Recreational Hunting in Wellington County, Ontario: Identity, Land Use, and Conflict

by

Christine Porterfield

A Thesis
presented to
The University of Guelph

In partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
Public Issues Anthropology

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

© Christine Porterfield, March, 2013
ABSTRACT

RECREATIONAL HUNTING IN WELLINGTON COUNTY, ONTARIO: IDENTITY, LAND USE, AND CONFLICT

Christine Porterfield
University of Guelph, 2013

Advisor: Professor Satsuki Kawano

This thesis provides an ethnographic examination of the contribution of recreational hunting in developing a sense of rural identity among hunters in Wellington County, Ontario. Throughout Summer and Autumn 2012, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted with recreational hunters and their peers, with a total of 17 participants. Using the theoretical framework of anthropology of space and place, this thesis suggests that hunting functions to connect rural residents to a sense of identity in Wellington County, particularly in the context of landscape changes associated with rural gentrification. Hunting provides a means of control over hunters’ experience as rural people, while also providing a mechanism for establishing attachment to place through mastery and sensory experience. The results of this study indicate that hunting provides a reference point for establishing an identity in alignment with what participants recognized as rural values, and in opposition to what participants identified as urban characteristics.
DEDICATION

To my grandparents: Annie & Gordon Leslie, and Donald & Margaret Porterfield.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a great debt to the men and women of Wellington County I interviewed for this project. The generosity with which you shared your knowledge and your time made this project successful, useful, and interesting. Speaking with each and every one of you was a true pleasure, and I will not forget your hospitality and kindness.

I am tremendously grateful for the support extended to me by members of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. I wish to thank my advisor, Dr. Satsuki Kawano, for her guidance, patience, and academic support throughout this process. Any student would be fortunate to have you as a mentor, and I will always be grateful for your encouragement. I am sincerely thankful for the input of Dr. Jeji Varghese, my committee member. Your detailed insight and revisions throughout this process helped create a well-rounded project. I would like to thank Dr. Belinda Leach for providing her knowledge and feedback as the external examiner for this thesis. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Shelagh Daly for her joyful and compassionate presence in the Department, and my PIA colleagues for their inspiration and solidarity.

I have been lucky to have had the support of my family and friends during the completion of this thesis. Thank you, Greg, for your endless reassurance and kindness during long days and late nights. Thank you to my brother, Patrick, for your encouragement. Thank you to my father, Craig, for your confidence in me (and for patching my laptop back together when it seemed like a goner). Thank you to my mother, Sharon, for allowing me to express both frustration at my setbacks and joy at my victories, and for making sure that I didn’t go too long without a break. I love you all, and I couldn’t have done this without you.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Some of my earliest memories as a child growing up just outside of Rockwood, Ontario, are of warnings from my mother to stay out of the woods during the autumn months. I remember seeing pickup trucks and ATVs pulled off to the side of the road that intersects the bush behind my childhood home, hearing shots ring out in the early morning, and, on occasion, picking up a spent casing during a summer hike. In this ephemeral but nonetheless memorable way, the activities of hunters in Wellington County have always floated along the periphery of my consciousness as a rural person. The motivation for this project originated in this place of transition: of me, seeking to understand and broker a relationship between an identity that I know intimately (that of a non-hunter in Wellington County) and one which I have experienced only through heeded warnings, hardware store camouflage gear displays, and, on occasion, men in their “hunter orange” sharing stories at Tim Hortons.

This project sought to explore the social and cultural identity of people who hunt for recreation in Wellington County, Ontario, in the context of changes associates with rural gentrification. In this thesis I argue that hunting functions to connect rural residents to a sense of identity in Wellington County. Hunting provides a means of control over hunters’ experience as rural people, while also providing a mechanism for establishing attachment to place through mastery and sensory experience. Although hunting is not considered by participating hunters to be an essential element of rural life, hunting does offer a means of immersion in rural space that few other activities could offer. Hunters did not equate hunting with being rural; rather, their rurality strengthened the depth of their identity as hunters. The hunters interviewed in this study are all
recreational hunters, meaning that they do not participate in hunting for subsistence, but rather as a hobby. Furthermore, “sport hunting” and “trophy hunting” are alternative terms that have been used in literature on hunting (for instance, Wenzel 2001); however, both terms convey imagery that would be dishonest to the activities of the hunters who were interviewed here. None of the hunters were concerned with killing a “trophy” animal, and they did not refer to their hobby as “sport”. The symbolic distinction between these three terms is significant and meaningful to hunters, thus, I was careful not to conflate the terms in this study. Seventeen participants, through in-person semi-structured interviews, offered their experiences, knowledge, and perspectives of what it means to hunt in rural Wellington in the context of rural gentrification. Rural gentrification is the application of processes associated with urban gentrification (immigration, social displacement of lower-socioeconomic status groups by higher socioeconomic groups, and landscape change) to rural communities (Phillips 2008). Through this project, I have employed hunting as an indicator to examine how people residing in and hunting in Wellington County are affected by changes associated with rural gentrification: how the changing landscape, both physical and demographic, shapes their sense of security as inhabitants of rural space. By examining changes to social structures and land access, this research contributes to a better understanding of how processes of urbanization and rural gentrification modify rural activities, and, in turn, affect rurality as a part of one’s identity. Wellington County, by definition, is a rural area: just over 50% of Wellington residents live in a rural situation, classified by the Government of Ontario as a community with fewer than 10 000 residents no closer than 80 km to a population centre of 50 000 or more. (Reichert 5: 2011). However, in the context of this study, being “rural” or coming from a “rural” area can best be understood by referencing the symbolic,
physical, and cultural associations that define non-urban areas: what can be thought of as “the countryside” (Creed and Ching 1997: 1).

The theoretical framework of the anthropology of space and place is used to inform this project. The anthropology of space and place provides a mechanism for understanding how people experience the space they inhabit, while generating a sense of identity associated with place through building knowledge, memories, and experiences within a locale. This approach was chosen because of the clarity it offers in revealing power structures, social dynamics, and cultural negotiation through use of and relationships to place. Anthropology of space and place in this project has allowed me to construct a revealing picture of inhabitants’ understanding of their existence as hunters within social and cultural contexts that are in flux. Throughout interviews, I asked participants to reveal personal and salient points surrounding their experiences with land access in Wellington County, through the context of change and limitations: how do hunters feel and what changes to their hunting activities do they need to make when new community members move in? Are hunters in Wellington County affected by rural gentrification and changing rural demographics, and how? Additionally, I asked hunters to examine their own feelings associated with hunting, through the lens of their experience as rural people: in what ways is the identity of a hunter significant? How is it intrinsic to a rural identity, if at all?

Ultimately, these interviews provided some insight into the research questions at the root of this project, which asked:

1. How do residents of rural communities who hunt perceive and experience changes in the social structure of their community when new community members from urban areas move in?
2. How do people who hunt perceive their activities as contributing to a unique identity as rural persons? How have processes of rural gentrification affected this identity?

Participant descriptions of their experiences are presented in four main themes that illustrate the significance of their hunting practices in maintaining a sense of rurality. These themes are directly tied to the availability of land access in rural areas. The first theme, mastery (used here to refer to the sense of accomplishment associated with becoming exceptionally proficient with a skill or task (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2013), was a primary mechanism through which participants asserted superior hunting expertise and control. Through firearm use, a thorough understanding of the law, and a superior knowledge of the natural landscape, a sense of mastery helps rural hunters differentiate their experiences from their urban counterparts. Following, the theme of sensory experience is crucial when examining the role of land access: hunters here described the absolute importance of consistent land access in producing a meaningful hunting experience. Again, this was described by rural hunters in opposition to urban hunters, who are generally seen as having a fragmented view of the natural world: for participants, the depth of experience while out in the bush is seen as very difficult, if not impossible, for urban hunters to achieve. The third theme that emerged was one of heritage and family history. For most participants, hunting was described as tied to the past, and family. Hunting was seen as connected to a sense of self-sufficiency\(^1\) and frontier dominance that participants viewed as intimately connected to the rural experience. The fourth theme briefly addressed the process of “becoming rural” through examining the experiences of formerly urban participants as they transitioned into their rural homes.

---

\(^1\) By “self-sufficiency”, I am referring to the ideology held by some participants that hunting allows them to participate in a lifestyle somewhat independent of modern society. It is relevant to note that these participants are not subsistence hunters: they do not need to hunt to survive; however, they appreciate the fact that they could if necessary because of their knowledge as hunters.
Contribution to Stakeholders

The public issue under consideration within this project encompasses factors limiting hunter access to land, and factors negatively affecting relationships between landowners and hunters in Wellington County. In a broader context, the state of intergroup relationships in the County speaks to the security of rurality and rural identity in the face of urban expansion and rural gentrification. Place, especially rural place, is a fundamental physical, social, and ideological nexus of negotiation between stakeholders. Place has the potential to be employed “by powerful groups to manipulate present and future actions” by serving as the venue through which economic, social, and political contests are prioritized (Masuda and Garvin 2008: 114). The greater the number of groups extracting physical, psychological, or symbolic resources from a locale, the greater the role negotiation must play. Limitations to access are also variable in accordance with who is the holder of land and power within a community, within a certain time (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 154). Access changes; thus qualitative studies of a group's experience with access can help determine not only the state of affairs in a region, but the direction in which policy and community relations must shift in order to accommodate change. The public issue of access and the symbolic limitations that align with property ownership has been approached by several disciplines, though infrequently among applied anthropologists. Although I would suggest that a direct implication for public policy adjustment affecting the rights of property owners wishing to prohibit or permit hunting is beyond the scope of this research, the public significance of this study for improved community relations in Wellington County is certain. As a candidate in the Public Issues Anthropology graduate program, this research was completed with applications to community relationships in Wellington County kept at the forefront. This project aims to contribute to a better understanding of hunter-landowner relations in the County by providing an academically rigorous qualitative account of hunters’ experiences.
As a lifelong resident of Wellington County myself, this study fell well within the bounds of the movement towards anthropology “at home” that is indicative of current trends in public anthropology (Lamphere 2004: 431). Furthermore, public anthropology draws from an extended range of engagement, from simply offering supportive relationships while participants tell their stories, to advocacy and activism (Low and Merry 2010: S207). The application of public anthropology is thus diverse, however, it is universally supported by “sincerity”, or the inner commitment to a study that replaces the search for authenticity typical of less engaged ethnography (Low and Merry 2010: S207). Although, as mentioned, I am not a hunter myself, my roots in the region run deep and my commitment to developing strong community relations through this research is sincere. This research holds immense potential for public application in three areas important to public anthropology, as identified by Lamphere (2004: 432):

1. **Collaboration:** The hunters I interviewed for this project were often motivated to make changes to the community in which they hunt. Two hunters I spoke with mentioned attending local council meetings to communicate their needs, while nearly all of the hunters indicated that they worked to improve community perceptions of hunters in Wellington County through communicating openly about their practices with neighbours. Thus, the collaborative contribution of my research is clear: the product of this study provides academic resources in support of the local knowledge possessed by hunters. This work contributes an academically credible body of work in collaboration with the efforts hunters are taking on their own to promote their practice and protect their access to hunting.

2. **Expanding outreach to the public:** Lamphere emphasises that “anthropologists are already engaged in communicating the results of their research through educational
programs, museum exhibits, and writing for accessible publications” (2004: 437).

Engaging with the community in order to disseminate study results in an accessible fashion is a critical element of public anthropology. Within the context of this study, several opportunities exist to draw attention to these findings within Wellington County. These include public announcements of the availability of this research in the Wellington Advertiser newspaper, and attending town meeting to summarize findings. The results of this study are important, and have legitimate potential to both instigate and contribute to community discourse on hunting.

3. Contributing to discussions on public policy: The County of Wellington has implemented a master plan in preparation for population growth over the next decade (The Corporation of the County of Wellington 2011). In this plan, the County outlines considerations for future growth, including maintaining the rural character of communities, and facilitating collaborative land use and stewardship. This project provides strong and very relevant insight to the character of a key stakeholder group in Wellington County, particularly in the context of these development goals.

Outline of Thesis

This thesis is divided into five main chapters. In Chapter 2, I offer a review of relevant literature, with a focus on how my research fulfills a unique niche in theoretical work in the anthropology of space and place, as well as ethnographic accounts of hunting. Chapter 3 provides a brief outline of the social, geographic and economic status of the field site, Wellington County. This chapter also explains the process of participant recruitment, the research design and methods, and provides a brief summary of the demographic makeup of participants. Fourteen of seventeen participants were men, with three women. All participants are residents of Wellington County.
Chapter 4 provides a summary and analysis of my research findings, following interview analysis. This chapter is organised by the four main themes that emerged in my analysis: Mastery, Sensory Experience, History and Heritage, and Becoming Rural. In Chapter 4, I outline how rural hunters assert their sense of rural identity in relation, or even opposition, to their urban peers. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes my research findings and also outlines the contribution this research makes to the field of Public Issues Anthropology. This chapter also offers some insight into where this research may be applied, limitations of these findings, and what potential areas could benefit from future study.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

For this project, a number of themes including community, identity in rural Canada, and recreational hunting will be addressed through the literature and examined in relation to rural identity and rural symbolism. Hunting is a practice deeply imbedded in sociological, historical, and environmental discourse. Although this project largely looks towards the practice of hunting in the context of identity and personal significance to the participants, it is necessary to explore several themes and academic spheres, including anthropology of space and place and anthropology of identity, in order to gain a sense of the practice’s complexity. Thus, the literature selected for this project suggests that an adequate background requires one to synthesise information from multiple disciplines including cultural anthropology, rural sociology, and rural planning.

Relevant literature to this project speaks to this diversity of disciplines: resources on hunting and identity will be consulted, as will works on rural gentrification, and works offering a theoretical background on the anthropology of space and place. The theoretical approach of the anthropology of space and place has been selected for this project because of the insight on identity it allows, as based on both concrete and symbolic orientations to place. Following a discussion of this chosen theoretical approach, I will turn to a more explicit discussion of recreational hunting, including literature on why one hunts, and who hunts. I will briefly explore literature on rurality, rural gentrification, and the ‘rural idyll’.
Anthropology of Space and Place in the Context of Rural Communities and Identity

Anthropological approaches to space and place are necessarily nuanced, a reflection of the complex nature of how humans are viewed in relation to objects, others, and ourselves. Studies of space and place in anthropology consider the reflexive relationship we have with the sites we live in, and the experiences associated with these sites. Rooted in theoretical discussions of structuralism and perception, literature addressing space and place spans essential struggles of power, identity, and negotiation of borders in a wide variety of communities. Space in terms of this project is understood as a “cultural variable” to which the “facts of social and personal existence” can be attached and interpreted (Kuper 1972: 411), while the anthropology of space and place can be understood as the study of the narrative existence that a locale holds once it is inhabited (Rodman 1992: 642). As a methodological tactic, the anthropology of space offers a multi-faceted approach to looking at community members’ relationships with the places they exist in, and can provide “a powerful tool for uncovering material and representational injustice and forms of social exclusion” through spatializing culture (Low 2009: 390-391). Low presents a number of categories through which “methodologies of space and place” can illuminate systems of exclusion in communities; most notably for this project, those systems which are made manifest through privatization of property, physical enclosure, and discursive strategies (2009: 391).

For the purpose of this project, it is place, less so than the “tabula rasa”, as Casey puts it (1996: 14), of space, I am concerned with: an examination of place allows insight into the cultural constructions and expectations associated with a locale. In the context of this research, discussions of rural relationships with place, and how these relationships contribute symbolically to defining a rural existence in opposition to urbanity, are particularly relevant. Rurality can
largely be understood through symbol and metaphor, often using material cultural markers as identifying features of the culture. The line between rural and urban is itself arbitrary and largely symbolic, particularly in areas “where town and country seem nearly indistinguishable” and inhabitants are left to generate a distinction “through extensive cultural discourse” (Creed and Ching 1997: 2). Thus, we become dependent on metaphor and symbolic markers to understand the cultural juxtaposition between urban and rural identities. In this way, the rural-urban interface offers a good starting point for discussions of space and place. The anthropology of space and place provides a framework for understanding how individuals who hunt develop an identity that is understood, in part, in relation to the land that they access. By employing qualitative research, “a moral relationship with the land” can be revealed and explored (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003: 17).

An additional theoretical issue that is relevant to this project is that of transitional spaces; thus, borders in the context of anthropology of space and place must be addressed. Within the social sciences, the commonly accepted perception of space is one of discontinuity; with regions and cultures based upon an “unproblematic division of space” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 6). When the continuity of space is disrupted (as with new limitations on land access) individuals’ understanding of their own culture is affected as well (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). By looking to hunters and their experiences in spaces formerly viewed as accessible, changes to hunting culture associated with legal and symbolic land regulation may be exposed. Wayne Fife (2010) has offered a starting point for the discussion of works considering hunting and place. Fife explores changes to rural communities in Western Newfoundland following the imposition of Gros Morne National Park borders upon land that had historically been used by community members for foraging and subsistence agriculture. Rural people in the region had developed “the standard
expectation […] for a free and relatively unlimited access for humans to roam and make use of nearby lands”, including for the use of moose hunting (Fife 2010: 258). When the federal government established park borders without community consultation, they shattered the cultural association rural Newfoundlander had developed with communal land by prohibiting moose hunting within park limits. Despite the booming moose population, park officials used the language of conservation and ecological integrity to dismiss assertions of the need to hunt moose.

The act of forbidding moose hunting in Gros Morne is a significant symbolic gesture aimed directly at rural Newfoundlander who had previously depended on administratively unregulated land for supplemental subsistence. Since it is ecologically unnecessary to protect moose (they are far from endangered in Newfoundland), these regulations are directly aimed at disrupting the political ecology of border communities (Fife 2010: 262). The border of the park, and the prohibiting of hunting within those bounds is an act of class antagonism against subsistence rural dwellers perpetrated by an urban elite - the tourists who visit the park, the government officials who enforce regulation, and the non-local ecologists who support limitations on the hunt under the auspices of conservation (Fife 2010: 266). Fife argues that the opposition to moose hunting was not based in sound ecological reasoning, but rather in the tourist-generating aesthetic of veneration that the park was seeking to promote. Thus, moose hunting offers a strong example of how the concerns of the urban elite (their desire to experience nature without exposure to death) are made a priority over the continuation of traditional practices of rural Newfoundlander.

Although Fife’s study is illuminating in its examination of hunting regulation in rural Newfoundland, it does not adequately address several subjects that are prioritized in this project. Since Fife, though examining internalized borders through anthropology of space and place,
focuses on the creation of “bureaucratized places” and subsequent implications for accessibility, discussion of place focus more so on material and regulatory limitations than symbolic (Fife 2010: 267). Furthermore, much of Fife’s discussion focused on the semi-subsistence activities of the hunters in his study. In doing so, it becomes more difficult to ascertain which elements of hunting are critical to identity, versus critical for survival. By eliminating the element of subsistence from discussion and exploring the motivations of recreational hunters only, the opportunity for discussing theoretical associations between hunting, identity, and place is opened. For instance, how can the needs of hunters be understood in the context of place access? How is place access necessary in maintaining hunters’ understanding of their own identity, and their association with rurality? Fife’s study, though illuminating, does not allow for questions of place-making and identity because of the focus he places on Newfoundland hunters’ need to maintain semi-subsistence activities.

**Shaping Place Through Experience: Embodiment, Sense of Place, and Rural Community**

As this is a project that solicited individual experiences in order to develop an understanding of group identity as connected to rural place, it is necessary to briefly examine literature within the social sciences on place as a meaningful component in constructing one’s identity. Most significant to this discussion are theoretical approaches to embodiment and embodied space, which I will discuss briefly below.

**Place and Identity**

Identity, in terms of this project, is defined as the factors that compel individuals into “social membership” groups based on practices and activities (Cohen 1994: 12). The social membership group considered is that of rural individuals who hunt. Although a number of studies touch on hunting in terms of factors of identity, most focus on the role of gender in relation to hunting.
Kalof et al. 2004 examines the assertion of masculinity through hunting via the sexualisation of women in the hunting narrative, while works such as Adams and Steen (1997) and Fitzgerald (2005) offer insight into the motivations of women who hunt. Alternatively, several authors have explored assertions of masculinity through sport hunting. Fine (2000) provides a historical account of deer hunting in Michigan as a powerful mechanism for acting masculinity among working-class white males, while Dunk (2002) has provided a nuanced examination of hunting as a “meaningful expression” of white male cultural identity in Ontario. This project veers away from both gender and class studies towards locating the connection between rural identity and hunting; asking to what extent is “being rural” integral to the social identity of the hunter, and how is the hunter’s identity impacted through changes in accessibility, both symbolic and concrete, to rural space?

The relevance of identity in relating to place as a tangible cultural object is intimately connected to the process of developing a sense of place. Sense of place is the semi-conscious assignment of cultural or mythological significance to a site; “a common place occurrence” which serves to both “appropriate” parts of the earth on behalf of a culture while engaging with one’s surroundings to foster familiarity (Basso 1996: 83). The process of defining a sense of place helps generate identity by “[connecting] our cultural values with physical places to determine their symbolic importance within our social identity and the world around us” (Wulfhorst et al. 2006: 168). Significant in its ordinariness, a sense of place recognizes the affinity of a community’s connection to a site insofar as it would recognize any part of “the way things are” (Basso 1996: 84). Sense of place is both profoundly significant in its grounding capabilities and ultimately mundane and rooted as a “simple fact of life” (Basso 1996: 84).
There is no great revelation associated with sense of place, and the particular social meaning assigned to a physical locale may not be apparent until the connection is threatened or forced into reevaluation. In a discussion on sites in West Virginia mining communities, Kathleen Stewart (1996) offers an ethnographic example of how sense of place exists in lived communities, and how community members’ sense of place is revealed by worsening economic circumstances. Through a poetic account informed by local narratives, Stewart describes the dynamic sense of place encountered by locals in post-industrial communities. She is describing a location that has undergone immense economic and social shifts over the past century, which have, in turn, embedded the local landscape with myriad tacit reminders of remembered places; “the detritus of history piled high on a local landscape has become central to a sense of place emergent in remembered ruins and pieced together landmarks” (Stewart 1996: 138). Places have become inscribed with the social malaise of the region, with Stewart’s definition of sense of place reflecting the maligned socio-economic reality: for Stewart, “sense of place” takes into account “the effects of contingency” while offering spatially-oriented “glimpses at moments of tension, displacement, and deferral” (1996: 140). Stewart’s Blue Ridge Mountain portrait is not lacking in the mythologization or imagery that is the backbone of building a sense of place, but the fantasy is fairly grim, with residents who “cling to the hills as a place of impossible possibility” (Stewart 1996: 152). In the world that Stewart describes, survival of local culture depends on “the prolific creativity” of residents to adapt to dynamic, constantly in flux attributes of their community (1996: 138). Sites once associated with prosperity and community require re-situation. Relaying tales of foreboding woods marked by suicides and drownings, mining accidents where the land turns on the residents, and homes marred by murders or abuse, Stewart and her informants describe places thoroughly lived in, understood, and mythologized. The sense
of place of inhabitants becomes apparent through their reflections on changing place, both in terms of material changes to community landmarks (homes fallen into ruin; yards littered with abandoned possessions), and less tangible shifts in place-based characteristics of identity that have led inhabitants to accept “abandonment to the currents of existence” (Stewart 1996: 144).

The concept of sense of place is crucial to this study. In order to understand how hunters in Wellington County comprehend their identity in relation to land access and shifting rural landscapes, grasping perception is critical. While studies such as Stewart (1996) do serve to illuminate the change of perception that occurs after cataclysmic socioeconomic change in a community— with inhabitants’ understanding of place shifting in relation to outside forces – there is a need in the literature for studies of a sense of place in transition. For example, how are places perceived by inhabitants throughout a gradual, not sudden, change? If this question is to be answered, building knowledge that can facilitate a thorough understanding of the impact of gradual urban expansion on rural communities is essential.

**Embodied places**

In the anthropology of space and place, the human body is considered the fundamental mechanism through which one understands and creates a relationship with space. The transition of a space to place is an inherently a ego-centered pursuit, and as such is intimately tied with one’s identity and sense of self. Casey suggests that “the living-moving body is essential to the process of emplacement”; it is the primary mechanism through which one creates the experiences and memories that generate place (1996: 24). The very transition of a location from space to place is constituted by the presence of a body to “sustain and vivify” the place through perception and sensory experience (Casey 1996: 24). Casey notes that perception, achieved through being a living body in a space, is not the only undertaking in the place-making
expedition: place-making is a pursuit that engages every part of the human experience, including cultural and historical experiences (1996: 31). While theories on the embodiment of space recognize that experiences of place are “ego-centered”, with space “demarcated” according to a person’s position within it, and understood according to that person’s past experiences with space (Cohen 1994: 24), place is also constituted in accordance with cultural expectations. This aligns with the generally accepted premise in anthropology that meaning is generated and maintained through experiences with material objects and events (for instance, laws, religions, and languages) (Cohen 1994: 134). Individual interactions with cultural experiences and objects become internalized, assigned significance and externalized back towards the web of social meaning in a unique way for every person: in accordance with Geertz’s kaleidoscope analogy, finite cultural experiences are “held at different angles to the light” to suggest a different, yet culturally contained, meaning for each individual (Cohen 1994: 136).

Upon processing and internalizing experiences, individuals have the opportunity to gauge the significance of each experience against another: they are compared and contrasted with other experiences and objects in different social and cultural contexts. Through the generation of these comparisons, one can understand the role that cultural membership plays in one’s social experience. Although cultural markers that one is associated with (race, gender, class, sex.) do not entirely constitute one’s individuality, membership in these groups has the immense and natural potential to shape the framework through which one assigns symbols meaning. The experience of place constitutes a membership, and a point of comparison through which an individual can define him or herself. Although experiences are individual, the unifying nature of ‘belonging’ to a place “may allow a collective to share common definitions and descriptions that become a shared way of knowing” (Wulfforst et al. 2006: 168). Thus, place as inhabited is one
of many characteristics that ultimately catalyze the transition of a person from individual self to group self. The relationship between identity and place should be clear: place, as inhabited, offers a structure through which sense of self and identity can be formed.

However, what does embodiment mean for places with multiple users, or, as Rodman (1992) puts it, the “multivocality” of place? If one is to understand embodiment as a necessary element of place construction, then one must consider the multiple constructions of place that occur when multiple bodies inhabit a locale. Furthermore, what multiple identities emerge even when a group enters a locale with an ostensibly similar understanding of place? It is essential to consider the multiple levels of embodiment associated with locality and access in the countryside.

**Rural Community and Place**

This research sought to define a rural identity according to the hunter’s perceptions of what “being rural” means. The idea of place as a theoretical concept is, in itself, in flux—there is no real rock to cling to, as changes to other social and cultural contributions to identity (changing political climates, shifting economic realities) ultimately influence the status of a place. In rural regions, such as within Wellington County where this project’s participants live their lives, the status of a place has the potential to dramatically affect the cultural practice of hunting. Through redefinition of a place, hunting can become effectively forbidden. This project has identified the effervescence of place described by sense of place literature, and has sought to find tangible examples of symbolic and real borders through the context of hunting. The way in which sense of place is forced to shift unnaturally on the basis of oppression and displacement can thus be exposed.

Literature on rurality, particularly literature focused on rural gentrification which I will address later, often identifies an idyllic definition of rural life. Hopkins (1998: 65) describes the
countryside as “a symbolic cultural landscape” made manifest through art, literature, and personal accounts, while Little (1999: 439) identifies common perceptions of rural people as “peaceful, wholesome, tightknit, [and] caring”. Rural communities exist in the public psyche “as if social relations in them were relatively uncomplicated”, write Epp and Whitson on the Canadian rural experience (2001: xxvii). Thus, examining the presence and perception of a rural identity, particular in juxtaposition to “the urban imperative” (Creed and Ching 1997: 4), is a critical task in this project. The rural-urban distinction has the power to shape the experiences and expectations of individuals on both sides of the divide (Creed and Ching 1997: 2). Through ostensibly mundane cultural choices (“country versus rap”, “cowboy boots versus wingtips”) as well as “less flexible markers of place” such as regional accents, rurality is formed as an identity in opposition to urban (Creed and Ching 1997: 3). What is lacking in this literature is an anthropological account of rural individuals’ self-perceptions: what “being rural” means to the individuals who live in rural communities. It is necessary to explore what “being rural” means to rural individuals, both in terms of personal identity and in relation to the lifestyles of their urban and suburban peers. Modifications influencing access to rural spaces, such as those present when landowners limit access to land for rural hunters, would hold significant implications for rural identities. This project examines the role of hunting as a significant rural pursuit, which shapes rural residents’ identities in significant ways.

Works on hunting

First and foremost, I note that there are relatively few works on recreational hunting from a Canadian perspective. Literature regarding Aboriginal hunting rights and practices in Canada, including sport hunting practices and access to wildlife resources is extensive. Literature on First Peoples and hunting ranges from lengthy historical and ethnographic accounts of the state of
Aboriginal hunter-gatherer groups throughout Canada (Brody 2000), to contemporary examinations of the social and economic functions of polar bear sport hunting among Inuit in Nunavut (Wenzel 2008, 2011). Additionally, McIlwraith (2012) provides a recent ethnographic work discussing the significance of hunting to the history, memory, and cultural identity of First Peoples in northern British Columbia. Other accounts examine the spiritual element of hunting among First Peoples: Kinsley (1995) and Tanner (1979) both detail the spiritual significance of hunting and game preparation among the Mistassini Cree of Northern Quebec. The literature addressing hunting and its associated ritualistic, economic, and sociocultural role among First Peoples is plentiful. However, an in-depth analysis of the literature explicitly examining First Nations and Inuit populations is beyond the scope of this study, as it focuses on the experiences of recreational hunters in Wellington County, a region which has a self-identified Aboriginal population of just over 1 800, including Guelph: this population amounts to less than 1% of the total county population (Statistics Canada 2007). Thus, in order to fulfill the intention of this project in providing an ethnographic account of hunting in Wellington County, I have necessarily focused on the perspectives of non-Aboriginal Canadians. As such, many of the works examined in this section serve only to illustrate the limits of research focused on non-Aboriginal Canadian hunters and rural identity. With those limitations in mind, I will look to literature on recreational hunting. Several texts from the last thirty years draw on defining the hunter: exploring the socio-economic background, gender, and historical origins of those who hunt in North America. Other texts are dedicated to discerning why hunters hunt: what experiences are gained from participating, and what values are held by hunters. Both of these concerns, defining the hunter and discerning why one hunts, are important to this research.
Contextualizing Recreational Hunting in North America

Much attention has been paid towards the development of the modern hunter, particularly in terms of shifting public perceptions away from hunter as predator towards hunter as conservationist/naturalist. Commencing in the final quarter of the 19th century, efforts to shift public perceptions of the hunter away from “savage” towards conservationist flourished (Altherr 1978: 7). The emergence of a hunter-naturalist identity that occurred at this time emphasised an effort to distance the recreational hunter from the brutalism of the hunt. Hunter-naturalists sought to be defined by their respect for nature and game; their aesthetic appreciation of nature, and their nostalgia for that which they saw hunting as representing: the purity and morality of the natural world (Altherr 1978: 7). Mastery over nature became a motivation for the hunter; with skill and knowledge replacing brute force as the mark of a skilled sportsman. By electing to practice sportsman-like behaviour on the hunt, hunter-naturalists were capable of distinguishing their behaviour as elite. In turn, efforts were taken to enforce desirable behaviours associated with restraint and impulse control: hunting seasons were established, as were bag limits (Altherr 1978: 9). Emphasis within the hunt turned to employing principles of fair chase, which offered the game opportunity for escape. The hunter’s code was not standalone a sporting ethic, however: it was deeply entrenched in colonial discourse seeking to distance sport hunting as an imperial practice from subsistence hunting (Gillespie 2007: 43). For the imperial sport hunter, hunting was frequently coupled with gathering “specimens” for scientific pursuits, furthering the association of hunter-naturalist with “respected empire builders” while encouraging the activity’s social acceptability (Gillespie 2007: 43; 45). Furthermore, by replacing psychological concern for the well-being of the game with pseudo-scientific concern for the well-being of the game’s
environment, hunter-naturalists created a context where they could stave off public accusations of brutality by referring to their ecologically necessary roles (Altherr 1978: 12).

While the hunter-naturalist perception held fast throughout the first half of the twentieth century, public perception of hunters began to morph following a surge in participation throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Gradually, hunting became less tolerable in the public eye. Disfavourable attitudes towards hunting reflected changing attitudes within North America towards nature and the wilderness; beginning to romanticize nature and “disparaging human interference with nature” (Dizard 2003: 27). Humans in North America were interacting with non-urban environments less and less. In the late 19th century, the need and desire to seek out wilderness became an earnest and imperative effort as individuals, particularly urban people involved in the industrial economy, found rural respite harder and harder to find (Manore 2007: 125). Canadians (and North Americans in general) were becoming increasingly separated from traditional, utilitarian land activities. The myth of nature as a superabundant and inexhaustible resource was beginning to be debunked (Manore 2007: 121). In a development that paralleled the emergence of the hunter-naturalist, nature became an object to be admired and preserved, rather than a frontier to be conquered. Rhetoric around the wilderness began to reflect the idea of nature as a sanctuary, a landscape to be preserved and protected: the appropriate stance to take when one encountered wildlife was reverance, rather than pursuit.

Furthermore, there were considerable concerns associated with changes in identity that were associated with the prevalence of an urban population in Canada. Urban living was thought to make people soft and lazy, and to cause poor health (Manore 2007: 126). There were also anti-modernist sentiments expressed among urbanites: people were wary that the industrial powers were becoming too powerful, risking the health of the nation (Manore 2007: 127). Thus,
protected spaces were established as a means of addressing these concerns. Wilderness could offer a “rest cure” for those made unhealthy by challenging urban living conditions (Manore 2007: 127). Nature, the public seemed to feel, was simply best left alone. With this change, the hunter-naturalist character began to die off. Instead of stewards acutely aware of the ecological implications of hunting, hunters became the mark of increasing pressure by animal rights activists and restricted land use (Manore 2008: 2).

Literature reveals a number of themes addressing the identity of recreational non-aboriginal hunters in North America, although information originating within the last decade is largely scarce. Perhaps the most extensive sociocultural take on recreational hunting is offered in Dizard’s (2003) book-length ethnographic account of hunters in the Northeastern United States. The text uses qualitative research to attest to the historical and spiritual value of hunting as a meaningful factor of identity in the United States. By providing an overview of the changes to public perception of hunting throughout the twentieth century, and, moreover, by discussing motivations and identity with hunters themselves, Dizard describes a practice deeply embedded in culture and constantly in flux. Although Dizard employed surveys in order to quantify his research, the goal of Dizard’s research methodology was “to interview hunters with an open eye to capturing their unique experiences and perspectives, the sorts of information that “can’t be captured by statistics” (2003: 46). Dizard’s text provides a strong example of ethnographic research within a community of hunters; however, it lacks focus on any particular aspect related to broader social issues surrounding hunting. For example, Dizard’s study only briefly acknowledges the urban-rural divide (2003: 167).

Aside from Dizard’s piece, there are a number of articles drawing from sociological, wildlife, and tourism journals that address hunting in North America. A number of texts use sociological
research methods, such as widely distributed surveys, to produce a portrait of who hunts in the United States. Langeneau and Mellon (1980) offer a succinct, if dated, study on the characteristics of youth hunters in Michigan, with a focus on defining the role of familial participation and residence in a rural area in a male youth’s likelihood to hunt, while creating a profile of the young Michigan hunter by examining factors in enjoyment, and ethical considerations taken during the hunt. Langeneau and Mellon reveal that most young people introduced to hunting begin hunting through family tradition (1980: 71). Furthermore, Kennedy (1974) offers a similar study of adult males in Maryland with a focus towards defining the character of the hunter, instead of familial background. In contrast to Langeneau and Mellon (1980) Kennedy finds that “hunting success” is not defined by hunters as successfully killing game during a hunt, but rather “extra-hunt rewards like getting-out-of-doors and companionship” are the primary sources of enjoyment during the hunt (1974: 7). Kennedy does not posit on the importance of hunting as a cultural exercise, but instead stops at an examination of hunting as a recreational activity.

It should be noted briefly that literature from the United Kingdom does, in fact, address similar themes that are approached in this study. Existing studies offer insight to class dynamics at play through hunting by examining the hunt as a well-supported and thoroughly embedded rural activity in the context of urban middle-class influence (Cox and Graham 2004; Milbourne 2003). This literature, though an excellent starting-point particularly in acknowledging the complexities of rural dynamics, does not negate the need for examinations of hunting and rurality within a Canadian study.

In short, current literature on recreational hunting is suffering from a dearth of qualitative accounts that explore the personal significance of hunting to rural Canadians in relation to
maintaining their identity as rural persons. This is particularly critical to address when forces of rural gentrification, discussed below, are considered.

**Rural Gentrification and the Rural Idyll: Land Access and Public Perceptions of Rural Life**

A further significant element to this research draws from recent literature on rural gentrification and the promulgation of a ‘rural idyll’. Although rural gentrification is only one of several forces that may be affecting experiences of place in Wellington County, its potential effects are significant. Rural gentrification has implications for the quality of experience residents have in the spaces they inhabit. Exploration of rural gentrification and its associated impacts helps to illustrate how a barrier to access could be enforced through public perceptions of what it means to live a rural life.

Emerging as an academic field of study in the 1960s, rural gentrification as a research subject has become increasingly popular over the last twenty years within the social sciences (Nelson et al. 2010: 343). There is a significant body of work based in both North America and the United Kingdom, though Guimond and Simard (2010) offer the only Canadian-context study found so far. This field provides valuable insight into how cultural markers of rural places, as identified in my discussion of Anthropology of Space and Place, are threatened by modern processes of demographic change.

Rural gentrification is a process of social and economic change engaged when migrants from urban areas settle in rural communities. There are a number of theories on the motivation for this move, including economic restructuring and “an aging population with loosening ties to the labour market” (Nelson et al. 2010: 344). Many explanations emphasise the intimate connection between rurality and class, describing the process of rural gentrification as one that positions the
local “working-class” in opposition to the in-migrating urban “middle-class” (Phillips 1994: 124). Phillips (1994) offers a thorough explanation of potential economic motivations the opportunity for home ownership in rural areas, or the opportunity to purchase investment properties; however, for the purpose of this project, they are not relevant. A primary motivation for movement into rural areas, and the motivation most relevant to this project, is that of seeking to participate in idyllic rural pastimes and participate in archetypical rural community activities. These expectations are part of a broader understanding individuals hold on what it means to live in a rural region, stretching beyond explorations of urbanization. Urbanization suggests the development of rural areas as structurally and culturally similar to urban centres through the absorption of rural regions (Press and Smith 1980: 214). Through urbanization, rural identities and the rural idyll may be considered collateral damage en route to urban growth. Rural gentrification instead maintains the aesthetic and idyllic perception of rural regions, while rejecting elements of rurality that run counter to this idyll. Individuals drawn to rural regions as “rural gentrifiers” are “lured to rural areas by deeply held beliefs of the promise or rural living”, including characteristics such as “nostalgia for a bygone era”, safety and tranquility, and the expectation of experiencing nature in the comfort of one’s own property (Nelson et al. 2010: 344). In regions affected by rural gentrification, it is the symbolic associations with rural life that are partially responsible for assigning value to land, rather than the potential for development as in areas subjected to urbanization. Individuals who relocate to the country, either as a full-time or part-time residents, do so with certain expectations and the perception of a higher quality of life than in urban areas; a bucolic ideal reproduced and represented in popular culture (Guimond and Simard 2010: 451; Horton 2008; Nelson et al. 2010: 344). Phillips suggests that “leisure pursuits” characteristic of rural environments (horseback riding, ‘craft’ production’, etc.), as well
as an “investment of time and identity” in rural institutions (the Women’s Institute, churches, schools, etc.) can be seen as part of the motivation for rural gentrification (1994: 126). Although these institutions and activities are by no means exclusive to rural communities, “it is possible to suggest that [they] might be perceived to have qualities particularly valued in rural communities […] which play an important part in drawing people into a rural residence” (Phillips 1994: 126).

The literature investigated for this project did not address hunting as a part of the idyllic imagery of the countryside, with one notable exception. An existing work from Jagnow et al. (2008) is particularly relevant. In this project, researchers consulted with landowners and hunters in three distinct counties, all in close proximity to urban centres. They sought “to determine why landowners make decisions about posting their property and how these decisions affect deer management and public hunting on private land” (Jagnow et al. 2008: 103). The researchers interviewed key informants, people who were “knowledgeable about deer management and private land issues” in the study region, about their experiences “working and interacting with landowners” (Jagnow et al. 2008: 105-106). The researchers found that the key informants describe landowners as hesitant in allowing hunting on their property because of safety concerns, particularly if the landowner did not know the hunter (Jagnow et al. 2008: 108). Furthermore, the informants indicated that the presence of a few hunters who did not follow regulations or respect property ownership coloured landowner perceptions of all hunters (Jagnow et al. 2008: 109).

Most significantly to this discussion, the authors reported that informants perceived individuals from non-rural backgrounds to be more resistant when approached by hunters seeking permission to deer hunt on their property (Jagnow et al. 2008: 108). Although the authors were researching from a conservation perspective and contextualised the value of deer hunting in terms of wildlife management, Jagnow et al. (2008) employed qualitative research, arguing that
“qualitative methods are especially useful for understanding private land access issues because personal experiences and attitudes about private land contribute to landowner’s access decisions” (Jagnow et al. 2008: 105). This text provides a strong example of the methodology appropriate for this project, though it does not address questions of identity, or place-making in respect to hunting practices.

Thus, there is an absence of Canadian work that directly explores the tensions between hunters and non-hunters as made manifest through land use conflict - an issue that is bound to increase as urbanization and processes of rural change continue, and thus deserves academic attention. This project sought to determine how rural residents who hunt view rural idylls, and how they have experienced enforcement of bucolic values through regulation of hunting practices and interaction with non-hunters.

**Conclusion**

As noted by Manore, “there are no documented oral histories in Canada among non-Native hunters that detail the importance of hunting to them and their families” (2008: 4). This project addresses deficits in knowledge surrounding Canadian hunting practices by introducing the voices of recreational hunters. Through the above literature, it is evident that hunting is a practice that thematically parallels changing relations between urban and rural communities, in addition to offering a proxy for how we as a society view our relationship with nature. The perception of the role of hunters in rural communities, by both hunters themselves and the owners of land on which they hunt, is indicative of attitudes towards rural practices and the deconstruction of the rural idyll.
CHAPTER 3
FIELDSITE AND METHODS

In this chapter, I will provide some background information on the site of my research, Wellington County, ON. Additionally, I will describe my methodology in the field and offer some preliminary insight into my participant group.

**Why Wellington County?**

Given that the purpose of this project was to explore changing dynamics in rural areas in the context of rural gentrification, it was important that this study took place in a region that was largely rural, but also proximate to urban centres. Wellington County was the ideal choice, primarily for the reason that residents are relatively evenly dispersed throughout several villages and small towns, and the intermittent countryside that connects these small centres.

Additionally, and pragmatically, all parts of the region are within a short (less than 2 hours) driving distance to the University of Guelph, the institution from which this research was conducted.

The Southwestern Ontario region of Wellington County includes seven towns and townships sprawling over a land mass of 2,569 km$^2$: Town of Erin, Town of Minto, Township of Wellington North, Township of Mapleton, Township of Centre Wellington, Township of Guelph/Eramosa, and the Township of Puslinch. The County is bisected lengthwise by Highway 6, with many towns situating their downtown core along this route. Wellington is bordered to the North by Grey and Bruce counties; to the East by Dufferin County and the Region of Peel; to the south by the City of Hamilton and the Region of Halton; and to the West by Perth and Huron counties, and the Region of Waterloo. The County is a primarily rural region with a 2011 Census
population of 86,672 spread throughout eleven small urban centres and rural agricultural areas.\(^2\)

Between 2006 and 2011, Wellington County’s population increased slightly by 1.4% \((\text{Corporation of the County of Wellington 2012})\). Population density within Wellington varies upon the Town or Township, though it maintains a general trend of decreasing as one travels north through the county.\(^3\)

**Figure 1: Map of Wellington County – Towns and Townships\(^4\)**

\(^2\) A note about population information: The City of Guelph, though the seat of Wellington County and geographically located in the County, is considered politically and administratively separate from the county. However, Guelph is included in Wellington County census data. To obtain census data reflecting rural Wellington County only, it is necessary to subtract City of Guelph data from Wellington County data. In order to provide an accurate illustration of the County’s rural character, census data presented here refers to rural Wellington County, excluding Guelph unless otherwise specified. The population for Wellington County, including Guelph, is 208,360 \((\text{Statistics Canada 2012})\).

\(^3\) Notable exception is Centre Wellington, with a population density of approx. 64 people per km\(^2\). County average is 34.6 people per km\(^2\) \((\text{Reichert 2011: 6})\).

\(^4\) Used with permission. (Corporation of the County of Wellington)
Hunting in Wellington County

Regulation of hunting in Ontario is the task of the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). Before obtaining the necessary permits and licensing, individuals seeking to hunt in Ontario are required to complete a safety course called the Ontario Hunter Education Program, which details “firearm safety, hunting laws and wildlife identification” (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources 2012).

Following successful completion of the course, most hunters in Ontario (with the exception of Aboriginals and youth participating in an apprenticeship program) are required to obtain a Hunting Outdoors Card from the MNR, in addition to appropriate game license tags, which permit the individual to kill a regulated number of game animals. Hunting season in Wellington County is strictly enforced by the Ministry of Natural Resources. The majority of Wellington County, with the exception of a fraction of Puslinch Township, falls into Wildlife Management Unit 80 of the Ministry of Natural Resources hunting regulatory system. This means that seasons in the County for fox, black bear, moose, deer, fowl, and squirrel begin at points throughout the autumn (the exception to this is the spring wild turkey hunt, which ends on May 31st) (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2011). The interviews completed through this study indicated that white tailed deer and turkey are by far the most common game hunted in Wellington County. The exact number of hunters in Wellington County is unavailable.5

In terms of trespassing, the MNR emphasises that “positive landowner or occupier/hunter relationships are important to the future of hunting in Ontario” (Ministry of Natural Resources 2012: 29). In turn, hunters are considered to be trespassing “if the person enters onto property or engages in an activity on property where notice has been given that entry or the activity is not allowed” (Ministry of Natural Resources 2012: 29). Notice can be verbal, or

5 Personal correspondence with the MNR to obtain these numbers was unsuccessful.
physical in the form of signs, or even a fence line. Hunters are required to obey all postings and
to leave immediately if asked to on an unmarked property. Furthermore, hunters in groups of 12
or more are not permitted on property without expressed permission from the landowner.
Hunters also require expressed permission to hunt on property being used for crops. The Ontario
Federation of Anglers and Hunters, a non-profit group wildlife conservation organization
representing the interests of anglers and hunters, offers further assistance in preventing
trespassing by offering a “Landowners Permission Form”\(^6\), which provides a written record of
permission to both the hunter and landowner.

**Socioeconomic Profile**

The economic presentation of Wellington is regionally variable throughout the county. Towards
the south end of the County, within the municipalities of Guelph-Eramosa and Puslinch, as well
as in the Town of Erin, median household incomes are highest at around $95,000 (Reichert
2011: 6).\(^7\) In Centre Wellington, median household income is roughly $80,000, with Wellington
North, Mapleton and the Town of Minto following at $63,000 (Reichert 2011: 6).

Similarly, the population working in their township of residence varies considerably within
Wellington County, and is linked to median household income: Wellington North has the largest
number of workers finding employment in the county, at 42%, with that number steadily
decreasing as one moves southward through Wellington (Reichert 2011: 27). In Wellington’s
southern townships, residents generally leave the county to find work in adjacent Kitchener-
Waterloo-Cambridge or the Greater Toronto Area. Overall, 72% of workers in Wellington
County are successful in finding work within the county (Reichert 2011: 26).

---

\(^6\) Included in appendix.

\(^7\) All median household income figures current as of 2008, the latest date for which these are available.
The workforce in Wellington County is dominated by manufacturing. As of 2009, it was estimated that 10,738 residents – around a fifth of Wellington’s workforce – was employed in the manufacturing industry (Reichert 2011: 21). Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting, retail, health care and social assistance, and construction all followed with between four and five thousand workers in each category (Reichert 2011: 21). The average education of Wellington County residents reflects the dominance of manual labour: although the County has fewer secondary and post-secondary University graduates that the provincial average, the County has more apprentice and trade certifications than the norm (Reichert 2011: 8).

**Characterization**

Given the complex variations between Towns and Townships, it is important to avoid considering Wellington County a homogenous region. The size, demographic profile, and needs of communities in Wellington vary considerably in accordance with their township, and, largely, their position within the spheres of influence of the Greater Toronto Area or urban centres such as Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo and Guelph. However, as one moves north in the County, the shift in character is palpable: distance between communities increases noticeably, while the communities themselves are passed through in minutes at most. Thus, Wellington County is considerably varied in its demographic distribution, and the lifestyles practiced by residents. In terms of general demographics, Wellington County is divided by gender roughly evenly, with 43,125 males to 43,545 females (Statistics Canada 2012). The median age of the population is 39.5 years old, which is slightly below the Ontario median of 40.4 (Statistics Canada 2012).

The relative seclusion of much of Wellington, as well as the historical family farms that helped to define the region, have led to a somewhat sedentary population in terms of immigration. The
majority (over 60%) of Wellington County residents are third generation Canadian, with nearly 70% having lived at the same address 5 years prior (as of 2009) (Reichert 2011:5). Residents born outside of Canada comprise 11.4% of Wellington’s population, with less that 1% of residents being non-permanent residents of Canada (Reichert 2011: 5).

In terms of ethnic composition, Wellington County is relatively homogenous: only 1605 residents identify as a visible minority (when Guelph is taken into account as well, the number is higher: just under 8%, or 13 760 members of the population identify as a visible minority) (Statistics Canada 2006). First language in the County is predominantly English, with approximately 8.7% of residents indicating otherwise on the 2011 Census (Statistic Canada 2012). Following English, German is the most common first language at roughly 3.3%. A probable explanation for the relatively large presence of native German speakers in Wellington County is the presence of Old Order Mennonites. Beginning in the 1960s and over the past several decades, Mennonites began emigrating from Waterloo Township to Wellington North, fleeing prohibitively high land prices resulting from urban expansion and demand for hobby farms (Dahms 2008: 62). The availability of less expensive land in Wellington allowed Mennonite families to settle and continue expanding their farms over the course of generations.

**Land Use in Wellington County**

As one drives North through Wellington County, it is difficult to ignore the stark changes in landscape that occur over the course of a two hour drive along Highway 6. Passing through Puslinch Township and the City of Guelph, one sees a progression of subdivisions and developed industrial land. Aggregate developments and water bottling facilities nod to the rich resources beneath the Earth’s surface in south Wellington. Traffic is heavy: this is an access point to one of
the busiest lengths of the 401 Highway. From this point, one can head west towards London or
drive an hour east to Toronto. The south end of Wellington, the region wrapped around the City
of Guelph, feels like a gateway to urbanity that belies the County’s rural roots slightly farther
north.

Passing north through Guelph, the natural features of the land begin to become apparent as
industrial and commercial development becomes less pronounced and traffic thins out
substantially. Through Fergus and Elora, fantastic limestone cliffs line the banks of the Grand
River. Mills and downtown buildings constructed from limestone allude to Centre Wellington’s
early dependence on the river for industry. Further still, into Wellington North, the land lies in
vast expanses of flat farmland punctuated by glacial deposits and woodlots. Many of the fields
and pastures are fenceless, enabling the massive equipment necessary for crop farms of this scale
to easily pass from one field to the next.

Within Wellington County, the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) is a major
landholder and a particularly relevant body to the discussion of hunting. Founded in 1966
following the merger of the Grand Valley Conservation Authority and the Grand River
Conservation Commission, the GRCA is tasked with managing the Grand River watershed and
approximately 48 000 acres of land throughout Southwestern Ontario. Included in this acreage
are 11 active-use conservation areas. For a fee, visitors can use these parks for a range of
activities including day hiking, camping, swimming, and mixed recreational uses. Maintenance
of these parks is funded through user fees; no tax dollars are used. Wellington County includes
several GRCA active-use conservation areas: Elora Gorge; Rockwood; Belwood Lake; Guelph
Lake; and parts of Luther Marsh. Out of these Wellington County parks, hunting is only
permitted at Belwood Lake Conservation Area and in some parts of Luther Marsh Conservation
Area, however hunting on non-park GRCA landholdings in Wellington North is also common and acceptable with the purchase of a permit.

**Methods**

Data collection for this project took the form of semi-structured formal interviews with participants. Although I recognise the potential value of attending a hunt with hunters, for the purpose of this project, participant observation was not a realistic option. Unfortunately, my available research period fell directly in between spring and autumn hunting seasons. Given the time constraints associated with a relatively brief MA project, it was not realistic to abstain from research until autumn. Furthermore, conversations with advisors and hunters alike suggested that time constraints on hunters during open season would be such that finding participants would be very challenging. This was a suggestion that became even more apparent over the course of participant interviews: when hunting season opened, I heard time and again, lifestyles shifted to accommodate hunting as a priority. Although participant observation would have allowed for the potential to observe, first hand, conflicts between hunters and landowners, it was simply not a realistic method. Thus, qualitative interviews were a preferred and more realistic option.

Participants were recruited using a variety of methods. Participants of this project were recruited based on their self-identified status as a hunter living and hunting in Wellington County. Thus, the voices of urban hunter have been excluded from this project in an effort to maintain a focus on rural experiences. There are understandable limitations associated with this absence, which will be touched upon in Chapter 5. A challenge of recruiting participants from Wellington County was reaching out to the largely rural population. Initially, I spent several hours at the end
of May driving around the County and posting fliers in Wellington communities. Post offices, banks, firehalls, branches of the Royal Canadian Legion, businesses and restaurants were posted in the communities of Rockwood, Arthur, Elora, Fergus, Mount Forest, Mapleton, Alma, and Guelph. These ads did not yield many results during any point in the research. Following, a recruitment ad was posted on the online classifieds site, Kijiji: this yielded several of my early participants. Finally, a recruitment ad was placed in the classifieds section of the Wellington Advertiser in both the June 29th, 2012 and July 6th, 2012 editions of the newspaper. This paper has a readership of just under 40 000, and is distributed free of charge throughout Wellington County. Several participants were successfully reached through this medium. Following initial contact made through recruitment, I had some success with snowball sampling the remainder of my participants.

Between June 2012 and December 2012, 13 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 17 participants. The first interview was completed on June 25th, 2012 in Rockwood, ON, while the final interview occurred on December 19th, 2012, in Guelph, ON. Participants were interviewed at their home, at a community library, or over coffee at a coffee shop. All participants were a pleasure to speak with, and had enthusiastic insight on the issues facing both hunters and rural people at large within Wellington County. Approximately 20 questions were asked, though often participants addressed many of the desired themes independently, and talking-points simply emerged over the course of conversation. The interviews are divided thematically into three sections. First, participants were asked several questions about their perceptions of what it means to be a rural person (“Please describe several factors that you think make rural people unique form people living in urban or suburban areas”;

---

8 Included in appendix.
9 Sample questions included in appendix.
“How do non-rural people mischaracterize rural people”). The second section of questioning addressed the participant’s experiences of hunting in Wellington County (“When did you begin hunting in Wellington County”; “Why did you begin hunting”). Finally, in the third section, participants were asked about attitudes towards hunting and hunters in Wellington County, and their experiences with conflict in Wellington (“What characteristics would you use to describe hunters and non-hunters”; “In your experience, does conflict exist between hunters and non-hunters in Wellington County”). Most interviews lasted an hour, as anticipated, with four outliers: two interviews lasted approximately a half hour, while another two reached over an hour and fifteen minutes in length.

Interviews were recorded digitally, and subsequently transcribed. Analysis was conducted through colour coding thematically similar sections of the interview, and indexing quotations according to dominant themes that emerged. In Chapter 4, I attempt to present block quotations as verbatim; however, some quotes have been slightly edited for clarity. Square brackets indicate that I have added text to a quote. Repeated utterances such as “um” or “you know” have been omitted. Some long quotes have been truncated while maintaining the intent and tone of the quote (removed text is represented by an ellipsis).

**Participant Profile**

Of the 17 participants, three were classifiable as non-hunters: two were non-hunting female spouses of participants, while the third was a farmer who permitted his land to be used for hunting though he was not a hunter himself. Of the remaining 14 hunter participants, 13 were male while one participant was female. Although I did not recruit based on gender, recreational hunting is a predominantly male pursuit, thus my interviews turned out to be almost exclusively
male. An important note is that nearly half of the hunters (6 out of 14) interviewed also functioned as landowners, thus providing insight into issues of trespassing and hunter-landowner relationships. Below is a table illustrating age, gender, the community of residence, and community of hunting for each participant. Whether the participant is a landowner is also indicated. Names listed are pseudonyms.

**Table 1: Basic Participant Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Community of Residence</th>
<th>Rural or Urban background</th>
<th>Length of residence in County</th>
<th>Community of Hunting</th>
<th>Owns land?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rick</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Centre Wellington</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Centre Wellington</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Timothy</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Centre Wellington</td>
<td>Lifelong Wellington County resident</td>
<td>Lifelong</td>
<td>Centre Wellington</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Barbara</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Centre Wellington</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Centre Wellington</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Robert</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Centre Wellington</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Approx. 15</td>
<td>Centre Wellington</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. James</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Guelph-Eramosa</td>
<td>Lifelong Wellington County resident</td>
<td>Lifelong</td>
<td>Guelph-Eramosa</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Christopher</td>
<td>50s – 60s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Guelph</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Approx. 13 years</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Mary-Anne</td>
<td>50s-60s</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Guelph</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Approx. 13 years</td>
<td>Non-hunter; Spouse of hunter**</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. David</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>32-33 years</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Dana</td>
<td>50s-60s</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>32-33 years</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Bruce</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Bernard</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>Non-hunter; Landowner</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Two participants had spouses in the room while participating in the interview. Both spouses demonstrated strong opinions about hunting practices, and offered input on several questions throughout the interview.
<p>| | | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Anne</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>Non-hunter; Spouse of primary participant</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Spencer</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Lifelong</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Andy</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Guelph</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>Guelph</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Cole</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Guelph</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Lifelong</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Harold</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Wellington North</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Jeff</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Puslinch</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Approx. 15 years</td>
<td>Puslinch</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rigour in Qualitative Research**

Within qualitative research, demonstrable rigour presents a challenge to the researcher. Bryman et al. (2009) suggest that the pursuit of “trustworthiness and authenticity” is a suitable approach to ensuring rigour in qualitative projects, and can be examined through factors encouraging and limiting rapport.

There are limitations associated with establishing rapport with a community of which I am not a part. During initial recruitment, I encountered some skepticism from potential participants who initially contacted me for further information about the study. These individuals were uncertain about my intentions as a researcher, and asked whether I was affiliated with an animal rights activist group. Two potential participants indicated that they were not interested in moving forward, alluding to having seen hunters negatively portrayed in the past as a reason to be wary. For these individuals, I thanked them for their interest nonetheless, and advised them to contact me if they had any further questions about the study. Even among some participants who did choose to move forward with the interviews, I sensed some hesitation to openly discuss hunting during the initial part of my interviews. I was aware that I was seeking access to a community
that is often asked to justify their pastime to outsiders, and is occasionally met with hostility. Participants were taking a risk by speaking with me: as a researcher, the analysis and presentation of the interviews was ultimately my responsibility. I recognise the implications of this inegalitarian power dynamic in the research process.

Despite the above limitations, however, after the first twenty minutes or so of our conversation, participants were noticeably more open about discussing their experiences. I attribute this change in attitude to the participants gauging from interview questions that my interest was scholarly and ethnographic in nature, not political. Although I would suggest that the level of rapport I was able to achieve was certainly confined by my identity as a non-hunter, over time, I became better versed in hunting terminology, and had more to offer in terms of providing prompts that would be well understood by participants. Furthermore, it is likely that there are two personal factors that helped establish rapport: first, as previously mentioned, I am a lifelong resident of Wellington County, and identify as a rural person. Also, I possess a non-restricted firearms license: revealing this in conversation helped to establish an open level of discourse surrounding firearm use.

In preparing and analysing research results, I took a number of steps to ensure an honest project: in an attempt to ensure credibility, I advised participants both verbally and in writing that their transcripts would be available for viewing and feedback following the interview. Participants were invited to contact me within two weeks of their interview if they wanted to review a transcript. Although none of my participants elected to review the transcript of their interview, the offer allowed for revision if the participant realized in retrospect that their input was not adequately reflective of the reality they experience as a Wellington County hunter.
Additionally, by using quotes extensively in Chapter 4, I have attempted to represent a rich account of the activities of Wellington County hunters, despite the limitations of semi-structured interviews as opposed to participant observation. I hope that by using the words of participants as a main source for discussion that I will have drawn honest and accurate conclusions from my analysis.

**Ethical Considerations**

Although risks associated with participating in this project were minimal, precautions were taken to ensure that the confidentiality of participants was maintained. This was particularly critical given the close physical proximity of hunters (some living just several farms down the road from each other) and the existing relationships between some participants. In order to protect the identity of participants, and create a safe interview environment where participants were able to comfortably express their views, certain ethical assurances were made. As per university policy, I sought and obtained approval from the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board prior to commencing recruitment for this project. All participants were required to read and sign a form to indicate informed consent before beginning the interview, in addition to being verbally advised of their right to withdraw from the interview or refuse to answer any questions at any time.\(^\text{10}\) If participants elected to meet me outside of their home or my office at the University of Guelph, they were reminded that confidentiality could potentially be compromised by responding to interview questions in a public environment.

\(^{\text{10}}\) Consent form included in appendix.
Hunting is a process that allows the participant to establish a relationship with rural space, and subsequently explore and define their identity in juxtaposition or alignment with traits seen by the hunters as rural. Hunting provides the context to explore both explicit and tacit cultural comments on rurality, including the rural idyll and the survival of a frontier mentality in a modern setting. In this project, I found that several subthemes emerged in support of the assertion that hunting aids in the maintenance of a rural identity. Within Wellington County, I have found that hunting provides a reference point for an individual to demonstrate his or her engagement in a rural community.

Throughout my interviews with participants, several distinct themes emerged from their responses to the questions I asked. Participants articulated the role held by hunting in defining their identity as rural people, and were generally quick to make distinctions between the hunting habits and, more generally, the worldviews of urban/suburban people, and rural residents. This dichotomy informed much of our conversation, to far greater an extent than I had initially imagined. Thus, the discussion that follows is best understood while keeping the urban/rural juxtaposition in mind.

The themes of this discussion can be categorically divided into four sections: the role of a sense of mastery; the value of heritage and history in hunting; the value of sensory experiences that are found while hunting; and, for some participants, the process of becoming rural. These themes, though distinct for the purpose of analysis in this chapter, are thoroughly unified under the
overarching providence of connection to rural space. Over the course of this chapter, I will outline my findings concurrent with these four themes.

**Mastery**

Over the course of the interviews, all participants revealed a sense of pride and achievement through hunting that can be referred to here as mastery. Hunting is a technically, physically, and psychologically demanding pastime. In order to successfully take game, the participant needs to become acutely aware of his or her surroundings, including the habits and habitat of game. The unique combination of adrenaline, immersion in the natural elements, and the behaviour of a distinct other living being add up to an immensely challenging activity for both seasoned and amateur hunters. Furthermore, technical skill is required to accurately use a firearm, either a bow or rifle, to kill an animal. The sense of mastery present in my interviews highlights these challenges, and indicates the pride felt when these challenges are overcome with a successful hunt. Unlike Langeneau and Mellon (1980: 72), who found that rural hunters did not identify the challenge of the hunt as important “for a good hunt” as compared to their urban counterparts, this study suggests that challenge is a major component of an enjoyable hunt in Wellington County. Participants thoroughly emphasised the importance of both technical skill and knowledge of the hunt, and indeed used these points to differentiate between ‘good’ (ethical; rural) hunters and ‘bad’ (unethical; “weekend warriors” from the city) hunters in their responses. Throughout responses, it was revealed to me that mastery had a number of key markers, many of which were equated with a rural identity and upbringing. To the participants, mastery (or lack thereof) provided characteristics and behaviours through which they could define themselves as rural hunters in opposition to urban hunters. Non-rural hunters are seen as less skilled, and less willing to adhere to regulations that govern hunting behaviour. In terms of shaping relationships between
hunters and landowners in Wellington County, mastery holds a prominent position. Demonstrable mastery, through adhering to the law and operating beyond the law at an ethical level, contributes to a sense of trust between hunters and landowners. It facilitates better relationships between hunters and the landowners, while the failure of some hunters to adequately adhere to the law negatively affects community perceptions of hunters in Wellington County. In the following several sections, I will describe the prominent themes through which mastery is addressed and exhibited: adhering to legal responsibilities; adequately developed skill and technique while on the hunt; and adequately developed knowledge of game behaviour and habitat.

**Legal and Ethical Responsibilities**

‘*Hunters are guys that follow the rules.*’ – Timothy

Almost universally, the hunters I spoke with emphasised the importance of understanding and adhering to regulations surrounding hunting, to such a point as to include this as a marker of mastery. In Canada, the practice of hunting is heavily regulated by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Officers of the MNR have the authority to enforce regulations on hunters found in violation, though the reality is that officers are limited in their ability to catch violators: the resources are simply not available given the scope of Ontario hunting grounds.\(^{11}\) As such, some hunters that I spoke with indicated their dependence on reporting violators to the MNR or local law enforcement, or, more frequently on self-regulation within the hunting community. Often in the interviews, participants indicated through their responses that the law is supplemental to the ethics they see associated with hunting: official regulations are simply a good starting point for

---

\(^{11}\) There are three Conservation Officers working out of the MNR’s Guelph office. These three officers are charged with enforcement for all of Wellington County, in addition to Waterloo and Brant Townships.
good practice. Hunters identify the difficulties of enforcement faced by the MNR, and the importance of self-regulation through reporting other hunters. To several of the hunters I interviewed, legal regulations provide the hunting community with a means of self-regulating disruptive or unlawful activity. The impossibility of enforcement faced by the Ministry of Natural Resources is widely recognised, so hunters take it upon themselves to report undesirable behaviours. Timothy, a lifelong hunter and former hunting guide from Centre Wellington, was particularly adamant about the important role of reporting. Timothy demonstrated considerable pride and investment in making sure that he, and the hunters he encountered, adhered to the law despite the reality that regulations were not easily enforced. Timothy reflects on the MNR and enforcement:

The thing is, though, there isn’t hardly any game wardens compared to police officers. In all of Ontario, I think there are about 230 officers. It’s not much for Wellington. I think there might be one or two guys. It’s pretty tough. They respond to a lot of people phoning in. The best thing ever is cell phones, because if someone is doing something illegal, it’s like, I got your picture, and now I’m calling.

In my conversation with Bruce and David, friends and hunters from Wellington North, similar perspectives on regulation were expressed. Bruce, who moved to the area several years ago, expressed frustration with hunters who do not seek permission. Here, he alludes to taking an active role in self-regulation:

For me, I follow the rules. If [there are] documents that need to be filled out, I do that. I make sure all my i’s are dotted and my t’s are crossed. I see people come in [to private property]. They don’t ask permission, they just pull over to the side of the road and go into someone’s property. And there’s poaching that goes on. That really irritates the hell out of me, because I do everything properly. I go out and confront these [trespassing hunters] in a field, and of course they lie to you. You would think that they would leave, and they don't leave. I don't care if you’re from the city or whatever, you do it right.

Likewise, David spoke of self-regulating hunters who he occasionally sees trespassing on his neighbour’s property, which has been posted as non-hunting:
Now, it's not my property, I don't have the right to say that, but I'll tell them to go back to where they had permission, the same way they came. And sometimes they'll [have] an attitude. They'll try and cross fence lines elsewhere. Nope, sorry: I'll stay on their trail. I'll ensure that they stay in the [unposted] area.

With both David and Bruce, I can see a pattern of frustration with hunters who do not follow the rules. They express a desire to broadly contribute to a sense of order within the community of hunters, and seem to take pride in their willingness to both adhere to and enforce legal regulation among their less strict peers.

Furthermore, there is an understanding among hunters that even if something is legal, it is not necessarily acceptable or right. In the words of Jeff: “The rules are just there to provide a baseline”. Several of the hunters I spoke to were wary of putting themselves in a position where they could possibly be seen as causing a conflict with non-hunters, despite being within the law. The reasons for this generally focused on an understanding of the tenuous hold hunters have on hunting grounds, and the recognised need to ‘keep the peace’ with landowners. Examples of this attitude occurred in participant discussions of hunting in close proximity to residential areas.

Timothy had the following to offer:

…I had one farm I used to hunt from high school still, around Cambridge, but eventually the town came right out to the edge of it so I don’t bother hunting it anymore. It’s just too close to town. Legally, I could still hunt there, but it’s just so close to buildings now that I prefer not to.

James, a hunter in his mid-20s from Guelph-Eramosa, had a similar story where he was concerned about the proximity of a turkey he had killed close to the home of an elderly woman whose property he hunts:

I really, really enjoy hunting, so I have to make it a point not to – I don’t ever want to break a rule. Break the law. [Or] even go so far as to piss a landowner off. I actually took my second bird at this lady’s house, and I thought I was too close to her house. So I came back and approached her and I apologised sincerely. I said: I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to. It was just chance…And she said it was fine, she appreciated it, and she thanked me very much for telling her.
The motivation for both Timothy and James to make judgement call as to how close they would hunt to inhabited property is a safety issue, but more so, a preventative measure to ensure that they retain access to their hunting grounds. The concern of proximity is not without foundation. Six of the participants I spoke with indicated that getting too close for comfort, so to speak, with landowners’ homes or properties was a potential source of conflict. Although no participants positioned themselves within a conflict, they did relay stories of other hunters who they knew had crossed the line. Both Bernard and Christopher (with Bernard being the landowner of the property Christopher hunts), told a similar story. Here is Christopher perspective on an event, which was echoed by Bernard:

Those guys that we were talking about earlier? They shot a deer on a guy’s front lawn! They gutted it right there, and left everything there and just took the deer. Like, the kids are coming off the school bus and that’s laying there. A big gut pile. You don’t shoot a deer on somebody’s front lawn. But that’s the weekend warriors for you, compared to us.

Overall, themes of legality and adhering to regulations coloured many interactions with landowners and even fellow hunters. Close to half of the hunter participants I spoke with mentioned instances when they, or hunters they know, ended a relationship or otherwise distanced themselves from a hunting buddy because of the friend’s lax treatment of the law. Bernard, though not a hunter, had the following to share regarding an experience his son had with hunting buddies:

My younger son, he likes to hunt. [A group of hunters] invited him to hunt basically so that they could get permission to hunt on [my] property. [My son] only hunted with them once. And he said I’ll never go hunting with those guys again. He said that the hunting season starts on a Monday, and by Tuesday afternoon they had had their quota. And then they call it Whiskey Wednesday. And that’s what they do, they drink all day. And then Thursday they go out again. They’re still hung over and in bad shape. He said, ‘I’m not hunting with those guys again’.
Along similar lines, Robert, a quiet man in his 40s who was, by far, the most reserved of participants, offered the following: “I primarily hunt alone. I used to hunt with a guy. He was not honest. He was not ethical enough. He was too much on the line, as far as what I thought was breaking the law. So I stopped hunting with him.” The hesitation among participants to take on a hunting buddy is understandable: given the time and effort that goes into building relationships with landowners, the hunters I spoke with were incurring great risk by allowing fellow hunters to join them. Because of this, the majority of hunters I spoke with who were the caretakers of relationships with landowners, hunted alone. Exceptions included Barbara and Rick, a domestic couple who hunted on their property together. Andy was not the caretaker of his relationship with the owners of land that he hunted; as a result he hunted as part of a group. Despite a family heritage of hunting, Andy began hunting in Wellington County just over a year and a half ago at the time of the interview, and had not yet built a relationship with landowners. Cole also did not hunt alone, despite having positive relationships with landowners. He viewed hunting as a social activity, and valued the time it offered with his companions.

Among the hunters, sticking to the law and reporting fellow hunters who were breaking the law was understood to be a true point of pride. Timothy relayed this anecdote of his experience:

I'm sure there's some guys, that if there's no fence there they'll just continue on walking. But myself, I try and maintain a good relationship... Years ago, where I grew up...there was a summer camp. it was a hundred acres and I hunted beside it. And I knew there was a lot of guys in there that shouldn't have been in there...Anyways, it was owned by like a non-profit organisation. But I found out one of my friends' dad was on the committee... I actually was able to present to the community club. I went and kind of gave them a lowdown on myself, and told them what I thought was going on the property. And being that they only ran the camp there in the summertime, they didn't know what was going on there in the fall. And they didn't really know the boundaries of the property really well or anything. So I basically had a really good relationship with them. They allowed me to hunt in there, and I told them I would maintain the property and help with the fences, and post the property and make sure that people that shouldn't have been in there were not.
In this anecdote, Timothy uses his demonstrable understanding of the law in order to gain access to a property that had proven challenging in the past. By convincing the owners of his willingness to abide by the law, and in fact safeguard their property through enforcing against other trespassing hunters, Timothy achieved access through mastery. The significance of proven mastery in accessing land was not lost on the participants. Robert summarizes the importance of adherence to regulation in hunter-landowner relations: “These people give me their permission. It’s a privilege to be able to be up there, and I want to respect their request”.

**Skill and Technique**

“I enjoy the challenge. You don't walk out there and say ‘come here, deer’, and he walks up to you and you shoot him.” – Robert

A second significant category of mastery that emerged through my research was that of skill and technique. Hunting is a highly skilled undertaking, with two subthemes of skill emerging in our conversations: skill with firearms, and knowledge of game.

**Firearms**

“A lot of guys will ‘hail Mary’, I call it. It's just pulling the trigger as many times as you can. And I don't do that. Sometimes I hunt with a single shotgun and one bullet and that's it. I have one bullet, so I take my time and line everything up.” – Spencer

In order to hunt successfully and ethically, a hunter must be skilled in the firearm he or she chooses. Within the hunting community, mastery over firearms is a particular flashpoint. Time and again in my interviews, participants emphasised the value of becoming skilled in firearm use to hunt successfully. Hunters use skill with firearms to differentiate between individuals who have adequately honed their craft over time and with practice, and those who have not. In the
interviews, this often translated to a discussion of urban-rural differences. I would go so far to say that this was the theme participants most wanted me to take away from our conversations: they consistently juxtaposed their skill and behaviours, and the integrations of these skills with rural life, against what they described as unskilled non-rural hunters. Rural hunters saw themselves as more practiced, and generally identified non-rural hunters as unskilled marksmen. Hunters who are unskilled and unpractised in firearm use were generally disrespected or made suspect among participants. To many, unpracticed shooting is a sure sign of a “weekend warrior”, a derogatory term used by three of my participants to describe unpracticed urban hunters who would travel to rural areas to hunt. Christopher summed up his thoughts on the issue of urban “weekend warriors”:

I find the urban hunters are weekend warriors. The only time they pick up their gun is for deer season. And the rest of the time it’s just stored in the closet. They’re weekend warriors. And that’s a shame…I find the urban hunters totally unsafe. I don’t trust them, whereas the rural hunters, they have respect of the gun…I’m always practicing, but these guys, they don’t even practice.

At one point, Christopher became particularly upset about the role he sees weekend warriors as playing in hunter-non-hunter relations in Wellington: “These weekend warriors! We shouldn’t be tarred with the same brush…it’s the weekend warriors, that’s why everything is so negative.”

Not all of the hunters I spoke with, however, viewed hunters bearing the characteristics of “weekend warriors” with equal derision. Some, particularly the hunters who did not own their own property on which to hunt, or who were in the process of building relationships with landowners, demonstrated an understanding of the challenges urban hunters face when developing a skill set without adequate land to practice on. Andy, a soft-spoken hunter currently living in Guelp, offered similar input, though with an empathetic understanding of the challenges urban hunters might face:
Everybody feels that the urban guys are maybe not up to snuff with the guys who grew up in the country shooting guns...I can see maybe a shadow of truth. I mean, where do people in the city go to practice to just stay on top of things? I think it’s harder for them to maintain a skill set that maybe somebody who is rural would have an easier time keeping up.

**Knowledge of game and sense of surroundings**

The value of skill in hunting was not limited to practiced use of firearms, however. Knowledge of game was of equal importance as identified by participants. Strong hunters are well-versed in the habits and behaviours of the game he or she is pursuing. All of the hunters I spoke with emphasised this theme throughout the interview. As with firearms training, knowledge of game was intimately tied to having experienced life in a rural area. This included being able to accurately identify which game is fair: “If you hear about somebody shooting an illegal [animal], say a swan or something that you definitely shouldn’t be shooting, it’s normally somebody from the city” (Timothy). Timothy goes on to offer: “Because I know my animals and all that, I usually get a turkey or deer. Or if there’s geese coming into the field, I know when to hunt [them]. I look for the weather and when the corn is cut properly. There’s different things that you learn [when you live in the country].” Here, Timothy has differentiated between his knowledge of game as a rural person in opposition to that of an urban hunter.

Furthermore, for nearly all of the hunters I spoke with, knowledge associated with hunting is so integral to the experience of a rural person that it shapes his or her worldview and relationship with nature: the rural hunter, even when not actively hunting, is aware of and studies the behaviour of his game. David had the following to say:

> If you will, we're always hunting. If we're running the dogs in the back field, we're looking for deer; we're watching the dogs chase the turkeys. The coyotes are howling. We're still hunting. It's a wildlife thing out here. You don't have a firearm. You're not going to harass them, you're not going to shoot them...it's part of being out in a rural area...we're always watching what they're doing.
Here, David describes what he sees as a fundamental difference between how some rural hunters might experience hunting, versus their urban counterparts: in the eyes of most participants I spoke with, being a rural person is an integral part of developing expertise as a hunter. Urban hunters, simply because of the geographical limitations of their homes, have limited opportunity to develop the skills that mark a good hunter when compared to many rural hunters. Likewise, as I will demonstrate in the following section, lack of engagement with rural landscapes deprives non-rural hunters of the valuable sensory experiences associated with the hunt.

**Sensory experiences of the hunt**

“You don’t have to be banging at things to enjoy your time out.” – Andy

Knowledge of game, as discussed above, is intimately tied to the next major theme I found during my analysis: the valuable role of sensory experiences in hunting, and how these experiences are identified as unique to the rural experience by hunters. When asked what they most enjoy about hunting, nearly every participant provided a response within the realm of experiencing the sensory offerings of nature: seeing the bush “wake up” or “come alive” early in the morning, for instance. Furthermore, without exception, every hunter participant emphasised that the pleasure they felt when out in the bush during hunting season had very little to do with the kill. Like Kennedy (1974: 7), hunters in this study pointed to the “extra-hunt rewards” of hunting, like time spent in the woods, as primary sources of enjoyment. According to Andy, “it’s more about the process than the finale of it all…I’ve got lots of stuff just fresh in my memory that I think I’ll remember forever, more so than when I’ve taken any game”. For Andy and many others, hunting provides a way to experience the natural world in a way that necessitates intense focus and acute awareness, and is invaluable as a memory-making mechanism. Furthermore,
Andy was far from alone in sentimentalising the experience of hunting. Barbara pointed out the excitement of “seeing all kinds of things that [she] don’t remember seeing since [she] was a tiny, tiny little girl”, while Christopher emphasised the value of participating in the cycle of nature: “Once you get into that mode, you’ll start living in that cycle. It’s a cycle. It’s a style of life that you live. I’ll sit out here and I’ll watch all the birds. It’s amazing to watch the cycles each year”.

For the people I spoke to, hunting provides a window through which to view nature in a way that few other activities could compare. The necessity of complete sensory commitment to hunting allows the hunter to immerse him or herself in the natural attributes of his or her surroundings. Hunters regularly describe seeing the sun rise, and having interactions with animals (including bees, porcupines, and owls) as the most memorable element of the hunting experience, regardless of whether game has been taken. This commitment to observation extends even to game animals, at times, particularly for more seasoned hunters. Christopher offers the following, when asked to describe some of the feelings he experiences while on a hunt:

> I just get the enjoyment of going out into the bush. Just sitting and watching. I’ve let more deer and more turkeys pass me by, because I’ve shot them [in the past]. I just like watching them now. I get the excitement when I see a deer or a turkey. I get the same excitement.”

David, too, had a similar outlook. As someone with many years of experience hunting, David was not uniformly concerned with making a kill; he was instead concerned with maintaining the wildlife he had come to enjoy on his own property:

> We’ve got in the area, these last several years, a big black buck. I got on the horn, and told everybody to leave it alone. It was at a point in its life that it was drawing pension. It had a massive rack. We have areas around here that we have shut down [to hunters]. We’ve blacked it out, so that if the animals feel under pressure, they have a place to run to. To relax. We’re not out to destroy.

For these hunters, hunting is primarily about experiencing nature in a way that would be difficult without their pastime. Likewise, for most participants, these experiences are thoroughly

---

12 Emphasis added for clarity.
integrated with a rural identity: the sensory experiences they associate with hunting are simply out of reach for urban hunters because of time constraints, lack of access, and not having been raised in community where the outdoors is a major part of life:

I believe people in the rurals \(^{13}\) have a lot better understanding of nature itself then they do in the city. Someone from downtown Toronto wouldn’t understand living out in the rurals, you know, in the middle of a hundred acres. They just wouldn’t understand what to do or how to get by (Timothy)

Related to the theme of sensory experience is the idea that rural people have a more holistic understanding of the natural world than their urban peers. This concept came up repeatedly through most of my interviews with hunters, and touched on topics ranging from wildlife management practices to understanding rural land ownership. On the topic of wildlife, participants generally presented the view that “we” as rural people are sharing the wildlife’s land. Barbara, a former resident of Hamilton who relocated to Centre Wellington five years ago, had a unique perspective drawn from her experiences:

I used to be a straight city person. They\(^ {14}\) used to tell me there was deer; there was coyotes, right across the street in the woods there. I kept saying, no way. I’ve never seen them in Hamilton, no way, and I didn’t believe them for the longest time. Until I went out there one day, and they showed me a herd of deer in the front yard. I thought, wow! I never knew! So I think city people are very ignorant to – I shouldn’t say ignorant, that’s not a good word. Well, ignorant to the fact that there is wildlife out there. I think a lot of city people don’t know anything about wildlife, and the reason we need to hunt.

Timothy had the following insight on this subject, when asked to identify some factors that differentiate rural people from urban or suburban:

…I believe that we understand the countryside and the nature and the animals more than a person would living in the city. They see them as rodents, pests, as dealing with raccoons and opossums. Whereas the country folks, to us we understand we’re coming into their land, you know.

\(^{13}\) This participant used “the rurals” to refer both to rural regions and inhabitants of rural areas.

\(^{14}\) Barbara’s partner and her partner’s friends.
I should note that the division between pest animals and game animals, as well as the disdain for the former and reverence for the latter, came up in a few interviews. Participants regularly identified coyotes and skunks as vermin, and generally did not consider killing these animals to be hunting, but a practice more akin to pest control. On the occasions when pest animals came up in interviews, participants would speak of identifying pest animals as an attribute lost on urban or suburban people. James had the following input on this relationship:

You go to the subdivisions and there’s rabbits on peoples’ lawns. And you have skunk problems and things like that, and predators come and eat them. People are surprised when their dogs and cats go missing, and it doesn’t surprise me at all.

Naturally, the differences between rural views on wildlife and urban views, as described by my participants, extended to a hunting framework as Barbara alludes to above. As with mastery, rural hunters were perceived as being more tuned-in to the natural world, and more capable of making choices with their behaviour that had natural interests at heart. When I spoke with David, who moved to Wellington North from Mississauga with his wife, Dana more than thirty years ago, he offered some insight to how this difference can be described:

I think it’s a philosophy on wildlife. Earlier on I mentioned that were constantly in touch with the animals. We’re seeing them...we watch them grow. We do shut down areas to protect the animals. If they’re under stress, if they’re under duress, they've got a place to go to that is safe...folks from the urban environment do not necessarily appreciate the fact that we are also concerned about the wildlife. They’re there to harvest, but at the same time we are not there to destroy them. In suburbia, we were constantly going out just to hunt...I’m not sure if the guys really understand or appreciate that not everything is there to shoot.

“Heritage hunters” and Family Tradition: The role of the past in the present-day hunt

A further theme that emerged within my interviews was of history and heritage: how an understanding of the past contributes to a hunter’s experience. Broadly speaking, two subthemes of history and heritage emerged in the discussions. How hunting is viewed as an important part
of rural heritage based on a history of hunting in a participant’s family, or, alternatively how landowners view “heritage hunters” as a threat to the enjoyment of their own property. Although I certainly would not describe the latter theme as dominant in the interviews, the handful of participants who did bring it up were very passionate.

Hunting is, indeed, a distinct and considerable part of Canadian heritage. Several of the hunters I spoke with emphasised the role feeling connected to their past played in their enjoyment of hunting. They outlined experiencing the hunt as tying them to how settlers survived while establishing Euro-Canadian communities, connecting them to a legacy of self-sufficiency that is intimately connected, for some, to the rural experience. Andy, who grew up in a small Northern Ontario town before relocating to Guelph, had the following insight:

I know I’m at least a 4th generation hunter because I got my great grandfather’s firearm. What a lot of people lose a sense of, or get out of touch with, is the fact that most Canadians, any Canadian family that was raised in Canada other than in a small town or city, ate wild game at some point…a lot of people just tend to forget about that, and are busy with a technological lifestyle these days. Hunting brings you back to those roots. You get outdoors, you get fresh air, you see wildlife, you appreciate the land. And that’s all part of the rural identity thing.

Even more often, and with very few exceptions, hunters I spoke with identified hunting as a part of their familial heritage. Often, participants spoke of how they began hunting in their youth with a family member: older cousins, brothers, uncles, and fathers. Hunting was naturalized for these participants early on in their lives and by their accounts became a memorable part of childhood. Robert felt especially connected to the experience of hunting with his family. When asked why he began hunting, Robert responded without hesitation:

Family, mainly. I had grandparents and uncles who were hunters and fishermen…sort of part of my family’s heritage is we lived off the land. As being farmers, as being hunters, as being fishermen. So it’s something that I’ve accepted as a heritage right in my family, and I continue to choose to do so.
Likewise, Timothy, who began hunting with his father and older brother during childhood saw both the hunt and game meat as connected to his past: “I grew up eating venison, primarily. We weren’t poor or nothing, but venison to begin with is better for you than beef”.

Hunting is seen as a means of demonstrating family ties and moving characteristic across generations. According to Robert, who began hunting with his family as a youth, “It’s simple to me. It’s part of my heritage, and I want to keep that heritage alive. You know, my family is getting older and realistically, they’re going to be gone before I know it. So I want to keep that family heritage, that legacy that we have as hunters and fishermen, alive.”

For one participant I spoke with, family had opened significant doors for him and his hunting crew. Cole, a charismatic man I spoke with over lunch in early September, now lives in Guelph but grew up in Wellington North. He still has many connections to the region, and evidently a strong family name in the area that has helped him to secure a network of properties to hunt:

That’s where I’m from, so I still have a bit of a relationship with those landowners. They still know of the family name. They’re familiar with the hunters. And I think now the problem is that there’s no familiarity with the people. They don’t know who you are, so they’re not very trustworthy to let individuals with firearms on their property.

For Cole, his family name has helped to assure property owners that he is a trustworthy member of their community, despite no longer living in Wellington North.

For other landowners, however, the familial connection to certain properties (and the privilege that comes with it) leads to conflict and frustration. The role of history and legacy in hunting in Wellington County is not exclusively relegated to the personal sphere of family pride: heritage also has the power to intimately shape relationships between landowners and hunters in

---

15 To my knowledge, three of the participants I spoke with have pre-teen children. When kids came up in the discussion, I asked whether they planned on encouraging their children to begin hunting when they were of an appropriate age. All three participants responded that they would.
Wellington County. Of the many subthemes that emerged in my discussions with several hunters who were also landowners, the issue of “heritage hunters” elicited by far the most powerful emotional reactions from participants. Hunters who persist in hunting on private property because their families had historically had access to the land drew the ire of Wellington landowners. In addition to the frustration generally expressed regarding trespassers on their property, broaching the topic of “heritage hunters” led to expressions of open rage, and even violence. Here is David’s take on the issue:

…and there's also what we call the "heritage hunters" around here. They grew up in the area. They've hunted the area. It is their right to hunt the area. Bullshit. I’m getting nasty here. No. [This is] private property. They have no permission whatsoever. Get out of here. [They’ll say], ‘Well you better duck when the bullets start flying because you might get hit’. Go ahead, Bud. I’ll shoot right back. I have no qualms about doing that. I’ve had confrontations, basically getting people out of here that don’t belong here.

Bernard and his wife, Anne, were particularly vocal about this point as well. Anne and Bernard had relocated Wellington North from a periurban area undergoing urbanization around 20 years ago, and still have problems with the ownership of their property not being recognised by some locals from a nearby community. During my interview with Bernard, Anne looked up while playing with her young granddaughter to passionately offer the following:

It’s people that live around here. And they live in town! They don’t have any relationship to the farmers. Maybe their fathers or grandfathers owned some property way back when. Or it’s trespassers in general. Because it’s the country! You see all kinds of ads, go to the country! Go to the country! Well if you’re in the country, does that mean you can go wherever you want? Go to a park. If you don’t pay taxes on it, it’s not yours. If you can’t pay to get into it, it’s not yours. Get the hell off. Stay in the city.

Bernard added concisely: “We have control over our property. Until hunting season.” The anger and fear Anne displayed towards the hunters who felt entitled to her and Bernard’s land was palpable. She is far from alone. Just up the road, when I spoke with Spencer several weeks later, his frustration was equally clear. As a farmer who had been living on his 50 acre property for close to a decade, Spencer was familiar with the issue of heritage hunters:
Some still seem to think that because their great, great, grandpappy used to own the land that they can still go on and do whatever they want…some of them still think that since their great, great, granddad did, they can still hunt off the land, and that kind of stuff.

Evidently and understandably, the sense of entitlement that some landowners experienced with “heritage hunters” is jarring, and damages the sense of control and comfort owners have over their own property. In my conversation with Bernard, he described the experience of deer season on his farm in poignant terms: “You hide. It’s like a war around here…they just come in... Deer season, you don’t want to be out too much. You just try to hide. Christopher [a permitted hunter], he knows the property lines and everything else. It’s these other yahoos…there’s no stopping them.”

**Becoming Rural**

“*You don't have an understanding of what it's like to live in a rural area, unless you stay there for a while.*” - Jeff

The theme of history and heritage as associated with rurality naturally leads one to ask: how does one become rural from an urban background? Throughout interviews, conversation occasionally turned to the process of becoming rural. Among the hunters that I spoke with, there were several individuals that bridged the divide between urban and rural: though they now identify as rural, they recall a time when their status as urban was fading, but there rural identity was not yet affirmed. They identified qualitative measures of rurality, and discussed a timeline of transition from urban to rural. These participants were positioned to offer unique perspectives on community membership and claiming a rural identity.

For some participants, this transition was best understood in the context of time spent in owning a rural property. Dana, who had lived on a Wellington North property with her husband for over 30 years, offered the following insight on their transition from urban to rural:
I think you have to live here for at least 20-25 years to identify as rural person. For the longest time [local people would ask]: where do you live? Oh, we just live down the road. [They would respond] Oh! At McGlenn’s\textsuperscript{16} place! It probably was about 10 years until it got to be our place. It’s about 25 years I’d say before you get known as a rural person.

Bruce echoed Dana’s sentiments, adding: “I found that too, living where I do. Same thing. [Existing community members] would reference the property, geographically speaking, as theirs. And I've been there 5, almost 6 years. So it takes time.”

Here, both Dana and Bruce indicate that the process of transition from urban to rural is at least partially dependent on becoming a member of the community, as recognised by existing community members. Although they owned their respective properties, it took time for the community to overcome historical associations of ownership. It is likely not a coincidence that Dana and her husband had issues with heritage hunters on their property, as previously mentioned.

Jeff, however, experienced a much shorter timeline and emphasised becoming involved with social functions in order to feel like a member of his rural community. He suggested that community functions such as the fall fair or the Santa Claus parade offered opportunities to become involved and included in the community, and, through participating in these functions, one could hasten community acceptance. For Jeff, face time with rural community members contributed greatly to his sense of inclusion in his rural community. When asked whether he identifies as a rural person, Jeff responded with the following: “Yes. I do [identify as a rural person] now. It took about 5 years of becoming more involved in the community.”

Evidently, becoming a member of a rural community is shaped not only by time spent living on a rural property, but also acceptance of the community characteristics one associates with a rural

\textsuperscript{16} Name has been changed.
lifestyle. In turn, particularly for those who had moved from an urban area to their current rural homes, becoming engaged with and accepting lived rural values played an integral part of identifying as rural. Throughout my interviews with participants, it became obvious that defining a trustworthy hunter with good practices is connected to the amount of time spent in rural places. Participants, through their expectations of what it means to practice ethical and knowledgeable hunting behaviour, indicated that there is a strong association between having an insider understanding of rural life and landscape, and demonstrating good practice. In terms of the role “becoming rural” plays in hunting, my interviews suggest that characteristics described by participants as integral to rurality (including “respectful”, “tight-knit”, and more trustworthy) translate effectively to defining a good hunter.

**Discussion**

The critical takeaway from these discussions on mastery, sensory experiences, heritage, and “becoming rural” as related to the hunt is to see the interconnectedness of rurality to hunting, as viewed by rural hunters. Furthermore, with this discussion, one can see that inter-hunter and hunter-non-hunter relations are shaped by a complex set of identifiers, including locality, experience, and willingness to adhere to the law. Although hunters who do not exhibit strong desirable traits are not always regarded as non-rural outsiders, the theme of “weekend warrior” was strong enough in my interviews to suggest that there is an association between rurality and what is believed by participants to be good hunting behaviour. Furthermore, evident in my discussions were factors contributing to hostile relationships between landowners and hunters. Several landowners spoke of problems with hunters feeling entitled to land that was no longer held by their family, leading to feelings of frustration, fear, and lack of control over their own property.
At the outset of this project, I sought to explore what “being rural” means to rural individuals, both in terms of personal identity and in relation to the lifestyles of their urban and suburban peers. In order to achieve this, I aimed to explore, through a framework of hunting, the characteristics residents of Wellington County assigned to themselves, and to outsiders. What I found was that, for the Wellington County hunters I interviewed, their identity as rural people was very much connected to their hunting practice in comparison and opposition to their urban peers, though not necessarily as a practice itself. That is to say, although Wellington County hunters did not generally see hunting as intrinsic to a rural identity, or even an important part of being a rural person, they did see their hunting practices as better because of their rurality. Wellington County rural hunters were often grappling with the reality of a changing sense of place, and the connected shift in identity that occurs when sense of place is compromised. Though a hunting space is physically the same location for anyone who uses it, the construction of a place as valuable to hunting is incredibly dependent on the experiential perception of each group. Even two parties, in the same location entertaining the same pastime, are not hunting the same land. They are not hunting in the same way, including operating within an identical ethical framework or with the same level of mastery; they are not walking through the same woods and fields. For the hunters I spoke with their experiences are replete with memories and past knowledge, often imbued with the weight of heritage. These experiences, both lived and remembered, are what shape hunters’ sense of place, and sense of rural identity.

Perhaps the most dominant theme throughout my fieldwork pertains to the evolving definition of a ‘good hunter’ in relation to rurality. Without question, the individuals I spoke with equated good hunters and ethical hunting practices with rural life; unethical and careless practice was associated with urban hunters. Many of the hunters I spoke with took concrete steps to minimize
their collegial interactions with non-rural hunters, including avoiding areas associated with urban hunters. The theoretical implications of this attitude in relation to the existing literature on hunting are significant, particularly when considered in light of current anthropological research on space and place. In the section that follows, I will illustrate how this project contributes to the current understanding on culture, place, and identity.

**Locality as a gateway to experience and access**

To begin with, it is important for us to consider the significance of experience and knowledge-building in the construction of place among rural hunters. Local knowledge is considered to be a fundamental element in the construction of place. The inherently experiential nature of local knowledge (for “to know is first of all to know the place one is in”), suggests that one can expect rural inhabitants to have greater perceptions of local structures, including those in the natural world (Casey 1996: 18). Among my participants, this was evidenced by their commitment to mastery within their hunting practices. For the hunters I spoke to, Casey’s suggestion was evidently internalized: participants indicated through their descriptions of good and bad hunters as parallel to rural and urban hunters, that rurality is synonymous with knowledge and perception of place. They, in light of their knowledge, were more involved in the transition from space to place of their hunting locales.

In following with Casey, however, I need to acknowledge that perception and knowledge do not exclusively contribute to the making of a place. Culture plays a significant role in sense of place as well. According to Casey, “practices and institutions pervade every level of perception”, with perception, though the primary mechanism through which a place is sensed and constructed, playing only a partial role in experiencing place (Casey 1996: 19). What does this thus mean for
rurality, and, more to the point, the experiences of rural hunters in Wellington County? Through this project, interviews with participants revealed that they, too, view the experience of hunting as intimately tied to a sense of place through multiple realms of experience. Through the perceptive experience of existing in and gathering knowledge from a rural space, to the cultural significance they often associate with the mechanisms of hunting (as tied to family practices, for instance) rural hunters in Wellington have a uniquely constructed identity heavily dependent on their sense of place. For the hunters I spoke with, living in a rural place offers the opportunity to gain knowledge of place through experience in a way that urban life simply does not often afford. In turn, rural hunters construct meanings of place in a way that is commensurate with the knowledge they draw from their experiences: as rural people, rural hunters inherently have access to more opportunity to construct a meaningful and nuanced place through their experience. Rural hunters, in the opportunity afforded by their lifestyles, are able to participate in constructing a sense of place to far greater an extent than urban hunters.

Casey leads one to consider, however, the significance of multi-party or multi-cultural use of property in place formation. The places constructed by processes Casey describes are homogenous: the relationship with their users and residents is exclusive, with the inhabitant drawing from place the memories and senses he or she has generated through experience. Although Casey readily recognises that “place is not one kind of thing: it can be psychical as well as physical, and doubtlessly also cultural and historical and social” (1996: 31), he offers little consideration to the contested nature of some places. In the context of this study, much of the relationship that Wellington County hunters have with space is shaped by their reactions to shared access, and fears of encroachment: in other words, opening up their place to the memories, knowledge, and bodies of others. For these individuals, their experience of place is
influenced by the symbolic presence of other, and in this case unwelcome, inhabitants. The language used by some participants to describe this phenomenon (Anne comparing hunting season on her property to a “warzone”, for instance, or multiple participants referring to non-rural hunters as “weekend warriors” as previously mentioned) indicates that rural hunters view the land on which they hunt, the places where they gain knowledge and experience, as contested. In turn, rural hunters in Wellington County have constructed a sense of place that places their experience as paramount in order to protect their sense of connectedness to place.

This experience of fear and retaliation is not exclusive to hunting: resistance to urban and periurban influence in urban areas has been identified by a number of researchers (Fox 1997; Masuda and Garvin 2008). In particular, I expect this issue to arise in Canada: the population concentration of Canada leans heavily towards urban, with roughly 81% of the population living in urban areas. Wellington County is decidedly rural, as described in Chapter 3. Both in Wellington County and more generally in North America, urban life is considered the default experience as a result of a predominantly urban population. As suggested by Creed and Ching, “the urban-identified can confidently assume the cultural value of their situation while the rural-identified must struggle to gain recognition” (1997: 4). Rural people are asked, by the very presence of an urban imperative, to prove the value of their practices and cultural associations. At times, and understandably, this process is coupled with resistance against the urban imperative.

The increased influence of the urban imperative may require adjustments to the aesthetic tone of the rural community. Historically rural artefacts (tractor tires, farm and homesteading equipment, for instance may be deemed charming by urban dwellers, and appropriated as decorations in much the same way as souvenirs from an ‘exotic’ nation (Creed and Ching 1997: 22). Rural
people, in turn, emphasise the importance of culturally significant artefacts within their community “in order to maintain their sense of themselves as country people” (Creed and Ching 1997: 17). This may mean that these material symbols attain greater prevalence within the community that they would have naturally because of the necessity of asserting one’s identity as a rural person. Much as with material culture, this current study suggests that a sense of connectedness through heritage and experience, too, is made further salient by the presence of non-rural influence. In line with suggestions made by Dunk (2002), hunting provides recreational hunters in Wellington County with the opportunity to express their connection to rural place via a culturally and personally significant activity, although this study did not address factors of race and ethnicity identified in Dunk’s work.

**Multiple cultures, multiple identities: Experiencing shared-experience places**

In light of the contrast to urban life evident in rural identity construction, it follows that perhaps relationships between rural and urban hunters can be best understood in a framework not only of constructing place through perception, as espoused by Casey, but rather through the lens of conflict, borders, and restriction. Returning to a key concept discussed in Chapter 2, contextualizing place in terms of tacit and concrete borders can shed much light on a group’s experience of place. Several authors mentioned in the Literature Review have focused on the construction of both physical and symbolic borders in space, which limit occupants’ access to place. To revisit Low briefly, a number of “systems of exclusion” exist in space that serve to delineate who may or may not access a place (2011: 391). Ranging from the physical (in this context, an example could be signs posting land as a no hunting zone), to legislative (increasingly complex and expensive licensing procedures for hunters) to discursive (community members’ descriptions of hunters as, for instance “murderers”, as participant James
encountered), these systems “reference the underlying structural racism, sexism, and classism that permeate contemporary neoliberal society” (Low 2011: 391). The finding of this study that hunters encounter tension and restrictive systems, both concrete and implicit, is no surprise: past studies including existing works examining hunting in North America (Jagnow et al. 2008; Fife 2010) and tensions between middle-class urban residents and rural people in the context of hunting in England (the previously mentioned Cox et al. 2008 and Milbourne 2003) have already suggested that this is the case. However, a major deficit in the existing research is the relatively homogenous approach researchers have taken to hunters and non-hunters. This current project reveals that hunters in Wellington County are anything but homogenous, and thus the restrictions they are apt to experience cannot be viewed uniformly. The experience a hunter will have is very much dependent on their immersion in the place they are hunting, and the experience landowners offer to hunters seeking access is, likewise, dependent on a shared perception of place. What is lacking in these discussions is an exploration of similar resource users’ dramatically different experiences of place. Both urban and rural hunter, hunt. Their goals are superficially similar. Only through discussion with rural hunters are alternative motivations, as discussed earlier in this chapter, revealed. Rural hunters are participating in an identity-sustaining activity in a way that is arguably impossible for an urban hunter to experience at the same level of significance.

Thus, an approach delineating land use as those who have access versus those who do not does not adequately reflect the complexity of relationships between hunters and landowners, and local rural hunters versus non-local hunters. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, a number of the hunters I spoke with emphasised their pride in maintaining a self-regulating population and campaigning against hunting peers they viewed as trespassers. The layers of symbolic regulation that occur in the microcosm of a Wellington County hunting season suggest that a dichotomous
approach to borders such as that described by Low, is inadequate. For hunters, it is not “us” versus “them”, in any simple way. “Us” is mercurial, referring to hunters, rural people, rural hunters, “good” hunters, and so forth, while “them” has equally multiple meanings. In order to understand the value of place to rural hunters in Wellington County (and even the value of rural living in periurban areas altogether), and to learn how to maximize knowledge and cultural use of land in these spaces, anthropologists need to move towards a more multidimensional interpretation of inhabitants of place.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Public anthropology, in its current incarnation, often encourages a critical discussion of “differences in the distribution of resources, statuses and power” (Rylko-Bauer et al. 181: 2006). Public issues anthropologists are called to look critically at issues impeding social cohesion and equality within communities, both at home and abroad. Academic skills of qualitative research and analysis are coupled with human curiosity and, at times, compassion in order to relay stories of public life to a broad, sphere-breaching audience. Through this study, I have illustrated the scope of identity in rural Wellington County, employing hunting as proxy. This research sheds valuable light on the current state of rurality and rural identity in a region that is gradually moving towards the increased influence of rural gentrification, and the continued influence of the rural idyll. Through this study, interviews with participants have uncovered the nuance present in rural identity, and the value assigned by rural people to their connection with place. I have demonstrated that hunting functions as a material artefact, connecting rural hunters to a sense of mastery and control over their experience as rural people, while drawing them towards a sense of heritage and history. For the participants in this project, there has not been a defining event that separates them from their sense of rurality: rather, their feelings of insecurity are manifest through a gradually encroaching fear of lost identity found in urban influence.

Contributions to the Anthropological Community

As mentioned in previous chapters, this study offers some unique insight to the theoretical study of space and place, as well as ethnographic literature on recreational hunting. Interviews with participants revealed that being local, and thus “being rural”, are fundamental factors in the construction of place as a hunter. Because of the significance associated with thorough
understanding of a space, and construction of place through experience, place for Wellington County hunters is intimately tied to identity. The intimacy of this connection between knowledge, experience, and locality assigns attributes of “good” hunters to those who are most immersed in building place. Furthermore, the complexity of a hunting identity as revealed by these participants resists homogenization and reveals the need for a multidimensional understanding of inhabitants of place. This study serves to contribute theoretically to the anthropology of space and place by revealing that constructions of place are not only contested, but can in fact be formulated in reaction to the presence of other inhabitants.

In terms of offering a unique ethnographic contribution to the discipline of anthropology, this study fulfills a deficit in research specifically related to individual responses to rural gentrification in Southwestern Ontario. Understanding how rural people view rurality in the context of an ever-expanding urban periphery will be crucial if public anthropologists want to protect the diversity of experience within rural regions in decades to come. Furthermore, this study contributes to the relatively sparse field of literature on recreational hunting in Canada. Hunting, like rurality, will call for increasing ethnographic attention as rural regions undergo processes of change that increase rural exposure to population growth, cultural transformation, and development.

**Community stakeholder benefits**

The primary community beneficiaries of this study are recreational hunters in Wellington County. Through this project, participants had the opportunity to relay their experiences and perspectives for analysis and presentation in an academic report. Although participants were often contributing in a significant way to change and knowledge-building in their community by openly discussing their hunting practices with other community members, this study provides
further context for these conversations. This study provides hunters with rigorous ethnographic accounts to supplement their experiential knowledge of hunting, land use, and conflict. Furthermore, participants can see through this study that they are not alone in their experiences, or in the values they assign to hunting: seeing shared perspectives in this study can help to validate the experiences hunters relay here. In turn, I hope that hunters in Wellington County can feel further encouraged to communicate with the non-hunting community, knowing that they are not isolated in their concerns of urban influence on their hunting practices.

This research has a potential application for shaping the way rural landowners view hunters. Although the input of non-hunting landowners was included only minimally in this study, I expect that landowners will be in a better-informed position when denying or allowing access to their property as a result of this study. Likewise, this study could offer some guidance towards urban hunters wishing to gain access to land in rural areas. The evidence presented here suggests that there are distinct characteristics rural landowners see as belonging to “good” hunters; urban hunters could look to these behaviours as tacit rules to adhere to in order to practice desirable behaviour on rural properties, an thus improve the likelihood of gaining access.

Additionally, the County of Wellington would benefit from an increased understanding of hunting practices in the region. The Wellington County Official Plan details priorities in planning for the anticipated growth of the County over the next decade. This plan outlines several areas of commitment that would be aided by a better understanding of hunting practices and hunter-landowner relations in the County. These commitments include:

- “Maintain the small town and rural character of the county” (Sec. 2.2.9)
- “Support the creation of partnerships among landowners, community groups, and government which promote land stewardship activities” (Sec. 2.2.16)
• “Maintain clean water, clean air and healthy plant, fish and wildlife” (Sec. 2.2.14)
• “Broaden recreational and leisure opportunities” (Sec. 2.2.21)

Understanding the experiences of hunters in Wellington County can assist in fulfillment of these development goals in the community. The contribution of this study to the first two listed goals should be clear: the County’s commitment to maintaining the “rural character of the county” is contingent on developing an understanding of what constitutes rurality within Wellington. This study describes in detail self-perceptions of rural identity through the eyes of hunters, while also illustrating the complexity of what being “rural” means. Furthermore, with respect to the second two listed points, hunters have a unique perspective guided by their sensory engagement with wildlife and the land, as indicated by this study. Building solid relationships with the community of hunters who live and hunt in Wellington County can contribute to informed land stewardship activities in the County.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Despite the significance of this research, there are some limitations. First off, despite pursuing connections via snowball sampling, ultimately I was only able to secure one interview with a non-hunting landowner, Bernard. He offered insight into how he, as a non-hunter, decided who would be permitted or forbidden from hunting on his property. For instance, at one point in my interview with him, Bernard indicated that he allowed Christopher permission to hunt because of Christopher’s rural background. It is possible that further conversations with other non-hunting landowners would reveal a similar theme. I would suggest that this issue merits further study in order to obtain a more balanced perspective on the motivations behind providing, or denying land access to hunters.
As mentioned early on in this thesis, my project intentionally omitted self-identified “urban” hunters in order to maintain a focus on rural voices. At the outset of this study, I did not anticipate the large contribution of contrast in defining an identity as a rural hunter. For many, “being rural” was very much defined in opposition to “being urban”. A future study of urban hunters in Wellington County could contribute enormously to the ethnographic illustration offered here, while ameliorating the rural-centered presentation of participant accounts.

A further limitation to the study is the method of data collection: because of various issues with timing, I was unable to complete participant observation as a part of the research process. Given my desired timeline for completion of this Master’s program, the majority of my original research needed to be completed during Summer and Autumn 2012. In the future, participant observation employed in a similar study could offer valuable and original insight into how hunters view place in the context of their hunt. Participant observation would also serve to ameliorate some of the limitations of rapport presented by my status as a non-hunter. Through actively partaking in a hunt, I would have had the opportunity to generate my own experiences and perceptions to drive inquiries with participants, thus adding a depth of trust and rapport that was not necessarily achievable through semi-structured interviews.
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX 1: Landowner Permission Form

Source: http://www.ofah.org/hunting/Landowner-Permission-Form

This is a two-part form so each party to the agreement has a record of it.

**Hunting/Angling Permission Record**

Name of Angler/Hunter: ____________________________

Address: _______________________________________

_________________________________________________

*OFAH Member #: __________________ Expire Date: ____________

I hereby consent to the person named above

Hunting  Angling  Hunting & Angling

On my property for the species and on the dates noted below:

Species: ____________________________

Dates: ____________________________

Property Boundaries: ______________________________________

LANDOWNER'S SIGNATURE: ___________________  LANDOWNER'S PHONE NUMBER: _______  DATE: ____________

* OFAH members in association with their membership and existing personal liability coverage have an additional $3 million in public liability insurance when they are engaged in OFAH-related activities such as hunting, fishing, skeet, trap or target shooting, archery, camping in connection with an OFAH activity, conservation work, and non-commercial trapping.

This is a two-part form so each party to the agreement has a record of it.

**Landowner's Permission Record**

Name of Angler/Hunter: ____________________________

OFAH Membership #: __________________ Expire Date: ____________

Year, Make and Color of Vehicle: _________________________

Vehicle Licence#: ____________________________

Species: ____________________________

Dates Permitted on Property: ____________________________

I hereby agree to hold

NAME OF LANDOWNER
blameless and without liability in the event of accident or injury while hunting or angling on his/her property.

______________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
Angler/Hunter's Signature  Angler/Hunter's Phone Number  DATE

* OFAH members in association with their membership and existing personal liability coverage have an additional $3 million in public liability insurance when they are engaged in OFAH-related activities such as hunting, fishing, skeet, trap or target shooting, archery, camping in connection with an OFAH activity, conservation work, and non-commercial trapping.
APPENDIX 2: Recruitment text

This text was used for recruitment purposes on posted fliers, in the Wellington Advertiser newspaper, and on Kijiji.

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR
RESEARCH PROJECT ON RECREATIONAL HUNTING IN WELLINGTON COUNTY

- Are you a licensed hunter residing in Wellington County, ON?
- Do you conduct some or all of your recreational hunting activities in Wellington County?
- Are you 18 years old or older?

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of recreational hunters and rural identity in Wellington County, ON.

As a volunteer for this study, you would be asked to participate in a digitally recorded interview lasting approximately one hour and arranged at a time convenient to your schedule.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a $10 gift card to Tim Hortons.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Christine Porterfield

University of Guelph, Department of Sociology and Anthropology
at
[phone number redacted for the purpose of thesis]
Email: [redacted for the purpose of thesis]

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics, University of Guelph

REB: 12AP016
APPENDIX 3: Sample Interview Questions

In addition to the examples provided in Chapter 3, these questions provide some reference for the structure of interviews. In many cases, participants worked through responses and addressed all relevant themes simply over the course of our time together.

1. Please describe several factors that you think make people living in rural communities unique from urban or suburban people.
   a. How do you see yourself acting out these characteristics in your day-to-day life?
2. When did you begin to hunt in Wellington County?
3. When you began hunting, what initially drove you to participate in this activity?
4. When you began to hunt, what were some of the earliest feelings that you experienced (Themes: feelings of community, belonging; feelings of power)?
5. What parts of the experience of hunting do you see as most connected to rural life? What parts of hunting do you see as least connected to rural life?
6. Can you describe why hunting is significant to you (Themes: family significance, meaning of game meat, attachment to the land)?
7. How do you determine where you choose to hunt?
8. In your opinion, what are some characteristics that make land more desirable for hunting?
9. If you hunt on private land, how often do you interact with the landowners?
10. When you have interacted with the landowners in the past, how has your presence as a hunter on their land been received?
11. In your opinion, do conflicts between hunters and landowners exist in Wellington County?
    a. If you do believe so, how do these conflicts affect your ability to hunt?
12. How have interactions or experiences you have had as a hunter impacted your sense of what it means to be a member of a rural community?
13. What characteristics would you use to describe hunters and non-hunters?
14. In your opinion, to what extent, if any, is hunting a significant part of what it means to be a member of a rural community?
15. What, if anything, would you like to see change in relationships between hunters and non-hunters in your community?
APPENDIX 4: Participant Consent Form

Recreational Hunting in Wellington County, Ontario: Identity, Land Use, and Conflict

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Christine Porterfield and Dr. Satsuki Kawano from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Guelph. The results of this study will be used, in the form of a thesis authored by Christine Porterfield towards completion of a Master’s degree in Public Issues Anthropology.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Christine Porterfield [phone number redacted for the purpose of thesis] (email [redacted for the purpose of thesis]) or Dr. Satsuki Kawano [phone number redacted for the purpose of thesis] (email [redacted for the purpose of thesis]).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine the importance of hunting as part of a rural identity among hunters living in Wellington County, ON. The study seeks to address: how do hunters feel and what changes to their hunting activities do they need to make when new community members move in? Are hunters in Wellington County affected by urbanization and changing rural demographics, and how? In what ways is the identity of a hunter significant? How is it intrinsic to a rural identity?

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. We will ask you to read and sign this consent form.
2. We will ask you to verbally answer 22 questions about your experiences as a hunter in Wellington County. The length of this interview will vary according to your answers, but it will likely take approximately 1 hour. Following the interview, the researchers may be in touch with you for clarification, but no follow-up interviews will be conducted. If, at any point, you are uncomfortable with the questions, you can refuse to answer or withdraw from the interview completely. This interview will be recorded via digital audio. You also have the right to withdraw your consent following the completion of the interview, and the data will be destroyed.

Finally, we will provide you with our contact information, which you can use to get a hold of us at any point if you would like to see the research results. These results will be available by May 2013. You also have the right to access the audio recording of your interview, as well as a transcript of your interview. The transcript of your interview will be available within 7 days following your interview. The opportunity to review your transcript will remain open for 14 days after becoming available. If you choose to review the transcript, you will have the opportunity to clarify information you have provided, request that certain quotes not be used, and withdraw consent entirely from the project.
POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is a minimal social risk associated with participating in this project. Although we will take extensive precautions to ensure your confidentiality is maintained, there is a minor risk that your confidentiality could be violated. For an outline of measure that will be taken by researchers to ensure that your confidentiality is maintained, please see subsection “Confidentiality”.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Benefits to the student researcher: this study will increase the student researcher’s understanding of applied research methods in anthropology
Benefits to participants: this study will increase participants’ understanding of issues facing the community of hunters in Wellington County, ON
Benefits to the scientific community and society: this research has the potential to influence relationships between hunters and non-hunters, and policies surrounding hunting in Wellington County, ON

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will receive a $10.00 gift card to Tim Horton’s in appreciation of your time.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study.

The data will be treated as confidential. You will not be referred to by name in the interview recordings, but rather by a pseudonym. A separate, written document will have the your contact information, should you wish to provide it, consent form, and your associated pseudonym. This document will be stored securely and separately from the interview recordings. All information and recordings will be destroyed following the project’s completion (expected May 2013). At no time will participants’ names and other personal information be shared outside of the researchers. Over the course of this project, all data including audio recordings of the interviews will be kept in a locked filing cabinet which can be accessed only by the researchers. All digital files will be encrypted.

As a participant, you have the right to review the interview recording and interview transcript. Contact information will be provided to you following the interview.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:
SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided for the study “Recreational Hunting in Wellington County, Ontario: Identity, Land Use, and Conflict” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

____________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

____________________________________
Signature of Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

____________________________________
Name of Witness (please print)

____________________________________
Signature of Witness Date