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Spinning Charlotte's Web: Resident Perceptions and Neutralizations of a Slaughterhouse Town

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SPINNING CHARLOTTE'S WEB:

RESIDENT PERCEPTIONS AND NEUTRALIZATIONS

OF A SLAUGHTERHOUSE TOWN

by

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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

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ABSTRACT

**Spinning Charlotte's Web: Resident Perceptions and Neutralizations of a
Slaughterhouse Town**

Ashley L. Flaherty, Master of Arts
Minnesota State University, Mankato
2019

Meat production, consumption, and slaughterhouses significantly affect the
environment, public health, and non-human animals. Those who live in communities that
house slaughterhouses must negotiate what it means to live and work in this community,
and be financially supported by the industry. Understanding how people negotiate the
roles that the industry plays in their community through semi-structured interviews was
the primary purpose of this study. To reconcile the issues the town faces, the respondents
in this study used excuses and justifications, specifically techniques of neutralization, to
account for both the company's actions and the social issues the city itself faces.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, there are over 2,800 slaughterhouses where animals raised for food are brought to be killed and processed (United States Department of Agriculture 2018). The entanglements of oppression between humans and other animals are particularly salient today through the processing of meat. While corporations and CEOs who own the animals and the production facilities make a significant amount of money, it is the most disadvantaged who work in and live near slaughterhouses. Slaughterhouses are more likely to be situated in communities where people live in poverty. Those who live in these communities are less likely to be able to fight against the inequalities this creates in their communities because they have limited access to resources and power (Arcury 1999; Broadway 2000; Glasser 2015).

Animal exploitation and human oppression are linked together throughout history. In *Animal Oppression and Human Violence*, Nibert (2013) has linked domestication, which he renamed domesecration, to reflect how humans domesticated animals to issues we have today surrounding fresh water, oil reserves, global warming, and food insecurity. Since animals have been domesecrated, there has been an increased risk to the health, safety, and autonomy of nonhuman animals and humans. Humans have used non-human animals as tools to increase exploitation, domination, and slavery of specific human populations. Today, we still see that entanglement of oppression between non-human animals and those without resources (Nibert 2013).

An example of the entanglement of oppression between human and non-human animals is visible in one Midwestern town that for anonymity will be called Wilbur. Wilbur is a small, rural town whose road signs, tourism marketing, and citizens proudly boast about being one of the largest slaughterhouses in the United States. The slaughterhouse sits on one side of the city, with a drab beige exterior as semis regularly head in and out of the slaughterhouse. There are distinct smells of burning flesh from the building that wafts through the air into the nearby neighborhoods. This situation happens so often that residents often joke about it "smelling like Wilbur" because of the stench that goes through the town.

The houses around the slaughterhouse are among the poorest neighborhoods in Wilbur. Homes near the slaughterhouse have paint peeling off of the sides and broken windows. Directly across two major roads on the same side of town sits the headquarters of the corporation that exclusively buys the meat the slaughterhouse produces. The building is quiet and peaceful. At lunchtime, workers can be seen taking walks outside. The homes by the corporation are modest, and a brand-new high-end apartment building was built a couple of blocks down. Although the parent company and the slaughterhouse in Wilbur are separate businesses legally, they are uniquely related. Some employees at the parent company are on the board of the foundation which bears the company name, despite the claims that the board and company are independent of one another. The slaughterhouse, which also asserts they are a private business, exclusively does meat processing for the corporation across the street. The companies' combined are the largest employers in Wilbur. Wilbur's local newspaper reports they employ roughly 4,000 people in its meat packing plant, corporate office, and research institute.

Wilbur's connection with the meat producing company and slaughterhouse is deeply intertwined. Wilbur proudly adorns a nickname based on the company's most popular meat product. During the summer, flags hang above the streets with the town's meat nickname "JerkyTown." The local high school's mascot is a man wearing a butcher's uniform with a cleaver in hand. It is clear that the town finds its identity through these businesses.

In addition to the slaughterhouse and corporation, is a foundation in Wilbur that bears the name of the parent company which is responsible for providing grants to the local schools, community projects, and events, as well as supporting the local nature center. Although the foundation lists it is a separate entity from the corporation, many of its board members have direct ties to elite corporate positions in the company. One of its board members is the operating President and Chief Executive Operator of the corporation.

This research explores the complex web of the meatpacking business in this Midwestern town. There have been other studies on the impact that slaughterhouses have on communities, but none that explicitly examines the effects of residents' beliefs about community, environmental, economic, and physical health in a slaughterhouse town. This study fills that gap by talking directly to residents about how they perceive the economic, physical and social health of their community, and the role they believe the parent company and the slaughterhouse have in their community.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Social Problems of Slaughterhouses

Animals are killed in slaughterhouses, or abattoirs, for food, usually in mass numbers at high-speeds (Oxford Dictionary 2019). Although meat may be an inexpensive food for consumers, there are considerable costs passed onto the communities of slaughterhouses. Slaughterhouses often have adverse effects on housing, employment, social programs, crime, the environment, healthcare, and education in the communities in which they are based (Broadway 2000; Broadway and Stull 2006; Cook et al. 2017). The meat industry fails to give proper attention to increase worker safety, public health, and animal welfare.

Animal Health

Nonhuman animals are at the heart of the oppression faced in the meat industry. Animals occupy a variety of roles in our culture despite being viewed as property in most circumstances. They are seen as vital to our ecosystems, as our companions, as objects for entertainment and consumption, and as a form of labor. Animals are crucial to providing habitat and environment for all beings, and their presence in the ecosystem directly impacts climate, production of soil, and water supply. However, in the animal agriculture industry, animals are used and seen as capital rather than as living beings.

Animals are more likely to be abused, exploited, and killed when their autonomy is taken away by others.

Animals raised for food often grow up in dirty, crowded facilities and then are transported to be slaughtered in the same conditions (Eisnitz 1997). Pigs, for example, undergo brutal conditions in slaughterhouses. Workers in the animal agriculture industry do not give pigs water, food, heat, or air conditioning in trucks. For many animals, this is one of the few or even the first, times they see the light of day. Some pigs freeze in the winter to the side of the truck and are thrown by workers into a pile of other dead pigs to die, despite still being alive. Pigs may overheat or go without water and become dehydrated in the summertime.

In the book *Slaughterhouse*, Eisnitz (1997) documented the brutal torture that animals experience in slaughterhouses. Many animals are boiled alive, have their throats slit, or are electrocuted by slaughterhouse workers. They are often the subject of worker's anger and frustration. A video of workers abusing animals in the Wilbur slaughterhouse was released and went viral, documenting these same conditions that Eisnitz (1997) discussed. Workers in the video are seen kicking the animals, slitting the throats of fully conscious animals, and forcing animals with sickness and injuries to slaughter.

Many animals have various illnesses before they are killed, with much documentation showing animals with infections are still fed to consumers (Eisnitz 1997; Mourouti et al. 2015). Industries give animals a large number of antibiotics to combat this problem. Around 80 percent of all antibiotics sold in the US are for livestock (Mellon, Benbrook, and Benbrook 2001). These antibiotics have been found in humans who eat

the meat, and studies show that due to a large number of antibiotics used, antibiotics are less effective in humans and future illnesses will be harder to treat (Mellon et al. 2001).

Despite most people's love for animals, the majority of human relationships with nonhuman animals consist of exploiting them. This animal-human connection becomes obvious when socializing children into "dominionism," or the notion that animals exist for their usefulness to humans (Ellis and Irvine 2010). Ellis and Irvine found that young people learn from others how to distance their emotions to animals. Children neutralize the actions they are performing and the love they have for the animals they raise. This process of socialization, along with family, school, and media messages perpetuates and socializes children and adults to adopt the idea of "dominionism." When people believe it is necessary or reasonable to exploit animals, they can distance themselves from these emotions and excuse the detrimental effects that come with animal agriculture.

Environmental Health

Another effect of animal agriculture is the impact it has on the environment. Global warming is connected with how we farm, slaughter animals, and consume animals (Gill and Wilkinson 2010; Koneswaran and Nierenberg 2008; Llonch et al. 2017). Animal agriculture is responsible for 51 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, more than the combined exhaust from all transportation (Goodland and Anhang 2009). Transportation exhaust is responsible for 13 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions (Environmental Protection Agency 2017) and slaughterhouse communities often have thousands of semis carrying the millions of animals to be slaughtered through their communities each year. Air quality in slaughterhouse communities is more likely to be

polluted and of poor quality (Broadway 2000). Water quality in these towns is also profoundly impaired from the production of meat processing (Broadway 2000). Wastewaters from slaughterhouses contain solids, including fat, grease, and manure (Alvarez and Liden 2008; Asselin et al. 2008). Wastewater in municipal sewage systems contributes to high levels of blood oxygen demand and chemical oxygen demand which can cause severe problems for cities when not treated correctly (Alvarez and Liden 2008). When there are high nitrate levels in water, it can kill aquatic life, cause blue baby syndrome, and make it difficult for water-dependent creatures to survive (Greer et al. 2005; Knobeloch et al. 2000; Majumdar 2003; Ward et al. 2005).

Consumer Health

Not only do slaughterhouses have negative implications for the towns they are in, but the product they produce –meat—has adverse health outcomes as well. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) issued a report that classified the consumption of processed meat as carcinogenic to humans (IARC 2015). Evidence supports that the consumption of processed meat "causes cancer in humans and strong mechanistic evidence supporting a carcinogenic effect" (IARC 2015). The IARC identifies red meat as a probable carcinogen to humans. Long before the IARC report was released numerous studies have linked various negative health factors to the consumption of eating meat (Mourouti et al. 2015).

A study released by the Environmental Protection Agency, (Mikati, Benson, and Luben et al. 2018) found that particulate matter released in hazardous areas such as landfills and industrial sites are more likely to cause severe degradation of health.

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Particulate matter, as examined in this study, is a known carcinogen that can cause lung cancer (International Agency for the Research on Cancer; Environmental Protection Agency). Wilbur's county has some of the highest lung cancer rates in the state (State Department of Health 2015). This fact is of particular interest since one of the town's other main industries is a research institute whose primary goal is to prevent and treat cancer.

Slaughterhouse Workers

Slaughterhouse work has been described as having the lowest prestige out of all other forms of "dirty work" occupations in the US (Baran et al. 2016). In capitalist production, employers measure success by income and profits. To rationalize the production process, deskilling of labor needs to take place to not only simplify tasks but to make workers more interchangeable. Since workers are no longer required to have special skills, their position is easily fillable by someone else. Both human and non-human animals suffer from this alienation, injury, pain, and death for a company to gain maximum profit.

Economic exploitation is one form of control present in many communities that suffer from environmental injustice, as those who live in these communities do not have other options for earning an income. Corporations depend on the residents not having the political will, time, or ability to create obstacles that may hinder corporations from building in their communities. They rely on the fact that low-income residents need jobs and will not complain. Residents fear that it will impact their economic survival if they speak out against the corporation. Employers economically extort workers to accept

adverse health and environment effects to have a job. Therefore, they must take low paying and often health-damaging jobs. In one study of minority slaughterhouse workers, the workers were well aware of this power imbalance, saying that they understood that employers knew they had no power, so they felt that employers could treat them poorly (Dalla and Christensen 2005). Economic exploitation is true for the residents of Wilbur as well. Although the town's poverty rate is 15.8 percent (U.S. Census 2010), the rates surrounding the neighborhoods closest to the slaughterhouse are 17 percent to 42 percent below the poverty line.

Health issues are often faced by those employed in the slaughterhouses, (Dalla and Christensen 2005). Those who work in slaughterhouses are more likely to develop physical illnesses from their environment, workspace, and daily routines. Illnesses from industrial accidents, contact with ill animals, and air pollution are common among slaughterhouse workers (Arcury, Mora, and Quandt 2015; Artz et al. 2007; Baran, Rogelberg, and Clausen 2016). These workers often develop diseases from the repetitive motion of the work and are likely to suffer mentally from stress associated with odors (Baran et al. 2016). Workers in slaughterhouses are directly affected by "air pollution, repetitive motion diseases, industrial accidents, direct contact with ill or diseased animals, and are more likely to suffer from psychological stress associated with odors, noise pollution, and other factors" (Broadway and Stull 2006). Many workers know that the repetitive motion of the work is the reason behind common illnesses such as carpal tunnel syndrome, but have no choice but to continue working in the factory to support their families (Arcury et al. 2015). Slaughterhouse work requires long shifts of repetitive work

that is often emotionally and physically exhausting. Injuries go mostly unreported due to rates of undocumented workers.

The presence of a slaughterhouse in a community also affects a town's crime rates. Fitzgerald et al. (2009) examined the role that slaughterhouses have on crime rates in a community and found that crime is one of the ways the slaughterhouse has "spillover effects" into a community's health. Compared to similar towns, and after controlling for variables that impact crime rates, Fitzgerald et al. (2009) concluded that communities with slaughterhouses experience higher crime rates, and higher arrest rates in general, as well as for violent crimes, rape, another sex offenses. This study demonstrates the spillover effect from slaughterhouses that impact community health, from pollution to racial tensions to work stress, impact a community in many ways.

Cruelty and routine killing of animals also directly affects the wellbeing of people and can lead to social isolation, suicide, and crime (Arluke et al. 1999; Baran et al. 2016). Those who work in slaughterhouses are more likely to develop negative coping strategies compared to those in occupations that do not employ routine killing (Baran et al. 2016). Workers are more likely to consume alcohol during weekdays, feel least rested after work, more likely to report sickness or accidents resulting from work, and found the least amount of meaning derived from their work (Baran et al. 2016).

Race

Slaughterhouse employers often recruit immigrant workers to provide cheap labor; however, studies have shown that members of the community are often apprehensive towards minorities who move to their towns to work in the slaughterhouses

(Baran et al. 2016; Grey 1999). There are intense levels of tension as newcomers bring new values into current residents and their established networks. Perceptions that immigrant workers were not as committed to their community, wanted to make the job seasonal, or were hurting others people's jobs in the community were among reasons that white people were upset with minorities for working in slaughterhouse communities (Grey 1999).

High turnover rates are evident for multiple reasons in slaughterhouse employment. The reasons for high turnover include high injury rate, alienation, and other negative working conditions (Grey 1999). However, many citizens often believe that the problem of turnover is associated with minority employment, citing their culture and lifestyle as the reason the slaughterhouse and the surrounding community had social issues. Without proper representation or plans for inclusion, communities are set up to fail and continue to create ethnic division between slaughterhouse workers and community members (Broadway 2000).

Slaughterhouses often recruit immigrant workers from outside the community to pay lower wages. The influx of residents often creates a need and demand for housing, social services, and schools (Dalla and Christensen 2005). This influx puts a deep economic strain on those who work in the slaughterhouse. They are not able to save money or provide a safe neighborhood for their children (Dalla et al. 2005). With new residents, schools can become overcrowded as well, which results in a need for additional taxpayer infrastructure (Broadway 2000). Many communities are not able to prepare for these new challenges, which lead to more significant problems.

As the largest employers in Wilbur for many years, both the slaughterhouse and corporation have come under scrutiny for other reasons in the past. A strike in the 1980s began to shed light on the problems that workers faced inside the doors of the slaughterhouse. Since the strike, the poverty level in Wilbur has been above the state average (Census 2010). Many of the workers in the slaughterhouse are undocumented immigrants working for lower pay. Latino/a workers steadily rose in Wilbur, and according to a local report, are now estimated to be about 75 percent of the workforce primarily because of the strike in the 1980s. Immigrant workers came in to cross the picket lines, and in turn de-unionized the slaughterhouse workforce. The strike has created racial and ethnic tensions in the town that exacerbate the current environmental issues they face.

People of color and those who live in poverty are disproportionately more likely to live in areas where pollution occurs, otherwise known as environmental racism (Jantz 2018). Those who experience environmental racism have fewer resources, status, and power to resist what is happening (Arcury 1999; Broadway 2000; Glasser 2015). Factories, such as slaughterhouses, are more likely to be situated in communities where people live in poverty. Factories compromise communities' health because they live around these areas. Since they are more likely to have air pollution, they also have the highest rates of respiratory illnesses compared to other neighborhoods or communities (WHO 2016). Unsurprisingly, the town studied had some of the highest rates of lung cancer in the state (Department of Health 2015).

Slaughterhouses affect communities in many different ways. They have a significant impact on the environment, nonhuman and human-animal welfare, social

welfare, and crime. Cruelty and routine killing of animals directly affects the wellbeing

of those workers and can lead to social isolation, suicide, and crime (Arluke et al. 1999;

Baran et al. 2016). They impact the town's ability to prosper as slaughterhouses often

create a strain on social issues such as housing, schooling, and income inequality

(Broadway 2000). Animals often suffer as workers are forced to kill nonhuman animals

at high-speed rates, with many animals still conscious (Eisnitz 1997). Slaughterhouses

also damage the physical environment; air pollution in towns with slaughterhouses is so

common that residents are more likely to have respiratory illnesses compared to other

neighborhoods or communities without the slaughterhouses' presence (Mikati, Benson,

and Luben et al. 2018). Despite all these issues, residents have to live in these areas and

work in the slaughterhouses.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of community members on the impact of the main industries: a meat-producing corporation and a slaughterhouse on the community's physical, social, and environmental health. More specifically, the study intends to understand: What are the perceptions of the impact the slaughterhouse has on the town? Do residents in the city recognize the literature's commonly discussed impacts of slaughterhouses in areas of social, environmental, and physical health? Do community members have specific coping skills or mechanisms? How do individuals with various roles in the community compare in attitudes towards these industries (i.e., those who work in the slaughterhouse vs. other roles)?

Data Collection

Secondary research included a literature search of the impacts of slaughterhouses in communities as well as a search of autobiographies, local papers, county and state data in regards to this town specifically. Questions for the interview included those that address the main research question; determining the perception that community members have of the roles that the slaughterhouse plays in their community, as well as the other affiliated businesses. These questions were rooted in what the previously discussed literature determined are the main impacts that a slaughterhouse has on a community

through social, physical, emotional, and environmental health. Questions attempted to address both the benefits and negatives that residents in the community perceive the industries to have on their town. As the literature has shown, there is also a connection between perception of immigration and slaughterhouse effects, so the research also probed into this area to determine if perceptions of immigration are a playing factor in how residents see the role of the slaughterhouse in their community.

Initial respondents were recruited via an email inviting people in the community to participate. The initial email was sent to various people in the community with publicly listed email addresses. The email contained a flyer detailing the purpose of the research, the benefits, the risks, and the time that potential participants would put into this research. In the flyer, there was listed both a phone number and email address for potential participants to reach out to on the flyer. Some employees at one of the companies in the town had publicly listed contact information and were contacted that way. To recruit other participants, people in the community were asked to send a recruitment email to anyone they feel might be interested. Flyers were also posted in public areas around the town including grocery stores, laundromats, and a library.

After initial interviews, participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was chosen to identify individuals who wanted to speak about this issue and may know others who should add to the data collection that may not have reached through other avenues of sampling. Participants were asked if they know anyone who might be interested in participating and if they would send the recruitment email or flyer to anyone they think may be interested in the study. There was no pressure asking someone to distribute contact information.

Respondents participated in a semi-structured interview. Interviews were the ideal

method for this project because it allowed for more in-depth answers from the

interviewees. Interview times were on average 45 minutes in length, with a range of

interviews lasting from 30 minutes to an hour and 30 minutes in length. All 15

participants were over the age of 18 and lived in the community at the time of the

interview.

Participants were notified before the interview that they could stop participation

and withdraw from the study at any time. The interviews were audio recorded.

Recordings were transcribed with the participant's identity being removed at the time of

transcription to ensure confidentiality. Two participants asked the recording to be stopped

for two questions during the process to answer the question "off the record." These

responses were not transcribed or noted at the request of the participants.

Each interview was approached with the intent to be conscious of the unique role

that the interviewer-interviewee have together. The goal was to use strong reflexivity as

much as possible to identify all the ways that data could be potentially impacted by the

interview itself. In the field notes, actions that may have impacted the research were

documented. There were problems with being completely neutral. There were times

during the interview process where the interviewer's opinion was asked, and the answer

itself may have swayed the direction that the interviews took. In each interview, there

was an awareness of this possibility and its consequences to the validity of the research.

Probing cues such as silence, head nods, and neutral encouragement was used when

attempting to find more data. Field notes were extensively used after each interview to

document everything that took place during the interview such as interruptions, noises, and other feelings that could not be captured by the audio interview itself.

Table 1 contains a chart of how trends were categorized. All 15 of the respondents were at the time living in the city of Wilbur. All but three of the respondents were white, five held high positions of power within the community, and six were female. All but one respondent discussed immigrants when discussing various social issues occurring in the town without probing. Ten of the fifteen respondents did not recognize there to be a crime problem within the town, or if they did recognize there to be a higher rate of crime, they asserted that it was a positive thing.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done through open, line-by-line coding. Charmaz's (2008) guide was followed to produce codes through several stages. Initially, transcripts were coded for where participants talked about the company, slaughterhouse, or institute. Then, transcripts were coded for themes that emerged from the literature review such as environment, labor, health, or race. During the data analysis stage, memoing was also utilized to identify any patterns and connections that were discovered throughout the interviews. During one of the memos, it became clear that respondents were utilizing Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization. As focus began to narrow more on how they were neutralizing the negative effects of the company on their town, transcripts were revisited and coded for the techniques of neutralization.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

What happens when people are aware of problems in their communities? In this study, respondents neutralized problems they identified in Wilbur through their accounts. Accounts are "statements made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior" or a "linguistic device employed whenever an action is subject to valuation inquiry" (Scott and Lyman 1968:46). Accounts can occur both in the form of excuses or justifications. When one utilizes excuses as accounts, they understand that the act committed was wrong, but they deny that they are responsible for the action. Excuses generally fall under four categories: appeal to accidents, defeasibility, biological drives, or scapegoating. Defeasibility is the most commonly used excuse by respondents in this study. Most often, when respondents admit that the act in question was wrong or bad, they explain that the person or business was not completely at fault because it was not up to them or that harm was not the intent of their action.

Techniques of neutralization, in the forms of justifications, were used by the participants on behalf of the company and the greater meatpacking industry. When people use justifications, they emphasize the value or good of an act when presented with claims of deviance or harm. In the case of this study, respondents accepted that the company was responsible for some actions, but they denied that these acts should be viewed as deviant. Types of justifications include denial of injury, denial of the victim, condemnation of the condemners, and appeals to loyalties (Scott and Lyman 1968).

When utilizing denial of injury as a technique of neutralization, respondents noted that the action in question was okay because nobody was hurt by what happened or, if they were hurt, it was not of serious consequence. Denial of the victim is another linguistic device that suggests that the act in question is okay because the victim deserved, or that the overall group of people that are being hurt are so low in status or stigmatized that they do not matter. Condemnation of the condemner is used by actors to admit that a deviant or wrong act occurred, but others do it as well, or that others who are doing it are not held responsible, so why should they be seen as at fault? The final justification technique is appealing to loyalties. This neutralization technique argues that the act is okay because it serves a greater good in the long run.

Although Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization is an older theory, it continues to be relevant and utilized by scholars. It is important to note that others continue to use it to describe not only personal deviant behavior as in the original theory, but also to explain specific actions, organizations, religious beliefs, and corporations. Scholars have applied techniques of neutralization to specific acts of deviance such as gambling among older adults (Wagner, Hamilton, Anderson and Rempusheski 2017), workers stealing from their jobs (Shigihara 2013), prisoners narrating crimes against their victims (Ugelvik 2012), and security officers justifying force against patients (Johnston and Kilty 2016).

Although techniques of neutralization originally focused on individuals accounting for their actions, these rhetorical processes provide a framework for understanding how individuals account on behalf of the companies in Wilbur which commit or play a part in deviant acts. Deshotels et al. (2018) used the techniques of

neutralization to examine how the religious group Christian Domestic Discipline justifies men using both physical force and other forms of punishment against women. At the macro level, corporations have used techniques of neutralization when accounting for their company's actions (Talbot and Boiral 2015; Whyte 2016). Since 1957, many scholars have expanded on Sykes and Matza's theory, adding additional techniques of neutralization (Bryant et al. 2017; Whyte 2016). Bryant et al. (2017) applied the techniques to participants in Rwanda's genocide and identifies two additional techniques of neutralization: victimization and appealing to good character.

Theories of neutralization, or justifications, elucidate how slaughterhouse workers and communities learn to live with the negative consequences of slaughterhouses. When residents recognize that the slaughterhouse may have contributed to some of the negative aspects of the social environment in Wilbur, they can deny that the slaughterhouse is solely responsible for the act. They can point to other factors such as the larger economy in general, immigrants, or even the result of individuals' lacking work ethic.

Loyalties: Socially Acceptable Narratives of the Town

Pressed with the feeling that the slaughterhouse industry is imperative to the viability of Wilbur, community members find ways to justify the labor, community, and environmental damage caused by the slaughterhouse. The citizens of Wilbur (mostly) recognize problems that exist in their community (i.e., poverty, lack of childcare services, housing issues, crime, overcrowded and underfunded schools), while also offering justifications and excuses that explain away the harm being done. This study analyzes a town that revolves around one industry, meat packing, to take a look at the accounting

they do on behalf of the company. When respondents recognize inequality and social problems they neutralize the problems that the industry makes. In sum, the findings indicate that people in Wilbur do not blame the corporation; rather they blame each other, the environment, or believe that is "just the way things are."

The company regularly utilizes accounts when explaining the actions of the slaughterhouse. For example, when a video of pigs being abused at the slaughterhouse went viral, the company distanced itself by stating it did not have anything directly to do with the behavior. Instead, they argued it was the fault of individual employees on the kill floor, as their company mission stands for animal welfare. However, the company is not alone in doing accounting work to deny responsibility. Notably, in the case of Wilbur, the residents are also doing the work of providing the company a pass for everything from low wages to noise pollution, and other issues they bring to the town. This provides two layers of protection for the company, making the problems challenging to address.

Respondents justify and excuse the fact that the company influences social problems in Wilbur. As detailed later in this paper, many respondents blamed those living in poverty or struggling to adapt to a new environment as an individual problem, and not something for which the company was responsible. Defeasibility draws on the idea that consumers, or in this case residents, cannot be certain that it is the corporation's fault due to the nature of their structure. There are a lot of people and practices at play within the organization. Corporations are excused from responsibility because they can state that, due to how large the corporations is, the circumstances are out of their control (Whyte 2016).

Since corporations are in positions of power, they can mystify or conceal the true costs of production. They are also embedded in a larger cultural narrative that suggests they are instrumental in bringing social benefits and resources to the area. Therefore, when they act in certain ways or contribute to social problems in the community, the respondents account on their behalf to justify their actions. For many respondents, the justification given was that it was an individual, not corporate, problem that could be solved by encouraging others to "step up to the plate" to take care of their own needs. They saw it as a personal matter and not as a matter that the corporation could have contributed.

Other respondents excused the company's role in social problems by minimizing their negative impact or emphasizing the good that they did for the community. They believed that other corporations were not as good to their communities and that the meat packing company was a better partner than most large businesses are, and that because of the benefits they provide residents should not focus on the bad.

One way the respondents neutralized the social and environmental problems in their community was glorifying the positives after admitting some shortfalls. By doing this, they were able to justify that some bad things were happening in their community but stated that overall, things were not that bad. Below is an example of the overall narrative, language, and loyalties to the company. After discussing the perceived negative impacts of the slaughterhouse and meatpacking company within the community, Charles immediately goes on to discuss how they are overall 'net' positive:

Charles: They make a concerted effort to have their employees be involved [in the community]. Right now, the chair of the human rights commission is an employee of [the company] and exceptional work beyond what would even be customary be thought of for a volunteer. Of course, he has worked at the company because he is a talented guy, but they [the company] allow him to share his talents with [community organization]. They have donated five million dollars to that plus another two and a half matching funds or something like that. So, a significant contribution. Boy. There is a lot. Whether it is donating the hot dogs for the national night out to well, the [company foundation] is a whole other beyond that that represents almost of half of the [company] shares, and they give back to the community. We share in the dividends from the company and direct charitable way too, which is huge and would not be the case if [the company] was not here. I mean it just goes on and on, so yeah. It's fantastic. They are a really good corporate citizen. I suppose they can be criticized some things but net they are extremely positive.

Charles' account minimizes the few criticisms he had of the company by stating they are not that important since the positive contributions of the companies far outweigh the negative. Emphasizing the positive contributions to the social environment is one-way respondents explained away the harmful effects of the corporation on Wilbur. Dean, on the other hand, notes that the community is special and others would long for the amenities that we are getting through the help of the company's foundation, despite

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acknowledging throughout the interview of the other shortfalls Wilbur has such as crime, poverty, and lack of housing.

Dean: You know Wilbur is quite a unique situation, you know of course everybody says it is a one-horse town, [the company]. And I don't think that's bad. But it would be nice to have diversification in the industry, and maybe someday that will happen, but the uniqueness about the [the company] situation is the [company] foundation. You know, it's not the company at all it's completely separate. But they have approximately 48 percent of the voting stock which is approximately nine billion dollars today which they oversee, and I'm guessing that eighty percent of the dividends go to the heirs twenty percent of the dividends come back to the community of which half is dedicated to the institute. And rightfully so. Communities around the world would love to have a foundation like that in that they also enable us to keep our taxes down. Our town's tax base is very low compared to the rest of the state. And, you know, right now we're looking at a thirty-six million dollar rec center that's being built. And that's mostly funded by the foundation. And it's paid for.

Dean notes it would be nice if Wilbur had multiple corporations to diversify the industries operating within the town, but they are getting some money back, which is so great that other towns would be envious. He chooses here to emphasize the positives rather than expand on the negatives he brings up later on. Many respondents also noted that they are lucky to have a company in the community that helps out with field trips,

paying for high school dances, and taking care of other social service needs as they see fit.

Respondents provide these types of accounts to deny the responsibility of the company for all areas that literature has identified as being negatively impacted by having slaughterhouses in a community: the environment, labor and wage issues, and race.

Environment

Excuses: Defeasibility

Excuses are linguistic devices that are socially acceptable accounts for relieving the responsibility of a deviant act (Scott and Lyman 1968). One form of excuses, *appeal to defeasibility*, states that when a deviant act is committed, it is not with the intent of harm, or that the actor does not have free will and operates within constraints that force them to act this way. When respondents were asked about the pollution of the factory, some admitted that the area around the facility was less than favorable, but nobody believed that it was worse than other places. When asked if they worried about the health of the community, nobody thought it was a problem. Aside from a handful of respondents, most stated they did not believe Wilbur had an environmental problem. Only three of the 15 respondents talked about the environment beyond the initial probe. Charles mainly focused on the water in Wilbur and not on other aspects of pollution. Below, Charles utilizes defeasibility to explain how the city has higher costs for wastewater treatment than other surrounding cities:

Charles: We have significant cost considerations for wastewater treatment facility

and different standards that come down from the EPA. So, you know, as far as

challenges are concerned, we want to do our part, and we do our part daily at our

wastewater plant, but some of the costly permit things would be difficult for an

economically challenged community. Sometimes the state doesn't recognize it so

that would be a particular challenge of just financing those types of things with a

community like Wilbur.

Here Charles offers an account that appeals to defeasibility for the slaughterhouse.

He discusses how the city has different wastewater expectations due to the industry;

however, he does not blame the corporation or the industry but rather notes that it is just

something that happens in a town like this. Although Charles does not work for the

company, he is affiliated with the city government and knows about the amount of money

the corporations often give back to the city. He believes that there are considerable costs

passed on to treating water because of the slaughterhouse, but ultimately this is outside of

the company's control, so they should not be held accountable for these additional

expenses.

Debra was the only respondent who directly stated that she believes meat-packing

industries produce more pollution in their communities by noting what she sees on her

walks:

Debra: Not everyone thinks about what goes into all that, but it's not just a

building that's sitting there using electricity. That's not all they contribute; they

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have waste that they have to get rid of, they have lots of machines that require

electricity in itself to run and resources to do every other thing. Trucks are going

in and out that haul stuff. I mean, I would say that a meat producing company, by

and large, pollutes more than the average business.

Debra notes all of the processes that have to go into meat-packing. When

considering the amount of air pollution that is typically omitted from businesses such as

these, coupled with the above-average rates of poverty and minority housing surrounding

the area of the slaughterhouse, environmental injustice is an issue for the community.

However, she chooses not to blame the company specifically, rather she blames the

industry in general. This technique emphasizes that the people perpetuating the behavior

have no choice in doing so because of the circumstances, or that it is something that is

simply beyond their control. It is not the intent of the company to pollute; it is simply

something that occurs in the realm of this industry; thus, appealing to defeasibility.

Justifications: Appeal to Loyalties

Justifications are "socially approved vocabularies" that "assert the positive value

in the face of a claim to the contrary" (Scott and Lyman 1968:51). Although 12 of the 15

respondents did not discuss the environment as a problem, those who did often

emphasized the positive effects of the company on the local community:

Shawn: A lot of people wouldn't have jobs, a lot of people would move away, and

there wouldn't be as many people in Wilbur. If we lost it, it would probably

improve our environment though.

Shawn briefly mentions there could be different circumstances for Wilbur's

environmental health if the company left. Shawn, focusing on employment, shows that

she believes what the company is doing is for the greater good. *Appealing to loyalties*

neutralizes deviant behavior by saying that it is better in the long run or it's good for the

town overall.   Here, Shawn's loyalty lies with the importance of jobs and the economy;

these factors are so instrumental in shaping the town's prosperity that they outweigh any

environmental concerns. Shawn discusses how if the slaughterhouse left, they would

have an improved physical environment. However, it seems to matter less to her than

what the slaughterhouse provides otherwise. What is most important is that the

slaughterhouse provides jobs, so therefore the deviant behavior of environmental

degradation can be neutralized.

Labor and Wage Issues

The community has one of the lowest unemployment rates regionally with 3.3%

versus the 5.5% national average (Census 2010). However, the community also has some

of the highest poverty rates. The poverty rate in Wilbur is 15.8% while the national

average is 14% (Census 2010). This demonstrates a productivity-pay gap. This is similar

to what we see going on throughout the nation. However, the town studied mostly relies

on one industry, the meat packing industry, for its wages. While there may be jobs through this industry, they are of low wage.

Excuses: Defeasibility

      Appeals to defeasibility allow actors to excuse the negative implications of deviant acts by asserting that other factors could explain what is happening or that it was not the intent of the company to harm the community. Some respondents recognized the level of poverty as a wage problem; however, they neutralized the role of the corporation. They suggested that the responsibility of wages did not fall on this particular company alone, but is an implication of the way the broader industry is set up in general. Corporate officials often deny responsibility by claiming certain issues are out of their control, and they are merely a 'cog in the machine' (Whyte 2016:168). What is notable here is that people who are disadvantaged because of the company's practices are the ones giving this account on behalf of the company.

> Charles: Poverty would be the one thing I would want to eliminate from this town because that would get me so many other things. That attacks housing, that attacks child care, that attacks general resource questions, and I think education and those aren't necessarily city government issues. I mean, they are, because we are a part of the community, but that's kind of globally outside the walls of city hall and just the corporate limits of Wilbur.

When discussing what issue he would most like to solve in Wilbur, Charles brought up poverty but also stated that managing poverty is not the responsibility of a single corporation, as it lays outside of their responsibility in the community. Therefore, Charles excuses the issue of poverty as something that could be caused by other variables outside of the wages of the company.

However, another respondent, James, talks about how other companies who are proposing to come to Wilbur must demonstrate that they will pay a better wage than the slaughterhouse because so many working there are draining Wilbur's social services. Overall, he states that the company failing to pay a higher wage is preventing other competing companies from being able to come into Wilbur. This is a form of economic exploitation in which people are forced to work jobs where they are not being compensated adequately because of power issues.

> James: So actually we have a company that was trying to come to town, but, we set a price for them and said they couldn't pay less than the 18 dollars since that is the [required wage needed] someone to not qualify for social services. We can't really ask that of the slaughterhouse] since they are here and established.

James discusses how contractually the parent company cannot leave Wilbur, but the slaughterhouse could leave and that he has "often wondered what Wilbur would be like if the slaughterhouse was not present." He cited other examples of similar sized towns where the board has voted against allowing a slaughterhouse into their community because of the effects they have on them. He seems to acknowledge the negative aspects of a slaughterhouse but believes it's just the way things are and therefore beyond the

control of the company. This is a form of appealing to defeasibility. James believes it is outside the realm of control to ask the company to change its practices and, overall, he believes that the company is good for the community.

Justifications: Condemnation of the Condemners

Charles sees poverty as a more significant issue that cannot be tackled from within the community alone. Charles utilizes *condemnation of the condemners* to assert that an act was deviant, but it should not be seen as the company's fault because other businesses are just as neglectful of community needs. Charles admits that the meat packing industry in Wilbur and those affiliated with it do have repressed wages. Even so, he denied the responsibility of the industry and instead placed it on the lack of other industries in Wilbur:

> Charles: Part of the reason they have repressed wages there are because there are no other employers to go and get another job with so if your here and your family is here and you want to try to better yourself, but you only have one employer or four employers to choose from or three or whatever the specifics dynamics might be, you are not going to have an opportunity to move ahead and get ahead to jump jobs. If you are going to take a new job you are basically leaving the community and your family and all that stuff, so, yeah. If [the company] left that would be pretty bad circumstance.

Charles was not the only respondent to note the low wage of slaughterhouse employment but ultimately did not condemn the company's choice to pay this wage. One reason for this is that some thought the wages were better than anywhere else in similar industries. This reflected the sentiment that it is outside the realm of the corporation's responsibility to raise a wage through the equivalency that it is worse somewhere else, thereby providing an excuse for the company.

Despite the average pay in a slaughterhouse being around 13 dollars an hour, some slaughterhouse workers are paid 9 dollars an hour, and those in the top 90 percentile make 17 dollars an hour (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017). The starting hourly wage in this community is very similar to the average wage, 13 dollars. Even though respondents realized that meatpacking workers received low wages, they used techniques of neutralization to deny the corporation's responsibility for the low wages within the community. Some respondents simply believed that the pay was better than anywhere else with similar industries and so, using this comparison, they excused the low wage through condemnation of the condemner.

Dean: It's a poor town. We're seventeen percent below the national poverty level. I hate to say it, but we're thirty percent poorer than [another area town], and we always considered [neighboring town] as being the poor town and the way we compare that is by average household incomes and housing prices. They do they pay a lot better and have a lot better benefits than [another slaughterhouse company] that has the same job. You know, right now I'm guessing that would be in a year you are at $15 an hour rate with medical you got they have a dispensary

there that's free they have prescriptions there that are free you know that brings it

up to almost a $20 an hour job. You know that is just the way I look at it.

Even though respondents believed "it is worse somewhere else," slaughterhouse

workers suffer more workplace hazards and lower pay than do workers in many other

similar industries (BLS 2017; NELP 2017).

Justifications: Denial of the Victim

Other respondents were able to deny the corporation's responsibility by placing

blame on another entity—the workers themselves. Relying on a bootstraps model of

personal success, respondents' level of education was often cited as to blame for the poor

work conditions and low pay. This is an example of Sykes and Matza's (1957)

neutralization technique *denial of the victim*. Denial of the victim is a rhetorical technique

that admits that a deviant act occurred, but there is no wrongdoing because there are no

'real' victims of the act, or that the victims of the act are so insignificant that their

problems do not need to be addressed. Essentially, through denial of the victim, people

are dehumanized.

Jeremy, Shawn and Jacob all believed that lack of education was the reason the

majority of the slaughterhouse workforce existed. He viewed the slaughterhouse as a

good company who was willing to offer jobs to anyone who was willing to work despite

them not getting college degrees:

Jeremy: It's great that they're offering jobs, but that also goes with the education thing I think. If they were to get an education they definitely would get out of that factory work and into something they actually want to get into.

Shawn: I feel like that's what you're doing, I mean I doubt they'll give someone slaughtering pigs an office job. People who work there, like that's where you are the rest of your life. That's what the majority of the people do who live here, that don't have retail jobs. I think that if a person were actually to involve themselves and actually go to college and stuff like that, then they're going to live a better life and get out of Wilbur.

Jacob: There's always going to be dirty jobs people don't like doing, but someone has to do them. That's why you go to college, so you don't have to do these things. Listen, we all like bacon, right? So, it's sort of something that just comes with the territory.

Jacob acknowledges that there are problems with the job, but because it is something that society cannot do without, people either have to do these things without complaining or go to college. Here the blame also rests upon the workers in the slaughterhouse for any unhappiness they experience on the job. This also projects the sentiment that people who perform low-status or "dirty work" deserve it due to their lack of education. He also sees bacon as something that is a product for the greater good. Therefore, utilizing the technique of appealing to loyalties as well. Appealing to loyalties

is a rhetorical technique that asserts there is a higher interest at play, and here that priority is meat eaters in society.

Another way people accounted for the low-status of the jobs was by asserting that low-level jobs were made for young adults who haven't attended school. Darla asserted that the wage wasn't ideal because the job was unskilled:

> Darla: Well, I guess, the only one thing would be what we talked about earlier. Except you know, I might have already changed my mind a little. Yes, while it would be nice to have [the slaughterhouse] pay more, I understand their side. Is it worth it, do the people deserve it? Its unskilled labor, so maybe you know, it's like McDonald's. It's meant for young kids without an education, and if you're still there, I mean, that job wasn't meant for you. Like, maybe then just go to school.

Darla admits that the wages of the company are not ideal; however, she views the position as unskilled labor and feels that people who perform unskilled labor have no right to expect a living wage. From Darla's point of view, if workers need higher wages, the burden is on them to better themselves; thus, the corporation is not to blame if their employees are unable to make ends meet under the current pay scale. This is a form of denial of the victim, asserting that "the action was permissible since the victim deserved the injury" (Scott and Lyman 1968:51).

Justifications: Appeal to Loyalties

The technique of appealing to loyalties is when a person admits social norms were broken, but they were broken because they had to help out with other loyalties and so the actions were justified. Justifications assert the positive value when faced with claims that contradict the positives (Scott and Lyman 1968). In the findings, this is noted especially when talking about low-income jobs as a good thing because low-income jobs are needed. For example, Sarah did not insinuate that people weren't applying themselves but did state directly that Wilbur had "low-income" level jobs covered. One way she helped justify the company's role in this was by stating they were working on mid-level jobs by having the corporation help pay for high school graduates' educations:

Sarah: I think we have covered the low income then I don't know how we would say it like not low-income jobs but your production type jobs, we've got we've got those covered. We need to start working on mid-income jobs, the mid-level jobs more. And I think some of the things we are working on right now really are going to help with that when we look at changes that are happening at [the local college] right now, and they are focused on the agriculture program that they have and being able to fund all of the high school graduates that graduate that from Wilbur so they can go to school for two years here right? That's going to create jobs and create you know that middle income, and we really want them to stay, and so we need to make sure we are creating more jobs for them to stay.

Another example of appealing to loyalties is the narrative that the community can endure the negatives that come with a slaughterhouse because the positives outweigh

them. Most respondents answered that without the company there would be no town. The industry is needed because it is socially beneficial to the community. It is a source of jobs, community growth, and other benefits. As shown in Gabe's and Shawn's example of how beloved the company is:

Gabe: So yeah. It's [the company] fantastic. Like the mayor says, well you should just name the town [after the company] or does he say [the company] or [the company's famous product]? I think [the company]. I say "okay."

Shawn: People wouldn't believe anything anti-[company]. They would say that's a load of shit. People generally praise [the company], And they, well people love it. I mean [their product] is a huge thing and so, yeah. I mean, [the company] gives money to the community and they are pretty much the only ones offering jobs, so like, yeah, you can see that [the company] basically is Wilbur if that makes sense, I don't know.

Here Gabe and Shawn show the 'common sense' excuse that Whyte (2016) discusses as the idea that corporations provide so many social benefits to communities that they cannot be held responsible for less than positive acts or policies. The common vocabularies of motive used by residents within the community are tied to the fact that majority of the jobs in Wilbur are associated with the meat packing industry. Shawn talks about how without the company, we would lose the majority of the jobs in town and there wouldn't be a town in general.

Shawn: A lot of people wouldn't have jobs, a lot of people would move away, and there wouldn't be as many people in Wilbur. If we lost it, it would probably improve our environment though. But overall, we need them. I mean, [the company] gives money to the community and they are pretty much the only ones offering jobs...so like, yeah, you can see that [the company] basically is Wilbur if that makes sense, I don't know.

Although she talks about the ways that she perceives the company hurts Wilbur with how they impact the environment, she ultimately decides that this is something that has to be accepted since the jobs are needed. Although Shawn identified many shortcomings with the company, and even questioned their ethics, ultimately, she believed that the company single-handedly supported the town itself.

Race

There is also a perceived issue with adapting to the newfound diversity of Wilbur. The perceived struggle falls onto the citizens and the local government which many expressed to be strapped and unequipped for the job. The respondents used race to neutralize behaviors through Sykes and Matza's (1957) denial of the victim.

Justifications: Denial of the Victim

In regards to some situations, the people in Wilbur do not blame the corporation; rather they blame each other. Denying the victim is used to place blame on those who are

affected by the deviant behavior, insisting that they brought the problem on themselves so they should have to deal with it. Most often when the justification of denial of the victim is used, respondents are asserting that those who belong to lesser social groups such as immigrants and minorities deserve the injury. No respondent suggested that the company who is hiring the workers at a low wage should also help with the financial issues that come with it. Consider Dean and Sarah who discussed a new perceived issue Wilbur is facing with languages in the local high school:

> Dean: …but now it's we got 50 languages in high school.
>
> Ashley: So do you perceive that to be an issue, I mean the 50 languages?

Dean puts the "situation" of assimilating into the community on the workers that the company hires. He believes that they need to "step up to the plate" and it is not the company's responsibility that the school systems are now requiring more resources to accommodate for the influx of immigration in the community. Dean excuses the company by saying that it's an individual's fault for not learning English:

> Dean: I don't know that it's a problem. It's definitely a situation. You know, you know they say you know what can we do to help you know what can we do to fix it? Well, the other side of the coin is people have to step up to plate. And, you know they have to do the work. You know we can provide the means, but they have to provide the work — for instance, the language barrier. You know, if I move to Russia, I probably have to learn their language and you know I just wish

they'd put more emphasis on that. And you know it's great to have culture and to come from other countries and stuff like that, and you know you don't wanna lose your heritage, but on the other hand, adapting to your new environment that's I think up to them.

Sarah also expresses her frustration with the rising number of languages spoken in the school district:

Sarah: I heard and this is not a stat, but I heard last year when my daughter was in sixth grade that at the school there were over 26 languages spoken. So when you think about the diversity in our schools, it's a lot different than when I went to school twenty years ago, right? And, there was one language spoken, and a few kids might speak Spanish but then they always spoke English in school so now my daughters are going to school with students that do not speak the language and have interpreters with them, and so I think there are definitely some challenges there and I know the school district is doing their best to accommodate that, but it's going to cost us more right? It's going to cost us more right to accommodate all of these different languages. If English isn't their first language when they come in here, then we got we have to incur more costs to make the education not only better for those kids but, so it's not disruptive for the general population that's there as well. And I think for me personally, that is an issue and I think we need to stay on top of it.

Sarah talks about the responsibility of the community members having to incur more financial spending among those who are living in the community because of those who do not speak English. She goes on to say that she recognizes this happens in other "production facility" towns. However, she does not put the responsibility of providing additional resources on the production facilities. The nature of having new needs to allocate resources to accommodate the growing town is not unique.

A few respondents denied that the victims of poverty were suffering and conflated the issue of poverty with one of race. Consider Dean's story of 'welfare' for example, in which he utilizes tropes about race and women on welfare:

Dean: Well you know, it's a matter of the people adapting you know the diversification is part of it. Wilbur has one of the highest per capita [rates of] single mothers in the state of ours. And that's because we have such good how would you say it, welfare? And, you know, only in America can you have nothing and have everything.

Dean believes that people in Wilbur are on welfare because they are not working; rather, than supplementing their low wages. Dean believes that the social and financial problems Wilbur is facing are because of individuals not trying to work hard and instead are taking advantage of our system or government, and race is a part of this for Dean.

Dean: Well somebody has got to work there. So, you know. If, and I hate to say it, but a Caucasian guy doesn't want to work there. Who are you going to get? You know.

Dean is also utilizing condemnation of the condemners as a form of justifying behavior. He states that there are other companies that do this and often times it is worse than what is going on here. Jacob also acknowledges that many immigrants are filling undesirable jobs, but he does not see them as being victims of low wages or the corporation. Rather, he places blame on them because he believes they aren't invested in the community and are deserving of their situations:

Jacob: Listen, I think there will always be a handful of Hispanics, blacks, whatever, that are good solid people. I'm not racist. But when you come from another country, you have a different set of ideas, and these people, they aren't here to settle down. They are here to retreat, save money, whatever. Think of it as a spring break vacation. They don't care about the damage they cause to the communities. We are in a huge economic crisis here. Ultimately, though, I think, what needs to happen is a better immigration policy. [Slaughterhouse] didn't have these problems in the '70s or 80's so it's not a company problem. It's a people problem.

Jacob also utilizes excuses as a form of accounting through scapegoating. Scapegoating is a way to shift the responsibility of behavior from one to another. By

stating that people are not here to settle down, he is shifting blame away from the slaughterhouse and company onto the immigrants who work for the company.

A strike at the slaughterhouse in the 1980s lasted ten months. It changed the structure of the slaughterhouse and the demographics in the town. According to a local report, once the strike was over, they hired mostly new workers and at much lower wages than previously and the workforce that replaced middle-class working white men now consisted of Mexican men. The report also noted that it "created a slew of unanticipated concerns for the community". Jacob's understands these problems but rather than blaming the company's union busting tactics in the 1980's, he places the responsibility for the problem on the immigrants, not the company.

Crime against Humans and Non-Humans

Justifications: Denial of Injury

The safety of communities is impacted by the presence of a slaughterhouse (Fitzgerald, Kalof, and Dietz 2009). The presence of slaughterhouses create a community health effect that is not seen in other towns without slaughterhouses (Fitzgerald et al. 2009) and this is reflected in Wilbur. Many acknowledged that crime was higher in their area than other regionally sized communities around them, as well as many cities that were much larger than the community. In fact, they believe their higher crime rate is a positive and accounted for the higher crime rate as a positive thing that suggested they have a better police force than other communities. This is an example of the denial technique of *denial of injury*, when respondents justify a deviant act through acknowledging that there is a problem but are stating that no one was actually hurt it.

Most respondents did not discuss crime as a problem; in fact, only one person expressed concern for their safety in Wilbur. Rather they discussed the crime rate as indicative of Wilbur's success as a town, as Charles and Sarah highlight:

Charles: We are higher. Yeah, we are higher. Our crime rate is higher. You know, there's the question is that because our police officers are more proactive? I mean if you know don't go looking for problems you are less likely to find it. We have a proactive police department. It's an item for discussion, but if you're you know, concerned about enforcement of the law then that that is a good thing, not a bad thing.

Sarah: I think we have a better, a better police department that catches more people, so that's why others think we have more crime, but we don't.

Here Charles and Sarah deny that the crime rate should be addressed because it is just better police enforcing than other towns. They believe that the town is safer and is minimizing the harm of those who are incurring the cost of crime.

Justifications: Denial of the Victim and Condemnation of the Condemners

Justification of deviance was also done at the non-human animal level. Denial of victims believes that a deviant act is permissible because the victim, in this case, animals, deserve what is happening to them. Most often, victims are denied in accounts because they are of lesser social groups. Take, for example, Laura, Joshua, and Jeremy whom all

note that along the way animals and workers are probably suffering to make the products. However, they believe it's a needed burden since people enjoy meat. They minimize the harm and believe it's something that needs to exist.

Laura: I like bacon? Do you? Of course, they have to slaughter a few hogs to get some bacon I guess — even the pork chops. I guess pork tenderloins are amazing. Love those.

Jeremy: Then imagine you are just slitting pigs throats all day. I guess you'd get used to it. There's no fun in it. You're just basically there to do the job. Someone has to I guess.

Laura and Jeremy admit that these practices are going on and that the company is responsible for them, but they minimize the actual deviance or harm that is associated with it because the victims are nonhuman animals. They talk about it like it is something that needs to happen and it is not as problematic as others make it out to seem. It happens to be the way things are in our world, and this corporation is not the only one that partakes in this act, which is also a form of condemnation of the condemners. Condemnation of the condemners asserts that the deviant act in question is irrelevant because other corporations do it as well. Therefore, they do not need to be held accountable for it. They provide a product, meat, that they believe the majority of people want.

Joshua: Like it is really sad what they do, you know. I saw a video on Facebook

of like how pigs are treated in there, and it's like so sad I thought about not eating

meat. Then I showed it to my mom, who works there, and she said she didn't think

it was a big deal, that's just how things are. She told me it didn't matter, and like,

we all need to eat it anyway. So I guess I never really thought about it again.

Appeal to Loyalties is also used when justifying harm towards nonhuman

animals. By stating "that is just how things are" Joshua invokes the rhetorical tool of

appealing to social order. He admits that it is outside the responsibility of the company,

as it is for the greater good that things continue to happen the way they do.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In the literature, slaughterhouses have been shown to have more crime, more environmental issues, higher amounts of poverty, and housing issues. All of these problems were brought up within various interviews, often without probing. Despite acknowledging these issues and their need to change them, participants did not blame the industries in question, rather they placed blame on other groups entirely.

Participants often noted that the town would have a hard time existing without the slaughterhouse, including its parent company. It is not surprising and supports the literature on environmental racism and environmental justice. Those who experience environmental injustice are less likely to speak out against it because they fear what could happen to them economically. When someone did note that perhaps a problem within the community was caused by one of the businesses, they quickly noted that without the business they wouldn't have a town, so it wasn't fair to place any blame on the business. Wilbur is especially unique because the businesses propped up not only the workers economically but the community. They often donated funds to local school events, gave out scholarships to local high school students, they helped finance local recreation opportunities, they donated to nonprofits in town, and they were even associated with helping to end cancer. Some participants felt so strongly about the corporation and their impact on the community, they believed the entire town should be renamed after the company.

Participants felt the need to account for and neutralize the negative impacts of the industry because they felt they couldn't negatively speak out against the hand that feeds them both metaphorically and literally. Techniques of neutralization were used by the participants on behalf of the company and even the greater meatpacking industry. Denial of responsibility, one of the techniques of neutralization, was most often used by participants. Many believed that if the social problem discussed was tied into one of the business's operations, it wasn't their fault because it was beyond their control. For example, some participants discussed how the town did have environmental degradation due to the slaughterhouse. However, they neutralized as something that occurs in most industries and is sort of outside the realm of what the slaughterhouse could control.

In the case of crime, the participants did not recognize a typical social problem as a problem at all. Interestingly, when discussing crime, some participants believed Wilbur's high crime rate was a positive thing for their community. They recognized that their community had more crime than similar-sized communities around them but believed this was due to their law enforcement being better than other communities. This was the most unexpected finding and deserves future exploration and research.

Most often, participants blamed other groups for the social problems in their community. For example, one of the issues often brought up was immigration into the town and the impact it had on school funding. Two participants talked about how Wilbur had more immigrants because the town was a meatpacking industry, but they blamed the immigrants for impacting school funding and not the greater industry. Others discussed how immigrants impacted the structure of the town and even the wages of the industry itself. They believed if there was a social problem, that they were not trying hard enough

to integrate, that they were on welfare, or were not truly connected to the community. Through this scapegoating, participants were able to navigate the blame away from the slaughterhouse and meatpacking industry.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, the sample was small. The demographics were also not representative of the community. Flyers were posted in public areas and potential participants were reached out to via publicly listed email addresses around the town. However, most interest came from members who held higher positions in the community and were most often white. The perspective of minorities and immigrants in the community and the critical voices of those who work in these industries were missing with the exception of one participant. To gain a clearer picture of this issue, further research needs to be done with a broader population size and demographic pool.

This study, although small in size, helps fill in some gaps in animal-studies literature when it comes to recognizing how people who live in these situations define what is going on around them. Neutralizing the problems that are occurring isn't surprising, because the community recognizes they need the slaughterhouse to survive. Although the literature shows that slaughterhouses often implicate towns in negative social situations, this particular town had a unique history with the slaughterhouse and its affiliated businesses in the town. They provided them and stabilized the town with not only jobs but most often funded most of the social events.

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(Table 1)

Demographics and Responses of Respondents

Name	Works for one of the primary industries	White	Sex	Discussed Environmental Problems	Discussed Labor Issues (Wages, conditions)	Crime as Positive or Neutral
Charles		x	M	x	x	x
Dean		x	M		x	x
Sarah	x	x	F		x	x
Shawn		x	F	x	x	
Jeremy		x	M		x	x
Debra		x	F	x	x	x
Jacob			M			x
James		x	M		x	x
Laura		x	M			x
Darla		x	F			x
Joshua		x	M			
Emily			F			x
Gabe		x	M			
Ramsey		x	M			
Jenny			F			