Gender, Geography & Rural Justice

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Lisa R. Pruitt 2008†

ABSTRACT

This Article argues that a more grounded and nuanced understanding of women’s lived realities requires legal scholars to engage geography. Because spatial aspects of women’s lives implicate inequality and moral agency, they have direct relevance to an array of legal issues. The Article thus deploys the tools of critical geographers—space, place, and scale—to inform law and policy-making about an overlooked population for whom spatiality can be a profoundly influential force: rural women.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Legal scholars often think about social change over time, using history as a lens to reveal disadvantage and injustice. Among them, feminist legal scholars have shown how society’s evolving perception of women and gender roles have informed changes to the law. Like other critical scholars, they have thus used history as a lens to reveal disadvantage and injustice. For example, feminists have shown the public-private divide to be a product of historical events. They have specifically linked this separate spheres ideology to the industrial revolution, when men moved from the home into spatially separate workplaces.
In this Article, I argue that a better understanding of women’s lived realities, including their encounters with the law, requires legal scholars to engage not only history, but also geography. Because spatial aspects of women’s lives implicate inequality and moral agency, they are directly relevant to an array of legal issues. Like feminists in other disciplines, I deploy the tools of critical geographers—space, place, and scale—but I do so with a view toward informing law and policy-making about a frequently overlooked population: rural women.

While historical analysis relies on the vector of time, geographic analysis uses the complementary vector of space. “Space” is an abstract concept that refers both to the familiar idea of physical surroundings (physical space) and to the impact that particular spatial configurations have on many aspects of life, from social relationships to economic opportunity (social space). Attending to the rural seems an obvious aspect of the “space” part of critical geography given the literal, physical isolation of rural residents and rural communities from one another, as well as the influence of this characteristic on how rural spaces and places are socially constructed. “Place” is a more concrete subset of space.

(discussing the rise of “domesticity,” the gendered separation of market work and family work that took hold by the turn of the nineteenth century); Linda K. Kerber, Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History, 75 J. AM. HIST. 9, 15-16 (1988) (discussing the work of historian Nancy F. Cott, who located the establishment of separate spheres in economic changes in the industrial revolution) [hereinafter Kerber, Separate Spheres]; Olsen, supra note 4, at 1498-1500; Susan G. Ridgeway, Loss of Consortium and Loss of Services Actions: A Legacy of Separate Spheres, 50 MONT. L. REV. 349, 356 (1989) (discussing the creation of loss of consortium in the context of separate spheres ideology).

6. See generally Lisa R. Pruitt, Toward a Feminist Theory of the Rural, 2007 UTAH L. REV. 421 (arguing that the spatial isolation and lack of anonymity associated with rurality undermine rural women’s autonomy and subjectivity) [hereinafter Pruitt, Feminist Theory of the Rural]; see also MARTHA NUSSBAUM, FRONTIERS OF JUSTICE 225 (2006) (recognizing the rural-urban axis as reflecting power disparities, and noting its neglect by scholars).


Analysis based on place considers particular locales, taking into account the range of characteristics that distinguish one place from another. "Scale" is a unit of measure of space and place: for example, the household, the region, the globe.

These spatial concepts can be illustrated by a brief example based in part upon an empirical study of gender in rural Appalachia. That study showed changes at a global scale having material consequences at regional and local scales, even at the micro-sites of household and body. Global economic shifts forced a mine closure, leaving many local miners unemployed. Viewing available service jobs as beneath them, the male miners moved into private or quasi-public spaces, away from the formal market. They resorted to the informal economy (e.g., car repair, cutting and hauling firewood) to help make ends meet. Many of the miners’ wives moved from the domestic and private spaces of the home into the public spaces of the market by taking paid work to supplement family coffers.

Women’s newfound status as earners conferred on them some power that altered the division of reproductive labor in the private space of the household, while also endowing them with greater power in the various public spaces of the community. Shifts thus occurred at multiple scales, and these changes reverberated across even higher scales as a few women took on leadership roles in local and regional political movements. At the same time, agitation about shifting gender roles and the stress of economic hardship was sometimes associated with intimate partner violence, which implicated the lower scale of

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12. This scenario is based loosely on a study of gender changes in the midst of Appalachian Kentucky in the 1990s. See Christiana E. Miewald & Eugene J. McCann, Gender Struggle, Scale and the Production of Place in the Appalachian Coalfields, 36 Env’t & Plan. 1045 (2004).
15. Id. at 1057-61; see also Nancy A. Naples, Contradictions in Agrarian Ideology: Restructuring Gender, Race-Ethnicity, and Class, 59 Rural Soc. 110, 123-25 (1994) (documenting newfound community respect for the contributions of women who worked outside the home to supplement family farm income).
Law and legal actors also have roles in these socio-spatial phenomena that play out in real places. These roles include, for example, global trade agreements that lead to rural economic restructuring, as well as federal and state laws that govern employment. At the other end of the causal chain, these roles include local law enforcement responses to domestic violence and other micro-scale consequences.\footnote{See Lisa R. Pruitt, \textit{Place Matters: Domestic Violence and Rural Difference}, 24 Wis. J.L. Gender \& Soc’y (forthcoming 2008) [hereinafter Pruitt, \textit{Place Matters}].}

As this example illustrates, critical geography can bring “the rural” into scholarly view and presents opportunities to expand our understanding of the diffuse and localized operation of the law. Unlike the robust disciplines of rural sociology and rural economics, legal scholars and critical geographers ignore the rural/urban axis.\footnote{Some recent forays into what might be called “legal ruralism” include: Katherine Porter, \textit{Going Broke the Hard Way: The Economics of Rural Failure}, 2005 Wis. L. Rev. 969; Ezra Rosser, \textit{Rural Housing and Code Enforcement: Navigating Between Values and Housing Types}, 13 Geo. J. on Poverty L. \& Pol’y 33 (2006).} I am thus challenging the often-implicit scholarly association of both critical geography and law with that which is urban.\footnote{In particular, I refute postmodern geographer Edward Soja’s implicit assertion that only the urban is worthy of critical attention. See Gerald W. Creed \& Barbara Ching, \textit{Recognizing Rusticity: Identity and the Power of Place}. \textit{Introduction to Knowing Your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy} 8 (Barbara Ching \& Gerald W. Creed eds., 1997). Ching and Creed have also observed that “[t]he rural/urban distinction underlies many of the power relations,” and therefore “the city remains the locus of political, economic and cultural power.” \textit{Id.} at 2, 17; \textit{see also infra} note text at 181 (quoting Soja, \textit{Postmodern Geographies}, supra note 1); Linda McDowell, \textit{The Transformation of Cultural Geography}, \textit{in Human Geography: Society, Space and Social Science} 146, 152 (Ron Martin et al. eds., 1994) (noting a trend among cultural geographers to study questions about the “city and cultural life” and “how people experience and respond to the ‘urban experience’”).}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[17] 1990-2000, 34 J. Legal Stud. 445, 447 (2005) (noting that men will beat their wives and girlfriends the night before the woman’s job interview or training to prevent financial and social independence); Kathleen Pickering et al., \textit{Welfare Reform in Persistent Rural Poverty} 215 (2006) (suggesting that added financial tensions created by welfare reform increased domestic violence among the working poor).
\item[19] In particular, I refute postmodern geographer Edward Soja’s implicit assertion that only the urban is worthy of critical attention. See Gerald W. Creed \& Barbara Ching, \textit{Recognizing Rusticity: Identity and the Power of Place, Introduction to Knowing Your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy} 8 (Barbara Ching \& Gerald W. Creed eds., 1997). Ching and Creed have also observed that “[t]he rural/urban distinction underlies many of the power relations,” and therefore “the city remains the locus of political, economic and cultural power.” \textit{Id.} at 2, 17; \textit{see also infra} note text at 181 (quoting Soja, \textit{Postmodern Geographies}, supra note 1); Linda McDowell, \textit{The Transformation of Cultural Geography}, \textit{in Human Geography: Society, Space and Social Science} 146, 152 (Ron Martin et al. eds., 1994) (noting a trend among cultural geographers to study questions about the “city and cultural life” and “how people experience and respond to the ‘urban experience’”).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Part II of this Article addresses the meaning of “rural” and discusses the term’s contested character, which reflects the burgeoning variation among the places bearing this label. It also provides a brief economic and socio-cultural overview of rural America, emphasizing changes over the past few decades and discussing what we know about the day-to-day lives of rural women. This section thus provides a foundation for demonstrating how critical geography can reveal the ways in which spatial and other features of rural locales constrain and shape social relations, economic activity, and the accompanying role and application of the law.

Part III is a primer on critical geography, focusing on the key concepts of space, place, and scale. I discuss and illustrate how these concepts can reveal often obscured differences between rural women’s lives and the implicit urban norm. Part III.A on “Space” theorizes the intersection of rural spatiality with gendered spatiality. Part III.B on “Place” explores rurality as a grounded metaphor, discussing the gendered consequences of economic restructuring in two rural places and noting the resulting legal issues. Part III.C on “Scale” challenges scholarly associations of rurality with that which is local, and discusses the character of rural places as embedded in higher scales (state, national, and global). This occurs even as their rural character also influences behavior and outcomes in the nested scales of body and household. I conclude with thoughts on how critical geography might further illuminate not only the lived realities of rural women, but also the legal relevance of those realities.

II. What It Means to Be Rural

Before turning to the perspectives that critical geographers offer regarding rural women, it is important to discuss what “rural” means, what the term includes, and what its invocation suggests. Some think of rural places simply as sparsely populated areas, but the term also carries social and cultural connotations. Long-time rural residents might, for example, characterize rurality as a “way of life.” These individuals, who comprise a significant subset of the rural population, could be described as “traditional.”

Long-term rural residents might, for example, characterize rurality as a “way of life.” These individuals, who comprise a significant subset of the rural population, could be described as “traditional.” They are likely to share a long history in the region where they live, with many families residing there over several generations. In many rural locales, poverty is high and intergenerational, local economies lack diversity, and jobs tend to be scarce and scattered. Further, these populations tend to be ethnically and culturally homogeneous and generally value consensus and tradition. Although my analysis focuses on such...
“traditional” rural places, I take this opportunity to illustrate briefly the variety among rural places, which is often overlooked.23

A. The Contested Nature of “the Rural”

The tendency of critical geographers to overlook rurality24 is ironic given that the term “rural” is generally understood in reference to space. The Encyclopedia of Rural America defines “rural” places as having “relatively sparse populations and relative isolation from urban areas.”25 While this suggests that the term is straightforward, even simple,26 it is not. Judges, legislatures, and administrative agencies offer myriad definitions of “rural,”27 and contemporary society similarly contests the term’s meaning.28

23. To overlook such variety is consistent with a tendency to view those designated as “other” in an overly broad, generalized way that ignores their multi-dimensionality and variety. See, e.g., Angela P. Harris, Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory, 42 STAN. L. REV. 581, 588 (1990) (arguing that “the notion that there is a monolithic ‘women’s experience’ that can be described independent of other facets of experience like race, class, and sexual orientation” necessarily silences the voices of some women and privileges those of others).

24. See, e.g., Michael M. Bell, The Fruit of Difference: The Rural-Urban Continuum as a System of Identity, 57 RURAL SOC. 65 (1992) (noting the assumption by social scientists that rural and urban were no longer substantially different, though the study showed that rural residents continued to identify as rural). This oversight persists despite the socio-spatial struggles—including gendered ones—associated with rural living.

25. Frank L. Farmer, The Definition of “Rural,” in ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RURAL AMERICA: THE LAND AND PEOPLE 833 (Gary A. Goreham ed., 2d ed. 2008). This is called the “ecological component” of rurality. Id.

26. See Kenaitze Indian Tribe v. Alaska, 860 F.2d 312, 316, 318 (9th Cir. 1988) (calling “rural” a “simple term” and “not a term of art”). The Ninth Circuit in Kenaitze cited the Webster’s Dictionary definition of rural with its reference to “areas of the country that are sparsely populated, where the economy centers on agriculture or ranching.” Id. at 316-17. “More broadly,” the court concluded, “rural is an antonym of urban and includes all areas in between cities and towns of a particular size.” Id. at 317.

27. See Lisa R. Pruitt, Rural Rhetoric, 39 CONN. L. REV. 159, 177-84 (2006) (discussing various judicial and statutory definitions of rural) [hereinafter Pruitt, Rural Rhetoric]; see also OFFICE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, U.S. DEPT. OF JUSTICE, 2006 BIENNIAL REPORT TO CONGRESS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GRANT PROGRAMS UNDER THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT 5 n.9 (2006) available at http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/reports-congress.htm [hereinafter 2006 VAWA BIENNIAL REPORT] (defining as “rural” states with “a population of 52 or fewer persons per square mile” or those in which “the largest county has a population of less than 150,000 people”).

28. One example would be the popular blog, The Rural Life. See Verlyn Klinkenborg, The Rural Life, http://klinkenborg.blogs.nytimes.com (documenting aspects of Klinkenborg’s life as owner of a five-acre farm in Columbia, New York). Klinkenborg does not rely on the farm for living, but sometimes contrasts his farming existence, which he calls not a “real farm,” with that of his family farm in Iowa. Id. at entry on Jan. 12, 2006, 23:00 EST. He also commented on various matters of agricultural interest. Id. at entry on Apr. 4, 2006, 09:57 EST. Somewhat similarly, those who choose an exurban lifestyle often refer to their rural lives. See Abby Goodnough, In Florida, a Big Developer Is Counting on Rural Chic, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 22, 2005, at A1 (describing rural chic and “new ruralism” as a movement that promotes connecting with land, where middle-aged people move from coastal and urban regions to developments with five to twenty-acre lots where rural trappings are marketed to prospective homeowners).

The meaning of “rural” is also contested among scholars. For example, rural sociologist Marc Mormont traces the history of usage of the term “rural” in relation to sociology. Mormont, supra note 9, at 21, 28-29, 36 (also criticizing the trend among rural sociologists to refer to the abstract term “rurality,” rather than to more concrete terms such as the rural
The U.S. government uses two numerical thresholds to differentiate rural from urban. The U.S. Census Bureau defines “rural” places as “all territory, population, and housing units located outside of urbanized areas and urban clusters with a population of 2,500 or less.”29 The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) uses the terms metropolitan (metro) and nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) to refer to a similar dichotomy. Metro counties are urbanized areas of 50,000 or more with a total area population of at least 100,000;30 nonmetro counties are everything else.31 The term “rural” is therefore broader than “nonmetro” because it includes people living in open territory or towns with fewer than 2,500—even if they are living in a metro county.32

Definitions that rely heavily on physical characteristics such as population, density, and size clusters are convenient in their relative simplicity, but they ignore important social and cultural characteristics.33 Although I use “rural” to
refer generally to sparsely populated places, I acknowledge that even the single variable of low population density refers to a relatively wide range of locales with differing demographic, economic, and social characteristics.  

I also recognize other aspects of the rural/urban continuum. As reflected in the OMB classification scheme, some nonmetro places are more rural (or less metro) than others. The OMB uses the label “micropolitan” for nonmetro places with a population cluster between 10,000 and 50,000. This designation recognizes that surrounding smaller communities are economically interdependent with such micropolitan population centers.

Exurbia is another aspect of that rural/urban spectrum. As urbanites move

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note 9, at 41. He writes of the “different ways of considering oneself to be rural, of identifying with ‘rurality.” Id. See also Dewey, supra note 28 (debating the significance of number, density of settlement, and heterogeneity in producing the social characteristics associated with rural and urban places).

34. Indeed, a familiar adage among those who study the rural holds: “if you’ve seen one rural place, you’ve seen one rural place.” Louis E. Swanson & David L. Brown, Challenges Become Opportunities: Trends and Policies Shaping the Future, in CHALLENGES FOR RURAL AMERICA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, 397 (David L. Brown et al. eds., 2003) (crediting rural sociologist Daryl Hobbs with this aphorism) [hereinafter CHALLENGES].

35. See Tickamyer, Space Matters!, supra note 11, at 811 (calling for movement beyond “binary spatial distinctions” such as rural-urban to development of “spatial continua with variable and permeable boundaries defined by careful delineation of their properties”). Scholars have observed that while the urban/rural dichotomy is pervasive, it is also socially constructed. Mormont, supra note 9, at 41. Ching and Creed use the “omnipresence of the rural/urban distinction” to argue its cultural relevance—even in the face of “more ambiguous forms of settlement,” such as suburbs and exurbs. Ching & Creed, supra note 19, at 15-16 (quoting RAYMOND WILLIAMS, THE COUNTY AND THE CITY 289 (1973), for observation that, in spite of the reality of these “intermediate” forms of “social and physical organization . . . the ideas and the images of the country and city retain their great force.”).

36. This continuum is reflected in the Office of Management and Budget’s (OMB) classification scheme, which includes six categories within the broad nonmetro category and three subcategories within the broad category of “metro.” The nonmetro subcategories vary according to the presence and size of urban populations within a given nonmetro county and the county’s proximity to a metropolitan area. See Econ. Res. Serv., U.S. Dep’t of Agric. Briefing Rooms, Measuring Rurality: Rural-Urban Continuum Codes (Apr. 28, 2004), http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Rurality/RuralUrbCon/.

37. This phenomenon has also been recognized in case law. See Gallivan v. Walker, 54 P.3d 1069, 1115 (Utah 2002) (Thorne, J., dissenting) (noting the difficulty of characterizing as rural or urban cities such as Moab and Park City, with small year-round populations, as well as Logan and St. George, cities with substantial populations but within otherwise rural counties). See also People v. Green, 27 Cal. 3d 1 (1980) (referring, in the context of a change-of-venue decision, to the place of trial being neither “a large metropolitan center,” nor “a rural outback”). Ching and Creed observe a similar distinction between “shallow rural” and “deep rural.” Ching & Creed, supra note 19, at 15.


39. “Exurbs” are “a type of spatial pattern of settlement that differ[s] from their suburban counterparts, . . . [are] located at greater distances from urban centers than suburban developments, and are comprised of a different mix of land uses and population.” Exurban Change Program, Defining Exurban, http://www.agecon.ag.ohio-state.edu/programs/exurbs/def.htm (last visited Feb. 18, 2008); see also Sonya Salamon, From Hometown to Nontown: Rural Community Effects of Suburbanization, 68 RURAL SOC. 1 (2003) (lamenting the loss of identity of small towns when they become “sleeper towns” to cities) [hereinafter Salamon, Hometown to Nontown]; SONYA SALAMON, NEWCOMERS TO OLD TOWNS (2003) (same; criticizing aspirations to become bedroom communities as a new
to the country, willing to endure long commutes in exchange for a partial escape from city life, long-time rural places morph into exurbia. While such places may remain sparsely populated, they become economically, socially, and culturally integrated with the urban. Many of my broad assumptions about rurality do not apply to these particularly dynamic places, which may nevertheless be referred to as “rural.” In the language of critical geography, the socio-spatial construction of exurbia differs from that of more isolated and traditional rural communities.

Despite some bases for differentiating among rural places and among people within a particular rural locale, I acknowledge essentializing “the rural.”

40. Since 1970, more than 35 metropolitan areas have developed in what were rural places. James R. Elliott & Marc J. Perry, Metropolitanizing Nonmetro Space: Population Redistribution and Emergent Metropolitan Areas, 1965-1990, 61 RURAL SOC. 497 (1996). As a related matter, several scholars have commented on the increasing interdependence of rural and urban areas, which is consistent with globalization. Mormont has argued that urban residents’ increasing use of the countryside has changed the nature of rurality, such that it is less defined “in terms of belonging to a particular place” and “associated more with the varying opportunities rural space affords”). Mormont, supra note 9, at 13; see also Linda Lobao, Continuity and Change in Place Stratification: Spatial Inequality and Middle-Range Territorial Units, 69 RURAL SOC 1, 21-25 (2004) (arguing for attention to how rural and urban areas intersect and pointing out how rural areas are taking on functions discarded by cities, such as hazardous waste storage and prisons) (hereinafter Lobao, Continuity and Change).

41. The same might be said of upscale resorts in rural areas, such as Telluride, Colorado. Although it is physically isolated from the nearest metropolitan areas (Denver, Phoenix, and Salt Lake City), the extraordinary wealth of many of Telluride’s residents permits them to travel frequently, by air, to and from urban places. Wealthy residents of such “rural” resorts also may experience anonymity or lack thereof differently from residents of traditional rural communities because they can buy more privacy than long-time rural residents enjoy.

42. See, e.g., Paul J. Cloke, Rurality and Racialized Others: Out of Place in the Countryside, in HANDBOOK, supra note 9, at 380.

43. A West Virginia court characterized this phenomenon in a colorful, if circular, manner: [A] “rural community” may be distinguished by its dominant character as a social and economic unit founded in rural, land-based interests. It is inhabited, in the main, by country people, who live a country life, and who engage in country pursuits. Its residents are removed from the immediacy of urban and suburban environs, and are not immediately tied to any city or urban area; they work, socialize and politic as an independent, integral community. There will, of course, always be some exceptions. In nearly every community there will be at least a few people who commute to a city for business or social purposes. However, the presence of a few such people does not destroy the rural character of a community, so long as development has occurred in such a manner as not to exclude the predominance of agricultural pursuits and rural activities.


44. While rural sociologists and economists also tend to essentialize the rural by giving primacy in their analysis to the rural-urban axis, some scholars have criticized this practice. See, e.g., Mormont, supra note 9, at 28-29 (tracing the history of how the term rural is used in relation to sociology, and focusing on differences among specific local communities while downplaying differences between rural and urban); but see Ann M. Oberhauser, Relocating Gender and Economic Survival Strategies, 34 ENV. AND PLAN. 1221 (2002) (suggesting...
Rurality is, of course, rarely the “sole dimension of identification.”45 My claim to a broad concept of rurality and my focus on it as a primary dimension of analysis are nevertheless helpful initial steps—perhaps necessary ones—for law’s engagement with rurality.46 At the same time, as the following analysis reveals, critical geography’s more concrete and discrete construct of “place” accommodates the variations in local cultures and economies among rural locales.47

B. Our Rural Past, Our Rural Future

Rural communities are often stereotyped as static, homogeneous, and traditional,48 yet evidence abounds that rural America is in the midst of significant change—demographically, economically, and culturally. This Part provides a brief sketch of the data and scholarly literature regarding women in contemporary rural America. It emphasizes (1) the socioeconomic landscape, with attention to the structural disadvantages faced by rural residents, and (2) the evolving sociocultural milieu, to the extent that it can be generalized across regions and among the varied places labeled rural.

1. Socioeconomic and Structural Disadvantage

Poverty rates in rural parts of the United States have long been higher and more enduring than those in urban areas.49 In 2007, 15.4% of the rural populace

45. Ching & Creed, supra note 19, at 22 (arguing that place inflects other dimensions such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity). Spatiality can aggravate disadvantages associated with race, ethnicity, class, and other markers of identity; see also Tickamyer & Henderson, supra note 44, at 114-15.

46. The same practical reality may be seen in critique, analysis, and law-making based solely on categories such as race or gender. Such essentialization of race or gender has been the subject of critique. See, e.g., Harris, supra note 23. Nevertheless, making laws that respond to discrimination or disadvantage based on race or gender, without reference to these categories, is virtually impossible.

47. See infra Part IV.B.

48. Common associations with the word “rural” include traditional values, family, and religion. Rural America “conjure[d] up generally positive images” for 84% of respondents to a 2001 survey. See W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION, PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL AMERICA 6-8 (2004), available at http://www.wkff.org/pubs/FoodRur/Pub2973.pdf (discussing the “overwhelmingly positive view of the people, the values, and the culture of rural America”) [hereinafter PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL AMERICA]; see also Pruitt, Rural Rhetoric, supra note 27, at 168-71.

lived in poverty, while the rate in urban areas was 11.9%. Rural households headed by women are hit especially hard, with more than a third living in impoverished conditions. The economic outlook for rural residents remains dismal because of limited economic diversity, substandard infrastructure, human capital deficits, and sparse populations that undermine economies of scale.

While rural places have long been associated with cheap labor and bad jobs, the employment landscape has worsened with the economic restructuring that has swept rural America in recent decades. Male breadwinners have lost...
their good blue-collar jobs or their livelihoods as farmers as the new staples of rural economies, manufacturing and service jobs, have replaced extractive industries. It is in this context that numerous rural women have made their initial entry into the paid labor force.

Rural labor markets generally have been unkind to women, for whom good jobs have been very limited. Rural women rarely hold jobs comparable to those of rural men. When they are doing similar work, women are paid only about

58. Manufacturing, retail, and public services are the fastest-growing areas of rural economies. They are largely characterized by low-wage and nonunionized jobs. In 2000, manufacturing accounted for 18% of all jobs in nonmetro areas, but 14% nationwide. TAKING STOCK, supra note 49, at 18-20; see also Peter T. Kilborn, In Kansas, a Growing Phone Company Helps Keep a Small Prairie Town Alive, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 2, 2003, at A28 (describing a small town that offered tax incentives to attract business as being in a “race to the bottom” that brought low wages and environmental destruction). The causes of this shift include the exhaustion of natural resources (e.g., timber) and economic restructuring, including the globalization of agriculture and other markets. See McNeil, supra note 13 and accompanying text; see also Lobao, Continuity and Change, supra note 40, at 12 (observing that rural areas are harder hit by economic downturns and global competition).


In fact, rural mothers of children under the age of six have long been employed at higher rates than their urban counterparts, although among all women, as of 2004, those in rural areas (60%) were still employed at slightly lower rates than urban women (62%). See KRISTEN SMITH, CARSEY INST., EMPLOYMENT RATES HIGHER AMONG RURAL MOTHERS THAN URBAN MOTHERS 1 (2007), available at http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/FS_ruralmothers_07.pdf.


By good jobs, I mean secure jobs that pay a living wage and provide benefits. Rural labor markets have long been associated with informal work, and they are increasingly associated with nonstandard work and underemployment. See Diane K. McLaughlin & Alisha J. Coleman-Jensen, Nonstandard Employment in the Nonmetropolitan United States, 73 RURAL. SOC. (forthcoming 2008) (defining nonstandard work as including the absence of long-term working relationships and varied work hours); Tim Slack & Leif Jensen, Race, Ethnicity and Underemployment in Nonmetropolitan America: A 30-Year Profile, 67 RURAL SOC. 208 (2002); Leif Jensen & Tim Slack, Beyond Low Wages: Underemployment in America, in WORK-FAMILY CHALLENGES FOR LOW-INCOME PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN (Ann C. Crouter & Alan Booth eds., 2004). Among all rural workers, 15.4% are in “low-wage” jobs compared to 13.5% of all urban workers. WILLIAM O’HARE, CARSEY INST., RURAL WORKERS WOULD BENEFIT MORE THAN URBAN WORKERS FROM AN INCREASE IN THE FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE 1 (2007), available at www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/documents/MinimumWage_final.pdf.

61. For example, rural women are now almost twice as likely as rural men (73% to 39%) to work in manufacturing. TAKING STOCK, supra note 49, at 18-19. Thirteen percent of nonmetro women work in manufacturing, compared to 10% of metro women. Gibbs, supra note 54, at 59; see also Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1050, 1054.
half of what rural men earn. When compared to their urban counterparts, rural women are even more likely to do low-paying, gender-segregated work, frequently working part time and without benefits. The continuing primacy of rural women’s roles as caregivers and homemakers, which persists to a greater degree than in urban areas, aggravates their employment woes.

Various structural obstacles also restrict women’s labor force participation and shape their status as workers. Long distances separating home, jobs, and services create hardships. Public transport is rare and inefficient, and child care centers are lacking. These same factors contribute to relatively low educational

62. See Linda K. Cummins, Homelessness among Rural Women, in The Hidden America, supra note 18, at 59, 86; Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44, at 1225-26, 1231-32 (noting that in West Virginia in 2000, women earned fifty-five cents for every dollar men earned); Pickering, supra note 16, at 210-11. While the 2007 American Community Survey by the Census Bureau reported a median household income in metro areas of $51,831, the median income in nonmetro areas was only $40,615. Census, Income, supra note 50. While the earnings gap between metro and nonmetro areas has grown in recent years, reflecting spatial inequalities across the entire economy, gender inequality has diminished. David A. Cotter et al., Gender Inequality in Nonmetropolitan and Metropolitan Areas, 61 Rural Soc. 272, 280, 283 (1996). In metro areas, the improved earnings ratio between men and women is the result of better earnings opportunities for women; in nonmetro areas it is due to declining earnings for men. Id. at 282.

63. Manufacturing jobs provide little security because of frequent overseas relocation in this age of globalization. Taking Stock, supra note 49, at 18; see also Morristown, supra note 56 (depicting the changing employment base and economic fortunes of Morristown, Tennessee, a micropolitan area in the midst of three rural counties in northeast Tennessee). One-third of nonmetro employment is now in consumer service jobs, up from 7% in 1990. Taking Stock, supra note 49, at 19; see also Don E. Albrecht, The Industrial Transformation of Farm Communities: Implications for Family Structure and Socioeconomic Conditions, 63 Rural Soc. 51 (1998) (finding that economic conditions in rural communities with service-based economies were worse off than those that remained agriculture dependent) [hereinafter Albrecht, Industrial Transformation]; Wells, supra note 57, at 236; Fast Food Women (Headwaters 1991).

64. See, e.g., Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44, at 1226, 1231; Gibbs, supra note 54, at 59.

65. See, e.g., Henderson et al., supra note 59, at 131 (arguing that rural women are placed in a “catch-22” by simultaneous pressure from welfare reform systems to enter the paid labor market and family policy pressure to maintain “child centered” households); Naples, supra note 15, at 125 (noting conflict women felt when they lived on a farm but worked off of it, trying to be good “farm wives” but also support their families).

66. See, e.g., Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44, at 1226; Ann Oberhauser, Gender and Household Economic Strategies in Rural Appalachia, 2 Gender, Place and Culture 51 (1995); Struthers & Bokemeier, supra note 60, at 42 (noting that poverty sometimes results from inability to find employment that allows parents to support their families); Tickamyer & Henderson, supra note 44, at 110; Taking Stock, supra note 49, at 21.

67. Less than 10% of all federal funding for public transportation goes to rural areas, and only about 60% of rural counties offer public transportation. United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Transportation at a Glance, Agriculture Information Bulletin 1, 3 (Jan. 2005), available at http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/AIB795/AIB795_lowres.pdf [hereinafter Rural Transportation at a Glance]. Women make up 62% of those using rural public transportation. Id. at 4. See also Porter, supra note 18, at 1008 (noting that in 2001 rural residents spent 25% of their incomes on transportation, while urban residents spent only 19%); Clifford Krauss, Rural U.S. Takes Worst Hit as Gas Tops $4 Average, N.Y. Times, June 9, 2008 at A1.

68. See Kristen Smith, Carsey Institute, More Families Choose Home-Based Child Care for Their Pre-School Aged Children, available at http://carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/PB_childcare_06.pdf (Spring 2006); Tickamyer &
attainment among rural women. Some scholars posit that rural residents rely on the informal economy to ameliorate economic disadvantages and respond to these structural challenges. In the past, scholars viewed the bartering of goods (e.g., farm produce, clothing) and services (e.g., car repair, child care) among rural residents as a significant survival strategy. Women have been particularly associated with networks of kith and kin engaging in such reciprocity, and these networks have been touted as alleviating the otherwise acute economic disadvantage attendant to limited formal labor markets. However, the extent to which the informal economy actually provides material assistance to rural residents is unclear. Despite such networks, data show that the rural economic disadvantage remains significant.

The informal economy is but one consequence of rural spatiality. Another is lack of anonymity among rural residents. Interpersonal familiarity is a product of the high density of acquaintanceship that marks rural communities. The resulting lack of privacy influences individual decision-making and may reinforce traditional thought and behavior patterns. Yet such high levels of social compliance and relative unity of thought are surely under challenge by the demographic and other changes afoot in many parts of rural America.

69. Forty-two percent of rural women have a high school education or less; only 24% of urban women have such minimal education. Twenty-six percent completed some college, as opposed to 30% of urban women; 32% graduated from college or went beyond, compared with 45% of metro women. Among nonmetro residents of all genders, only 15% have at least a bachelor’s degree, while the national rate is 25%. TAKING STOCK, supra note 49, at 16.

70. See, e.g., Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44, at 1221, 1225, 1226 (collecting sources); Struthers & Bokemeier, supra note 60, at 25 (reporting details of an empirical study showing that women babysat, canned fruits and vegetables, and cleaned others’ homes, while men cut wood and worked on vehicles).


72. See SONYA SALAMON, PRAIRIE PATRIMONY 185 (1992) [hereinafter SALAMON, PRAIRIE PATRIMONY]; Ann. R. Tickamyer, Public Policy and Private Lives: Social and Spatial Dimensions of Women’s Poverty and Welfare Policy in the United States, 84 Ky. L.J. 721, 738-739 (1996) [hereinafter Tickamyer, Private Lives]; Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44, at 1223, 1225, 1226. These networks have also been associated with the constraints attributed to the spatial isolation of rural areas. Id. at 1231.

73. Pruitt, Missing the Mark, supra note 51, at 475-77. See also SALAMON, PRAIRIE PATRIMONY, supra note 72, at 246 (discussing loss of social networks accompanying the demise of rural community).

74. See Louis E. Swanson & David L. Brown, Challenges Become Opportunities: Trends and Policies Shaping the Future, in CHALLENGES, supra note 34, at 401 (referring to this phenomenon as “involuntary intimacy”); Mormont, supra note 9, at 24 (noting familiarity among rural neighbors). See also Pruitt, Place Matters, supra note 17, at Part II.B.1 (collecting sources).

75. Rural communities that become resorts illustrate my point. Telluride, Colorado and Jackson, Wyoming are two examples. These communities’ cultures surely change with the influx of wealthy, urban-oriented residents, at least on a seasonal basis. Like exurbia, they represent a sort of rural gentrification. See supra note 41; Lisa R. Pruitt, Legal Ruralism Blog, Rural Gentrification, http://legalruralism.blogspot.com/search/label/rural gentrification. The influx
2. The Changing Nature of Rural Community

Just as rural areas have seen dramatic economic change in the last quarter century, they have also experienced social and cultural shifts. While some differences between rural and urban have diminished, meaningful and generalizable distinctions remain. Advances in transportation and communication have somewhat ameliorated geographic isolation in rural areas, but it is unclear whether attendant social and psychological isolation have significantly abated. To the extent they have not, traditional thought and behavior patterns—including those regarding women and their roles—likely persist.

Of ethnic and racial minorities also changes rural cultures. See Pruitt, Latina/os, Locality, supra note 56, at Part III.C.

76. See Salamon, Hometown to Nontown, supra note 39, at 1 (noting that the stability and rigidity often praised in rural America are being challenged by people who add diversity moving into rural settings); SALAMON, NEWCOMERS, supra note 39 (discussing changes in rural communities brought about by new populations moving in, such as upscale urbanites and people of other ethnic backgrounds). See also Don E. Albrecht & Carol M. Albrecht, Metro/Nonmetro Residence, Nonmarital Conception, and Conception Outcomes, 69 RURAL SOC. 430, 433 (2004) (speculating that increasing similarities between rural and urban are attributable to the decline of the family farm and a decreasing rural population) [hereinafter Albrecht & Albrecht, Conception Outcomes]; Lobao, Continuity and Change, supra note 40. Cf. Terry Marsden et al., Introduction: Questions of Rurality, 1 in RURAL RESTRUCTURING: GLOBAL PROCESSES AND THEIR RESPONSES 21, 28-41 (Terry Marsden et al. eds., 1990) (suggesting that some characteristics associated with rural areas were never actually unique to such places); Dewey, supra note 28, at 60-63 (same; also noting temporal component of urban and rural as referents).


Similar television, radio, movie, magazine, and newspaper availability does not guarantee similar impact. Individuals can be selective—watching, listening to, and reading those materials that are most in keeping with their prior values, beliefs, and interests. Selective exposure to alternative ideas also may be brought about by other circumstances . . . A sense of both superiority and inferiority may provide a kind of psychological isolation to set the rural dweller apart from non-rural counterparts. On the one hand, many ruralites may see themselves as embodying the traditional virtues of America—indecent, self-reliant, God-fearing—and hence superior to their urban cousins. On the other hand, the ruralite may feel inferior in coping with secular, modern, or worldly pursuits.

Id. at 74. Sonya Salamon has argued that rural Americans have become more geographically isolated in recent years, as rural areas have lost population and services. Consequently, some rural residents must now travel even greater distances to reach services and visit their neighbors. SALAMON, PRAIRIE PATRIMONY, supra note 72, at 40. Judicial decisions occasionally comment on the social isolation of rural residents. See, e.g., Kakretz v. Kakretz, 2002 WL 757655, 2002 N.Y. Slip Op. 50145(U) (N.Y. Sup. Jan. 3, 2002) (acknowledging plaintiff’s social isolation after she moved from Russia, as a mail order bride, to her husband’s home in rural New York).

Studies from the late 1970s and early 1980s suggest that rural residents interact personally with others in their community and that they are slow to alter their traditions and cultural heritage. Sociologists attribute these characteristics, at least in part, to the types of relationships rural people form as a result of population size and density: “a predominance of personal, face-to-face social relationships among similar people” within a rural community lead to “greater levels of consensus on important values and morals.” Another explanation is that urban settings, being larger and more diverse, “foster the generation and acceptance of new ideas.” Norms in urban areas thus change because a “critical mass” of organizationally and occupationally diverse people innovate, while those in more sparsely settled places continue to embrace tradition.

Relatively little empirical evidence is available regarding the extent to which rural folk remain socially, culturally, and politically settled. Again, diversity among (and increasingly within) the nation’s rural areas makes generalizing across the rural populace problematic. Nevertheless, studies spanning a wide geographic swath reveal similarities. Evidence of rural residents’ attachment to place is a recurrent finding, although it is unclear
whether this attachment is to networks of kith and kin or to the land itself. While the incidence of divorce and single-parent families is rising in rural areas, families in which the parents have remained married still appear to be more traditional (i.e., gender-conformist) in terms of their division of labor than are urban families. Finally, recent elections have shown rural Americans to be—for the most part—politically conservative.

Though various details of rural social and cultural change remain undocumented, many rural communities are undergoing demographic transformation. Although most rural areas experienced slow population losses during much of the twentieth century, many regained population during the 1970s and again in the 1990s. Reverse migration is bringing city dwellers to the country. Such migration, along with immigration, accounts for most of that growth. Immigration is also diminishing the racial and ethnic homogeneity long associated with rural communities.

89. See, e.g., Feyen, supra note 18, at 118 (describing one woman’s choice not to leave abusive husband as a desire to maintain roots to the farm). Scholars have documented rural women’s decisions not to move to locales with better opportunities because of their attachment to land and to the lifestyle it represents. See, e.g., Tickamyer & Henderson, supra note 44, at 113-14.


92. See, e.g., Pruitt, Latinos, Locality, supra note 56; Salamon, Hometown to Nontown, supra note 39, at 2-3 (noting that those moving into rural settings do so for various reasons, including retirement and a desire for a slower-paced life, even at the cost of long commutes); Rick Lyman, In Exurbs, Life Framed by Hours Spent in the Car, N.Y. Times, Dec. 18, 2005.

93. Some of these population losses were associated with changes in agricultural production and other economic shifts. See generally Albrecht, Industrial Transformation, supra note 63, at 51-52; Naples, supra note 15, at 112-13.

94. Kenneth M. Johnson, Unpredictable Directions of Rural Population Growth and Migration, in Challenges, supra note 34, at 19.

95. Id. at 20-21. In the 1970s, 3.1 million metro residents migrated to nonmetro areas. The nonmetro population grew by 5.2 million (10.3%) during the 1990s. Id. People under age 65, not only retirees, accounted for most of the population gain in rural areas. Id. at 26.

96. Id. at 22-23 (noting that migration accounted for 67% of the nonmetro population increase).

97. Minorities were a prominent factor of growth in nonmetro regions, constituting at least 40% of overall growth in every nonmetro region. Johnson, supra note 94, at 19, 25. The Latino population tripled in the South and doubled in the Midwest. Rogelio Saenz & Cruz C.
With regard to family structure and women’s roles, both change and stasis are evident. On one hand, rates of divorce, teen pregnancy, and unmarried cohabitation are rising in rural areas. Birth rates, employment rates among women, and the number of female-headed households are now similar across metro and nonmetro areas. On the other hand, rural women still marry younger and at a greater rate than their urban counterparts, still place greatest value in their homemaking and mothering roles, and are less likely than their urban counterparts to terminate a pregnancy.

Torres, Latinos in Rural America, in CHALLENGES, supra note 34, at 57, 58. By 2000, one in eight Latino residents in the American South and Midwest lived in a nonmetro area. Id. at 59. Immigrants go for the low-paying jobs long associated with rural economies. While jobs associated with rural economies have long offered poor pay, rural restructuring has brought different low-wage jobs to rural areas. See MORRISTOWN, supra note 55; Pruitt, Latina/as, Locality, supra note 56.


99. Albrecht & Albrecht, Conception Outcomes, supra note 76, at 435. See also Katherine MacTavish & Sonya Salamon, What Do Rural Families Look Like Today? in CHALLENGES, supra note 34, at 73 (suggesting that demographic changes which indicate diminishing differences between rural and urban families emerged as early as the late 1980s).


101. Lichter & Jensen, supra note 98, at 83 (providing breakdowns according to race). See also Diane K. McLaughlin et al., Economic Restructuring and Changing Prevalence of Female-headed Families in America, 64 RURAL SOC. 394 (1999) (suggesting links between economic restructuring and the prevalence of female-headed families, but finding those links to be less clear in rural areas). Five percent of nonmetro residents (1 million people) report living in households with an unmarried partner. About 87,000 nonmetro residents (less than 1 percent) are in same-sex partner households. TAKING STOCK, supra note 49, at 16.

102. A 2004 study concluded that rural and suburban families remain more traditional than those in central cities. See Snyder & McLaughlin, supra note 51, at 146. The study compared family structures across rural, suburban, and central city areas in 1980, 1990, and 2000 and found that rural and suburban families were more likely to have married parents. Id. at 146. It also noted that compared to those in metropolitan areas, nonmetro females experience many family-related transitions at earlier median ages. For example, nonmetro females are more likely to ever marry and less likely to ever divorce . . . are more likely to marry at younger ages, are less likely to cohabit . . . and have higher fertility rates during their teens and early 20’s.

Id. at 129 (citations omitted).

103. Struthers & Bokemeier, supra note 60, at 34.

104. See FIENE, supra note 71, at 41-42; Struthers & Bokemeier, supra note 60, at 25, 28. But see Naples, supra note 15, at 126 (observing contradiction between women’s traditional roles and the fulfillment they find in the paid labor force).

105. See Albrecht & Albrecht, Conception Outcomes, supra note 76, at 444, 447. Unmarried rural women who become pregnant are also more likely to marry before the baby’s birth. Id. Attitudes about abortion are generally more negative among rural women as compared to their urban counterparts. See, e.g., FIENE, supra note 71, at 44-45 (indicating Kentucky women’s rejection of abortion even when the pregnancy results from rape). Rural women are significantly more likely to support pro-life rather than pro-choice candidates. PUB. OPINION STRATEGIES & GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH, REPORT FOR THE W.K. KELLOGG FOUND., ELECTION 2002: RURAL VOTER AND RURAL ISSUES 36-37 (2002),
C. Summary

Rural women, like other rural residents, have seen great change in the last quarter century. Buffeted by economic restructuring, many have entered the paid workforce or have otherwise increased their economic activity. Still, rural populations tend to be more conservative, with patriarchal attitudes and accompanying traditional gender roles deeply entrenched. For the most part, entry into formal labor markets (and increased economic activity of other types) has not alleviated rural women’s economic marginality; nor, for those married, has it significantly decreased their financial dependence on their husbands.

The next Part outlines the basics of critical geography. I explore how scholars can use the concepts of space, place, and scale to theorize rural women’s situation based on empirical data, thereby enhancing our understanding of the difference rurality makes to women’s lives. The next section also begins to analyze links between critical geography and law in relation to rural women’s livelihoods. In doing so, it both undergirds and builds upon my earlier work about law’s misapprehension of rural difference and its relevance to gender issues.

III. CRITICAL GEOGRAPHY AND RURAL WOMEN

Space, place, and scale are the primary analytical tools of critical geographers. “Space” is the most universal, abstract concept of the three, while “place” and “scale” are subsets of space. Space and place implicate each other, and their meanings sometimes merge. Between the two, however, place is the
more grounded concept, focusing on a particular locale. Scale measures space and place. The following section discusses each tool and begins to explore the ways in which they may elucidate female rural livelihoods, including the ways in which the law either regulates them, or is absent altogether.

A. Space

“[S]pace is fundamental in any exercise of power.” Critical geographers assert that understanding how society evolves requires reference to spatiality. Postmodern geographer Edward Soja explains spatiality and emphasizes its importance by juxtaposing space with time, situating geography next to history. In the context of critical geography, “spatiality” refers to this two-way process by which society creates space, even as space shapes or constructs society. For example, geographers Janet Kodras and John Paul Jones have asserted that individuals consider the enabling and disabling features of space in their decision-making, even as their own actions modify spatial structures. Institutions, networks, and individuals are thus spatiality’s agents, engaged in ongoing “struggle, conflict and contradiction.” Rural sociologist Marc Mormont has similarly observed that “social identity exists primarily in relation to space . . . because it is by the practical apprehension of a structured space that the individual first becomes aware of the world and learns to define his or her position within it.” He sees rurality as “socially constructed . . . borne and interpreted by social agents.” At the same time, society “takes form in space” and is “constituted in and by

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112. Tickamyer, Space Matters!, supra note 11, at 811.
113. Soja, Postmodern Geographies, supra note 1, at 19 (citing P. Rabinow, Space, Knowledge, and Power, 239-56 in The Foucault Reader (P. Rabinow ed. 1984)). Space is used to refer to real, imaginary, and symbolic spaces. Id.
114. Introduction, in Geographic Dimensions of United States Social Policy, 24-25 (Janet Kodras & John Paul Jones eds. 1990) [hereinafter Kodras & Jones].
115. Soja writes: “Just as space, time and matter delineate and encompass the essential qualities of the physical world, spatiality, temporality, and social being can be seen as the abstract dimensions which together comprise all facets of human existence.” Soja, Postmodern Geographies, supra note 1, at 25.
117. Id.
118. Teather, supra note 116, at 33. See also Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1045-46 (observing that individuals and communities are “not passive objects of restructuring processes” but the characteristics of particular places are “negotiated and struggled over”).
120. Mormont, supra note 9, at 36.
Space both contains and actively shapes social processes, as “social phenomena are necessarily spatial phenomena.” Soja emphasizes space’s abstract nature by differentiating it from its more concrete companion, place, which is “the physical space of material nature.”

I noted above the spatial characteristics associated with the rural, and I have elsewhere theorized the legal relevance of rurality to women’s lives. I have argued, for example, that geography, like various markers of identity, can be accommodated within anti-essentialist feminism. I have also demonstrated the legal relevance of spatial isolation to domestic violence, termination of parental rights, and the undue burden standard for regulation of abortion. In the context of domestic violence, for example, spatial isolation from sources of assistance, including neighbors and law enforcement, may aggravate the vulnerability and helplessness that a woman feels in the face of an abusive partner. Such vulnerability may lead her to capitulate to his coercion under duress, or to kill him because she has no other way to protect herself. Rural spatiality is also relevant for a woman seeking an abortion. Given that 87% of U.S. counties have no abortion provider, she may well be deterred, or literally unable, to get one if a mandatory waiting period requires that she travel not once, but twice, for many hours to reach an abortion provider. Physical distance from jobs, opportunities, services, and other people can thus profoundly influence both everyday decision-making and life course, including at the critical junctures where rural women encounter the law.

The lack of anonymity that flows from spatial isolation and low population density also circumscribe rural women’s autonomy. Such diminished privacy may, for example, deter women from reporting crimes, especially those within

122. Kodras & Jones, supra note 114, at 24-25.
123. Id.
124. Id.
125. SOJA, POSTMODERN GEOGRAPHIES, supra note 1, at 120.
126. See Pruitt, Feminist Theory of the Rural, supra note 6, at 437-41.
127. Id. at 442-82.
128. Id. at 444-53.
129. Id. at 445-48 (discussing Swails v. State, 986 S.W. 41 (Tex. App. 1999)).
130. See Pruitt, Place Matters, supra note 17.
133. Physical distances are a particular problem for women, who generally have fewer resources to overcome the adversity created by spatial isolation, and who are already vulnerable to a variety of economic and physical harms. See Diane Pearce, The Feminization of Poverty: Women, Work and Welfare, 11 URB. & SOC. CHANGE REV. 28, 28-30 (1978) (noting that for many occupational sectors, the “demand for cheap labor and the demand for female labor became synonymous”); Weissman, supra note 16, at 416-17 (noting that communities with difficult economic conditions have higher rates of domestic violence).
134. See Pruitt, Place Matters, supra note 17 at Part II.B.i; supra notes 74-75 and accompanying text.
families, because law enforcement, prosecutorial, and judicial officials are also neighbors, acquaintances, and even friends or family. This familiarity among community members may be particularly influential with regard to matters such as sexual issues and the family, which are generally considered private.

Again, abortion regulations illustrate how law fails to recognize rural difference in relation to social dynamics. State abortion laws may, for example, require a parent’s consent to a minor’s abortion, but provide for judicial bypass of that consent requirement under certain circumstances. However, when the minor is a resident in the same small community where the judicial officer resides, her acquaintance with the officer is likely to deter her from seeking permission. Traveling to another judicial district creates logistical obstacles similar to those facing any rural resident who must travel to a neighboring county or population center, especially because she must do so surreptitiously.

Spatial isolation and the lack of anonymity it fosters are just two consequences of the spatial characteristics of rural areas. Both are relevant to a range of legal issues. The following sections discuss additional ways in which space can enable or disable rural women as they negotiate the struggles of their everyday lives.

1. Spaces of Dependence

Some of geographers’ theorizing about spatiality and society is relevant to rural women. David Harvey, for example, locates “the politics of space . . . in the contradiction between mobility and immobility.” Kevin Cox builds on Harvey’s work to articulate the concept of “spaces of dependence,” which is the idea that some socio-spatial relationships are interchangeable within a given space but difficult or impossible outside of that space. As an example, Cox hypothesizes a high-end housing developer who acquires knowledge of a local

135. See Pruitt, Place Matters, supra note 17.
136. Pruitt, Feminist Theory of the Rural, supra note 6, at 467-82, esp. 482 (discussing judicial treatment of post-Casey restrictions on abortion).
137. Id. at 478-79.
138. Id. at 478-80.
139. Kevin R. Cox, Spaces of Dependence, Spaces of Engagement and the Politics of Scale, or: Looking for Local Politics, 17 POL. GEOGRAPHY 1, 4 (1998) (discussing David Harvey, The Limits to Capital, ch. 13 (1982)); David Harvey, The Geopolitics of Capitalism, in SOCIAL RELATIONS AND SPATIAL STRUCTURES, supra note 116; David Harvey, The Urbanization of Capital (1985)). That is, capital exists in immobile, spatially fixed forms, “such as factories, worker skills, social and physical infrastructures,” as well as in mobile forms, such as money. Id. Both are relevant to understanding where and how economic growth and development occurs.
140. Cox, supra note 139, at 5. As a related idea, Cox writes: “For workers, a particular labor market may be a necessary condition for them being workers. But for one it may be a question of spousal employment, for another a house that would be difficult to sell and yet another, an age close to that of retirement, which makes not simply leaving a particular place but a particular employer highly problematic.” Id. at 4. For rural residents, attachment to place may be the limiting factor that binds them to a particular labor market, while that labor market features its own limitations. See infra Part III.B (discussing limitations on rural women’s mobility and the impact on their employability and employment options).
market’s subcontractors, builders, and lenders. The developer’s knowledge and reputation is “spatially circumscribed” by the local housing market. Where the developer initiates projects does not matter, as long as it is within that geographical area.141 His reputation and knowledge are not “portable” to another; his networks make it a space of dependence for him.142

Feminists and ruralists could use this concept of spaces of dependence, for example, to theorize the lack of mobility among rural women and the reasons for it. As noted above, rural people are generally more attached to place than their urban or suburban counterparts.143 Empirical research shows that rural women rely heavily on social networks for material assistance144 (e.g., babysitting services, transportation, and even assistance with paying bills),145 as well as social and emotional support.146

141. Id.
142. Id.
143. See Tickamyer & Henderson, supra note 44, at 112-14 (emphasizing in discussion of three different rural regions the residents’ “deep-seated local affiliations and loyalties,” lack of willingness to leave their rural homes in spite of greater opportunity in urban areas, ties to family, and community and “commitment to the land that make[s] relocation undesirable, and attachment to rural “land and lifestyle”).

Rural residents are less likely to move than metro residents. Taking Stock, supra note 49, at 16. This attachment to place may be linked to rural residents’ historical attachment to their land. See Mormont, supra note 9, at 34; Paul S. Taylor, Public Policy and the Shaping of Rural Society, 20 S.D. L. REV. 475, 497 (1975); William M. Smith, Jr. & Raymond T. Coward, The Family in Rural Society: Images of the Future in The Family in Rural Society 221, 225 (Raymond T. Coward & William M. Smith Jr., eds. 1981).

144. I have argued elsewhere that the informal economy associated with such networks is overrated in terms of its ability to provide an effective safety net for the rural poor. See Pruitt, Missing the Mark, supra note 51, 475-77; Pruitt, Feminist Theory of the Rural, supra note 6, at 135-36 (arguing that such networks are increasingly fragile and temporary as single parenthood increases and family-based and social support networks diminish in significance) (citing Janet M. Fitchen, Rural Poverty in the Northeast: The Case of Upstate New York, in RURAL POVERTY IN AMERICA 177, 195 (Cynthia M. Duncan ed. 1992)); see also Salamon, Prairie Patrimony, supra note 72, at 246 (discussing the loss of social networks accompanying the demise of rural community); Feyen, supra note 18, at 112-13 (noting the significance of church-based networks for rural women, whereas men’s networks might be elsewhere, such as “at the feed mill or the implement dealer”).


146. Tickamyer, Private Lives, supra note 72, at 738 (asserting that such networks can provide “relief from the daily hardships of grinding poverty”); Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1058 (discussing the importance of kinship networks in rural Appalachian culture); Struthers & Bokemeier, supra note 60, at 18 (noting the import of “formal and informal connections to others” by rural families, who are “intricately connected through a web of social relations”).

One scholar has suggested that the “minimal presence of formal helping systems, for example, social services, can explain the extensive development of informal relationships among rural Americans.” The Hidden America, supra note 18, at 16-17 (discussing significance of networks and lack of anonymity in situations of domestic violence). See also Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44, at 1226-29 (discussing the significance of network to a group of women engaged in cottage industry knitting work); Naples, supra note 15, at 125-26 (discussing the value women attributed to the networks they developed when they worked outside the home).
The difficulty of establishing new networks in a different locale may make rural women reluctant to give up existing ties, thus profoundly influencing the course of their lives. Yet laws and policies that encourage relocation ignore the significance of such networks. In the context of termination of parental rights, for example, courts and social service agencies have sometimes used the rural locale of a woman’s home against her, suggesting that she should move to a city to avail herself of better work and housing opportunities. Such legal actors misunderstand the significance of rural women’s networks and underestimate the cost of losing and recreating them. Their urban bias is evident when they treat these critical spaces of dependence as legally irrelevant.

2. Spaces of Production and Reproduction: The Public/Private Divide as a Geographical Construct

Gendered divisions of labor, along with the gendered nature of the home and market have long been subjects of feminist scholarship. Whereas traditional scholarship has focused on production in the market place (coded male), feminists have successfully garnered attention to social reproduction in the home (coded female). The public/private dichotomy and separate spheres ideology thus became familiar constructs of feminist analysis, even as their limitations were acknowledged.

Geographers and other scholars sometimes analyze these spheres in spatial terms. Rural sociologist Ann Tickamyer’s comment is illustrative:

Discovering spatiality . . . can be further specified by reference to public-private distinctions between and within all social institutions. Feminist scholars have noted a spatial division of labor prevailing to some degree or another in all industrialized societies in which men dominate public space (political, civic, and economic arenas) and women occupy private space (household,

147. Tickamyer, Private Lives, supra note 72, at 738-39; see also Naples, supra note 15, at 125-26; Struthers & Bokemeier, supra note 60, at 35; Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1058.
148. Tickamyer, Private Lives, supra note 72, at 739 (noting welfare policy as an example); see also Tickamyer & Henderson, supra note 44, at 112 (questioning repeatedly why rural women do not migrate from rural areas to places with greater opportunity).
149. See Pruitt, Feminist Theory of the Rural, supra note 6, at 454-55.
150. See supra notes 3-5 (collecting sources).
152. See Olsen, supra note 4, at 1566.
153. Linda McDowell has written of geographers who have noted the “prominence of spatial references in contemporary feminist writing. In particular the work of women who feel ‘outside’ the conventional norms of society, migrant women, women of colour, lesbians for example, is saturated with spatial imagery in their discussions of transgressing boundaries in their struggle to find a place.” Linda McDowell, Space, Place and Gender Relations: Part II. Identity, Difference, Feminist Geometries and Geographies, 17 PROGRESS HUM. GEOGRAPHY 305 (1993) (citations omitted). Also interesting is Tickamyer’s catalog of the use of spatial terms to express aspatial concepts: social landscapes, segmented labor markets, embedded institutions, career ladders, and cyberspace. Tickamyer, Space Matters!, supra note 11, at 807.
family, and other sites of reproductive activity), thus “gendering” space.154

Spatial segregation between the home and the workplace, as well as within these and other institutions, reinforces gender stratification.155 In other words, who does what, and where, reflects a spatial division of labor that is closely intertwined with the gender division of labor.156 By relegating women to a sphere that is both conceptually and spatially private, society limits their access to knowledge and power.157 Feminist geographer Doreen Massey has observed that the distinction between public and private is “[o]ne of the most evident aspects of this joint control of spatiality and identity.”158 The attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere has been not only a spatial control, but also a social control on identity.159 Massey observes how the familiar expression “women’s place” emphasizes the “importance of the spatial separation of home and workplace.”160 The expression also demonstrates how spaces and places transmit gendered messages, and how “they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood.”161

Feminist architects, planners, anthropologists, geographers, and sociologists have all used spatiality to illustrate the correlation between degrees of gender segregation and degrees of spatial segregation.162 Feminist geographers have employed spatial concepts, for example, to theorize urban and suburban women’s tendencies to accept less desirable jobs that permit them to work close to home, the site of their reproductive activities.163

While spatial concepts have rarely had voice in law,164 they are gaining a foothold.165 Professor Katharine Silbaugh, for example, recently brought critical

154. Tickamyer, Private Lives, supra note 72, at 740 (citing Dorothy Smith, The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology (1987)). Scholars have also identified a correlation between “low status” and a high degree of public-private differentiation. Id.
155. Id. at 738.
156. Id.
157. Tickamyer argues that “sources of knowledge . . . provide[ ] the basis for power,” and gender stratification makes knowledge that is most valued “most readily available to men”, while “spatial segregation reinforces differential access.” Id. at 740-41 (citing Spain, supra note 7, at 15-21).
158. Massey, supra note 7, at 179-80.
159. Id.
160. Id.
161. Id.
162. Tickamyer, Private Lives, supra note 72, at 738 (relating universal asymmetries in the actual activities and cultural evaluations of men and women to a universal opposition between domestic and public spheres).
163. See Susan Hanson & Geraldine Pratt, Gender, Work & Space (1995) [hereinafter Hanson & Pratt, Gender, Work & Space]; Susan Hanson & Geraldine Pratt, Geographic Perspectives on the Occupational Segregation of Women, 6 Nat’l Geographic Res. 376, 380-83 (1990) [hereinafter Hanson & Pratt, Geographic Perspectives].
164. I borrow this phrase from Ann Tickamyer, who asserts that “space and place are still struggling to find their voice in sociology.” Tickamyer, Space Matters!, supra note 11, at 807.
geography into feminist legal scholarship, arguing that we should attend to the “gender of sprawl.”166 Because sprawl contributes to the distance between where women work and where their homes and children are, she discusses its salience to the work-family debate that has so engaged feminist scholars in recent years.167

Like their urban and suburban counterparts, rural women prefer economic opportunities close to their homes,168 yet they have fewer options.169 Some may have none. Indeed, while economists lament the inefficiency of distances between home and work in reference to urban and suburban places, such distances are deeply implicated in rural living.170 Imagine, for example, a woman living in a place so remote that even the closest Wal-Mart or McDonald’s is 30 miles away—or more. Assume that no public transportation is available. For her, working outside the home requires reliable access to a vehicle and personal circumstances that permit a long commute. Young children further complicate her situation. Home-based work such as an in-home day care may not be possible, depending on her distance from would-be clients. A poor communication infrastructure may also prevent work from home, as in a telephone-based customer service job.171

Like other women, then, those living in rural areas are engaged in spatial balancing, but with additional constraints. Literal, physical space works against

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166. Silbaugh, supra note 7, at 1799. Drawing on the work of feminist planners and architects, she identifies single-family living arrangements as another culprit. Id. at 1800; see also Katharine Baird Silbaugh, Wal-Mart’s Other Woman Problem: Sprawl and Work-Family Balance, 39 CONN. L. REV. 1713 (2007).

167. Silbaugh, supra note 7, at 1851. She notes, for example, the role of suburban women who transport their children to various events, invoking the “soccer mom” image. Middle-class rural families have somewhat similar concerns about transporting their children long distances to extracurricular events, but for rural families, distances are often prohibitive, resulting in lack of access altogether. See Struthers & Bokemeier, supra note 60, at 43.

168. See, e.g., Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44, at 1233-34 (reporting study of a network of knitters who worked in their homes to earn money in the wake of loss of mining jobs in Appalachia; many chose this opportunity because of the dearth of choices in their local labor market); Tickamyer, Private Lives, supra note 72, at 738.

169. See, e.g., Tickamyer & Henderson, supra note 44, at 111; Feyen, supra note 18, at 101, 110; Pickering, supra note 16, at 210 (discussing poor availability of jobs in persistently poor counties). See also supra notes 52-69 and accompanying text.


them. So do its consequences: lack of good jobs due to isolation from centers of commerce and deficits in human capital, a dearth of services (e.g., child care), and inadequate infrastructure (e.g., good roads, public transportation, high-speed internet). If available spaces of production are too far from their spaces of reproduction, or are otherwise inaccessible, rural women may choose informal economic activity that permits them to merge these two spaces/spheres. Alternatively, they may be economically inactive. These same barriers may similarly inhibit women’s participation in other public spheres, such as local or regional activism and politics.

a. Public/Private, Urban/Rural

In addition to being literally relegated to private spaces, rural women may also be conceptually associated with the private in a way that urban women are not. This is because the public/private divide that permeates life and law is arguably still more acute in rural than in urban places. One consequence is that rural patriarchy has tended to be private patriarchy. That is, the critical “locus of women’s oppression and exploitation” has been the household, not the public institutions of the market and politics, in which rural women have been less involved.

172. See, e.g., Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44, at 1235 (citing care of dependents, transportation barriers, and low-paying service jobs as reasons women chose to work at home); Tickamyer, Private Lives, supra note 72, at 738 (analyzing the spatiality of household survival strategies in relation to the family farm and noting that off-farm employment is balanced against household and farm labor). Of course, farm wives who do not also work off the farm have no commute and are in a situation in which public and private, work and family spheres merge.

173. Olsen, supra note 4, at 1529 (the market/family dichotomy “pervades our thinking, our language, and our culture”); Catharine A. MacKinnon, Disputing Male Sovereignty: On United States v. Morrison, 114 HARV. L. REV. 135, 170 (2000) (discussing the Supreme Court’s attention to the public/private divide in the course of “maintaining a system in which male power over women remains effectively without limit”); Judith Resnik, Categorical Federalism: Jurisdiction, Gender, and the Globe, 111 YALE L.J. 619, 621 (2001) (dichotomies regarding gender depend on dichotomies of family/market, and public/private); Emily Sack, Battered Women and the State: The Struggle for the Future of Domestic Violence Policy, 2004 WISC. L. REV. 1658, 1736 (discussing contemporary dilemmas regarding domestic violence policy in terms of the public-private divide); Weissman, supra note 16, at 424 (gender roles, relegating men’s work as paid and women’s as unpaid are accepted conventionally and legally as “self-evident truths”); Kerber, Separate Spheres, supra note 5, at 39 (though the distinctions may be increasingly fuzzy, the gendering of public and private spaces persists).

174. See SYLVIA WALBY, THEORIZING PATRIARCHY 59 (1990). “Patriarchy” may be defined as “male dominated, male identified, and male centered” social structure. ALLEN G. JOHNSON, THE GENDER KNOT: UNRAVELING OUR PATRIARCHAL LEGACY 26 (1997). “[W]hat drives Patriarchy as a system . . . is a dynamic relationship between control and fear. Patriarchy encourages men to seek security, status, and other rewards through control; to fear other men’s ability to control and harm them; and to identify being in control as both their best defense against loss and humiliation and the surest route to what they need and desire.” Id. See also R. EMERSON DOBASH & RUSSELL DOBASH, VIOLENCE AGAINST WIVES: A CASE AGAINST PATRIARCHY 43-44 (1979) (discussing patriarchy as structure and ideology); Lobao, Gendered Places, supra note 108, at 270 (defining patriarchy as men’s relatively greater power, prestige, and privilege).

175. See NEIL WEBSDALE, RURAL WOMAN BATTERING AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM 49 (1998); cf.
The sharpness of the public-private divide in rural places is true in several senses, and for several reasons. While I have used the public/private dichotomy thus far as essentially synonymous with the market/family analytical axis, it is also associated with other, related dichotomies. One of these is between domains in which law plays a role (public) and domains in which it does not (private). Historically, this regulation/nonregulation dichotomy was closely aligned with the market/family divide because the law actively regulated the former sphere, whereas the male head of household retained authority in the latter.

The urban/rural binary also reflects these dichotomies. Scholars across several disciplines have associated rurality with the private. So have judges, who have found rural residents have greater expectations of privacy than their urban counterparts, and therefore a greater entitlement to it. Legal actors may thus be reluctant to act in the realm of the rural, as in the domestic, because of the same sense that a private, informal order prevails there. They may view the invocation of law as an inappropriate interference.

Soja has characterized the rural somewhat pejoratively in relation to the private, associating it also with a lack of conformity and with individuality:

To be urbanized still means to adhere, to be made an adherent, a believer in a specified collective ideology rooted in extensions of *polis* (politics, policy,

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176. Any area in or upon which the law operates is or becomes “public” to some degree. In this sense, the public defines the private as that remnant of society with which it declines to deal. The line is often one between grievances for which the law provides redress and those for which it does not.

177. *See* State v. Rhodes, 61 N.C. 453, 454 (1868) (“The courts have been loath to take cognizance of trivial complaints arising out of the domestic relations—such as . . . husband and wife. Not because those relations are not subject to the law, but because the evil of publicity would be greater than the evil involved in the trifles complained of; and because they ought to be left to family government.”); *see also* WILLIAM BLACKSTONE, 2 COMMENTARIES ON THE LAWS OF ENGLAND 432-33 (giving the husband authority to correct the behavior of his wife and children as the head of household); NANCY COTT, PUBLIC VOWS: A HISTORY OF MARRIAGE AND THE NATION 57-58 (2000) (discussing Southern slave-owners’ framing of slavery as domestic relationship rather than a labor-based one); Reva Siegel, “The Rule of Love”: Wife Beating as Prerogative and Privacy, 105 YALE L.J. 2117 (1996) (recounting the Anglo-American tradition of permitting the husband, as master of the household, to chastise his wife).

178. *See*, e.g., ROSE, supra note 7, at 74 (associating the countryside with nature and the primitive, and the city with space and culture).

179. Pruitt, *Rural Rhetoric*, supra note 27, at 194-95. These associations have been articulated most often in relation to the U.S. Constitution’s Fourth Amendment protections against search and seizure. They have also been expressed in relation to creditors’ right of entry to repossess goods, *id.* (citing Salisbury Livestock Co. v. Colo. Cent. Credit Union, 793 P.2d 470, 475 (Wyo. 1990)), and in considering the unique character of rural land. See Macon-Bibb County Water & Sewage Auth. v. Reynolds, 299 S.E.2d 594, 599 (Ga. Ct. App. 1983) (suggesting greater right of privacy in rural property than urban property, in the context of considering the uniqueness of land).
polity, police) and civitas (civil, civic, citizen, civilian, civilization). In contrast, the population beyond the reach of the urban is comprised of idiots, from the Greek root idios, meaning ‘one’s own, a private person’, unlearned in the ways of the polis. . . . Thus to speak of the ‘idiocy’ of rural life or the urbanity of its opposition is primarily a statement of relative political socialization and spatialization, of the degree of adherence/separation in the collective social order.  

While Soja’s statement ignores the internal social compliance associated with rural communities, his point seems to be that rural residents have opted out of the broader polis/civitas by choosing the marginality of rural life. Marc Mormont has similarly suggested that rural social life “preserves the individual . . . whereas the city requires large organizations that take precedence over the individual.” He writes that rural “social life is made up of personal relationships: hence everyone is necessarily involved in social life, as no collective organizations stand between the individual and ‘society.’” Mormont sees rural spaces as symbolizing difference, and he views rural residents as able to express “their own systems of values . . . their own private lifestyle” because they enjoy more space, which is less-structured. Both Soja and Mormont thus use the public/private dichotomy to suggest an institution/individual binary, which they see as parallel to the urban/rural divide.

182. This is consistent with associations of rurality with self-sufficiency and rugged individualism. See Naples, supra note 15, at 115-16. It also reflects associations between rural residence and libertarianism, even anti-government sentiment. See infra note 187.
183. Mormont, supra note 9, at 26.
184. Id.
185. Id. at 37.
186. Id. at 26.
187. An extreme manifestation of this is the Posse Comitatus, who recognize no government above the county level.
188. Again, the alignment of this collective/individual binary with the rural/urban binary seems inconsistent with the informal social control that is associated with rural places. See supra note 181 and accompanying text. That inconsistency might be explained by focusing on notions of rurality in relation to urbanity, not within rural communities. While rural people are marginal vis-à-vis the urban and the national, within the rural area where they live, they may conform to their own community’s norms. Indeed, Mormont says these rural residents are necessarily involved in social life because institutions and organizations are not present to negotiate their relationships to society.

This apparent inconsistency between the informal social order and conformity associated with rural communities and what Mormont calls rural individualism might also be explained in terms of the distinction between those who live in small towns (or students who attend rural schools) on the one hand, and those who live more remotely, with much greater spatial and information privacy because of their dearth of contact with others.
Mormont also associates rurality with a preference for “compromise [over] conflict in dealing with social tension.” Legal actors have similarly viewed rural residents as avoiding the conflict of litigation in favor of the compromise of informal resolution. In the same vein, judges have opined that rural places require less regulation than cities. They have based this view on the assumption that rural folk are less amenable to law playing a mediating role in their lives because they are capable of resolving their own conflicts—and prefer to do so.

Finally, rurality has also been associated with femininity. This link dates back to the Renaissance period, when cities were perceived as places for expressing the ideas of the mind, while rural places were associated with “the disorderly, the chaotic, the unknowable”—and therefore the feminine. Urban thinkers of the time saw the city as “a unified, visual whole, that should reflect rational, geometric principles,” reflecting the human intellect’s dominance over nature. Man thus controls nature, as exemplified by the “city,” even as he enjoys dominion over woman.

189. Mormont, supra note 9, at 26.
190. See Engel, supra note 80, at 552-54; ROBERT ELLICKSON, ORDER WITHOUT LAW (1991).
191. See Pruitt, Rural Rhetoric, supra note 27, at 202-07 (giving examples of judicial expression of this attitude).
192. Id.
193. Consider the term “Mother Nature.” See also, e.g., MASSEY, supra note 7, at 9-10 (associating the feminine with the private, nature, and the local). Massey explains:

And yet in spite of all these reservations, some culturally specific symbolic association of women/Woman/local does persist. Thus, the term local is used in a derogatory reference to feminist struggles and in relation to feminist concerns in intellectual work (it is only a local struggle, only a local concern). Neither, it is argued, possesses the claim on universalism made by a concern with class. That bundle of terms local/place/locality is bound in to sets of dualism, in which a key term is the dualism between masculine and feminine, and in which, on these readings, the local/place/feminine side of the dichotomy is deprioritized and denigrated.

Id. at 10. See also ROSE, supra note 7, at 74 (noting that the nature/culture dichotomy is gendered, with that natural being associated with the body, the specific, the private, and the relational). Cf. DOMOSH & SEAGER, supra note 5, at 4 (discussing perceptions of the family as a communal institution where people relate to each other through bonds of compassion and obligation, in contrast with the public or market sphere where individuals compete).

194. DOMOSH & SEAGER, supra note 5, at 69.
195. Id. at 71 (citing ELIZABETH WILSON, THE SPHINX IN THE CITY: URBAN LIFE, THE CONTROL OF DISORDER, AND WOMEN (1991); see also Eric Freyfogle, The Education of Ada, in AGRARIANISM AND THE GOOD SOCIETY: LAND, CULTURE, CONFLICT AND HOPE (2007) (commenting on the sharp distinction between the characters Ada and Ruby in Charles Frazier’s Cold Mountain; the former all culture, the latter all nature); Dewey, supra note 28, at 63 (listing other dichotomies that parallel rural-urban, including sacred-secular, preliterate-literate, static-dynamic, primitive-civilized).

196. DOMOSH & SEAGER, supra note 5, at 69.
197. On the other hand, cities do share some associations with the feminine. Both are sometimes seen as sinful and corrupting. Female associations with such characteristics go back to the Garden of Eden in the Old Testament of the Bible, with Eve tempting Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. Urban associations with such unsavory elements are culturally widespread. They may even be seen in judicial opinions. See e.g., Dixon v. State, 167 So. 340, 344-45 (Ala. Ct. App. 1936) (quoting HARRY BEST, CRIME AND THE CRIMINAL LAW IN THE UNITED STATES (1930)). Best wrote:
Related to this gendered hierarchy is the observation of Professors Ching and Creed that “[t]he rural/urban distinction underlies many . . . power relations,” and that “the city remains the locus of political, economic and cultural power.”

Just as men (like cities) have been associated with the public sphere of money and politics, women (like the countryside) have typically lacked access to power and knowledge. In part because of their association with the private sphere and domestic spaces, women have wielded little power. The same is true of rural residents, who tend to be denigrated culturally, and who lack political clout.

We can thus identify a series of parallel and related binaries: public/private, regulated/unregulated, orderly/chaotic, institutional/individual, and urban/rural. In each, the less—valued item is coded feminine. Among these is rurality.

Because judicial attitudes toward rurality are similar to those long held about the private or domestic sphere, the law may seriously neglect rural women. If the law is seen as having a lesser role in both rural places and domestic spaces, legal actors may not perceive a role for the law in the lives of rural women, who share both associations. Indeed, the more traditional notions regarding gender roles as well as the low status of rural people may intensify the separation between the urban/public/masculine and the rural/private/feminine spheres.

Vice and immorality, with actual crime in attendance or close behind, may be directly and deliberately organized in the city, to ensnare the feet of those who otherwise would not be tempted. Entrepreneurs are ever on hand, and customers not far to seek. The city harbors solicitors of wrongdoing. The gangster and his compatriots are developed and grow to power in the city. To it criminals gravitate.

198. Ching & Creed, supra note 19, at 17.

199. See Tickamyer, Private Lives, supra note 72, at 740-41.

200. See supra notes 155-161 and accompanying text.


202. See supra note 91 (indicating that while rural voters generally hold little political power, they are significant within swing states in close elections).

203. Feminist geographer Doreen Massey has observed that, as between space and place, place connotes local, specific, concrete, and descriptive—in contrast to space’s associations with “general, universal, theoretical/abstract/conceptual.” Massey, supra note 7, at 9. She continues: “It is interesting in that context to ponder the gender connotations of these pairings. The universal, the theoretical, the conceptual are, in current western ways of thinking, coded masculine. . . . On the other side of the pairings, the term ‘local’ itself displays, on the one hand, a remarkable malleability of meaning and, on the other, a real consistency of gender association.” Id. at 9 (citing Genevieve Lloyd, The Man of Reason: “Male” and “Female” in Western Philosophy (1984)).

204. There is cross-cultural evidence for the relationship between the rigidity of spatial sexual segregation and the status of women in nonindustrial societies as well as detailed examples of its operation both historically and in the contemporary United States. Spain, supra note 7,
Legal actors may thus be oblivious to rural women because of both their physical and attitudinal distance from centers of power and knowledge.\textsuperscript{205}

Feminist legal scholars have long argued that law’s neglect of the family and other private spaces is not benign because it denies them law’s protection. Catharine MacKinnon offers a vivid expression of the problem: “[T]he actions and inactions of law construct and constrict women’s lives, its consequences no less powerful for being off-stage. Focusing on the areas the law abdicates, its gaps and silences and absences, one finds that women’s everyday life has real rules,” albeit not formal ones.\textsuperscript{206} MacKinnon calls these rules of everyday life “the law for women where there is no law.”\textsuperscript{207} As she observes, wrongs ignored or laws unenforced profoundly shape women’s lives—sometimes to a greater degree than matters that the law affirmatively regulates.

The same might be said of rural places, which law has tended to approach with a “hands off” presumption.\textsuperscript{208} Legal actors’ views of the rural as marginal are similar to the law’s views of the domestic sphere as beyond its purview. For rural women, then, who are associated with the private by virtue of both their gender and their location, the law is “high up and a long way off.”\textsuperscript{209}

b. (Urban) Mobility and (Rural) Immobility

Rural women may be disserved or disabled by rural spaces in yet another way, this one related to their immobility. I have already noted that rural residents are relatively immobile in two different respects. First, they are constrained by the physical distances that separate them from jobs, educational opportunities, services, and each other. Indeed, distance may effectively exclude them from public spaces. Second, rural residents are relatively immobile on a macro level

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{205} See \textit{Webisdale}, supra note 175, at 44-45 (citing \textit{Walby}, supra note 174) (arguing that patriarchy takes a particular form in rural areas due to “women’s more limited opportunities for survival in the wage labor market,” which endows men with greater power to keep and control them within the home).
  \item \textsuperscript{206} \textit{Catharine A. MacKinnon, Women’s Lives, Men’s Laws}, 34 (2004). She argues that these rules “effectively prescribe what girls can be, what the community encourages and permits in a woman, what opportunities are available and hence what aspirations are developed, what shape of life is so expected that it is virtually never articulated.” \textit{Id}. Feminist geographers have similarly called for attention to the “everyday,” with respect to the spaces of women’s movement and activity. \textit{See Rose}, supra note 7, at 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{207} \textit{MacKinnon}, supra note 206, at 34.
  \item \textsuperscript{208} \textit{See Pruitt}, \textit{Rural Rhetoric}, supra note 27, at 202-07.
  \item \textsuperscript{209} \textit{MacKinnon}, supra note 206, at 34. “The content of the formal legal system, the output of legislatures and courts, has a real effect on these processes, but, from the vantage point of life being lived, it seems a distant one.” \textit{Id}. at 34-35.
\end{itemize}
because their attachment to place often binds them to their locale in a way that is not relevant to most urban dwellers. Recall Harvey’s assertion that “the politics of space” resides “in the contradiction between mobility and immobility.”

Gender politics—including its rural manifestations—are similarly linked to women’s mobility and immobility.

Feminist geographers assert that women’s mobility poses a threat to patriarchy, an assertion related to separate spheres ideology. Restrictions on women’s movement within and across spaces thus shape women’s identities in critical ways—by limiting the very possibilities of their lives. Indeed, limitations on mobility and identity are “crucially related,” and such limitations enforce women’s subordination.

Domosh and Seager have discussed women’s mobility in relation to urban places, asserting that women represent a threat to the social order of the city, which is coded masculine. Thus, social controls keep urban women “in their [domestic/home] place.” These controls include street harassment, which Cynthia Grant Bowman characterizes as the “informal ghettoization of women.”

Bowman observes that because society associates women with the private or domestic, men are less likely to challenge or harass women when they are in places associated with their domestic or social reproduction responsibilities. Their presence on city streets, however, has invited the sort of aggressive male behavior that intimidates and threatens, thus potentially or

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210. See supra text accompanying note 139.
211. Massey, supra note 7, at 11. Martha Nussbaum has also commented on the significance of mobility to women’s situation. See Nussbaum, supra note 6, at 76-78 (listing “being able to move freely from place to place” as a component of “bodily integrity,” one of ten capabilities that all democracies should support).
212. Massey theorizes that the masculine desire to fix the woman in a stable and stabilizing identity . . . may be tied in with a desire to fix in space and place. One gender-disturbing message might be—in terms of both identity and space—keep moving! The challenge is to achieve this whilst at the same time recognizing one’s necessary locatedness and embeddedness/embodiedness, and taking responsibility for it.
213. Massey, supra note 7, at 11 (internal quotation marks and citation omitted); see also id. at 179-80. A social or cultural desire to fix rurality in a “stable and stabilizing identity” arguably also exists in the United States. See Pruitt, Rural Rhetoric, supra note 25, at Paris II, VII.
214. Id.
215. Domosh & Seager, supra note 5, at 69-72, 82-94.
216. Rose, supra note 7, at 56 (observing the idealization of place as home and the link of both to women, while also noting that feminists contest these associations); see also id. at 23; Domosh & Seager, supra note 5, at 71-72, 82-94 (discussing the history of women’s presence in urban public places as problematic).
218. Bowman, supra note 217, at 530; see also Massey, supra note 7, at 179-80 (writing of the “straightforward exclusion by violence,” as a way in which spaces and places are gendered). This, of course, does not mean that homes are not sites of male harassment and violence against women. In those spaces, however, male intimates are more often the perpetrators.
effectively driving them back home.219

But what is the rural counterpart to this need to control urban women by, for example, harassing them into immobility? Because a certain degree of immobility is inherent in the lives of rural women,220 they are already less mobile than their urban counterparts.221 Rural women may thus be less of a threat (or differently positioned as a threat) to the public/social order in rural places because the entrenched patriarchy there so effectively confines them to spaces that are out of society’s (and law’s) line of vision. If women are associated conceptually with rurality222 and seen as “belonging” in the country, rural women may already be effectively “in their place.”223 Further, even as rural women increasingly work outside the home, their deep-seated association with the domestic persists.224 The ongoing primacy of their home making and parenting roles means that they are already effectively controlled. The rural manifestation of patriarchy so limits them that no further control may be

219. This phenomenon is associated, at least implicitly, with urban spaces. See Deborah M. Thompson, “The Woman in the Street”: Reclaiming the Public Space from Sexual Harassment, 6 YALE J. L. & FEMINISM 313, 316-19 (1994) (offering various examples from urban settings, primarily New York City; referring to “boorish urban environment”) (quoting Robin L. West, The Difference in Women’s Hedonic Lives: A Phenomenological Critique of Feminist Legal Theory, 3 WIS. WOMEN’S L.J. 81, 106 (1987) (suggesting many or most women living in urban places have experience street harassment)).

220. See supra Part III.B.1; Pruitt, Feminist Theory of the Rural, supra note 6.

221. See supra notes 67-69 and accompanying text. Mormont acknowledges both mobility and immobility associations with rurality. He repeatedly acknowledges long-time rural residents’ attachment to place. Mormont, supra note 9, at 33, 39. He nevertheless also argues that rural places are increasingly porous and have been greatly impacted by increased movement of people and goods between the rural and urban, as well as by technology. Id. at 31.

222. DOMOSH & SEAGER, supra note 5, at 69-72. Massey makes a related point, observing “an association between the feminine and the local,” and noting a link between this observation and the public/private division. MASSEY, supra note 7, at 9. Massey provides as an example the assumption that women “lead more local lives” than men. Id. She has also notes gendered associations with place, including those with a “culturally constructed version of ‘Woman,’” home, and nostalgia. She gives the example, “A place called home,” which she acknowledges is entrenched, even as she contests its accuracy. Id. at 10.

223. The association between home, gender, and place is also reflected in a rural Southern expression: “home place,” which refers to the family land, sometimes a farm, where the eldest generation typically still resides. The term was used in this way, for example, by a justice on the Mississippi Supreme Court, in a 1991 opinion in which he wrote separately regarding the City of Hattiesburg’s annexation of a neighboring community:

I refer to those who for decades have been country folk who have by and large lived off the land, who never dreamed of moving to town or doing anything other than maintaining and enjoying a rural life-style. I refer to those who have made their homesteads without reference or thought to avoiding city taxes, politics or cultural pluralism. Indeed, many of these, who have not merely remained on the home place mom and dad left them, have consciously accepted the costs, risks and inconvenience of living many miles from town.

In re Enlargement of the Corporate Limits of Hattiesburg, 588 So. 2d 814, 833 n.6 (Miss. 1991) (Robertson, J., concurring and dissenting) (emphases added).

224. See, e.g., WEBSDALE, supra note 175; supra notes 103-05 and accompanying text. Other possible explanations for street harassment not being a rural phenomenon are that the line between public and private is less distinct there; that paternalism toward women makes it socially unacceptable, especially in the context of communities where the social pressure to conform, and the opportunity to monitor conformity, is great; and that the lack of anonymity in rural places means that men cannot harass women anonymously.
3. Summary

Opportunities to analyze gender in relation to rural space are plentiful and productive against the current backdrop of demographic and economic change. These transformations present an opportunity to consider rural women’s “legal lives” with respect to the issues around which they encounter the law, legal institutions, actors, and decision-makers—in a more nuanced way that takes account of space. Theorizing the intersection of gender and rurality may help explain law’s lack of responsiveness to rural women in the same way that early theorizing around the public/private divide illuminated law’s inattention to the realities of women’s lives, particularly in the domestic sphere.

Yet, viewing rural women through the abstract lens of spatiality reveals only a partial picture. Studies over the past two decades, which have considered gendered struggles arising from economic restructuring in rural America, provide an empirical basis for theorizing its socio-spatial implications for rural women. These studies illustrate how women respond to particular labor markets and resources associated with their locales. The next Part details two of these studies to show how attention to place further enhances our understanding of rural women’s lived experiences in a way that can inform the law.

B. Place

“All politics is local.”

Place is a subcategory of space, and change in an actual physical place implicates spatiality. At the same time, socio-spatial features influence the material characteristics of a place, as well as its social construction. One exposition on place articulates its role in spatial analysis: “particular places provide a locale that may operate as a container and backdrop for social action, as a set of causal factors that shape social structure and process, and finally as an identifiable territorial manifestation of social relations and practices that define

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225. On the other hand, the domestic violence associated with rural restructuring might be viewed as another form of control, given that the domestic violence correlates to women taking paid work outside the homes, albeit out of economic necessity. See supra note 16 and accompanying text.

226. Lobao & Meyer, Economic Decline, supra note 79, at 575 (asserting that gendered divisions of labor tend to be “most malleable during periods of economic decline” providing a backdrop that reveals changes as something other than natural); see also Naples, supra note 15 at 131.

227. See, e.g., Nelson & Smith, supra note 57, at 80.

228. This adage is associated with Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill, U.S. Speaker of the House, 1977-1986, and is part of the title of his 1995 book, All Politics Is Local (and Other Rules of the Game). The expression actually “appeared much earlier, such as in the Frederick News (from Maryland) July 1, 1932.” YALE BOOK OF QUOTATIONS 566 (Fred Shapiro ed., 2006).

229. Tickamyer, Space Matters!, supra note 11, at 806.
that particular setting. Place presents a valuable opportunity to consider and grapple with how specific characteristics of a given location—and specific happenings there—shape its socio-spatial character, as well as the livelihoods of its residents.

1. Rurality as Literal and Metaphorical Place

Place-based analysis takes us beyond the broad rural/urban axis. Such a place-oriented approach is more nuanced than the rural/urban binary, and it responds to the criticisms that rural scholars have leveled against simple, dichotomous thinking. Mormont, for example, has emphasized the lack of unifying criteria among rural communities. Tickamyer has observed that a dichotomous approach “has less explanatory power than elaborating differences in economic base, industrial mix, links to other markets, human capital factors, and population characteristics that constitute different places.”

Critical geographers tend to emphasize not only such differences, but also the “contested, fluid and uncertain” character of place “made through power relations which construct the rules” that define social and spatial boundaries. They thus see place, like space, as socially produced, which challenges the “commonsense geographical notion of a place as a set of coordinates on a map that fix a defined and bounded piece of territory.” Linda McDowell observes

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230. Id.
231. An excellent example of work demonstrating variations among rural places is Cynthia Duncan’s book, *World’s Apart* (2000), in which she identifies the differing causes of rural poverty in three locations: Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta, and New England. See also Cynthia M. Duncan & Nita Lamborghini, *Poverty and Social Context in Remote Rural Communities*, 59 RURAL. SOC. 437, 442 (1994) (noting variations in population stability and job opportunities between Appalachia and New England, which had an impact on poor women’s experiences and aspirations; also explicitly differentiating “remote” rural places from less remote ones by studying two communities that were each more than four hours by car from the nearest metropolitan area).
232. It is also consistent with a similar feminist critique of dichotomous thinking.
233. Mormont, *supra* note 9, at 27.
236. *See*, e.g., Micewald & McCann, *supra* note 12, at 1045 (abstract) (referring to “networks of social relations at the scale of the locality” contributing to the “production of place and scale”).
237. McDowell offers this exposition: “It is socio-spatial practices that define places and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion.” McDowell, *supra* note 7, at 4 (citing Massey 1991, Smith 1993). “Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial—they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience.” *Id.* In relation to rural places, this raises questions such as how women fare in rural spaces, such as the public spaces of the town square, the farm supply store or feed mill, and traditionally masculine workplaces. Are women effectively excluded from these locales? On the other hand, are they the ones making the rules and defining who belongs in other public spaces, such as churches and in the service-sector workplace to which they tend to be relegated? *See* Feyen, *supra* note 18, at 112-13.
that “[p]laces may no longer be ‘authentic’ and ‘rooted in tradition’” but rather are “defined by the socio-spatial relations that intersect there and give a place its distinctive character.”238 In this regard, and in relation to rural places, Mormont goes so far as to call the rural “a category of thought . . . a constructed representation and not an ascertained reality.”239

Others endorse a less radical approach to the “rural” as place. Tickamyer, for example, asserts that regional identities and cultures—place-based variations—are real because they are believed to be real; they therefore have real consequences.240 Ching and Creed take the middle ground, endorsing a metaphoric use of “place,” with reference to “a particular physical environment and its associated socio-cultural qualities.”241 Professor Hari Osofsky has expressed a similar idea: “culture and identity are inextricably bound with . . . place-based relationships.”242

Like these latter scholars, I use place as a “grounded metaphor,”243 a “setting for the routines of everyday life” that is also related to “social memory, identity, and sense of place.”244 Such a conception of place is appropriate to rural locales because rural culture and identity are often linked to land, and many rural places are rooted in tradition.245 Nevertheless, an awareness of how rurality is socially constructed—by both insiders and outsiders—accommodates an assessment of the social and cultural shifts that necessarily accompany demographic and economic change.

2. Gender and Restructuring in Two Rural Communities

Specific events occurring in particular communities provide prime opportunities for place-based analysis.246 The exhaustion of timber in Oregon’s

238. Id. (opining that our “notion of locality or place itself” has become more sophisticated as a consequence of the understanding that globalizing forces reconstruct rather than destroy localities).
239. Mormont, supra note 9, at 22, 40, 41.
240. Tickamyer, Space Matters!, supra note 11, at 810.
242. Osofsky, Litigation as Pluralist Dialogue, supra note 111, at 222.
243. Ching & Creed, supra note 19, at 7 (arguing for attention to the "conceptual and experiential difference" between rural and urban).
244. Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1047.
245. See supra Part III.
246. See, e.g., Nelson & Smith, supra note 57, at 79, 83 (studying a rural Vermont county in the early 1990s in the wake of economic restructuring); Katherine Meyer & Linda M. Lobao, Engendering the Farm Crisis: Women's Political Response in USA, in GENDER AND RURALITY 69-70 (Sarah Whatmore et al. eds., 1994) [hereinafter Meyer & Lobao, Engendering the Farm Crisis] (analyzing the gendered nature of the farm crisis and its consequences for political attitudes); Katherine Meyer & Linda M. Lobao, Farm Couples and Crisis Politics: The Importance of Household, Spouse, and Gender in Responding to Economic Decline, 59 J. MARRIAGE AND THE FAM. 204 (1997) [hereinafter Meyer & Lobao, Farm Couples] (analyzing responses to the 1980s farm crisis); Miewald & McCann, supra note 12 (discussing the production of place, particularly in the “microsites” of body and household, in the wake of economic restructuring in Appalachia); Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44 (analyzing renegotiation of gender identities in the wake of economic restructuring in rural Appalachia); Sally Ward Maggard, Race, Gender & Place:
Western Cascades, a factory closing in East Tennessee, and the Midwest farm crisis of the 1980s each invites place-based analyses, which also inform more abstract spatial analyses.

The material consequences of such events reverberate through those places and affect neighboring, and even distant places. As I discussed in Part III.A, these reverberations have spatial dimensions. They influence socio-spatial arrangements at home and in the labor market, as well as between such spaces. Their impact plays out at various scales.

To illustrate the role of place analysis, I discuss two studies of rural economic restructuring. While these studies from Iowa and Kentucky employed differing methodologies and had somewhat different foci, each considered the consequences of economic change for rural women. Some common themes emerged from these critical geographic analyses oriented to “place.” Both local cultures exhibited an entrenched patriarchy in which women had rarely played roles in the public spheres of market and politics, but both studies showed women transcending the public-private divide to some extent in the wake of economic restructuring. Both tales of restructuring reveal spatial implications, in the public sphere/space of the market, as well as in the private sphere/space of the household.

a. Differing Economic Crises

The rolling plains and rich soil of Iowa foster agriculture. The natural

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247. For a discussion of the effects of the closing of timber mills in the Western Cascades, see Erik Eckholm, In Rural Oregon, These Are the Times That Try Working People’s Hopes, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 20, 2006 (reporting that those previously earning $20-$30/hour are working in low-end service jobs for a fraction of that with many commuting to Eugene).

248. See Morristown, supra note 56 (depicting the changing employment base and economic fortunes of Morristown, Tennessee, a micropolitan center in the midst of three rural counties in northeast Tennessee).

249. See generally Kathryn Marie Dudley, Debt and Dispossession: Farm Loss in America’s Heartland (2000) (observing that rural residents in the midst of the farm crisis of the 1980s were unlikely to seek assistance from neighbors because they found doing so stigmatizing); Meyer & Lobao, Engendering the Farm Crisis, supra note 246, at 70-71; Meyer & Lobao, Farm Couples, supra note 246.

250. See infra Part IV.C.

251. Both studies tended to focus on heterosexual, married couples. Nevertheless, divorced women were also occasionally discussed, with the authors suggesting that divorce was sometimes a consequence of the strain of economic restructuring. See Naples, supra note 15, at 122-27; Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1045, 1052-53.

Another study, set in Vermont, was expressly limited to married couples. Nelson & Smith, supra note 57, at 81. They found that economic change in rural Vermont in the early 1990s also led to an increase in women’s financial contributions to their families’ budgets through the paid workforce and increased efforts in the informal economy. Although this study was sited in a rural Vermont county, a setting that no doubt limited economic options and contributed to the families’ transportation challenges, the authors did not present the rural setting as significantly influencing the outcomes.
resources buried deep in the Appalachian Mountains invite mining. The physical characteristics of each place have determined the focus of the local economy, essentially discouraging economic diversification. Changes in the supply of labor, or demand for it, thus threatened the livelihoods of the residents of these different rural places.

In Iowa, the farm crisis of the 1980s challenged the Midwestern form of entrenched rural patriarchy and agrarian ideology, which viewed men’s labor as primary, thereby obscuring women’s contributions to family farms and other rural enterprises. As well-paying mining jobs declined in Appalachian Kentucky, sharp and enduring gender divisions of labor also shifted. To survive, many women in these disparate communities emerged from the private spheres/spaces of their households to join the public spheres/spaces of the paid workforce and the wider community.

b. Similar Challenges to Gender Roles: Resistance & Empowerment

In her early 1990s study of rural Iowa, sociologist and feminist theorist Nancy Naples observed how “traditional gender ideology shape[d] material practices,” reinforcing gender inequality in the face of economic restructuring. But Naples also saw economic restructuring as a challenge to gender roles because of shifts in the relative economic contributions of men and women. Economic restructuring led women to renegotiate their roles as helpmates to their farmer-husbands, changing where and how they lived and worked. While some women continued to work informally in their homes or beside their husbands on the farm, others took work outside the home, which made their

252. Agrarian ideology is “the celebration of farming and farmers as the heart of American society.” It is characterized by traditional gender roles within the family, meaning that the woman’s role as wife, mother and homemaker are paramount. Naples, supra note 15, at 115 (quoting and discussing DEBORAH FINK, AGRARIAN WOMEN: WIVES AND MOTHERS IN RURAL NEBRASKA 1880-1940 (1992)). See also Struthers & Bokemeier, supra note 60, at 25 (observing in their study of rural families “the agrarian ideology of being self-sufficient by providing for yourself and family and engaging in non labor market activities largely consistent with farming”); Feyen, supra note 18, at 109-10 (noting rural farm wives being forced out of their roles as direct producers as a manifestation of the patriarchy associated with agrarian ideology).

Naples also studied these phenomena in relation to gemeinschaft. Naples uses that term to mean “close-knit ties among community members who help each other through difficult economic and emotional crises.” She calls gemeinschaft a myth grounded in the “presumed homogeneity of beliefs and attitudes among community members.” Naples, supra note 15, at 115 (citing KENNETH P. WILKINSON, THE COMMUNITY IN RURAL AMERICA (1991)).


254. See Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1055.

255. Naples, supra note 15, at 123. Naples describes perceptions of male and female pig farmers following their divorce: a social service agency and the Farmer’s Home Administration (“FmHA”) saw the woman’s pig farm as a hobby, which they urged her to abandon; in contrast, FmHA saw her former husband’s pig farm as his livelihood. Id.

256. Id. at 123.

257. See id. at 131-32; see also Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1055-57.

labor more visible. Among the jobs Naples observed women taking were teacher, child-care provider, nurse and nurse aid, clerical worker, social-service worker, waitress, and laborer in sewing and food processing factories. Some community observers, such as bankers, tended to view women’s paid work as significant to rural families’ economic survival, and some women also ultimately recognized the value of their own financial contributions. While male farmers were also aware of this changed reality, they nevertheless maintained social dominance over their wives.

Christiana Miewald and Eugene McCann studied economic change against a backdrop of historically rigid gender divisions of labor in Appalachian Kentucky: men in the mines and women with full responsibility for the children and household. The authors found that mine closures and the ensuing economic crisis “pushed” many women into the workplace, but that women generally took jobs or informal work that were “extension[s] of their ‘natural’ roles.” While these shifts left few men as sole breadwinners, most nevertheless failed to take on significantly greater roles in household work. Men also resisted relaxation of the entrenched patriarchy by declining to take retail or service work, which they saw as women’s work. They instead tended to choose informal economic activity that reflected their masculinity, including car repair, “serving as the volunteer fire chief, raising hogs, and helping out around the yard.”

These studies documented not only women’s movement into the paid workforce, but also some of the gendered consequences of that migration. The

259. Id.
260. Id. at 122; see also Nelson & Smith, supra note 57, at 80 (citations omitted). Nelson and Smith note that when the norms within households change—as at times of economic restructuring—the “work of ‘doing gender’” is no longer taken for granted, but is made visible. This visibility demonstrates that households are critical units of economic life. Nelson & Smith, supra note 57, at 80.
262. Id. at 124.
263. Id. at 123, 126.
264. Id. at 123-25 (noting contradictory messages sent by farm couple: she self-effacing about her role while he gave her credit, even as he dominated the interview in a way that hardly permitted her to speak).
265. Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1051.
266. Id. at 1054.
267. Id. at 1055 (reporting that men generally only assisted if women complained).
268. Id. As one wife described her husband, “He just doesn’t see himself being able to do anything like working at Wal-Mart or something that may be feasible for him. It’s not the pay, it’s just that he can’t see himself walking around talking to people.” Id.; cf. Nelson & Smith, supra note 57, at 105 (finding that in households where neither partner had well-paying work, men were more likely to share domestic duties only if they still had more extensive labor force involvement than their wives).
269. Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1055; see also Nelson & Smith, supra note 57, at 89-92 (describing the masculine nature of men’s moonlighting and self-provisioning strategies; activities included auto body work and gathering wood); 95-96 (describing men in less fortunate families, those supported by bad jobs, as tinkering with and trading various types of vehicles); but see Naples, supra note 15, at 113 (reporting that in the wake of the farm crisis, men also worked off-farm, including in factories, and in seasonal and low-wage work).
Iowa study found that women entering the workforce often expressed enjoyment of their new roles and the opportunities to expand their friendship networks.270 The women also began to appreciate the significance of their own financial contributions, even as they lamented how their paid labor detracted from their mothering and other care-giving roles.271

Some of the Kentucky women also reported feeling independent as a consequence of their labor force participation, despite the poor employment opportunities they found.272 Indeed, a few felt sufficiently empowered to challenge the patriarchal division of labor and demand that their husbands assist with housework.273 Some began to envision themselves in roles other than housewife.274 Younger women in particular began to speak out about issues important to them, such as welfare reform and intimate abuse.275 The Appalachian women thus began to take on roles in the public sphere of the formal market and politics.

Another consequence of the Kentucky women’s increased participation in the paid work force was a shift in their roles in maintaining critical kinship networks. Because this was traditionally considered “women’s work,” these tasks suffered.276 By way of example, one woman explained how she no longer had time to cook and bake when a need, such as a death, arose in the community.277 Rather, she had begun to purchase food for such occasions.278 These women’s “sense of place”—their culture—was thus reconfigured by economic change and its socio-spatial consequences.279

**c. Place Reconfigured: Gendered Consequences of Economic Restructuring**

While the details of these two place-based studies varied with the geographic context and with the particulars of the economic change that sent women to work, some common socio-spatial themes emerged. Indeed, while the consequences of restructuring were material, they were also socially and spatially constructed. Moves into the paid labor force sometimes gave women access to money and other sources of power such as social networks or training opportunities.280 The low-paying, low-status jobs they got, however, did not

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271. Id. at 125.
272. Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1055.
273. Id. (reporting that men would only assist with household tasks if women complained).
274. Id. at 1057. The authors acknowledged that these rural Appalachian women had not yet achieved “egalitarian partnerships with men.” They nevertheless suggested that, empowered by greater access to employment and education, the women were using strategies “aimed at reconfiguring household gender relations.” Id.
275. Id. at 1060-61.
276. Id. at 1059-60.
277. Id. at 1059.
278. Id.
279. Id. at 1060.
280. See PICKERING, supra note 16, at 215 (women who entered the labor market in the wake of
substantially increase their economic or social power. Breadwinner ideology was so entrenched that even when women’s earnings were significant, their contributions to the family coffers were viewed as marginal. In addition, women who worked outside the home still retained responsibility for the bulk of domestic and care-giving work. Consistent with other studies of rural places, gender dissonance was heightened when women became earners.

The net gains in money and status were thus minimal for most women. Nevertheless, with the increase of rural women in the public sphere of the market, they became “differently positioned as potential workers.” Some reported gaining confidence, along with job skills, as they reduced their isolation and dependence. In short, they began to transcend the gendered dichotomy of production/reproduction, of public/private.

3. Summary

In addition to revealing common themes between two rural locales facing economic restructuring, these studies demonstrate how attention to place welfare reform felt better about themselves; see also Lobao & Meyer, Farm Couples, supra note 246, at 210 (documenting women’s decision-making roles in the context of farm families during the farm crisis of the mid 1980s); Naples, supra note 15, at 125 (explaining that jobs offered women an opportunity to expand their friendship networks).


282. See, e.g., Nelson & Smith, supra note 57, at 87-88; Naples, supra note 15, at 124 (noting women’s descriptions of their income, whether in the formal or informal economy, as “supplemental”). Oberhauser’s study of a rural West Virginia network of home knitters found that while their earnings were primarily supplemental to household incomes, they provided “important resources for household expenditures.” Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44, at 1229.

283. See, e.g., Naples, supra note 15, at 122-27. Oberhauser, for example, reported that one woman in her study earned 90% of the household income of $11,000, while also home-schooling the children. Her husband pursued “odd jobs.” Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44, at 1233; see also Lobao & Meyer, Economic Decline, supra note 79, at 575-76, 598, 601 (noting that a traditional, gendered division of labor remained intact for many farm families during economic crisis, meaning that men worked more on the farm and women increasingly sought work off the farm, making women “triply burdened” with housework, farm work, and income-generating work; gender roles thus became more rigid).

284. See, e.g., Struthers & Bokemeier, supra note 60, at 28; Tickamyer & Henderson, supra note 44, at 112-14. An early 1990s study of rural Vermont also showed that women’s entry into the paid labor force, especially when they earned as much or more than men, threatened men’s masculinity. Nelson & Smith, supra note 57, at 93-97, 106-07; see also Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44, at 1231 (noting the “contentious nature” of income generation in the home, not a traditional site of economic activity).


287. See, e.g., Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44, at 1233-34.

288. See Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1048-49.
recognizes distinct local and regional identities, including those with gendered connotations. Among these are the agrarian ideology of the Midwest\textsuperscript{289} and Appalachia’s kinship networks.\textsuperscript{290} Other socially constructed regional identities might include the tropes of rural folk in the West as hardy pioneers, rural Southerners as uneducated simpletons, and rural New Englanders as stoic traditionalists. While attention to the rural/urban axis is an important first step, acknowledging the great variety among rural locales is also essential. This variety stems not only from place-based differences, but also from those associated with degrees of rurality.\textsuperscript{291}

These studies of place also demonstrate another theoretical concept of critical geography: scale. The changes discussed play out in the scales of the body and household, which are economically and socially enmeshed with the community, the region, and the globe. In the next Part, I take up the concept of scale and its implications for a more sophisticated understanding of rurality, gender, and law.

\textbf{C. Scale}

“The Personal is Political.”\textsuperscript{292}

As the third major tool of geographers, scale represents another subset of spatial analysis.\textsuperscript{293} It is defined as “the level of geographical resolution at which a given phenomenon is thought of, acted on or studied.”\textsuperscript{294} Attention to scale allows assessment of social, economic, and legal experience at different spatial resolutions. An awareness of other spaces—greater and smaller, encompassing and nested within—enhances our understanding of those experiences.\textsuperscript{295} When geography meets law, scale often equates with jurisdiction,\textsuperscript{296} which is a proxy

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{289} See Naples, supra note 15.
\item \textsuperscript{290} Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1058; Oberhauser, Relocating Gender, supra note 44, at 1226.
\item \textsuperscript{291} By the latter, I refer to the range of characteristics discussed in Part III: population density, physical isolation from urban centers, and degree of social and cultural integration with the urban. Rural places that are morphing into exurbia may, for example, present a wider array of options to women. These opportunities stem from the differing social, spatial, and economical construction of exurbia, as compared to more traditional, more isolated rural places.
\item \textsuperscript{292} Carol Hanisch, Notes from the Second Year (1969), quoted in YALE BOOK OF QUOTATIONS, supra note 228, at 337.
\item \textsuperscript{294} Brenner, New State Spaces, supra note 19, at 9 quoted in Ososky, New Haven School, supra note 8, at 447.
\item \textsuperscript{295} Tickamyer challenges scholars to consider which scale or unit of analysis can best be used in considering a particular form of inequality. See Tickamyer, Space Matters!, supra note 11, at 811. She suggests exploration of how systems of inequality operate in different locales, advocating attention to both local and “more complex models of socio-spatial processes.” Id. at 809.
\item \textsuperscript{296} Discussion of geography in legal contexts—scale, in particular—often implicates jurisdiction. See, e.g., Ford, supra note 165.
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for where the power of decision-making resides, or the level of governmental interests that are implicated.

As with space and place, geographers’ typical use of scale reflects urban biases.297 Tickamyer cites as examples research and policy analyses that assume poverty is a national problem, but then approach it with an urban bias.298 She touts the opportunities that scalar analysis presents for scholars of the rural, particularly given the rich tradition of regional and community studies, as well as the literature on uneven development, inequality, and rural labor markets.299

Feminists have also criticized geographers’ use of scale, but for its masculine bias. In particular, feminists have sought to bring attention and credibility to the scales of the body and the household.300 They note that “our understandings of the politics of place and scale must include the gendered struggles of everyday life,”301 which they work to politicize.302 Feminists thus argue that these “lower end” scales—associated with women and private spaces—deserve a place at the “high table of scale,” along with the national and the global.303 Their argument is similar to that of feminist legal scholars, who have revealed the gendered nature of federal jurisdiction, which eschews authority over the family.304

Feminist geographers also emphasize the inter-scalar character of the processes that define spaces and places.305 Using the nesting metaphor to

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297. Political, economic and urban geographers discuss scale, for example, in the context of debates about globalization (including global-local relations) and urban-regional restructuring. See Brenner, Limits to Scale, supra note 293, at 591 (calling scale a “buzzword of sorts in recent debates”).

298. Tickamyer, Space Matters!, supra note 11, at 809.

299. Id. at 809.

300. See, e.g., Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1046; Marston, infra note 303.

301. Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1045 (abstract) (asserting position in the context of studying economic restructuring of Appalachian coalfields).

302. Id. at 1047. Their suggestion, of course, is akin to the old feminist adage that the personal is political. Miewald & McCann explain that “the conduct of politics involves a constant interplay between supposedly public and private sites of struggle, as ‘roles and identities [are] conditioned by power relations at several scales and settings (i.e., the home, workplace, political organization, city and society).’” Id. at 1049 (quoting L.A. Staeheli, Gender Relations in Urban Growth Politics, in MARGINALIZED PLACES AND POPULATIONS: A STRUCTURATIONIST AGENDA 129, 133 (David Wilson & James O. Huff eds., 1994)).

303. See Sallie A. Marston, The Social Construction of Scale, 24 PROGRESS IN HUMAN GEOGRAPHY 219 (2000); Sallie A. Marston & Neil Smith, States, Scales and Households: Limits to Scale Thinking? A Response to Brenner, 24 PROGRESS IN HUMAN GEOGRAPHY 615, 617 (2001). Marston and Smith write: “Middle-class women’s identity struggles over domestic ideology and practice not only transformed the home and the household around the turn of the century but simultaneously provided a scale basis from which women’s organizations contributed to a powerful reshaping of state territorial organization in the USA.” Id. See also Miewald & McCann, supra note 12 (referring to the “microsites” of the body and the household as “scalar”).

304. See, e.g., HANSON & PRATT, GENDER, WORK & SPACE, supra note 163, and Hanson & Pratt, Geographic Perspectives, supra note 163.

305. MCDOWELL, supra note 7, at 3. Spaces and places are “produced by the intersection of global and local processes—social relations that operate at a range of spatial scales.” Id. at 4. McDowell uses home and neighborhood as examples of localities “bounded by scale—that is rules/power relations that keep others out.” Id. at 3. She observes, however, that a given place’s “constitution is through the intersection of a range of factors that may coincide there
describe relationships among scales, Tickamyer observes that households and labor markets influence each other in their operation as both economic and spatial units. She notes intersections “at their margins, blurring distinctions between different forms of work: waged and non-waged, formal and informal, productive and reproductive, and how these are gendered, raced, and spaced.”

While rural places tend to be conceptualized as intrinsically local—indeed, quintessentially so—forces originating at myriad scales are at play there. As Linda McDowell expresses it, “a place—a village, a small town, or a region—may be local in the sense of a geographically small unit but it is constituted by social processes that operate at a variety of scales.” Again, we can draw a parallel to the feminist scholarship on federal jurisdiction, which has challenged women’s association with the local in claiming that violence against women implicates the commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution.

The studies discussed in Part III.B illustrate the scalar interdependence that constitutes spaces and places, even rural ones. Global economic shifts set in motion changes that reverberated down to the household and body. As women took waged work (formal, productive) outside the home, they attempted to renegotiate their domestic and community roles (non-waged, informal, reproductive). The socio-spatial repercussions of rural economic restructuring were manifest at several scales, in particular places. In both initiating changes and mediating their consequences, laws and legal actors played roles, albeit sometimes passive ones.

IV. THE ROLE OF LAW

Law and its agents are actors in these interscalar events, in shifts of the socio-spatial landscape of particular places. Law is implicated at scales associated with the market and politics, for example, by regulating employee protections, labor law, and free-trade agreements. Laws and legal regulations also influence individual actors, constituting space and place at the scales of the body and the household. This can be seen in divorce and child custody disputes, or when domestic violence erupts. In the face of such events, the law dictates but are not restricted to the local level in their operation.” Id.

306. Tickamyer, Space Matters!, supra note 11, at 809.
307. Id.
308. Massey asserts that “place” and “local” are coded feminine. See supra note 7 and accompanying text. “Rural” is also coded this way, while “urban,” like space and that which is abstract, is coded masculine. See ROSE, supra note 7, at 74.
309. McDowell, Linking Scales, supra note 286, at 229; see also Tickamyer, Space Matters!, supra note 11, at 809.
310. See, e.g., Resnik, supra note 173, at 627-28 (referring to the extensive congressional record regarding the economic impact of violence on women’s working lives, such as placing certain jobs out of reach); Deborah Weissman, Gender-based Violence as Judicial Anomaly: Between “the Truly National and the Truly Local,” 42 B.C.L. REV. 1081, 1082, 1089, 1091 (2001) (arguing that violence against women is a national problem because it prevents women from participating fully in the national economy and therefore implicates the Commerce Clause). See also supra Part IV.C.
311. Miewald & McCann, supra note 12, at 1061.
who has what rights, who gets what (in terms of property and children, for example), and who bears what consequences or costs.

As I have documented elsewhere, law’s application may vary between rural and urban settings. As I have documented elsewhere, law’s application may vary between rural and urban settings.312 In divorce proceedings, for example, courts in rural states may divide property in a way that keeps a family farm intact.313 In child custody matters, some judges may favor the parent who lives in the rural place because it is seen as providing a safer, more child-friendly environment,314 while others will prefer urban locales, which they view as providing greater opportunity.315 As for domestic violence, although both its incidence and its ferocity tend to be greater in rural places, law enforcement and prosecutorial efforts are weaker and less consistent there.316 Courts may also overlook—or expressly deny—the enhanced physical vulnerability associated with rural spatiality.317

Other double standards that align with the urban/rural axis may operate with regard to laws regulating employer-employee relations.318 Many rural

312. See generally Pruitt, Rural Rhetoric, supra note 27 (documenting a range of legal double-standards based upon the rural-urban axis); Pruitt, Feminist Theory of the Rural, supra note 6. Some of this variation may be inevitable because of difference in size, with rural areas unable to achieve economies of scale and to provide many of the services that urban areas take for granted. For an exposition on size-based asymmetry in a different legal context, see Robert T. Laurence, Symmetry and Asymmetry in Federal Indian Law, 42 ARIZ. L. REV. 861 (2000).

313. See In re Marriage of Jacobson, 600 P.2d 1183, 1186-88 (Mont. 1979) (stipulating the priority of keeping the family farm intact upon divorce when there is “a reasonable means of providing a wife her equitable share of the marital property short of selling the land”), quoted in In re Marriage of Gomke, 192 Mont. 169, 627 P.2d 395, 396 (1981); see also In re Marriage of Glass, 697 P.2d 96, 100 (Mont. 1985). The court has since clarified that a family farm need not be retained intact, although Montana policy favors it when distributing marital property. In re Marriage of Binsfield, 888 P.2d 889, 894 (Mont. 1995).

314. See Odegard v. Odegard, 259 N.W.2d 484, 486-87 (N.D. 1977) (awarding custody to the father; court was not swayed by the mother’s argument that if her son was left with father to be raised on the farm he would most likely become a farm laborer). See also Pruitt, Rural Rhetoric, supra note 27 (discussing relevant cases).

315. See Berg v. Berg, 490 N.W.2d 487 (N.D. 1992) (awarding custody to mother, the better-educated parent, who planned to take children away from North Dakota to further her career). In his dissent, Justice Wright indignantly defends the rural as one that stresses quality of life and sarcastically notes that the children might want to be farmers like their father. Id. at 495 (Wright, J., dissenting).

316. See Pruitt, Place Matters, supra note 17. Studies show that the less densely populated a place and the greater its distance from an urban area, the more likely a killer was a family member or intimate partner of his victim. Id. (citing Adria Gallup-Black, RURAL AND URBAN TRENDS IN FAMILY AND INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDE: 1980-1999 (2004)). Further, according to a pilot study, rural perpetrators of intimate abuse are nearly twice as likely as their urban counterparts to inflict severe physical injuries, as by using a weapon. They are also twice as likely to destroy property during the event. Id. (citing T.K. Logan et al., Qualitative Differences Among Rural and Urban Intimate Violence Victimization Experiences and Consequences: A Pilot Study, 18 J. FAM. VIOLENCE 83, 86 (2003)).

317. See Kodras & Jones, supra note 114, at 122-23; see also Pruitt, Feminist Theory of the Rural, supra note 6, at 450-53.

318. An example of how labor law may expressly vary in its operation as between rural and urban settings is found in Southside Hosp. v. Davis, 252 N.Y.S.2d 330 (1964). There, a New York Supreme Court upheld a law that allowed New York City hospital workers to strike, while disallowing rural hospital workers from doing so. One example of how employee protections may be sensitive to the rural context is seen in a 2003 decision, Zeller Elevator Co. v. Slygh,
employees are ineligible for federal protections because they are not formally employed or because their employers have too few employees to be subject to federal regulation. Employers with fewer than fifty employees, for example, are not subject to the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and those with fewer than fifteen are not subject to Title VII mandates. While these laws do not expressly distinguish between urban and rural employers, their application (or lack thereof) may disparately impact rural residents—especially rural women—who often work informally or are employed by small businesses.

Reflecting the multi-scalar nature of law, as well as phenomena such as rural restructuring which implicate it, state employment laws may lower some of these employee-count thresholds to protect the rights of more workers. The complex nature of employment protections illustrate the inter-scalar character of the legal issues arising from them, including their manifestation in rural locales. In the employment setting, then, regulation originates at several scales: the federal (e.g., FMLA or Title VII), the state (laws mirroring federal protections but sometimes altering criteria), and even the local, as with municipal ordinances that prohibit the hiring of unauthorized immigrants.

796 N.E.2d 1198, 1201-05, 1215-16 (Ind. Ct. App. 2003) (focusing on the rural setting of the place of employment in relation to the vulnerability that the female plaintiffs experienced when employer appeared semi-clad, showed pictures of himself skinny dipping, and called them into his bedroom, which was on the workplace premises).

319. See Cornelia Butler Lora & Jan Flora, Rural Communities: Legacy and Change 102 (3d ed. 2008)


321. See 42 U.S.C. § 2000e(b) (2000). Another example is the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act (WARN), which applies only to employers with 100 or more employees. 29 U.S.C. § 2101 et seq. (2000). Also, agricultural employers who did not use more than 500 person days of labor during any quarter in the preceding year are not required to comply with the minimum wage and overtime requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act. 29 U.S.C. § 213 (a)(6) (2000).


323. Eleven states have adopted their own FMLA laws, of which six have reduced the number of employees an employer may have in order to be covered. Of these six, four have significant rural populations: Maine, Minnesota, Oregon, and Vermont. These cover care for a sick relative, not pregnancy leave. See U.S. Dep’t of Labor, http://www.dol.gov/esa/programs/whd/state/fmla/index.htm (last visited Oct. 22, 2008).

Another example where legal actors at multiple scales are implicated is domestic violence. It is the criminal law of states that prohibits intimate abuse, but the state is not the only scale (law) relevant to this phenomenon. Lower scales, such as county, city, or town, greatly influence how victims, perpetrators, and legal actors respond to the crime. These local considerations include staffing levels of law enforcement personnel, their education regarding family violence, and their familiarity with the parties.

Federal decisions will also be relevant to factors that might appear quite local, such as the availability of social services and physical infrastructure, such as a women’s shelter or a sufficiently large jail. In spite of a 2000 Supreme Court decision declaring domestic violence to be “truly local,” and striking as unconstitutional a civil rights remedy under the Violence Against Women Act (“VAWA”), funding under that Act continues to support programs aimed at reducing the incidence of domestic violence and improving its investigation and prosecution. The Office of Violence Against Women recognizes rural women as an at-risk population, and one category of VAWA grants is for programs in rural areas. Federal funds may also be used, for example, for renovating or replacing a substandard jail.

These are just a few examples of the multi-scalar nature of issues arising for rural women at the junctures where they encounter law—or at least where

326. See Pruitt, Place Matters, supra note 17, at Part IV.
327. See, e.g., Feyen, supra note 18, at 111-12, 114-17.
328. See Websdale, supra note 175, at 106, 108.
329. See, e.g., Feyen, supra note 18, at 111-13; Websdale, supra note 175, at 84.
331. See, e.g., Feyen, supra note 18, at 102, 105 (finding that shelter in rural River County, Wisconsin, had been established only in 1979; it served a county of 18,000, but only 25% of the county’s populace lived in the town where the shelter was located; only 22% of those who had used the shelter lived in that town); Struthers & Bokemeier, supra note 60, at 32 (finding in study of rural Michigan that while some shelters were available for women, the shelters did not accommodate children); Ralph A. Weisheit & Joseph F. Donnermyer, Change and Continuity in Crime in Rural America, in Criminal Justice 2000, Volume I: The Nature of Crime: Continuity and Change 309, 323 (Gary LaFree ed., 2000) (finding that 68% of rural counties had no shelters and for those counties without one, the average distance to a shelter was 36 miles).
332. The dilemma of my home community over a substandard, too-small jail, built in 1903, is illustrative. Although Newton County has known of the deficiencies for some time, it has no money to remedy the situation. See Jeff Dezort, Jail should be in the Smithsonian, Newton County Times, Oct. 11, 2007, at 1 (discussing as possible funding sources a property tax increase or a USDA public building safety grant); Sharon C. Fitzgerald, Sheriff Struggling to Keep Jail Open, Ark. Democrat Gazette, Feb. 12, 2007, at 1B. In June, 2008, the jail was closed following the suicides of two inmates within a one-month period. It reopened in mid-July 2008, although the state’s Criminal Detention Review Committee has given the county just six months to bring the facility into compliance with state requirements. County Jail May be Closed, Newton County Times, July 10, 2008, at 1.
334. See 2006 VAWA Biennial Report, supra note 27.
335. Id. Other grant categories include tribal units and campuses. Id. The Act’s definition of “rural” is given at supra note 27. See generally Pruitt, Place Matters, supra note 17, at Part I.
they might if legal actors were more present, or if the law were available to them in a more meaningful way. These examples also illustrate how geography influences legal outcomes. Spatiality thus constitutes law, whether by assuming and declaring rural difference—or by overlooking it. Law also constitutes spatiality by influencing behavior—sometimes even dictating it—within spatial containers, whether great or small, public or private, urban or rural. In rural locales, however, law’s influence may be greatest in its perceived irrelevance, inaccessibility, or even in its complete absence.

V. CONCLUSION

More than a decade ago, rural sociologist Ann Tickamyer initiated (or attempted to initiate) a conversation with legal scholars about rural women, law, and spatiality. Her 1996 article seems to be the earliest attempt in legal scholarship to bring critical geography to bear on women’s lives, with particular attention to poor, rural women. Yet legal scholarship continues to ignore the rural milieu, including gender issues in that context. In spite of this oversight, and to some extent because of it, the opportunity presented by critical geography remains great.

Thinking about rurality in terms of “space” reminds us, for example, of literal distance—both between the rural and the urban, and among those who reside in rural communities. As a consequence of this first aspect of rural spatiality, rural people and places are largely unseen by broader society. Further, rural spaces are considered more private relative to urban and suburban spaces, while women’s roles and identities within rural communities are more associated, literally and figuratively, with the private. Functioning in spaces that are private in the extreme burdens and constrains rural women in myriad ways, as does the immobility associated with those spaces.

Other aspects of rural spatiality also invite our attention, particularly as they relate to gender. Socioeconomic disadvantage—all too often rising to the level of poverty—is part and parcel of the socio-spatial landscape of rural America. Sparseness of population, a material aspect of spatiality itself, contributes to socioeconomic disadvantage because it results in—and is a result

337. See Pruitt, Rural Rhetoric, supra note 27, at 164 (observing that fewer people now have meaningful contact with rural places, leaving them to rely on stereotypes to form their impressions of the rural); Weisheit Et Al., supra note 181, at 14 (hypothesizing a lower awareness of rural crime because, among other reasons, major media outlets are centered in large cities).

Indeed, rural visibility may be diminishing as our nation is increasingly urbanized. The world’s rural population is also shrinking, with half now living in cities. Celia W. Dugger, U.N. Predicts Urban Population Explosion, N.Y. TIMES, June 28, 2007, at A6.

338. See supra Part IV.A.2.a.
339. See supra notes 57-70, 103-05 and accompanying text.
340. See supra Part IV.A.2.b.
341. As Ching and Creed have written, class “is the dimension of contemporary identity politics most explicitly connected to rural identities . . . the cultural devaluation of rural people often reflects their economic marginality.” Ching & Creed, supra note 19, at 26.
of—fewer jobs, fewer services, and a less diversified economy. Women are particularly vulnerable in this context because of the acute wage gap between rural men and women, as well as the entrenched form of rural patriarchy that keeps women’s domestic duties primary.

Lack of anonymity, a consequence of rural spatiality, is another significant feature of the rural socio-spatial landscape. This feature influences decision making and circumscribes agency. It also explains how physical distance constructs spaces in ways that foster physical privacy, while also creating vulnerabilities for rural women and undermining the sort of privacy that is associated with anonymity.342

Attention to “place” moves us beyond the broad rural/urban axis. It adds texture and value by making room for explicit consideration of regional identities, cultures,343 and economies, with their attendant structures of inequality. This analytical tool helps us see and understand these differences among rural places, including those falling at different points along the rural/urban continuum.

Legal actors and policy-makers whose decisions affect rural populations, as well as gender scholars and rural scholars, must explore the repercussions of these socio-spatial features and place-based differences. Intentionality about space and place helps us guard against conflating the idea of a universal women’s experience with urban women’s experience. It allows us to contemplate not only how a rural woman’s experience of gender inequality may differ from that of her urban counterpart, but also how oppression on the basis of race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation may “take a different form . . . in the countryside.”344 Indeed, just paying attention to rurality “can be a crucial form of cultural awareness and resistance.”345

The temporal is relevant, too, of course.346 Changes wrought at specific times and over time have socio-spatial consequences in actual places. In this era of transformation and restructuring for many rural people and places, vigilance is necessary regarding assumptions about rurality. When the “rural” is more

342. See Elizabeth Schneider, *The Violence of Privacy*, 23 CONN. L. REV. 973, 993 (1990-91) (making a similar point about the duality of private spaces like the home).
344. Ching & Creed, *supra* note 19, at 3; see also Mormont, *supra* note 9, at 36-37 (advocating that space be considered an element of identity in relation to other characteristics, which he calls “a field of relationships”).
346. See *supra* notes 2-5 and accompanying text.
contested than ever, we must be open to how demographic, economic, and social changes are reconstructing rural spaces, altering rural power structures, and aggravating or ameliorating spatial and other inequalities.

Professor Hari Osofsky asserts that doing legal analysis in spatial context is critical in light of ever-increasing “complexities of scale, interrelatedness of people, entities, and institutions, as well as a multiplicity of connections to and disconnection from place.” Although Osofsky’s focus is international law, her assertion is “spaceless”: it rings true even in relation to rurality. While that which is rural has long been thought of as quintessentially local, rural livelihoods are no longer isolated economically and culturally from the rest of the country, or from the rest of the world. Though rural places are physically and socially removed from urban America to differing degrees, advances in technology and transportation have blurred aspects of the rural/urban divide. Rural locales are increasingly enmeshed with higher scales and other places, even as spatial isolation and its many consequences constitute (and are constituted by) rurality, influencing events and legal outcomes.

Law is called to understand how “power operates through and in spaces and places” to investigate how space is used to perpetuate disadvantage, inequality, and oppression. Otherwise, space “hides things from us.” Nowhere, perhaps, is this more so than in the increasingly obscured spaces and places of rural America. With respect to few groups is this as true as for women who—especially in rural places—populate the already hidden spaces of the private sphere.

See supra Part III.A.

See Tickamyer, Space Matters!, supra note 11, at 806-08; see also Lobao, Gendered Places, supra note 108, at 272-73 (observing that “gendered places are created from the bottom up . . . by the routine behavior of people in bars, on farms, and in small towns” and that changes in how gender is constructed occur incrementally); Madhavi Sunder, Cultural Dissent, 54 STAN. L. REV. 495, 496-501 (2001) (arguing that modernity is defined by “cultural dissent,” the efforts by individuals to challenge and reinterpret cultural norms in ways favorable to them).

Osofsky, Litigation as Pluralist Dialogue, supra note 111, at 190.

Tickamyer, Space Matters!, supra note 11, at 806-07 (citing SOJA, THIRDSPACE, supra note 19, at 84-87) (emphasizing that power is contextualized and made concrete through the production of social space; employing the work of bell hooks, who characterized the space of everyday life as a place where all forms of oppression can be found, to illustrate the significant role that space and geography play in the study of race relations).

Id. In his work on race, Reginald Oh similarly calls on critical scholars to “explicitly theorize about space, because the organization and production of space is ultimately about social and political control and power.” Reginald Oh, Re-Mapping Equal Protection Jurisprudence: A Legal Geography of Race and Affirmative Action, 53 AM. U. L. REV. 1305, 1315 (2004).

SOJA, POSTMODERN GEOGRAPHIES, supra note 1, at 60.