Weathered Mountains: A Qualitative Study of West Virginia Women and their Perceptions of Strength, Land, and Womanhood

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WEATHERED MOUNTAINS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF WEST VIRGINIA WOMEN AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF STRENGTH, LAND, AND WOMANHOOD

A thesis submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
In
Sociology
by
Danielle Renee Mullins
Approved by:
Dr. Kristi Fondren, Committee Chairperson
Dr. Maggie Stone
Dr. Donna Sullivan

Marshall University
May 2018
APPROVAL OF THESIS

We, the faculty supervising the work of Danielle Renee Mullins, affirm that the thesis, *Weathered Mountains: A Qualitative Study of West Virginia Women and Their Perceptions of Strength, Land, and Womanhood*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and the College of Liberal Arts. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

Dr. Kristi Fondren, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Committee Chairperson

[Signature]

Date: 1/20/18

Dr. Maggie Stone, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Committee Member

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Date: 1/20/18

Dr. Donna Sullivan, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Committee Member

[Signature]

Date: 1/20/18
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the sixteen West Virginia women who shared their stories, experiences, relationships, and childhoods with me, and to all the strong Appalachian women who demonstrate their grit each and every day.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful and appreciative of all those who assisted in my research and writing process for this thesis. Particularly, I would like to thank Dr. Kristi Fondren for her guidance, patience, and fighting spirit throughout my time here. Her course, Feminist Social Theory, inspired this work. Dr. Fondren has not only been an excellent advisor and thesis chair, she has also been a dear mentor and a friend. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Maggie Stone and Dr. Donna Sullivan for their participation on my committee, mentorship, and many conversations over these years. I am incredibly proud of and grateful for the three strong, knowledgeable women who served on this committee.

I would like to extend a special thank you to (soon-to-be Dr.) Jessica Scott for helping introduce me to some amazing women in my state, for encouraging me to always pursue the challenge, and for her years of mentorship and friendship. I would also like to extend special gratitude to Clara Lehmann for her insight and guidance with developing my instrument, as well as her fierce dedication to her place and people. Also, a special thank you to Dr. Kat Williams for talking through the historiography portions of this paper.

I would also like to thank my partner, Zachary, for his patience and support throughout the duration of my degree program and this process. Thank you for defying traditional gender roles, for growing to love our shared culture together, and for listening to me explain Wallerstein twelve too many times. My sister, Kristyn, for showing me the love and support of family. And finally, my best friend, Kady Pack, for being my example and paving the way a few years ago.
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ABSTRACT

Appalachia and those living within the region have been discussed, examined, critiqued, and defined primarily by those living outside of the area, particularly following the 2016 Election. The main narratives of Appalachia form a dichotomous view of the land and its people: beautiful landscapes threatened by resource extraction and a people wrecked by the symptoms of long-term poverty and economic stagnation. Simultaneously, the Appalachian identity has been constructed around a rugged or blue-collar male identity that excludes and makes invisible the female experience. This study seeks to break through the landscape and poverty binary, as well as the male-archetype, to explore the ways in which Appalachian women are strong, resilient, and capable on their own terms in their own voices. The overarching goal of this study is to explore strong womanhood in Appalachia. Specifically, this study aims to elevate the voices and stories of women in Appalachia, a population that is often ignored or made invisible in mainstream culture and discourse. This qualitative study also seeks to explore if Appalachian women align with the mainstream feminist movement. A purposive and snowball sample was interviewed across five counties in West Virginia with women across three generations. Women in West Virginia find strength within their culture and gender roles, but battle stigma and issues of inequality associated with low-pay within an economy that preferences male labor. Women in Appalachia also have a relationship with the land that predicates land preservations and sustainable use in order to facilitate subsistence agrarian strategies of living.
I am analyzing the results of this research in the midst of a historic labor strike taking place right now in West Virginia, or the heart of “Trump Country,” as some people call it. Teachers across the state have instituted a state-wide, fifty-five county work stoppage to protest their ever-increasing insurance premiums and nationally-recognized dismal pay. Despite this historical duplicity of the area, a duplicity not uncommon anywhere else in the country, our entire area is still labeled as “backward, regressive, and always voting against their own interests.” Despite empirical, historical evidence to the contrary and despite over 100 years of being on the forefront of fair labor fights, West Virginia is still “Trump Country.” The continued use of this willfully narrow lens of analysis is not only harmful to people living in Appalachia, but it perpetuates the stereotypes that ensure needs here remain unfulfilled.

I chose to conduct this research as a lifetime resident of West Virginia, first and foremost, but also as an Appalachian student hoping to add to the narratives of the region with an insider perspective that is sometimes misrepresented. It is appropriate for me to state my positionality with the subject matter in order to acknowledge the field from which I operate and the lens that I use. I grew up in the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia in Berkeley County. I attended Musselman High School, one of three high schools in the county (a rarity in the state—many schools have been consolidated). Berkeley County is one of the few counties not dominated by a history of coal or currently experiencing the long-term effects of systemic poverty. However, Berkeley County is not immune to issues of drug use, hopelessness, fatalism, and other maladies attributed to the region. There is more money in the county I come from than in other places around the state that I have both lived and traveled to; however, the socioeconomic success was not evenly spread within counties.
One of the issues that we experienced, and I often heard about growing up that is not unique to many communities across the country, was an influx of urban migrants looking for cheap housing and an escape from the city. This influx raised property taxes for many of the people who had always lived and worked in the area to the point of unviability, or so I was told by many while I was growing up. I simultaneously watched land grabs of long-time family-owned farmland that gave way to Dan Ryan subdivisions meant to attract more city folk and turn my home into a suburbia. Stores and local businesses gave way to chain restaurants and large retail box stores. Thankfully, my favorite frozen custard stand from my youth is still open, though only during the summer months, in Inwood. When the housing crisis hit, the Dan Ryan subdivisions became ghost-towns, their plastic still swaying in the wind on unfinished homes stopped in the middle of construction. Many of them sat brand-new and unoccupied for years.

My dad used to point out all the empty subdivisions and lament that there were still homeless people in this country. Despite his seemingly “conservative” nature, I inherited a lot of my Union-fighter spirit from him. When I was younger, my father lost his job trying to unionize his warehouse. During my gap years in my higher education, I was proud to follow in my father’s footsteps and join the Local 2009 CWA as a Shop Steward for my coworkers. These stories of carrying on in our parents’ footsteps are common here in Appalachia.

During my last year of middle school, I was selected to apply to a state-wide scholarship program called Health Sciences and Technology Academy (HSTA). I had always been told I was smart enough to be a doctor and most of my classes in school had been chosen with that goal in mind. As such, HSTA offered me an amazing opportunity as a potential funding source for my college education in the future. To be considered for HSTA, students had to meet certain requirements: person of color, “broken home” (which was literally a box to check on the
application), low socioeconomic status (SES), an interest in health sciences, and a track record of academic achievement. Looking back, I find it interesting the way that I was encouraged to take on the labels of “broken home” and “low SES” in order to access opportunities. This use of trauma is something West Virginians are not unfamiliar with—my friends and I who attended college were frequently encouraged to share “our stories” of poverty, familial abuse/drug use, etc. to access funds to attend college. I remember applying for a Critical Languages Scholarship through the US government to go to Turkey and study Arabic during my time as an undergraduate student. The professor looking at my personal statement encouraged me to demonstrate my resilience by writing about my mother’s struggle with alcoholism. It felt exploitative and disingenuous to talk about something I had tried so hard to distance myself from in order to access financial resources for higher education, yet these stories are common among young people in Appalachia and other marginalized places and populations across the country.

Following my graduation, I chose to stay and work within my state. This was not an easy decision and many in my family felt that I was wasting my “potential” by not planning my escape from my home. After four years of working, living, building relationships, and exploring West Virginia, I chose to go back to school and work to earn a master’s degree in Sociology. I wanted to tell a different story than one of coal, drugs, and merely surviving. Of course, those phenomena cannot be separated from the Appalachian experience, but they do not always have to be centered. Rather, my research seeks to explore perceptions of strength, resilience, survival, and living from the perspective of the women who live here, raise their families here, and invest their energy and labor here.

Appalachia and Appalachian people are defined, first and foremost, by their relation to trauma, exploitation, and a lack of educational and economic opportunity. The Appalachian
Regional Commission (ARC), which will be discussed later in greater detail, was created in 1965 and defined the region through a lens of economic need. In considering which counties should be included, the criteria were “geographic contiguity and economic underdevelopment marked by a lack of jobs and forced migration, overspecialization of the economy, a high rate of poverty, low rates of education, and poor health facilities,” (Keefe, 1996, p.3). This definition for inclusion, however, does not mitigate the ways in which exploitative industrial practices, mimicking the descriptions of neocolonialism established by Immanuel Wallerstein’s World Systems Theory (2007), have ravaged the area and forced dependency on a previously self-reliant people.

Another issue I have encountered, particularly as an Appalachian woman, is a masculine lens through which Appalachia is defined and analyzed (Bell, 2016; Engelhardt, 2003; Vance, 2016). This masculine lens is historical and is founded in the ubiquitous construction of the Mountaineer from our frontier settlement days in the late 1700s and early to mid-1800s (Clapp, 2015; Catte, 2018). Many of the mainstream symbols used to represent the region: the mountaineer, the coal miner, the hillbilly, are obviously not universally masculine, despite frequently being presented in such a way. Certainly there were women mountaineers, coal miners, and hillbillies, but they are often not represented as such. I had a professor in college, the late Irene McKinney, former Poet Laureate of West Virginia, who often regaled us with her stories of harassment during her duration down in the mines. I have researched stories of women like Anna Maddy, a frontier widow who pushed a man off a cliff for trying to rob her on her way back home across the Allegheny mountains. I have also met many hillbilly women and define myself with that word.

Dr. McKinney, during her time as my Honors Appalachian Literature professor at West Virginia Wesleyan College in Spring 2010, taught me to love my home in spite of the negative
narratives and difficult realities. Instead of broken people from broken homes trapped in a broken economic system, Irene saw resilience, grit, survival, deep passion, undying love for land and family, loyalty to place, and most importantly, people. I, like many Appalachian youth, had spent most of my formative years dreaming of big cities and other places outside of my mountainous homeland. I thought my future could only be realized in a place other than here; that to stay here was to settle in some way. Indeed, these are the stories we tell our children, whether directly or indirectly, when we define this place and its people solely by economic disparity, negative health outcomes, and social disintegration.

With this research, I aim to tell a different story. I have no intentions of “covering up” or hiding issues associated with long-term poverty, such as drug use, domestic violence, and unequal gender roles. Rather, I seek to demonstrate the ways that women in Appalachia, who are generally unrepresented or minimally represented in the historiography (Catte, 2018; Engelhardt, 2003; Smith, 1999), navigate traditional gender roles and a lack of economic opportunity, perceive their culture and ideas regarding what it means to be a strong woman, and their relationships with the land, their families, and outsiders. I conducted this research to answer a few general research questions. First, I wanted to uncover how women in the area define gender roles for themselves, how they navigate those roles, and to what extent they deviate from those roles. Secondly, I wanted to see how women in Appalachia defined strength and strong womanhood, and how or why this does or does not fit into mainstream feminist narratives. Lastly, I wanted to discover how women in Appalachia define their relationship with the land, how they define the culture, and if women’s ideas on land use differ from masculine, industrial narratives of land use in the area (Bell, 2013, 2016; Engelhardt, 2003).
This research is both timely and significant. Given the recent media attention to the
region in light of the 2016 Election (Catte, 2018), this research seeks to not only add nuance to
the story, but also provide a contextual understanding of the region specifically from the
perspective of women. This voice is both necessary and crucial to the literature, as the region is
often defined with a masculine hegemony which will be explained further in the following
chapter. Most importantly, the goal of this research is to provide a platform for Appalachian
women to define strength, womanhood, and relationships with the land on their own terms from
their own lived experiences.
“If, as many have suggested, human history is not in the end about the received circumstances into which people are born, but about what we do with those circumstances, then the analysis of hidden transcripts and related modes of self-assertion can provide a wide and clarifying window into some of the most profound questions in Appalachian history,” (Smith, 1999, p. 13).

**Defining the Region**

**Relevant Demographic Information**

West Virginia became a state when it separated from Virginia on June 20th, 1863. Current demographic information based on 2017 data provided by the US Census Bureau states that West Virginia has a total population of 1,815,857. That is approximately 15,200 people less than 2016.
Out-migration is a major problem affecting the area as people, especially youth, seek academic and economic opportunity outside of the region. In her 2016 book, Bell notes that since 1950, West Virginia has experienced a 38% decline in total population (p. 23). Despite economic emigration, there is an even distribution of males and females. Approximately 93.6% of the state is white, while Black Americans comprise 3.6% of the population, LatinX and Mixed Race (two or more races) each make up less than 2%, and Asians and American Indians comprise less than 1% each. While West Virginia is very white, it is important to note that Vermont, Maine, and New Hampshire are all more racially homogenous (and found in New England). Data taken from the Statistics Center of the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources’ “Most Requested Statistics” provide an interesting glimpse into gendered trends. These numbers are based on 2011 Census Data for the state of West Virginia. In 2011, the oldest father to a newborn was 70 years of age, while the youngest father to a newborn was 14. For females, the oldest mother in West Virginia gave birth at age 50 while the youngest was 13 years old. The leading causes of death for both men and women living in West Virginia in 2011 were heart disease and cancer (accidents were fourth). As of 2011, West Virginia’s oldest living man and woman were both 110 years old. There were 115 females over 100 years of age and 22 males who had lived for a century or longer. The youngest groom and bride were both 16 while the youngest male divorsee was 17 and the youngest female divorsee was 16. It is important to note that with parental permission, children that are at least sixteen years of age may marry in the state of West Virginia. These rules are not uncommon across the country. West Virginia is the only state to fall entirely within both the Appalachian Mountain range and the region defined as Appalachia by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) (see Figure 2.1). West Virginia is part of the Central Appalachian subregion along with southern Ohio, eastern Kentucky, southwestern Virginia, western North Carolina, and eastern Tennessee.
Central Appalachia is further divided: north central, central, and south central.

West Virginia lies primarily within the North Central Appalachian region while the southwestern coal counties are considered (with eastern Kentucky and parts of northeastern Tennessee) true Central Appalachia. Central Appalachia is a region that is dominated historically by coal production, though those industries have recently expanded to include oil and natural gas. Central Appalachia is often viewed through a lens of poverty, and quantitative studies both demonstrate and perpetuate this view. Indeed, the region has some of the worst high school and college completion rates, income per capita, poverty, economic distress, and outmigration of the entirety of Appalachia. However, despite these issues, many Appalachians say they would not live anywhere else. This loyalty to homeplace was present in the literature regardless of discipline – history, sociology, political science, psychology. Attachment to homeplace is also something I have heard my entire life growing up here. This loyalty is present in much of the fiction written about the place, as well. My goal is that this qualitative study, which utilizing components of historiography, adds richness to these demographic statistics for a deeper understanding of the area.

**A History of Appalachian Women**

Anna Maddy, after losing her husband who was a soldier in the Revolutionary War from Virginia, by accidental drowning in the Shenandoah River, emigrated with her children to Monroe County [later West Virginia], and settled on what is still known as the “Charley Maddy Place,” near the Saltpeter Cave near Greenville. Here she reared her family. She had a considerable estate in Virginia, which it became necessary for her to return to settle up, and she rode horse back through the mountains and the wilderness, crossing the Alleghenies. After transacting her affairs and recovering her money, a considerable sum, she proceeded on her return, and in doing so she stopped over night with a settler in the wilderness. During her stay she incidentally disclosed the fact of her carrying on her person considerable funds. On the next morning, the gentleman of the house told her he knew a direct route through hills that would save her a great part of the distance and volunteered to show her the near cut. They proceeded for some time until they came to a wild place and a great cliff, where the man stopped, told her to give him the money, and declared his object to be to secure the money which she carried on her person in her clothing, and to murder her. She declined to give up the money, when he demanded her to take off her dress, it being
his purpose to secure it and the money therein, and then throw her over the cliff. She requested him to turn his back, as she did not desire to undress in his presence. This he did, turning his back to her and facing the precipice whereupon she gave him a sudden push with all her strength, sending him over the cliff and into the ravine below, where he was instantly killed, thus saving her own life as well as the money. She then proceeded on her journey at her home in safety. The above experience does not deal directly but indirectly with this community and is a fine illustration of pioneer life. We have wondered if there are any women of this day who would make this trip, under the circumstances as described, crossing the Allegheny Mountains alone on horseback with hardly a path through the unbroken forest, subject to the danger of wild animals and hardships. (History of Marie Community, WV History & Archives)

There have been major advancements in “discovering” (recovering) women’s contributions and roles throughout history. Because most of our societies across the globe have been and are patriarchal, women were often excluded from major arenas in human and societal progression. To put it simply, history is written by those in power and by those who win. Women were relegated to submissive and seemingly powerless roles for most of history. Relegation to these roles not only limited their ability to contribute but erased the contributions that were made. Therefore, any work on marginalized women is a contribution to the field. As Smith (1999, p. 9) suggests, “The paradoxical quest for Appalachian women’s history takes us beyond established historiography, beyond heroic constructs of the region, to a landscape of action and meaning so familiar that we routinely fail to recognize its significance.”

The area currently known as West Virginia within Central Appalachia was originally inhabited by the Shawnee, Haudenosaunee, Cherokee, and Tuscarora, peoples indigenous to the United States prior to settlement (Isenberg, 2016; Keefe, 1996; Stoll, 2017). Both Isenberg (2016) and Stoll (2017) analyze the way the history of settling the area affected its culture. Both authors sketch historiographies centered on Ulster Scots that were removed from Northern England/Lower Scotland. Ulster Scots were descended from agrarian folk who had fought the contentious Scottish/English border for centuries and were thus thought, by England, to be
violent and hardy enough to settle the wilds of Ireland (Stoll, 2017). Those Ulster Scot
descendants living in Ireland were again removed to settle another land: Appalachia, or the
contentious border with the indigenous peoples of North America (Isenberg, 2016). This history
is why many living in West Virginia identify as “Scots-Irish.” More importantly, both Isenberg
and Stoll use historiography to demonstrate the ways in which this particular group of
marginalized folks (first in Britain, then in Ireland, finally once again in America) were used
sacrificially to secure borders for expansion yet remained in poverty. Catte (2018) touches
briefly on these events to demonstrate the beginnings of external and systemic exploitation as a
defining feature of the region and the people living within Appalachia.

Early portrayals of the settlement of the West often focused on the Mountaineers taming
the land and securing it from the Natives. In the years prior to and during the American
Revolution, many colonial families ventured West to settle Appalachia facing rugged terrain and
hostile Natives. Elizabeth Clapp (2015) explores the way in which the women who accompanied
those Mountaineers subverted and changed gender roles in ways not previously available or
socially acceptable in their East Coast colonial communities. Discovering this history of settler
women is not without challenge: frontier women were often dichotomized between the “one-
dimensional victims in newspaper accounts,” (p. 60) and the “larger-than-life frontier heroine of
the memoirs and oral histories,” (p. 60). Exposure to violence and the general hardship of settling
the area forced these women to act beyond their gender roles, effectively differentiating them
from the external population.

During this time, women’s roles were almost exclusively tied to the home and the
responsibilities associated with domestic life and child-rearing. Women rarely received an
education and the majority were illiterate, rendering them virtually incapable of leaving behind
their own written history. Smith (1999) acknowledged the need for oral historiography to access the histories of women when she said, “The history of women in Appalachia will not be discovered exclusively, perhaps even primarily, in the official documents of institutions, even those that they founded and shaped” (p. 9). Therefore, historians must rely on journals of women who could read and write, written testimonies, and other secondary sources that would be subject to the norms and stigmatized deviances of the 1700s. When examining popular literature and media of the time (and perhaps even currently), Clapp (2015) suggested we must be wary of the middle-class, urban lenses used to document other women at the time when she said, “Many of their experiences were filtered through mid-nineteenth century ideas about what might be judged appropriate behavior for ‘civilized’ white women” (p. 62).

The decision to become a settler was often left to men because they were regarded as the head of household. Man, for fame or fortune, could move out west, clear and tame a parcel of land, and potentially improve his lot, or in the very least, increase his individual freedom. In a way, this settling and conquering of the West is a very individualistic, masculine enterprise. Popular depictions then and now often feature a man either warring with Natives or timbering his chosen piece of earth. The women and families behind those men, tending the cabin and the livestock, are often erased from the picture or hazily constructed in the background. However, “as wives, mothers, and daughters, white women acted as partners in clearing the land and establishing homesteads on the frontier, but they also played an indispensable part in protecting their homes and families when they came under attack” (Clapp, 2015, p. 60). Women were less enthusiastic about becoming settlers of Appalachia. Clapp (2015) said, “Many historians have suggested that for women whose worlds were centered more on their homes and the network of
family and friends in their neighborhood, the outlook was less alluring for it would mean leaving behind all that was familiar to them” (p. 63).

Women who moved their families West learned quickly their former roles were to be less restricted. During travel to Appalachia, families were vulnerable to raids by Native Americans. Women were active in protecting themselves and their families during this journey and upon arrival at their new home. They often assisted the men in keeping watch for Natives and even armed themselves. Once at their new homestead, as previously stated, women were partners in the clearing of land and establishment of the settlement. Men were often gone during the day either hunting or expanding their land, leaving women and children behind to defend the cabin and crops from raiders. It was uncivilized for women back East to arm themselves, but frontier women learned to shoot guns, carried axes and hatchets for protection, and carried out labor previously reserved for men: chopping wood, butchering animals, tending crops, and maintaining the area immediate to the homestead.

**Spaces for Deviance**

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, a new kind of settler arrived in Appalachia ready to tackle the demons of poverty and supposed isolation known in the area: educated white women. These women were unlike their counterparts in urban areas. They were college educated, unmarried (by choice), and earned their own incomes. Despite depictions in mainstream culture of Appalachia as a regressive and oppressive place throughout history, Appalachia repeatedly affords women the space to expand themselves beyond their prescribed gender roles.

Contrary to mainstream narratives depicting rural spaces as hostile towards LGBT persons, Engelhardt (2003) notes that some of these educated women that came to Appalachia for a place in the world were also queer. In the cities, queer and lesbian women could not escape
the expectation of marriage, even after delaying marriage for education. They moved to Appalachia for economic and sexual freedom. Some of these educated women remained unmarried and lived together, communally, for the duration of their lives. In this instance, radical feminist principles of separatism were practiced not only for self-advancement, but also for self-preservation in a society where marriage to men at a young age was expected.

Also violating traditional stereotypes of the regressive region, women at this time formed extensive social networks that transcended race and religion. Engelhardt (2003) said, “Diverse Progressive women across Appalachia, despite working on projects specific to their own communities, shared a commitment to social change and community welfare,” (p. 19). Because communities were often spread out and resources were more scarce, Appalachian people, especially women, were and are very communal. This communalism is noted by Denham (2016) in her analysis of best nursing practices in the region, “A tradition of reciprocity learned early in life is honored and demonstrated by families, neighbors, and larger communities. Deep-seated interdependence among families was important historically as they shared similar adversities, hardships, and challenges,” (p. 98). Though equality was certainly not actualized, communities took care of each other and relied on one another to fulfill needs. Kinship, no matter the race of the community, is deeply valued and often necessary for survival in Appalachia.

Furthermore, women subverted the patriarchy by using their domestic status to create informal trading networks within these kinship groups. Barbara Ellen Smith examined her own family history in the region in her article “Beyond the Mountains…” written in 1999. Smith focuses on a relative from the pre-industrial era who ran her husband’s general store in an Appalachian hollow (holler). The business was owned by the man of the house, but his work often took him out of town, so his wife was left to run the business. In this example, a woman’s
role to her family was expanded to include a means of economic activity. Smith examines the way in which women traded homemade goods such as butter, eggs, and produce for access to manufactured goods that helped alleviate their work at home. In this way, Appalachian women were defying both gender roles of economic inactivity and stereotypes about modernity within the region; they were active advocates for modernization within their homes and their communities.

Bell (2013) demonstrated how women used their roles as mothers as a way to become activists in their communities. Many of them were experiencing the effects of coal and gas extraction, and these industries were beginning to affect their families’ health, their homes, and their safety. Despite a hegemony of the energy industries in their communities, they were able to justify their activism by trying to protect their families, homes, and communities by employing and utilizing their positions as mothers and grandmothers. Some women were descendants of coal miners and were married or had family in the industry. However, their fierce desire to protect their children’s future and their land led them to speak out and become active in demanding better in their communities.

**Constructing Appalachia and Its People**

**Characteristics of the Culture: Narratives and Identities**

It is important to recognize the ways that we, as a society, construct place and people. The region known as Appalachia is not composed of all the areas that fall within the Appalachian mountain range. Rather, Appalachia refers to counties within the mountain range that have similar traits of poverty, economic collapse due to monoeconomies and overspecialization of the workforce, poor education outcomes, and poor health outcomes (Keefe, 1996). Fisher (1977)
best summarized this subcultural model of poverty completed by other researchers of mountain culture in the following analysis:

The traits of the folk culture…are largely responsible for the problems which plague the Appalachian area—poverty, poor healthcare, low educational achievement, emotional disturbances, violence, poor government, and welfare dependency. Furthermore, efforts to alleviate these problems often fail because of the Appalachian’s resistance to new ideas, reluctance to work cooperatively, lack of goals, fatalism, suspicion of outsiders, and distrusts of bureaucracies of all types. As a result, simply pumping money into Appalachia will not solve the problems of the area. The folk culture must be changed before substantial social progress can occur. The mountain people are unable and often unwilling to change themselves. Outsiders must provide the stimulus and instruments for revamping the culture (p.15).

This narrative, constructed in the 1960s with the invention of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), defines the culture only in relation to trauma, exploitation, and the use of a “culture of poverty” lens (Lewis, 1998). Within this narrative, there is no room for individuality, diversity, stories of grit and resilience, or acknowledgement of community and cultural tactics to overcome obstacles.

The first major study completed to assess the subculture of Appalachia was completed in 1967 by Thomas Ford. Ford sought to assess the strength of four values: individualism/self-reliance, traditionalism, fatalism, and religious fundamentalism. Ford found that individualism, traditionalism, and fatalism were not core Appalachian values. Rather, he concluded the region was progressively-minded, open to changes in political and economic structures, and very achievement-oriented. Similarly, Billings (1974), completed a study assessing attitudinal differences between people living in North Carolina. Those living in Appalachian counties were found to have no significant difference in attitude than those living in flat counties on the eastern seaboard of the state. Differences that were distinguishable were found to be associated with ruralism, in general, and not to the presence of an Appalachian subculture. Billings found that the subculture of Appalachia was not only poorly defined, but it also did not contribute to the
poverty of the region, if the subculture exists at all. Rather, the poverty of the region contributes to norms and values within the subculture. Fisher, in his examinations of these early studies, concludes that real change and alleviation of poverty is not currently possible because we still view Appalachia through the “culture of poverty” paradigm (1977, p.16). Fisher calls on social scientists and mountain researchers to instead define the subculture through a conflict lens that examines how colonial-like exploitation and economic abandonment have contributed to norms related to survival within the culture (p.20). By using a historical lens that accounts for centuries of industrial exploitation, we can better understand social issues within the region.

In 1987, Jean Speer completed a study in which she analyzed the historical construction of two monoliths of Appalachian culture: the Mountaineer and the Hillbilly, and the ways that these monoliths have been commodified and sold as part of Appalachian folk culture. Speer suggests that the centralization of the Mountaineer and the Hillbilly within the Appalachian narrative occurred during the early 1900s as America was rapidly industrializing. Folks traveled to parts of West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, eastern Tennessee, and southwestern Virginia to experience what was left of “pioneer” and “settler” America, a place untainted and unchanged by industrialized modernity. The people were framed as “native” and “primitive” (Speer, 1987) in need of civilizing, romantically holding onto a lifestyle that was no longer celebrated in mainstream society, similar to the imagery we used and still use with American Indians who resist Western notions of civilization that degrades attachment to land and kin (Stoll, 2017). Within these spaces, the people were seen simultaneously as passive actors within their lives, allowing events to happen to them, as well as active aggressors in opposition of progressive change. Fisher (1977) posits that this narrative of adherence to “the old ways of life” position mainstream, middle-class norms and values as inherently at odds with the culture of
Appalachia—our pre-industrial style of existence. For middle-class norms and values to be understood and cemented within the larger population, an “other” is needed with which to define and compare middle-class culture against for difference. Both Fisher (1977) and Speer (1987) acknowledge the ways that the subculture of Appalachia is therefore defined in opposition of progressivism, education, modernity, and change. Indeed, Fisher questions, “Why is the mountaineer’s ‘what will be, will be’ most often described as ‘fatalism’ rather than ‘contentment’ or ‘realism,’” (p. 18). Fisher, through his content analysis of the literature, concludes that researchers of mountain folk rarely focus on the positive traits associated with the subculture—“neighborliness and hospitality, love of place, modesty, bravery, sense of humor, loyalty, resourcefulness, patriotism…placing a higher value on people over objects, continuity over change,” (p. 18) and individuality within group cooperation. Rather, aspects of Appalachian culture are compared against traits of the modern middle-class and deemed “destructive” and “negative.” If this is how we have defined the region for the better part of a century, we should not be surprised when the people come to define themselves within that narrative of “otherness” and “backwardness.”

**Regional Masculine Hegemonies**

Appalachia is a region defined by outsiders (Engelhardt, 2003). The people of the region have been stereotyped and caricatured throughout history and those symbols have evolved as time has progressed. First, during the time of settlement, those that moved to Appalachia to settle the region were dubbed Mountaineers. Mountaineers were brave, strong, rugged men that conquered the mountains to the West and the people that inhabited them, permitting the first wave of what would become Manifest Destiny to take place. This label negated the women and children who also worked with those Mountaineers to clear land and battle Natives. Next, the
people of Appalachia became known as coal miners. Coal mining became the ubiquitous industry of the area and the coal miner became the new stereotype of the region. Coal miners were often depicted with blackened faces in work wear with pick axes and headlamps. They still embodied the rugged-man identity of Mountaineers, but rather than conquering mountains, they were now laborers. Again, this image erases the women and children who maintained the homes in the coal camps, helped manage picket lines during strikes, and subsisted in farming and trading to supplement a coal mining income. Bell (2013) notes the way the coal mining monolith is used to silence other voices in the region that call for conservation and more environmental regulations. By allowing this one industry, which only employs roughly 12,000 people in West Virginia, to control the representation of the entire culture results in political inactivity within the community and a disinterest to invest time and resources by larger, progressive organizations. Catte (2018) uses new stories during the election to demonstrate how Appalachia and particularly West Virginia, despite having only five electoral votes, became the scape goat after the 2016 Election.

Finally, Appalachians are often caricatured as Hillbillies. The Hillbilly is often depicted as male, dirty, wearing a straw hat and coveralls, sometimes drinking, sometimes sleeping, and always for the sake of a laugh. This image is often used to justify the experiences of Appalachians with poverty by displaying them as stupid or lazy (Speer, 1987). Again though, women are not present even in this depiction. Barbara Ellen Smith (2001) says, “Fashioned from Adam’s rib, ‘mountain women’ are secondary entirely compatible with the ‘mountain men’ from whom they are derived.” In each of these three monoliths, women were not far behind men: mountaineer women helped carve out the state alongside mountaineer men, coal miner’s wives
held some of the fiercest picket lines during the Mine Wars, and women have a deep connection with the hills. They, however, are rarely, if ever, centered.

These masculine roles have been projected about Appalachia and to Appalachia via movies, television shows, books, and think pieces, especially during the 2016 Election. Indeed, they are often used to represent the region as a whole and those roles have been commodified to sell as culture from the region. My local gas station sells coonskin hats so that any passerby can take home a bit of Mountaineer culture for themselves. Reducing people to a singular image only serves to erase diversity of race, gender, and culture within the region.

**Traditional Gender Roles**

“Most other women remain outside history, only slightly further removed from it than those men—the landless, the tenant, the slave, the unemployed—who also fail to meet the standard for economic agency in their day,” (Smith, 1999, p. 8).

As noted by the title of Engelhardt’s (2003) book, the roots of feminism in Appalachia have been tangled and often misunderstood. Smith (1999) suggested, “Overt feminism was rarely the mode by which women...asserted themselves. Their tactics were often indirect, surreptitious, and, on many occasions, humorous,” (p. 12). “Feminist” is a term not often used to describe Appalachian women. This paper has discussed the ways in which universal male depictions of the region and people within have erased Appalachian women’s identities and historical contributions. Appalachian women are also left out of mainstream feminist definitions and discourses. Because women of the region have had to work within a very dominant patriarchy with severe economic disparities between men and women, they have had to rely on men heavily for financial support. Therefore, overt feminism is not an effective tactic for Appalachian women to get their way within their relationships and communities. Rather, compliance to motherhood and seeming compliance to gender roles have been used to gain traction and power in their
homes and in their communities (Bell, 2013). According to Bell, this motherhood role further translates into a protector role that extends beyond the nuclear family to include the surrounding lands, environment, and animals. By occupying this gendered role and working within its confines, both Smith and Bell outline how Appalachian women can maintain legitimacy, exert power, and cause social change within their communities.

Women in Appalachia may not relate to many tenets of mainstream feminist discourse due to the pervasive idea that women must be independently financially stable. Not only does this violate many traditional norms regarding families and kinship in Appalachia, it is also economically impossible for many Appalachian women. To prescribe to this form of feminism would be detrimental. The reality for most Appalachian women is a dependence on another income, even if she has her own. Due to decades of steady economic depression, many of the well-paying, physical labor jobs have left the area. While those jobs were primarily, for most of the history of the industry, occupied by men, many women have decided to take on those jobs in order to access the higher incomes associated with them. Otherwise, women typically perform service- or care-related work, which does not pay enough to support themselves and their families alone. An article appeared in The Atlantic in 2014 with the subtitle, “Higher-income ‘single ladies’ often push back against ‘patriarchy.’ But the statistics don’t lie: Low-income, unmarried women face significant economic challenges when they stay single” (Green, 2014). Rather than face failure in achieving this unrealistic goal, many women in Appalachia reject these tenets of mainstream feminism as unrepresentative of them and their culture.

Experiential knowledge in the area and the literature both suggest that Appalachians have a unique tie to the land (Williams, 2002) that is both historical, cultural, and gendered. This gendered experience of the land is first evidenced in Clapp’s (2015) analysis of frontier/settler
women moving to the region at the turn of the 18th century. Women moving from cities to Appalachia (and many other rural spaces) often experienced an expansion of the gender roles to include activities and behaviors that were previously denied to them. Many frontier/settler women hunted, fished, shot at potential enemies, butchered animals, and tended livestock. For middle-class women on the coast, these activities were both unladylike and “uncivilized.” As demonstrated previously, Appalachia offers a unique space for gender roles to be both transformed and subverted.

Shannon Bell explored women and their roles in Appalachian communities in her 2013 and 2016 studies. In *Our Roots Run Deep as Ironweed* (2013), Bell used qualitative methods to analyze women’s roles in their communities in West Virginia through the lens of environmental activism. The experiences of women with their communities, their children, their husbands, and their land provided a more nuanced view of strength, resilience, and womanhood that is often not demonstrated in statistics of various outcomes for the region. Women negotiated their traditional gender roles and stipulations of motherhood to develop a protectionist view of land and kin. Employing many aspects of ecological feminism present in Engelhardt’s (2003) work, Bell demonstrates the need for all disciplines to partake in qualitative research that leaves room for family histories, relationship to place and land, and negotiation of gendered roles and spaces.

The West Virginia 55 United Teacher Strike in the spring of 2018 was another example of women using their traditional roles (many women in West Virginia are employed as teachers and this profession is still dominated by women nationwide) in order to demand better benefits and rights for themselves and their students. Teachers in all fifty-five counties closed schools for two weeks in what was even at one point called a “wild cat strike” (where employees keep striking even after the employer and Union come to an agreement). They drew attention to their
lack of pay and compensation, their inadequate health insurance policies, and the conditions they deal with in their schools such as having to feed many of their students and provide many of their own supplies. This strike also brought attention to our horrible family leave policies (a nationwide problem) as parents worried about losing their jobs while staying home with their children. Many communities came together across the state, often through the organization of women, to ensure children were fed and had places to go if parents could not stay home. The entire strike defied many of the narratives, stereotypes, and monoliths that have come to define the Appalachian region.

Theoretical Background

Feminist Theories

This research utilized two lenses of analysis. First, a multicultural feminist lens was used to examine the ways in which Appalachian women have been erased from mainstream narratives pertaining to the region. Multicultural feminism allows for the multiple experiences of women across strata, such as class and race, to be equally validated and reviewed. Rather than reducing the experiences of all women to one mainstream narrative, a multicultural feminist lens permits the acknowledgement of the differing experiences of women and encourages acceptance of those different experiences. Patricia Hill Collins (2011) uses a multicultural feminist lens, what she calls Black Feminist Thought and Black Feminist Epistemology, to better understand the experience of black women within their intersecting strata of race and gender. Collins demonstrates this lens is also useful to understand more fully the ways that class affects women’s lives based on their position within society. Appalachians, as a people of a region whose very definition is poverty and economic despair, are a labeled class within our society. Because of this and the subculture associated with the region, Appalachians, despite experiencing white privilege over racial minorities, experience stigma by other white Americans because of their cultural and
economic label. While multicultural feminist theory has been traditionally used to examine the experiences of marginalized women of color, I argue that it is also the best lens to view marginalized Appalachian women despite color because of its experience-validating power.

Examples of liberal and radical feminism are also present in this exploration of Appalachian women past and present. Liberal feminism focuses on the ways in which legal and economic equality can raise the status of women to that of men (such as equal pay policies or the legalization of birth control). Radical feminism examines the ways in which women are systemically negated from society in our current patriarchal structure. Liberal feminism can, at times, rely on essentialist notions of womanhood, while radical feminism rejects biological differences between men and women as a means of social stratification (Collins, 2011).

Secondly, an ecological feminist lens is utilized to both determine and examine the extent of Appalachian women’s relationship to the land and their perceptions of land within their subculture. An ecological feminist lens was used by Elizabeth Engelhardt (2003) in her examination of the historiography of women in Appalachia and The American South. Ecological feminist lenses enhance the multicultural feminist approach; according to Engelhardt (2003), ecological feminism recognizes the difference among women’s experiences and oppressions while rejecting essentialist narratives surrounding “womanhood.” Ecological feminist lenses also recognize the ways in which injustices tied to land and land use intersect with social injustices experienced by marginalized peoples across the world. Specifically, both women and land are subjugated by the patriarchy for use and production within this perspective. By recognizing this tie, ecological feminist lenses encourage a more nuanced macro analysis of the role of land injustice within social injustice especially in relation to women and femmes.
An expansion of regional identities and shared histories that recognize Appalachian women and their contributions to society is needed. We also need to validate the ways in which women subvert the patriarchy within their marriages and communities. Mainstream feminism should recognize the financial situations of many low-income and marginalized women that still require their dependence on men and men’s incomes, rather than allowing feminism to be defined in a way that isn’t possible for many women. Multicultural and ecological feminism allow those multiple woman narratives to exist in a valid space while still recognizing the need for progress, but a progress defined within the population instead of imposed onto the population.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

“Don’t dare presume there’s shame in the lot of a woman who carries on,”

Given that my goal is to access subjugated knowledge and histories of women in Appalachia, a qualitative study utilizing semi-structured, in-depth interviews is appropriate. I utilized an ecological feminist lens to access perceptions of women’s relationships to others and the land as well as multicultural feminist approaches to access subjugated knowledge and ways of knowing by centering and uplifting individual experiences of women and their perceptions of those experiences. Finally, elements of oral history, or asking women specifically about other women in their family, specifically mothers and grandmothers, permit me access to feminine knowledge that was not recorded due to our societal emphasis on masculine property ownership and roles within the written record.

Figure 3.1: West Virginia Counties marked with Interview Locations (West Virginia Archives and History Map)
The Sample

Purposive and snowball sampling methods were utilized to collect data for this project. Attempts were made to stratify the sample across four generations (see Figure 3.2): The Silent/Greatest (1928-1945), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), and Millennials (1981-1996). Because the first cohort of the newest generation, Generation Z (1997-present) is coming of legal age this year, they were left out of the study due to age of consent limitations (Dimock, 2018). When developing this study, I had intended to focus on Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials, but I discovered excitement and willingness among women born prior to 1946, so they were also included in the sample. This generation offers particular insight into the shift from substance living towards modern industrial wage systems, as demonstrated in the following analysis chapter. Sixteen women born between 1929 and 1996 were interviewed in-depth about their perceptions of womanhood and strength in Appalachia.

Figure 3.2: Generations Defined by Years by Pew Research Center
West Virginia is the only state that lies entirely within the region defined as Appalachia by the Appalachian Regional Commission and because of ease of access, this area was chosen as the site for data collection. The women’s geographic distribution across West Virginia counties can be seen in Figure 3.1. Only women who had spent most of their lives in West Virginia were interviewed. Women were selected purposively using a key informant and through a subsequent snowball sample from initial interviews. The use of a key informant proved necessary to avoid sampling within a “liberal bubble”: because most of my connections throughout the state are from higher education or my work in reproductive justice, access to right-leaning or politically moderate women proved challenging. By using a key informant involved in her home community and the community she works within, access to women across a diverse range of careers, stages of life, and political leanings was increased. The key informant initially approached several women through both churches and community organizations like Kiwanis. From there, word-of-mouth about my interviews, and suggestions from participants upon completion of their interviews led to a partial snowball sample. Some women are retired, some are homemakers, some are former school teachers, many are involved with their church (both paid and unpaid positions), and some are students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th># of Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cabell</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanawha</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randolph</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upshur</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th># of Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen X</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomer</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent/Greatest</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Interviewee Demographics
Geographically, the interviews span seven West Virginia counties: Cabell, Harrison, Kanawha, Marion, Randolph, Taylor, and Upshur (see Table 3.1). Topographically, my interviews took space in three out of four of the geographic regions as defined by the West Virginia Division of Culture and History spanning the Allegheny Mountains across the Allegheny Plateau into the Ohio Valley Section (See Figure 3.2). By sampling across multiple counties and geographic regions, smaller cultural nuances dependent on geography can be described, adding further knowledge to dispel assumptions of homogeneity throughout the region. The literature suggests cultural ties to the land are hugely dependent upon topography (Clapp, 2015; Denham, 2016; Engelhardt, 2003; Fisher, 1977; Smith, 1999; Williams, 2002).

The mean age of the same group was 57 years old. Every woman interviewed was white. Nearly every woman identified as heterosexual or did not specify her sexuality but described relationships with men. Two women, both Millennials, identified specifically with the LGBT community: one woman identified herself as a lesbian and another identified herself as queer but currently dating a man. Women varied in ages ranging from 21 to 88 in 2017. I interviewed five

![Figure 3.3: Geographic Regions of West Virginia](image)
millennials, one Generation X woman, five Baby Boomers, and five women that belong to the Silent/Greatest Generation. I chose to center my sample around generations to gauge how women’s issues, economic changes, and culture change or evolve over time. The generational lens also helps establish women more within the historiography of the area. Other questions also asked participants to discuss themes in relation to their mothers and grandmothers. This inclusion of an oral-history-style methodology allows for further knowledge on women in the region throughout history by including stories of their mothers and grandmothers that were not often recorded (Smith, 1999; Valk, 2010).

**The Instrument**

I constructed the interview guide (See Appendix B) using themes that emerged from the literature review. These themes included: women as maintainers of culture, women and their ties to the land, women in the private sphere, women as economic mediators, women as community leaders, and women and their relationship with outsiders (Bell, 2013; Clapp, 2015; Collins, 2011; Daugneaux 1981; Denham, 2016; Engelhardt, 2003; Keefe, 1996; Mounts, 1997; Rademacher & Turner 2012; Smith 1999; Sohn, 2006; Speer, 1987; Williams, 2002). Another key informant was utilized to help develop both themes and questions within each thematic area. The informant is a thirty-four-year-old woman from a small town in Randolph County, WV. She has a bachelor’s degree in Sociology and is a mother of twins. Through email, she assessed and critiqued my interview questionnaire using the experiential knowledge she gained from growing up in a small, rural community.

The passive, more indirect style of questioning typically used by Appalachians (Rademacher & Turner, 2012; Speer, 1987), necessitated that I seek additional input in order to develop the questions with which interviewees would be most comfortable. For example, it
would be both rude and insulting to ask a stranger about abuse within her marriage or past relationships. Instead, I first asked how the interviewee and her spouse divide household labor. Next, I asked if they ever bickered or fussed (Appalachian slang for verbal altercations) at each other. Finally, I inquired if it ever became more physical than that. By building rapport, especially regarding the individual’s personal relationships, it was easier and less confrontational to ask questions pertaining to domestic abuse. A distinct advantage I have as an insider researcher is the ability to understand and utilize slang of the region, coupled with the instinct to code-switch to my accented version of English. This use and understanding of the local dialect along with my accent was the catalyst for quick development of rapport and proof of kinship, thus allowing interviewees to pursue the interview more conversationally.

Similarly, I wanted to gauge individual responses to the term “feminist” and whether they used that identity for themselves. After consulting with my advisor, I decided to ask that question last. By asking this last, the interview did not center “feminism” but instead centered the interviewee and their own navigations with strength and grit on their own terms. By allowing for experiences of strength and descriptions of relationships outside the assumed confines of “feminism” women were able to describe their own narratives of what a strong woman is. Some respondents had strong, negative reactions to the word itself, thus confirming the need for placement at the end of the interview questionnaire. My informant agreed that the interview should not begin with questions of “feminism” because of the potential for bias due to individual interpretations of feminism in relation to their own stories of strength.

**In-Depth Interviews**

I chose to exercise a qualitative study utilizing semi-structured, in-depth interviews with an oral history component. According to Hesse-Biber (2017), “Qualitative approaches center on
understanding the subjective meanings that individuals give to their social worlds. They privilege subjective forms of knowledge building and seek out how individuals come to understand their world. The social reality is multiple and not unitary; there is no single truth sought.” Similarly, Collins (2011) examines the necessity of qualitative work to uncover the stories between negative statistical data as a means of understanding marginalized communities. Furthermore, Bell (2013, 2016) demonstrated the viability and necessity of using qualitative methods to both access and assess women’s subjugated knowledge and histories within the Appalachian region.

I decided in-depth interviews as the technique best suited to my examination of womanhood and strength at two levels: experience and perception. I organized (or ordered the items/questions on) my interview guide in a way that prioritized topics and themes emergent from the literature (Hesse-Biber, 2017). However, if additional topics or information were brought forth by respondents, I pursued them with further questioning. I completed all interviews during August 2017. Each interview lasted an average of 52:12 minutes. Interviews were completed in various locations of interviewees’ choosing: a coffee shop, a church, respondent’s homes, work offices, the local college grounds, and the Wendy’s in Elkins, WV, over biscuits and gravy.

After completing the initial interviews, I labeled each interview audio file by the county the participant resides in and her birth year. The audio files were stored on my encrypted, password-protected iPhone and backed up to a password-protected file on my cloud and personal computer. Transcriptions of interviews were completed verbatim and were stored in a password-protected file on my personal computer. Upon transcription, the audio files were erased from all platforms. During both the interview and transcription process, audio files and transcriptions were only identified by the respondent’s home county and birth year (Cabell 1940, for example)
in order to ensure anonymity.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Because themes from the literature were used to develop the interview instrument (see Appendix B), many of the responses were taken in a pre-organized, thematic fashion. Those themes were women as maintainers of culture, women in the private sphere, women as economic mediators, women as community leaders, women and their ties to the land, and women and their relationships with outsiders. As evidence of sensitizing concepts was found, quotations were pulled from the transcriptions and placed into a separate word document for further analysis of potentially emergent themes.

Through this analysis, I found that I was working with three main themes: gender, land, and culture, and these themes were intimately interconnected in a reflexive way. Leading in the community, economic mediation, and perceptions of outsiders acted more like exogenous variables acting on the three main variables of land, gender, and culture. For example, responses to questions within the “economic mediation” theme fit best within gender or land because women discussed how their work affects their home life and subsequent navigations or how they used the land to mediate food scarcity within their families.

Upon transcription, quotes were compiled around these previously assessed literature themes and new themes were developed with supporting quotations as needed. Four works informed quotation selection. Engelhardt (2003) and Bell (2013) both found a connection to the land centered in subsistence agriculture and a sense of spirituality. Bell (2013, 2016) also found that many women in the area supported land conservation but the level of that support was determined by the extent to which the local economy was dominated by extractive industries that employed many of the men in the area. Collins (2011) suggested that marginalized women have
trouble connecting to mainstream feminist and progressive narratives. Finally, Smith (1999) explored the necessity of oral history methods when analyzing gender roles and economies within the Appalachian region. Smith found that many women were involved in underground trading networks and unofficial market economies in order to help supplement the male incomes in their families and that this tradition is inherent in Appalachian culture. The works of these four authors informed the theoretical frameworks, multicultural and ecological feminist lenses, used to flush out subthemes within the participant interviews. Many emergent themes were regarded as subthemes within the framework. Once these emergent themes were identified, they became definitive concepts and transcriptions were assessed once again and coded appropriately. The results are listed and analyzed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYSIS

As I began to review the transcriptions of the interviews I completed, new themes began to emerge from the data. Women in West Virginia were asked to describe their culture and how it is unique from other rural cultures. I found that Appalachian culture, for many of the respondents, was a unique experience for women because of the need for resilience within struggle and navigating external stigma associated with negative stereotypes about the region and its people. This grit was something that made the Appalachian different from other rural folks around the country in the eyes of the women I interviewed. A historical and cultural tie to subsistence agrarian lifestyles was present in every interview and yielded rich data because of the oral history questions about older female family members. Women also supported regulated land use unanimously, but the extent of permissible regulation was dependent on whether or not the family’s income was tied to labor in extractive industries such as coal or gas. Because of this extreme wage differential between men and women, “traditional gender roles” are common at home even when women were working, too. This wage gap also encourages women to get married in order to access financial security through “traditionally masculine labor” performed by husbands. Women find strength and power from these roles that they sometimes wield to enact change within their homes and communities. Despite economic challenges, women in West Virginia describe a desire to stay that is connected to both land and culture.

Defining the Culture

Current literature is and has been split on the topic of a unique Appalachian subculture. Therefore, one of the first objectives of this study was to find out if West Virginia women in my sample perceive their culture as unique and then have those participants define the culture in
their own words on their own terms. Multicultural feminist perspectives founded in intersectionality dictate the necessity of women within their own cultures to define their own systems of knowing, or epistemologies, that help them navigate their social setting. The Appalachian Regional Commission, a federal entity, defines Appalachia through a lens of economic success, or lack thereof. Growing up, I always heard the culture defined within the context of the mountains, or geographic isolation, which led to an adherence to agrarian lifestyles and the subsequent social norms associated with those traditions. Several themes emerged when analyzing transcriptions for evidence or perspectives of an Appalachian subculture:

resilience/hardship, land spirituality, and kinship.

**Does an Appalachian Subculture Exist?**

Within the past century, Appalachia has undergone a significant transformation from land-based, agrarian subsistence systems (Stoll, 2017) to an industrial wage economy. Randolph 1933, an 85-year-old woman born and raised in Randolph County, acknowledges these rapid shifts in relation to culture:

We have grown up in the mountains and uh do you want early on? Because I’m 84 and a half. Okay. Back when I was growing up, there weren’t too many phones, very many cars. Maybe there were a couple in our community because my dad had one. He was an electrician and had to drive to town. I think Mr. Gimmel had one—he was a jeweler and he had to come to town for his job. We didn’t have any way of getting around. If we went to town, we walked to town and it was seven miles out. And uh, my granddad, who was an old man when I knew him, he lived to be two months short of 105, so he could talk about the negroes, the Indians, and then he got to see a man walk on the moon, which is quite a stretch of time there. But we didn’t have television until I was probably about 25.

Randolph 1933 recognizes the immense changes experienced by those who came before her, such as her grandfather. Growing up just outside of Elkins, WV, where her father was an electrician in town, her family and a few others were the only ones in the town to own vehicles. However, ownership of a vehicle did not mean access to town by the whole family—the car was
only used by her father and when he was working; the family still had to walk seven miles to
town to get necessities if needed. Cabell 1940, a 78-year-old woman, grew up outside of town, as
well, and remarked on the community that she grew up in:

I grew up on a farm and I’d say that’s kinda part of the culture, too. Back then it was
great because I didn’t know any different. Now, I look back at it and uh it’s…it was
really hard work and all, but it was still good. It was. And the people were good. And the
people would help everybody, and it was just...if somebody had a problem, then
everybody joined in to help. You know what I mean? I think that’s an Appalachian thing.
Like with farm work and harvests and stuff. Or somebody’s house. Like if somebody
needed a barn or their house burnt down or something, all the neighbors would gather
round and help them, you know?

Cabell 1940 describes a community that is close-knit, interdependent, and aware of the struggles
of each other within the hollow. The isolation described by both Randolph 1933 and Cabell 1940
did not result in a lack of integration, but rather in a deeper, richer community solidarity and
recognition of mutual success.

In line with literature about the region, Harrison 1982 doubts the uniqueness of
Appalachian culture in relation to other rural cultures. She states:

I think to an extent we have a distinct culture, but it seems to me there’s also a bunch of
stuff that you would find other places, too. Well, we like to think, I think your
stereotypical Appalachian woman cooks, and makes apple butter and quilts and sews and
raises the kids and gardens and things like that so I think that’s kinda the stereotype, but I
think you find all of those things other places, too. So, while we’re somewhat isolated
and maybe have some more traditional ways of life, I think you still find that stuff other
places, too, so I don’t know how unique it necessarily is.

Many of the tangible “artifacts” of culture in Appalachia are similar to other rural cultures in the
American South, Midwest, and West and are associated with a lack of modernity, urbanization,
and isolation. Food culture centered on preservation, self-sufficiency in regard to food and labor,
and a connection to the land because of that self-sufficiency. However, Harrison 1982 notes
where the perception of a unique subculture may come from when she was asked if the land is
tied to the culture in Appalachia:
Yes. Mountains. I think they’re important to the culture because it made it hard for people to get here. They had to work to get here to begin with. It’s…geography-wise, and I think it makes it hard for them to get elsewhere, too. They tend to, for centuries, they’ve tended to stay rooted, isolated and have really had to work to stay stuck here in a lot of cases. They had to work to get here then they had to work to build a life on a hillside somewhere. There weren’t many people so it’s not like they had wide-open land or even cleared land or that sorta thing. I think many people, yea, definitely have to work to stay here.

This isolation, however, does not necessarily result in the homogenous culture depicted in mainstream media accounts. Rather, the mountainous landscape contributes to a host of subcultures within the state of West Virginia itself. This phenomenon is described best by Randolph 1959 when she said:

The land is probably the cause of some of the culture. Because of where people lived, and that’s a whole nother thing. People lived in districts that were hilly and rocky, couldn’t really be farmers, so they had to find something else to do, some other way to make a living. Uhm so the culture in different areas of WV is tied to the land and what people had to do to live where they live. WV has different cultures in itself. Oh, yea honey. Drive down the road 20 minutes from here to Belington. We’re 20 minutes away, but there’s still some things that we say, ‘Well we don’t do that over in Randolph County,’ and they say, ‘Well we do here in Barbour County.’ You’re completely different because you’re from Huntington. People don’t know what mountains are over there.

This multicultural view of West Virginia was present in most interviews. Indeed, many of the women explained certain things to me because they thought I would not understand because I was introduced as being from Huntington. Once I explained that I had lived in their area for four years, they quit explaining certain concepts or places to me. Because the majority of my interviews were conducted in regions not currently dominated by the coal economy, many of the women acknowledged that their culture differed from those “down in the coal fields,” (Cabell 1967). Indeed, growing up in West Virginia, you begin to learn the place and people by their regions: The Eastern Panhandle (northern Virginia), The Northern Panhandle (steel-reliant like Pennsylvania), North Central (tourist mountains, former coal), the Southern Coal Fields (still reliant on coal, impoverished more than anywhere else in the state, also where it floods), and The
Chemical Valley (the land between Charleston and Huntington that has a higher economic status than most other areas in the state, also more liberals). Knowing where one was raised and where one resides allows fellow West Virginians to better understand one another’s context. It also helps to establish a certain level of cultural capital and rapport as a researcher by sharing in these experiential and subjective ways of knowing.

**A Culture of Resilience**

In my sample, resilience, or the ability to keep going despite obstacles and stigma, was central to participant descriptions of culture. Some participants believe that Appalachian culture is set apart from other rural cultures because of the difficult terrain and geography that made surplus difficult and ensured some amount of isolation. This isolation resulted in an attitude of self-reliance within an interconnected kin group.

Harrison 1982 suggests that it was very difficult for those that settled West Virginia in the early days and for those that continued to reside in the region thereafter. She describes how hard work and struggle came to define the region and those within it. Kanawha 1995 echoed these sentiments when asked about land and culture:

> Yea I think there’s a lot to the physical environment that makes West Virginia and Appalachia different than maybe some of the other, flatter places like this. There, the culture is just directly surrounding agriculture but here in West Virginia, and Appalachia, especially mountainous Appalachia, it’s centered around something else, but I can’t quite pinpoint what it is.

For Kanawha 1995, this aspect of the culture helped prepare her for life outside of the state. She attended college in Boston, MA, and believes one aspect of the culture is a can-do attitude resulting from isolation and learned self-sufficiency. She says:

> So, I think like, for me personally, the way it has reflected in my life is that I would like describe most of my family as rednecks. People that can go out and fix whatever piece of
equipment they have because they need to use it now and they don’t have the money to go out and get a new one. Uhm and it’s a kind of can-do attitude and being able to figure out like…figure out how to fix stuff because nobody else is going to do it for you.

Due to isolation and low wages, many Appalachians have had to rely on themselves to fix different things around their homes and farms. The ability to take an object, study it, and learn how to make repairs is a trait often associated with individuals that live in rural settings. Kanawha 1995 says, “So, I think like growing up in the very kinda country family that I did, uhm, made me prepared to kinda like just go out on my own and figure out what I need to do next.”

**Rooted in Tradition, Rooted in the Land**

Throughout the interview process, I asked women across four generations about their connections with the land. I discovered that throughout family histories and in the current era, people in West Virginia have been passing down land-based knowledge rooted in subsistence that has become synonymous with cultural knowledge in the area. This knowledge ranges from gardening techniques and food preservation to an understanding of uses for local plants and roots. With some women, this knowledge defied gender norms and was passed down regardless of gender. For others, certain land-based knowledges were gendered and resulted in tasks where men took from the land, like hunting, and women worked with the land, such as gardening and foraging.

Harrison 1983 described a culture that centered around land-based knowledge. Culture, or the norms, behaviors, material creations, and language associated with a distinct people, is taught and passed down through generations. With techniques and skills passed down to her and her husband’s family over generations, she described a spiritual connection between the Appalachian culture and the land. Harrison 1983 says:
Being little, my grandfather used to take me out into the woods and he would teach me all the different leaves and what trees they were. Or we would go and pick sassyfrass [sic], which you can use to make sassyfrass [sic] tea, from the roots, you would boil them down to make tea, but we would always chew on the bark. It had a really good taste to it! And it helps clean your teeth because it’s an antiseptic.

When asked specifically about Appalachian culture, Harrison 1983 said:

I feel like women in West Virginia are more connected to the earth. Farming, canning, all that’s a big thing here or at least it was for my family. All that’s a part of living here. To this day, our family, we still do a lot of canning and we put out a garden every year and that’s substantial to a lot of families here. Especially lower income families. But yet, still with us, we don’t collect food stamps or anything like that—I’d prefer to can and garden. Cause you know what you’re getting. And to me, there’s a great sense of worth that comes from knowing I started that seed or we started those seeds and nurtured them into plants and those are seeds that we’ve had for years passed down through family members. Heirloom seeds. And every year, we save a certain amount of like beans or whatnot and we dry them out and extract the seeds and that’s what we use. We’ve done that for years now. And a lot of people…I grew up in a very small neighborhood called Marshville and everyone there knew everybody. The families had been there forever. The farms had been there forever. Everybody would share recipes and like the community would put out a cookbook and all the little old ladies would share their recipes with one another. Heritage and stuff in West Virginia—it’s good to know where you’re from. I’ll warn ya though, sometimes I have a tendency to get off topic cause I am a talker. So, you’ve got to keep me honest and on task here (laughs).

For Harrison 1983, “culture” refers to skills of self-sufficiency grounded in land-based knowledge that can only be learned from experiences that are based down from generation to generation. Randolph 1963 reverberated these notions when she said:

Living in the mountains it’s…you get some treacherous times and you learn to do things that other people don’t learn to do. I mean…you know, I have a spring for water. When it goes dry, you learn to catch rain water to heat and boil and do your dishes and your cooking. You learn to go to the river to take baths and do your clothes and…haul water. I catch a lot of rainwater as you can notice from all my buckets sittin’ around and stuff. You adapt to what’s necessary.

This ability to adapt to struggle, to maintain through hardship, and to make the land work for you and your survivability was the most common theme that emerged when discussing the idea of “culture” with women living in West Virginia.
Connections with the Land

During the analysis phase of this research, I found two themes emerging around connections with the land: subsistence agrarian lifestyles and differing perceptions of land use and regulation. Bell (2016) found that attitudes towards land use in West Virginia are typically viewed through a masculine lens that promotes industrial land development and ultimately, destruction. According to the author, this land use narrative is perpetuated by outsiders attempting to control the labor force of the industry by framing land use narratives as part of the culture. In my sample, I found that every woman was in favor of land regulation to some extent and their diversity of views depended primarily upon whether or not their husbands were involved in an extractive industry as the main source of family income. Women in my sample expressed a connection to land that is both historical and cultural.

Subsistence Agrarian Lifestyles

When I began these interviews, I did not expect the snowball effect my project would have in the small communities, particularly among the Silent/Great Generation women. Many were extremely hesitant when we began the process but then expressed a cathartic feeling upon completion. Still, many told me no one had ever asked them for their experiences before. Randolph 1934 told me that her grandchildren always asked for her husband’s stories because he traveled a lot for work so his were more “colorful” than her “drab” stories of keeping up the home in his absence. Numerous participants expressed this sentiment. Because my sample expanded to include women from this generation, I was able to capture a phenomenon that I did not intend to examine this in-depth: the transition from land-subsistence and self-reliance to a full wage economy. When asked of her relationship to the land, Cabell 1940 said:
I’ll tell ya when I was growin’ up it meant everything to us. Because we raised our own food and… and it was just you know…we didn’t have a lot of money, but we survived and didn’t go hungry any. And we were really, back then it was fine cause I didn’t know any better. And all the people—they were the same way I was, so it was okay. It (the land) does mean something to me. It always will, I think. It means whether we have food or not, really (laughs). Really. And uh… if we didn’t have land, we’d a never made it back then. It’s not as important to me as it was back then because things has changed so much. But it is important even now. I own what I have now. It’s important to me. Because when you own your own land, you can do what you want. If you don’t own it, you can’t.

Cabell 1940 noted how subsistence agriculture and land-based knowledge helped her family growing up. She also described a time when differences in social class were perhaps not as visible as they seem to be today. Land ownership is not only a symbol of subsistence and survival but also freedom to “do what you want.” Similarly, Randolph 1933 reflected the comparability of social class discussed in the previous narrative. She talked about growing up with food rations and using the land to supplement what you could not purchase in stores. When asked about men’s and women’s relationship to the land and if there was a difference, she said:

I think that West Virginians tend to hang onto whatever they have. Man or woman. I grew up in the uh Depression years, when you had nothing much, but nobody had anything, so you didn’t really know that you were poor (laughs). Because everybody was the same. And umm we got by. My mom was pretty thrifty on cooking. I was umm in grade school. In my teens. We each got a rationing book and each person was allowed so much sugar, butter, coffee, things like that. And if you ran out, then that was it. So, there wasn’t too much demand on gasoline since there weren’t that many cars around. But they still…you were rationed on it. You had to be very careful. We had to rely on the land a lot during that time. We had our own garden. Everyone had one. We went out and picked blackberries and huckleberries and just everything you could find and canned it so that you would have it you know. Actually, it was kind of nice. My mother always invited the minister at the church down for lunch after church and it was pretty nice to open jars and you could have food on the table in a few minutes!

This land-based system of living encourages self-sufficiency and kinship. Sharing meals with family, friends, and other community members was not only a mechanism for social capital, but also a way to ensure the community was fed. Cabell 1940 said:
Well...I grew up poor, but I enjoyed it. Cause everybody else was just like me. I didn’t even know I was poor cause I had food and clothes. I think now, people know when they’re poor. But back then everybody was just the same. I think maybe now they’re more spread apart—like you’ve got some people that are much richer and somes that are a lot poorer. And they know it now. Whereas before, we all kinda had nothing. We was probably considered poor back then, but we didn’t have a lot money or anything, but we never went hungry or anything and we always had clothes, so I don’t really think we were poor.

Cabell 1940 suggests that the separation between the classes is worse now and more visible than when she was growing up. This rift between social classes is the result of materialism and consumerism. Back when people had less and were not encouraged to buy and spend as much as now, social class was less visible in places where she grew up. Her experience suggests an association between the rise in modern consumer culture coupled with the decline in self-subsistence and the rise of visible social stratification.

**Perceptions of Land Use**

I expected conflicting opinions regarding land use, land perseveration/conservation, and industrial development when I began these interviews. As expected, many of the women laughed, scoffed, and sighed audibly. Overall, the majority of women interviewed were pro-regulation of land use to some degree. The extent varied among individuals. Randolph 1933 said:

I’m not for their stripping the land. Strip mining and logging. I’m for selective timbering, but not stripping. Some are old enough that just really need to come down. They’re just dropping their limbs all the time. I hate these wild cherries, but my daughter won’t let me cut them down cause she says that’s the air conditioning for her house, so I tell her she better be out there picking up all those limbs.

Randolph 1933 spoke directly of the logging industry which currently is a dominant force in her county. She also mentions a relationship with the land and trees that allows her and her daughter to be more efficient with their energy use. Echoing sentiments of aversion to land destruction, Kanawha 1995 said:

Yea. Uhm, so I grew up with family who, like all my family before my parents were coal
miners, then my parents worked for DEP, a job they kinda stumbled into. Uhm, and think, you know my dad fishes and hunts and I grew up with a real respect and understanding for both the importance of our history and so uhm, knowing what happens when industry doesn’t follow the letter of the law, and uhm also how hard it is to make sure they do that. I think one of the hugest sins that industry commits is performing mountain top removal. I think that, that we should be investing in renewable energy sources rather than plundering the land that we have because once you, once you destroy it, it’s never going to be back to where it was. And I think that communities are being torn apart when like land is seized through eminent domain to open a new coal mine. And I think citizens in the United States and people in Appalachia deserve better than that because I can’t imagine anyone opening a coal mine in the middle of Brooklyn, uhm without people saying anything or raising hell or burning it down.

Kanawha 1995 references geographic inequalities often faced by Appalachians. Appalachia is and was the site of energy extraction for greater American progress, but Appalachians often experience the negative outcomes—eminent domain, land degradation, pollution, etc.—of these industries more than the communities that these industries serve (like Brooklyn). Historically, West Virginia served as the extraction site for the coal that helped to industrialize the entire country (Catte, 2018). When asked if we should do more to protect the land from destruction, Randolph 1959 said:

Back to Girl Scouts, we were part of some of the recycling and reclaiming program. We started that. You know, people don’t think about it but if you cut a tree down, it took that tree 200 years to get where it is. Now you plant another one, where’s it gonna be in 20 years? This tall. And people don’t think about that. Rather than chopping it down and then putting it back, maybe we need to eh, let’s just keep it the way it is. I mean, do what we must, but let’s just leave it alone as much as possible. Preservation.

Kanawha 1995 had done service work down in the southern coal fields of McDowell County. While there she noted several systemic issues in town related to property ownership and land stewardship. She discusses this below:

So, I spent a summer living in McDowell County with the Sky’s the Limit program through WVFREE, I think they still do it, and one of the things, I was living in Coalwood, one of things that I noticed there was that people had all these water problems. Because when the coal companies pulled out in the 60s, uhm they…sold the houses, but they still owned the land. So, people…and somewhere along the way, no one was taking care of the water system. So, people are stuck without clean water and they don’t own the land the land under their house, so they can’t…I guess there’s not as much
reason to do like renovations to your house because you know, they could take it at any point. I think that plays a huge role in Appalachia, even in my family. We own the land our house is on, but we don’t own the mineral rights below so it’s pretty regular for the gas company who owns the mineral rights to come through and tear up our yard. Cause they bring all their equipment through to access their stuff. So, I think that, from the industrial part, there’s always a feeling of encroachment on a thing that you love so much. I think one of the biggest Appalachian values, which can be positive or negative, is the situation of privacy and if you are like constantly at risk of having someone come through your property, it really puts your privacy at stake.

Some of the women I interviewed had a complicated relationship to regulation because their husbands work for extractive industries. Many were trying to navigate their desire for land preservation, the need for economic stimulation, and their husband’s job, as demonstrated when Upshur 1990 said:

*(sighs)* So… I do think that we have to regulate things better. Uhm, but I do think we have to be smart about it. So, for example when my husband worked for oil and gas, he saw people try to cover things up. A spill. Because the regulation was so strict that they didn’t want to be fined and lose their job. So as individuals they chose to take a risk and cover it up rather than to call it in because they knew that meant they’d be getting fired and couldn’t support their families and their lifestyles anymore. So I think that with the regulations, there has to be you know, some, I don’t want to say like a gentle slap on the wrist but there has to be more of an intense, rather than just a straight fine that might result in job loss of an employee who might otherwise be a really great employee and want to do the right and ethical decision, but they’ll lose their job over it so why would they call it in? So, could we you know, cause the environmentalist at the company or the safety person to do some additional training or could it be like that rather than a straight fine resulting in the loss of an employee’s job because now the company has to pay the fine? They’re upset with the employee. So, I think that there’s give and take. But yea. Overall, I want to preserve our land. I want it to be beautiful and what it actually is. I want our streams to have fish and different species and be plentiful. But I think that we have to be careful on the other end to not over-regulate.

Upshur 1990 described a situation where individuals, who have both a stake in environmental preservation in their home where they are performing labor and a stake in maintaining a good relationship with their company to ensure economic viability, are caught in between the needs for environmental regulation and company profit. The ways that companies shift blame down from the institutional level to the individual level in the form of job loss could explain individual resentment to environmental regulation in the region. Very directly, individuals laboring in the
region can become economic victims of regulation, as described above. Similarly, Harrison 1983 said:

Yes. It’s hard for me cause like…my husband works in oil and gas and I know that’s a big thing but…I also watch, and his company is all about the land. It’s a big company but they’re also smaller compared to like the really big ones, and they actually, they really put forth a lot of effort to making sure that things are done properly. They have safety engineers on every site and these guys are avid hunters, they’re gardeners, you know. They have farms and they wanna make sure that what they do doesn’t make so much of an imprint that it can’t be used later down the road for our children. And I…I’ve watched him go through a lot of crap from uhm…people that have been picketing. And you know…some companies need that. Some companies need people in their face making sure. I mean…we had coal mines in our history. You know that’s why the WV State Police was formed right? Matewan…Baldwin Phelps. All that.”

Harrison 1983 praises those that protest harmful industry in the area but expressed a need for those involved to differentiate between harmful business and those that are attempting to do business within regulation. She also connected current environmental movements to our history of labor strikes, thus further demonstrating the connection between land and culture. Cabell 1967, my only participant to spend time in her childhood in the Southern Coal Fields, said:

That’s a loaded question. Well a lot of people are upset at like the strip mining and stuff. Okay. Coal has always been one of our most natural, best natural resources. Uh people are upset because they’re saying it’s destroying the land, it’s taking the trees, it’s doing this and that. Everything that they take away, they replenish. So, I really don’t think it’s destroying the land, uhm, as long as they do that. The mines and the places I’ve been…you know you’ll see a mountain top and it’s clear. It’s just like straight with trees on each side. But then as you go back over time, that area starts to grow up. And you know…there’s a lot of mines in a lot of places that you don’t even know is there because of the reclamation.

Cabell 1967 notes that if and when reclamation efforts are maintained and completed, the land can be used again.

**The Decision to Stay**

Out-migration is a problem affecting West Virginia and Central Appalachia. I decided to explore this issue by asking why people choose to stay in the area. Many young people leave the
state for academic and economic opportunity. I wanted women to discuss what went into their
decisions to stay, especially the millennials, but also why they believe others choose to stay.
These perceptions tell us more about the nature of the culture in Appalachia and relationship to
the land. Kanawha 1995 said:

The reason I came back to West Virginia after going away to Wellesley was I saw in
other places that there was a whole lot of hierarchy and not a whole lot of like, working
guns because everything had gotten so big. Whereas here, you can be a big fish in a small
pond and get things done no matter what your age is. But one of the hugest challenges
that you see facing West Virginia of course is a lack of jobs but also a lack of ability to
pay people what they’re worth. For me the work was so important that I chose to come
back for various reasons.

Rather than a lack of opportunity, Kanawha 1995 sees the economy, particularly the non-profit
scene, as a place to stand out where one might be just another employee in a larger city. This
ingenious and resilient way to deal with a depressed economy is part of the culture here for
Kanawha 1995.

Harrison 1983, in discussing whether she thinks her children have a future in the state,
discussed mechanisms of survival rooted in kinship that are described as being part of the
culture. She suggests that part of being able to live here, both historically and presently, is rooted
in both self-sufficiency and interdependence with kin and community. She said:

I hope that he (her son) has a future here. I hope he doesn’t have to move. I hope
everything that we teach him that’s been taught to us from family will give him enough
of a base that whatever he decided to do, he can root himself here and make it work. And
I hope that he will have enough family and friends around him that will help ensure him
that he can do that. And that’s a huge part of it. If you don’t have a support system, even
just an emotional support system, not even financial, if that emotional support is there,
you can do anything in this world. Everyone needs someone to believe in them and tell
you things are gonna be okay.

Harrison 1982 also spoke of her relationship with her family as a reason to stay. She said that is
why she thinks many in the area choose to stay. She said:
I think they choose to stay because their family is here, and I think number one is that their family is here, and they don’t wanna leave the family, leave their parents. And then I think a lot of people just stay because it’s home. It feels like home. They don’t wanna go somewhere different or strange. They’re home.

However, Kanawha 1995, suggests that sometimes, especially for queer/LGBTI Appalachians, family is not a reason to stay, but potentially a reason to leave. She said:

People I’ve talked to, you know the first thing they list is their family. But uhm for queer folks in Appalachia, a lot of the time their families don’t want them anymore. Uhm which is, I’m fortunate that when I came out to my parents they said, ‘Oh okay, yea that’s fine.’ But I’ve had other friends where that wasn’t the case at all. They’ve really had to strike it out on their own.

Some of the women I interviewed did not want to leave the area because they did not desire the fast-paced, modern lifestyle associated with urban life elsewhere. Many of them expressed concern at even living in Huntington, a city with a population less than 50,000.

Randolph 1959 told me of her desire to maintain a laid-back, small-town lifestyle. She said:

We stay because it is West Virginia. It’s not urban. It’s not congested. Uhm. You know, traveling with the girls, Charleston, WV, is where the girl scouts are based so I’ve been there plenty of times. Uh…Ohio, I’ve had the girls in Savannah, you know, I’ve had the girls all over the place. And some just say “well I’m just gonna stay here in Elkins. It’s a nice, small town. Everybody knows everybody. There’s good and bad. But oh my god. I do not want to live in New York. I don’t even want to live in Charleston. Charleston’s too much for me. Too much. Too busy. Too loud. Like I said, I like it here where I can go out on my back porch and hear nothing but the birds and the horses and the cicadas at night. No police sirens, or ambulances, or any of that.

Randolph 1959 described a small, close-knit community where people look out for one another as the main reason for staying in West Virginia and Appalachia. Randolph 1963 discussed how growing up rural makes living in a city difficult on the individual when she said, “Well when you’re born in a rural culture, going to the city is hard. Even for work. City has a fast pace, a lot of crime, a lot of drugs, but of course we’re getting all that now, too. They’re nice to visit, but, I mean, I was raised in a suburb and then moved out here to the middle of nowhere.” Randolph
1933’s reasons for staying were far briefer than any other participant responses. She said, “Well frankly I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.”

**Gendered Expectations**

While coding transcriptions, three themes (women as community leaders, women as economic mediators, and women in the private sphere) converged into a new theme called “gendered expectations.” This new theme better encapsulates the intersections between agrarian land use to support families (part of the traditional mothering role), covert leadership within traditional women’s spaces (Parent Teacher Associations and public works community organizations like Girl Scouts and Lion’s Clubs), and subsequent navigations that take place with husbands in the private sphere in relation to income and family preservation.

**Cultural Tradition or Traditional Capitalism?**

The issues of women’s roles came up in both the literature and the participant interview sessions. As noted in the following subsection, “Perceptions of Outsiders,” many women feel that they are placed within a stereotypical, traditionally feminine role both inwardly in the region and outwardly projected onto the region from the rest of society. I explored this phenomenon through the use of oral historiography methods. Rather than simply asking about the economic situation of each individual, I chose to include questions with elements of oral history methodology to access subjugated and unrecorded knowledge about women and their families’ navigations of our ever-changing economy. By employing this method across the generations that I interviewed, I was able to capture the transition of subsistence agriculture to a wage economy. Nearly every participant I interviewed recognized that within the wage economy, they are often paid less than men or are pushed into “traditionally feminine jobs” such as nursing,
teaching, and secretarial work, that is usually paid less than those “traditionally masculine jobs” that are available. Some of these women, or their female family members, chose to work “men’s jobs” in order to access higher income brackets. Those choices were sometimes met with complications that are still present.

Besides accessing knowledge about formal work, I also wanted to uncover the methods women have used throughout history to take part in an economy that often was not meant for them. Barbara Ellen Smith (1999) suggests using oral history methods to uncover the “side-jobs” women often performed to help supplement their families financially and laboriously. Randolph 1933 discussed the things her mother and grandmother did during The Depression that helped their family survive. She described a time when her father was still working but simply was not being paid by his boss because the money was not there. Her mother, with the help of other female family members and kin in the community, ensured they were all clothed and fed. Randolph 1933 said:

…my mom sewed. She was a really good seamstress. And uhm during the Depression, a lot of times, that was the only money we had. When she was sewing something for somebody and they were paying her a little bit for it. My dad was working but the guy my dad was working for would say, ‘Now Glenn, I can’t pay you this week, but I’ll make it up to you next week.’ Next week never came and there was a long period of time where Daddy never got paid and then the man went into bankruptcy. And he never got paid. I was a baby then and a lot of times Mom’s sewing bought the milk then until we bought a cow and had our own. And just other staples that you absolutely had to have. She always made all the bread. Always. I used to think ‘Oh I’d love to have store-boughten bread for my sandwiches and not homemade bread.’ And then after I grew up it was ‘Oooo I wish I had homemade bread’ (laughs).

Cabell 1940 also remembers her mother taking charge on making sure the family was fed and clothed. Cabell 1940’s father would give her mother an allowance to take care of the children. She would supplement this income with foodstuffs from their farm. When asked if her mother was a leader, she responded:
My mom was a strong lady, but she never did anything in the public, but at home, I mean, if that counts or whatever, she was very good. If it hadn’t been for her… and my dad… but my mom, she canned everything and kept us all fed and clothed, you know? I wouldn’t say she led the house or anything. My dad was a good guy though. But I think he kinda led it.

Harrison 1982 described a similar experience with her grandmother and an allowance for childcare. Her grandmother was a farmer’s wife and would also sell items she made for money to supplement the household. When asked of women leading in her family, she said:

My mom taught school and my grandmother was a homemaker. She was a farmer’s wife. She would sell her stuff on the side. My mom always told me that grandpa would give my grandma a hundred dollars a month to support her children on, in Preston County. So, she would sell eggs and something else. Maybe something else. They grew up on a dairy farm in Preston County. Yea I was always fascinated: a hundred bucks for four kids. Now granted this was the 40s, 50s, 60s. If you had a big garden, which they did, then they had their dairy farm for milk. The house was paid off because they built it. It was a much different way of life 60-70 years ago than it is now. For sure.

Randolph 1959 also had female family members that were active leaders within their families through traditional female roles. When asked of women in her family that have been leaders, she responded:

Well going back to my great grandmother. She was the one that when anyone was sick in our family, she was the one you went to her house to stay. Uhm and that when on down until she died. Everyone went to Mom’s. You called her Mom. But if you didn’t feel good you went up there and layed on the couch. She’d be watching soap operas snappin’ beans. And you layed on the couch with a rag on your head and a bucket by your side and she took care of you. She took care of everybody. And she could handle throwing up and whatever. I mean, my husband, if the cat or dog throws up he’s gaggin’ and runnin’ out the house. He can’t do it! Can’t do it! Now on the other hand, he can handle the horses being cut and stuff. But when my daughter was little and would spit up, he couldn’t do it. But I think the women are still the caregivers. And they just always take care of everything and everyone. Always have been. And I’m not going to say that’s fem… it’s just the way we’re wired. Someone gets cut, we don’t get sick, we’re there. The boys get sick and faint and stuff (laughs).

Randolph 1959 drew attention to a gendered difference in care within her own experience. She acknowledged that women are often the ones that nurture and care for sick family members and that this is a form of strength and leadership. Within her narrative, Randolph 1959 also remarked
on the inability of men to handle sick people and illness itself. Randolph 1959 suggests these differences are related to essentialism when she says, “…it’s just the way we’re wired.” When asked what a fair split of labor is in the home, she suggested the roles are still intact presently when she said:

Women around here probably still pretty much run the house. The husbands go to work, and they make the big paycheck, but the women run the finances, clean the house, take care of the kids, take the dog to the vet. The women do, I’d say probably like 80% of the housework. If not more. It’s still pretty much traditional. Kids get into the housework, too, cause the husband’s like ‘Oh I’ve worked all day, you do it.’ I think men do help more than they did, but around here, there’s no 50/50 split. Now, I’ll take that back. I do sometimes see that but that’s in a family where one works day shift and the other works night shift. That’s a whole different dynamic. So, I won’t say it doesn’t happen but your traditional both going to work at 7 o’clock in the morning and then comin home at 5. He comes home and sits down at the couch and you go fix dinner.

**Expectations of Marriage**

I chose to explore whether or not women across generations still perceive pressure for women to marry for financial stability. Because West Virginia and Central Appalachia are dominated by extractive industries, many of the high-paying jobs in the region are traditional men’s jobs. An article that appeared in The Atlantic in 2014 explored whether staying single to “fight the patriarchy” and maintain independence was a privilege only accessible to women of a higher socioeconomic status. The by-line of that article read, “Higher-income ‘single ladies’ often push back against ‘patriarchy.’ But the statistics don't lie: Low-income, unmarried women face significant economic challenges when they stay single,” (Green, 2014). I chose to explore this as a reason some Appalachian women might not identify with mainstream feminist narratives. When asked if women could survive here (in West Virginia) on their own incomes, Randolph 1933 responded:
A lot of them feel pressured, I’m sure, to be married, because of the income. Because mostly everywhere women aren’t making what a man is in the same job. I know that came up in politics this year, quite a bit. But that still hasn’t been solved and I don’t know that it ever will be because uh, it’s always been a man’s world and I think it will remain that way. They…just won’t accept women as equals. Most of them. Some of them will. But most won’t.

She acknowledges the issue of equal pay as a reason some young women still feel pressured to get married. She also suggests that men refuse to see women as equals. Harrison 1982 suggests, however, that it is difficult for anyone, regardless of gender, to survive on one income. She said:

I think there’s still pressure from society in general for women to get married. It’s like the next step, the next thing that makes you a ‘real adult’. I think women can survive on their own around here, but I think there’s still that pressure. It’s the next thing to do. And I think it’s increasingly difficult in general to survive on one income. Man or woman. It just depends on the job.

Cabell 1967 suggested that women get married for financial dependency which then turns into abuse that keeps them stuck in bad relationships and cycles of dependency. She cites tactics of emotional abuse. She said:

In general, though, I think some can and some can’t. There’s a lot of men out there…and a lot of women I’ve volunteered with have said this, too…there’s a lot of men that think their wives couldn’t survive without them. Some of them have convinced their wives of that. “If I’m not here to take care of you, you will not survive.” I dunno if it’s abuse but it’s dependency. They make them think they could never go off on their own, even if they hate the man, you’re stuck right here, whether I hate him, love him, whatever, I’m stuck here because I can’t survive.

Randolph 1963 shared with me that her first husband had been abusive to her. During the course of the interview, I learned that her abuse was both mental and physical. Sometimes she met him with physical force in return. She said:

You know…with my ex-husband it was sex, sex, sex. With my new husband, he’s comfortable just holding me and talking to me and getting to know me. My ex-husband forced me to have sex with my first child up until the day he was born. And even though the doctor advised me three months beforehand to quit that because it could be harmful to the baby and stuff. It didn’t matter. Cause I was his wife and that’s his right. I mean, I had an operation for cervical cancer. I wasn’t supposed to have sex for however many weeks and within a week he was forcing me. And again, there was a lot of things I found
out about him through the divorce and after the divorce that people came out and told me. Like that…incest on his side of the family and stuff. You know? During her interview, when asked if women were strong in the home, she reached under the couch and removed a metal baseball bat. She then told me:

I used to have a wooden baseball bat called a Louisville Slugger that I don’t have no more cause I used it on him one too many times. So instead of that Louisville Slugger, I moved up to the metal baseball bat. (She pulled out a baseball bat from underneath where she was sitting on the couch). The weight. The strength. They bend and dent, but they still keep working (laughs). And of course, I was avid about guns but…cause I went huntin’ and everything, too. He hurt me though. So…he was…more…mental? Mental abuse? Than physical abuse. Physically he knew I would strike back. West Virginia women hit back. It was common in the old days, but I dunn’ about now. Randolph 1963’s story is interesting within this lens of economic marriage because she used a traditional man’s job to take care of herself after she left her abusive marriage. She became a plant operator for a water company. This job allowed her to access a higher income than other women at the time. Randolph 1963 shared:

Later in life, I became a water plant operator which is a man’s job. I did that for 11 years until I became disabled. But there wasn’t very many women. I was making the same wages as the men were. It’s just that…there wasn’t very many real jobs for a woman if you didn’t go to school and become a nurse or a teacher. Secretaries just don’t get paid well enough. It’s what was there, and it came natural to me to do the other stuff. I mean when you’re raised to work and do like a man, you just do like a man. It’s not men’s work, it’s just work. But I was never feminist or nothing. I’m sorry. But I never got into the makeup and all that. And shoot, I’m glad I didn’t cause my sisters did and they look older than I did. Mines came from hard work and different things.

Perceptions of Outsiders

While coding the responses to the “Perceptions of Outsiders” section of the interview guide, two major themes emerged from the responses: navigating external stereotypes and navigating internal relationships with outsiders who have decided to move to the area and become involved in their new homes. Women in West Virginia expressed difficulty in trying to form their own identities and perceptions of their culture within the external stereotypes placed
on them by outsiders. Others discussed the challenges of community organizing and planning in conjunction with those that have moved to the area and brought their interests, norms, and behaviors with them.

**Navigating External Stereotypes**

Experiences with outsiders were prevalent throughout every participant interaction. Many of the women I interviewed had anecdotal evidence of stigmatization by outsiders. This stigma ranged from assumptions about a lack of education to implications of incest and physical disability. When asked of their opinions of outsiders, many of the women expressed that they did not care much as long as people were not coming to the state to look for stereotypes and prove mainstream narratives of backwardness. Indeed, when asked what she thinks outsiders think of Appalachian folk, Randolph 1959 said:

> We’re just not smart. Not stupid. We just don’t have as much book learning as everyone else. They still think that some of us just go to the 8th grade and then quit school…If they go by what they see on TV, they think WV is backward. Socially, economically, and they think we’re not as smart as everyone else. They think we’re the Clampetts, Jed Clampett, we just don’t have his millions. And uhm, I don’t know. Now uhm, once you get out and talk to people it’s like they say they saw something on TV and you’re like, oh great. They watched that one show. That one thing about Appalachia that was probably actually about Appalachia in the 30s. But that’s okay. That’s fine. Buckwild. Oh that…they should have never showed that. That did more damage to West Virginia’s reputation than anything that’s ever been out there. And then that poor boy died. Goodness.

Randolph 1933 echoed these sentiments when she said:

> We’ve always been known to other states as hillbillies—uhm we go barefoot and chew tobacco, uhm, things like that. It’s not true but some people did way back, so I guess the people that started it had seen us and that’s what they thought we all were like. They don’t see us as educated, I don’t think.

Some of the women I interviewed expressed concern that the media perpetuates harmful stereotypes and narratives about Appalachia and Appalachian people. They were especially worried about the very minimal presence West Virginia has in mainstream media and popular
culture, but when the region or people are presented, they are often depicted in stereotypical ways that cause shame and anger among residents. Upshur 1990 summarized these feelings when she said:

I think that outsiders think down on West Virginia. That our education system isn’t as good as other states. I think that they think that we’re all deadset on coal and I think that I mean the hillbilly and even movies like how pop culture has sometimes portrayed West Virginia. That might be their only experience in making a judgement or a conscious decision about West Virginia, but I think that does change whenever they get to know someone or whenever they visit or whenever they have an experience. I think that people are a lot more open whenever they have more than just what they read on the internet. Whenever they have a personal experience or a direct experience. I think it does change but yea. I don’t think it’s good. And sometimes whenever…they’ll say the people are good and the land is beautiful, but they won’t say what we have to offer is worth their time.

Upshur 1990 pointed out that once individuals from outside the area began to form a relationship with an individual from the area, these stereotypes sometimes decreased. However, she notes at the end that ultimately, the view of the area is still negative regardless if outsiders feel positively about the land or the people.

Several of the women shared stories of stigmatization when they traveled outside of the state. These anecdotes ranged from jokes about their accents to insinuations at incest and physical disability as a result of growing up in the mountains. Cabell 1967 shared an experience of traveling to Indiana in her early twenties for a football game:

I’ll tell you a story. I went to Indiana. Went to Purdue University cause a friend of mine was up there. He invited me and another friend up to see a football game. So, we went up there, walked in the door, every guy in that frat looked down. Every guy in that frat house looked down. We said, “What?” And they said, “…you’re wearing shoes!” Like we never do that when we go outside. Then they made fun of me for how I say “outside.” And every time we opened our mouth, they say this was cute or that was cute. But yea, they were lookin to see if we had shoes on. And if you watch TV, like on that, what was it, the Tonight Show? Did you see that? He said it’s National Cousins Day and uhm in West Virginia that’s…you know he made a joke about us datin our cousins and stuff. The usual you know. Like I’ve never dated my cousin. They always show the stupidest people on TV and when they do a thing that shows WV they always pick the people that make us
look like we’re ignorant. And I think I’ve known a lot of people in West Virginia and there’s ignorant people and intelligent people. Kinda like everywhere else.

Trying to navigate mainstream media portrayals while traveling outside of the state is a skill many in West Virginia have developed. Randolph 1959 has been an active member of Girl Scouts her entire life. Scouting has offered her many opportunities to travel outside of West Virginia with her child and her child’s friends as a Scout Leader. Randolph 1959 shared her experiences:

The bad is when I go out of WV I would get teased about… ‘Oh do you have indoor plumbing?’ Yes, we do. Another one I got one time was, ‘OH you walk like everybody else in W.V.’ And I said, ‘Yea what’s that?’ He said, ‘One leg’s shorter than the other.’ I said, ‘No it’s not.’ He said, ‘Yes, it is.’ It’s from walkin around them hills all the time.’ You know, so I…I have been a girl scout. I’m a lifetime girl scout. So, I have taken my girls to Savannah, GA, to Alabama, we went to space camp. And there was all the time, traveling with the girls, people would say, (exaggerated accent) ‘Oh y’all from West Virginia?’ And just immediately start making fun of the way we talk. And I’d say (exaggerated ‘proper’ English) ‘I’m sorry. Were you speaking to us?’ Because it seems like they assume that if you come from West Virginia, parts of Virginia, and Kentucky, you’re all related to the Clampetts. That we all still eat opossum, which some of us do, but that’s besides the point. They think we’re still back country and that we’re just not smart enough to live. Oh! Another one… ‘Hey in WV, when y’all get divorced, are you still related? Still brother and sister?’ Ugh. ‘Yes. Yes, we are. Thank you for asking.’

Harrison 1982 and Kanawha 1995 think these narrow views of West Virginia and Appalachia actually stem from public ignorance of the region rather than from intentional malice. Rather they acknowledge the ways that mainstream media perpetuate a narrow lens of poverty on the region. Harrison 1982 said:

Many don’t realize it’s a state. I hope they’re joking but they aren’t. I think a lot of people think we’re kinda closed off and backwards and poor. People think we’re poor. Images of the flooding and stuff doesn’t really help things for sure. They never see downtown Morgantown where everything is just fine. They never see downtown Huntington where everything is just fine. They just see pictures of flooding and single-wide trailers floating down creeks and stuff like that. Yea I think they think we’re kinda closed off, backwards, poor, and uneducated. Fat. (laughter) Huntington’s the fattest city. That’s what they put out there. The news is just really negative and sensational. That’s what they want.
Harrison 1982 suggests that these singular narratives of poverty and destruction are what the public expects to see, forcing the media to comply. Her thoughts echo analyses conducted by Elizabeth Catte (2018). Kanawha 1995 offers a perfect summary of this analysis:

I think actually, you know, people that are not from here don’t really think about West Virginia that much and that’s part of the problem. I think if you brought it up, people would say…here’s my textbook thing people would say that would piss me off when talking about West Virginia. I was talking to this person in my stem cell biology class during my last semester at college and I said, “Oh yea you know I really want to make some black bean soup cause I had some this summer at this organic restaurant in Charleston I really liked,” and she said, “There’s an organic restaurant in Charleston? Like how would they support it? They’re all white trash there.” And I just looked at her and she said, “Yea they’re all just white trash and they don’t like organic food,” and I said, “You just called me white trash. And people are not trash.” And she just refused to like see eye to eye with me. So, I think that there’s like a…I think for people who have negative feelings about Appalachia and West Virginia, there is an uhm…assumed level of knowledge that they refuse to have challenged. But I would say that across the board, most people probably don’t think about Appalachia like all the time and if they do it’s more like, “Well a lot of people voted for Trump there,” but I think eventually, that will ebb away, too, into not thinking about us. Again. The usual.

Kanawha 1995 mentioned how difficult it is to change outside perceptions of the area that are already solidified as legitimate interpretations of Appalachia and Appalachian folks. Both Harrison 1982 and Kanawha 1995 allude to issues with legitimacy against preconceived narratives of the area. Stories or experiences that lie outside the stereotypical constructions of Appalachia are not believed. Kanawha 1995 pointed to this when she spoke of her colleague that could not believe an organic restaurant would be successful in West Virginia.

Navigating Internal Outsider Relationships

As migration continues, more and more West Virginians are having to navigate relationships with outsiders that have decided to move to the area and call it home. Several women expressed their successes and difficulties of fostering these new relationships within a stigmatized identity. Harrison 1983 said:
Ha! When I went to school up at WVU I was the only girl on my floor from West Virginia. Everyone else was from Pittsburgh, New York, New Jersey. And I was going to be the atypical, barefoot and pregnant at 19, stereotypical West Virginian. But knew nothing about me. Cause people are judgmental, and people see what they want to see, and people are hateful anymore. A lot of people that don’t know, and I feel like it’s people that don’t know anything about West Virginia, they look at us like we’re uneducated, hill jacks, as one would say. The women, just one job and one job only—barefoot and pregnant. We’re pregnant by our cousins and this one and that one. Always pregnant cause that’s our job is to just stay pregnant.

Upshur 1990 described the difficulty and cultural double-standards she experiences in her own small town. She is a member of a young, progressive group that performs community projects and initiatives. However, she is the only young person who grew up in her town on that committee. Upshur 1990 says:

So, we have (WV Progressive Millennial Group) here and I literally go, and they come up with all of these things that they want to do and hold in our community, but the greatest number of people in the room—they’re not from here. And if I say, ‘Oh I think we should have like a bonfire,’ or we should go visit Indian Camp or something that is kinda more traditional to West Virginia and isn’t a ‘new’ idea brought in, then it seems like I’m the only one in the group with the opinion that that is a good idea. And they outnumber me. But I’m from here. So sometimes I feel a little disadvantaged in the changing culture because the things that I grew up doing are no longer acceptable or fun enough for the people that are moving here. I think that you know women in West Virginia, families in West Virginia have, for a long time, had to be creative about what they do, and kids grew up maybe not with toys but going to the river or the creek or beating on pots and pans like drums that you just had in the kitchen.

Upshur 1990 speaks to the struggles she experiences when trying to adapt to the needs of outsiders who have settled in the region within the context of her own personal identity and way of life. As the only person from her town involved in this group, she is often outnumbered when voting. She also suggests cultural differences in “play” or “fun” activities between herself and outsiders who have settled in the region despite similarities in age and education.

**Feminism and Appalachia**

Because Appalachia was framed as “Trumpland” during the 2016 Election (Catte 2018) and 53% of white women voted for Trump (Golshan, 2017) I wanted to ask specifically about
feminism. As a person that grew up in Appalachia around women that I have always viewed as strong, especially in the face of struggle, I could never understand the climate against feminism in the region. Primarily, I wanted to ask this question in order to see if women in West Virginia saw themselves as feminists in order to gauge their perception of the movement. Like the question about protecting land, this question received a host of reactions. I asked this question last so as not to inject potential bias against or for ‘feminism’ in my interviews.

Self-identification as a feminist was diverse. Some women did not identify with the label, some used the label, and others identified with the label but chose not to use it in order to maintain their position within their communities and families. Upshur 1990 said:

No, because I think that it automatically closes off people to being able to hear what I have to say. So, I choose not to use the label because I want people to be open to mine and other ideas. People around here wouldn’t listen to me. I don’t think the community as whole thinks feminism is bad. It’s just individuals but it affects everybody so even if it affects one person, I hear about it.

For Upshur 1990, who sits on several boards and is very active within her community, the label of “feminist” itself is the problem. She described the friction that is created with use of the label within the community. However, Kanawha 1995, another younger Millennial from my sample, said:

I would say yes, I identify as a feminist, but I wouldn’t identify necessarily as maybe a mainline feminist. I guess like if I was being more specific I would say like my views fall more towards womanism which is far more inclusive of women of color and trans women, but I also like, I don’t believe in this kind of incremental change route. I believe in prison abolition. I believe in radical legalization of abortion. I think you can’t pussyfoot around the issue. You just kind of have to say what it is and fix it.

This woman does identify as a feminist but specifically states that “mainline” or mainstream feminism is not the movement she would place herself within. Rather she prefers a more inclusive version of womanism that is inclusive of women of color and trans women. Harrison 1982 preferred a feminism that was more aligned with liberal feminist narratives. She believes in
a feminism that helps create economic opportunity for women in order to bring about equality.

She, however, associated feminism with “radical” demonstrations from decades past. She said:

Hmm (laughs). I know. I suppose yes. In so far as the definition of that to me is someone who believes that women can have equal rights and responsibilities to men. They should have the same pay and so on and so for. Am I like...gonna go demonstrate and burn things over it? No. So yea sort of I guess.

Similarly, Cabell 1967 said:

In some ways, yes, in a lot of ways, no. I do believe that I am strong enough to take of my life, my family, whatever needs to be taken care of. I do still like certain things that the man’s role in life is. I don’t mind it. I don’t know a whole lot about feminism. But I don’t mind my husband being polite and a gentleman. But basically, I think that women are strong enough to do whatever they want to as long as they don’t get into a relationship that brings them down and make them think that they are not able to do it. I think that’s really common around here. I think it’s a country thing. Like a rural thing. There’s even a difference between Huntington and where I live now out in Lesage. And uhm, I like living where I live now, but yea there’s just a difference.

Cabell 1967 has a perception of feminism rooted in individual strength and the ability to take care of one’s self and family, but also a woman that sometimes fulfills traditionally male roles. She worried that feminism results in a loss of chivalry (opening doors, general politeness), but also notes that men are the biggest hindrance to women’s independence in the area. She perceives this as a rural problem associated with men, women, and relationships within the region.

Not all women had benign reactions to feminism. One woman saw the movement as women striving for a status above men. Randolph 1963 said:

No because I believe in equal opportunity. If a woman can do a man’s job, then she should be able to do it and the same for a man. So be it. You see a lot of male nurses and stuff now. I don’t believe in that. Men and women are equal, we both put our pants on the same way, one leg at a time.

For her, feminism was perceived as reaching beyond equality. Despite falling in line with most mainstream feminist narratives surrounding equal pay and gendered differences in labor,
Randolph 1963’s perception of feminism was one of women reaching to be above men, rather than equal to them. Similarly, Randolph 1959 said:

No *(laughs)*. Well, I think sometimes feminist has become almost a bad thing because yes, equal rights is a good thing, but leave it alone. Don’t just jump on somebody and be like “Well women should be allowed to do everything men do!” Uhm, no they shouldn’t. They can’t. Some of it’s physical. Some of it’s mental. And you know, I don’t think you should be limited to what you do or how you do it by your gender. Period. If you’re good at football, go play football. Now I wouldn’t want a woman on a male football team—she’d get the crap beat out of her And not on purpose—just because of the way she’s built and the way they’re built. You know. Now if you have an all-girl football team, go for it. Uhm, but I think sometimes feminist gets dragged in the ground because someone gets on a soap box and you’re just like, “Aw come on. Leave it alone.” Just never mind. I can open my own doors, but if you want to open them for me, that’s fine. I don’t think I should be granted privileges because I’m female. At the same time, guys shouldn’t automatically get to do stuff just cause he’s a guy. It happens. But it’s the way it is. Change it if you can, deal with it otherwise.

For her, issues regarding feminism, equal pay, and gendered labor were more founded in essentialism, or the idea that men and women are biologically different, and differences between gender are due to that biological difference. Cabell 1940 held a similar opinion to Randolph 1959. She believed that there are simply some jobs that are too physical or too dangerous for women to do; however, she did agree that women should be paid equally for equal work. When asked if she identified as a feminist, she said:

*(laughs)* I’m not a feminist. I’m really not. I believe women should have their say but I’m not and never was. Because I don’t…I think to a certain extent, it’s good but when you, when the women…for instance, down at Steel WV, you know those jobs are really really hard. And I don’t think…I really don’t think a woman should be in there working because it’s too hard on her to do that. That’s why I’m…that’s what I’m saying. But I also know it’s good for women to have their say. But with something like that, I think…I think there’s jobs that should just be men’s work and then there’s jobs that should just be women’s work. Women should have work that maybe men don’t do or can’t do. But I think they should be paid equally. If you’re doing a job, you should be paid equally.

Like most other places, responses to this question and positions of self on the spectrum of feminist varied amongst the individual Appalachian women I interviewed.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

APPALACHIAN CULTURE

Appalachian culture, as defined by the women I interviewed, is centered around kinship and communal reciprocity over modern notions of individuality outside of family and community ties. The women I interviewed described experiences of struggle, both individual and systemically, and the resilience to keep going, as a major part of the culture. Appalachia is an external definition placed on the region and its people from outside (Catte, 2018), and that was especially apparent in the responses about relationships with outsiders.

Harrison 1982 told me that West Virginia is multicultural and that the culture of the people is primarily determined by their geography and secondarily by the economies of the area. A more nuanced understanding of subcultural regions of the area is needed within the literature to better understand both the people of Appalachia and the social issues within the region. By partaking in a more in-depth cultural examination of the area, those seeking to cause social change would be better equipped to help local communities work towards their own goals of social equality by understanding the histories and norms of particular regions in the area. In conclusion, culture in Appalachia is not perceived to be homogenous by those living there.

Connections with The Land

Every woman I interviewed and much of the literature described a relationship with the land that was potentially different from other places in the country. Some women described this relationship as traditional or cultural while others spoke of a spiritual connection to the mountains and land. Indeed, Upshur 1990 specifically said the land and the area are the primary roots of her identity. Connections with the land transcended several thematic sections of my interview guide and was a potent part of the entire process. Shared history with knowledge of
specific geographic locations was not only important to me as a researcher attempting to develop rapport with my participants, but that shared history also informed many of the women’s identity formations through their lives across generations.

With this deep connection in mind and the collective history of extractive industry in the area, it was important to gauge opinions on land use and land regulation. I found that opinions regarding land use were complex and diverse. However, every woman I interviewed stated that some regulations were needed to protect the land from destruction. Bell (2013) found similar results in her study and attributed this to an ecological feminism that ties women to nurturing roles which value land and family preservation. The main cause of differing opinions on land regulation was primarily based on whether or not the woman’s husband or other male family members worked in extractive industries. Those women who were financially dependent on men working in extractive industries agreed there should be regulations on land use and destruction, but worried about the extent to which those regulations would cause economic hardship within their families.

**Gender, Strength, and Feminism**

With this study, I suggest that traditional gender roles in West Virginia and Central Appalachia are the result of both culture and extractive industrial monoeconomies that preference the labor of men over the labor of women. Women in West Virginia historically and currently resist many traditional roles of womanhood by performing “traditionally masculine jobs” or work in order to help their families survive. For some of the women I interviewed, this meant taking a job in a “traditionally masculine field” of work. For others, it meant taking part in farm and subsistence agricultural labor alongside the men of their families.
Women have used their traditional roles within the home to help enhance their family incomes both currently and historically (Smith, 1999). Some of my respondents spoke of their mothers and grandmothers sewing, canning, churning butter, or doing housework to help bring money into their homes and supplement the incomes of their husbands. Because much of these activities take place outside of the traditional market economy, these efforts were not recorded in the historiography (Smith, 1999), thus limiting the narratives of economic strength and resilience of traditional Appalachian women. This omission is a disservice to the countless women in the region who perform labor that is both ignored and undervalued and contributes to the idea that women in Appalachia are complacent within traditional roles. Rather, they have been and are deviating from those roles to help their families regularly.

Women in this study had mixed feelings about ‘feminism.’ All of my participants spoke of liberal feminist notions of equal pay for equal work. To them, this was not necessarily feminism but general empowerment to women by creating personal financial autonomy. If women had access to jobs that paid well (outside of extractive industries dominated by men), negotiations about marriage and household labor with husbands would be on more equal ground. West Virginia women are still performing the overwhelming majority of household labor in their homes regardless of generation and despite that many within my sample view a 50/50 split as more equitable. The primary reason for this inequality is because of the income difference of men and women. Despite working equal hours, women’s labor is valued less and therefore they either feel obligated or they are expected to perform more household labor to mediate that discrepancy in incomes.

Many of the women expressed strength within womanhood. Women are not only primarily responsible for ensuring a smooth functioning home for their families, but they are also
charged with rearing the next generation. Some of the women I interviewed expressed essentialist narratives that women are better suited or more capable of nurturing their families and children. Others expressed that women just notice these things need to be done so they do them, regardless of gender. They find identity and personal strength in this narrative that helps them navigate the roadblocks within traditional gender roles. Mainstream feminist narratives are perceived to reject notions of this strength within tradition and illicit strong, negative reactions from the community, thus negating Appalachian women from identifying as feminists.

**Implications of the Study**

This study adds not only to existing research about West Virginia and the Central Appalachian region but also to feminist discourses of women and gender studies. The work is timely and adds nuance to mainstream narratives of “Trump Land” that includes diverse views from women living in the region. By allowing women to define the region on their own terms, we avoid external “culture of poverty” (Lewis, 1998) narratives previously used to assess the region. This qualitative study allows women in the region to define their own perceptions of strength within these narratives of poverty and economic dysfunction while maintaining a focus on individual lived experiences instead of statistical outcomes from the area.

Methodologically, this study demonstrates the importance and necessity of insider-driven research on marginalized populations in order to provide a more nuanced and complete understanding of those populations of interest. Because I am a West Virginian born, raised, and educated entirely within the state of West Virginia, I was able to develop rapport quickly with my participants. I understood most of the argot as well as geographic landmarks used in respondent descriptions, which aided my endeavor to diminish any participant-researcher barrier and establish rapport based on a shared identity and knowledge of place. I am in no way
essentializing insider-situated research, but instead suggesting that it work in tandem with outsider-situated research in order to discover a more complete story of a particular region and people. Insider-driven research centers internal perceptions rather than forcing those perceptions to fit within an external framework. This type of research is crucial both to progressive solutions to social problems and issues with inclusivity in large social change-oriented movements.

Theoretically, this study suggests the need for a praxis of feminism that better incorporates the experiences of women in marginalized geographic locations and economies forcing traditional dependency on male incomes. In the wake of the 2016 Election, those interested in incorporating Appalachian women into progressive social change movements need to expand their measures of inclusivity to reach populations of rural, white women. These new narratives should exalt current models of female leadership in these areas, such as local church groups, children’s groups, and community advancement projects, and seek to expand women’s leadership in roles that women have carved out for themselves alone.

Limitations

Working with marginalized populations sometimes comes with limitations. While conducting this research, I experienced three major limitations. The first was access. West Virginians are untrusting and suspicious of outsiders (Bell, 2013; Daugneau, 1981; Denham, 2016; Fisher, 1977). Though I am a West Virginia native, my education coupled with my childhood in the eastern panhandle other me within my home population. Despite years of being taught to change my twang and local colloquialisms, I found that my ability to code-switch to my native Appalachian tongue helped alleviate the otherness created by different aspects of my background.
Secondly, I encountered much difficulty trying to recruit respondents, even with the use of a key informant. Many of the women approached for this study would respond to me or my informant that they personally did not think their lives were “interesting enough” or that they themselves were “strong enough.” Rather, many women suggest I talk to a friend or family member of theirs that they thought better fit my research. My informant and I had to explain to many women that we were looking for “normal” women, not “extraordinary” women to interview. Most interviewees were extremely hesitant at the beginning of the interview because of this lack of confidence in their own strength and stories; however, by the end of the interviews, every woman expressed surprise at her own strength. Some told me it was cathartic to tell their stories and stories of the women in their families.

Lastly, a combination of geography, time, and financial support provided limitations to the depth of study. West Virginia is quite a large state: my childhood home is a six-hour drive from my current home. I grew up in the most eastern part of the state and now live in the most western part. The terrain is mountainous and in certain areas, it can take a person an hour to drive ten miles because of mountain roads. With funding, it would have been possible to do more interviews across the state and solicit participants at local fairs and festivals (for example), rather than using a key informant to establish rapport.

**Directions for Future Research**

There are two primary directions I would like to take this research in the future. First, a more comprehensive, regional approach to finding participants to interview based on the West Virginia Division of Culture and History’s (WVDCH) regional and economic zones in West Virginia in order to facilitate a comparative analysis of perceptions across these defined regions of supposed similarity. WVDCH defines four different regional zones and five different
economic zones. In the future, I plan to split my work into two studies utilizing those zoned regions. Analyzing culture and ties to the land across the four regions could provide comparative insight not garnered in this study. Interviews centered around economics and the persistence of gender roles could be compared across the five different economic regions within the state to provide a more complete analysis of similarities and differences.

Secondly, a similar study examining culture, ties to the land, and gender roles should be completed with men in the region. During my research, local men volunteered for interviews frequently. Some wanted to have the opportunities to discuss the strong women in their lives (mothers and grandmothers) while others wanted to provide a man’s perspective on the topics I was looking at. A study on West Virginia men would be timely, especially as JD Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy* (2016), which relies heavily on a “culture of poverty” (Lewis, 1998) narrative, has come to define men in the region as a *New York Times* bestseller.

**Conclusion**

Through this study, I did not seek to prove the existence of an Appalachian subculture nor did I seek to define the parameters of that culture. Rather, the purpose of including cultural questions was to access West Virginia women’s perceptions of their culture in their own words. Whether there is an Appalachian subculture as defined by sociological and anthropological standards is irrelevant if those living in the region perceive they are part of a distinct culture that has implications to their identity and acceptance throughout society. Regardless of the actual presence of a subculture, all the women I spoke to shared experiences of strength and belonging within the culture and stigmatization and stratification because of their culture. This perception is important because it defines not only each woman’s identity, but also her relationships with others and greater society.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A - IRB LETTER

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755

July 17, 2017

Kristi Fondren, PhD
Sociology and Anthropology Department

RE: IRBNet ID# 1101820-1
At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Fondren:

Protocol Title: [1101820-1] Appalachian Womanhood: Strength in Our Own Voices
Expiration Date: July 17, 2018
Site Location: MU
Submission Type: New Project APPROVED
Review Type: Exempt Review

In accordance with 45CFR46.101(b)(2), the above study and informed consent were granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire July 17, 2018. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

This study is for student Danielle Mullins.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Bruce Day, ThD, CIP at 304-696-4303 or day50@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.
Interview Guide

1. Women as Maintainers of Culture
   - Do you think Appalachia has a distinct culture?
   - What does Appalachian culture look like? What do you think makes it unique from other cultures? What have others told you about this?
   - Who taught you these things?
   - Do men and women pass culture on differently? How so? Who do you think is more responsible for ensuring culture is passed down?

2. Women and their Ties to the Land
   - Do you think Appalachians have a tie to the land?
   - What does the land mean to you?
   - Is the land tied to Appalachian culture?
   - How so?
   - Why do you think people choose to stay here?
   - Do you think your children have a future here?
   - Should we do more to protect the land from destruction?
   - Do you think women are more tied to the land than men? Why? How so?

3. Women and their Relationship with Outsiders
   - What do you think people who aren’t from here think about this place? What do you think they think about the people?
   - How do you feel about tourists? Other outsiders in general?
   - Do you think tourism is helpful or harmful? What have other people told you about this?

4. Women as Community Leaders
   - Do you think Appalachian women are leaders in their communities? How so?
   - Have you ever personally taken on leadership roles? Do you know women in your family who have?
   - How did other people feel about you or your relative doing that?
   - What have others said to you about women leading in the community?

5. Women as Economic Mediators
   - Do you work at a job or do something else to bring money into your household?
   - Do you think women around here can survive on their own incomes? What have others told you about this?
   - How do you feel about asking for help from friends or family? What about governmental social service programs such as SNAP or WIC?
   - What about your mom and grandmothers? Did they make money? How?

6. Women in the Private Sphere
   - How do you split up the chores at home? Does your husband (or wife) do outside tasks while you maintain the inside of the home? Do your children help? Do your boys and girls do different chores?
   - How do you get your husband (or wife) to do chores or tasks he doesn’t want to do? What have others told you about this?
   - Do you and your husband ever bicker or fuss? Has it ever gotten worse than that?
• How do you think women are strong in the home?
  i. What does that mean to you?
  ii. Can you think of any examples with your female family members going through this?
• What do you think is a fair division of household and family obligations between husbands and wives?
• Did your family help with raising the children?
  i. Which family members helped most?

Other Information:

  1. Year of birth
  2. Education level
  3. Current occupation
  4. County of birth, county of residence
  5. Are you registered to vote? Which party are you registered with?
  6. Do you personally identify as a feminist? Why or why not?
Danielle Renee Mullins
629 Shaw Street, Barboursville, WV 25504 • 304.582.3446 • mullins350@marshall.edu

Education

Master of Arts (in progress) • Marshall University • August 2016 – May 2018
GPA: 4.0
Graduate Certificate in Women’s Studies
Thesis: Weathered Mountains: A Qualitative Study of West Virginia Women and their Perceptions of Strength, Land, and Womanhood
This is a qualitative study consisting of interviews with West Virginia Women across three generations. Themes exploring home life, perceptions of outsiders, domestic violence, land use, strength, and resilience are demonstrated through in-depth interviews with women from six different counties across West Virginia. Relationships to feminism and perceptions of feminism are also explored and discussed. This study seeks to provide groundwork for future research of an under-studied population.

Bachelor of Arts • West Virginia Wesleyan College • August 2008 – May 2012
GPA: 3.4; Major coursework: 3.7
Majors: Sociology, International Studies
Minors: Gender Studies, History, Political Science
Bonner Scholar & AmeriCorps Volunteer: completed over 3000 hours of community service
Capstone projects: survey study analyzing rape culture on campus; paper examining the history of genocide and current weaknesses to preventing genocide; paper examining the relationship between fraternity culture and rape culture on college campuses

Teaching Experience

Spring 2018 Instructor of Record for Introduction to Sociology, 25 students
Fall 2017 Instructor of Record for Introduction to Sociology, 30 students
Spring 2017 Solo instructed Introduction to Sociology, 20 students
Fall 2016 Co-taught two introductory sociology courses with an assistant professor, 45 students

Academic Conferences

Penn State • October 2017 • State College, PA
Penn State Rural Sociology’s 5th Annual Rural Studies Graduate Conference
Panel Presentation: “Appalachian Womanhood: Strength in Our Own Voices”

Marshall University • April 2016 • Huntington, WV
Women & Gender in the Social and Natural Worlds: Rural Perspectives (bi-annual)
Panel Presentation: “Rural Feminism: Appalachian Women and their Place within Mainstream Feminist Discourses”

*North Central Sociological Association • March 2016 • Indianapolis, IN*
NCSA Annual Conference
Panel Presentation: “The Production and Commodification of the Maasai Warrior”

*West Virginia Wesleyan College • 2012 • Buckhannon, WV*
Mid-Atlantic Research Conference (annual)
Panel Presentation: “The Production and Commodification of the Maasai Warrior”

*University of Richmond • 2011 • Richmond, VA*
Annual Undergraduate Gender Studies Conference
Masculinities Round Table: “What it Means to be a Man: Focus on South Africa”

**Selected Awards and Honors**

2017    Outstanding Teaching Assistant (Sociology)
        Marshall University

2017    Steve Winn Memorial Scholarship for Social Stratification Recipient
        Marshall University

2017    Alpha Kappa Delta Sociological Honor Society Induction

2012    Best International Studies Senior
        West Virginia Wesleyan College

2012    Campus Leadership and Service Award
        West Virginia Wesleyan College

2012    Rao Global Awareness Award (Sociology)
        West Virginia Wesleyan College

2012    2nd Place Paper—Mid-Atlantic Research Conference
        West Virginia Wesleyan College

2011    Maxine Bruhn’s Scholarship for International Study ($5,000)
        West Virginia Wesleyan College

2011    Campus Compact Newman Civic Fellow
        National Award—on behalf of WVWC

2008    Bonner Community Service Scholarship Program
        West Virginia Wesleyan College

**Guest Lectures**

*Marshall University • April 2018 • Huntington, WV*
Panelist: How does Rape Culture relate to sexual assault and what can we do about it on college campuses?

*Marshall University • November 2017 • Huntington, WV*
Guest lecture: Gender & Sexuality two-day discussion with an Introduction to Sociology section
West Virginia Wesleyan College • March 2016 • Buckhannon, WV
Healthy Masculinities Panelist, 3-person panel, as part of the school’s annual Healthy Men’s Week

International Experience

2011  Study Abroad • Nairobi, Kenya • United States International University
• Studied regionalism, African politics, gender in an African context, African philosophy, and international response to crises in Africa for a summer semester (May-August)

2010  European Model United Nations • Maastricht, the Netherlands • Maastricht University
• Developed a resolution on a mock Human Rights Commission with 44 other students representing 20 countries across the world
• Experienced first-hand challenges and rewards presented by collaboration in a multicultural setting
• Gained multicultural awareness from over 400 different people from 50 countries in a professional setting

2009  Belize May Term • Cockscomb Reserve, Belize • Belize Foundation for Research & Environmental Education (BFREE)
• Worked with 100 multicultural Belizean elementary students for 1 week on the importance of basic hygiene during the Swine Flu outbreak

Service and Leadership Experience

August 2016-present

Marshall University • Huntington, WV
1. Graduate Teaching Assistant
   • Introduction to Sociology (SOC200), four semesters
   • Offered a teaching position during my first semester of graduate study
   • Taught from a writing-intensive pedagogy that also included a multicultural and critical thinking focus (to fulfill core graduation requirements for students)

2. Service
   The SOCiety: as a graduate member of the sociology club, I helped organize Naloxone (Narcan) trainings each semester (100 participants per semester). I also led a panel discussion featuring the women highlighted in the Netflix short film Heroin(e) (200 attendees, at capacity). With the help of the local health department, I facilitated a discussion around the intersection of Hepatitis C with the opioid epidemic. The SOCiety also established a Little Free Library in the Huntington community.

3. Interactive Pedagogies
   In collaboration with my major professor, Dr. Kristi Fondren, we completed an interactive human trafficking student program. This program was student-led as part of the service learning curriculum. Approximately 50 students participated while 20 students were integral to the planning and execution of the event. I acted as an advisor.
August 2012-March 2013

**WV FREE (WV’s only reproductive justice advocacy non-profit)  Charleston, WV**

Field Organizer  
• Collaborated with diverse stakeholders, such as non-profits, community members, church leaders, public school teachers, college students and faculty, community leaders and members, and local businesses, from across the state to advance women’s reproductive rights and education  
• Distributed over 3,000 reproductive health materials across many demographics of West Virginia  
• Worked with college and high school student groups on values clarification exercises, discussions on how to discuss tough issues and controversial topics, and how to advocate in their communities and at the legislature  
• Worked on the ground through canvassing and phone banking to increase awareness and outreach outcomes

August 2011-May 2012

**Center for Community Engagement, WV Wesleyan College  Buckhannon, WV**

**WE LEAD Social Justice Issue Team Leader**  
• Led a core group of 15 peers to host 10 events on campus during the year, educating more than 900 students on social justice issues including war, poverty, and education  
• Researched and created lesson plans to educate peers weekly on multi-faceted and complex social issues and their interconnectedness, including the complexities of aid, conflict in central Africa & the Middle East, gender issues, food security, trade, income inequality, education, and human rights abuses  
• Conducted meetings, managed conflict, and led the group to establish shared goals and values  
• Wrote and submitted progress reports and post-event reports on behalf of the issue team

August 2010-May 2011

**Center for Community Engagement, WV Wesleyan College  Buckhannon, WV**

**WE LEAD Coordinator**  
• Led a group of 20 peers leading multiple “issue teams” to raise awareness and support for the environment, children & youth, social justice, Appalachian culture, and annual service events  
• Wrote group mission statement, bylaws, and vision statement with input and support from all group members  
• Conducted meetings and presented a workshop on conflict management and resolution  
• Represented WE LEAD through verbal and written communication to diverse campus audiences, including students, faculty, staff, and campus administrators

June-August 2010

**Center for Community Engagement, WV Wesleyan College  Buckhannon, WV**

**Bonner Scholar Summer Intern**  
• Planned fall orientations for new scholars by coordinating logistics, creating agendas, and mailing all materials  
• Tracked and validated all service hours for 30 students volunteering in multiple communities during the summer
August-December 2010, 2011  
**West Virginia Wesleyan College**  
Buckhannon, WV  
First Year Seminar Student Leader  
- Mentored and provided academic support to over 30 freshmen during their first semesters of college through *Introduction to Global Issues* and *Sustainability* courses  
- Led class discussions in an undergraduate teaching assistant capacity for both courses  

November 2008, 2009, 2010  
**Center for Community Engagement, WV Wesleyan College**  
Buckhannon, WV  
Ten Thousand Villages Student Organizer  
- Initiated and led an on-campus Ten Thousand Villages satellite sale over a three-year period, selling over $30,000 in fair trade merchandise by communicating with store representatives and advertising the sale  
- Recruited, trained, and organized over 40 student volunteers each year to assist in the store  
- Educated volunteers & patrons about fair trade standards and its impact on individuals, communities, and local economies around the world  

June 2009-May 2010  
**Main Street Arts Cooperative**  
Buckhannon, WV  
Board Member, Volunteer Coordinator, & PR/Marketing Intern  
- Served on the Board of Directors in the organization’s formative stages by stimulating and invigorating local interest in the arts, advocating for local artists, and confirming the importance of creativity in the community  
- Recruited, trained, and managed eight student volunteers to support the daily operations and programming of the organization  
- Managed sales, schedules, and $70,000 worth of inventory  
- Created and developed a social media presence for the organization on Facebook, Twitter, and Ping  
- Trained 8 adults over 65 years of age to use the cash register, website, and social media tools  

September 2008-April 2009  
**Valley Green Housing Development**  
Buckhannon, WV  
Bonner Scholar Site Placement: Afterschool Tutor & Mentor  
- Tutored and mentored 12 children for 10 hours per week in a low-income, government-assisted living facility by offering homework help, remedial instruction, and developmentally-appropriate activities  
- Learned how to serve children with a variety of academic and behavioral challenges with dysfunctional family backgrounds (i.e. single-parent teen mothers, drug-addicted parents and siblings, incarcerated parents)