-sentient Earth-spirit (Gaia) may seem romantic, the underlying impulse to “return to the land” was a common thread within the American counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s (Aberley, 1999). In an extensive review of early American environmentalist imaginings, Buell (2005) notes that, in this specific discourse, “traditional writing about place tends to interest itself especially in bounded areas of small size…[in which] the locale is treated as pretty much frozen in time…[and] sits just beyond the edge of a more cosmopolitan world” (p. 77).

While globalization continues to intensify alongside recent technological innovations, the emphasis on these “localist” threads in American environmentalism is apparently being revived, such that there has been “resurgence of localism throughout contemporary environmental thought and action” (Krakoff, 2011, p. 87). Evidence of the localist “resurgence” is visible, for example, in the work of Cafaro (2010), who voices concern about the utility of “cosmopolitan” and “universalist” ideologies in the context of environmental ethics and activism by arguing that he “can enjoy nature and belong locally, in a way that [he] cannot do elsewhere,” and that “environmentalism can only be a life-affirming and personally enriching activity if it involves connection to the land and communities around you” (p. 194). From a similar standpoint, Curtis (2003) argues for “eco-local” economics, in which “economic sustainability is best secured by the creation of local or regional self-reliant, community economies” (p. 83). In both cases, there is an apparent tension between environmental responsibility and the allure of global socioeconomic participation, with the understanding that cosmopolitan lifestyles and ideologies may not be wholly evil, but that they may fail to provide realistic pathways for environmentally-responsible behavior and for democratic politics.
In the specific context of American food culture, this localist perspective is especially visible in the rising popularity of “alternative food movements” (AFMs) that are being promoted in academic communities, activist communities, and in the popular press (see DuPuis & Goodman, 2005, p. 259). Consider, for example, the “local food movement” (LFM), which is characterized by the commonplace command to “eat locally,” and which is associated with the now-fashionable “farm-to-table” and “slow food” movements that are said to be reasserting “place” in food culture, and which are actively promoting “re-localization” through the conscious consumption of locally-sourced foods (Buck, Getz, & Guthman, 1997; Delind & Bingen, 2008; Harris, 2010).

See also the popular work of Michael Pollan (2006), who has brought broad attention to the negative environmental consequences of global food systems that service unwieldy populations of people across huge expanses of space, thus suggesting that local- and small-scale food politics would be both more sustainable and more ethical. Indeed, some participants in LFM have expressed that they are compelled to eat locally in order to counteract large-scale food production practices that they believe perpetuate environmental destruction and ultimately harm smaller-scale producers, whose livelihoods and communities are oppressed by globalized, de-regulated, corporatized food politics (Nabhan, 2002; Peterson, Taylor, & Baudouin, 2015).

D. Conscious Consumerism

In discussions of alternative food movements and locavorism as forms of political activism, many scholars have characterized locavorism as one thread in a larger tapestry of “conscious consumption” behaviors (also known as ethical consumption, political consumption, and green consumerism), by which people attempt to “shop for change” or “vote with their dollar” (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; DeLind, 2011; Roff, 2007). Although there is support for the idea that consumers are important players in political systems, some scholars have
nonetheless raised questions about the efficacy of conscious consumerism as a form of political activism (Johnston, 2008). For example, Guthman (2007) has highlighted the fact that locavorism—as it is promoted by writers like Michael Pollan—fosters cynicism about systemic solutions, thus placing responsibility for social change in the hands of individuals rather than institutions, and reinforcing the neoliberal tenets of global capitalism that it allegedly rejects.

Consistent with this view, Connolly and Prothero (2008) show that “green consumers” genuinely internalize a belief in their own individualized responsibility for resolving global environmental crises. However, despite possessing a strong sense of duty and a feeling of empowerment, green consumers also experience a profound “confusion” about how to act (Connolly & Prothero, 2008, p. 141). In support of Beck’s (2006) observation that there has been a “globalization of risk,” green consumers indeed seem aware that massively-complex global systems are responsible for widespread environmental devastation, yet, instead of demanding institutional change, they genuinely “believe that they, as individuals, can help solve global environmental problems” (Connolly & Prothero, 2008, p. 142). Although green consumption may have some positive effects, it is certainly not the whole solution, and scholars thus point to a disturbing under-emphasis on other, more collectivized forms of activism in popular eco-localist rhetoric (Guthman, 2007).

Furthermore, as individuals increasingly accept the notion that responsibility for social change rests largely with their consumption habits, they may not only experience confusion about how to act, but they may also begin to see lifestyle choices as symbolic indicators of social differentiation, including association with (or against) environmental activism. Groups of consumers begin to “segment” themselves and others as, for example, those who want “local” apples and those who don’t care how their apples are produced. In response to this, scholars have
shown how the corporate food industry “co-opts” newly-emerging consumer categories in order to create niche markets by reinforcing these lifestyle differences through marketing campaigns (Adams & Shriver, 2010). In cases where marketing is well-regulated (such that “local” or “organic” labels denote truly sustainable production), then the shift to accommodate more ethical consumers could be seen as a good thing. However, as Guthman (2004) shows in her discussion of “organic lite” practices, the regulatory systems can be rather insufficient, and producers will often meet only the minimum standards.

To be clear, I certainly believe that some self-described “locavores” are deeply engaged in alternative food movements, and that they participate in myriad forms of eco-local activism that advance environmental sustainability projects and encourage grassroots democracy. However, these observations suggest that eco-localist sentiment has also been commodified, packaged, and sold as a “niche” lifestyle and associated activist identity that can be achieved through the consumption of certain products (Giddens, 1991, p. 198). In this way, locavorism may encourage some people to self-identify as activists simply by “eating locally,” whether or not they are deeply involved in LFM or engage in critical “reflexivity” about their behaviors (Johnston & Szabo, 2011). Perhaps more superficially-engaged locavores will even self-identify as “someone who cares” about localist ideals while nonetheless engaging in many practices that are largely inconsistent with eco-localist ideals. To this point, Connolly and Prothero (2008) have shown that the underlying ideological tension of green consumerism—i.e., that individuals are largely responsible for making changes to massive, global systems—can cause many green consumers to experience “confusion about how to act,” ultimately leaving them with feelings of “guilt, ambivalence, compromise and inconsistencies” (p 133).
On the subject of compromise and inconsistencies, it is important to recall that the wider eco-localist effort has sought to foster not just an interest in eating locally but also of participating locally—of not only consuming in smaller, more “localized” ways, but also of investing, voting, volunteering, self-identifying, and generally living in a manner that limits one’s participation in the damaging aspects of global capitalism. Reflecting on the above discussion of conscious consumerism, it seems likely that the disproportionate prominence of locavorism is related to the lack of attention that more “collective” forms of eco-local activism receive in popular rhetoric, as well as to the unsurprising lack of support and reinforcement that they receive from neoliberal institutions. Thus, it is probably a stretch to believe that an everyday locavore could be convinced to become a community organizer or to attend a political rally.

However, if locavores were presented with other ideas for consumption-related, individualized, “lifestyle” choices (beyond “eating locally”), which might also achieve some of eco-localism’s goals, I am curious how they would respond. For example, given that air travel is a demonstrably eco-hazardous behavior (Penner, Lister, Griggs, Dokken, & McFarland, 1999), and given that individuals could simply choose, for example, not to take leisure vacations, it seems that reduced mobility would be aligned with locavores’ sense individualized “duty” and their support for conscious consumption solutions. Moreover, as mentioned above, some threads of eco-localism have encouraged people to rediscover the joy of living and participating in smaller communities, perhaps outside of major cities, in the hope of small-scale production and consumption and grassroots organizing. For those who have the economic means to make a conscious choice about where they reside, the decision to live in a smaller-scale place seems like a personal lifestyle choice that would support at least some eco-localist projects.
Although these lifestyle choices appear to align with locavores’ values and conscious consumption practices, they are not currently as popular as locavorism. People are traveling in greater numbers, across greater distances than ever before (Urry, 2007), and they are congregating even more intensely in and around global cities (Sassen, 2005). Of course, as the above literature review has made clear, the structural and ideological forces associated with globalization, banal cosmopolitanism, and the glamorization of mobility *compel* people to be hypermobile urbanites in order to obtain both financial security and a desirable social image. Thus, because mobile/cosmopolitan lifestyles are currently so strongly linked to socioeconomic success, I suspect that locavores will *not* be very receptive to adopting immobile/small-scale lifestyle choices, even if their locavorism is self-reportedly driven by eco-localist ideals (e.g., support for small-scale economics, grassroots local politics, and environmental sustainability).

Consequently, in conversation with the above literature that has articulated myriad concerns about the efficacy and coherence of locavores’ engagement with eco-localism, this study explores the possibility that the allure of mobile/cosmopolitan lifestyles may constitute another complicating factor in locavores’ willingness to engage more broadly with eco-local projects. Thus, I seek to collect and analyze locavores’ thoughts and feelings on the ideas of (a) residing in smaller-scale communities, and (b) traveling less frequently, and I ask:

**RQ3:** How do American, urban locavores respond to the idea of residing in a smaller-scale place as a means to realize eco-localist ideals?

**RQ4:** How do American, urban locavores respond to the idea of traveling less frequently—especially by plane—as a means to realize eco-localist ideals?
III. METHODS

This study focuses on urbanites’ “conscious consumption” of local foods at a time when mobile, cosmopolitan lifestyles are becoming increasingly desirable. Although there are many reasons to be a “locavore,” I am interested in the reality that some people choose to “eat locally” in order to support local places, local communities, and smaller-scale methods of production and consumption, often as a means to undermine various systems of global capitalism that have become visibly harmful to the environment. Of course, “eating locally” is not the only means by which to participate in the “relocalization” efforts inherent to eco-localism, but it seems that “conscious consumption” behaviors are becoming particularly popular, as compared to other forms of activism. As demonstrated in the literature review, a variety of analyses have emerged to address the popularity of locavorism over other forms of activism, ultimately showing that consumer-focused solutions such as “eating locally” are well-aligned with the hyper-individualist tenets of neoliberalism, and, consequently, “eating locally” does not seriously threaten the global capitalist status quo.

In conversation with this point, I suggest that “eating locally” may also be a popular behavior because, unlike certain other forms of eco-local activism or civic engagement, locavorism allows people to participate freely in the urban and mobile lifestyles that globalization processes have rendered both structurally necessary and culturally desirable. In order to investigate this possibility, I seek to explore how locavores understand and describe urban vs. non-urban life, as well as mobility vs. immobility. I am also curious how they would react to the possibility of living a less mobile or “smaller-scale” lifestyle as a means to accomplish eco-localism’s goals, and whether or not they experience any tension between their conscious consumption behaviors and their other lifestyle choices.
Given my clear focus on people’s lived experiences and their subjective perceptions, the study I have conducted is qualitative and essentially phenomenological in nature. I have also chosen to use in-depth, semi-structured interviews as my data collection method. A more detailed discussion of qualitative inquiry and interviewing methodology appears below.

A. A Qualitative Framework

In their thorough and evolving discussion, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) have explained that qualitative research “consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible,” specifically by “turn[ing] the world into a series of representations” through myriad data collection methods, such as interviews and observation (p. 3). Most important in this description of qualitative inquiry is the clear emphasis on interpretation as a means to generate insights and understanding. Not only do qualitative researchers engage in interpretation, but so too do their subjects, who are themselves continually interpreting the world. Consequently, qualitative social science has been described as an effort to interpret the interpretations of others (Carey, 1989, p. 359). Indeed, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) go on to explain that qualitative researchers “attempt to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3).

These points highlight a core assumption of much qualitative inquiry, which is that knowledge is “social,” or that it is formed through processes of human interaction and ongoing cultural exchange (Blumer, 1969; Carey, 1989). This assumption forms the epistemological basis for the study to be conducted here, which presumes the centrality of symbolic processes in people’s lived experiences, and which stresses the importance of exploring individuals’ thoughts, feelings, and reflections in order to begin explaining various social phenomena. Furthermore, because qualitative researchers are engaged in an interpretive process that is very similar to that of their subjects, I acknowledge the importance of remaining self-reflexive about the influence of
my own perceptions during data collection and analysis, and I have attempted to self-consciously “separate out” my perspective from those of the participants (Van Maanen, 2011).

Qualitative inquiry has allowed me to address my participants’ perceptions on their own terms. Throughout the interview process, which will be discussed in more detail below, I captured and recorded my participants’ language choices and probed more deeply into their nuanced understandings of the phenomena under investigation. My qualitative method has thus shifted a substantial amount of interpretive agency onto the participants themselves, rather than relying solely on my own analytical practices as the researcher, as might occur with a quantitative strategy. In the case of a survey, for example, the investigator meticulously and rigidly structures the terms of interaction (i.e., the survey instrument) in order to execute the study, and this circumstance limits a participant’s ability to assert his or her own understanding of the topics in question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Although a survey would have enabled wider data collection—and could have also enabled generalizability—it would have restricted my ability to explore respondents’ subjective viewpoints in sufficient detail and according to their own interpretive frameworks (A. Rubin & Babbie, 2010). Because I desired to shed light on people’s own experiences and understandings on their own terms, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate.

Furthermore, because my study focuses on individuals’ subjective viewpoints and lived experiences of certain phenomena, it is phenomenological in nature. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) have stated that phenomenology is concerned with “understanding social phenomena from the actors’ own perspectives and describing the world as experienced by the subjects, with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be” (p. 26). To this end, phenomenological studies emphasize the importance of interpretive, meaning-making processes,
and they employ in-depth, qualitative methods that enable open-ended inquiry into individuals’ thoughts, feelings, and reflections (Moustakas, 1994; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Such studies are undertaken with the intention of uncovering the “essence” of a given phenomenon through systematic analysis of qualitative data. Indeed, phenomenological researchers claim that the examination of multiple first-person accounts—including personal narratives, memories, imaginings, and judgments—will ultimately reveal thematic similarities that can broadly demonstrate a given phenomenon’s core features (Moustakas, 1994). Consistent with this perspective, my study collected data via qualitative interviews that were designed to encourage an “unfurling of perspectives and meanings, which are unique to the person’s embodied and situated relationship to the world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 21).

B. **Study Population**

Because my study investigates the possibility that there may be some tension between eco-localist ideals and a desire to live more urban and mobile lifestyles, I chose to work with a population of people who are likely to experience this tension. To this end, I have chosen to work with American locavores who also residents of a major urban area. As mentioned previously, studies of locavores’ reasons for eating local foods have revealed that locavores are motivated by a variety of factors, including an interest in providing economic support for local farmers, as well as an eco-conscious impulse to encourage environmentally-sustainable food production practices (e.g., Peterson et al., 2015). In light of this observation, there is reason to believe that some locavores are engaged in self-reflection about the role of the “local” in their everyday lives, whether their definition of “local” encompasses local communities, local places, local businesses, or some combination of these. Whatever the “local” might mean to a given locavore, it seems likely that he or she attaches some positive value to it, such that the consumption of “local” foods is understood as an important and worthwhile activity.
However, unlike locavores who are living in smaller-scale locales, locavores in urban areas are affiliated with massive, metropolitan spaces, which have both tangible and symbolic ties to the “flows” of globalized socioeconomic life. Consequently, at least some urban locavores may have lifestyles, perceptions, and identities that could be at odds with certain eco-localist ideals. As described above, eco-localism is characterized by a push to “reinhabit” the world and to become more in tune with the natural environment by establishing a deep connection to “local” places and to smaller, more manageable communities. Many American eco-localist imaginings assert that a rising cultural attraction to urban life is indicative of a problematic emphasis on status, wealth, and prestige at the expense of the environment. For example, the American environmental activist Wendell Berry (1977b) has noted the following:

> It is characteristic of our present society that one does not think to improve oneself by becoming better at what one is doing or by assuming some measure of public responsibility in order to improve local conditions; one thinks to improve oneself by becoming different, by ‘moving up’ to a ‘place of higher consideration.’ Thinkable changes, in other words, tend to be quantitative rather than qualitative, and they tend to involve movement that is both social and geographic. The unsettlement at once of population and of values is virtually required by the only generally acceptable forms of aspiration. The typical American ‘success story’ moves from a modest rural beginning to urban affluence, from manual labor to office work. (p. 201)

In this same text, Berry has further noted that, in the current economic climate, individuals are penalized if they attempt to stay in one place—especially a rural place—and do anything well. Although Berry does not assert that small-scale life would be ideal for everyone, he does suggest that people should at least feel free to choose a more rural or “rooted” lifestyle, for example, without significant social or economic penalty (Kury, 1978). The fact that certain discourses are “mythologizing” cosmopolitan lifestyles lends some credence to Berry’s concerns that people’s freedom to choose modest, small-scale lifestyles will be compromised as they are compelled to chase the status and prestige associated with more cosmopolitan experiences (Cohen & Gossling, 2015; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006; Urry & Lash, 1994). Thus, I have focused on exploring the thoughts and feelings of locavores living in an urban area in order to yield insights as to how
potentially eco-conscious Americans experience these seemingly conflicting discourses, and, if applicable, how they attempt to reconcile the tensions in their lifestyle choices.

Finally, as I made decisions regarding the population, I chose to limit participation to English-speaking adults. I focused on English-speaking individuals because I intended for the participants’ own language choices to form a central component of the data analysis process, and it was thus vitally important that I could capture and understand those language choices. I am a native English speaker with limited knowledge of other languages, and, due to time constraints for completing this research as well as logistical considerations, I was the sole researcher. Consequently, the study was necessarily limited to other English speakers. Furthermore, the topics under investigation deal significantly with lifestyle decisions over which children (people under 18) do not typically have control, including food purchases, geographic places of residence, and participation in civic activities such as environmental activism. Consequently, children were excluded from this study.

C. **Sampling**

I selected interviewees according to a purposive sampling method, using my own “knowledge of the population, its elements, and [my] research aims” to recruit participants (A. Rubin & Babbie, 2010, p. 147). Specifically, I used my knowledge of locavores’ behaviors and interests to recruit participants from settings where locavores were likely to be found, including farmers’ markets and restaurants serving local foods. As I recruited individuals from these settings, I attempted to encourage diversity in my sample along such lines age, race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Because this project does not seek generalizability, a purposive, non-probability sampling method was sufficient to produce an exploratory investigation of locavores’ perspectives on the topics addressed in my research questions (Babbie, 2012, p. 222).
Importantly, as stated above, I intended for my study population to include not only self-described locavores, but also residents of a major urban area. The study participants were consequently sampled from Chicago, which is located in the state of Illinois, and which is the third largest city in the United States in terms of population (following New York, New York and Los Angeles, California) (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Not only is Chicago sufficiently populous, but it is also geographically situated in the American Midwest, a region of the country that contains 8 of the top 10 states in terms of agricultural production, according to data released by the United States Department of Agriculture (2015). The history of Chicago’s development as a major metropolitan area and global economic center has been connected to its geographic position amidst this vast expanse of farmland, such that “no place furnishes a more striking vantage point” of the “elaborate and intimate linkages between city and country” than Chicago does (Cronon, 1991).

Furthermore, the centrality of agriculture to the economic health of the American Midwest—and to the state of Illinois—is visible in the fact that Chicago’s major financial enterprises emerged to facilitate agricultural commodities trade for products such as corn, soybeans, wheat, and livestock, among other things (MacKenzie & Millo, 2003). Specifically, the “futures market” for agricultural products has been identified as one of the main factors in Chicago’s rise to prominence as a city (Cronon, 1991). In honor of its agricultural heritage, Chicago’s financial district even boast a statue of Ceres, the Greek goddess of agriculture.

Given its existence as an urban area in close proximity to America’s major rural areas, Chicago formed a uniquely relevant locale from which to draw my study participants, who, ideally, would have a heightened awareness both of mythologized cosmopolitan lifestyles and more “eco-localist” lifestyles that focus on small communities and natural resource protection.
The economic history of the city and its legacy of investment in agriculture offered me a reason to believe that at least some Chicago locavores would be aware of environmental issues associated with agribusiness, which are key considerations within the larger local food movement. Finally, given Chicagoans’ spatial proximity to a vast array of farming communities, some Chicago-based locavores seemed likely to have interpersonal connections to individuals who were living non-urban lifestyles, or who have adopted a deep connection with eco-localist food production practices, possibly to a greater degree than residents of places like New York or Los Angeles.

Ultimately, I was able to recruit 10 total Chicago-based locavores for participation in my study. The participants were evenly split in terms of gender, including five men and five women. Participants ranged in age from 23 years to 53 years (exact ages included 23, 26, 27, 28, 31, 33, 39, 40, 48, 53). Of the 10 participants, nearly all of them (80%) were white. For the remaining two individuals (20%), one person self-described as Asian, and the other person self-described as mixed race. Almost all (90%) of the participants reported as non-Hispanic (with the remaining person reporting as Hispanic). In terms of economic status, the participants’ reported household income levels skewed wealthy, with the following breakdown: 10% below $30,000 per year; 10% between $31,000 and $50,000; 30% between $51,000 and $70,000; 20% between $71,000 and $90,000; and 30% over $91,000. Furthermore, all of the participants held at least a four-year college degree, with 80% possessing Bachelor’s degrees and 20% possessing master’s degrees. The fact that the participants were generally of higher socioeconomic status is not surprising, given the reality that wealthier and more educated consumers have likely had “more exposure to information about the food system,” as compared to individuals from less privileged backgrounds (Johnston & Szabo, 2011, p. 305).
D.  **Interviews**

To address my research questions, I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with as many members of the study population as my time and resources would allow. As I collected data via the interviews, I analyzed it according to a “grounded theory” approach, which is described in more detail below (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Because I hoped to explore locavores’ own understandings of the topics in question, qualitative interviewing presented a highly relevant method (Saldaña, 2011, p. 32). Indeed, a key strength of interviewing is its ability to probe individuals’ thoughts and feelings in great detail, such that it has been described as a method by which “to explore meanings” (Arskey & Knight, 1999, p. 4) and to reach “people’s subjective experiences and attitudes” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 529). The epistemological value of interviewing is consequently markedly different from other methods, including surveys, and is consistent with the phenomenological theoretical underpinnings of my study.

In preparation for the interviews, I assembled a set of open-ended main questions and relevant probes about specific topics. This interview instrument is outlined in Appendix A. In alignment with the best practices of phenomenological research, as described by Moustakas (1994), the interview opened with a conversational question that was “aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere” (p. 114). The goal was to ensure that participants would be comfortable, and that they would therefore be willing to provide honest answers throughout the rest of the interview. The interview then continued with a series of questions that were written according to Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) suggestions for qualitative interview design. Specifically, the questions are written to accomplish the following: (a) To “use language interviewees understand,” by not employing needlessly sophisticated diction or academic jargon; (b) To “allow interviewees to answer in their own way,” by phrasing questions in an open-ended
manner; and (c) To “focus on the experiences and knowledge of the interviewees,” by avoiding questions regarding other people’s thoughts and feelings, and by avoiding abstract questions that prompt the interviewee to discuss “how” things happen in general, rather than how they personally think or feel about the topic (H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 2012, pp. 132–133). Finally, the selected probes were inspired by Patton’s (1990) suggestions for designing probes that can “deepen the response to a question” and “increase the richness of data” without being restrictive, and without leading the interviewee toward a specific response (pp. 324-326).

With the permission of the interviewees, the interview sessions were audio recorded and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. I was the sole interviewer, and the interviews all took place at a public place of the participant’s choosing, such as a relatively quiet coffeehouse or a public library. The interviewees were offered mild compensation in exchange for their participation, in the form of either lunch and/or a non-alcoholic beverage, the cost of which did not exceed $10. The purpose of the compensation was to thank participants for their time; it was not intended to persuade or pressure them in any manner. To avoid any undue influence, the compensation was kept to a minimum amount.

Finally, when all interviews are completed, the recordings were transcribed verbatim by a transcription service. As soon as a given interview was transcribed, I systematically analyzed it in accordance with the “grounded theory” approach put forth by Glaser and Strauss (1967). More details about the coding and analysis of the interviews can be found below.

E. **Coding and Analysis**

I collected and analyzed my data according to a grounded theory approach, which involves the “joint collection, coding, and analysis of data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 47). “Coding” is a process by which an investigator applies a few words to a qualitative data element—such as a transcribed statement or a phrase uttered by an interviewee—in order to
“best describe conceptually what the researcher believes is the meaning of the data,” sometimes using the participants’ own language choices (Strauss & Corbin, 2015, p. 216). Consistent with a grounded theory approach, I began coding and analyzing my data shortly after the first interviews was completed, even though I was still in the data collection phase, with additional interviews to come.

By jointly collecting and analyzing data, I was able to begin identifying thematic categories that appeared to be “emerging,” and to recognize possible gaps in my approach that could be corrected before another set of interviews (Saldaña, 2013). An essential part of this effort to identify emerging themes and gaps was a “memo writing” process, wherein committed to diligent meta-notation about the data analysis procedure and its results (Charmaz, 2014). As Charmaz (2014) explains, “memos catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystallize directions for you to pursue,” which ultimately facilitates more focused data collection and streamlines the final analysis.

I used a qualitative analysis software program called “Dedoose” to assist in my analysis of the interview transcripts. The program allowed me to generate and assign coding categories, to take memos, and to compare codes and memos across transcript documents as I conducted a comprehensive review of the full dataset.

The coding process itself followed the guidelines provided by Saldaña (2013), involving multiple rounds of coding. For my first cycle, I intend to applied a “structural” coding method that allowed me to identify data elements as being relevant to specific questions from my interview protocol (Saldaña, 2013). However, because of this study’s phenomenological emphasis on participants’ subjective perceptions and understandings, I also used “in-vivo” coding during this phase, in order to generate codes from the interviewees’ own language use.
In-vivo coding allowed me to “prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” in a way that other coding methods might not (Saldaña, 2013, p. 284).

Furthermore, in an effort to remain self-conscious of my own interpretations during the coding process, I kept track of in-vivo codes (those that are “participant inspired rather than researcher generated”) by putting them in quotation marks, as Saldaña suggested (2013, p. 83). Because I took a grounded theory approach to my analysis, I periodically revisited previously-coded interview transcripts in order to apply any newly-emergent codes that arose during ongoing data collection. During this iterative, first-cycle coding process, I generated codes freely, with the intention of “collapsing” them into more abstract or broader categories during a second-cycle coding process.

After first-cycle coding, I followed Saldaña’s (2013) suggestions for facilitating the transition to second-cycle coding by engaging in a process of “code mapping.” I reorganized the original set of codes into “a selected list of categories” that could then be “condensed further into the study’s central themes or concepts” (p. 194). This process of reorganization—of hierarchically categorizing and sub-categorizing the codes—made it easier to begin the second-cycle coding process, in which the codes became more abstract and analytical. Indeed, Saldaña (2013) describes the purpose of second-cycle coding as follows:

The primary goal during Second Cycle coding is to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from your array of First Cycle codes...Basically, your First Cycle codes (and their associated coded data) are reorganized and reconfigured to eventually develop a smaller and more select list of broader categories, themes, concepts, and/or assertions. (p. 207)

The second-cycle coding methods that I used included “focused coding,” which “categorizes coded data based on thematic or conceptual similarities,” followed by “axial coding” that can contextualize the focused codes and begin identifying “how the categories and subcategories relate to each other.” Finally, I completed a “theoretical coding” stage that allowed me to
crystallize the “primary theme of the research” and the “central/core” categories of my comprehensive analysis (Saldaña, 2013, p. 209).

F. Ethics

Consistent with the well-established expectations of social science researchers, I take an ethical position that acknowledges the humanity of my participants, that appreciates their participation, that ensures their informed involvement, and which seeks to protect them from harm or personal exposure (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). I view my study participants as equals and remain sensitive to any possible power differentials, especially given my role as a researcher, in which I have the power to dictate the terms of interaction, as well as to control the interpretation of data and the final “representation” of participant’s experiences (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012). I remain self-reflexive to these power dynamics and will endeavor to ensure that my methodology maximizes adherence to participants’ own perspectives.

Moreover, as required for scholarly research with human subjects, I submitted a research proposal for this study to the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at the University of Illinois – Chicago. Because this study posed little to no risk to participants, and because I planned to collect de-identified data to the extent that the study allows, I applied for a Claim of Exemption from full review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and I was granted that exemption. Thus, this study has successfully undergone a formal ethics review process.

Finally, in full compliance with the requirements of IRB, I ensured that the research participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study, the study procedures, and their rights as participants. To accomplish this, I created a detailed Informed Consent Document (ICD), as well as informative recruitment materials, all of which were reviewed and approved by IRB. During the recruitment process, the potential participants were presented with the ICD, which they were also able to review a second time prior to the actual interview. Ultimately, the
participants’ informed consent was captured verbally on the interview audio recording, rather than as a signed document, in order to preserve the participants’ anonymity.
IV. ANALYSIS

A. **Perceptions of Spatial Scales**

This section presents and analyzes my findings on participants’ perspectives of their real and imagined experiences of urban and non-urban spaces, as well as the people who inhabit those spaces. Consequently, it provides the results for my first research question, which is repeated here:

**RQ1: How do American, urban locavores discuss various scales of spatial experience (small-town vs. urban), including the people in those spaces?**

A generalized summary of the participants’ relevant responses can be found in Table I, where it is made clear that the interviewees distinguish between urban and non-urban areas along several axes of experience, including entertainment and avocation, people and community, access and opportunity, and broadly-construed perceptions of space and time. As a supplement to this tabular account, this section contains my commentary regarding each axis of experience.

Ultimately, as my commentary will show, the participants’ perceptions are consistent with Sassen’s (2005) and Castells’s (2010b) aforementioned descriptions of modern social life, wherein economic activity and opportunity—as well as consumerist-based mechanisms to obtain and demonstrate high social status—are concentrated in “global cities” and the “space of flows.” Consequently, I suggest that there is reason to believe that locavores are indeed discouraged from strong engagement with certain aspects of eco-localism (such as the notion of “embedding” oneself in a smaller-scale place) due to their perception that the socioeconomic sacrifices associated with smaller-scale lifestyles will be too great. Furthermore, my findings show that some urban locavores strongly conflate pleasure with consumerism, which also complicates their interest in living in small places. To address this phenomenon, I draw on Soper’s (2008) work regarding discursive constructions of “pleasure” in late capitalism.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Non-Urban</th>
<th>Example Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>Multicultural, racial/ethnic diversity, open-minded</td>
<td>Homogenous, close-minded, conservative, religious</td>
<td><strong>Urban:</strong> “It’s diverse. I live in one of the most, um, I live in the 40th district, which is the second-most diverse district in the nation. So, um, all walks of life, all income levels…so that makes it really neat, so you can experience a lot as far as people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anonymity; lacks sense of community</td>
<td>Tight community</td>
<td><strong>Non-Urban:</strong> “The narrow mindedness of the people that typically live in those towns and the gossip and everybody's up in your business…[and] typically, especially if it's not outside a larger city, it's more conservative in politics and religion…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>Centralized “hub” in global networks – facilitates mobility</td>
<td>Disconnected from global networks</td>
<td><strong>Urban:</strong> “[In] the stage of growth we are in our lives right now, we benefit from living in the city. It's like, I can get experience from companies with certain brand names… I mean, transactional might sound a little harsh but it's kind of like we totally need to be in a city in our like mid-to-late twenties just to make sure we get the stuff we need [for our careers]…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access to jobs, top-tier opportunities</td>
<td>May hinder mobility and career options</td>
<td><strong>Urban vs. Non-urban:</strong> “Um, the cons of a smaller town, I'd rather not be further, I would rather not be too far from an airport. Right now [in Chicago] I can be at Midway in half an hour, which is nice, because then I can get anywhere I want.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Eclectic cultural consumption: diverse restaurant scene, entertainment venues, museums, galleries</td>
<td>Could be boring: limited consumption options, repetition; May facilitate hobbies, relaxation</td>
<td><strong>Urban:</strong> “Museums. Plays…free concerts at Millennium Park…I can get some really authentic, different experiences and foods…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Non-Urban:</strong> “There's nothing to do, and you have to drive significant distances to even have a decent meal… you go to a chain restaurant to eat, or you got to the movies…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>Limited, crowded, expensive, not green enough</td>
<td>Available, not crowded, not expensive, green</td>
<td><strong>Urban:</strong> “There’s a lot of spatial issues…You can’t really get a lot of, um, you can’t really get, I mean, if you want to rent a space [for anything], that can be very cost prohibitive.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Non-Urban:</strong> “Um, having a yard [would be nice], having um, well, most likely, if I’m moving to a smaller place, there’s probably lots of green space…maybe a river, barns…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Fast-paced</td>
<td>Slow-paced</td>
<td><strong>Urban:</strong> “Like, I think Chicago is a hard place to like, just stop moving…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Non-Urban:</strong> “[I might like a small town] maybe when I'm older though and retired and I really just want to stay at home, it might be nice to have it quieter, slower paced.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This study included 10 total participants.*
1. **People**

As Table I suggests, the participants drew a sharp distinction between the types of people who inhabit urban places, and the types of people who inhabit non-urban places. There was a consistent emphasis on the open-mindedness, multiculturalism, and diversity of urban areas, as opposed to the pronounced homogeneity in non-urban places. The idea of non-urban “sameness” extended across many topics, including politics, religion, race, ethnicity, and personality, ultimately painting a picture of small towns as inhabited mostly by conservative, Christian, white people of European descent, some of whom are likely to be “narrow-minded,” and who are most likely “content” with “sleepy” routine.

As the participants constructed these images of small-town inhabitants over the course of the interviews, many of them differentiated themselves from the people they described. For example, in the following statements, taken from two separate interviews, both Bird and James paint a vivid picture of small-town people, and then contrast the image against their own identities as a means of explaining why small-town life isn’t suitable for them:

**James:** They were maybe just satisfied to eat at the one or two restaurants around there, and were just kind of, um, very, um, maybe kind of a sleepier community, where people just kind of came home from work, and, you know, were content to maybe just watch TV and go to bed. I think it’s just the fact that the things those people were satisfied with, and not feeling, or, or, well, like, something that they would consider maybe a ‘once in a while’ type of thing was something that I wanted to do more frequently.

**Bird:** Not that I’m not spiritual, but I’m not religious. And it seems like so much of what revolves around the community in smaller towns like that is around religion. And also around, you know, conservative politics, I guess. And I’m just not. I’m a liberal.

The fact that over half of my interviewees shared a similar, generalized image of small-town inhabitants suggests that there is a collectivized “sense” of small towns as being a haven for a certain “type” of person to whom many urbanites do not relate, and the participants used this common understanding to communicate their “urban” identities.
In the fields of sociology, human geography, and environmental psychology, scholars have explained that because “places” are made meaningful through social activity (see, e.g., de Certeau, 2011; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1989), it is possible for constellations of symbolic associations to assemble around certain places (or types of places). The shifting collection of meanings associated with a place is known as the “sense of place” (Cresswell, 2009). For example, a group of people may all share a “sense” of Los Angeles, California as being a city that is sunny and full of Hollywood celebrities. Related to “sense of place” is the notion of “place identity,” or the phenomenon by which a person’s individual identity and self-concept becomes to some extent linked to a locale (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). As might be expected, people leverage common, collective “senses” of places during their identity performance processes (Goffman, 1959), in order to distinguish themselves from “other people [who identify] with other settlements,” such as self-described urbanites who may “negatively label the qualities of the country” (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996, p. 217).

The interviewees’ desire to differentiate their personal identities from the perceived qualities of smaller places (and small-place inhabitants) was most noticeable among individuals who had once lived in a smaller place, but who had left that place to live in Chicago. When confronted with the idea of being in any way “connected” to their hometowns, these participants clearly distinguished themselves from those places.

Consider the following example:

Nicole: Do you feel connected to anywhere else? Like, do you feel connected to your home town [a small, rural town in Ohio]?

Kaylee: Not really. I was a theater kid; I went to school for theater. And I very much like wanted nothing to do with my hometown, and I left 3 months after graduation, and you can say I never looked back.
In this exchange, Kaylee explicitly identifies as a “theater kid,” which is perhaps meant to suggest that she is creative and cultured, and she implies that this personal identity is somehow out-of-sync with her hometown in rural Ohio. She suggests that her move to an urban area was an attempt to match her location to her self-identity. Indeed, later in the interview, Kaylee expressed that she loves Chicago because she “thrives in an urban area,” which she described as replete with “cultural vibrancy.” For Kaylee—as well as many other interviewees—it was important to communicate that (a) small places typically contain, create, and/or accommodate a certain “type” of person, and (b) that “type” of person is not who they are, nor who they want to be. Inversely, being an “urbanite” comes with its own array of symbolic associations, and it was clear that the “urban identity” was more desirable to these same people.

Given the relatively negative perception that several interviewees seemed to have of the “type” of people who live in small towns, it seems possible that certain locavores would indeed be deterred from full engagement with certain forms of eco-local activism, if those practices threaten their ability to disassociate from a “non-urban identity” that they may find undesirable (or at least incompatible with how they view themselves, and how they want to be seen). For example, individuals who have such negative associations with small-towns will perhaps be unwilling, as was my acquaintance in the opening anecdote, to be socially branded as a “townie” due to their participation in hyper-local politics. or by taking up residence in non-urban place. By comparison, “eating locally” is an eco-conscious practice that can be undertaken at any spatial scale. including an urban one, and it may therefore pose less of an identity threat.
Interestingly, some interviewees suggested that once a person had lived in a larger city for a sufficient period of time—and had thereby symbolically associated themselves with desirable markers of “urban-ness”—then that person could be free to reside in a smaller place, if desired, without the serious risk of being socially grouped with other people in the small-town crowd. As will be shown below, this particular identity management and performance strategy is founded on the participants’ understanding of urban areas as places of socioeconomic opportunity, and as places where “successful” people can be found (or made). The next section will articulate this idea in greater detail.

2. **Opportunity**

As demonstrated in the literature review, major metropolitan areas can now be understood as “global cities,” where one can find the “control” infrastructure and the elite individuals that are required to direct the increasingly-complex socioeconomic activities associated with global capitalism (Sassen, 2005). As social activity continues to converge in these “mega-nodes” of the “network” or “information” society, individuals are attracted to major cities in order to find work and to obtain markers of high social status (Castells, 2010a, 2010b).

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that several study participants articulated a clear preference for urban life over small-town life, in terms of gaining access to “top tier” career opportunities, as well as the elevated status that comes with such opportunities. For example, upon being asked if she would be interested in living in a smaller place, one interviewee clearly asserted her “transactional” relationship with the city by expressing that she and her fiancé were living in Chicago entirely for career reasons:

**Lauren:** We don't want to have to stay here, like not in the heart of an urban city. I mean long term we've talked about North Carolina, where we could actually buy a house and it would be like, you know, that's our stuff, but it all still feels like kind of awhile away.
…Yeah, I think both my fiancé and I are pretty aware of, like, at the stage of growth we are in our lives right now, we benefit from living in the city. It's like I can get experience with companies with certain brand names…I mean, ‘transactional’ might sound a little harsh, but it's kind of like we totally need to be in a city in our, like, mid-to-late-twenties just to make sure we get the stuff we need.

Implicit in Lauren’s explanation is the idea that her desired career advancement cannot be achieved—or is significantly less likely to be achieved—by residing, for one’s entire life, in a small place. It should be noted at this point that Lauren is an MBA student at an elite university, and that her specific career aspirations are ambitious. In a statement offering clear support for Sassen’s (2005) claims about the spatial reconfiguration of modern social life around “global cities,” Lauren asserts that she “totally needs” the city in order to “get experience with companies with certain brand names,” which will ultimately provide her with a more competitive resume. Thus, in order to become successful in the most financially and socially rewarding sectors of the modern economic system, Lauren is aware that she must situate herself in the “space of flows” (Castells, 2010b).

Interestingly, Lauren seems to feel that once she has established a certain resume, she will be able to leave “the heart of an urban city” and move somewhere smaller, where she hopes to buy a home. Presumably, Lauren believes that desirable opportunities will exist in the smaller community that she will choose, but she perhaps also believes that those opportunities will be limited, which is why her resume needs to be so competitive. The suggestion here is that, at least in the context of certain status-oriented and/or highly competitive careers, there are “prestige markers” or “success markers” that can (or must) be obtained by associating oneself with urban life, and that such markers can ultimately be used to socially distinguish oneself from other people, perhaps including people who have always lived and worked in smaller-scale places.
Another interviewee—a 23-year-old aspiring artist with the pseudonym “Allie”—traced a similar phenomenon in the art world. She asserted that “your work is good if it's accepted internationally [because] that means it's on a whole different level,” and she explained that these internationally-recognized galleries exist in large cities, such as New York, Stockholm, and Miami. Consistent with this image of “success” as being synonymous with larger “scales of recognition,” Allie also felt that there was a perceived difference, in the art community, between people who “stay local” and people who actively attempt to expand their horizons:

Nicole: What if you said, ‘I'm gonna stay really local, I, I'm not gonna climb this ladder?’

Allie: Yes, people would not believe it was a choice.

Nicole: What would be, like—

Allie: They would be like, ‘oh she didn't make it.’

Nicole: You just didn't make it, yeah. But if you'd gone up—

Allie: Yeah. You have to get the proof first.

In this exchange, Allie suggests that, at least in the art community, there is a perception that individuals who can be found in “local” (read: smaller) places have somehow failed—i.e., they “didn’t make it.” Consequently, if someone actively wishes to reside in a smaller-scale place, it is important to first obtain “proof” that this local-scale lifestyle is the result of a conscious “choice,” rather than the result of failure.

Interestingly, Allie goes on to suggest that being able to remove oneself from the competitive, international art scene and to opt instead for an off-the-beaten-path lifestyle is, in fact, the ultimate expression of personal success. She explains:

Nicole: Would you be interested in moving to a smaller place?

Allie: I feel like career building, yeah, yeah there's a lot of ... there's a lot of experiences that can only be afforded to me in Chicago, and I need to get a handle on those before I leave. So yeah.
By telling the story of Georgia O’Keefe’s retreat from New York, Allie emphasizes the desirability of obtaining complete independence from spatial restraints. Having climbed the ladder of prestige—from local venues to international galleries in New York—O’Keefe has sufficiently proven “her talent,” ultimately becoming “so successful” that she “no longer has to go to New York.” O’Keefe has seemingly conquered space by succeeding at every possible scale, such that she is no longer compelled to function in any specific place, of any scale, as a means to accommodate any person or ideology. Indeed, it seems that O’Keefe has nothing left to “prove.” In this way, Allie suggests, O’Keefe becomes fully independent, such that she can move back to the desert without the risk of compromising her reputation. O’Keefe no longer risks being seen as a non-starter, a failure, so she is free to go where she pleases and do what she wants.

This story, along with Allie’s statement about the necessity of “obtaining proof” that one could “make it” in the big city, echoes Lauren’s statements above about using Chicago to find work with “brand name companies” before moving to North Carolina. Judging by Allie and Lauren’s two accounts, it seems that the opportunities afforded by “global cities” can constitute a form of symbolic, cultural capital that can be actively deployed in identity management processes and in the pursuit of socioeconomic success. A resume or personal history that is full of top-tier (read: global-scale) experiences can be
used to differentiate oneself from the other individuals in smaller places who cannot similarly “prove” that they could “make it” in up-scale environments, nor that they are indeed small-town residents “by choice.”

Again, these observations offer support for my earlier suggestion that “eating locally” may constitute a particularly popular form of eco-localism not only for the reasons discussed in the conscious consumerism literature, but also because people are compelled, both structurally and ideologically, to associate themselves with larger scales of spatial experience. As the literature review suggested, the structural realities associated with the global capitalist economy push individuals toward urban lifestyles in order to increase the likelihood that they will find and secure desirable career opportunities and/or social prestige.

Consequently, there is reason to believe that some locavores will be deterred from engagement with certain aspects of eco-localism—such as the idea of “digging in” to a non-urban place and engaging with a non-urban community (Berry, 1977a)—because they fear it will compromise their career opportunities. Or, similarly, they may fear that they will lack sufficient status markers by which they might “prove” that their non-urban life was indeed a choice, rather than evidence of personal failings.

3. **Entertainment**

Beyond the topics of people and opportunity, the interviewees expressed a strong distinction between urban and non-urban areas on the axis of “entertainment.” In order to contextualize their responses, it is important to recall from the literature review that, as the global capitalist system intensifies and concentrates more and more of the world’s core socioeconomic activity in an international network of global cities, a variety of goods and services must emerge in those cities to meet the myriad needs of the affluent
professionals who direct and execute modern socioeconomic activities. Thus, among other things, a diverse array of consumption venues—restaurants, bars, music venues, theaters, museums, sports arenas—arises near major urban centers as companies recognize that a concentrated market of wealthy consumers can be found there (Castells, 2010b). Access to eclectic consumption experiences thereby becomes a defining feature of life in “the space of flows,” and, for the participants in this study, the question of finding “things to do” becomes a key point of divergence for urban and non-urban areas.

Many interviewees (70%) characterized Chicago as a place where they had easy access to novel and diverse experiences. Interviewees evoked this image of Chicago through references to the "variety" of its restaurants, as well as to the "excitement" or "stimulation" offered by its myriad cultural institutions (museums, galleries, and entertainment venues), through which interesting ideas, artifacts, products, and people were assumed to be continually flowing. For example:

**Bird:** Eating is a lot of what we do because there's so many different places and options and stuff...[also] Museums. Plays. Definitely in the summer when they do the free concerts at Millennium Park...I can get some really authentic, different experiences and foods. And, you know, going into the grocery store that's primarily Hispanic and seeing, oh, what kinds of foods do they have? And, oh, let me try this...

This image of Chicago as a place of eclecticism became particularly apparent when I asked the interviewees whether or not they would be interested in living in a smaller place. Of the seven (out of 10) people who strongly celebrated the city’s eclecticism, five of them expressed concern that non-urban areas would lack a sufficient degree of stimulation. Specifically, these interviewees articulated a perception of non-urban places as being potentially boring, even if, as will be shown later, they could envision some benefits to living in a small town.
Among those who mentioned that they might be under-stimulated in non-urban areas, most of them (60%) phrased this concern in terms of limited access to novel cultural consumption experiences. Such concerns are exemplified in the following quotes taken from two separate interviews:

**Bird:** But I just felt like, you go to the mall or, what? There's nothing to do, and you have to drive significant distances to even have a decent meal... [When we lived in a smaller place], we had a choice: you go to a chain restaurant to eat, or you got to movies. We went to the movies a lot... If I had to eat at another Chili's again I was gonna slap somebody. I just can't do it. I will probably never eat at another Chili's as long as I live.

**Kaylee:** I think that [my concern] is this idea of leaving the cultural vibrancy of an urban area. Something as simple as leaving our favorite Thai restaurant. This is actually a conversation that my boyfriend and I have had a lot... I think that it's the idea of leaving, whether it be food culture and accessibility to when, like, I'm in the mood for sushi, and now I can have really good sushi to leaving museums, and leaving theater, and leaving art galleries, and leaving all of these things...

Arguably, implicit in these kinds of statements is the notion that stimulation and entertainment are primarily achieved through the consumption of diverse cultural products—eating new and different foods, touring museums, attending theatrical performances, going to the movies—rather than by other means. Examples of "other means" might include participating in community organization and activism, or skill-based hobbies like gardening or playing an instrument. Interestingly, the three interviewees (30%) who most noticeably defined "entertainment" or "stimulation" in terms of cultural consumption were also the most adamant that living in a smaller community would be unappealing, largely because there would be "nothing to do."

For the two other people who celebrated urban eclecticism and had some concerns about under-stimulation, their concerns were alleviated by their (unprovoked) realization that non-urban lifestyles might facilitate entertainment that is less feasible in Chicago, including certain hobbies or forms of outdoor recreation. For example:

**Bob:** [That's one] way of saying that it’d be boring. Yeah. I think it’d be more...but, hm, I don’t know... it’s like maybe it could actually be *more* stimulating because you’d like
read more because you have, like, a rocking chair [laughs], I don’t know… I just mean, because there’s not so many overwhelming things going on that it would allow you to relax and maybe take on more hobbies and things like that, you know?

This kind of response articulates a more nuanced understanding of entertainment that goes beyond eclectic cultural consumption, and which ultimately constructs a less "boring" image of non-urban life. This more nuanced perspective on entertainment was common between this group and the remaining two people who did highlight the eclecticism of Chicago's entertainment offerings, but who were not concerned that smaller-scale lifestyles would be under-stimulating. For example:

Steve: Um, well, you have to make your own entertainment more [in a smaller place], um, certainly…And, and in New York City I had to do that anyway, uh, growing up...Yes, there are wonderful museums and things like that that you can go to in New York City that you wouldn't be able to elsewhere, but, at least, the small towns I've seen will have, like, town festivals and other little things that, which have a charm to them, and…you can learn to be self-sufficient in your entertainment.

As for the remaining three people (out of 10) who never specifically celebrated cultural consumption in the first place, they also had no concerns about being bored in small towns. Instead, two of them expressed specific intentions to leave the city and move to a smaller place, either in the near future or within the next 5 years, in order to “settle down” in some capacity (e.g., to raise a family, purchase a home, or start a business). Finally, the last person in this category was a technology consultant with no personal attachments and an ability to live and work anywhere he desired. He explained that he wouldn’t mind living in a small town because he simply wouldn’t stay long anyway, and, at least for a while, the small town experience would be a novelty.

In summary, when looking at the participants’ views on small-town “boredom” through a lens of cultural consumption, it becomes clear that the respondents who were most concerned about having “nothing to do” in small towns were those who preferred to consume novel and diverse cultural products in their free time, rather than to engage in
other forms of activity, which might include taking up a hobby, starting a business, raising a family, or myriad forms of outdoor recreation.

Although it may seem unlikely that the strongly consumerist individuals could be convinced to engage in forms of eco-localism beyond “conscious consumption” (i.e., locavorism), there may be reason to believe that the other individuals—who were concerned with the city’s under-emphasis on less-commodified “pleasures”—could be convinced to support environmentalist projects that undermine global capitalism, if only because they wish to recapture lost pleasures. This is essentially the argument presented by Soper (2008) in her discussion of “alternative hedonism,” which is discussed in more detail in the following section.

4. **Lost Pleasures**

Thus far, this analysis has focused largely on the participants’ perceptions of small-town limitations, as compared to the benefits of urban life. However, it was not the case that every participant had a wholly favorable opinion of Chicago. In fact, as suggested above, several participants expressed that they were only in Chicago for rather “transactional,” career development reasons, and that they had intentions to leave the city once they had achieved their goals (which, as shown above, could include obtaining “proof” of one’s non-townie-ness). Furthermore, as outlined in Table I, most of the interviewees cited some frustrations with urban life along the axes of “space” and “time.” Specifically, they perceived urban space to be too limited, too expensive, too crowded, and insufficiently green, and they felt that urban time was often too fast and too stressful. By comparison, participants painted a somewhat idyllic picture of small-town space and time, as will be shown below.
Almost every interviewee mentioned that living in a small town would most likely afford them access to more space, which was particularly desirable to the interviewees who had dogs. Specifically, the interviewees expressed a desire to have personalized space in the form of a “yard” or “plot of land,” which, in Chicago, would be either difficult to come by, very expensive, or most likely shared with others. For example:

Steve: [A con of urban life is that] I don't have a back yard. The back yard was actually taken over by another—we had another person in the building who wanted to grow their own food. A garden. They took up the entire backyard so no one else has any, there's no green space for anyone else.

This desire for personal green space was often associated with a more general desire to have more space—of any kind—at a lower cost. Almost all the study participants (except two, and one of them was already a homeowner) mentioned that living in a smaller place would allow them to purchase a home because the real estate prices would be lower. As mentioned above, for the individuals whose definition of “entertainment” was less strongly linked to consumption, the idea of having affordable space was particularly appealing because it would allow them to advance personal projects. For example:

Allie: Um, I guess, I'm an artist, so, like, finding studio space and stuff like that would be easier [in a smaller place]…that's really difficult to find in Logan Square [Chicago], and it's expensive…

With responses such as this one, it becomes clear that the interviewees perceive urban space to be both limited and expensive, and that it is difficult, without substantial wealth, to gain access to the spaces they might need to pursue projects, hobbies, or simple pleasures, such as spending time with their dogs. It is useful but perhaps unsurprising to point out that the apparent lack of space for hobbies/avocations in Chicago can be starkly contrasted against the aforementioned eclectic consumption spaces that the city does offer. It seems that Chicago’s space is allocated and configured in a way that more clearly facilitates and encourages consumption, as opposed to other forms of activity.
Associated with this kind of spatial-structural reality that compels consumption, Soper (2008) claims that there is also a strong discourse in modern, capitalist societies that conflates affluent, consumer behavior with “the good life.” This discourse constructs a certain perception of what is “pleasurable,” and it specifically directs hedonistic desires toward consumption, which, to some extent, also directs people toward cities (where novel consumption experiences are readily available). However, as global capitalism intensifies, Soper also notes that “people are beginning to wake up to the downsides of modern consumerism,” as they begin to recognize that “there are all sorts of pleasures that are actually going missing,” including such things as having hobbies, taking leisurely walks, and enjoying pleasant natural areas (Edmonds & Warburton, 2009).

Indeed, most of my interviewees were aware, on some level, that they had traded certain pleasures in exchange for their participation in a modern, urban lifestyle. But, for those who strongly associated entertainment with consumption, as mentioned above, this trade was clearly worth making. For example, after poetically expressing her sadness about Chicago’s lack of “stars” and “rustling wind,” one of these people simply said: “So, we’re missing that. But, what are you going to do, right?” However, not all of the interviewees were so willing to accept their losses, and, consequently, quite a few had aspirations to someday retreat from urban life after their “transactional” experience had ended. As a third alternative, one individual noted that she aspired to have two homes—a city home and a country home—so that she might gain the best of both worlds:

**Kaylee:** So, maybe the middle ground for me, or for us, is that idea of having like a split home or a vacation home that is in a smaller community, like in rural Wisconsin or rural Michigan, where we can go, and we can have the things that we really want to, and we can grow food, or we can spend time in the summers, or at different points in our lives, and have this ability to live smaller and potentially more on our own terms, but still have access or still have a primary location in an urban environment.
Of course, reaching this kind of compromise comes at a significant cost, but Kaylee did not mention the wealth that would be required to accommodate her desired lifestyle.

Nonetheless, the idea of buying one’s way to a solution was a clear strategy among some interviewees. For example, Bird explains that she had to purchase a “sound machine” in order to artificially simulate the natural stimuli she was missing:

**Bird:** [There’s] the park space. But it's not the same as the middle of nowhere, [where] you can see the stars and, yeah, that kind of thing. So, we’re missing that…When I moved to the city, I had to start listening to a sound machine to start blocking out the sirens and air brakes on the buses because I grew up where all—we had fields all behind us, and it was all just crickets and birds, and that was it…

Another interviewee, Jeff, makes a similar comment by suggesting that he attempts to escape urban noise by visiting Chicago’s golf courses:

**Jeff:** Yeah, yeah and some, some of them [the golf courses] are not—you know, some of them you pick 'cause it's a little bit like being able to tell yourself, ‘Okay, now I'm not in the city. I can't hear the cars there.’ You’re, you're like, ‘This is cool.’

This strategy is consistent with Soper’s claims that, having structurally eliminated access to certain forms of pleasure that people still want and/or require, capitalist systems thus construct a market for contrived versions of those lost pleasures, which it can then “sell back” to people. She explains:

We’ve got a kind of compensatory dynamic going on here, whereby, having denied us the adequate free time to gratify these needs in a non-commodified way, capitalism then sells us them back…some of the examples here are…an increasing emphasis on luxury holidays through which you will regain your quality time…

Soper’s explanation here functions as a good segue into the participants’ perceptions of urban time, which they felt was too fast-paced and too stressful. Many participants used words such as “bustling,” “hubbub,” or “hectic” to describe the more centralized areas of the city, and there were several references to the idea that the city never seems to “stop.”

Consistent with Soper’s explanation, the perceived solution to this problem, for several
interviewees, was to make compensatory “leisure” purchases, which, in some cases, took the form of short trips to the surrounding countryside:

**Bird:** I still like to get away and go to [a countryside farm that is also a bed & breakfast], which has, I don't know, 1500 acres, and you can walk for as far as you can and not see anything else. I don't feel like I can do that here [in Chicago]. But, I feel like Indiana or Southern Illinois or Michigan or Wisconsin are close enough [so it’s okay].

The idea that rural areas might function as getaway for overworked urbanites is perhaps one of the reasons that participants’ perceptions of non-urban time was rather romanticized as being slower-paced and more relaxing. This romanticized image obscures the reality that individuals who live in smaller, non-urban spaces are also most likely overworked by the same capitalist system that affects urbanites, and which compels the need to recapture lost pleasures through vacation. Still, there is nonetheless some truth to the image of the smaller locale as a place that occasionally “stops,” since businesses do shut down at some point, and, as a result, many people go home at night.

Aside from short trips to the countryside, however, the consummate commodified leisure experience is perhaps, as Soper suggested, the “luxury holiday.” For one interviewee, tropical “leisure” vacations indeed served to lift a “huge weight” from her:

**Nicole:** Is it typically tropical, your vacations?

**Anna:** Yeah. We like to. Leisure is the idea. Lay down as much as you can.

**Nicole:** What would you say traveling means to you, in general?

**Anna:** Um, I don't know. [Pause] I think it's kind of, now...just like the...just getting out of the city is such, like, a huge weight lifted off of most people, that I think that's definitely what means the most to me as far as traveling goes.

**Nicole:** So, getting out of Chicago. When you say it's a weight lifted...what is the weight?

**Anna:** I think it's...hm, I don't know. That's a big question! [Laughs] Kind of, just getting like out of the work mode, and things like that. Like, I think Chicago is a hard place to like, stop moving. Um, so to actually like go somewhere where like your phone doesn't work, and like, you can't actually reply to emails and things like that, is helpful. We're all very connected here.
Anna’s statements clearly suggest that she views her leisure experiences as a means to escape from work. Her vacations function as an opportunity to slow down and to rest, presumably so that she will be able to return to her job feeling somewhat refreshed. Without these opportunities to “compensate,” as Soper would say, for her participation in a “workaholic” culture, it seems possible that Anna would feel overwhelmed and/or upset to the point that she might be unwilling to work as hard as she does.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, as the literature review explained, that the myriad industries associated with global capitalism have been “mythologizing” and “glamorizing” mobility and cosmopolitanism (Cohen & Gossling, 2015; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006), such that leisure travel is construed as desirable and rewarding. This mythology helps to preserve the compensatory mechanisms (such as the tourist industry) that allow global capitalism and its associated workaholic, consumerist lifestyles to continue to appear both pleasurable and normal. The strength of this narrative, as well as its apparent normalcy, often seems to overshadow arguments for possible alternatives to global capitalism, including eco-localist arguments for smaller-scale, less consumerist lifestyles and economic structures. Consequently, as Soper suggests (2008), individuals and organizations who wish to undermine global capitalism—such as eco-localist activists—may find it both necessary and useful to dismantle and reframe the myths which define “the good life,” rather than simply appealing to people’s ethics.

Although my study was not aimed at addressing Soper’s theory of “alternative hedonism,” my data nonetheless provides unexpected support for her claims. Moreover, my data suggests that despite globalization’s push toward an urban, consumerist lifestyle, at least some of the interviewees have become jaded with the downsides of that lifestyle.
Consequently, although some urban locavores may shy away from “townie” associations, as demonstrated above, they may nonetheless be receptive to eco-localist arguments that celebrate the pleasures of small-scale living. As Soper suggests, if an ethical appeal will not work to convince people of global capitalism’s myriad ills, then perhaps a hedonistic appeal might succeed.

Still, such a strategy would certainly meet with challenges, especially in cases where individuals believe strongly in the pleasures of a given behavior that eco-localists might wish to change, such as, for example, traveling frequently by plane (which is a significant contributor to climate change [Penner et al., 1999]). As will be shown in the following section, almost all of the urban locavores I interviewed held a strong belief in the personal and socioeconomic rewards of physical mobility, and their perceptions may be quite difficult to change.

B. Perceptions of Mobility and Immobility

This section presents and analyzes my findings regarding participants’ thoughts and feelings about their real and imagined experiences of mobility, as well as of people who are more or less mobile. Consequently, it provides the results for my second research question, which is repeated here:

RQ2: How do American, urban locavores discuss varying degrees of mobility (more rooted vs. more mobile), including their perceptions of people who engage in more or less mobility?

A generalized summary of the participants’ relevant responses can be found in Tables II and III. First and foremost, these tables indicate that the interviewees’ thoughts about mobility and travelers depended on the type of mobility in question, and, in the case of immobility, it is clear that their perceptions were significantly influenced by the reason for immobility. A detailed analysis of the apparent “taxonomy” of travel, travelers, and immobility will not be pursued for
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mobility Type</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Places</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Character Traits</th>
<th>Example Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leisure Travel</td>
<td>Relaxation, indulgence</td>
<td>Lying on the beach, having cocktails</td>
<td>Tropical</td>
<td>Relief</td>
<td>Tourist</td>
<td>Overworked, rather privileged, any age, any gender</td>
<td>“[If] we have a decent amount of time off... then we're going somewhere warm and going to a beach... Leisure is the idea. Lay down as much as you can...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Tourism</td>
<td>Exposure to the Other, Cultural consumption</td>
<td>Visiting museums, art galleries, sight-seeing</td>
<td>Anywhere, but likely abroad, where culture is found</td>
<td>Insight</td>
<td>Tourist</td>
<td>Curious, open-minded, rather privileged, any age, any gender</td>
<td>“It tends to be a combination of arts and culture... I'm a museum person... You come back better than when you left...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure Travel</td>
<td>Adventure, exploration, discovery</td>
<td>Road tripping, backpacking</td>
<td>Anywhere</td>
<td>Contentment</td>
<td>Backpacker; bohemian; “free spirit”</td>
<td>Casual, creative, open-minded, unattached, maybe less affluent, probably young</td>
<td>“There's the backpacker, who is more of a free spirit... the person who is really trying to live life on their own terms... that artist...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Travel</td>
<td>Work, professional networking</td>
<td>Work, elite consumption</td>
<td>Fancy hotels; members’ lounges, nice restaurants</td>
<td>High status, stress, exhaustion</td>
<td>Elite business traveler; frequent flyer; executive</td>
<td>Overworked, charming, elitist, wealthy, privileged, unattached</td>
<td>“A business person who is just going and going and all of a sudden has platinum status...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility as a Lifestyle</td>
<td>Become &amp; be seen as non-spatial, i.e., “free”</td>
<td>Being mobile and/or open to mobility</td>
<td>Anywhere, probably urban areas</td>
<td>Street Cred, Confidence</td>
<td>Cosmopolitan</td>
<td>Urban, young, privileged, cool, maybe superficial, maybe pretentious</td>
<td>“They tend to be very casual about their, like, ability to speak multiple languages, which, like, I only speak English... It's intimidating but, like, in a cool way...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional Transport</td>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>Riding trains, driving</td>
<td>On subway or in traffic</td>
<td>Fatigue, boredom, annoyance</td>
<td>Commuter</td>
<td>Widely varied</td>
<td>“[A frequent traveler is] someone who has to commute to and from work every day...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This study included 10 total participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Immobility</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>Perceived Attributes</th>
<th>Example Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personality:</td>
<td>People who are content with where they are</td>
<td>Unmotivated, close-minded, inexperienced</td>
<td>“People who are unmotivated people…just people that are very content, and they aren't learners, they're not engagers, they're not seekers. They're like, this is my little bubble, it's a nice little bubble…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefers the Familiar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“A little more close-minded. Less experience, more deeply rooted in their opinions and their belief systems, um, especially about other cultures…[Traveling] just makes you think, my way can't possibly be the only right way. And I think if you just stay in your little bubble, you just think well that's the only way…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality:</td>
<td>People who are content with where they are</td>
<td>Grounded, carefree, casual, relatively young</td>
<td>“They are more carefree. They’re more, like, uh, more grounded. That’s kind of cheating though. That’s just a concept. I don’t know. Um, what else are they? [thinks]. They’re more, um, yeah, carefree. 30s. Maybe late 20s. Um, they’re just wearing normal, casual clothes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“[When I picture] someone who doesn't travel frequently. I immediately picture someone elderly. Frail elderly not like not, not, not ‘old’ like me [laughs]. Old like, like, like 89 or something.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Age</td>
<td>Elderly people</td>
<td>Limited physical mobility</td>
<td>“Uh, he and his wife are a fire fighter and a teacher. They can't really move. They can't even change jobs. Because if they change jobs they reset the clock on things like the pension and service time which are very much the reasons you take those jobs in the first place.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rooted by Circumstance</td>
<td>Parents, Social Sector Employees</td>
<td>Anchored, tied down, settled</td>
<td>“I often think of like retirees…they don't need to get anywhere… Chances are they're not hopping in a car every day.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxing, Not Working</td>
<td>Retired people</td>
<td>Independent, content, has no reason to move</td>
<td>“[Someone who is] trying to, like, pay the bills. To get by.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Money</td>
<td>People who are less affluent, less privileged</td>
<td>Focused on daily life, feeling financially unstable, has aspirations to travel</td>
<td>“Somebody who's dreaming about travelling but just can't. You know, whatever financial restrictions.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This study included 10 total participants.*
this paper. Instead, my analysis will focus on certain intriguing themes that emerged during the participants’ reflections, as those themes relate to the material covered in my literature review.

To this point, the main mobility-related claim of my literature review was that mobile lifestyles are being “glamorized” alongside the intensification of globalization processes, by the myriad industries with an interest in ensuring the continued existence of global capitalism. Consequently, the first section of my commentary will demonstrate that, although my results suggest that mobility is indeed seen as glamorous, it was not necessarily the case that participants were unaware of the “darker side” of mobility, as might be expected (Cohen & Gossling, 2015). Instead, the interview participants clearly asserted that business travel in particular seems rather undesirable, as a lived experience, despite their belief that this “elite” form of mobility would make them seem “important” in social circles. In fact, as the second section articulates, the study participants were evenly split in terms of preferring a “rooted” or “mobile” lifestyle, when I asked them to choose. Ultimately, it became clear that one very important factor influencing some participants’ mobility preferences was the idea of having chosen their situation. Indeed, some interviewees expressed that they could happy at many points on the mobility spectrum, as long as the movement and/or stasis was occurring on their own terms.

As I will show, this finding is well-aligned with the above analysis of participants’ perceptions of urban and non-urban lifestyles, wherein several interviewees asserted the importance of being able to “prove” that small-town residency was a personal choice, rather than the result of personal failings. In that discussion, the interviewees suggested that such “proof” could be obtained by achieving success and recognition in top-tier scales of spatial experience (international, global). Having obtained such proof through their symbolic spatial associations, people would be liberated (perhaps in their own eyes and the eyes of others) from claims that
they lived “locally” because they “couldn’t make it” in the wider world. Similarly, regarding perceptions of mobility, several participants seemed to feel that becoming “free” to move—e.g., by working a telecommuting job—would constitute this kind of “proof” that their place-based lifestyle decisions were indeed the product of choice.

1. **Glamorized Mobility and Cosmopolitanism**

   As the literature review suggested, mobility and cosmopolitanism are becoming normalized and discursively glamorized alongside the expansion of globalization processes (Szerszynski & Urry, 2002; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006). This “glamorization” occurs in part by stylizing physical mobility as both an “elite” and “desirable” behavior, such that the ability to move becomes a strong indicator of a person’s socioeconomic success. As a component of this discourse, a celebrated image of the globe-trotting “cosmopolitan” begins to emerge. “Cosmopolitans” are sort of “worldly” characters whose unfettered, international mobility has granted them access to eclectic cultural experiences, such that they have become well-connected in international social networks and generally confident as they move about the globe (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006).

   As a component of the interview, I asked the participants a variety of questions related to mobility, in order to probe for their perceptions of mobile lifestyles and mobile people from a variety of angles. I asked them to imagine people who travel frequently, to imagine people who don’t, to tell me about their personal travel experiences and/or aspirations, and to describe what travel means to them. Over the course of the interviews, it became clear that certain kinds of mobility—such as business travel and international tourism—are indeed understood as glamorous, even if these experiences may also have downsides. Several interviewees explicitly stated that mobility was synonymous with success, as demonstrated in the following excerpts, taken from three separate interviews:
Allie: I would like a more mobile lifestyle, yeah… I want to travel… And I want to like experience more places… And, I guess I kind of equate that lifestyle a little more with success, so that makes me feel like if I were to look like that, I would be successful.

Logan: [Traveling] means things are going well. It means that, you know, I don't feel like I'm, I'm trapped to the routine of everyday life… So, like, if I am in that situation where I'm not moving around, it feels like something went wrong… Like I can't travel because I have a health issue, or financial issue, where as if everything was going well, one of the things I would love to do is travel.

Lauren: I mean, it feels corny, but it's more that like I'm embarrassed to admit it [business travel] makes me feel important… If you're important enough that someone is going to pay you to put you on a plane to put you somewhere, it shows that your presence in some way is at least symbolically important.

These interviewees’ statements variously suggest that mobility behaviors can be equated with “success,” with the idea that “things are going well,” and with feeling “important.” Simply put, these perceptions of physical mobility imply that mobile people are most likely of higher (or more stable) socioeconomic status.

Not only were mobile people often perceived to be more “successful” in this way, but, for some of the interviewees, mobile people were also seen as more open-minded and more interesting than non-mobile people. These perceptions were particularly apparent among individuals who, when I asked them to imagine someone who does not travel frequently, immediately imagined someone who had chosen not to travel. In fact, it is worth noting that these people did not even mention the possibility that these “infrequent travelers” might not be able to travel, for various reasons. For example:

Kaylee: My parents [laughter]. Older, more rural or small town, um, just people who are unmotivated people. And, I don't necessarily know if I mean that in a negative, but just people that are very content, and they aren't learners, they're not engagers, they're not seekers. They're like, 'This is my little bubble, it's a nice little bubble, and I'm just going to stay in my bubble.'

Interestingly, despite Kaylee’s strong indication that infrequent travelers are rather “unmotivated” people who are “not learners,” and “not seekers,” she later acknowledges that she and her fiancé are, in fact, infrequent travelers due to financial restraints:
Kaylee: [I don’t travel] as much as I would like to. It’s a strong aspiration for myself and then for my boyfriend and I. But it’s just—it's been a financial hurdle. It's an expensive thing to do, and so it has been, that has been the biggest barrier.

Kaylee’s inconsistent responses perhaps result from her internalization of an over-simplified cultural narrative about mobility, which highlights the rewards of traveling and glamorizes the people who do it, while obscuring the economic inequalities associated with the practice. Thus, in Kaylee’s abstract imagination, immobility takes on somewhat negative connotations, despite the fact that a reflexive look at her own circumstances could dissolve the problematic, incomplete narrative that she recirculates and reinforces.

It should be noted at this point that although many interviewees celebrated mobility, they did not necessarily also disparage relative immobility and less mobile people. In some cases, interviewees simply expressed that they were “impressed” with people who pursued more mobile, cosmopolitan lifestyles, simply because it made them seem skillful and bold, but they acknowledged that such a lifestyle may not be for everyone. Lauren’s story about a “cosmopolitan” friend of hers is exemplary of this view:

Lauren: I'm always really impressed by people who have lived and worked in other countries…I have a friend who worked in Hong Kong for a couple years, she's great, and, like, she rocked that…I am convinced she could be successful anywhere. To me, that's what I picture when I picture cosmopolitan. It's like that ability to just, like, go anywhere and like make it work.

... Lauren: ...[cosmopolitans] tend to be very casual about their, like, ability to speak multiple languages, which, like, I only speak English. It's intimidating but, like, in a cool way. Maybe not in like a rude way, but, like, “Wow, I can't believe you're so casual about the fact that you speak 3 languages.” Then, you could literally go anywhere, is what it feels like, even though that's not actually the case.

Nicole: So when you think of these people, is it an aspiration you would have for yourself personally, or is it just something that impresses you?

Lauren: I think it just impresses me; I don't think I would actually want to it. It's more like I—it's like street cred, almost.

In this discussion of cosmopolitanism, Lauren reveals that it is “impressive” to be able to “go anywhere” and to be “fluent” as one moves around internationally. Her description of
this highly-confident “cosmopolitan” person, and her associated feelings of admiration for that person, are exactly aligned with the claims made in the literature review about the glamorization of mobility and cosmopolitanism.

However, it is worth noting that although Lauren indeed perceives this lifestyle to be “impressive,” it is not something that she specifically aspires to, which is an important reminder that the delivery of a certain message (“Mobility is glamorous”) and the apparent acceptance of that message (“I believe that mobility is glamorous”) does not automatically translate to altered desire (“I want to travel”), nor to behavioral outcomes (“I am buying a plane ticket”). Perhaps, in Lauren’s case, there are various other means of obtaining “street cred” that she would prefer to pursue, or that may make more sense for her other life goals. Or, perhaps, Lauren’s desires and behaviors are tempered by an awareness of the “darker side” of mobility, which will be discussed shortly.

However, before I proceed, I first wish to acknowledge that, in the above analysis, both mobile and cosmopolitan lifestyles do indeed seem to be synonymous, for some urban locavores, with success and prestige. As Cohen and Gossling (2015) suggest, the discourse which glamorizes mobility essentially celebrates the “mind-set of being young, urban, highly mobile, and open to constantly explore new places” (p. 7). The results of this section—especially when paired with the preceding analysis of urban and non-urban perceptions—strongly suggest that at least some urban locavores have internalized this popular narrative, and that it may exert some influence on their thoughts and behaviors. In regard to mobility specifically, the urban locavores with whom I spoke held views that were often aligned with a prevailing cultural logic that “[assigns] status and network
capital to travel, and [ascribes] anti-status or reduced capital to the less mobile” (Cohen & Gossling, 2015, p. 3).

My data suggest that engaging in mobility (or having done so at some point) is likely to function for some urban locavores as an important form of “street cred” with which it is possible to “impress” other people in their social circles. In light of this, there is reason to believe that certain urban locavores will indeed be unreceptive to eco-localist discourses that attempt to discourage mobility or “cosmopolitanism” in favor of less mobile, more small-scale lifestyles, since the locavores may be aware (consciously or subconsciously) that doing so could negatively impact their social identity and status.

Still, despite the generally positive perceptions of mobility, in terms of its socioeconomic implications, it was not the case that all aspects of mobility were seen as desirable. The interviewees expressed a particular distaste for the lived experience of travelling for work, which became most apparent during the interviews when I asked the participants to imagine a “frequent traveler.” Their first impulse was usually to picture a business traveler. As Table II suggests, these businesspeople were generally described as wealthy or important, and they were also typically white men (with some exceptions). In fact, three of the ten interviewees specifically mentioned that they were picturing the actor George Clooney, in his role in the film Up in the Air, where he plays a business traveler who is charismatic, wealthy, and largely “unattached” from material and social life, toting only a small, wheelie suitcase containing bare necessities.

As I have already explained, the interviewees typically associated mobility with various forms of success. However, the interviewees were also aware that this “street cred” might come at a cost, especially if it is achieved through business travel, which
most of them viewed as having both upsides and downsides. Consider the following excerpts from three different interviews:

Kaylee: I think before I took this job and was booking for people that are traveling so frequently, I think I had a much more positive impression of it [business travel], because it gives so many opportunities. But at the same time, it's taking you away from what's happening in the office, because that doesn't stop, and it really is in-and-out, in-and-out, and it's happening so frequently sometimes that I don't feel like they ever get to catch their breath...

Jeff: [I traveled for work and] it was delightful. It was great. It was fascinating. I learned more than I've ever learned in my life since I was learning how to walk and talk and feed myself. But it is also, um, um, an unbelievable slog. Uh, at one point I was working so many consecutive 18-hour days that I realized I knew what day it was by number, but I couldn't for the life of me tell you what day of the week it was.

Lauren: A mix. Like, I dislike traveling in the sense of, it throws off my routine. On the other hand, it's a great experience, like, I was helping run things and go do stuff…It feels, like, you feel important when you're traveling for work, as cheesy as that sounds.

Clearly, despite the possible benefits of business travel—e.g., the thrill of “feeling important,” or of gaining access to “opportunities”—there are also downsides, including becoming overworked and disrupting one’s preferred routines. Ultimately, the interviewees’ perceptions of the “darker sides” of mobility seemed to exert a strong influence over whether or not expressed a preference for a more “mobile” or a more “rooted” lifestyle, as will be discussed more thoroughly in the succeeding section.

2. Roots vs. Wings

When I explicitly asked the interviewees to choose between a more “rooted” or “mobile” lifestyle, there was an even split between the 10 total participants. The five interviewees who opted for a more rooted lifestyle explained that they made this choice because they preferred (a) to not be rushed, (b) to be able to enjoy familiar routines, (c) to really dig into a place and “make it [their] own,” (d) to engage in less “superficial” experiences, or (e) some combination of these. Implicit (and sometimes explicit) in their responses was the idea that a more mobile lifestyle would not facilitate such things. For
these participants, the downside to a mobile lifestyle was that it is stressful, disruptive,
and/or characterized by such brevity that it hinders “deep” experiences with people or
places, including the ability to raise a family. The following excerpt illustrates this idea:

James: Initially, I would definitely say rooted…I mean, the type of conversations I like
to have are just, you know, like, where it’s, it’s, you know, hours of just kind of talking,
and I’m not rushed, maybe, just kind of with friends, but, uh, just less superficial, I
guess…I think there’s definitely, um, if you’re, if you’re, if you know that you’re going to
be living some place for, say, six months, um, I think that you’ll, you’ll look at
relationships differently…like, maybe you're not going to get too attached…that doesn't
feel very natural, like being, like, to kind of just go and move on. It definitely feels like
there needs to be a little bit more of a continuity and an anchoring there…

When I asked the interviewees to choose a lifestyle, I did not specify how much time
would be spent in any given place, for either the rooted or mobile option. However, it
was clear that the individuals who desired more rooted lifestyles wished to live in one
place for years at a time, or for whatever amount of time it might take to develop routines
and habits, and/or to deeply engage with their spaces, families, and communities.

By comparison, the individuals who chose the more mobile lifestyle either (a)
associated that lifestyle with success, (b) had a desire to “see the world” and thereby
“experience culture” (which they felt would bring them wisdom), (c) had always lived a
mobile life, (d) disliked the idea of settling down/had no intention to settle, or (e) some
combination of these. The interviewees who desired mobility did not share in the
“rooted” group’s perceptions that a more mobile lifestyle would come with certain
downsides (and, notably, none of them imagined that being more “mobile” would mean
traveling for business). The following are excerpts from separate interviews with
individuals who opted for the more “mobile” lifestyle:

Kaylee: The more mobile one appeals because I do have a desire to, as cliché as it
sounds, see the world, experience cultures, experience places that are completely unlike
my own, experience things that might be a better fit for me, that are more my
style…Having a worldview that is bigger than the Midwest, having a care about what is
happening everywhere, and we're all interconnected, and how we all owe it to one
another. In this global society, how we are all everyone's responsibilities.
Allie: I want to travel. And I want to, like, experience more places. And, I guess I kind of equate that lifestyle a little more with success, so that makes me feel like if I were to look like that, I would be successful.

Jeff: Because the first one [the rooted lifestyle] sounds awful... You never get to do much—now, people I love very much, my father, I think is, is—he would like to, to, to get his world down to: The store, the house, and work. Until he’s eventually down to just the house and the store. There's nothing wrong with him. He's just a man who likes routine... I get bored... my mother has lived in the same house for 40 years. Kill me now.

Interestingly, these responses echo strongly of the above discussion about spatial scales. The perspectives of “small town life” that emerged previously—e.g., that small towns life is more routine, less cultured, less conducive to success—is quite similar to the image of “rooted” life that is emerging here. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that three of the people who expressed a preference for mobility (Bird, Kaylee, and Logan) are the same people who had previously equated “entertainment” with novel consumption experiences, and who felt that small-town life was not suitable for them.

Similarly, in the excerpts cited here, there seems to be a belief that changing one’s surroundings will allow a person to remain stimulated and to continue “growing” through the novel consumption of eclectic spatial experiences. Indeed, especially in Kaylee’s statement, there is an underlying assumption that, merely through brief exposure to a collection of novel places, a person can “experience culture,” which allows the person to seemingly transcend space and become nearly omniscient (i.e., “to have a care about what is happening everywhere”). Notably, the notion that a person might “grow” by standing still does not figure into these responses, and this reality echoes of the aforementioned quote by Wendell Berry (1977a), who lamented that the “only acceptable forms of aspiration” in modern society involve geographical and social mobility, as with a person’s “successful” transition from rural to urban life.
It would seem, as Berry suggests, that eco-local activists must therefore fight against this belief in the apparent rewards of mobility and the perceived problems of being more “rooted.” Furthermore, consistent with my suggestion in the introduction, it seems possible that the practice of “eating locally” might be more widely popular as a form of eco-localism not only because of its emphasis on consumer responsibility, but also because of its compatibility with the more mobile and cosmopolitan lifestyles that are becoming increasingly desirable in a globalized era. Unlike other forms of eco-local activism, “eating locally” does not require a person to become “rooted” in any given place, which may make it less inconvenient or disruptive as a form of activism. Indeed, my data suggest that at least some urban locavores have significant concerns about being “rooted.” Therefore, they will most likely disengage with behaviors that require strong association with (or embeddedness within) a small-scale place, and instead gravitate toward behaviors that are more compatible with their desired lifestyles.

Interestingly, in Allie’s response about opting for a more mobile life, it is interesting to note that she makes a small but significant linguistic choice. She says that by “looking” mobile, she would “be” successful:

Allie: I want to travel. And I want to, like, experience more places. And, I guess I kind of equate that lifestyle a little more with success, so that makes me feel like if I were to look like that, I would be successful.

With this statement, she subtly suggests that it may not even be necessary to actually be mobile in order to secure the desired fruits of mobility (i.e., success and prestige), but, rather, it may be enough to simply appear mobile. At this point, it is worth repeating Cohen and Gossling’s (2015) assertion that the “glamorization of mobility” in the media and elsewhere has rendered a certain identity socially desirable: “…young, urban, highly mobile, and open to constantly explore new places” (p. 7, emphasis mine). As Kaylee’s
statements have shown previously, it was important for some interviewees to demonstrate their interest in being mobile, even in the absence of actual mobility (e.g., Kaylee didn’t have the funds to travel). Thus, it is clear that some of the individuals in my study who preferred a mobile lifestyle (many of whom also expressed the strongest concerns about small-town life) possess personal views which suggest that their desired self-image is aligned with the discursively “glamorized” image of an urbanite who is either mobile, or, at least, who is demonstrably “open” to mobility.

Indeed, establishing a “mobile-person identity” was important for several of the “mobility” supporters, who, like Kaylee, carefully distinguished themselves as people who are always open to new experiences and not interested in routine. For example, on Jeff’s passage above, he establishes a “mobile” self-identity by directly contrasting himself to his parents, whose lives he describes as mundane and routine. Although he says he “loves [them] very much,” Jeff makes a clear effort to assert that although some people are okay with standing still, he is certainly not one of those people.

The strength of Jeff’s desire to disassociate from stasis became increasingly visible over the course of his interview, and his strategy for accomplishing this seemed to be to demonstrate how thoroughly “beyond” place, or non-spatial, he was. For example, when I asked if he felt connected to his hometown [a Chicago suburb], he said:

Jeff: This, this, ‘I have pride in this place’ idea, I can't even fathom that enough to disagree with it. I don't understand. I'm missing, I'm missing the chip. I'm missing the chip for patriotism. I'm missing the chip for municipal pride. How, on accident of where you are from, it should become a piece of your identity doesn't make any sense. And I don't mean that in the sense of ‘I don't agree with it.’ I mean, genuinely, I can't figure out how that becomes important to a person.

In addition to this, Jeff seemed convinced that becoming deeply committed to a place, even for ostensibly “good” reasons, would problematically anchor a person. He expresses
this sentiment clearly when he discusses his brother and his sister-in-law, who both work in public service jobs, which seem to undeniably “root” them in a specific place:

**Jeff:** What I mean is my younger brother again. Uh, he and his wife are a fire fighter and a teacher. They can't really move. They can't even change jobs. Because if they change jobs they reset the clock on things like the pension and service time which are very much the reasons you take those jobs in the first place. That's rooted.

At this point, it is worth sketching a more complete picture of Jeff. He is a white, male, wealthy, Chicagoan who works as a telecommuting consultant for a firm that provides software solutions to internationally-recognizable clients. Jeff is the quintessential “elite professional” in the “information society,” and his socioeconomic situation enables him to function entirely within the “space of flows” (Castells, 2010b). Indeed, Jeff at one point expressed that it doesn’t matter where he lives, because he “could order whatever [he wants] on Amazon,” and because he can conduct his work from any location.

By disassociating himself so thoroughly from the “space of places”—and by associating so firmly with the “space of flows”—Jeff constructs an image of himself as rather “non-spatial,” in terms of physical space. He appears to have transcended all spatial restraints, and he now has the freedom to move anywhere. In a move that would be reminiscent of Allie’s story about Georgia O’Keefe, Jeff could perhaps retreat to the desert or to the tiniest town, without risk of being “grouped” alongside the life-long inhabitants of that town, whose perceived traits (stasis, narrow-mindedness, lack of success, failure) will render them undesirable as associates in a sociocultural climate that glamorizes mobility and urban life.

Although Jeff may be an extreme manifestation of this phenomenon, it is worth considering the possibly that his sentiments are simply a stronger articulation of some of the perspectives revealed by others in my dataset. Furthermore, Jeff was recruited for this
study while he waited outside a Chicago restaurant serving local foods, at which point he did self-identity as a “locavore,” specifically by noting that he prefers to eat local foods whenever possible, in order to support small-time farmers. Consequently, it is possible that there are other urban, self-described “locavores” who, like Jeff, may be somewhat interested in supporting eco-localism through consumption, but who will be thoroughly unreceptive to eco-localist messaging that celebrates place-embeddedness, due to their vehement distaste for space-based identity markers. Furthermore, individuals like Jeff who prefer a mobile social identity seem unlikely to support or participate in any activist efforts that require them to become “rooted.”

Consequently, in conversation with the aforementioned literature on “conscious consumerism” and “citizen-consumers,” which cites myriad reasons for locavores’ often shallow engagement with eco-local politics, my data suggests that mobility aspirations are likely to constitute an additional axis of dissonance between some urban locavores and broader eco-localist projects, especially when those projects encourage or require individuals to strongly associate with non-urban places, to stop traveling, or to thoroughly “root” themselves in any place whatsoever.

C. **Smaller-Scale Living as a Pathway to Sustainability**

Toward the end of the interview, I introduced the participants to the possibility that living and engaging in a smaller-scale community—perhaps outside of a city—might encourage environmentally-conscious ways of living, as well as more sustainable local economies. I then directly prompted them to share their thoughts on this idea by asking, “What do you think of this argument?” I did not ask the participants to tell me specifically whether or not they, as individuals, would be willing to participate, although most people volunteered that information. I encouraged the participants to answer freely, and I probed for additional explanations of their
responses. This section offers a summary and brief analysis of the participants’ reactions, and it therefore provides analysis relevant to my third research question, which is repeated here:

**RQ3:** How do American, urban locavores respond to the idea of residing in a smaller-scale place as a means to realize eco-localist ideals?

To begin, a summary of the participants’ reactions can be found in Table IV. As the table suggests, it was often the case that people’s responses fell into more than one category, since their answers became more detailed and nuanced as the conversation progressed, and as they considered the implications of the idea. For example, in some cases, participants would begin by telling me that smaller-scale, “local living” seemed like a logical concept, and that they would be interested in participating in such an idea, but, eventually, they would point out that there would need to be jobs in the smaller community in order to make the idea work.

Overall, most participants (80%) reacted positively to the notion of people embracing smaller-scale lifestyles, even if they could imagine barriers, or even if they felt that the lifestyle might not be right for them, specifically. In order to elaborate on the results in more detail, I will outline and discuss several relevant themes that emerged in participants’ responses, along two different axes: structural barriers and sociocultural barriers.

1. **Structural Barriers**

First, it is worth noting that half of the participants (5/10) felt that the idea of living a more sustainable life in a smaller-scale community was agreeable enough to interest them personally, although most of these people (4/5) offered caveats regarding the success of the idea on a large scale. Interestingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, these five people—James, Lauren, Bob, Anna, and Steve—were all of the same people who opted for a more “rooted” lifestyle when they were asked, and who had the least difficulty imagining that they could be happy residing in a non-urban place (see above).
TABLE IV: RESPONSES TO THE IDEA OF LIVING IN A SMALLER-SCALE PLACE IN ORDER TO LIVE MORE SUSTAINABLY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like this, and it will work</td>
<td>It seems logical</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“It's helpful to think of like, if the communities are stronger as a whole that it would branch out to be something that affects a larger scale. So, I think it's logical.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Local” must be cool</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“I think it [the “local”] has to be cool, or else it won’t matter. People won’t care.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like this, but it won’t work unless things change, which may be difficult.</td>
<td>The necessary structures aren’t there</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>“Not unless you can make jobs happen elsewhere…It's not ‘Tell people to go, and the jobs will come.’ You have to have jobs, and then people will come.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s too risky for some</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>“[Moving is] a luxury…[for some people] it's not even an option.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco-communities are too expensive</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“We couldn't afford it, but, but that's the thing that that's so sad, right? ‘You want to do the right thing…Oh, it’s going to cost you $500,000’…it seems like only rich people can care about the environment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This idea is interesting, but it probably won’t work.</td>
<td>The lifestyles simply won’t appeal</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>“People come from all very different backgrounds and have various reasons for…choosing the lifestyle that they have. If you tell them that based on one thing they need to change the whole, like, organization of their life, no one's gonna [do it]…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough people will do it</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“If I felt like it was actually going to make a difference, I'd do it. But, I would be leaving [the city] to make room for someone else, who would not feel that way…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global experiences are more attractive</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“Uh, people aren't going to choose the thing that's local over the thing that's, uh, more global... Um, I think the global is more attractive…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like this, but we should do it in the city</td>
<td>Bring small-town practices to cities</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“How do we make the things that are sustainable about a small community work here, on a bigger scale?…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t agree with this, and it won’t work</td>
<td>Focus is too narrow</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“Just saying, you know, &quot;It's, it's unsolvable because it's too big a footprint, or a city's too big, so therefore you have to move smaller,&quot; I think is kind of narrow…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People like cities</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“It feels like a plan that doesn't make sense. If people wanted to live in smaller towns, they would…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This study included 10 total participants.
However, even among these “accepting” individuals, only one of them (Anna) was convinced that this idea was entirely feasible. Notably, she was also the only person (1/10), who, at the time of the interview, was actively searching for a home in a non-urban area, with the intention of moving there as soon as possible. Her primary reasons for this move were that she wanted to buy property, to have children, and to start her own business (a restaurant) in a place where retail space would be more affordable, and where she felt she would have less competition. She did mention environmental concerns.

For the remaining interviewees who were less receptive to this idea (50%), their perspectives can be summarized as follows:

- Two of them liked the idea, but they felt that, in the end, they personally wouldn’t want to make the perceived lifestyle sacrifices.
- One liked the idea, but she felt that something similar could also be achieved through hyper-localization in Chicago’s unique neighborhoods.
- Two of them felt that this idea was simply illogical or too narrow in scope.

Among the cumulative 80% of interviewees who did not entirely dismiss the argument, their most common concerns with its feasibility were economic and structural issues, including (a) access to jobs, (b) the economic inequalities that make moving a high risk for some people, and (c) the availability of infrastructure that would keep the widely-dispersed places from becoming disconnected. The following is an example of one such response:

Laura: [But it won’t work] unless you can make jobs happen elsewhere. Really, it's like I am very aware of the fact that I am more mobile than a large majority of the population, based on my education and my resources …That is not true for most people. The kids I lived and worked with in Boston, their families had literally never been anywhere else... The idea of telling them, I mean, it would have to be connected to economic development as well, so yeah. If telecommuting becomes, like, the thing, and Facebook decides that rather than having a big office in the bay area they want to have a bunch of little offices throughout smaller cities, sure, that's fine. There's, like, it's not "Tell people to go, and the jobs will come." You have to have jobs, and then people will come.
With responses such as this, several participants explained that, although they supported the idea of building smaller, more sustainable, non-urban communities, the solution would need to be preceded by structural changes. Their responses placed a noticeable emphasis on the undue (or impossible) socioeconomic sacrifice that would be required of individual people in the absence of structural change. In fact, they suggested that many members of society will not have sufficient means to accomplish this goal without associated structural support. Furthermore, as James at one pointed suggested, the structural issues impeding participation in small-town life are simply “too big” for an individual person to address, even if, as he later implied, many people may wish to escape the “downsides” of city life.

These findings are interesting when considered alongside the aforementioned literature on conscious consumerism, which suggested that the popular rhetoric of the alternative food movements (e.g., Michael Pollan’s books) might cause people to internalize a strong belief in their own, individual responsibility for global environmental issues, rather than encouraging them to seek institutional or systemic solutions (e.g., Guthman, 2007). At least in the case of these urban locavores, there seems to be an abstract awareness that institutions and industries are indeed important structural actors, which can facilitate or hinder people’s behaviors, in terms of sustainable living. So, even if locavores have internalized some belief in their individual ability and/or obligation to effect change with their purchasing habits—especially in the context of food—it appears that some locavores also recognize the importance of institutional participation, at least when looking at a bigger picture that goes beyond food. Thus, although conscious
consumerism may indeed emphasize individual empowerment and responsibility, it can also sometimes do so without dissolving a person’s belief in structural accountability.

On a different note regarding the structural concerns cited here, I think it is unsurprising that the interviewees made the specific comments they did, as these results are consistent with my analysis in RQ1, in which several people explained that non-urban places would offer less economic opportunity. Between both this section and section A, the interviewees have clearly articulated a perception that jobs are concentrated in urban areas, and, consequently, it seems that most people will be compelled to live in major cities until that reality changes. Of course, as already demonstrated several times, this perception is aligned with the work of Castells (2010b) and Sassen (2005), among others.

As a final comment here, I would like to acknowledge that, despite the magnitude of the structural changes that would be required to allow people to live in smaller-scale, sustainable communities—including the newly-acknowledged challenge of addressing economic inequalities—the interviewees were nonetheless willing to discuss the possibilities with me, and, in some cases, they even seemed to enjoy imagining how this “less-urban future” might be achieved. Lauren, for example, talked in fairly robust detail about how businesses might be convinced to invest in smaller areas:

Lauren: I feel like, in real estate and commercial real estate, there have been some really interesting trends recently with like [putting businesses in] the smaller cities...because, like, people don't want to live in the city anymore because it's too expensive, but the businesses have to do it first. When the businesses—actually, it's kind of a chicken and egg. Businesses have to realize they could get staffed with in that area, or to reverse it... If somebody spent a lot of money doing research on getting people to move to certain places, I would look for that... it's just really interesting to think about...

After recognizing that a widespread migration to small towns would necessitate extensive structural change, Lauren voluntarily rolls the idea around in her mind, and she considers the circumstances that must transpire for the idea to be feasible. I did not request that
Lauren engage in this exercise; she did this of her own volition. Admittedly, Lauren is an MBA student, and perhaps this is the kind of activity she enjoys, and perhaps this is why, as she says, “it’s just really interesting to think about.”

However, I call attention to this because the participatory attitude that Lauren displays here—this rather enthusiastic willingness to engage in what may seem like far-fetched, hypothetical reasoning—was shared by several other interviewees in response to this question, but it was markedly absent when I asked a similar question later in the interview. Indeed, when I asked for people’s reactions to the idea of traveling less often in order help the environment, I met with strong resistance, and even indignation. For example, in the succeeding conversation about reduced travel, Lauren reacted as follows:

**Lauren**: We’re not just going to, like, stop that. I mean, it's not realistic. It's taking a stand that everyone knows is not going to happen… it's just like, you can’t say that. *No one* is listening to you right now, no one is going to do that, and, if they do, it's going to be 20 people, and it's not going to make a difference. So, like, use your microphone instead to say more productive things…

It’s just… I’m very pragmatic… I do care about the issues, I think climate change is huge. At the same time, like, you have no pragmatic approach to this, you're just huffing about things in a way that makes other people not want to listen to you, because what you’re telling them is so absurd… Wow, I'm like waking up over here! [laughs]

In this situation, Lauren not only thinks that the idea is unrealistic, but she seems to feel it is not “productive” to even discuss it. She repeatedly articulates how “absurd” it would be to travel less, saying that “everyone knows it is not going to happen,” and that people should stop “huffing” about it. At the end, she seems amused at her rising fervor, even expressing some surprise at how much she’s “waking up” in response to this crazy idea.

As I said, this kind of reaction was much more common in the case of the travel question, as will be discussed in more detail below. However, as an initial comment, I would like to note that the lack of this “rejection” response in the small towns section is worth considering. To me, it seems possible that the interviewees were more willing to
entertain the “small town idea” because they could imagine it would bring about some benefit—other than environmental sustainability—either for themselves, for society, or both. I suggest this because, as I have shown on multiple occasions throughout this analysis, at least some of the interviewees were attracted to the idea of living in a small town, and they could imagine various benefits to leaving city life, including the recovery of “lost pleasures,” per Soper’s (2008) theory. By comparison, I do not believe that the participants felt there was anything (other than reduced carbon emissions) to be gained from not traveling, which perhaps is why they would not even engage in a hypothetical discussion of what seems to them like a dismal, backwards, “travel-less” future.

But, before moving ahead to the travel section, I would like to make a few more comments about the participants’ responses to the “small town idea,” since it was not the case that all of the respondents had structural concerns. Instead, there were several participants who cited sociocultural considerations as they explained why, even if the idea interested them in the abstract, it most likely wouldn’t work. In the end, these two participants ultimately felt that the “lifestyle” sacrifice would be too great for them, and probably for others. The next section will illustrate this in more detail.

2. Sociocultural Barriers

As I explained before, the study participants expressed some concern about the people who live in small towns, especially the life-long “locals,” who were in danger of being viewed as failures because they had no “proof” that they could “make it” in the wider world, nor that they had control of their space-related lifestyle choices. To this point, some participants suggested that voluntarily reaching the larger scales of spatial experience—urban, global—were synonymous, on a cultural level, with success. Even if the participants knew that this outlook might be unfair or oversimplified, some of them
were nonetheless concerned about being symbolically associated with small places, due to the possible negative impact on their social lives and/or their careers. Moreover, in addition to these more abstract concerns, some people simply felt that small towns would be too boring, and that the entertainment offerings would be too few or too homogenous, such that they’d lose out on myriad consumption experiences if they left an urban area.

In both cases, the participants were expressing some concerns about lifestyle sacrifices that they were not willing to make. And, as Table IV suggests, these lifestyle concerns continued to ring true for most of these same participants when I presented them with the possibility of living in a smaller-scale place for the purpose of encouraging environmental sustainability.

Indeed, as mentioned in section A, there were three individuals who found it particularly difficult to imagine being entertained in small towns, simply because they felt that the lack of eclectic consumption venues would leave them bored. One of these individuals was Bird, and, unsurprisingly, she at one point responded to the “small town argument” in the following manner:

**Bird:** Right. For my lifestyle. Even though you think about what your lifestyle is going to be in 30 years when your body can’t breathe and you’re [simulates coughing]. I get that already in Chicago…[But by moving to the small town], your whole lifestyle would change drastically. Because I’ve lived in both kinds of places. That is literally … That's not a misperception. Your lifestyle will change, and if that’s not a lifestyle that you want to live, then I’m not sure you’d sacrifice that for something that, even with all the scientific evidence, isn't immediately affecting your life.

Although Bird is not specifically talking about herself in this passage—instead, she is deploying the second-person “you”—she is nonetheless echoing the concerns that she cited earlier in terms of her own unwillingness to leave the city.

Similarly, the aspiring artist “Allie” had quite clearly articulated throughout her interview that she equated urban and global lifestyles with success, and that, to some
extent, presenting oneself publicly in this manner was important in order to be viewed as a success in the art community. Consequently, it is also unsurprising that Allie reacted in the following manner to the notion of living in a smaller place:

**Allie:** Like, I think you have to give people a reason to do that. Because…uh, people aren't going to choose the thing that's local over the thing that's, uh, more global, unless they have a good reason to.

**Nicole:** So, when you were say that people would probably choose the global stuff over local, like, I'm curious, what you mean, um, or what makes you say that?

**Allie:** Um, I think the global is more attractive. Because of, like, I think a lot of the things that I said a while ago about why I wanted to travel. And why I would rather be that type of person than like a local type of person, that's attractive to me because I—I—I—these are very, very revealing questions! (laughs). Global makes me feel more connected. Local makes me feel like I'm limiting myself.

**Nicole:** Limiting yourself how?

**Allie:** Um, because I'm not meeting the rest of the world where I know it's at. Like I can't, I can't deny that I live in a global world, and that, that is how you are successful.

Whether or not Allie likes it, she seems aware that she needs to “meet the rest of the world where it’s at,” in urban and more globalized spaces, because “that is how you are successful.” Because socioeconomic and cultural dynamics are set up to equate global experiences with success, Allie believes that the “global is more attractive,” and that she will be “limiting herself” if she decides to be “a local person.” Allie, it should be noted, is 23-years-old and living below the poverty line, so she is just “starting out” as an artist, and she feels quite strongly that she will not be able to succeed without making use of the social networking and professional exposure that is available to her in Chicago. For this reason, she elaborates on her frustration with the “small town argument” by saying:

**Allie:** People have all different, people come from all very different backgrounds and have various reasons for, like, living in the city, or, like, choosing the lifestyle that they have. And if you tell them that, based on one thing, they need to change the whole, like, organization of their life, no one's gonna, that would not have any impact.

Although Allie believes that the idea makes sense in the abstract, she doesn’t think people will do it, nor does she feel that they should be expected to, given that they will be
making significant lifestyle changes and disregarding their other personal goals, which are most likely unrelated to environmentalism. Ultimately, at this stage in her life, Allie feels that moving to a small town would be worth neither the career sacrifice she would have to make, nor the sacrifice to her social image.

To this point, one of the participants was quite adamant that people would only be receptive to the idea of engaging with smaller-scale communities if the local could be made “cool” and could therefore command people’s attention. He explains:

**Bob:** Well, one of my goals in my community is to make local politics cool, and explain why, like, this, this cool judge or progressive judge can effect change on a bigger level, kind of like how [President] Obama and [Senator] Bernie [Sanders] have used social media and branding to really build their brand, so that it’s like, cool to vote for them.

**Nicole:** Do you think making it cool is key?

**Bob:** Yeah. I think it has to be cool or else it won’t matter. People won’t care…Making it cool will get their attention, and then you can address some of the deeper and ethical issues once you have their attention, or their backing, or whatever.

In this passage, Bob explicitly states that people will not “care” about local politics—including local-level environmental sustainability—until “local”-scale ideas, people, and places make an effort to “really build their brands,” so that various forms of engagement with them become “cool.”

The implication here, of course, is that the local is not already cool, which is consistent with the perspectives revealed through the other interviewees’ accounts in the preceding sections. For many participants, notions of the “local” simply draw up images of boredom, homogeneity, narrow-mindedness, and possibly even failure. Indeed, as Jeff exemplifies with his outright rejection of the small-town argument, many participants held a strong belief in the apparent sociocultural desirability of larger-scale places:

**Jeff:** Any amount of gains that proposal makes would be wiped out by the increased time people spend driving back to the places they wanted to spend time. It feels like a plan that doesn't make sense. If people wanted to live in smaller towns, they would. If you
resettled them in smaller towns, they will attempt to come back to cities where everything interesting is happening. Clearly folks are drawn to, to central locations.

Although Jeff’s point completely fails to acknowledge the structural realities that might compel people to live in cities (or to prevent them from simply residing wherever they “want to”), his statement nonetheless reflects the belief, shared by several others in this study, that “everything interesting” is happening in cities.

In summary, in addition to the structural concerns cited by the study participants, there were also some sociocultural concerns expressed as well, in terms of the feasibility of building smaller-scale sustainable communities. Of course, as expressed in the literature review and other preceding sections, the cultural discourse that renders urban lifestyles desire and/or synonymous with success ultimately arises from certain societal and structural reconfigurations associated with globalization. Nonetheless, these discourses are perceived and recirculated by people, including several of the study participants, who take part in perpetuating cultural norms while being pressured by those same norms.

The analysis of this specific interview prompt is consistent with the analysis above, which demonstrated that my participants’ perceptions of urban and non-urban spaces were aligned with scholarship regarding both the structural and ideological changes that have accompanied the intensification of globalization. Consequently, as we consider locavores’ myriad reasons for engaging perhaps somewhat superficially with the larger eco-localist movement, my study thus far offers clear support for the idea that some locavores are interested in conscious consumption in part because this specific form of “activism” allows them to continue living in cities, which is not only important for their careers, but also for their social identity performances.
D. Reduced Travel as a Pathway to Sustainability

In this fourth and final analysis section, I will discuss the results of a second direct prompt that I posed to interviewees regarding possible solutions to environmental crises. In a similar format to the preceding topic, I introduced the participants to the possibility that reduced travel—especially by airplane—might improve environmental health. I then directly asked them to share their thoughts on this argument. As a part of the original question, I did not ask the participants to tell me specifically whether or not they, as individuals, would be willing to travel less, although some people volunteered that information. I encouraged the participants to answer freely, and I probed for additional explanations of their responses. This section offers a summary and brief analysis of the participants’ reactions, and it therefore provides analysis relevant to my fourth and final research question, which is repeated here:

RQ4: How do American, urban locavores respond to the idea of traveling less frequently—especially by plane—as a means to realize eco-localist ideals?

To begin, a summary of the participants’ reactions can be found in Table V and VI. As the tables suggest, it was often the case that people’s responses fell into more than one category.

I prompted interviewees with this specific question about travel for two reasons: First, given that there is a strong cultural discourse glamorizing mobility and cosmopolitanism, I was curious if the participants would express some acceptance of the prevailing narrative. Second, the literature on conscious consumerism has suggested that consumers often develop an empowered belief in their own, personalized ability/obligation to resolve systemic environmental issues through their purchasing behaviors, to the point where they de-emphasize structural solutions. In light of this, I wondered, (a) if the locavores in this study would indeed acknowledge and accept their “individualized” power to not take leisure vacations, and (b) if they would indeed de-emphasize systemic solutions.
### TABLE V: OPPONENTS’ REACTIONS TO THE IDEA THAT PEOPLE SHOULD TRAVEL LESS IN ORDER TO HELP THE ENVIRONMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I reject this idea: its logic is backward</td>
<td>We should not halt progress</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>“I guess it depends whether you believe that progress is inherently harmful to the environment…I’d rather not just curb the travel but encourage development so that travel isn’t as harmful…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This will just shift the problem</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>“Because if you're just, like, staying at home, you know, you’re still using fossil fuels.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I reject this idea: it is unrealistic</td>
<td>Globalization can’t be stopped</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>“It’s so unrealistic I’m almost having a hard time articulating it. People are more and more mobile these days…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It will prevent trade and slow growth</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>“Well, if you prevent travel, you prevent trade…[you] slow down growth.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This discourages international exchange</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>“Why on Earth would you take a world that has opened up in so many ways just to close it off again? I think a lot of good things come from international visits and people from different countries working together, whether it's competitions or companies or non-profit NGO's…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travel makes us better people</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>“It’s important to see other cultures, other perspectives, other life experiences. Things that are outside your comfort zone. Because if you only stay in your small town in rural, wherever America…[that] allows us to regress into nationalism or into ‘Me good, you bad.’…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People need travel to be eco-conscious</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“…They only care about where they’re at because they’re not going to see, I don't know, the ocean and see what happens to dolphins…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I deserve to enrich my life by traveling</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“That sounds like it's being said by someone who already has traveled…It seems pretty privileged, and kind of ignorant. [I would lose out on] experiences that would enrich me personally as a person and possibly change my work…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not traveling will impact my social life</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>“People would see that [not traveling] as I'm closed minded. Too local of a perspective to have, and I would lose a lot of respect…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More powerful actors should be accountable</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“[They should ask] people who have more of an influence on global industries, and, like, or just, like, whose decisions make more of a difference than mine. I can only do things on a small scale because I’m only one small person and I don’t have any like power…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This study included 10 total participants.*
### TABLE VI: SUPPORTERS’ REACTIONS TO THE IDEA THAT PEOPLE SHOULD TRAVEL LESS IN ORDER TO HELP THE ENVIRONMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I accept and agree with this idea, but it will be difficult to achieve because travel is ingrained in modern social structures</td>
<td>Travel is necessary elite careers</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“I went to a very WASP-y school in New England, and there were a lot of jet-setters who just work all over the country...It almost seems socializing and networking is more the business than anything else. How would you even do it?...Certain careers absolutely necessitate travel, and it would be career suicide not to travel.”</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Infrastructure and technology must come first</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>There’s just so much of, like if, if you took out, ripped out the old infrastructure, like, you're really kind of, ripped out the old thinking and said “Okay, let's promote, like, you know, rapid public transit routes everywhere, you know, like, um... so many things would need to be rethought...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I accept and agree with this idea, but it will be difficult to achieve because it will be met with strong resistance from people</td>
<td>Travel is a status symbol</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>“Among a certain class, [travel is] definitely a sign of status. Oh, I studied abroad in Belgium...It's, it's a charmed life. It's a charmed one. But asking them not to do that, they have the most ability not to do that. Like they can afford to do whatever they want here and um it would have the greatest, positive impact by not flying your entire family across the world. But people would be hesitant to do that because of that status...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People think travel is a right</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“It’ll be a tough one, to convince them not to. It’ll be like convincing people, like, it’ll be like trying to take away people’s guns, you know? They think it’s a right, when it’s actually a privilege. It’s a privilege to travel, and people don’t like having their privileges taken away, or even pointed out, really... So, that’s a tough sell. But it’s an interesting one. And I’m sure it’s factually sound.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travel is a reward for many people</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>“The folks I know who do more blue collar stuff never have to [travel for business]. So, then you get the flip side of, like, you worked all year, and now you're saying, ‘No, you can't take your vacation and do what you want to do with those 2 weeks of time you have been allotted.’ It's socially difficult to ask.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The effects are not tangible enough.</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Yeah, exactly, and that’s the tough thing with an environmental issue, too. You don’t exactly see the change. You don’t get to feel it. You don’t get like, you don’t get to feel it. Somebody doesn’t like send you a bottle full of fresh air or fresh water every time...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This study included 10 total participants.*
The results reveal that most of the locavores (70%) were adamantly opposed to the idea of reducing travel, and, in their strongly-articulated responses, they often pointed to systemic solutions rather than individual ones. More details on these two patterns are included in the below analysis.

1. **Strong Resistance**

   As shown earlier, most of the study participants responded quite favorably to the “small towns argument,” even if they felt there would be structural and/or cultural barriers to the successful realization of the idea. Indeed, they were willing to entertain a hypothetical conversation with me about the challenges facing the project of small-town migration, even if those challenges included complex and far-reaching structural implications that would be difficult to overcome.

   For this prompt regarding travel, I did not meet with similar reactions. In fact, the reactions were more negative, and only four of the participants were even remotely interested in discussing what it would take for the idea to succeed. As I suggested earlier, I suspect that the discrepancy between these two sets of responses stems from the possibility that the participants did not enjoy imagining a “reduced-travel future” in the same way that they enjoyed imagining a “less-urban future.” Because many of the interviewees had articulated myriad downsides to city life, as well as a somewhat idyllic image of small-town life, I believe that they were able to envision how the “small town argument” might offer some benefits to them, to society, or both. By “benefits,” I am referring to benefits that go beyond the environmental and sociopolitical improvements desired by eco-localism. Instead, I am referring to the various functional and hedonistic benefits that might accompany small-town life, including spending less time in traffic, deciding to start a new hobby, or gaining access to more affordable housing.
However, as will be shown below, most of the interviewees did not seem to believe that there were any benefits whatsoever—beyond the alleged environmental benefits—to the notion of reduced travel. Moreover, as Table V clearly shows, they seemed to feel that travel itself is an inherently good thing, mostly because the things it enables are inherently good, including cultural exchange, international cooperation, and human progress. In the absence of a good reason that travel should be reduced—other than environmental concerns, which are apparently not sufficient—many participants were not willing to engage in an enthusiastic, hypothetical discussion of “what it would take” to make it work, as they had been in the previous conversation. Instead, they forcefully asserted the absurdity of traveling less, either on the grounds that it was impossible, completely backwards, actively harmful, or some combination of these.

In the case of the “small towns argument,” the interviewees were, on some level, confronted with the idea of scaling back urbanization processes and restructuring socioeconomic systems to facilitate smaller-scale lifestyles. In the case of the travel argument, they were essentially being asked to scale back globalization. Both of these ideas, of course, would meet with formidable challenges. However, while the interviewees apparently believed that moving toward a “less-urbanized future” would be a worthwhile goal, their perceptions of the “less globalized future” were quite dismal.

Indeed, without travel, participants felt the world would probably “regress into nationalism” and experience a “backtrack of rights”:

Kaylee: That’s a bunch of hootenanny…It’s important to see other cultures, other perspectives, other life experiences. Things that are outside your comfort zone. Because if you only stay in your small town in rural, wherever America…[that] allows us to regress into nationalism or into ‘Me good, you bad.’…a backtrack of [human] rights almost.
Moreover, they felt there would be a lack of international cooperation, as if countries would stop “working together” in the capacity they do now:

Lauren: Why on Earth would you take a world that has opened up in so many ways just to close it off again? I think a lot of good things come from international visits and people from different countries working together, whether it's competitions or companies or non-profit NGO's…

Finally, they felt we would be needlessly halting “progress,” when we could instead continue progressing the way we are, but also encourage smarter progress:

Logan: I guess it depends whether you believe that progress is inherently harmful to the environment or not… Whereas, I'd rather not just curb the travel but encourage development so that travel isn’t as harmful. For example…Boeing developed a plane that's, like, made of carbon fiber.

Even if some of these ideas have merit, what interests me is their delivery and their stark contrast with the discussion of small-town life. In Kaylee’s response, for example, she is instantly dismissive, saying that this argument is “a bunch of hootenanny.” Similarly, Lauren’s response exasperatedly begins with the words “Why on Earth,” thus suggesting that she feels the idea is ridiculous. In the discussion of the small-town solution, both Lauren and Kaylee were willing to imagine possible ways to make it work—e.g., bringing small-town solutions into Chicago neighborhoods, or by sorting through the ways to make small towns attractive for business. I believe that Kaylee and Lauren—as well as the other interviewees—were willing to engage in that kind of reasoning because they felt there were benefits beyond environmental sustainability to achieving a less-urban future, but they simply could not imagine the benefits of a travel-less future.

Perhaps, per Soper’s (2008) theory, the less-urban future has hedonistic appeal, whereas the less-travel future does not. Although it is possible that the participants truly believed in the society-wide downsides of traveling less often, it also seems possible that the argument simply asks for too much personal sacrifice, with too little personal gain.
Interestingly, however, the arguments made thus far by the participants have all emphasized the perceived sacrifices that humanity or society would be forced to make if travel were reduced, but they make no mention of how specific individuals, such as the participants themselves, might be affected. Of the seven people who outright rejected this idea, six of them did so by pointing to the structural impossibilities of the idea, the backwards logic of its premise, the harms that would befall society, or some combination of these.

The remaining person—Allie—was the only respondent who reacted by highlighting the idea’s impact on her, specifically. She was also the only one of these seven participants to readily admit, without provocation, that not traveling would negatively impact her career, her self-image, and her personal enrichment, and to point out explicitly that the sacrifice was simply too great. All of these quotes are from her:

Allie: That sounds like it's being said by someone who already has traveled. How are you going to have that mindset unless you've like done the things that you like already wanted to do. It seems pretty privileged, and kind of ignorant. [I would lose out on] experiences that would enrich me personally as a person and possibly change my work…

Allie: People would see that [not traveling] as I'm closed minded. Too local of a perspective to have, and I would lose a lot of respect…[this could work if] it could be like a completely different world…Just make a whole new philosophy of success.

Allie: People who have money [should be the ones doing this]. And people who have more of an influence on global industries, and, like, or just, like, who's decisions make more of a difference than mine. I can only do things on a small scale because I'm only one small person, and I don't have any, like, power. Uh, there are a lot of people more powerful than me, and [environmentalists] should be talking to them…”

In each of these statements, Allie clearly emphasizes that she would individually suffer, in various ways, if she were forced to travel less. Unlike the other participants who rejected the idea of reduced travel, Allie does not suggest that the idea is impossible, nor that it is bad for society, nor that it is bad for progress—instead, she accepts the logic of the idea, but she nonetheless rejects it on the grounds that it is asking too much of her,
and that it should not be her responsibility in the first place. Indeed, in the final quote, Allie articulates that she is relatively powerless compared to “global industries” and “people who have money,” so she asserts that this argument should be directed “to them.”

As mentioned, the 70% of interviewees who rejected the travel idea were largely unwilling to talk about how the idea might be achieved. However, in addition to Allie’s points that both institutional/industry actors and “wealthy people” should take action, two of the “rejecters” stated that the only remotely reasonable idea would be to “make travel cleaner” (specifically, by building better planes). Consequently, there does not appear to be a striking emphasis on “individualized” or consumer-related solutions among these locavores, with the exception of Allie’s point that wealthy people should take action.

2. Social Status Impact

The topic of wealthy people brings me to my final analysis section regarding the glamorization of mobility as it relates to people’s willingness to stop traveling. To begin, it is important to note that, in the course of responding to the reduced travel argument, half of the interviewees (5/10) eventually mentioned that traveling less frequently would have an impact either on their social life, or on people’s social lives in general.

Two of these individuals simply suggested that, by not traveling, a person would be “left out” of a very common cultural experience, which would lead to some “awkward conversations.” The relevant excerpts, taken from separate interviews, are included here:

Kaylee: I think it would bring up a lot of conversations.... I think it would be like choosing to be a vegetarian where some situations are going to be way more awkward or difficult than others... Think about something like a destination wedding... Do you tell your friend, ‘I'm sorry I'm not going to be able to make it to your wedding because I'm not flying.'?

Anna: I think so [that it would affect my social life] because I think it's a big topic of conversation, to talk about traveling and where you've been and things like that, and other people's experiences of places, so I think not having that as a default conversation could be... Yeah, that would be sad. I'd feel left out, for sure.
Implicit in these responses is the idea that traveling frequently has become normalized. Anna, for example, suggests that talking about travel is a “big topic” and a “default conversation,” which clearly suggests that travel is commonplace. The same is true for Kaylee, who imagines that not traveling would “bring up a lot of conversations,” as if she would be continually confronted with the decision not to engage in leisure travel, almost with the same frequency that a vegetarian might confront the decision to eat meat.

Both Kaylee and Anna fall into the category of people who outright rejected the reduced travel argument, as described above. Although they cited impersonal reasons when asserting their initial rejection (i.e., Kaylee said travel teaches people about culture; and Anna said people won’t care about the environment if they don’t travel), both of these women clearly have some concerns that not traveling would negatively impact their own lives. Specifically, they worry about becoming socially uncomfortable because non-traveling behavior would be both socially unconventional and socially inconvenient.

In addition to the possibility that not traveling would be “abnormal,” however, it is also possible that it would be “uncool,” or that it would mean sacrificing the social status updates that accompany leisure vacations. Other than Allie, who said that not traveling would influence her social status, there were only two other people who stated that travel has a “coolness” or “status” factor. These two people fell within the 30% of participants who did not react to the travel argument with strong resistance, and who actually reacted favorably. Their comments about travel and status, are included below:

**Steve:** Among a certain class, [travel is] definitely a sign of status. ‘Oh, I studied abroad in Belgium…or, or spring break trip with the parents to Micronesia.’ I don't know. Some weird, crazy, places…It’s, it’s a charmed life. It’s a charmed one. But, asking them not to do that, they have the most ability not to do that. Like, they can afford to do whatever they want here, and, um, it would have the greatest, positive impact by not flying your entire family across the world. But people would be hesitant to do that because of status…
Bob: Well, there is a huge coolness factor in traveling, because they’re showcasing their privilege, right? So, to take that away would be really hard…

These comments explicitly address the idea that mobility has become glamorous in modern culture, at least among certain classes of people. As suspected by the scholars in the literature review, these kinds of mobility behaviors are associated with higher social status, and, the more “cosmopolitan” (i.e., international and elite) the behaviors are, the greater the status update will be (Cohen & Gossling, 2015; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006).

Statements like the ones made by Steve and Bob suggest that people will struggle to give up travel due to the perceived implications for their self-image. Their comments are supported by statements from Allie, Kaylee, and Anna, who all expressed some concern about not traveling, on the grounds that it would cost them some kind of cultural and/or social capital. When these observations are combined with the above analysis on the participants’ more general perceptions of mobility and immobility, there is strong evidence to support my original suggestion that at least some urban locavores are willing to “eat locally” (i.e., to engage in conscious consumerism) not only for the myriad reasons suggested by the literature review, but also because “eating locally” allows them to remain mobile. Moreover, the fact that most of the urban locavores in this study so vehemently rejected an opportunity to exercise their individualized, “citizen-consumer” power by traveling less frequently, provides additional evidence that they, as well as other locavores, have apparently internalized a belief in mobility’s necessity and normalcy in everyday life. Consequently, at least some locavores in this study have demonstrated that a desire/need to be and/or to appear mobile deters them from deep engagement in certain aspects of eco-localism, including the notion of being “rooted” to a place (and, implicitly, of traveling less frequently).
V. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated urban locavores’ perceptions of urban vs. non-urban lifestyles, as well as more “rooted” and more “mobile” lifestyles, at a time when globalization processes have contributed to structural and ideological changes that compel people toward mobility and cosmopolitanism. The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to investigate my hypothesis that, in addition to the other known factors contributing to the popularity of “conscious consumerism,” it may be the case that “eating locally” is a particularly attractive form of eco-local activism because it does not interfere the more mobile and/or urban lifestyle choices that have become increasingly necessary and desirable amidst globalization.

Indeed, as the literature review explained, globalization processes have given rise to structural and ideological forces that compel people toward more cosmopolitan and mobile lifestyles. As Sassen (2005) shows, for example, it is now the case that the key socioeconomic activities of modern society are concentrated in “global cities” where, among other things, the “corporate services complex” can be found, supplying many jobs. Castells (2010b) reinforces this point by asserting that major cities have become the playground of the most powerful and “elite” citizens who work for majors corporations, and who direct what he calls the “information society,” or a new socioeconomic reality in which information production and knowledge exchange have become the primary forms of social, economic, cultural, and political activity.

As Castells further argues, the “information society” was born from a technological revolution characterized by the emergence of rapid transportation (e.g., air travel) and communication technologies (e.g., the Internet) which have rapidly connected a “network” of key places across the globe (“global cities”), thus facilitating an unprecedented exchange of goods, services, people, ideas, money, and information across huge expanses of space. Not only
have these developments resulted in significant global-scale interconnectivity, but they have also transformed our very perceptions of space and time, such that some aspects of human social life are now “disembedded” from physical-spatial restraints (Giddens, 1991). As human activity becomes increasingly liberated from spatial confines, and as more and more activity seamlessly “flows” about the globe (Appadurai, 1996), it is also the case that people have become more mobile than ever before (Sheller & Urry, 2006).

As these massive changes restructure social life, the power of the nation-state is waning, and a global, capitalist order is emerging to direct most of human life (Castells, 2010b; Sassen, 2005). In advanced capitalist societies such as the United States, everyday people are thus compelled by the structural shifts outlined above to chase socioeconomic opportunity into the “global cities,” thereby emptying the more rural countryside, where, for example, manufacturing and agricultural jobs are in decline (Castells, 2010b).

Furthermore, everyday people are continually exposed to ideological discourses that have emerged to support the new global order by “mythologizing” (Barthes, 1972) its most central, self-sustaining functions, including urbanism, consumerism, and mobility. Indeed, as scholars have shown, popular rhetoric in the media and elsewhere has begun to “glamorize” and “normalize” mobility and cosmopolitanism, such that eclectic global consumption experiences have become commonplace or “banal” (Beck, 2003), and travel experiences now appear incredibly luxurious, desirable, and enviable (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006). Ultimately, a highly-celebrated social identity becomes that of a person who is “young, urban, highly mobile, and open to constantly explore new places” (Cohen & Gossling, 2015, p. 7).

Clearly, the structural and ideological forces associated with globalization are compelling people—along economic and sociocultural lines—to be and/or appear urban and mobile. The
structural realities of modern life suggest that, by living in a “global city,” a person is more likely to obtain a job and to achieve higher socioeconomic status. Similarly, the cultural forces of modern life would lead people to believe that by “standing still” in a non-urban area, they will become “uncool.” Consequently, people are compelled to cultivate a more desirable social image by demonstrating an interest in other places (by moving), and by not being a “townie.”

As urban and mobile lifestyles become increasingly necessary and culturally desirable in wealthy nations such as the United States, it is important to recall that some thread of the eco-localist environmentalist movement have argued that people opt for quite a different lifestyle—specifically, one that is more “rooted” and smaller in scale. Eco-localism has called for the “relocalization” of human activity as a means to combat the myriad ills of globalization, including environmental devastation (Curtis, 2003; Heise, 2008). As eco-localism asserts the importance of smaller, more rooted lifestyle choices, a specific aspect of their practice—the “local food movement”—has become especially popular. Indeed, as evidenced by the popularity of Michael Pollan’s work, the idea and practice of “locavorism” (consciously consuming locally-sourced foods) has gained much traction, although other aspects of eco-localism have not be so successful (DeLind, 2011; Guthman, 2007; Johnston & Szabo, 2011; Pollan, 2006).

In order to understand this, some scholars have pointed to the reality that “conscious consumerism,” in general, takes a hyper-individualized approach to addressing environmental issues, and that it consequently aligns itself with the individualizing tenets of neoliberalization that support global capitalism. Indeed, by suggesting that consumers should take responsibility for widespread environmental problems that are, in fact, caused by global capitalism, the practice of conscious consumerism has been said to deflect blame from institutions and to discourage people from pursuing structural change (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Guthman, 2007).
Furthermore, some scholars have shown how corporate food producers can leverage conscious consumerist behaviors in a savvy market segmentation move, ultimately using “green” branding to sell more products to eco-conscious consumers who may not be aware that product labels such as “organic” or “local” are insufficiently regulated, with producers meeting only minimal standards (Guthman, 2004). In moves such as this, corporations are able to “co-opt” conscious consumer behavior in a manner that both reinforces and further popularizes their behavior by “fetishizing” green products, such as local foods. Finally, some scholars have reminded us that individuals are not simply being “duped” by corporations, but that they also have their own, personal reasons for making their purchasing decisions, such as, for example, the freshness and better flavor of local produce (Johnston & Szabo, 2011; Johnston, 2008).

Alongside these analyses addressing the popularity of conscious consumerist practices such as locavorism, I have suggested that people may also be interested in locavorism (over other forms of activism) because eating locally allows them to continue pursuing the more urban and mobile lifestyles that, as mentioned above, globalization processes have rendered necessary and desirable. In order to investigate this possibility, I focused on a population of individuals who were likely to have experienced some tension between the draw of eco-localist participation and the allure of more urban and/or mobile lifestyles. Specifically, this study qualitatively investigated the thoughts and feelings of urban locavores in Chicago, in order to begin exploring how their views on urban/non-urban and mobile/less-mobile lifestyles may influence their willingness to become more “rooted” and less mobile, as some eco-localists might suggest.

Regarding the participants’ perceptions of urban vs. non-urban lifestyles, I found strong support for the idea that urban lifestyles appear more functionally attractive than non-urban lifestyles, in the sense that urban areas offer greater socioeconomic opportunity than non-urban
areas. Indeed, the participants clearly expressed that urban areas would offer significantly more
and/or higher-quality jobs than non-urban areas—a finding that is consistent with Castells’s
(2010b) and Sassen’s (2005) observations about the information society and global cities.

Although many participants were able to imagine that they could be happy living in a
smaller place, they repeatedly emphasized the fact that structural changes—in the form of job
creation and infrastructure development—would need to precede their migration from urban to
non-urban areas. This result highlights the well-known fact that systemic change is vital to the
success of eco-activists’ goals. However, it also suggests that although “conscious consumers”
such as locavores are indeed engaged in a highly-individualized form of activism, they are not
necessarily unaware of the structural realities that impact and direct their lives—indeed, they are
not necessarily “duped” into accepting full responsibility for solving global ills.

However, locavores may nonetheless be confused as to how institutions might be
compelled to change, or they may even be overwhelmed at the idea of challenging the status quo.
As one of study participant said, these issues are often “too big” for individuals to address, and,
as another said, “[she] can’t think about it too much, or [she] get[s] really upset and angry,
because [she has] no power.” In the absence of clear pathways to systemic change, the eco-
conscious individuals in this study seemed to feel that “doing their part” through locavorism was
a small and knowingly insufficient solution. Despite its apparent insufficiency, “eating locally”
was nonetheless an attractive practice as compared to the idea of retreating from an urban area,
which many participants felt would require too much socioeconomic sacrifice.

Furthermore, beyond the structural realities compelling individuals toward urban life, the
participants clearly expressed support for the idea that there would be sociocultural consequences
to opting for a non-urban lifestyle. Many participants in this study articulated an image of small-
town life as being boring, homogenous, or “backward” in myriad ways. For example, some participants painted an image of small towns as being full of narrow-minded, unmotivated people who all think and act alike, and who are generally uninterested in the wider world. The participants who expressed this view typically made an effort to symbolically disassociate themselves from the “type of people” who live in small towns by strongly emphasizing how much they “thrive” in urban areas, where the people are more interesting, diverse, cultured, and/or open-minded.

The participants’ desire to avoid associating with smaller-scale places lends support for my hypothesis that some people might prefer locavorism to other forms of eco-local activism due to their desire to maintain a more “urban” personal identity, which, as explained above, is more socially desirable. A concern about being seen as a “townie”—i.e., of being seen as someone who never bothered to venture out of their tiny hometown, or who didn’t “make it” in bigger places—seemed to be a serious concern for some of my participants. Indeed, one participant quite clearly asserted that she would prefer to be seen as a “global person” rather than a “local person” because she didn’t want to seem like a failure.

Finally, although the participants expressed some concerns about smaller-scale life, they did explain that city life had some downsides, including the fact that it is too crowded, too expensive, too fast-paced, and too stressful. Essentially, the participants were concerned that city life had robbed them of the space and time to engage in certain kinds of leisure activities and “simple pleasures,” such that many participants found themselves “buying back” those pleasures, in the form of simulated experiences or expensive leisure vacations. The idea that global capitalism has to some extent become unpleasurable is a key premise in Soper’s (2008) theory of “alternative hedonism,” in which she suggests that people are “waking up” to the ills of modern
global systems, and that they would likely be receptive to activist arguments which highlight the “pleasur es” that might be regained by moving toward alternative lifestyles, such as eco-localism. Although my study did not intend to investigate the merits of Soper’s claim, my results find unexpected support for her theory, by suggesting that urban residents may indeed be jaded with the various stresses of urban life.

Still, despite lamenting certain “lost pleasures,” there were some individuals in this study who remained adamantly that non-urban life would leave them thoroughly bored, since there would be “nothing to do” outside the city. This sentiment was expressed most clearly by people who strongly associated “entertainment” with novel and eclectic consumption experiences, rather than with other types of activity, including hobbies, community organizing, and outdoor recreation. For individuals who felt that they would be completely under-stimulated in the absence of a diverse array of consumption venues—restaurants, music venues, theaters, etc.—the notion of small-town life was particularly repellant. For these people, who seemed particularly uninterested in disrupting their current urban and highly consumerist lifestyles, it certainly seems possible that “eating locally” presents them with a form of “activism” that aligns well with their lifestyle preferences, which may partially account for the popularity of the practice among this crowd, as compared to other forms of activism.

Beyond the idea that urban lifestyle preferences may draw some locavores away from deep engagement in eco-localism, I have also suggested that mobility aspirations could present another axis of dissonance between some locavores and the broader eco-localist project. The results of my interviews offer clear support for this idea, as some participants strongly expressed not only that mobile lifestyles are indeed “glamorous,” but, further, that they would prefer not to symbolically associate themselves with any kind of spatial “restraints.” Indeed, in a similar vein
to their descriptions of small towns, many participants described more “immobile” people and more “rooted” lifestyles in a rather negative light, as if people who “stand still” have somehow failed, or are somehow less interesting than more mobile people.

The strong association of mobility with success and “coolness” offers clear evidence of the claim that a “glamorization” of mobility is occurring (Cohen & Gossling, 2015; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006) and that cosmopolitanism is becoming normalized, at least to some extent (Beck, 2003). Furthermore, there was a clear trend among about 50% of the study participants to associate higher status with more mobile people, which was accompanied by an interest in posturing oneself as more demonstrably “mobile,” in order to obtain a more desirable social identity. Indeed, during the interviews, several participants made a clear attempt to distinguish between themselves and the less mobile people they knew, who were described as more comfortable with routine and generally less open-minded, ambitious, successful, or interesting.

Consequently, my data suggests that there could be many urban, self-described “locavores” who, like my participants, may be somewhat interested in supporting eco-localism through consumption, but who will be thoroughly unreceptive to any eco-localist messaging that celebrates place-embeddedness, due to their desire to avoid space-based identity markers, and to instead appear as “mobile” as possible. Indeed, individuals who prefer a mobile social identity seem unlikely to support or participate in activist efforts that require them to become “rooted.”

To this point, when I directly presented the participants with the possibility of traveling less frequently as a means to realize eco-localism’s goals, the idea met with strong resistance. In my opinion, the participants seemed to have trouble imagining that reduced travel could provide any personal or societal benefits beyond improved environmental health, and they consequently emphasized the absurdity of the idea, its apparent impracticality, and the myriad ills that would
befall society if travel were reduced. While their points may have had some merit, I found their strong distaste for this argument particularly intriguing, especially as it compared to their more positive reaction to the notion of moving to small towns. Despite the fact that slowing a strong urbanization trend would also be difficult, impractical, even unrealistic, the study participants were much more receptive to this idea, and they were even willing to engage in a hypothetical discussion as to how it might be accomplished. Because the study participants had previously lamented certain downsides to city life, it seems logical that they would enjoy imagining a version of reality in which they did not live in a city. However, an equally pleasurable image of a “travel-less future” did not seem to exist for them, and, consequently, the notion of reduced travel was strongly rejected.

In summary, the results of this study have shown that urban locavores’ perceptions of urban/non-urban and mobile/immobile lifestyles offer reason to believe that at least some locavores are strongly drawn toward urban and mobile lifestyles for both structural and ideological reasons. This finding offers support for my suggestion that some urban locavores will be attracted to locavorism over other forms of eco-local activism because eating locally does not inhibit their ability to live the urban and mobile lifestyles that are required for economic advancement, and/or which are important to them for identity reasons. Furthermore, when directly confronted with the notion of going beyond “eating locally”—for example, by moving to a smaller place or becoming more “rooted” in a single place—several of the study participants reacted quite poorly, citing both structural and individual reasons that such activities would be undesirable. This result further supports the idea that the smaller-scale and more “rooted” lifestyles associated with certain threads of the broader eco-localist project will be undesirable to certain locavores, in a way that locavorism is not.
A. **Limitations**

Having thus summarized my study and its findings, I would like to make a few notes about the study’s limitations, followed by possible directions for future research.

First of all, Chicago is notoriously one of the most segregated cities in America, and an exploration of the impact of that segregation on the participants’ experiences is not addressed in this study. Although some indications of this divide did begin to emerge in the interviews, the data appeared solely through the study’s single participant who was residing in the south side of Chicago, and who grew up in a less affluent area of Queens, in New York City. This individual was the only interviewee to point out that certain areas in both Chicago and New York are "cut off" from the "pop culture image" of "cool urban life." As he said, "people don't go on vacation to Queens.” From his perspective, many of Chicago’s apparent benefits—including eclectic entertainment experiences and access to socioeconomic opportunity—did not apply to the city’s less affluent and primarily non-white south side, which he described as "cut off" and "forgotten."

This interviewee was also the only person, other than one other individual who volunteered at an anti-gun-violence organization, who explicitly mentioned urban violence by referring to gun shots at a nearby park. Furthermore, this man was the only person to say that, although he would like a backyard, he considered access to green space to be a privilege, and that many less affluent urban residents never get to experience "nature" at all, and often don't even know what they are missing. I imagine that similar sentiments would have been expressed by additional interviewees, had this study included more participants who were either non-white, less affluent, and/or residents of the south side of Chicago. However, given the absence of sufficient data addressing the issues mentioned above, and given the my limited time and resources, I determined that full engagement with these topics should fall outside the scope of this project, and would instead constitute a fruitful avenue of inquiry in a future study.
B. Future Directions

In addition to conducting a more thorough investigation of the impact of racial, economic, and geographical differences on Chicago-based locavores’ perceptions of urban life and mobility, there are other possible directions that future research might take.

To begin outlining future directions, it is important to note that this study was an exploratory exercise that broadly addressed participants’ thoughts and feelings on a variety of lived experiences. Because it was exploratory, it has painted in rather broad strokes in terms of articulating urban locavores’ perspectives on urban vs. non-urban life, as well as mobility vs. immobility. Although the analysis articulated above has provided some insights regarding urban locavores’ preferences for urban and mobile lifestyles, these findings could be supplemented with a more pointed analysis of specific topics.

An example of one such topic would be to more thoroughly investigate the participants’ lamentations of “lost pleasures,” as it relates to the theory of alternative hedonism articulated by Soper (2008). This finding is ripe for further exploration into how eco-local activists might “reframe” their messaging to emphasize the pleasures associated with smaller-scale, less urban lifestyles, as opposed to the urban, consumerist experiences associated with global capitalism.

Furthermore, the results of this study have pointed to the emergence (or intensification) of a cultural ideology that strongly links success, freedom, and independence to a person’s demonstrated ability to “conquer space,” perhaps by working a telecommuting job, or by having “proven oneself” capable of functioning in any tier of spatial experience through the acquisition of “cosmopolitan” status markers. Some participants felt strongly that being in any way “anchored” to a physical place—for example, by working a civil service job or by having children—would be thoroughly undesirable and may even be synonymous with failure. Indeed, for some participants, there was a noticeable fear that by “standing still,” or by becoming
somehow “rooted” in a place (especially a smaller place), they would be negatively perceived by their peers as someone who simply couldn’t “make it” in the wider world. And, importantly, this perception was not limited, as might be expected, to the younger participants in my study, nor was it clearly linked to any specific demographics, such as gender or economic status.

The fact that this ideology so visibly emerged among my small group of interviewees suggests that it may be more widely apparent in broader social circles, and it raises some concerns about the future, for example, of social service, and of the careful “stewardship” of natural environments and communities. If “success” becomes increasingly synonymous with one’s demonstrated ability to rid oneself of physical-spatial “restraints,” how might that reality impact a person’s willingness to participate in the myriad social processes that require at least some people to be physically embedded? For example, does a cultural distaste for “spatial rootedness” affect individuals’ willingness to become farmers, or teachers, or to participate in local politics? Does it influence the psychological health of individuals who do not have the means to become mobile, and who find themselves in a position to be seen as rooted “townies”? Do individuals in non-urban areas share a similarly negative perception of immobility, or is their definition of “success” less noticeably influenced to mobility considerations? Questions such as these provide a fruitful starting point for additional research projects going forward.

Finally, because this was a qualitative study, the results of this study cannot be generalized. Consequently, the insights gleaned from this investigation would be well-supplemented by a more quantitative analysis that, for example, deploys a series of surveys aimed at addressing similar considerations with a much wider sample, and from which generalized conclusions can be drawn.
APPENDIX A

This appendix includes an overview of the types of questions I asked during the interview process. The instrument below addresses my research questions regarding people’s experiences of “local” lifestyles within a sociocultural context that renders mobile, cosmopolitan lifestyles increasingly desirable, and which seems at odds with certain goals American environmentalism. As explained in the methods section of this study, the interview questions have been designed in accordance with Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) guidelines for qualitative interview protocols, as well as Patton’s (1990) suggestions for creating useful “probes” that will elicit richer detail without leading or restricting the interviewees’ responses. Furthermore, the interviewees were recruited to participate due to their self-reported interest in consuming local foods. Consequently, this interview begins by assuming that the participant is a “locavore,” or a person who intentionally purchases and eats local food products.

Understanding of—and relationship to—the “local”: These questions focused on participants’ personal understandings of the “local,” including their perspectives of local food, their relationships with their current places of residence, and their thoughts on how issues of scale affect their experiences.

1. Please tell me how you became interested in local food.
2. What does “eating local” mean to you?
3. What can you tell me about your reasons for eating local foods?
4. Please describe the place where you currently live.
   a. What kinds of things do you do there?
   i. Are there things you feel you can’t do there?
   b. (If not mentioned) Please describe the natural environment where you live.
   c. (If not mentioned) How long have you lived there?
5. Would you say that you feel “connected” to the place where you live?
   a. (If so) Please describe how you feel connected to it.
   b. (If not) Why do you think you don’t feel connected to it?
   c. Are there other places to which you feel connected?
   i. (If so) Please describe those places and how you feel connected to them.
6. Do you think you would be interested in living in a smaller community or small place?
   a. (If so) What appeals to you about this idea?
   i. (If speaking about what “could be”) Why don’t you do this already?
   b. (If not) What do you think makes you uninterested in this idea?
7. Please describe what you think it means to “participate in local life.”
   a. Would you say that you participate in local life?
   i. (If so) Please describe how you participate in local life.
      1. Do you participate in “non-local” life?
         i. (If not) Please explain why you think you don’t participate.
         1. Do you participate in “non-local” life?

Perspectives on mobility and cosmopolitanism: These questions focused on participants’ perceptions of physical mobility and cosmopolitan lifestyles.

1. Imagine a person who travels frequently. Please describe that person to me.
2. Imagine a person who does not travel frequently. Please describe that person to me.
3. Which of the following lifestyles sounds more appealing to you: (a) A more “rooted” lifestyle where you live long-term in one place, (b) A more “mobile” lifestyle where you live for shorter periods of time in different places?
   a. Please tell me more about your decision.
4. Please tell me about your experiences traveling.
5. What does traveling mean to you?

Thoughts on environmentalism and the natural world: These questions focused on participants’ personal perspectives on the non-human natural world, including their identification with the environmentalist movement, their awareness of local environmental issues, and their reactions to eco-localist arguments.
1. What does the word “environment” mean to you?
2. Are there any environmental issues about which you are concerned?
   a. (If so) Please discuss a few of the most important ones.
      i. What makes you interested in these issues?
   b. (If not) Have you heard about any environmental issues?
      i. (If so) Why do you think you’re not interested?
      ii. (If not) Why do you think you haven’t heard?
3. Imagine someone who is an environmentalist. Please describe that person to me.
4. Are you aware of any environmental issues affecting the place in which you live?
   a. (If so) Please describe these issues.
      i. Are you involved in any activities to resolve these issues?
         1. (If so) What are you doing?
         2. (If not) Why do you think that is?
   b. (If not) Why do you think that is?
5. Some people have argued that we should become more involved in small-scale, local communities in order to resolve environmental threats. What do you think of this argument?
   a. (If not already addressed) Do you think that people who make this argument will succeed in convincing people to live and become involved in smaller places?
      i. Why or why not?
         1. (If not) What do you think would have to change for the argument to succeed?
6. Some people have argued that traveling—especially by plane—can be environmentally destructive, and that we could significantly help the environment by being less mobile. What do you think of this argument?
   a. (If not already addressed) Do you think that people who make this argument will succeed in convincing people to travel less?
      i. Why or why not?
         1. (If not) What would have to change for the argument to succeed?

Demographics:
1. Age
2. Gender
3. Race/Ethnicity
4. Socioeconomic status
5. Education level
6. Occupation
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