Constituting Women’s Experiences in Appalachian Ohio: A Life History Project

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Rebecca Mercado Thornton
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This dissertation titled
Constituting Women’s Experiences in Appalachian Ohio: A Life History Project

by
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ABSTRACT

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Drawing from the critical works of Edward Said and the narrative perspective of Mikhail Bakhtin, I explored how women, native to Appalachian Ohio, narrated their lived experiences across different moments in their life course. Their interview discourses, juxtaposed with my ethnographic field notes, provided me with rich accounts of lives lived in a space that has been historically, economically, socially, and politically encroached upon by the now diminished coal mining industry in the region. I found that many of my co-participants’ lives share an intricate relationship with the local economy. Specifically, I discussed conceptual information that contributes to our understanding of home, identity, and the body. I provided an exploration of self-stories of women in this Appalachian Ohio context to show how larger political, social, and economic shifts infringe upon our everyday lives.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Devika Chawla
Associate Professor of Communication Studies
Para mi familia, por todo lo que hizo por mí.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I: Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subverting the Speaking Subject</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motown Magic and/in Haunted Hollers: From one Othered America to Another</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Departing from Motown Magic, Arriving to Haunted Hollers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A History of Othering, My Old Urban “Home”—Detroit</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost “Homes”</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching “Home”</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A History of Othering My New Rural Home—Appalachian Ohio</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arriving “Home”: Between and/in Amongst</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter II: The Construction of the Appalachian “Other”</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Representations of Appalachia</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Set in Appalachia</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular literature</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Films Set in Appalachia</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Appalachian Ohio</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reterritorializing the Appalachian “Other”</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III: Narrative Perspective and Life History Interviewing</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Stories</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Individual in Society</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representing An “Other”</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV: A Feminist (Un)Methodical Approach</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Sensibilities</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystallizing Methodologies</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autoethnography</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter V: Becoming and Unbecoming “Appalachian”: Disgust, Ambivalence, and Pride .......................................................... 82
  Disgust .......................................................................................................................... 84
    I’m not Appalachian! ................................................................................................ 85
    “Only Down in West Vrrrrgina” ............................................................................... 90
  Small-mindedness ................................................................................................... 101
  Ambivalence ............................................................................................................... 105
  Pride ............................................................................................................................ 126
    A Rootedness to the Land ....................................................................................... 138
  Becoming and Unbecoming........................................................................................ 147

Chapter VI: Between the River and the Railroad Tracks: Speaking Marginal Bodies to Central Spaces in Appalachian Ohio ............................................................. 149
  Part I: One Body, Two Gender Performances ............................................................ 152
    First Encounters, Prefacing the Presenting Body .................................................... 152
    Intersecting Identities: The Trans/Black Body ....................................................... 157
    Colliding the (Pre)formed with the (Per)formed .................................................... 160
    My Cisgender Privileged Position/Obscuring Trans Understanding ...................... 166
  Politics of Language ............................................................................................... 169
    Other in an Other Space .......................................................................................... 176
  Part II: The (un)becoming (dis)able body ................................................................... 177
    Positioning Subject/Object, Object/Subject ............................................................. 179
    Performing (dis)ability ............................................................................................ 183
    Seeing and Being (Dis)Abled ................................................................................. 191
    Lived Realities of Representing (Dis)Abled Bodies .............................................. 196
  Part III: Queering the Queer Body .............................................................................. 200
    A Strange Body in Strange Land .......................................................................... 202
    Queering the Queer ................................................................................................. 210
    Making the Queer, Pregnant .................................................................................. 216
Queering the Status Quo ................................................................................................. 220
Moving Marginal Bodies to Central Spaces ................................................................. 221
Chapter VII: Speaking an Elderly Body into a Visible Space: Defining Moments ...... 224
The Elderly Body ........................................................................................................... 226
Elderly Subject Positioning in “Zones of Social Abandonment” ............................... 227
First Encounters. ........................................................................................................... 227
“You’re the only one who hasn’t forgotten about me” .............................................. 238
Institutionalized Abandonment .............................................................................. 243
Institutionalized “Help” ............................................................................................. 247
Final Thoughts on Elderly Bodies .............................................................................. 252
Chapter VIII: Concluding the (Un)Constituting of Appalachian Women’s Lives ...... 256
Conceptual Contributions ............................................................................................ 257
Being at Home .............................................................................................................. 258
Unbecoming and Becoming “Appalachian” ............................................................. 260
Marginal Bodies .......................................................................................................... 262
Researcher Tension One: Feminist Critique Vs. Other Understanding ...................... 265
The Feminist Struggle: Critique and/or Appreciate .................................................. 268
Researcher Tension Two: Other Understanding vs. Self Projection Understandings 271
(Mis)recognition of Self and Other .......................................................................... 273
Ending Thoughts ......................................................................................................... 276
References ..................................................................................................................... 278
Appendix A: OU Baker Center opens its doors to Trimble 'girl power' ....................... 295
Appendix B: Demographic Sheet ............................................................................... 298
Appendix C: Interview Protocol ................................................................................. 299
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>General Motor Building in Detroit</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>A View Down Woodward Avenue in Detroit</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>The Cross Streets of My Rural “Other” Home</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Girl Power, Formal Dinner Night</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Girl Power Empowerment Workshop</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Wall Display in Amesville about the Underground Railroad</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Kasler’s Country Kitchen in Amesville, Outside</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Kasler’s Country Kitchen in Amesville, Inside</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Girl Power Empowerment Workshop</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>Arriving and Departing Counties</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>Black Face Antiques, The Plains, OH</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>Me with Girl Power Mentees, Fall 2010</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13</td>
<td>The Ohio River, Middleport, OH</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14</td>
<td>Poem from April, Co-participant</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15</td>
<td>Woodbridge that Betty Paints in Shade, Ohio</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16</td>
<td>Betty’s Horses in Shade, Ohio</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17</td>
<td>Article from The Athens News about Maddie</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 18</td>
<td>Article from The Athens News about Maddie, Continued</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 19</td>
<td>Joan in the Summer of 2010</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 20</td>
<td>Joan, Amanda, and I at a Senior Friends Event</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 21</td>
<td>Services Provided, a List of Numbers</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 22</td>
<td>Joan and I at a Senior Friends Event</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 23</td>
<td>Mural in Middleport, Ohio</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The verdant Appalachian region extends from as far south as Mississippi and as far north as New York. Nestled in this region among the rolling Appalachian hills is my new home: Ohio University. Since I have moved to Athens in 2008, and because I have been an advocate for survivors of sexual violence for eight years now, I have encountered many survivor stories in Appalachia. People often make sense of those violent narratives by excusing the behavior. “Well, that’s just Appalachia,” they might say. Addressing this phrase was at the heart of what began this project. What are the everyday experiences of women that influence them to believe the mediated stereotype that Appalachian culture may be more tolerant of violence? Or more panoramically, what are some of the lived experiences of women in the Appalachian Region?

I engaged with 20 women using life history interviewing with those whose families have lived in Appalachian Ohio for at least two generations. I also completed four years of fieldwork, living and being present with many of my co-participants. I was most interested in how women narrated their life experiences and how those narrations reflected or rejected the monolithic, and dangerously ubiquitous, stereotypical images of Appalachian women. I asked my co-participants questions across life domains such as childhood, schooling, marriage, tragedy, and triumph, but most paramount, the mundane. The three broad research questions that drove this study were: 1. How do women in Appalachian Ohio narrate their life experiences across biographical time? 2. What are the self-stories that women tell about their individual identity that situate them into the larger
3. Through a reflexive analysis, what do my co-participants’ narratives teach me about being a woman in Appalachia?

Through these investigations, I learned a myriad of things. The concepts I learned most closely were about home, identity, the body, and culture, which is explored deeply in the following chapters. This constituting of Appalachian women’s lives travels through eight chapters. In chapter I, I engage Said’s understanding of Orientalism, and show how both spaces—Detroit (my primary and most significant home) and Appalachia are both (re)produced as Othered spaces through historical and contemporary discourses. I situate myself into the larger discourse by showing you how my Othered urban identity shapes my ontological and ideological interpretation of this rural Othered space that I study. By showing what is here, the readers can access, understand, interpret and be reflexive about what is there. I also illustrate how both Detroit’s and Appalachia’s histories have been marked by internal corporate colonization and political and social ignorance.

In chapter II, I speak more specifically about the ways in which Appalachia has been positioned as Other through an analysis of academic, literary and popular culture contexts. I analyze how Appalachia has been rendered Other through totalizing representations that posit themselves as speaking the truth, rather a truth.

Chapter III discusses how I use narrative theory and life history interviewing to frame this project’s epistemological perspective. I do this to demonstrate the need for a more subjective approach to understanding women’s experiences, especially in a space
which falls outside of the dominant narrative of “America,” and experiences that have been positioned only as “remarkable” (Said, 1978; Stewart, 1996).

In chapter IV, I map out my plan that I executed for the project in a (un)methodological approach. I discuss how my feminist sensibilities inform my approach to this context, the formation of this project, the questions I ask, how I interpret those responses, and finally how I present them in this ethnography.

Through ethnographic investigations and life history interviewing, I purport “Appalachian” identity as an oscillating state of becoming and unbecoming, which is detailed in chapter V. The chapter is arranged in three sections—disgust, ambivalence, and pride. Within the three sections are, what I call, “hallmarks” of Appalachian identity.

Chapter VI is a meeting of corporeal theory and lived bodily existence. This chapter explores, what Judith Butler calls, “the nexus of discourse and materiality” in an Appalachian Ohio context (1993). In a space that has been rhetorically positioned as Other, the bodies that are marginal in any context, becoming doubly Othered. This chapter moves marginal bodies to a central space in this particular knowledge production.

The last thematic chapter, chapter VII, is an ethnographic performance of the four-year-long relationship I have had with my most important co-participant, Joan. This chapter is a storied performance of all the things I have learned from her, and through her, about aging, abandonment, and Appalachia.

I conclude this project with a final chapter, chapter VIII, which summarizes my conceptual contributions to the discipline and scholarly knowledge production at large. I
also narrate two researcher tensions that have lingered with me from the beginning of the project to the final pages.

This project is more than eight phases for me. It is a short story that informed, formed, and reformed my very self for the past four years. I hope it answers more questions than one could ask about what it means to be a women in Appalachian Ohio.

Subverting the Speaking Subject

As the most important stake holder of this political project, it is imperative for me to initially address the polyvocal nature of this text. Language is, as Bakhtin (1981) argues, “ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion” (p. 271). As such, I warn my reader about my intentional fluidity of language, subverting grammatical structures, and reappropriating my “academic voice” to one that better suits my “unrefined” character and locates me in a project that represents and speaks with an other as an Other. Neither I, nor my co-participants, speak in an academic vernacular. We speak organically, our everyday talk is constantly code switching, depending on the social contexts. My primary socialization occurred in a Mexican-American family, located in a working class, Mexican-American neighborhood, and my speech is a reflection of such conditions. The women who volunteered as co-participants to this project come from similar labor intensive backgrounds and are positioned as an “ethnic minority” by the dominant discourses (Flynt, 2004). Thus, many of them also do not tidy up their “aint’s” and “shit’s” in good company. Consequently, I hope the language of this project destabilizes the internalization of academic and other Othering discourses. The
decentralization of the speaking subject is a purposeful strategy of everyday resistances (Scott, 1990).

Beyond undermining the politics of language, through this proposal I hope to accomplish other things. This project is salient because as Gluck and Patai (1991) write, “by documenting women’s representations of their reality, we were engaging in advocacy. We [feel] that our work [is], indeed, political and that it [is] for women” (p. 3). Documenting women’s experiences in Appalachia is not a radical feminist endeavor, but telling a story that has not been told before about people in a space that has been economically, politically, and historically encroached is one step in redesigning a new narrative about women living in Appalachia.

Motown Magic and/in Haunted Hollers: From one Othered America to Another

“Appalachia,” like the inner city, became a symbolic pocket of poverty in an affluent society and an unassimilated region in an otherwise united nation.

—Stewart (1996, p.118)

Every Sunday morning for as long as I can remember, I have attended mass at Saint Anne’s Catholic Parish in Detroit, on the “notoriously violent” Southwest side. This past Sunday was no different—I was at “home” in the city for the weekend. Father Tom Sepulveda preached boomin’ly about how “we should not question the very existence of Jesus in our everyday lives!” I always attend the Spanish masses because they are at a more reasonable hour and the men who attend are usually more attractive, arms littered with tattoos, just the way I like em. ’ While I sat on the hardwood, old church pews, glancing around, I thought about two things: one, I hoped E&L had my favorite kind of
empanada baked and for sale, and two, the drive home to Athens was going to be miserable and tedious as always. Five hours in one position is not kind to anyone’s body.

In five hours, I drive away from my cosmopolitan and familiar home in Southwest Detroit to my slanted log cabin, which was built on top of one of the many rolling hills in Athens, OH. Although my homes are less than 300 miles apart, they feel like worlds away from one another. The home in which I grew up is known for its soaring rates: crime, obesity, and unemployment—Detroit. The community soccer league I play in, on Sunday evenings when I return to Athens, they didn’t even know I spoke “Mexican.” At times, the two spaces are, as I have said, worlds away from one another. But after four years, I have arrived at acknowledging both spaces as more than my domestic dwellings, but as spaces in which I can find different types of comfort, support, and security. The two spaces share common associations with poverty, unemployment, and fat, dangerous people. But they are both so much more than what the media packages them to be. In this chapter, I complicate the notion of “home,” by seeing it not as a fixed, stable residence, but rather I hope to show the reader that “home” for me is a conceptual space, which is the constant renegotiation between and amongst two seemingly different Othered spaces in America.

*Departing from Motown Magic, Arriving to Haunted Hollers*

I moved to the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains from the inner city of my childhood home in the late summer of 2008. Dominant discourses that circulate about the two areas as “symbolic pockets of poverty” serve as major socializing and materializing agents which (re)produce these spaces as “Other” in a modern America.
Edward W. Said (1978) first critiques how these Other spaces are discursively constructed through history, language and thought, and thus have a very real and powerful presence. He thinks and writes very specifically about the context of the Middle East, but his argument of how a space even becomes there or here, the Orient or the Occident, has been extended to Othered spaces within the context of the United States (Stewart, 1996; Jansson, 2003).

The discourses that construct the Orient are similar to the discourses surrounding my past and current home. Similar to context of the Middle East, Appalachia becomes discursively constructed as a space with “exotic beings, haunted memories . . . landscapes, [and] remarkable experiences” (Said, 1978, p. 1). In this way, Appalachia becomes a reflection of the “Orient.” The consequences of discursively constructing a space such as the Orient, or Appalachia, or any Othered space, are powerful. Some of the potential consequences are systematic domination and discipline over a space and the people who occupy it. Domination over an Othered space demarcates it as morally and politically inferior. Therefore, it defines the superior as the authority to what is and is not normal—even ideal—in comparison. This knowledge of what is normal and ideal then becomes the accepted standard to which all things are compared. This authoritative position is a “strategic location,” one that gives rise to the power to dominate, exploit, devalue, degrade, and ultimately colonize the Other (Said, 1978 p. 20).

Said (1978) argued that no one writing about or discussing the Orient could do so without the influence of Orientalism and the potential of reproducing Orientalist rhetoric. The Orient, in a Said-ian sense, is a European Western invention. The Other, in a Said-
ian sense, is anyone else who is not a European Westerner. I am an Other, a Chicana who grew up in one of those inner city “symbolic pocket[s] of poverty,” that Stewart discussed (1996). I “study” an Other: Appalachian women. And I want to, as Said demands of anyone writing about the Orient:

Locate h[er]self vis-à-vis the Orient…this location includes the kind of narrative voice [s]he adopts, the type of structure [s]he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in h[er] text—all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf (Said, 1978, p. 20).

To position myself properly for the rest of this project, I must own my subjectivity as a researcher representing an Other. I must locate my orientation to this region, this particular phenomenon, and “the most important filters” that relegate what I see as integral in an other woman’s words, an other woman’s experience (Behar, 1996, p. 13).

****

The only thing I knew about rural living or Appalachia before moving here was predicated on stereotypes. I knew about Appalachia from watching the horribly essentializing film, “Deliverance,” which depicts two travelers who are assaulted by mountain men, who then avenge their assaults by becoming vigilantes. I also knew about the region from reading books such as Jeannette Walls’s *The Glass Castle*, which is a memoir of Walls’s young life in which she and her siblings struggle with an aloof mother and an alcoholic father in dire poverty in the “hollers” of West Virginia. Mediated images of Appalachia only confirmed my suspicion about the type of white people living
in the “hollers.” Embarrassingly, I had not even entertained the idea that people of color might actually live in the region. I had applied to Ohio University because a professor in my undergraduate program, who I trusted (and who also was a woman of color from humble beginnings), recommended the program to me, she told me that I would be a “good fit” with my current advisor. When I was accepted, I was very apprehensive, but again, I was assured by my professor that OU would be great place to call “home” for a few years.

After my brothers had unpacked me into my new house, and tiny Styrofoam peanuts were parceled all over my black rug, I realized that I was in desperate need of a vacuum cleaner, so I went to the only place in town that sells vacuums, good ole Wal-Mart. As we were walking through the parking lot, a monstrous monster truck, splattered with dirt, skirted into a parking space right in front of us. Two small, muscular boys hopped out, one wearing a camouflage hat with a confederate flag stitched on the back. As they walked toward the entrance, one was recounting a story that involved some “niggers.” My innocent and now wide-eyed tía turned to me and asked, “What have you gotten yourself into?” I was thinking the same thing. This was my fear and, now, my reality.

***

I evoke this narrative to illustrate my reflexive researcher position and valorize how I once understood Detroit as “home” and Appalachia as distant, different, and even scary. It is a narrated interrogation of how I arrived here. I arrived at this Othered Appalachian space with my urban, Detroit, Western, albeit Latina, gaze. I grew up in the
inner city and lived in a Mexican-American neighborhood. I had never met a person from Appalachia before moving here. I speak Spanish. I eat tortillas with most of my meals. I had never touched a gun and never drunk moonshine. I took public transportation to high school. I had never even heard of The National FFA Organization (formerly known as Future Farmers of America) or Four H. I lived for years in a housing project, with families on top of families. My everyday reality looked very different from those who live in this area. I cannot divorce my researcher self from these past social facts. These are the powerful forces that once shaped my understanding generally and specifically the understanding of the Appalachian Other. All of my previous knowledge of Appalachia was filtered through Oriental discourse and as an academic writing about an Other, this information was shared to “locate” myself before representing an Other (Said, 1979). This locating of myself, the researcher, is “reterritorialization” (Appaduri, 1996). I am re-fragmenting what was once fragmented. I examine and emphasize the demographics of my home to position and (re)center my gaze upon an Other.

Growing up in my Othered urban environment shaped and shapes my ideological, sociological, political, and even my imaginative positioning. I cannot separate myself from this reality or from my past, which has constructed my present self. I present this next section “not as a decorative flourish” about the City of Detroit nor about myself but to move the audience to an understanding of how these two spaces (Detroit and Appalachia) are rhetorically constructed as Other in very similar ways. From the stories that circulate about these two areas, from the television news reporting, to the historical discourse about these sites, both are rendered Other through dominant discourses. I
physically moved from my childhood home in an urban Othered space to my most recent home in a rural Othered space, but the “Detroit” socialization processes that occurred—and occurs—follows me everywhere, including my new rural Other home.

Figure 1: General Motor Building in Detroit
Reterritorializing the Urban “Other” Home

I was born and mostly raised in Detroit. The neighborhood in which I grew up was predominately comprised of poor bored kids of color with flashy new sneakers and hard attitudes. Our exposure to things rich and white was filtered through ABC’s lineup of TGIF shows (e.g. *Full House, Boy Meets World,* and *Step by Step*) or the occasional caring white school teacher. Detroit, once known for its musical legacies and massive automobile production, now finds itself being a metonym for a fat, poor, and desolate place in the United States (Chanan, 2005). This transition has marked Detroit from a city with a rich history of talent and progress to an urban Othered space with a steadily declining population.

The borders of Detroit are marked by a history of colonization, past narratives of white flight, and now gentrification (Thompson, 2001). The city has been rendered Other through the circulation of multiple discourses mostly produced through media representations of the city. In the 1970s, the city was known as the “murder capital of the world” (Thompson, 2001). The image projected by the media was one that dehumanized the city’s mostly black residents. Television reporters and other journalists created a monolithic representation of the city in which the people living there were not “us” — that is, civilized, imperial, and white— but, rather, wild, dangerous people of color. These became the privileged discourses. These wild and dangerous people of color had to be bound by the borders of the city and controlled and dominated by a civilized white police force. By the 1980s, Detroit came to represent the worst of what the United States had
become: politically, economically, and racially divided (Olsen & Hocking, 2007). Today, my city struggles to fight off the image of being a post-industrialized, dilapidated dead zone in the “rustbelt.” For outsiders, Detroit is a disharmonious place, a nexus of drugs, dilapidation, and despair.

A History of Othering, My Old Urban “Home”—Detroit

Detroit, originally colonized by the French in the early 1700s, the city was founded as an outpost by Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac (Olsen & Hocking, 2007). Once upon a time people even referred to the city as the “Paris of the west” (Olsen & Hocking, 2007, p. 2). In 1706, the British took control of the region during the French–Indian war. The British, French and Native nations fought over the city because of its waterways. But eventually, The United States took over the city permanently in 1813(Olsen & Hocking, 2007, p. 2).

The 19th century transformed Detroit into the nucleus of a prosperous transportation hub. Ship building and manufacturing allowed the city to flourish and in 1896 the city earned its right to boast about being the birthplace that revolutionized transportation. Henry Ford built his first automobile in the famous Mack Avenue plant and how people moved around the world changed forever. Soon, the discourse that circulated about Detroit postulated that this was the place where the American Dream could be reached.

The discourse about the city’s economic potential became impossible to ignore by people all over the world, including my great-grandfather, Manuel Mercado de Acévedo. In 1913, Henry Ford began to experiment with the factory assembly line and it did not
take long for this idea to take off (Ford Motor Company, 2010). Ford required a huge number of workers to operate this assembly line and advertised his need for workers. This call was heard from as far south as Zacatecas, Mexico, a state directly north of Mexico City. By walking part of the way and hitchhiking the rest, my great-grandfather arrived into the city of Detroit in 1920—the trip took him over a year with setbacks along the way. My great-grandfather, grandfather, and, finally, my mother all worked on the assembly line in Ford plants in Detroit. All three generations have witnessed a very different era of the only city they have known, lived and loved.

When my great-grandfather arrived in the city, Detroit was a diaspora, chock full of immigrants from all over the world. My great-grandfather settled in a house where he had a Polish family living above him and an Irish family living below him and Mexican neighbors to either side. All of these people had left their home countries in hopeful search of achieving the American Dream but my family and many others never found “it.” Most of my family still lives in Detroit, in a part of the city that now is most commonly known as “Mexicantown,” but is infamous for its parks filled with needles and dirty, used condoms with its streets littered with yesterday’s trash.

I rewind. The version of Detroit that my great-grandfather and my grandfather witnessed was the transition of the city from the birthplace of the transportation revolution to violent union organizing, which led to violent race riots and, ultimately, resulted in white flight (Thompson, 2001). In these assembly plants, which employed my great-grandfather and other desperate, poor immigrants, these workers tolerated long onerous hours that lasted most of the entire day. Their work atmosphere was incredibly
dangerous, unbearably hot, and racially hostile. The workers began to organize to resist workshop conditions. And in 1935, the United Auto Workers union was formed. The union fought a bitter—and at times bloody—battle to gain basic workers’ rights.

Also in the 1930s, during the Labor Movement, the Great Depression, and right before World War II, the city also saw an influx of African Americans and the founding of the Nation of Islam—the racial and political milieu was unsteady and electrically charged. In 1943, the city saw the worst race riot to date, with working-class whites openly attacking poor blacks (Thompson, 2001). As the city’s black population grew, racial lines became more clearly demarcated. After the race riots, the Detroit Housing Commission adopted policies of racial segregation, which kept African Americans in impoverished neighborhoods on the lower east side, ethnic whites on the south and west side, and whites on the north side. The city was, and remains, fragmented by racial borders (Thompson, 2001).

As early as 1945, the city saw a reflection of the Civil Rights Movement, with liberal whites and blacks trying to improve the conditions in the Lower East side neighborhoods where many African Americans lived. Also during the late 1940s and 1950s, Detroit slowly saw prominent visitors from the black community, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Diana Ross, Stevie Wonder and W. E. B. Du Bois, which brought hope to the city’s black population (Thompson, 2001). African Americans who lived in these dire conditions were never passive victims but, rather, they became opportunistic about the Civil Rights Movement and the potential for equality within the city (Thompson, 2001). In the 1950s, as African Americans fought for racial equality,
the city’s conservative whites resisted, with politicians running on platforms that promoted segregation. More than half of the city’s white population agreed that races should not coexist in the same space (Thompson, 2001). Whites, who saw desegregation as an inevitable outcome, moved out of the city, and into the newly formed, homogenously white suburbs of Detroit. Thus, like other major U.S. cities, white flight characterized the decade of the 1950s.

By the time the 1960s were underway and the Civil Rights Movement erupted in violence everywhere, Detroit had rightfully earned its nickname as “Motown,” after the city’s famous recording label. Detroit had become the “Sound of Young America,” filled with the melodic and soulful sounds of Marvin Gaye and Diana Ross playing on car radios across the United States (Olsen & Hocking, 2007). The city that gave the world cars also gifted the world with soulful tunes that emanated from their radios. Racially conservative whites must have seen this musical innovation as cacophonous because, by the 1960s, they were mostly defeated in the city’s politics and population.

As a result of white flight, the 1960s and 1970s were economically depressed times for Detroit. In 1965, with almost 50% of the city’s population being black, less than 3% of the police force was black, which set and reflected the racial tone (Thompson, 2001). The city was sued for police brutality several times during those years. However, in the early hours of July 23, 1967, the overwhelming white police force raided a party that resulted in the arrest of 82 African Americans. Extra police officers, the governor, and military troops (almost exclusively white) were called in to “control” these wild black citizens. The situation escalated into a full-blown race riot that lasted 5 days and
resulted in the deaths of 33 black men and 10 whites, with thousands of buildings destroyed (Thompson, 2001).

Four outsiders, the city’s reputation never recovered from that event. For them, the city is just a mecca of urban ruin. For insiders, those still bound within the city limits, are the loyal residents who believe in the city’s enchanting glamour that once was. Having grown up there, I see Detroit as a magical place with limitless potential. Detroit is a space I will return to because I have not only witnessed the city’s undesirables but lived through summer festivals on the river walk, annual auto shows at Cobo Hall, Cinco de Mayo celebrations in Southwest, and fieldtrips to the Detroit Institute of Art. This local culture of Detroit has made me and other citizens part of the city’s topography by imparting values of a city with transcendent power, with a community that emphasizes “home.” These events are at the heart of what is essential about Detroit: inclusion, community, and shared struggle.
Growing up in Detroit, I was an insider to the city, inside and enmeshed in the Other. But now, I have come to view Other from multiple standpoints; I grew up in a working-class Mexican-American neighborhood and thus, I was not part of the dominant “American” culture, but now as an academic I hold the power to (re)define reality and what is Other. I once idealized my urban Othered city, embracing it as “home,” seeing it as integral to my identity. But after a series of events detailed below, I abandoned Detroit
and lost my home. I was catapulted from my humble working class beginnings to a more secure place in the middle class, simply by receiving a degree. I am now outside of my “home” and an outsider to Detroit. I cannot “go home again” as the song assures me that I can. Once “homes” as a concept, as an understanding are lost, and new ones are gained, “home” as it once appeared cannot be returned to. “Home” for me has changed, I have physically moved to Athens and I am removed from naming Detroit as my “home” space. And beyond the materiality of a degree, I am now metaphysically further from the “home” I once had by simply questioning “home” as a conceptually space rather than a physical space. Now I have the privileged position of wondering where is “home”? Is “home” where I come from or the “home” I seek (Behar, 2005)? Behar (2005) argues that this ambivalence between the field and home begs the interrogation of the “sweetness and terror of our homecomings” (Behar, ix). For me and for others, this question is complicated, where is my “home”?

Lost “Homes”

No longer is my “home” the neighborhood in which I grew up. After seven years of living and being at predominately white institutions I can no longer lay claim to a neighborhood of “poor bored kids of color with flashy new sneakers and hard attitudes.” I barely wear my old kicks anymore, I have retired the red lipstick, and I often preach about nonviolence. In fact, I am ashamed of the vehement reaction I had when I heard another girl had called me a zorra. This fight formulated my “hoodrat” identity in the neighborhood I grew up in and still haunts me. I have been reconditioned, reluctantly, to tuck away the incessant “mother fuckers” and save them for when it is absolutely crucial.
Most of my present interactions are with white people and my closet friend in Athens is a 6’7’’ white dude, who wears cardigans every day, from Hartington, Nebraska.

I cannot go “home” and talk about my research or the philosophical underpinnings of “the body” because people would understand, they just would not care. I cannot go to Rosalita’s on the corner and discuss the unstable postmodernist conception of “home” over some beers. My family cannot see why in the world a smart young woman who almost has a doctorate cannot find a job around the corner in Detroit. Moreover, they do not understand why I would want to go to school for eight years to be a “doctor that can’t even help people.” I have outgrown this “home,” it can no longer offer me the “stability, oneness and security” (Massey, 1994) it once did. As my identity has evolved into an academic one, my old Mexican neighborhood on the southwest side no longer fits me. I have been silently rejected for my materialist practices.

The house—which was synonymous with home for me—that I grew up in, is now a rental property, deemed too dangerous for my family to continue inhabiting. My mother purchased that house with a down payment that included every penny she had. She was finally getting for her kids a “home of their own,” in a decent neighborhood, with a good public school within a safe walking distance. She was proud of our home. When she first started working after my father left, the only job she was able to get with her reading and writing level was at Taco Bell. When she got sick, she was working as a school bus driver. When she died, us five kids were separated, in order to make taking on extra rambunctious kids, easier. My sister and I refused to leave our house. This is was the
place our mother had raised us, our memories were trapped in its walls and those we
could not leave it behind. This is the space where we felt we belonged.

    After my mother died and while I was still in high school, my aunt who was my
legal guardian at the time, asked me to leave the house after I made a foolish, teenaged
decision. Although I knew I deserved my retribution, it broke my heart to leave my home.
I lost the sense of security that accompanies that home (Bollnow, 1963). That “home”
was taken away from me. I cannot return to the materiality of that space (Bollnow, 1963).
I cannot return to “the joy of dwelling” in that space and I can no longer identify with the
“hood” culture of that space (Bollnow, 1963).

    The reality of the unhomeliness of my childhood dwelling is not an easy one to
come to acknowledge and own. To admit you have outgrown your moorings feels like
“selling out”—denying where you came from, and how you got where you are. This shift
in thinking distances me from my family and my friends who have been with me since
childhood—it is incommensurate with my values. I pay homage daily to my three sassy
black female teachers who saw something special in me, I honor my family at every
public opportunity, and I always “rep” Detroit as hard possible. These three things are the
nuts and bolts to my otherwise fluid identity. But this space is no longer accessible,
merely imaginative, I cannot go back to my high school, it is no longer there, I cannot
move back into my house, it is too dangerous, and Detroit shall be confined to remaining
a sweet memory of my hometown.
Figure 3: The Cross Streets of My Rural “Other” Home

Searching “Home”

After being accepted to a doctoral program, I moved further away from “home,” both the physical space and the idea. I had a thirst for a formal education that nowhere in the city could not satiate. I had to leave my beloved community in search for a better schooling experience. In exchange for a better schooling experience, I left what I knew was a psychologically safe and familiar space for a physically and culturally different space (Hao, 2012). I hoped that although my cohort members and I were disconnected by
cultures (me, being the only Latina in the program), we would be united by our curious minds.

When I moved to Athens, I immediately sensed the disconnect between the Ohio University community and the rest of the Athens community. The permanent Athens residents watch and laugh at students staggering down Court Street, stopping in and out of the bars, throwing up in the bricked street along the way, and releasing their litter onto the streets. At Halloween, it is quite the scene to watch the locals sit on the courthouse steps and observe the behavior and dress of the 30,000 young people who pour into the city to be part of the Halloween party scene. The observed become the observers. Conversely, the students refer to the locales as “townies” which serve as a symbolic regulator of who belongs where and the kinds of practices and behaviors that are appropriate (Aden, Pearson, & Sells, 2010). There is very little interaction between the university community and the residential community. Therefore, the residents of Athens view students as temporary outsiders and the students define townies as “not clean, not educated, and not mobile” (Aden, Pearson, & Sells, 2010, p. 284).

For the most part, in the four years that students squat on this space, they rarely travel far off campus. They see Athens as an efficient space to get their education rather than being invested in their temporary homes. Students do not care enough to create the “ideal comforts of home” here (Rybczynski, 1986). Knowing that students view the residents of the community as “not clean, not educated, and not mobile” and their obvious (un)investment in this space, it would not be hard to make the inferential leap: the community’s distrust and dislike for outsiders, like me. This, what I will call
“localized xenophobia,” is mutually constructed amongst the students and the community, the students do not engage with the Other and thus students remain Other to the locals. Thus, this localized xenophobia serves and served as a clear demarcation of who is and who will remain—outsider.

***

After I was settled into my tiny house on the hill in Athens, I realized not only do I not know anyone within hours of a drive, I was also living alone for the first time in my entire life and I felt it. The first few months were extremely isolating and lonely. I had no car, no one to speak Spanish with, no one to cook for me, and most crushing, nowhere to dance bachata.

In effort to alleviate this loneliness, I decided I would become a “real” member of my community, try to regain “home.” I contacted the local homeless shelter and volunteered for any job. I cooked and cleaned—things I abhor—just to be around people and in effort to earn the trust of the clients. Eventually, I was assigned to the Senior Friends Program where I was matched with an elderly couple in the community who needed help attending to the house and yard. Thus began my tumultuous relationship with Joan (detailed in chapter VII).

In four years, we have experienced the lost of her husband, a vexing breakup with my long term boyfriend, and now a struggle to maintain her independence in her own “home.” Joan has lived in the same house on Stimson Avenue for 62 years with her husband. She has witnessed Athens amend and alter itself in significant fashions. Her home is settled on what has become a very lucrative location, but it is “all she has.” Joan
and Albert had but one child, who is mentally ill, few distant siblings, and even fewer, more distant, friends. Her walls need re-plastering and paint, her house smells like bleach and vinegar, her most recent furniture dates back to before I was born, and she does not have a furnace. The property is probably worth ten times as much as her house that rests on it.

In Joan’s “home,” with her, I have come to understand what Rybczynski means about the “cultural meanings of comfort” (1986, p. 214). For me, comfort meant seeing other brown faces, the interweaving of Spanish in my dirty English vernacular, eating tacos de lengua, wearing big hoop earrings, and the freedom to do—or not do—whatever you want with your own damn lawn. For Joan, comfort means being at home on Sundays to accept calls on her land line, eating mush drowned in syrup from Bob Evans, wearing big button blouses and slacks, never leaving the house without having her hair combed down in the back, and “cutting country” entirely too fast in her big maroon Buick. Joan and I were Other to one another, she was an Appalachian Other woman to me, and to her, I was some Other Mexican city girl. Our understanding of what brings us comfort and well-being was not shared.

But “home” for her, as it once was for me, is “everything I’ve got.” Although our everyday realities were, at a time, vastly different—the things we desired, imagined, or feared never the same, the common denominator that united us was this shared space. Her, never having left it, and me wanting to become at home with it.
The longing I have had to make this space my “home” has never been appeased. Thinking that becoming an active part of the community I lived in was the answer, I became over-involved. I had this responsibility to Joan, I volunteered with a program called Girl Power in a local middle school, I joined a community soccer league, and I attended the farmer’s market every Saturday. While these activities fed me and gave me the support and socializing I so desperately needed, there were subtle reminders of my Otherness. Whether Joan it was reassuring me that she “wasn’t a racist, or against any religion, but…”, or someone asking if my family was “still for hire,” or my one of my girls in Girl Power while hinting at my ambiguous skin tone and asking me “What am I,” there was always something to cue my Otherness in this community. That relationship of Othering was reciprocal, I explicitly lamented that there is nowhere for me to grocery shop, nowhere to dance, nowhere to socialize with other Latinos or even other urbanites. That distancing was, as is true with the undergraduate students, mutually constructed. I have tried to give back to this space which has allowed me to exist in for the past four years, but as hard as I have tried, I cannot call this space “home,” and this space does not welcome me as at home, I am and shall remain—outside.

Making the conscious decision to try to make this space my modern ideal of “home,” was not enough to compete with this localized xenophobia. Although I have become more comfortable and I have even arrived at a place of appreciation for the beauty of the hills, I am still outside of Appalachia and away from “home.” I have consciously accepted this space as the idea of “home,” the natives to Appalachian Ohio
speak boundaries that sharply demarcate outsider and insider, consequently, this space has yet to accept me as at home. I wondered what was the social, economic, and political history of this space that gives way to this localized xenophobia? Why were people fearful and distrustful of outsiders? Why such the need and want to protect and police the boundary of who is outside and who is inside?

*A History of Othering My New Rural Home—Appalachian Ohio*

Similarly discursively positioned as an internally Othered space in the United States like Detroit—Athens, Ohio is located in the Appalachian Region and often is thought of as “the Other Ohio” (Gilliom, 2001). Appalachia is a space that has been rendered Other through totalizing representations, such as “backwater,” “inbred,” and “welfare mothers.” These two Othered spaces, southeast Ohio and Detroit, reflect and reject one another in the most intriguing ways. Both Detroit and southeast Ohio have a history of successful bootlegging during Prohibition (Olsen, & Hocking 2007; Drake 2001), and both are marked by poverty and despair. Both have contemporary social conditions that have resulted from decades of colonization and industrialization, and both have a violent history in the struggle for workers’ rights. Both are rhetorically situated as Othered spaces in modern America, but it is in this Othering process that we see the major difference: one is urban and the other is rural. From the perpetration of repetitive Othering discourses, both are wary of outsiders hoping to reproduce the perversion of its land and its people.

The Appalachian region has a rich but also tragic history, lands opulent in mineral resources but, consequently, exploited through requisition of those precious resources
(Lewis, Johnson, & Askins, 1978). As previously stated, the ARC recognizes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states as Appalachian territory. The Appalachian mountain range includes the Blue Ridge, the Ridge and Valley section, and the Cumberland-Allegheny Highlands (Drake 2001). The word “Appalachia” bears the burden and privilege of naming almost a quarter of the United States and over 24 million people. In Ohio, 32 counties are recognized as “Appalachian,” mostly along the southeast regions of Ohio (ARC, 2011). Because I have lived and dwelled in this southeastern Ohio space for the past four years—teaching, volunteering, studying, playing, and eating here—I have become familiar with this region. My desire was not to focus on the experience of all women within Appalachia, as that would be a task ten states too large, but, rather, on the women who live within a portion of the Ohio River valley area. This Ohio valley area, from which I have been able to recruit women, constitutes several counties within southeast Ohio (Athens, Vinton, Jackson, Perry, Hocking, and Meigs) and West Virginia (Wood and Calhoun).

Southeast Ohio’s history is similar to the history of West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, as documented by historians (see, e.g., Lewis, Johnson, & Askins, 1978; Drake, 2001, Caudill, 1962). Southeast Ohio also is marked by endemic poverty and exploitation, with mountain tops blown off in search for coal, and streams and water supply polluted by leaking wells and documented spills. Southeast Ohio becomes a fascinating mecca in that although this area is not known for being outwardly accepting of people of different racial backgrounds (for a discussion on poor white supremacy in Appalachia, see Flynt, 2004) it is bordered by the Mason-Dixon line, and where slaves
escaped across for liberation before the Progressive Era. Consequently, there are small enclaves of predominantly black communities nestled within the region.

This area’s original inhabitants were from multiple Native American nations; Adena, Iroquois, Erie, Miami, Shawnee, Mingo, Creeks, Cherokee and Catawbas, to name only a few (Drake, 2001). The Appalachian natives were respected and feared by their flatland counterparts. Before the first onset of colonization, these Appalachian natives quibbled with one another about territories. They disputed spaces, such as the valleys and riverbanks, where the soil was rich. Drake (2001) suggests that the Cherokees were the most dominant power of the southern Appalachians from around the 1600s until about 1780. These nations were thriving agriculturalists, successful hunters, sophisticated fur traders, and skilled fisherman. In the early 1600s, however, the Appalachian region began to see its first wave of colonization. With the arrival of colonizers from Virginia, it did not take long for these so-called “pioneers” to move westward into the “wilds” of the Appalachian forests and intrude into existing intertribal relations. Amongst these early colonizers were immigrants from Spain, Holland, France, and England, who sailed with relentless ambition across the Atlantic Ocean (Drake, 2001). Native nations stood little chance of prosperity, with wave after wave of colonization crashing down and destroying their Appalachian homes.

From as early as 1540, Spanish conquistador, Hernando de Soto, led a party of 600 soldiers, 100 camp followers, and 220 horses through the American Southeast, burning villages and killing Native people who stood in their way (Drake, 2001). Appalachian Natives were able to thrive a bit longer than did the coastal Natives because
the higher altitude may have prevented the spreading of disease. Ultimately, however, historians have estimated that 95% of the native population in North America and the Caribbean died from either violence at the hands of colonizers or due to diseases, such as smallpox, gonorrhea, syphilis, malaria, and tuberculosis (Drake, 2001). In 100 years, colonizers were able to destroy nations of people, rewriting a history full of natural preservation and sustainability to one that was filled with violence and destruction of territories both corporeal and environmental.

From the 1670s into the 1690s, the Appalachian Natives traded furs with the Europeans. Through this trading of fur, Englishmen were able to become familiar with the mountainous region, which later aided in their attacks. The English remained in rule until about 1730, when they became concerned with the French’s influence over the area. In 1763, the British forbade expansion beyond the Appalachian Mountains, not because they were concerned with harming and claiming land that was not theirs, but because they wanted to maintain control over the early colonials from across the Atlantic. However, in 1769, Daniel Boone penetrated through the Appalachian terrain and created the first good wagon path, which allowed other colonialists to follow. The wars for Appalachia continued, from as early as 1689 until 1764, with the British and French fighting continuously over this terrain. In the 1750s, the area also saw many battles between the French and Appalachian natives. During this war, native nations mostly maintained control over the Appalachian Mountains. In 1763, a proclamation was passed that prohibited settlers from going past the mountain range. Disputes over the 1763 Proclamation are part of what incited the American Revolutionary War (Drake, 2001).
During the early years of the American Revolutionary War, both the “new world colonizers” and British “loyalists” remained mostly neutral to the Appalachian natives. In 1777, however, the Cherokee initiated an attack and lost 66 villages and towns to fires set by the British Army. The Natives’ stronghold in the east was not entirely broken by the American Revolutionary War—it maintained power over the Ohio River until the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794 (Drake, 2001). The native challenge to the Appalachian region then was loosened and the mountains were controlled by the United States.

The most profound Othering historical process occurred during the Civil War, in which the region became tragically divided. The northern portion of the Appalachian Mountains rested with the Union and the south aligned with the Confederacy. Slaves feared being sold down river where conditions were thought to be much harsher before the outbreak of the war. By 1820, the Mason-Dixon Line was established, splitting Appalachia between Pennsylvania and Maryland. The Ohio Valley, resting just above this line, became a space where gradual emancipation could be reached if slaves were able to escape. Many elderly people today discuss the town names in this area as being pronounced differently to detect both coal-mining executives and slave bounty hunters (personal communication, summer 2011).

The Civil War years lasted from 1860–1865. During the Civil War, stereotypes about Appalachian people as strange and peculiar began to emerge because of the lack of adequate transportation and a remoteness of the land. Those who stayed in Appalachian territories after the war found it hard to maintain their lifestyle because so many institutions (schools, churches, and towns) were destroyed in the Civil War. The family
became a means of stable dependency and control of land, and, thus, the powerful tradition of strong familiar ties began to form (Drake, 2001).

After the Civil War and during Reconstruction, the southerners who initially supported the Union were left bitter and forgotten, which was evident in the New South’s political equation. The Appalachian people became forgotten by politicians, leaving it ravaged and impoverished by the war (Drake, 2001). The Appalachian region became an isolated space and its people forgotten.

Although early settlers were aware of the region’s rich natural resources and explored the land for coal, it was not until 1840 that the Industrial Revolution really plagued the Appalachian region (Drake, 2001). As the need for steel grew during the Industrial Revolution, so too did the ravaging of Appalachian land. The tops of mountains were blown off, tunnels underneath the Earth were dug, and people were stuffed in and underneath to excavate the land for coal. The Appalachian region, thus, fell victim to modern corporate capitalism. As Drake (2001) explained, “When small owners were involved, buyers gained control of mineral rights by outright purchase of the mountain lands or by purchase of the mineral rights only, leaving the surface to the original owners” (p. 139). The everyday small landowner, who mostly populated the region after the Civil War, received nothing, and big-corporate America, which excavated underneath the surface of this land, reaped all the material wealth and hoarded it. Coal mining brought people from all over together—blacks from the south, immigrants from Italy, Poland, and other European countries (Drake, 2001)—but the competition for monetary and domestic resources did nothing to assuage race relations.
Corporate executives and mine owners were bloodsucking, smart capitalists—they typically bought all the homes in the town and all the stores in the area. Coal miners could only recycle their money back to the greedy capitalists. They made a meager income and paid it back to them when they bought groceries for their families or paid rent for their homes (Drake, 2001). The major coal-mining production era was from 1861–1990, sucking the souls of workers, chopping down trees, creating massive amounts of unrecyclable waste, and widening the gaps between the haves and the have-nots.

What Detroit and Appalachian Ohio share, at first glance at the topography, seems small. Verdant rolling hills and decaying concrete buildings cannot possible have a shared history, but they do. These two spaces, one rural and one urban, have been subject to a history marked by internal corporate colonization which has left both bellwether to Othering discourse, both the land and its people. The intentional demarcation of who is insider or outsider is a machination of protection. Localized xenophobia stemmed from a need to guard themselves from dominant discourse which try to (re)define them as Other. The people in the Appalachian region remain weary and distrustful of outsiders. And whether it is being fully enmeshed in the Other that feels familiar and comfortable to me, or my own desire to safeguard my home spaces, I do not know, but both I have lived in both spaces and experienced both as “home.”

Arriving “Home”: Between and/in Amongst

Sunday, after church was over, I went with my cousin, Rico, to his basketball game at the Latin Leagues in Pontiac. I tagged along to watch the boys littered with tattoos, just as I like em.’ On the way there, we picked up our friend Rogelio and his
baby, Santara. Rog wanted to play but had no one to watch his kid, so I agreed. I was shocked Rog could even come, let alone wanted to play. Two months ago, on the first of September 2011, Rog was shot three times, once in the back, once in the stomach, and once in the leg. While he was being operated on, police officers tried to ask Rog questions. The doctors kicked the officers out. They left and did not return, there is not even a police report of the shooting. With Rog’s help, Rico’s team won.

After the game, I packed my car, said goodbye to my family and started the five hour trek back to Athens. After the departure but before the arrival, I thought about Rog and what his situation signified about my old “home” community. Rog is younger than I, has two kids, unemployed, and still considered to be “a catch” in my old neighborhood. What happened to Rog is not unique, although living through it, is. Since I have left Southwest, I have come back for several funerals. Kids get shot. At a number so excessive, police stop to care about another dead, brown body. Rog is not indignant about it. He does not view it, as I believe he should, as another example of the systematic and institutional racism that maintains social order, pinning blacks and Latinos at the bottom of the hierarchy, perpetuating violence between and amongst their own people. No, “that’s jus how shit be.” I never had that, that lassitude about injustices that are seemingly beyond our control. I guess you must have some callousness in order to thrive in those milieus, but had to get out, both then and now. Only in the serenity of my car, I can think, I can feel, I can reflect about Rog.

In Athens, I have the privilege of speaking through my qualms with feminism and phenomenology in class. I am warmly greeted with debates about Bakhtin’s notion of
heteroglossia or benefits and drawbacks of people of color buying from local businesses as oppose to Walmart. In this space, my mind feels satiated in the comforts of “home.” But this is only my profession, it is what I do, but it is not who I am. I am Latina from Southwest Detroit living in a small white town in Appalachia conducting research.

This tension I drive through between two “home” landscapes, Athens and Detroit, is both physical and metaphorical. In the five hours I drive between the concrete towers, over the infamous potholes of the city streets, and out of the florescent lights of the city, to in between farmlands, over the infamous hills and into the enveloping darkness of the rural. Physically I travel from one “home” landscape to another. But in that physical path, I become conscious that I am most at home between and amongst those two spaces. It is when I am traveling to and fro those spaces that I feel the sense of “stability, oneness and security” that I long for (Massey, 1994). When I am driving towards Detroit, I experience the excitement of being reunited with my family and friends, dancing at Sangria’s to a live Salsa band, and eating tortillas fresh from the comal. These things fuel me. But after four days of raucous awaking at 7:30 a.m. in my nephew’s twin size bed from cacophony of nine people living under one roof, or learning about another friend who was shot, I am ready to return to the sanctity of my unglamorous car. But when I see the “State Street” exit, I am overwhelmed, and my body wilts with stress of all that I have to do now that I “home;” read journal articles, grade my student’s papers, do laundry, send emails, etc.

In my car I can stop pretending. I can turn off and tune out. I no longer have to mask my infuriation for what happened (or did not happen) to Rog. I can say “mother fucker” as many times as I want, there will be no one who will associate that talk with my
intellect or “my childhood environment.” I can play bachata and dance along. It does not
matter how tan (or not) my skin is. I can think about Bakhtin or the cute boy I just met. I
can be authentically “hoodrat” or authentically “academic” or nothing at all. I am
temporarily suspended from these two worlds that pull me in disparate directions. In the
space in between these two “home” landscapes, I have the security I need, the oneness I
desire, and the stability I create (Massey, 1994).

I am Other in the Appalachian Othered space that I inhabit. I am Other in the
urban Othered space that I was raised in. But somewhere, in between those two spaces, I
can find the ideal qualities of being at home in myself.
CHAPTER II: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE APPALACHIAN “OTHER”

For colonization of the land to occur, colonizers had to construct the land as wild and Other, dehumanize the people living there, to make sense of, and to justify their domination over this Appalachian space. The perspective I take employs the work of Lewis, Johnson, and Askins (1978), who examine the processes that “dominate outside industrial interests establish control, exploit the region, and maintain their domination and subjugation of the region” (p. 2). Coal-mining capitalists saw the Appalachian people as impoverished, desperate hillbillies who needed their proletariat classification to bring civilization back to the land. Various dehumanizing and Othering processes came in multiple forms: through the mass circulation of popular culture via literature and films, through everyday decision-making, as well as in anthropological texts, and other academic representations of Appalachia. Investigating and deconstructing the texts produced about Appalachia remains essential to this project. Below, I thus, analyze, evaluate, and unpack several academic and popular culture texts of Appalachia that produce and reproduce stereotypical representations of Appalachia.

Academic Representations of Appalachia

The processes that construct an Othered identity are interdependent, strengthening their effect. Said (1979) identifies the academy as one of the key contributors in crafting “the Orient,” writing that “the most readily accepted designation for Orientalism is an academic one, and indeed the label still serves in a number of academic institutions” (p. 2). I argue, those early and contemporary academic texts that have emerged from
Appalachia or about the region have served as a major socializing agent, reaffirming Appalachians’ reality that they are backwoods hillbillies (Drake, 2001).

Classical anthropological research that investigated this region also reified these stereotypes. Anthropologists were viewed as adventurers living amongst these “Othered” exotic (in the perverse sense) people. Classic anthropologists, in general, produced social-scientific texts that were objective and colonizing. In classical anthropology, the primitive Other was maintained in substitution for validity and reliability. Their field accounts constructed a space where otherness, simultaneously, was an object of threat and desire (Stewart, 1996). Historical texts, such as the ones cited above (e.g., Drake 2001; Flynt, 2004), were crafted with more care than the “objective” anthropological position.

In Dixie’s Forgotten People, which is a book that argued poor Appalachian whites were an ethnic minority in the United States, Flynt’s (2004) position was clear. He was born and raised in Alabama amidst the foothills of the Appalachian South. As Flynt writes, “Perhaps the impressionistic inspiration of my own family experience in the Appalachian foothills of north Alabama was the proper starting place and their family insights the right trajectory for the story” (p. xxiv). Flynt demonstrated the argument that Said (1978) made when he discussed the most powerful tool of Orientalism being the internalization of Orient discourses. On pages 103 through 106, Flynt (2004) visually represents the internalization of Orient discourses. There are several photographs of poor whites in Appalachian Alabama, none of the children are wearing shoes and all of them are dressed in soiled clothing. The photos reproduce a monolithic representation of
Appalachia, poor, dirty, barefoot people living in simple wooden shacks. Flynt (2004), similar to other representations discussed, communicates a sense of hopelessness about the region, he concludes, “Perhaps no solution can end white poverty in the South” (p. 166). Flynt’s discussion of his family and his region in an academic model reflect the internalization of Appalachian Othered discourses, which he reproduced in text for mass consumption. Although there was no biographical summary about Drake’s orientation to the region, his objective historical position leads to the assumption that he also was from the region. Historical texts and literary texts, thus, often produced the same, monolithic Othered representation.

Literature Set in Appalachia

Early literature from the 1830s to the 1870s depicted Appalachians as tough pioneers, grotesque figures, and as tricksters. Stewart (1996) showed how the Other was produced—“once as tough pioneers (‘our contemporary ancestors’) grotesque figures (vicious, bestial, extravagant, eccentric), and tricksters (wily, survivalists, con men who were as much victimizers as they were victims)” (p.118). The Appalachian community struggles to break free of this “Othering” and continues to struggle with extreme poverty and deprivation. With the advent of color pages to storybooks, the people of Appalachia became backward, pathetic hill people who carried on traditions that had been lost to the modern world (Stewart, 1996).

During the Progressive Era (roughly the 1890s to 1920s), the difference became seen as “Other,” and an Appalachian became viewed as an “Othered” rural space.
Appalachia became synonymous with poverty and a culture of backwardness, marked by what Appalachians did not have access to wealth, education, and literacy (Stewart, 1996).

Ohio University (herein OU) is nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. People sometimes refer to southeast Ohio (where OU is located) as “the Other Ohio” (Gilliom, 2001). Not far from this proverbial ivory tower, there are crowded trailers crammed with hungry kids. Gilliom (2001) writes that this region is “the sort of place where young families face a very likelihood of turning to various governmental programs for assistance,” and it was marked by “forms of endemic rural poverty and underdevelopment” since the nineteenth century (p. 44). This Other space is explored by Stewart (1996) in her work, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an “Other” America*. Although this ethnographic work focused mostly on the hollers of West Virginia, her ethnography is relevant to the OU community. This book discussed the meaning and poetics of living in the Appalachian region. The Appalachian community struggles to break free of this “Othering” and continues to struggle with extreme poverty and deprivation.

**Popular literature**

A memoir written by Jeanette Walls also contained a thick description—similar to Stewart’s—of Appalachia. In *The Glass Castle*, Walls (2006) shares her story about growing up hungry and in poverty in the hollers of West Virginia. In her memoir, she described her life in poverty, being so hungry that she ate whatever she could find in her house, including sticks of butter. When Walls and her family first arrived, she described the scene and people in a stereotypical fashion. She recognized nature in a haunting way,
saying, “The leaves had turned brown and were falling from the trees, and a cold mist shrouded the hillsides. . . . It was very still, heavier and thicker, and somehow darker. For some reason it made us all grow quiet” (p. 130). The haunting quality of Appalachia is a repeated theme in popular culture texts. The haunting mood created through diction that analogizes the scenery as cold and misty, and even dark. This haunting quality contributes to the Othering process of a place to which one is unfamiliar. Walls also provided a real life account about growing up with parents who were too proud to ask for help, or to go to the welfare office. Such perspectives cannot be ignored—some children are starving because of their parents’ Appalachian pride or hesitation to seek help. Is there a narrative that circulates about Appalachian women’s pride, a pride that inhibits them from asking for help, even when needed?

The book, Knockemstiff (Pollock, 2008), narrated all of the negative stereotypical representations of Appalachia that register in the cultural imagination. This book presented a short story of an incestuous brother and sister who get murdered while engaged in sexual relations by mountain man hiding in the woods from the draft. The author sacrificed a family to the depiction of domestic violence, perpetrated at the hands of an alcoholic father. The book illuminated the abuse of various drugs, such as “Butane huffing,” “Oxy popping,” “hilljack popping,” and alcoholism. The book is set in a small town, in Southeast Ohio, full of vivid characters that often reappear in multiple narratives, giving the book a sense of wholeness and a “being-there” quality (Geertz, 1989). Every short story in the book ended with complete despair and hopelessness. The characters remained stagnant in their miserable lives, and although many dreamt of
leaving the *hollers*, none ever did. Repetition of miserable, stagnant narratives reified to media consumers the anti-progressive culture of Appalachia—that things and people remain in their places. The danger of illustrating this monolithic view of Appalachia serves as a reminder that poor people are and will forever remain poor, and that poor people will do nothing proactive to “rise above” poverty and the hollers.

Films Set in Appalachia

In the opening scenes of the movie *The People vs. Larry Flint*, Larry Flint is a young boy living in rural Kentucky in 1953. The movie illustrates the negative, poverty-stricken stereotypical image that often circulates about people living in Appalachia. Larry Flint and his brother Jimmy have dirty faces, dirty goulashes, and laced muddy boots shown without signs of socks. The two obviously young boys are making and then selling moonshine. The boys use wooden handmade wheel barrels to cart the moonshine through the woods to sell. On one of their return trips, they find their father stealing drinks of the liquor. The projection is clear: They are hillbilly boys catching their drunken father stealing the liquor they produced in a shed in the woods somewhere in Kentucky. The two boys are rendered Other through this powerful depiction of Appalachian poverty.

A similar setting and context occurs in the movie *The Coal Miner’s Daughter* starring Sissy Spacek. In one scene, Tommy Lee Jones is in military uniform out in the woods with a friend who is trying to recruit Jones to help him sell moonshine. The friend states, “Growing up in the mountains, you’ve got three choices: coal mining, moonshining, and moving on down the line,” which he says in reference to Jones’s
character, who is looking for work in that area. The perpetuation of one narrative, that making moonshine during the Prohibition Era was a major source of income for Appalachian folks, sinks down deep into the cultural imaginary. Moreover, this line insinuates that moonshining is one of the only three choices afforded to men. Moonshining, which was an illegal activity at that time, is seen as one’s only hope at being successful in an Appalachian context.

*October Sky* is set in Coalwood, West Virginia, with the Coal mine being the focal point of the movie. The Appalachian Mountains loom in the background, painting beautiful scenery, but remain cloudy throughout the movie. This cloudiness, once again, contributes to the haunting quality of Appalachia, creating an Othered space and, simultaneously, making it feared and desired for travel. The main character, Homer, states in his smooth southern accent that “here in Coalwood, people are more interested in what’s bellow the Earth instead of what’s above it.” The movie is about the story of Homer Hickman, a young man growing up in a coal-mining community, who wants to study rocketry. Homer’s father reflects the characterization that a skill such as building rockets is devalued in this community, which places value on working in the mine—a position to which he believes a boy in that town should pursue. For example, the school principal warns the teacher not to give students false hope, stating that a lucky one might get a football scholarship, but the rest of them will work in the mines. This movie narrates the Appalachian myth that there is no way out of the community and that they are to remain, just like the town, stagnant. When Homer travels to the science fair in Indiana, his friend tells him, “Say hello to the outside world for us.” This statement
reflects stagnant nature of Appalachians and their level of unsophistication by insinuating that the Appalachians do not travel and that everyone else is “the outside world.”

Some of the themes that seem to be occurring in the literature and movies set in Appalachia reproduce this Othered image either by depicting the space as haunting, poverty stricken, unprogressive, and/or hopeless. These discourses then set in unconscious knowledge about Appalachian people, which solidifies in the cultural imagination. These mediated representation of what it means to live in this Appalachian space become more real. People’s unconscious cannot be divorced from their conscious minds. If the unconscious allows people to only imagine those from this area as being poor, haunting, and backwards, they cannot know the real diversity of the people who live there. The relationship between the representations and reality is restabilized through these discourses for consumers of these texts.

However, in addition to the audience internalizing these mediated discourses, one must consider the impact that these images would have on a person living in an Appalachian context. Fischer and Goblirsch (2006) postulate that “the self is produced, maintained, and modified in interaction and discourse” (p. 28). The movies and books that are set in Appalachia produce discourse about Appalachian selves. They narrate the expectations and realities of people living within those communities. People ultimately see a reflection of themselves through watching and reading these problematic texts.

Movies and books symbolize Mead’s notion of “generalized other,” which is a reflection of the way that people see themselves. As Mead posits in *Mind, Self, and Society*:
In abstract thought the individual takes the attitude of the generalized other toward himself, without reference to its expression in any particular other individuals; and in concrete thought he takes that attitude in so far as it is expressed in the attitudes toward his behavior of those other individuals with whom he is involved (1934, pp. 155–56).

If these movies produce an Appalachian generalized other in the sense to which Mead referred, what impact do these movies and books have on the construction of the Appalachian self? Mead would argue, as would I, that these Appalachian texts influence the way people think and who they are. Does the Appalachian self see itself in terms of the themes present in movies and books: that they are poor, backwater, haunting inbreeds? These textual representations that project Mead’s (1934) generalized Other, then are internalized into the unconscious and shapes the Appalachian self. I will argue below that the Appalachian generalized Other is more often represented as men than as Appalachian women.
Figure 4: Girl Power, Formal Dinner Night

Women in Appalachian Ohio

The experiences of men in Appalachia have been consistently documented (Eller, 1978; Caudill, 1963; Halperin, 1990). Several studies (e.g., Eller, 1978) and documentaries have recorded and analyzed the lives of men who either worked in the coal-mining industry or rallied in opposition to it. The “Mountain man” stereotype is applied most often to men (Howell, 1994). The experience of women, in general, largely has been muted from a historical context (Gluck, & Patai, 1991), but women in Appalachia have been doubly muted from history. Appalachian women’s voices in popular discourse appear in two stereotypical representations: as impoverished hillbilly women or as outspoken union organizers (Greiner, 2010).
A multitude of both negative and positive stereotypical representations of Appalachian women circulate through popular culture (Greiner, 2010; Billings, 1974; Blee & Billings, 1990). One of the most popular books about this region, Night Comes to the Cumberlands, was written by Henry Caudill, a Kentucky legislator and a third-generation resident of the Cumberland area. (1962). The book describes the historic and economic development of the Cumberland Plateau and the area surrounding it. Caudill (1962) sketches a monolithic portrait of Appalachian poverty and, thereby, cemented an image of the Appalachian region as a place with overwhelming suffering and starvation.

In the introduction of Caudill’s (1962) book, Stewart Udall writes that after reading this book, President Kennedy visited Appalachia, which garnered national attention that sparked political activism to eliminate poverty in this area. However, despite the book’s fame, it brought negative characterizations to people living outside of the area—representations that Appalachian residents have been unable to shake off. One such stereotype was about “welfare mothers” (Caudill, 1962, p. 278), which portrayed women as purposefully continuing to have children despite their impoverished condition to collect more money in welfare and other governmental assistance (Gilliom, 2001).

These stereotypes are specifically associated to women in the Appalachian region can be the lived experience of people all over. A hidden truth is that poverty transcends “races colors, ethnicities, religions, and ages of people, although it is heavy on women and children” (Gilliom, 2001, p. 20–21). When stereotypes are limited to a specific region or specific gender, they discount the unique experiences of an entire community.
The “truth” is a poor person fits no particular physical description and all people are subject to it, as they live in it, move on from it, and can just as easily return to it.

Another atrocious stereotype that inundates the U.S. cultural imagination about people in the Appalachian region is that they are backwards or worse, “inbreeds.” Even Vice President Dick Cheney made a reference about West Virginia inbreeding, stating, “So we had Cheney’s on both sides of the family—and we don’t even live in West Virginia” (Dobson, 2008, p. 1). These stereotypes are created mostly by travel accounts, not by people who actually lived and dwelled in the region. These accounts later came to be circulated in popular literary magazines or other outlets. This representation of Appalachian culture as backwards “in breeders” was employed as one of the many justifications for the area’s immense poverty.

However, not all representation of Appalachians necessarily is about poverty or backwardness. In her subversive book, appropriately titled Hillbilly Women, Kahn (1972) gives an alternative perspective of women in the region, strong, outspoken women who fought against the injustices of the coal-mining industry, and women who provided for their families with dissident modes of earning an income at an economically depressed time. Kahn tells stories of strong, subversive women using their words to story the experiences of bootlegging or working in textile companies to feed their families at times before there were coal-mining unions.

These stereotypical representations of women in Appalachia prevent people from knowing what the lived experiences are of ordinary women residing in this region. This project intends to pursue Engelhardt’s (2005) call for a more accurate perspective of the
mundane. My attempt was to veer away from (re)producing stories that over-generalize women’s experiences in Appalachia, rather situate 20 women’s unique life histories to “see actual diversity, nuanced life choices, or useful contexts for real women’s lives” (Engelhardt, p. 5). My goal was to steer away from generalizing and essentializing claims about the millions of women who inhabit this region, and instead, to engage with the life histories of 20 women to co-narrate their lived everyday realities with me.

Reterritorializing the Appalachian “Other”

After four years, I can say that I have experienced what it means to live (albeit temporarily) in Appalachia, my entire reality has been dismantled and rebuilt. I am aware of the limitations that once constricted my thoughts. I can say with veracity that I have arrived at a more humanistic place through experiences with the community and contemplation. I have made an effort to make this space feel like “home” and have become active in my community. I continue to witness economic, social, and racial diversity. The Appalachian Regional Commission’s (herein ARC) website (2011) states that “the Region includes 420 counties in 13 states. It extends more than 1,000 miles, from southern New York to northeastern Mississippi, and is home to 24.8 million people” (ARC, homepage). Obviously, among these millions of people, there is immense diversity and with that diversity sometimes follows tolerance and even acceptance. I have made and maintained deep friendships with elderly women like, Joan, who have lived their entire lives in this region. These irreplaceable friendships inspired the conception of this project, as the stories of women living in Appalachia deserve to be told. I have come to view this Appalachian space as comfortable and unique. Thus, at
times, I use the word “we” to discuss both spaces: my urban Other space and my rural Other space. I hope that this vernacular of possession will not add confusion but, rather, demonstrate the sense of desired belongingness that I share with both Othered spaces.

The women whose stories and experiences are represented in the following chapters transgress prevailing Appalachian stereotypes constructed by those in dominant social and political positions. The women I have encountered are not wholly hillbilly women (Khan, 1972), rattlesnake throwers (Kerman, 1942), or even ordinary (Greiner, 2010), some are my friends, who have really beautiful and heartbreaking stories, as all women do. My co-participants and I share some narratives about humble beginnings, although the details are quite different. Dominant discourses serve to separate and pit societies and cultures against one another by exaggerating differences, but with this work, I hope that we can reach some shared meanings. People living in rural poverty and urban poverty are drastically disparate—the latter have access, whereas rural poverty is complicated by distance between those who need aid and those who have it to give (Gilliom, 2001). Consequently, I argue as Visweswaran (1994) argues about feminist ethnography; we must to suspend the belief that we will ever be able to wholly understand another woman’s experiences. There were many moments in which I was not able to identify with my co-participants and I was confirmed in my belief that there is a place of true empathy. I do not want to provide a full and comprehensive representation of women in Appalachia, but rather, I offer a partial account (Clifford, 1986), with a dialogical performance (Conquergood, 2002) of a vulnerable text (Behar, 1996) that narrates the lives of a few women living in this Appalachian Othered space.
Humans are inherently storytellers. We make sense of our lives in and through stories. Stories give our lives meaning. Every existence we know was arrived at through a story. In *An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* by Roland Barthes, delineates this relationship between self, experiences, and story:

There are countless forms of narrative in the world. First of all, there is a prodigious variety of genres, each of which branches out into a variety of media, as if all substances could be relied upon to accommodate man's stories. Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated language, whether oral or written, pictures, still or moving, gestures, and an ordered mixture of all those substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, drame [suspense drama], comedy, pantomime, paintings…stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation. Moreover, in this infinite variety of forms, it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups, have their stories, and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds: narrative remains largely unconcerned with good or bad literature. Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural (Barthes, 1977, p. 79).

If narrative is everywhere, all the time, are they not worthy of analysis? I am, and always have been, interested in stories. I am interested in the stories we tell about ourselves that
situate us in a larger culture. This chapter is a justification for why I see stories as an integral part to human life and why and in what fashion I collected the stories of 20 women living within Appalachian Ohio.

Self Stories

It is from the narrative theoretical perspective that I came to this project. In telling stories, we construct and reconstruct our selves. Jerome Bruner, author of the book, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (2002), wrote that “telling oneself about oneself is like making up a story about who and what we are, what happened, and why we’re doing what we’re doing” (p. 64). Through personal narrative, people learn about who they are, where they were, and where they would like to go—hence stories situate people’s lives. Without narrative, people cannot know selfhood (Bruner, 2002), and self-hood or “self-knowledge” as Crites (1986) called it, is but a “recollection, as ancient wisdom testified” (p. 162). Stories are partial recollections of people’s selves. I am interested in learning how women discuss their “self-knowledge.” As Crites (1986) explained:

The continuity of memory certainly contributes to this self-certainty. “I”—this self who speaks now—have memories that go back to early childhood, fragmentary and intermittent, but forming enough links with a past to give this present self a sense of having existed over time (p. 156).

The “I” who speaks now forms the past (through memories) and the present self (through future goals). People’s present selves are created and shaped by their past experiences. Crites (1986) would argue that the person that I am certain of today is determined by the memories of the past about which I hold. My quest there is to explore the stories that
women tell about their everyday life and, consequently, their selves. What moments do women reveal about their childhood, adulthood, marriage, and child rearing that construct their selfhood? What episodes do these women access that enhance or inhibit their present selves? What stories do they repeat and what tragedies are minimized to achieve a “strong sense of personal continuity” (Crites, 1986, p. 159)? As such, one of the questions I seek to pursue with this project is: How do women in Appalachian Ohio narrate their life experiences across biographical time?

The Individual in Society

This sense of “personal continuity” (Crites, 1986) cannot be formed in isolation—people require the presence of other/s in shaping and maintaining identities. George Herbert Mead, in his influential work, *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934), tell us that people come to understand societal expectations, their sense of self, and their place in the world through interaction with others. People’s identities are formed through interactions with our residual conceptions of those others who see us, this composes the generalized other. As Lucas and Steimel (2009), explained, “In response to the generalized other, people come to understand themselves, develop their sense of identity, participate in their own socialization, and learn how to interact effectively with other members of society” (p. 326). People cannot know who they are and what they represent without the reflection from another. I argue popular culture representation of Appalachia—such as films, books, and performances constitute a significant image of the generalized other and, thus, are integral in shaping the self in an Appalachian space, if only and largely to the degree they inform others’ responses to Appalachian people.
People, after all, are storytelling animals, and it is through narratives and other stories that they come to understand Other people and Other cultures in conjunction with ourselves (Kirby, 1991). Wherein, the identities that people construct and reconstruct undoubtedly are influenced by the culture in which they live. Bruner (2002) posited, “we are virtually from the start expressions of the culture that nurtures us. And culture itself is a dialectic, replete with alternative narratives about what self is or might be. The stories we tell create ourselves reflect that dialectic” (p. 87). The identities that people narrate for themselves reflect the culture in which they live. The relationship between narrative, identity, and the body is a complicated one as Judith Butler explains in *Gender Trouble*:

The source of personal and political agency comes not from within the individual, but in and through the complex cultural exchanges among bodies in which identity itself is ever shifting, indeed, where identity itself is constructed, disintegrated, and recirculated only within the context of a dynamic field of cultural relations (1990, p. 161).

People’s identities as selves are constructed or reconstructed by their culture. We do not have completely autonomous agency to identify ourselves, our identities are crafted through interexchange. If one desires to learn more about another’s identity, we must examine the web of cultural discourses which surround the Other. Hence, my desire to rigorously contemplate the question: what are the self-stories that women tell about their individual identity that situate them into the larger culture?
Representing An “Other”

I investigated a field in which I am a partial insider. I have lived in this region for four years, but my “hyphenated identity,” as it were, is not Appalachian American, but Mexican-American (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 118). There is no discrete identity that exists for me as researcher. I epistemologically studied the locality of lived experience while being both local and nonlocal. I am both here and there, a resident of Appalachia, but never to become “native.” My identity, as a researcher of an Other’s identity, exists in the space somewhere between cultures, in a liminal space (Visweswaran, 1994).

Geertz (1983) notes that to understand an other’s culture or lived experience, people must be able to understand and interpret their culture and lived experience. I have spent four years learning and thinking reflexively about my “mode of expression” and how I have made sense of my everyday life. After these years of living, observing, analyzing, and participating in the ivory tower, I learned the walk and the talk of an academic. I constantly code switched from my urban Latina identity to my rural academic identity. I cleaned up the cuss words and tidied up the “ain’ts.” I grew more comfortable crossing the terrain and investigating and documenting an other’s life. My aim was neither to “Other” the women studied, nor to maintain the fragile air of objectivity or distance, but rather, to achieve a “being-there” (Geertz, 1988) authorial presence because I want the women who I interviewed to be fully present with me (and I with them). Geertz (1988) highlighted this “being-there” presence when he writes that researchers must demonstrate a:
Willingness to endure a certain amount of loneliness, invasion of privacy, and physical discomfort; a relaxed way with odd growths and unexplained fevers; a capacity to stand still for artistic insults, and the sort of patience that can support an endless search for invisible needles in infinite haystacks (pp. 23-24).

I cautiously swam in these waters. I understood that I entered such a field, one that records the lives of women who have been historically marginalized. I have the authority and the privilege of representing an other. My hope was to investigate an other with the care that Bakhtin laid out in *Art and Answerability* (1990).

Bakhtin’s (1990) early philosophical notions about the relationship between *author* and *hero* are explored at great lengths in this project. Originally, Bakhtin discussed this relationship of author and hero with regard to the novel, however, the relationship can be translated here. As the ethnographer of the project, my relationship to the women interviewed was “created and determined” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 7) through dialogue. I was and am outside and independent of, their experience. Through the recounting of their lived lives, the relationship of ethnographer as author and co-participant as hero was consummated. For the purposes of the project, I used author as synonymous with ethnographer and hero as synonymous with co-participant. I am not “the bearer of inner lived experience” for my co-participants but I did select the narratives that held deep meaning for me. In ethnography, both the author and the hero co-narrate but the hero still is only a character in the author’s aesthetic form. Bakhtin (1990) warns about the tendency of the author to select “excerpts that lay claim to some sort of meaning, while completely ignoring the whole of the hero and the whole of the
author” (p. 9). Through this filtered selection process of what is and is not meaningful enough to report about an other’s life, people miss out on the relationship to the event or the experience of the whole lived life itself. There is never enough time to give you a complete picture of the wholeness of my heroes or the wholeness of every event I represent, however, I acknowledge that a story is never entirely whole or complete.

The benefits of this were fourfold. First, I co-constructed, what Conquergood (2002) called a “dialogic performance,” that “bring[s] self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another” (p. 9), to achieve a nuanced understanding of an other. Second, in engaging with and co-constructing these women’s stories, together we reflected back upon and affirmed their life accomplishments, everyday realities, weaknesses, and wishes. Third, when their lived lives end, their histories will go on telling in some ways through my co-authoring of their stories. Lastly, and what Bakhtin (1990) thinks is integral to the process, I returned back into myself, “a return to my own place outside the suffering person, for only from this place can the material derived from my projecting myself into the other be rendered meaningful ethically, cognitively, or aesthetically” (p. 26). This return to the self is what I saw as a gentle balance between getting lost in others’ suffering stories and recognizing ways in which I identified and was moved by an other’s story. It was paramount to return to the self as it re-centers the story, posits the hero at the forefront of the narrative, and separates the author out of the story. This return to the self deepens the aesthetic experience for the reader, restructuring the story as a biographical text about an other, and
not about a narcissistic author, which I believed should be the accomplishment of ethnography.

Bakhtin (1990) also offers the concept of the excess of seeing or observing another. The excess of seeing illustrates the position of the author to see things that the hero might not be able to see from her or his perspective. As Bakhtin (1990) explains:

I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head his face and its expression), the world behind his back, and a whole series of objects and relations, which in any of our mutual relations are accessible to me but not to him… This ever-present excess of my seeing, knowing, and possessing in relation to any other human being is founded in the uniqueness and irreplaceability of my place in the world (p. 23).

The author can see what the hero cannot possibly gaze upon and, in this way, the author’s view can see the hero in ways that the hero could never see her or himself. This excess of seeing allows researchers to notice with care and respect symbols, meaning-making and sense-making tools, speech patterns, and other cultural practices that an other might not notice about him or herself, or see as integral to producing selves and culture. Another question I sought to answer through a reflexive analysis was what do my participants’ narratives teach me about being a woman in Appalachia?

The concept of the excess of seeing not only allows readers to see the role of the author but also widens the possibility of transformation. Bakhtin’s (1990) political positioning stressed the interdependence of author and hero as essential for a life well
lived. Bakhtin (1990) emphasized the importance of conscious and unconscious interdependence, stating:

We have to do with a meeting of two consciousness . . . distinct from each other . . where the author’s consciousness, moreover, relates to the hero’s consciousness not from the standpoint of its objective makeup, its validity as an object, but from the standpoint of its subjectively lived unity; and it is this, the hero’s own consciousness, that is concretely localized and embodied . . . and lovingly consummated. (p. 89)

Stated more simply, people need each other. Bakhtin asks people to recognize an other’s humanity, not just in the authoritative role as researcher but in life, generally. Authors and ethnographers (I will use these phrases interchangeably because, for me, they are synonymous) alike, must embrace subjectivity, disregard stances of objectivity, and work together in the construction of dialogical performances (Conquergood, 2002), such that some shared understandings, and (I argue) appreciation, for one an other can be achieved. Fieldwork can afford author and hero benefits, for as Stacey (1991) explains, “fieldwork research offers to particular research subjects practical and emotional support and a form of loving attention, of comparatively nonjudgmental acceptance, that they come to value deeply” (p. 117). In rejecting the substitution of objectivity for sensitivity, researchers no longer have to sacrifice “contextuality, depth and nuance” (Stacey, 1991, p. 118). I wanted to see things both as they are, but also as they could be.
When I speak of the erotic, then I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.

—Lorde (1984, p. 34)

In the summer of 2011, I collected the life histories of 20 women living within the Appalachian Ohio region. These interviews, in combination with four years of fieldwork, helped me to create this dialogic ethnography. I asked women questions across different
life domains, such as stories about their birth, their childhood, schooling, marriage, and for them to narrate peaks and valleys of their lives. From these hours of interviews, I transcribed over a thousand of pages of discourse. I analyzed and learned with these interviews by listening and re-listening to the interviews and reading along with the transcriptions. In this chapter, I will write more copiously about whom I spoke with, what I did, how I did it, and why I did it.

Feminist Sensibilities

Recognizing and honoring an other’s humanity is my most fundamental desire to live the life of a feminist researcher. Feminist researchers not only investigate and critique systems that serve to objectify and dehumanize members of non-dominant groups, but they do so in ways that pays close attention to the sensitivities and experiences of women. Stacey (1991) describes a feminist approach to research as the “disenchantment with the dualisms, abstractions, and detachment of positivism, and were rejecting the separations between subject and object, thought and feeling, knower and known, and personal and political” (p. 111). Ultimately, feminist research seeks to suspend notions of objectivity, as I have in this project.

The feminist methodology of life history, Geiger (1986) explains, can attain a multilayered understanding of the consciousness of women both presently and historically. Life history is an extensive account of a person’s life told and then recorded by an other, who then writes about that life as if it were an autobiography (Geiger, 1986). This method is used to study women’s lives across different domains of their life cycles in both cultural and historical settings. Life history interviewing can be most closely tied
to the field of anthropology but it also has roots that spread throughout history, sociology, psychology, and communication studies (Geiger, 1986). Several studies have used the life history form as its epistemological platform (e.g., Menard-Warnick, 2007; Sosulski, Buchanan, & Donnell, 2010; Roberts, et al., 2010). Life history interviewing is important because it not only addresses the idiosyncratic standpoints and life experiences of women, but it also purposefully ignores traditional academic standards of rigor and objectivity, and embraces subjectivity (Geiger, 1986). Life history also allows researchers to see the careful relationship between experience and consciousness—that consciousness is not extraneous but, rather, a clear act of interpretation and constructing social worlds. Documenting women’s lives might no longer be seen as “moving against the grain,” but circulating those discourses to make them more mainstream, is.

Crystallizing Methodologies

This project used multiple methodologies to crystallize a fragmented understanding of the complex experiences of women in Appalachian Ohio.

Crystallization, Laura Ellingson, feminist methodologist in health communication, writes:

Combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers’ vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them (Ellingson, 2009, p. 4).
Crystallization was used to simultaneously embrace my researcher subjectivity and eschew my researcher authority. I wished to represent and speak with an other (in a Bakthin-ian sense, 1990), not construct an Other (in a Said-ian sense, 1978). I wanted to offer a coherent, thick, and deeply descriptive interpretation of these women’s words through multiple genres of writing. I played with the speaking subject moving from first person, to third person, from stories to poetic transcriptions, from showing to telling (Denzin, 2001, 2003).

Through the incorporation of multiple paradigms; ethnographic, autoethnographic, interactive life history interviewing, historical and archival research, photography and performance methodologies, I understood and then represented these women’s lives.

*Ethnography*

Ethnography is more than observing a population, it is:

Actively situated between powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilization, cultures, classes, races, and genders. Ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion (Clifford, 1986, p. 2).

I have lived in the Appalachian region that I studied for the past four years and have been an active member of the community at large, not just the university community. I volunteered with several community organizations, such as Girl Power, which serves to empower girls in grades fifth through eighth in one of the poorest counties in Ohio. I also have worked with Community Food’s Initiatives, which works to stabilize food systems
in the county, and with Good Works, an organization that serves the community’s needy populations (specifically, those who are homeless and those who are elderly). My time within this field has been sustained and consistent. João Biehl, in his ethnography, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*, speaks to my sentiments about the amount of time spent learning from and with a community, Biehl writes:

> Long-term ethnographic engagement crystallizes complexity and systematicity: details, often dramatically narrated, reveal nuanced fabric of singularities and the logic that keeps things the same. This ethnographic sense of ambiguity, repetition, and openness collides with my own sensibility in the way I have tried to portray the book’s main characters: as living people on the page, with their own mediated subjectivities, whose actions are both predetermined and contingent, caught in a constricted and intolerable universe of choices that remains the only source from which they can craft alternatives (2005, p. 19).

Biehl is making sense of the subjective nature of ethnography. A sustained presence is necessary in order to capture and represent the fleeting moments and complex characters from the field. In my thematic chapters, I wrote in a way that my characters come “alive on to the page,” as Biehl does, giving you phenomenological insight to how they experience the world in and through their bodies (see chapter VII). I tried to “mediate their subjectivities” and “catch constrained choices.” I tried to evoke a sense of presence in my field for my readers.

I wrote not to represent Appalachian culture as a whole, but rather, to present moments of ethnographic production that I have witnessed since I have been *here*
My observations reflected an “intensely sensuous way of knowing” (Conquergood, 1985, p. 180). Meaning, that I narrated for the reader the things I saw, the things I smelled, the things I felt, the things I touched, and the things I heard. This ethnographic perspective was essential to understanding the institutional, political, geographical, and societal forces that contributed/s to the Otherness of this area. I wanted to “rethink” ethnography, unveil the political stakes, and become aware and critical of the cultural understandings of this area (Conquergood, 1985).

*Autoethnography*

To do ethnography well, as Bakhtin (1990) discusses in relation to biography, necessitates a return to the self. Good ethnographers must own their subject positions; respond to the “vulnerabilities and vicissitudes of fieldwork” by having “honesty, humility, self-reflexivity, and acknowledgement of the interdependence and reciprocal role-playing between knower and known” (Conquergood, 1985, p. 182). This return to the self and writing the experience of an other through my sensory and temporal perceptions required an autoethnographic approach. If meaning is constructed and contested in the spaces in between people, my experience of an other cannot and should not be ignored. I, thus, displayed “multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis, & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). I wrote in my “self” with the dialogue of my co-participants, showing you my consciousness in the ethnographic present, writing as I thought. Ellingson is dogmatic about the necessity of writing in the researcher’s body. She writes:
The erasure of researchers’ bodies from conventional accounts of research obscures the complexities of knowledge production and yields deceptively tidy accounts of research. (Ellingson, 2006).

Ethnography is messy and vulnerable. By not writing in my body, I would have produced knowledge that was suspended from the self and suspended from the other. When using intensely subjective ways of knowing, it is imperative to write in the body, to reveal how we came to know what it is that we know. By writing in the body, I showed the interaction as they naturally occurred, specifically in chapter VII. Beyond writing in my body in to this project, I also wanted to situate the dialogue in other historical discourses.

*Historical and Archival Research*

The use of life history interviews has been justified in chapter II, however, to make these interviews more evocative to the reader, I also investigated historical and archival research. I want to supplement and situate these women’s experiences in larger, broader cultural conversations. Since arriving in Appalachian Ohio four years ago, I had heard many rumors about the area’s pivotal role in the Underground Railroad. On more than one occasion, my Girl Power girls have boasted to me that, “my grandma’s basement was used in the Underground Railroad” or “My pawpaw’s cellar was a hiding space for slaves during the Civil War” they would say. Beyond the rumor’s, throughout Athens County, one can find paintings illustratively emphasizing the town’s contribution “helping free the slaves” (see image below). Zakes Mda, a professor of creative writing here at Ohio University, writes *Cion* (2007), which was researched in a neighboring community, Kilvert. The book fictionalized Kilvert’s role in the Underground Railroad
through juxtaposing past escape story with a contemporary love story. But from all these
rumors and claims, I was hard press to retrieve any written documentation about the
area’s role in the Underground Railroad.

Figure 6: Wall Display in Amesville about the Underground Railroad

Consequently, during an interview with the daughter of the Middleport mayor,
Terra, she told me about an Underground Railroad walking tour that her dad seasonally
guided. The walking tour narrated the escape while we physically traveled the terrain. I
knew I had to go. After several email correspondences with the Mayor of Middleport,
Mike, he invited me over to his house for dinner and afterward he guided a tour for about
20 local residents and I. Mike affirmed for me, my inability to substantiate the rumors heard about the Underground Railroad, “most of the people escaping to the north, did so in the 1820’s and 1830’s, so many of the houses still do not stand, but a lot of people in Middleport do claim it happened here or there,” he said. The evening was very muggy and I had not brought bug spray like it was recommended, but I trailed on with the tour, hoisting my recorder in the air, trying to record every word. The tour was one of the very few documented passages of the Underground Railroad. We started out down by the Ohio River, just across the peak from Point Pleasant, West Virginia. We walked northward, “literally walking the same path that slaves did,” stopping intermittently to hear stories about spotted artifacts which all aided in the journey to the North. Mike, the mayor of Middleport, was a retired high school history teacher and a fantastic storyteller. He paused for affect, “setting the mood” as Mike said, he used voice inflection, and decorated his narration with gestures. If he had been one of my public speaking students, I would have given him a prized “A.” The tour was both educational and interesting. It ended at the high school stadium, in the center of town, to hear the story of the first crowned African American homecoming queen in Middleport. In more detail:

Middleport was founded in 1796 and had not been that old when slaves were escaping through it in the 1820’s and 1830’s. Although many people brag about the city’s help in the Underground Railroad, it is important to remember that not everyone felt the same way about it. The same people, who advertised help to cross slaves over the river and across the terrain in the newspaper, were also hired with their packs of dogs to chase down runaways, money spoke and people
listened… However, Middleport had been integrated since before the 1930’s, black people appearing in many of the high school and primary school yearbooks. But Middleport did have a small Klan presence. However, in the 1960’s, Middleport elected its first black homecoming queen. The tradition was that the mayor would crown the new queens and kiss them on the cheek. The mayor at the time refused to kiss a black girl on the cheek and the whole town gossiped about his vehement refusal to kiss her. So when half time at the big football game came everyone was in suspense as to what would unfold, even young Mike, who was in the 7th grade at the time. The whole crowd held their breath when the women lined the stage. After a long and dramatic pause, the white superintendent of the schools emerged on to the stage with a huge smile on his face, he was “delighted” to crown the queen and kiss her on the cheek. The whole stadium roared with applause. And the new tradition now remains, the superintendent, not the mayor, crowns and kisses the homecoming queen. It was therapeutic for the whole community. A sight to see.

Although I went on two other tours, the Little Cities of Black Diamonds and a Brick Tour in New Staitsville, neither was nearly as memorable. The Underground Railroad tour was both educational and very interesting. This area has a very rich, multilayered history, which has not been physically recorded. The area relies on an honored tradition embedded in Appalachian culture—orality.

I did archival genealogical research and conducted interviews at the Athens Historical Society. I perused several county museums; Perry County, Meigs County,
Athens County. I toured the Little Cities of Black Diamonds Museum. I read newspaper articles from the 1920’s that one of my co-participants had kept. I reviewed old fashion maps of both Middleport and New Straitsville. I attended produce auctions out in Chesterville, Ohio. I attended a Civil War re-enactment, which was a very strange experience for me. I was hosted by the South, I was unsure of when they were “in character” and when they were just being themselves. They talked twice about “shooting the damn Yanks off their lawns…” And finally and proudly, I have eaten in almost every diner or restaurant in every city I conducted interviews in, that was some serious research. This is not really an impressive feat as it seems, as there are typically only one diner per small town. My favorite, however, is Amesville’s “Kasler’s Country Kitchen” out on Route 550.

*Figure 7: Kasler’s Country Kitchen in Amesville, Outside*
I viewed the archival research as painting a more holistic picture of these women’s lives, interconnecting these women’s words with the social and cultural politics present and connecting the link of “ethnographic detail and political economy” (Agar, 1996, p. 3). In an attempt to make the reader fully present in my research world, I have also included several photographs throughout my dissertation. Insofar as ethnography helps to “untangle these knots of complexity, bringing into view the concrete conditions and spaces through which human existences become intractable realities” (Biehl, 2005, p. 43), photographs provide a more panoramic and illustrative view of these conditions and realities.

I incorporated photographs for two main reasons: 1. To challenge textuality (Calafell & Holling, 2011) and 2. give the reader a “having been there” presence (Clifford, 1986). Bernadette Calafell and Michelle Holling, in their edited volume,
Latina/o Discourse in Vernacular Spaces (2011), write that we should move beyond textuality because of its “reverberations of colonialism on the body” (p. 23). In a space marked by internal corporate colonization such as Appalachia, photographs hold the greater potential to represent, “agency, revision, and community building” (p. 23). Photographs communicate things that words cannot touch. Harper writes, “Thus images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness that do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain’s capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words” (Harper, 2002, p. 13). Photos take our minds places words and descriptions cannot. Too much of what we produce in communication studies never reaches the audience for whom we produce it. Photographs not only evoke deeper levels of consciousness, but it is also more engaging, accessible, and concrete.

**Performative Writing**

It is through the telling of stories that people come to learn who they are, and more about the relationships they are enmeshed in. I wanted to honor this potential by performing these women’s stories through my writing (Carr, 1986; Freeman, 1998). I privileged people’s lives, and not themes, thus my writing takes on a performative mode. In all the three thematic chapters, I wrote about each person with a sense of wholeness, characteristics about their physical and visual identities, to perform their presence through writing. Words themselves call people to performance and the words we choose perform our very selves.

My goal in writing performatively was not to attain narrative Truth (Ellis, & Bochner, 2000) but to deepen and clarify the meaningfulness of life (Conquergood,
2002), to show a genuine conversation between my co-participants and myself. To show my reflexive research position, I wrote to reveal the distance between, and the connectedness of, my co-participant and I. Writing in a dialogically performative way “brings self and Other together even while it holds them apart” (Conquergood, 2002, p. 9). Through writing, I epistemologically came to know difference and identity with and in-between these women. It is through writing that I came to know and make sense of my experience, thoughts, and feelings about a particular subject, which I then shared with my readers. Conquergood (2002) writes that “dialogical performance is the means as much as the end of honest intercultural understanding” (p. 10). Like Madison (1999), performing this group of women through writing helped me to see them, illuminate these women’s words, and made me realize them, and then allowed me the opportunity to express what I have learned with others.
Participants

I recruited 20 women living in and around Appalachian Ohio. The only requirements I had were that they must be at least 18-years-old (thus, the absence of dialogical presence of my Girl Power girls, although their words and our experiences are interwoven in the very fabric of this project), a second-generation Appalachian woman, and want to talk about their life across various domains, such as childhood, cultural meanings, school, marriage, tragedies and triumphs, gendering, and other socialization processes (see Appendix B for the interview protocol).

I recruited these women by starting with connections I have made through my volunteer work with Good Works, Girl Power, and The Community Food’s Initiative. Good Works has a program that connects those who are elderly with people who are
young to help them with small chores that they are unable to do for themselves. I have
been in a volunteer relationship with my senior friend for the past four years and we have
grown very close and have an intimate understanding of one another’s life (for a more
information, see chapter VII). My senior friend, Joan, was my first interviewee and I can
speak to significant moments shared with her, which were also culturally meaningful for
me. Together we have cruised the country roads, back in the “hollers” she grew up in.
Most Sunday mornings that we are together are spent driving out to Amesville, close to
where she was born and raised, to Kasler’s Country Kitchen. The most significant
contributions of this writing can be attributed to the years dedicated with her.

Consequent participants were accumulated through snowball sampling (Lindlof &
Taylor, 2002). Frankly, I banked on my extroverted personality to meet and elicit
participation. I walked into the county historical society on a Tuesday afternoon and
walked out with two interviews scheduled. Old ladies love an interested ear.

Beyond the elderly cohort of women, I also recruited women from other
generations through other community outlets. Two women I recruited through the softball
team I play on over the summer. I asked women who played on the team and they
excitedly agreed. I “cold” called Cheryl (see chapter V for more information about her),
at the Little Cities of Black Diamonds, and she invited me to her home that Friday. I met
Summer through my trail running group. Casually, I mentioned my need for participants
and she invited me over to swim and talk. I had a very difficult time floating in the pool
and keep the recorder close and dry. The rest were mostly introduced to me through
friends, a very “informal” snowball sample. I had more volunteers than I could interview, which was a good problem to have.

Transcription and Analysis

All interviews were recorded with a hand-held Sony IC recorder, all the co-participants felt comfortable with this procedure. The only verbal apprehension I received was from Becca and the recorder was not being able to pick up her “mumbling” or the potential to catchall of Sarah’s “ya’lls,” that she worried about. I also took some shorthand notes throughout the interview, or inscription as Clifford (1990) calls it, in which a researcher jots down a word or phrase in the social discourse. Because I am not from Appalachia, I experienced moments of transcription, in which, my co-participants had to carefully and cautiously explain a few cultural idioms or colloquial phrases with which I was not familiar. After the interviews were over, I returned back to my office in Central Classroom, and I wrote out my descriptions, which made my field notes “a more or less coherent representation of an observed cultural reality” (Clifford, 1990, p. 51).

After the field notes were settled, I immediately began to transcribe after each interview. Although, I did not always finish the transcriptions before the next interview was scheduled. As I said, I received more than enough offers, and they were all relatively close to one another.

I transcribed my participants’ words as they were pronounced, including filler words. In the presentation of their dialogue in the chapters, I cleaned up the transcript, making it more coherent and legible. Narrating accents as a non-native runs the very real risk of Othering these women in a very demeaning way. This rhetorical choice of
whether or not to “perform” the dialect of my participants is something that required reflection for me, and in the end, I only did so when absolutely necessary to perform the story as it unfolded.

I analyzed the words of my co-participants through narrative analysis, assuming structure and surrender to the process. I listened closely to the words of my co-participants while I was in conversation with them, trying to only ask questions to clarify. Some of the conversations lasted as long as four hours, the shortest conversation recorded was an hour and half. When I returned to my office, I transcribed my co-participants’ words, re-listening to the dialogue. For weeks, I listened to the recordings in my car and in my office, writing down notes of interesting stories, paying close attention to the language of the narration.

After hundreds of pages of transcription, I began data reduction, noticing themes and issues that I am sensitive to hearing, filtered through my theoretical leanings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As a feminist of color, interested in stories, I am sensitive to noticing discussions of identity, storytelling, the body, and culture. I arranged the transcripts such that the order reflected the domains as laid out in the interview protocol (e.g., childhood, schooling, marriage, tragedy, and triumph). I loosely grouped transcriptions after a very close reading of them and put them into Dropbox folders labeled, “the body,” “identity,” “stories/language,” and “culture.” I constructed evocative narratives from my field notes, interview transcriptions, and archival research. I thought with and felt from the stories shared and crafted (Ellingson, 2009). Before I interviewed the women, I warned them about my fictionalized licensure; when I had gaps of information about something
my imagination has a tendency to take over, as most humans do. In Spanish, we have two words for history, cuenta and historia, both assume a quality of fictionalization. Cuenta, means an account, signifying that it is one account amongst others. Historia is the word often used for story, embedded in the meaning is the blurring between fact and fiction. I believe that data can only offer partial accounts (Clifford, 1986), and thus, memory must be fictionalized to give the past a more holistic quality.

Through conversations with my advisors and other committee members, reading several ethnographies (Biehl, 2005; Myerhoff, 1978; Agee, 1939; Stewart, 1996), and weeks of reflection on and with my recordings, field notes, and transcriptions, I developed a sense of clarity about the focus of this project. The chapters presented here are a reflection of the macro, meso, and micro levels. Chapter V interrogates Appalachian identity while contributing to larger conversations about Appalachian culture, engaging the macro level and addressing the literature presented in chapter II. Chapter VI discusses marginal bodies, moving them to central spaces in this knowledge production. The proliferation of these “marginal” bodies and “marginal” experiences engaged meso level discourse. The micro level of discourse is performed through my relationship with my co-participant, Joan, in chapter VII. These three chapters are formed interpretations that address the questions and concerns presented in chapter III. In the final chapter, VIII, I address my theoretical conclusions more thoroughly.

In methodologically completing this project, I have met communication studies with anthropology in its “coming of age,” Victor Turner, prominent anthropologist, writes:
Barriers between self and other, head and heart, conscious and unconscious, history and autobiography, have been thrown down and new ways have been found to express the vital interdependence of these and other “Mighty opposites” (In Myerhoff’s, *Number Our Days*, 1978, p. xiii).

This project bridges the gap between dualisms, self and Other, mind and body, *then* and *now*, *there* and *here*, hidden truths and experience. The path was not as seamless as it presents in this chapter, it was a windy road to get to the known, complete with stops, hang-ups, and let downs. I end this chapter with a short story composed by my field notes to narrate the complications of the field:

My friend, Trish, thought she could help me out, claiming to be friends with many “good, generationally-Appalachian women.” So she invited me over for a picnic to her house on a Thursday at 6p.m. I went. I knew she was a Mormon. But what I expected did not match what I found.

I drove past the tiny village of Amesville, down a hilly country road, to another country road, to a dirt road, and up her mile-long gravel driveway. At first, I was lost and after sitting on someone’s porch with the beans I prepared for the picnic for over 20 minutes, I then realized, no. This was not Trish being “Flakey Trish,” forgetting she invited me to her house on Thursday, but rather, I was just at the wrong house all the way out in the “country.” So I drove back down the mile-long gravel driveway, down the dirt road, out to the country road only to discover this absent stranger’s address was only one number off from Trish’s address.
When I finally pull up to Trish’s driveway, 25 minutes late, there was a pool, literally, of people staring at me in the front yard. I asked if I was at the right place, they stared for a minute—both the lady carrying the red-headed-child, and the old man with a full beard and sans a shirt—and then they said yes, that I was in fact at the right place. Trish was inside.

I was uncomfortable from the moment I entered. They were several women in the kitchen, I did not know why they were there, whether it was for me or not, and then there were…the Mormon missionaries, just hanging out in their classic, easily-identifiable uniform—white elbow-length shirts, black ties, black pants, and black and white name tags. This only added to my confusion, so this was a Mormon picnic? Were the ladies here to eat with these missionaries? Or were they here for me to interview? I tried to poke and prod, one woman I sat next to was not a part of the Church of Latter Day Saints, so then was she here for me? But before I could ask any more questions there was prayer. There was a lot of prayer. Praying over food. Praying over their mission. Praying for my project. Praying for thanks for being together. Praying, praying, and more praying. Which I was willing to endure, so long as I got an interview date out of it. But alas, after dinner was over and the dishes were washed, the one woman who actually was there for me was—as most women in Athens are—a transplant to the area. The other women there were from the east coast, but not asked to be there for me anyway.
So I spent a day in the kitchen, soaking, boiling, and smashing beans, to bring a “real Mexican homemade” dish to a picnic in Appalachia. After lots of head bowed in prayer, lots of small conversation, lots of awkward interactions later, I was—just as I arrived—fourteen interviews short of my dissertation goal.

This is the research process. You try to recruit, you make refried black beans all day, you pray your agonistic heart out, get a kinked in your unaccustomed-to-bowing-for-long-periods-neck, only to find women who do not qualify as “second generation” Appalachian women. You have got to love fieldwork.
My own interpretation of it is that, and this is just me, it seems unique to me because, you always feel, I always felt I wasn’t quite good enough…you grow up always thinking that everyone else is looking down…on this area. And I think that the university plays a large part in that. Because people come from all over, in to this little town, and they have an immediate mindset when they hear that you’re
from Athens, or, this has happened to me many times, people don’t know I’m a
native Athens Countian. And they will say things like, “Well you know how the
local people are,” and I say “Yeah, tell me how are they, and I’m one of the local
people.” And they don’t ever think. Or people have said things like, “You’re from
Athens, you’re from this area?” and I say, “Actually, I’m from Glouster.” And
they are like “You’re from Glouster?! You sound so intelligent.” What does that
mean? So I think that when you grow up here, and the university just feeds it, that
you always feel like you’re just not quite there yet…

Identity is a complex idea to study. It cannot be controlled nor quantified. It is too
slippery to explain with either abstract or concrete words. Identity is fluid but I agree with
Hermans (2000), that it is dialogical, as in the self is constructed in and through multiple
positions and stories (Kirby, 1991). Our identities change over our life course and as we
cross landscapes. In one day, I can be a student or a hoodrat\textsuperscript{1}, I can be a young
professional or a hoochie\textsuperscript{2}, I can be a fierce feminist or a dominated dame, my identity
performance depending on the requirements of social context. Identity is best explained
by interrogating these social contexts, the social, political, geographic, and economic
discourses, which serve as moderators to our identity performances.

Consequently, to explain an identity I do not own—the identity of an other—is
even more difficult to understand and interpret. I cannot offer you a complete picture of

\textsuperscript{1} Bakhtin writes that our language is saturated with ideology. This diction is an attempt to
reflect the code switching that I engage in as a person who performs a social self from
multiple social stages (For a more careful explanation see chapter one.

\textsuperscript{2} Again, a reflection of the double voiced-ness of my writing and anticipated audiences.
identity or culture, I can only guess at what I think is and is not a hallmark of Appalachian Ohio female identity based upon four years in the field and the 20 life history interviews I partook in. Through in-depth narrative interviews, I specifically asked my co-participants, to discuss “Appalachian” identity (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002). Life history interviews “act as prism for understanding larger cultural or historical frames” (p. 180). Consequently, either through the collection of social, political, or economic stories these woman told me or through their own explicit expressions of identity, in this chapter, I attempt to explain what I consider to be important themes in understanding Appalachian female identity.

In this chapter, I explore first how the term “Appalachian” became a corporeal label, rather than a name to describe a geographical space. Following this, I show what I call “hallmarks” of Appalachian female identity. I created these hallmarks through months of listening and learning with the interviews and then later the transcripts, but also by simply being present and “here” in Appalachian culture. These eight hallmarks fall into three larger, broader categories; disgust, ambivalence, and pride. I will discuss each of the hallmarks under the befitting larger category and conclude with a linguistic bow that ties all of the hallmarks and categories together.

Disgust

In this supposedly “post-racial society,” most people in the United States would like to think that we have transcended from seeing people as simply a race, but rather observing their wholeness as human beings (Orbe, 2011). But what I would contend is true, and objectively remains true through artifacts such as the Census, is that we like to
sort people. We like to tidy things up, and place people in classifications, and press labels on it. Sometimes this labeling of our personal identities might be acceptable or even welcomed, but for rebels-against-the-establishment such as myself, I reject these Other-imposed identities. They are not who I want to be. Accordingly, Kirby (1991) writes, “Clearly, personal identity implies more than an empty pole of identity and more than just temporal continuity. What makes personal identity personal is that it is my characteristic identity, my particular life with all its turn and vagaries” (p. 33). This section is dedicated to those such as myself, the rebels-against-the-establishment, who do not see Appalachia as part of their characteristic identities, moreover as a classification that they are comfortable with.

I’m not Appalachian!

In 1963, following John F. Kennedy’s tour of poverty plaguing the countryside in and near West Virginia, he and another United States president were moved to establish the Appalachian Regional Commission (herein ARC) (ARC.gov, 2011, homepage). This commission was charged with addressing the ubiquitous poverty and rising economic despair within the Appalachian Region. Since it’s coining, Appalachian has been synonymous with poverty, destitution, and despair. The ARC was created and formed to address systemic poverty within the region. As the ARC itself puts it on its website:

In the mid 1960s, at the urging of two U.S. presidents, Congress created legislation to address the persistent poverty and growing economic despair of the Appalachian Region. A few statistics tell the story: One of every three Appalachians lived in poverty, Per capita income was 23 percent lower than the
U.S. average, High unemployment and harsh living conditions had, in the 1950s, forced more than 2 million Appalachians to leave their homes and seek work in other regions (ARC, History page).

The story of Appalachia is one of poverty stricken lands and unemployed peoples, and the narrative persists. Since its inception, since the story was first told by ARC, “Appalachia” has come to symbolize poor people living in poor regions.

Not until the 1960’s does the term “Appalachia” become a name used to address bodies living within the region rather than mere geographical space. The mountain range that rests across West Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, has been called the Appalachian mountain range for centuries (McNeil, 1995). The word “Appalachia” originated (or at least it’s etymology) from the Native Americans who lived with the land long before it was subject to colonization by Europeans. As one of my co-participants, Cheryl, directly puts it, “I knew there was the Appalachian Mountains and such, but I didn’t know that peoples was Appalachian.” Since the narrative of “how America’s was founded” has been told, Appalachia has signified mountains, but it was not until the formation of ARC that the name is used to describe those living within the region.

After the ARC was formed as a government entity, the term “Appalachia” was forced on to the people who inhabited the space. The space, what was and was not “Appalachian Region” was (and still is, presently) predetermined by the members of ARC. ARC determined which counties met the criteria to be “Appalachia.” That criterion was not solely about characteristics of geography (land miles above sea level) but also about poverty rates, how many people were living at or below the poverty rate in a
particular county. To be clear, for ARC, and thus for the government, to recognize a county as “Appalachian” had nothing to do with its original signifier (mountain range), but rather was applied to areas that were simply nearby and poor.

Consequently the borders of Appalachia, what is and is not “Appalachia,” are temporary and arbitrary, and are purposefully and detrimentally—socially and discursively constructed. ARC has shifted the border of “Appalachia” to include or exclude counties on the periphery depending on the number of people living in poverty. These borders have been, are, and will be contested throughout history. Appalachian borders are not permanent or stagnant, they have shifted. And these shifts are machinations of the local political economy. They are both real and unreal. There is an incentive for counties to assume these “Appalachian identities,” ARC shells out millions of dollars per year to these counties through various social programming. ARC owns the final word on which counties do and don’t have official “Appalachian” identity.

Thus, individuals do not reserve the right to decide whether their identity is “Appalachian” or not, the commission does. The commission which is a governmental agency gets to speak these Appalachian borders. The counties, and subsequently the people living within those counties, are named “Appalachia” in the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission County List (ARC website, Appalachia: A Report by the President's Appalachian Regional Commission, 1964), which has been drafted and redrafted depending on the county’s “social and economic characteristics.” The term “Appalachian,” which was originally used to describe an aesthetically beautiful mountain range, has become the story of poor people living in a poor land.
Such a discursive construction of borders can be likened to the construction of borders in the Southwest of the United States in the 1840’s. When the United States military invaded territories of Mexico (present day Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, California, Nevada), subsequent wars (e.g., the Mexican-American War) and treaties (e.g., The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo) resulted in the United States government stealing land from Mexico, and conjuring up borders and boundaries. Indigenous Mexicans living within those territories had borders discursively constructed up around them. They were displaced from their families living on either side of the symbolic yet powerful divide. In a matter of days, families living on one plot of land were no longer neighbors, but national enemies. On side of the border people could continue their Mexican indigenous practices, customs, languages, and everyday existences, and on the other side people were forced to adopt a new language, values, allegiances, and practices, that ultimately separated them from their people. Indiginos Mexicanos living in the Southwest in the 1840’s became United States citizens overnight. This imposition of a new identity was rightfully begrudged. Growing up, I never had the opportunity to forget, my abuelo told us our history. Chimamanda Adichie, in her Ted Talk discusses, “the danger of the single story.” A single story is constructed by, “show[ing] a people one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they will become” (2009, 9:30). If you only tell one historical story, of how U.S. pioneers “tamed” the West, full of savage and wild natives, then that single story has the power to become true. Our history, the version my grandfather told began from what Adichie talks about as “the other side of the arrows,” which attempts to tell the story from another’s perspective, such as; my
people’s, my grandfather’s point of view, rather than the only one found in history books (Adichie, Ted.com, 2009).

The history textbooks I read in my mainstream elementary education narrated the story as a heroic epic battle that the civilized soldiers of United States bravely fought and won and then brought a value of “civilization” on to the lands and people that were once Mexican. When I brought my history textbook home, it provoked my grandfather to share the historical narrative from our ancestor’s side of the arrows. I now understand that my grandfather was exposing this colonial discourse and finding inconsistencies with both my textbook’s historical instances and the rhetorical functions (Spurr, 1993). My grandfather re-educated me; that the Mexican government was tricked through a serious of false promises made by the United States and the U.S. government’s insatiable thirst for the acquisition of land and brown bodies waged a shameless war against us and won. In the end, Mexicans were forced to give up their lands, their identities, and their languages.

Incidentally, carrying this ideologically critical stance of U.S. history on my back, I am intrigued as to how I started this project sans this scrutiny. I drafted my protocol and consent form, without knowing or interrogating the politically loaded history of the word, “Appalachian.” I was just an innocent, wide-eyed researcher coming to collect the stories of these strong, fierce Appalachian ladies, or so I thought.

Since “Appalachia” is not a term people chose for their selves, as was the situation with Mexican indigenous populations, some women feel disgust at being labeled “Appalachian.” One of my co-participants vehemently corrected me, “Don’t call me
Appalachian, I ain’t no Appalachian!” George Herbet Mead (1934) in *Mind, Self, & Society*, convinces us communication researchers, that the self is constructed through our interactions with others, some of my co-participants, the oldest generation, never interacted with this label, were never socialized with this term, and had no problem with telling me so. By the end of my third interview, I changed my language and my questions. Here is just one of those stories.

“Only Down in West Vrrrrgina”

I first met Sarah when I walked into the Athens Historical Society (herein AHS) looking for more information early on in the proposal stage of this project. Sarah ignored the dominant social memo about old ladies having to cut their hair short once they went entirely gray. She wore her long gray thick strands on top of her head in a bun—a beautiful older lady, with intense smile lines around her eyes. After speaking with her for only ten minutes, I could see why they were so deep. She smiles all the time when she talks. When she recalls a fine memory, her eyes smile. I went to the AHS for the purpose of gathering literature on the Native Americans who had inhabited the space before colonization. I did not find such a pamphlet, instead I found something better, one of my first co-participants. Sarah was not an easy recruit.

Sarah told me no at first, “No, I think you better ask someone else,” she said. I tried to contain my disappointment. “Okay,” nodding my head. Then the kind man behind the counter nudge her, “Morgan County is just a border away from Athens county, Sara,” he also said something else, I could not quite hear. And then she turned to me and agreed.
“Okay, okay” she said hesitantly, and walked towards me. We arranged a date for me to come back to the AHS so that we could talk.

Upon my return visit, I realized why she initially hesitated and rejected my request. I was going over the consent form with her, naively reading to her, “I am collecting the life histories of 20 women who have lived in Appalachian Ohio for at least two generations…” to which, she abruptly corrected, “Okay, now this says women living in Appalachian Ohio? This isn’t Appalachia, I’m not Appalachian. This is only the foothills of Appalachia, this, this is a mis-statement right there,” she chastised.

I was busted, this must be what it is like to be a deer caught in headlights, and I did not know what to say. Yet I wanted her participation. I blinked for a while, and then I managed an apology:

I know, I’m sorry, I didn’t even think about the political implications of calling women “Appalachian,” I guess my perspective is, and maybe I’m wrong, that this area is part of the Appalachian Region. I’m sorry, I guess, the ladies I play softball with call themselves Appalachian…?

I offered as recourse. To this, she replied “So you just assume?” I responded that it never occurred to me that it would offend someone. She did not wait for me to answer. She interrupted me by saying, “Ahhh okay, well, but that would be a false statement. Don’t you think?”

She pursed her lips and stared blankly at me. I did not know. I did not think. I was unacquainted with this position and ill-equipped to handle this reluctance by a co-participant. She handed me back the sheet of paper and my pen and said, “So now I won’t
sign it.” I tried to recover and be respectful to all my co-participants as my advisor always instructed I do:

Okay, well, that’s fine. Maybe you could just give me a verbal consent? That yes, you agree to participate?

Sarah: Sure so long as you change those lies. This is not Appalachia.

She said, and then cleared her throat. With provoking her or asking her any other questions, Sarah said:

You’d have to go down in to West Virginia to get Appalachian women. Cause I was gonna say, when I think of Appalachian women and, they’re….they’re living in the backwoods, and you know, no modern thangs, maybe not now, maybe, but back in the…

This was not quite how I imagined my first interview. But at that moment, I was at the vulnerability of my co-participant. I needed and wanted to hear more. This exchange only piqued my interest and I said:

Absolutely, well now I have to think more about my terminology.

Sarah: Okay, well I’ve read it. But to me it’s not true statements. So can you still do it?

I told her I could. She never did sign my consent form because of all the “lies.” In the beginning, I thought I don’t know how far we will get if the entire questionnaire utilized a language that upset her. But I tried my best to meander around it. I used “Southeast Ohio” where it said Appalachia or “women from this area” where it said Appalachian women. Her hard critical exterior melted away within minutes after this
interaction, and I was surprised by the end of the interview she even admitted that “this was fun.”

As I reflect on this vehement interaction from one of my co-participants, I can only speculate on her ardent opposition to the language of my consent form and her total (dis)identification with being called “Appalachian.” To try to further understand this opposition to an Appalachian identity, it is prudent to highlight the time and space relationship between Sarah’s life and the application of an “Appalachian” label to bodies (Giddens, 1979). Giddens’s idea of structuration allows us to see her communication as placed in a larger structural context. Structuration recognizes the importance of identifying and studying the time and space conditions that situate and help explain social acts and how they might become social patterns. Sarah’s bold reaction to being labeled “Appalachian” cannot be understood as an isolated act. Her words, when situated within a spatial structure, understood within a particular time period, gives us insight to the social conditions that give rise to such a fervent reaction.

Sarah was born in 1937, before Appalachia was a term introduced to speak about people. She was an adult when Kennedy created the ARC and a consumer of the national popular discourse surrounding the formation of ARC. At that time, Appalachia was the place that Kennedy campaigned in, saw how desperate and poor it was and decided something had to be done for these poor, incapable people in this poor, unproductive region. This was not Sarah’s story of her self, in Sarah’s mind that place was only “down in West Virginia,” not her town, not the place or family where she grew up, and so, not something with which she could or wanted to identify. She discursively constructed up
the border to lie in between her and her life experiences on one side, and the other to be “down in West Virginia,” some place foreign and distant to her. To own an Appalachian identity, for Sarah, meant to own poverty her mother worked hard to avoid and to voluntarily release her—and her mother’s—responsibility for her families’ achievement. Her words and orientation to Appalachian identity reflect her age, born and raised long before “Appalachian” borders were discursively constructed by ARC, and what would have been a rehearsal of the dominant ideology at that time.

Sarah’s self stories involved an American Dream ideology and a reoccurring theme of self-reliance (Cloud, 1996). Dana Cloud, a critical rhetorician, writes the article, “Hegemony or Concordance? The Rhetoric of Tokenism in “Oprah” Winfrey’s Rags-to-Riches Biography,” which examines television programming surrounding Oprah’s success. Programming about Oprah reinforces the ideology of the American Dream, which is the myth that through individual hard work and self reliance, success such as Oprah’s, can be achieved. Rather than recognizing the very real structural economic and political barriers posed in a racist society (Cloud, 1996). Sarah’s stories reflect this myth, which is, her family’s story is the story of those who pulled themselves up from their bootstraps. Here Sarah, in discussing her own family’s success, shows how her story is rooted in the same ideological structure, that through hard work and determination they were able to find such success. Sarah’s mom was widowed by a freak accident and forced to run the family business on her own, the local tavern. In the early 1950s, it would have been very unusual for a woman, anywhere—moreover in conservative rural Southeast Ohio—to run a tavern. Her mother, “through her will and her want” (in Sarah’s own
words dripping with American Dream ideology), was able to keep the family afloat during those difficult years. She said:

So, that’s what I mean by my mother really raised me.

Me: What do you mean?

Sarah: Well, after my father died. She was alone. She ran a tavern. There was one of the businesses that my father was involved in was an ice manufacturing company. This was before electricity…before ice boxes, so that was right beside our house. He sort of got out of that, and mom and dad started this tavern. And like I said he went to work on the shipyard and she ran that, I think until the people who own the building wanted the building, because they just leased it. So then she just got another job and worked in a factory. And did that. And things.

Me: That must have been unusual, for a woman to run a tavern, by herself, in that time period?

Sarah: Well, not really. There were others…but I guess that did have their husbands to run it with. Well, she was just an active lady. She was very active. She worked hard, all the time. Got up every day, got dressed, did her hair. She lived to be 92, but I guess I already said that…

Sarah believes it was through her mother’s hard work that she successfully ran the tavern, rather than the right external conditions such as; having a manufacturing plant next to the tavern, and having the privilege of being in the “right” social and racial strata. One of the privileges of being within this “right” social stratum, obtaining financial literacy as a generational bequeathing, might have also aided in her mother’s success.
Both external and internal conditions were “right,” but to recognize it would have meant denouncing the achievability of the American Dream and the normalization of white and middle-class privilege. Sarah’s mother may have worked hard but she also had a white owned tavern, serving other good white folks in the Southeast corner of Ohio in the 1950’s.

Bakhtin tells us, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, that, “actual social life and historical becoming create within language a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal ideological and social belief systems” (1981, p. 288). For Bakhtin, and for me, language is saturated with ideology. For Sarah, “Appalachian” is not just her story, the term explicates those who are born in the “backwoods,” with “no modern thangs.” “Appalachia” is a term used to describe those living on the Other side of her Appalachian border “down in West Virginia.” Her diction reveals her classist ideology, she is physically and financially above those living “down in West Virginia” because, in Sarah’s mind, their success can only be attributed to their individual autonomy and hard work. Her words and her language stabilize the discursively constructed “Appalachian” borders which contains poor people to living “down in West Virginia” and strengthens the dominant social and economic class hierarchies.

Sarah’s unbecoming “Appalachian” identity can be best explained by examining the intersections of nationalist discourse before the 1960s. Appalachia is a space regulated and patrolled by the ARC as one with “persistent poverty and growing economic despair” (ARC, homepage). Her words collide with dominant economic discourse that prevailed before the 1960s, her American Dream ideology, which creates
her interpretation of these discourses, “Appalachian” identity is about those living down in:

West Virginia... Cause I was gonna say, when I think of Appalachian women and, they’re….they’re living in the backwoods, and you know, no modern thangs, maybe not now, maybe, but back in the...

Appalachian identity is something that she is repelled by, and consequently, not something with which she wants or can identify with. But Sarah’s personal dis-identification and classist position is not unique amongst my co-participants. Sarah, along with another seventy-year-old co-participant commanded me to not call them “Appalachian.” Sarah and Betty, both command, “I’m not Appalachian! Don’t call me Appalachian! I am from Ohio! I am from Southeast Ohio!” Sarah un-becomes “Appalachian,” her identity is simply that of an Ohioan, She constructs that border as on the other side of her. After a closer examination of the time and space conditions, Sarah’s un-becoming “Appalachian” is ostensibly explicated by her age and the dominant ideologies that were part of the zeitgeist. Although the disgust with being called “Appalachian” does tend to reflect the attitudes and ideology spoken by those older than the age of 60 in my research, the racial and class composition of my co-participants were mostly homogenous, most were white, middle-class women. Consequently, it is not surprising that Sarah’s American Dream ideology does not stand alone.

This ideological stance was shared by my co-participant, Ashley. Born the only child to a school teacher and coal miner, she would have been squarely and securely middle-class when she was growing up. Ashley now works for the local university and
owns her own three bedroom house, in town, where the property taxes are very high. At
the beginning of our interview, I asked her if she had read the front page of our local
paper, *The Athens News*, which featured the heading, “More Poor Kids than Ever”
(Phillips, 2011) and debriefed to her that the article was about the increasing percentage
of children living at or below the poverty line. She responded by asking me if I had seen
the recently aired MSNbc Dateline special, “America Now: Friends and Neighbors”
(MSNBC, July 25, 2010), which is about the current economic conditions in Athens
County. This Dateline special, which is supposed to increase awareness about poverty,
only re-affirmed national discourse, the only thing to be found in Appalachia is
“persistent poverty and growing economic despair” (ARC, Homepage). Below is a brief
synopsis of Ashley’s initial thoughts about the Dateline special:

I think there’s some people on there who need to go out and get a damn job. I
grew up here. I’m from here. I have a master’s degree. I did it. Now, granted I
had parents who pushed me. My mother is a teacher but my father, he didn’t have
any education and they did it. You have to change your environment or you’re
always going to be that stereotype that people assume you are. I’m tired of people
allowing others to think that about people in Southeast Ohio. I’m tired of people
assuming that’s who I am. I’m not that. I can speak in a correct sentence, I use
you’re and your correctly, I can speak correctly. As proud as I am to be from here,
this part of Ohio, this state, when I saw that I’m just like get up off your ass,
you’re obviously eating because you’re 400 pounds. I know that sounds cruel, but
I grew my entire life seeing that. I grew up seeing friends and family like that. I
thought why are you doing anything for yourself? Help yourself. There aren’t any jobs? McDonald’s is hiring, McDonald’s is always hiring (Amanda, interview transcript, summer 2011).

This dialogue coagulates into a rich point for analysis. Ashley’s reaction to, “America Now: Friends and Neighbors” is visceral, but personal. She is, simultaneously, angry about the economic conditions of her home, owns these negative identities as familial, but also distances herself from the possible. Although she recognizes that she had parents who pushed her, she does not recognize the class privilege growing up that propelled her educational acquisitions thereby reinforcing her class control (Langston, 2001). Ashley is able to secure the same or higher social status as her parents by simply being born into that stratum. Their access to higher education, which she attributes to her parents, just stabilizes hierarchies of social class.

Her mother was a school teacher, who constantly emphasized the importance and value of an education. Ashley comments on the family value of education instilled in her:

Every day my mother dresses up for school. Every day, she puts on her pearls and heels and lipstick, because, she says, that you know, she might be the only person that these kids see looking clean and professional.

Her mother modeled for Ashley, and for her students, how far an education can take you—to the place where you can afford pearls and the luxury of putting real time and energy into your appearance. Ashley’s comment can be extrapolated to understand the nuances of what it means to be “clean” and “look professional.” This comment reflects social conventions of being middle class, which does not allow room for the imaginative
or creative interpretations; it posits that there is one way (Ashley’s white middle class 
school teacher Mother) of being clean and looking professional, of being middle class. 
Beyond the educational opportunities her mother’s profession exposed her to, as a 
daughter of an alumni football player for The Ohio State University, Ashley had access 
(both financially and through alumni legacy admission practices) to a degree that her 
friends and family might not have had access.

This educational access might have also helped Ashley drawl out her accent and 
grammatical structure, allowing her to “speak in a correct sentence.” Accents have 
become a marker of privilege, below William Drye (2005) succinctly explains how 
Appalachian accents were associated with illiteracy and shame:

The stigma of sounding like a hillbilly began in the late 19th century. After the 
U.S. Civil War, writers created fictional illiterate characters whose fractured 
grammar established an enduring negative stereotype of Appalachia residents… 
Later, television comedies such as The Beverly Hillbillies presented the stereotype 
to an even larger audience. And the focus on Appalachia during the U.S. 
government's War on Poverty in the 1960s portrayed residents of the region as 
impoverished and illiterate (2005, p. 2).

From this brief synopsis, and what I have learned about Ashley from our conversations, I 
think her criticism of “Appalachian talk” can be best explained by her class and 
educational privilege. Ashley cannot recognize her current economic and social situation 
are probably due to structural, systemic, institutionalized advantages that she has had 
access to. She was raised in the home of two (at least some) college educated, middle
class, white parents. She was raised with a conscious trajectory and practice of college and financial success. Although Ashley tries to naturalize this inherently classist hierarchy, she and other co-participants consciously identify “small mindedness” as a hallmark of Appalachian identity, although as something they despised about the area. This unconscious naturalization of class positioning seems rather interesting in juxtaposition with the very conscious recognition of other forms of oppression, disguised as “small-mindedness.”

**Small-mindedness**

As one of my co-participants, Summer, insightfully explains it, “Southeast Ohio isn’t exactly known for its open-mindedness,” instead national discourse has reflected its opposite, small-mindedness. From movies such as “Deliverance,” to books such as *Knockem Stiff* (Pollock, 2008), to politicians such as Dick Cheney, Appalachia has become synonymous with backwardness and ignorance. “Backwardness” is described by one of my co-participants, Jen, as an anti-progressive, or “slow to change” mentality. Specifically, when seven of my co-participants were discussing “small mindedness” vis-a-vis Appalachian identity as something they abhor, they were referring to the acceptability of so-called “non-normative” sexuality and non-white races.

All my co-participants discussed their schooling experiences as part of my interview schedule, and all of the women in my study attended schools that were, almost exclusively white, or schools with a few black students. In Appalachian Ohio there is not much racial diversity, outside of Kilvert and Chesterhill (small towns that were once predominately black and are now mostly abandoned). People in the region remain a bit
ignorant about cultural, racial, and sexual diversity. When I asked Sarah what her elementary school experiences were like, she said:

Mostly good, I was happy. You know Ohio was mixed before there was even an anti-segregation movement, we had coloreds and whites, all in the same building, well before the 50’s and 60’s….the colored girls would play jump rope with the white girls.

Sarah is in her mid-seventies, back in the 1940’s (the time period about which she speaks) when Sarah was an elementary student, it would have been socially appropriate for her to use such language. But for me, born in 1986, the term “coloreds” hit me like a thousand darts to the chest. “Coloreds” is inappropriate and even a display of bigotry. And we were in the Athens Historical Society. She should know better, I thought. I did not know how to respond.

I was in, what I have come to understand as, a classic researcher conundrum. I want and need this interview, to work towards my overall goal of 20 interviews, which is an “acceptable” number for my committee, to write my dissertation, to graduate from this doctoral program, to fulfill my lifelong dream of becoming a professor but she is a bigot.

I silenced my thinking, rationalizing that she is old, she is ignorant, and she probably does not interact with anyone different, or brave enough to correct her. But what I have come to realize is that this small mindedness is not a quality only insiders are privy to, but rather, something that is observable in the comfort of someone else’s home. When I traveled to the homes of my participants I encountered something I had never seen before, outside of a museum—black face antiques.
During fieldwork, I spent a considerable amount of time in the home dwellings of my co-participants. One of my last co-participants, Shirley, had a home brimming with antiques. Her mother was a locally famous antique collector realtor who had a very popular shop in the Plains. In a china cabinet, on full display, rests an extensive collection of black face antiques. I was stunned. And I was staring. Here I was, in this woman’s house, her graciously accepting an interview. I was in a very vulnerable position. Shirley saw me staring at the antiques, she did not comment nor did she seem embarrassed. For
her they were collector’s items. I did not know how to even broach the subject. I couldn’t inquire. I just stared, shocked. Instead of starting the conversation off on a negative foot, I instead made a non-evaluative observation, exclaiming, “Wow, you have a lot of antiques.” She replied:

Yes, my mother owns Lindsey’s Antiques; you passed it on your way here. It’s a bit of a family tradition, as you can see.

And that was it. I could not critique, I could not chastise, I could only stare. Moments like this, in the field, heighten our own sense of researcher/scholar/activist identities. On one hand, I am asking this woman to share her life with me, the good, the bad, and the ugly, but on the other hand, black face announces itself as a dehumanizing characterization of black people. At that moment, I had bell hooks (2004) in one ear asking me, what legacy is to be found in silence? And in the other Appadurai (1996) reminding me that I should be careful not enter a space with my subject position (one of educational and class privilege), making evaluative observations and translations without trying to adopt a holistic understanding of that space. Appadurai argues that the contextual conventions must be understood first before translated into a public context. In Kamala Visweswaran’s treatise, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, she exemplifies this dilemma, how do we interrogate our privilege as researchers to lay claim on an other subject with less privilege? How was I applying my non-local interpretation on this localized phenomenon?

In the end, I did not say anything to her about her racist antiques because I was not sure of the criteria of the context yet, but I did wonder how long they had been on
display, whether anyone had ever told her that it was racist, and if the answer was no to those questions, why are black face antiques still socially acceptable in this area of the United States and common in the south? And Shirley works for a local university, she should know better. But then again, I should have said something.

As far as I know from my fieldwork, the social acceptability of black face in Appalachian Ohio is unknown. Unpacking “small-mindedness” in this context is not something I fully understand yet, and it continues to linger with me. As someone who is invested in and works toward social change, “small-mindedness” is something that calls back my attention, especially since people are aware of its persistence but comfortable with its insidious nature. Even though most of my co-participants are disgusted by the very idea of small-mindedness, unfortunately, its ubiquity makes it an integral part of Appalachian Ohio identity.

Ambivalence


To take one’s place in it as in a becoming, to grow both young and old in it at once, going through all its components and singularities. Becoming isn’t part of history; history amounts only to the set of preconditions, however recent, that leaves behind in order to ‘become,’ that is, to create something new (1995, p. 170-71).

In order to become something new, we must have known another existence previously. In this case, to become prideful, we must have known other states, varying states in between
disgust or pride. But to write about identity as a polemic concept, as either being
disgusted by being labeled by others as “Appalachian” or having strong Appalachian
pride would be just as problematic as writing identity as a generalizable concept to the 29
million people living within Appalachia (ARC website, homepage). In order to defy
categorical and binary identities that feminist have worked hard to deconstruct, I show
that Appalachian identity is not a binary; I argue that ambivalence to an Appalachian
identity has a strong relationship to one’s generation (Anzaldúa, 1987; Lorber, 1994). Those born after or right before the formation of ARC, grew up with outsiders using that
language to describe their identities, but usually it’s not language they would use to
describe their selves. Considering that the national discourse about this naming of
“Appalachians” was centered on poverty and despair, those who are middle and upper
class, do not see themselves as “Appalachians,” because they are/were not poor. I had
three cohorts of co-participants arranged by age. My co-participants’ ages ranged from as
old as 83 to as young as 18. Altogether, they crossed at least three generations of women.
And in the middle generation of women, they have known others to have called them
“Appalachian,” but would never use it to describe themselves.

Women in their late 30’s-60 age range neither had an affinity nor repulsion at
being labeled “Appalachian.” Kathy, a 52-year-old woman who was born “down in West
Virginia” but in her words, “the other side of the river” is an administrative assistant for
one of the programs at the local university. Kathy has the most twang in her words than
any other co-participant, constantly attaching a “ya know wha I meen?” to her
explanations. When describing where she grew up, she used the all too familiar hand
map, “New Martinsville, which at the bottom panhandle of West Virginia, is that ok? New Martinsville is at the bottom here. We were still an hour from the Ohio river,” she says while pointing to the bottom of her fists. I responded, “You must be from Michigan. We do this,” I held up my hand to simulate a mitten, classic Michigander move. She laughed, “Ya’ll do that too? It’s just easier this way, ya know,” I nodded in agreement. I felt that our interview was off to a comfortable start.

Kathy tried for ten years to get a job at the local university. With three children, she desperately wanted the tuition benefits the local university offers to any full time employee.  For ten years she put in applications to every and any department at the university. She says, “Once I applied for OUCOMS, and it wasn’t until I showed up for the interview that I realized it was the medical school.” She didn’t care what department it was, she just wanted to make sure her kids had a shot. Kathy grew up squarely middle class, she says. Her father, a small business owner (Vacuum salesman) and her mother a stay-at-home mom, she did not see herself as a character in the larger Appalachian narrative. However, when we starting discussing Appalachian culture, she said:

It wasn't until I started working here that, at Ohio University, about 10 years ago, that I even realized “Appalachia” was a term, well, I knew there was Appalachian mountains, and um, I didn't know it was a culture onto itself, kind of thing. You know what I'm saying, I lived in it, but I didn't know it was anything different, I should say.

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3 The university gives 12 tuition credits to the person, son or daughter or spouse of the fulltime employees.
Labels, that become or unbecome our identities, are often generated from governments and academic institutions, in this context, “Appalachia” is a label pressed on to bodies by a governmental institution, the ARC, labeling almost always occurs structurally or politically. The university, as a public institution of higher learning, is another extension of the government, and thus perpetuates this branding. The university’s presence on this area, and accordingly the people living in this area, is undeniable. As one of the two major employers of people in this area, people are dependent on the University for a stable, livable income. The university gets to define Appalachian identity for those living around the university community, as Kathy said. It wasn’t until she had a necessary connection with the university did she know that she was even “Appalachian” or that she was living and participating in “Appalachian culture.” When one’s livelihood is contingent upon a powerful organization, you’re less likely to dispute the way it gets to define you. As a government entity, the university adopts the language and bordering constructed by the ARC. And underneath this identity placement, is a very real financial incentive.

Those living within the region are caught in a conundrum. If they claim their “Appalachian identity” then they are eligible to apply for two lucrative scholarships reserved for students from Appalachia. While it behooves them financially, to adopt an Appalachian identity, often times, students do not see themselves as “Appalachians.” Their knowledge of Appalachian identity rests only in stereotypical depictions, students from a culturally and geographically rich region do not have positive representations with which they can identify and relate. The dominant stereotype of Appalachia is one of
“noble and savage, independent and proud, rugged, and violent, but also as dirty and uneducated, yet crafty and practical. They drank too much and were lazy, but managed to produce excessively large families” (Straw, 2008, p. 151). If you are a young person, seeking an education, not too crafty, and do not come from large family, it is hard to speak and write yourself as “Appalachian,” yet too foolishly expensive not to. This idea parallels larger narratives of identity politics, as this I often true about other minority groups. In fact, here at Ohio University, the same office gives that gives out scholarships for minority students also gives out scholarships for the students from Appalachia, the Office for Multicultural Student Access and Retention (Ohio.edu, 2012).

In addition to the scholarships available for students, the university positions the topography as a marketable space, “Ohio University is nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains.” The university rhetorically packages and sells this Appalachian space like a tourist destination. The financial incentive to hype up the Appalachian geography is attractive, both aesthetically and financially. The university bolsters it, and the university is eligible to federal funds by over-emphasizing its location in a “marginal” Appalachian region, whether it is to support “Appalachian” scholarships or to beautify our “Appalachian” image. As one of my co-participants, April eloquently puts it:

You want us to play Appalachian? We’ll play Appalachian, so long as there is money involved. We’ll bring out the ya’lls and the kissing cousins you need us to! When it is financially savvy to, people and places will appropriate “Appalachian” identity, even if it is at the cost of a more “authentic” self. Correspondingly, as Audre Lorde, famously posits, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”
But in this context, it is not a question of whether the master’s tools will dismantle the master’s house, but rather, will re-appropriating his tools help us to build our own houses (Lorde, 1984)? And if the answer is yes, then we play the way “He” wants us to play it, embodying the stereotypes and all.

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Many of my co-participants either worked or currently work for the local university. As I have mentioned before, there are only two major sources of economic income in three counties—Ohio University or the mine. Jen works at OU and was born and raised in Glouster. She is a tall, beautiful woman. With a lean frame, thick light brown hair and bangs, she looks barely in her 40’s, although she’s 59 years old. She bares her beautiful, straight, white smile often and with pride. On the day that I interview her at her favorite coffee shop, it is hot, mid-July, sticky with humidity, and she wants to sit outside in the sun. She is wearing all white, and I am unprepared for the heat. She foreshadows her recent remission status with this, “I’m one of those few people who enjoy hot weather. So this is fine for me.”

I dishonestly but eagerly respond with, “Me too! People keep complaining about the hot weather, and I’m like you know winter is going to come around, comes around every year.” Judge me if you would like, but it was my second interview and I had not had any more lined up at that moment. I knew from the moment I saw Jen pull up in her cream colored Volkswagen Beatle that I wanted her to like me. Volkswagen is a symbol of bourgeois culture, so I think that she might be rather complex.
Jen follows up my stretch, “That’s right! I promise myself last January that I would never complain about the heat if I ever feel it again.” Little did I know that she was recently cleared by her doctors as “in remission” from a punctuated battle with anal cancer that she waits until the end of the interview to discuss because of its “embarrassing” nature, saying:

People talk about breast cancer, no one minds you talking about your breast cancer, but no one wants to hear about your anal cancer, which is almost just as common…

As an audience to her story, I empathize with her. Listening to her struggle with anal cancer was a bit shocking at first, but I eased into it. Just the word “anal” usually causes my eyes to grow wide, and with this woman who has a child older than I, it is a bit more uncomfortable.

Jen is serious and intense, allowing me genuine insight and access to her life story. I walked away from that interview feeling like we were old friends and the interview lasted three and a half hours. Our interview transcripts illuminate Social Penetration Theory in its originally intended form (Altman & Taylor, 1973). I met Jen through my experience at the Athens Historical Society with Sarah. Jen is the sister of the man who mostly runs the AHS, which is where we began the interview and the discourse fits into the “ambivalent Appalachian identity” frame. As we sit down to start the interview, she asks me:

What’s the actual….um… it’s a…it’s a …doctoral? It’s a dissertation?….what’s the actual title….or what is the question?…. Or what is the…?
Even though it shouldn’t, her question throws me a bit off, my explanation reveals my flutter:

My title, my tentative title, I should say, of my proposal was constituting women’s experience…women’s experience, in Appalachian Ohio…a life history project. I don’t think I really like it anymore, because one, I met your brother, and he, at the Athens Historical Society, right, and he, he really, put me in my place, but-

“How’s so?” She cuts me off for clarification.

Her inquiry is inquisitive, intense, and begs for a more eloquent response than I am able to provide. I answer:

Because he says you know that…Appalachia is a term of, the government enforced on people of Southeast Ohio, there aren’t a lot of people. A lot of people don’t identify themselves as Appalachians, so you’re recruiting women, you’re recruiting Appalachian women, and you’re wondering why no one wants to be a part of your project…and I was like “I guess, I didn’t really think, well not that I didn’t really think a lot about, because I think a lot about researcher ethics, I guess I didn’t realize that people, a lot of the people that I work with do have Appalachian pride, they say I’m from Appalachia! And have such a sense of pride about being from the hills, or having hills around them, I should say, and so I didn’t think that women would have a problem that terminology,” but now…

Mark Freeman (2010) discusses in his book, *Hindsight: The Perils and Promise of Looking Back*, that hindsight is the retrospective looking back on the past from the
narrative present. With the infinite wisdom of hindsight, I can see the shades of looking back on this moment as neither all good nor all bad, but rather as a lessoned learned in my research process. Hindsight, Freeman tell us, is about looking at the terrain of our pasts from the standpoint of our current present and seeing things as new or making a connection. I realize, at this point, that this embarrassing moment became a definitive turning point in my research; a struggle between my semi-insider and semi-outsider status. I was fumbling for the right words because I was asking myself, “How did I not prepare for the event that some women would have repulsion to claiming or disclaiming an ‘Appalachian identity’”? I am so conscious of the dominant narrative of Appalachian women, one that positions them as poor, backwards, and uneducated women with tons of kids. So, did I also believe in it? Yes, I realized that young women that I volunteer with are from working class backgrounds. Girl Power is a program for girls at the poorest middle school in Ohio and Senior Friends is a program that appeals to those who are not financially stable. And I observe their indubitable pride in being “Appalachian.” But could this apprehension I sense in Jen, be different from the outright disgust others show for the word, “Appalachian”? Could the ambivalence that Jen demonstrates account for the fact that she has always been squarely middle class? Is Appalachian pride reserved for those who cannot afford anything else? Meaning is pride in one’s cultural identity a working class phenomenon?
I noticed and make note of Jen’s “ummmhmmm’s,” they are very knowing, too knowing, and maybe she thinks that I am naïve, and that I shouldn’t be doing research on women from this Appalachian context. At times, now, and in the future, I know that my postionality will be a struggle. I have often thought and think that I should not be digging in and up women’s lives about things and places I simple cannot ever live or understand. But at this moment in this space, drinking coffee and conversing with Jen, it is too late to step back. Jen’s interruption is welcomed, saving me from my political and cultural ignorance:

I think it does depend on the women you interview, I mean, I never would have identified myself that way, only because, I’m old enough, that growing up that
wasn’t a term that was used, I mean I sort of came understand that term, like my brother said, after it was forced on to us. I think the sad, the unfortunate thing about that term, is that it leads to a lot of stereotyping…

Jen’s few sentences support and nicely sum up all that I have tried to argue here, that Appalachian borders were discursively constructed in the 60’s, the Appalachian identity was stamped onto bodies, and depending on how long you have lived with this label, determines your attitude towards using “Appalachian” to speak your own discursive, social identity. Jen is young enough to have been labeled “Appalachian” by outsiders most her life, but too old to adopt this identity as her own. She is ambivalent, but realistic, about her Appalachian (dis)identity.

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This disassociation with Appalachian identity is shared by other co-participants around Jen’s age cohort. Take, Cheryl, who was one of the quirkiest and most interesting co-participants. I found her through a series of internet searches, studying websites such as her company, The Little Cities of Black Diamonds (littlecitiesofblackdiamonds.org, 2011). The Little Cities of Black Diamonds is a museum in Perry County, supported and run by the Little Cities of Black Diamonds Council. Their purpose, as stated on their website is:

To promote the story of the Little Cities of Black Diamonds Region in southern Perry, northern Athens, and eastern Hocking Counties of Ohio where the impact of the extractive industries of coal, oil, clay and iron ore have significantly impacted our way of life since the late 1800's… understanding of our region's
story and assets by the residents of our region will help citizens and organizations become more actively involved in the regeneration of the Little Cities of Black Diamonds area…We endeavor to share our story and assets with others who live outside this region as well, utilizing a low impact tourism strategy that will economically benefit our region without displacing the positive aspects of our rural culture. (local control and ownership, limited traffic, privacy, etc.). Through our efforts, we seek to move the image of our region away from one of poverty and decay, toward an image of quality small town and rural living where historical and cultural exploration are commonplace and where community and environmental regeneration are a way of life (littlecitiesofblackdiamonds.org, 2011).

It is easy to note that this description from their webpage does not utilize official government language. Although all of these counties are within the “Appalachian Region,” the website simply (yet rhetorically) speaks it as “our” region, not an “Appalachian Region,” although the hallmarks are present, an investment in protecting the land, the history, and “their” residents. The politics embedded within this purpose statement mimic the language politics performed by Cheryl.

When I first called Cheryl at the museum, I knew my interview with her would be my most memorable. And after studying “The Little Cities of Black Diamonds” website, and speaking with a few friends who knew Cheryl, I was quite determined to get a research interview with her. So I bit the bullet and “cold” called her:
I’m an evil researcher over in the school of communication studies, and I am doing a project on women who are native to this area, and several people recommended that I contact you, like John and Ruth…

Both, John and Ruth had warned me about how researchers from the university have taken from the land and the people for projects and advancements, but rarely ever give back, or represent them fairly and “accurately.” They convinced me that I might be perceived as just another, “evil researcher.” So I decided to embrace it, hoping my candor would put her ease. With my odd language and all, Cheryl did not any persuading. She just said “okay,” plainly and flatly to my request to come interview her.

My curiosity was even more peaked when she gave me the directions to her house. Cheryl advised:

When you come in to New Straitsville, into town, slow down. Look for our house on the left, there will be a big black and red bus stop with some skulls and bones and stuff on it.

I was thinking that this would be a big downtown, big enough to require public transportation, but actually you can ride your bike everywhere in New Straitsville. And I still have no idea why there is a bus stop in that location. Cheryl continues:

If you get to the white big float, like the kind you see in a parade? Then you’ve gone too far. We were in the Moonshine festival, you see, and we just kinda liked it. So we decided to put it in our yard. Well, actually, there’s all kinds of things in our yard. You’ll see.
She said it such a matter-of-fact way, like “duh, why wouldn’t you put a float that you worked real hard on in your front yard?” On Friday evening when I finally arrived to Cheryl’s house, after practicing and anticipating the interview, my suspicion about the house was out to rest. Her yard was just as she described, “filled with all kinds of stuff”—rows of bikes, rusted tractors, old cars, small engines, and empty pop bottles. When I pulled in the driveway, I stopped a hundred yards or so away from the white two-story house.

Watching me pull in to the yard was a graying, wild-haired, middle-aged man, who was bald at the top, wearing old jeans and no shirt. Next to him was a pimply-faced teenage boy with glasses, wearing all black, with a green mohawk spiked about seven inches above his head. I jumped out of the car, and shouted a friendly “Hello!” Apprehensively, they saluted back and when I had walked closer to the porch where they were sitting, I saw that they were sitting on an old gray seat stripped from van, like the old red Aerostar we used to have. They were inspecting me as I was inspecting them. But I would like to think my face appeared friendlier than theirs, “Does Cheryl live here?” I asked.

The older man was the first to respond, “Yeah, she’s inside.” He said with a slur, but did not move. So I walked up the two rickety porch steps to the door and knocked. “Just go in,” he offered. I opened the door and walked in. To say that the house was disorganized would be putting it too lightly. Later in the interview, I would come to understand why the house was in disarray—Cheryl has at least ten people living in her home at once. People, teenage boys mostly, kept entering and exiting the house.
throughout the three hours I was there, some would stop to inspect the new face, and introduce themselves, others did not.

Although Cheryl only has two biological children, over the years, she has invited dozens of people to live in her home. The man on the porch, who seemed a little unfriendly, was her husband, and is actually a gentle soul. He recently suffered a stroke, but still sung me a song that he wrote for Cheryl. After dark and after we had been talking for hours, Jack picked up his guitar and sung, “The Night an Angel Came to Perry County,” which is about the night that he and Cheryl first met. Some hours later, when I was finally ready to leave I realized why so many young people had called this place home. Cheryl has taken in friends’ of her son’s (Her son’s name is Cameron, or the guy with the green Mohawk), people from the community needing a place to stay, and even foster children. It was not clear to me, nor was it explicitly said, the exact number of people presently living in Cheryl’s house, but I do know that Cheryl, her husband, Cameron, Cameron’s friend Skyler, Skyler’s girlfriend April, her two kids (and one on the way), Roadie, Amanda, J.R., and Michael all sleep in the house. Cheryl is a known member of the community, she is a respected historian, a local politician, and a person who provides refuge to those who request it. Speaking with her felt like reading a storied history book; because she had a story about everything, across time periods, and contexts. Sometimes she would break in her story and invite people into the conversations. When talking about the local women, she summoned J.R., asking him, “But the boys have other names for women who behave like that, don’t you J.R.?”
J.R. turned around from the kitchen sink, pretending as if he wasn’t listening, even though Cheryl and I were the only ones in the kitchen at the moment, and said, “Huh?” Cheryl clarified for J.R. and asked him again, “But you all have names for women who have, how should I say, loose morals…?”

J.R., too quickly for someone pretending not to be listening, responds with, “Yeah, we call them ‘busch-carp’ or ‘loose lip croppy’ or ‘floopy titty bass…’” counting up the insults with his fingers. Cheryl did not use the words herself, but her silence about it and refusal to admonish J.R. made me speculate that she was complicit and even encouraged this display of patriarchy.

Again, I was faced with one of those ambivalent moments in the field, when you are made aware of your vulnerability as a researcher. On one hand, this woman’s invitation into her home and her life was immeasurably generous, but here in this “sexist” moment, my feminist sensibilities were being alerted and breached. This is one that I cannot allow myself to skirt, and I quip, “If that’s what you call a loose woman, I am curious about what you call a loose man…?” J.D. responded, “A stud.” And so we have it, the blatant double bind, women never can win, they are always having either too much, or not enough (Frye, 2007). But just like the “busch-carp” I am, I can’t let this swim away. I asked, “So it’s okay for a man to have loose morals but not a woman?”

In the end of our short debate, they both agree that yes it’s unfortunate that the double standard exists, but it exists nonetheless. For the sake of research, I must let this one go. This side-bar conversation is just one example of the many shared during Cheryl’s interview. Throughout the interview she invites the participation of others’ to
co-construct her responses. Her house, and our conversation, is communally constructed and polyvocal, the recording revealing multiple voices and multiple stories and experiences (Clifford, 1986). Clifford, in the introduction of his co-edited book, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, he writes that ethnographies have an “artificial nature of cultural accounts” (p. 3). Ethnographies are not intended to be Truths about a culture, but partial truths. These partial truths are best substantiated when they include more than one authorial voice, but rather, multiple voices. By including these “side-bar” conversations had in Cheryl’s home, we are co-constructing this text and making this ethnography a dialogical production of discourse. I find Cheryl, Cheryl’s home, and the people living there either temporarily or permanently, so complex that I return two more times.

Cheryl’s politics are not overt, they are as hidden and as subtle as they appear on the Little Cities of Black Diamonds webpage. One must decipher and decode her words. I did not understand the nuances of her words until I returned to my office to transcribe the interview. When I asked if she had always lived here (in New Straitsville), she responded:

> No, we, me and my husband, when we first got married we lived over in Muskingum. But it's all Appalachia…

> With a hard –ch in enunciating Appalachia she introduces the term herself, without any coaxing from me. I was pleasantly surprised, but tried not to reveal it, I asked, “So you have no problem with the term Appalachian?”
I tried my best to mimic her hard –ch, as opposed to the typical –sh sound, a “mistake” outsiders typically make. Cheryl answered:

No. I don't see, uh, I've heard negative stuff about it, but I think they are missing the strengths of it, and that's what I see, the strengths of it. I really wasn't aware of that so much when I was a kid. Nobody really, I mean, I was born in 1954, so I think I would have remember them talking about the war on poverty and all that stuff, but it didn't mean anything to me because I didn't associate that with where I lived, what I thought was, hmm, log cabins, and I didn't know anyone in log cabins, so it didn't seem like it was our area at all, but I didn't think they were talking about us until I got older and realized that part of it. And realizing that part of it (of being Appalachian) was how we talked is a little different, which is so scathed that I started picking up on it. And people from different parts talk differently than people here, and my father was a school teacher, so he didn't have the same the same accents, as say, my husband’s family does.

From this explanation it is clear that she is not jubilant about her Appalachian identity, but she does not disregard it either. Her explanation has a quality of ambivalence. She was not provoked to use this terminology, she used it willing to describe the region, but it is still not something she sees as a “corporeal language,” not signifying bodies within the region. For Cheryl, spaces and places are Appalachian, not people.

Cheryl’s husband’s family can retrace their blood line to some of the earliest settler’s of New Straitsville. And Jack does, in fact, speak with a much thicker Appalachian Ohio accent than does Cheryl. Cheryl’s words tend to resemble a standard
Midwestern dialect, drawling out her o’s in Ohio, rather than emphasizing the “hi” as other women in this region do. Whereas Jack’s speech, complicated by a stroke that left his left side of his face almost completely paralyzed, does speak with a slower, slightly more pronounced twang. I have come to learn that all of the counties in Southeast Ohio have different accents, some with more twang than others, some mostly the counties down by the Ohio River pronounce Appalachia with a hard ch-, and others further north, with the soft sh-. But spending time with women who are mostly middle class and college educated, I understood that they practice “training out” their accents as to perform a more homogenous sounding style of speech, which they believe, “makes them sound like they have an education.” The politics of speaking eloquently are quite clear—twang equals uneducated (Drye, 2005). Drye discusses the stigma associated with sounding “like a hillbilly” and how that stigma became popularized by shows like the Beverly Hillbillies which positioned Appalachians as illiterate and impoverished. One of my co-participants, Christy, is a school teacher and she spoke directly to this stigma associated with Appalachian accents, when I asked, “But an hour ago you said now that I know it’s not crick, its creek, who pointed that out to you?” She laughed and said:

Oh my gosh, that’s a big joke in my family, we all try to correct each other because we have all done it. I mean my grandmother said “wrench out the dishes” instead of “rinse,” “wrash” instead of wash, all those things, and I said them… Probably until high school. And then when I went to OU, and I realized how differently I talked and it killed me.
Me: Were you embarrassed?

Christy: Oh yeah, completely. My mom does some, everyone once in a while it will come out, she says “wrash” she can’t get rid of that. That’s the one thing I keep laughing at her about. Like she says “Wrshington, D.C.,” she can’t get rid of the “wrash,” we pretty much got the other things away from her. We try to stop her. My dad thinks it’s mean, that it’s good to hold on to the...where you’re from…but as a teacher, and going to college people look at you differently, if you talk like that, they just do, it’s impossible not to. If you came here and I was like “hol on a second I gotta go wrsh mah dishes,” you would have looked at me differently…

Not only does Christy’s family try to “train their accents out,” as a family activity, they practice a sort of collective policing and shaming of one another’s indigenous accents. Christy, as a college educated woman and as a teacher, feels that it is her responsibility to “speak well” for her students and even for me. The social stigma associated with accents that Drye (2005) discusses is illuminated in this exchange with my co-participant. Not only is one stigmatized but also laughed at, even in jest, for their accents. Accents continue to be a marker of a stigmatized Appalachian identity, one that people work tirelessly to train away.

Cheryl and Kathy’s (dis)identification with the “Appalachian” label were merely another observation that they made. They were neither boasting of an Appalachian identity nor were they infuriated by it. They fall within a neutral intersection of identity politics—as those who are neither prideful nor disgusted by the term Appalachia. Cheryl
and Kathy, now both in their fifties, were alive during the formation of the Appalachian Regional Commission, but were not old enough to recognize the zeitgeist that gave rise to the commission. Consequently, they are not revolted by the label, but the socially constructed meaning of the word (log cabins, accents, and mountains) just didn’t seem to fit them. Terra, a 34-year-old athletic trainer echoed this sentiment:

I knew we were Appalachian because that’s what everyone else called us, but would we call ourselves Appalachian? Probably not.

Terra is the daughter of a local mayor and past high school history teacher. She is familiar with ARC and with the national/historical discourse that circulates about Appalachian identity. Although she does not identify with the region, she does have a strong sense of identification with her city, Middleport, which rests on the Ohio River. Middleport, once a thriving economy comparable to Cincinnati and Pittsburgh, did not join the railroad industry and suffered as a consequence. Terra expresses an ambivalent sentiment shared by many individuals who are neither enough to remember the formulation of ARC nor young enough to want to re-appropriate the term, neither a disgust for or pride in, Appalachian identity.
When people “raze” on me for “reppin” Detroit—a space with a shameful national discourse centered around obesity, a corrupt mayor, and a dying economy—I tell them that it’s more honorable to find pride in being from a place where it isn’t as easily seen. My sense of pride in Detroit rests in the geography and history of the space. Outsiders see abandoned and burned down buildings, I see it as a place with history written on its walls, both literally and metaphorically. Similarly, if one only watched haunted films supposedly set in Appalachian woods or listened to ignorant politicians talk about “inbreeding” cousins from Appalachia, then it would be difficult to see why young
people wear t-shirts that bear the phrase, “Appalachian Pride” is worn ubiquitously in the area. From living and participating in this field for years and from my interviews, I realize that the redefining of Appalachian pride rests in the young people and the narration about the geography of this space. Stewart discusses the hold of the geography on to the people, she writes about the hold of the hills in the re-membering of home, “home is a vibrant space of intensity where things happened and left their mark. Home is sweet not despite the loss…but because of it” (1996, p. 65). From the hills to the hobbies, the landscape holds the “cultural home” (Stewart, 1996) of young Appalachian pride. To avoid writing about Appalachia with “romantic admiration for the simple, hardy virtues of rural life” (Eller, 1978) as outsider academicians have a tendency to do, I liken this re-appropriation of Appalachia identity to my own experience of re-appropriating a marginal cultural identity.

As I have mentioned in previous chapters, my grandfather traveled to this country through a legally “legitimate” means of immigration. My grandfather’s name was Manuel Mercado de Acévedo. He came to the United States in the 1940’s through a program called the “Bracero Program” (Snodgrass, 2011). The Bracero Program was initiated during World War II to aid agriculture. Because American men were summoned to war in Europe and East Asia, in order to prevent agricultural production from plummeting, the government needed bodies to harvest the fields for its citizens. Franklin Roosevelt negotiated with the then Mexican President, Manuel Avila Camacho, for temporarily loose immigration policies. Franklin Roosevelt allowed men to immigrate to the U.S. for farm work, with the assumption that once the war was over, they would return back to
Mexico. As a farm laborer, working beside and amongst other Mexican men, my
grandfather (whom we called *abuelo*), could socialize in his native tongue, and eat foods
that reminded him of home. During that time, my *abuelo* heard rumors from other
workers that more money and better working conditions were possible in the automobile
industry in Detroit. Through a series of walking stints and hitchhiking, he made his way
to Detroit.

On the assembly lines, my *abuelo* stood with black, brown, but mostly white men.
Incidentally, here in Appalachia, work in the mines also brought men of different racial
and ethnic backgrounds together. Standing side-by-side, both on the lines and in the
mines, black, brown, and white men worked together with a shared goal. But with this
introduction of Other colors, my grandfather’s attitude about his cultural heritage began
to shift, like Others, he felt the pressures of assimilation (Thompson, 2001). Through
major socialization processes like joking, teasing, and even bullying my *abuelo* stopped
speaking Spanish, learned and spoke exclusively in English, and instructed my *abuela* to
stop packing tortillas in his and his children’s lunchboxes. When he, my *abuelo*, and his
children moved to a mostly white neighborhood, his American Dream seemed further
achieved and solidified, and he would not return. In a white racially homogenous section
of the city, he forbade his children from speaking Spanish, even in the privacy of their
home, anglicized the pronunciation of their names, and instructed them to dress and act
like all of the other children in the neighborhood.

My mother, who had skin shades browner than most blacks, and hair just as
kinky, could not hide her Mexican identity, even though she tried desperately to do so.
Growing up with a mother who had skin as dark as the black people in our (also racially homogenous, but in an ebony hue) neighborhood but performed a mostly white racial identity. My brothers and sister and I were confused when we were small children. A similar autobiographical experience is documented in Richard Rodriguez’s book *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (2002). Rodriguez discusses being brown as a paradox, a state of in-betweeness, that I have come to learn and feel. Like Rodriguez posits, we saw ourselves as we were: brown; neither black like our neighbors nor white like we felt we should act. We knew that our ethnic identity was Mexican, but we minimally performed cultural traditions that would distinguish us as such. We beat piñatas on special occasions, we knew only *dichos* in Spanish, and we ate *nopales*, but only for breakfast when we never had company. We were both conscious of our Mexican heritage and/but conscious of our intricacies that made us Mexican. I never felt wholly “American” nor wholly “Mexican” as a small child. So when my classmates would ask me if I was “mixed,” confused by my mother’s dark skin and my own ambiguous skin tone, I would reply with the most simple and obvious answer, “yes.” Although I knew my answer was only a hybrid between what they wanted to hear and what I felt inside.

As a teenager, a voracious reader, and my family’s declared “rebel,” I began searching for information that explained my marginal racial identity. Finally audacious enough to ask my grandfather the questions that were not to be asked, I learned my family’s history, my country’s history, *our* history. I pieced together bits and scraps of information I was able to gather from my grandfather, my great aunt Lorretta, and my tías, and realized that my family was currently living and performing the consequences of
assimilation that had to occur (both voluntarily and involuntarily) during the 1950’s and 60’s in metro-Detroit. Non-white immigrants had been forced to and pushed themselves to relinquish any cultural practices that distinguished them as something other than white America (Thompson, 2001). The pressure to assimilate came from a variety of social contexts—in my abuelo’s work at Ford’s; in school from white teachers; and in interactions with neighbors. My abuelos learned very quickly what lessons and values they should and should not give to their children. This inevitably trickled down to me and my generation.

While in high school, I knew I had to regain the language that had been spoken and lived just a generation before mine. I never missed a semester or a class period of Spanish. I knew I would need it for the travels I would make to reconnect with my extended family still living in the Zacatecas countryside that my grandfather had left as a young teen. And when I was old enough, dumb enough, and had enough money, I traveled to the Mexican countryside to reconnect.

Nevertheless, my experience as a second generation Mexican-American is not unique. I only hope I have explicated the historical and social conditions well enough for my reader to understand the desire but also the necessity for assimilation processes to occur in our grandparents and even our parent’s generations. Presently, the social and contemporary conditions make possible and even encourage a reconnection to one’s marginal cultural heritage. In this supposedly, “post-racial” “post-affirmative action” society, one’s race is not something that holds us back, but rather supposedly lifts one up (Orbe, 2011). Tokenism, as in the Oprah case that Cloud discusses, is thought to be her
gift, an opportunity for her to rise up against the economic conditions that previously oppressed African Americans, not a downfall (Cloud, 1996). To extend this conversation to a different context, I often hear my students proudly exclaiming their Irish or Italian heritage, although they cannot even identify the generation or even the time period that their ancestors arrived to the United States. Having an “ethnic” background is no longer something taboo and keeping traditions alive is celebrated in public spheres. The economic precedence to (re)learn another language is undeniable. Potential employees who are bilingual are seen as valuable company assets, not as racial liabilities. But to be clear, how one learned that Other language is just as important as whether or not one knows it. There are still good and bad ways of acquiring language skills, learning an Other language in a controlled environment like the classroom is notable and even a prized exotic. But knowing an other language as a result of one’s suspicious citizenship could cost one the job. And just as Christy, my co-participant said, there are right and wrong ways of speaking, even in Appalachia, even if you were born right here in the United States.

Those living in Appalachia and Mexican Americans share an unusual tension, the gift and the burden of being Other in a modern America. But the public acceptability of having explicit pride about one’s cultural heritage is a gift to the millennials. Young people, such as myself, are re-appropriating language, customs, and traditions once performed by previous generations. I observed this re-appropriation phenomenon in not only myself but in my classroom discussions, my service work with Girl Power, and in
my dissertation research. Below is a poem written for me in the handwriting of April, one
of my co-participants, who is two years younger than I:

Figure 14: Poem from April, Co-participant

April is one of the young women living in Cheryl’s house and this was the poem
she shared with me when I asked her if she had ever heard a message about what it means
to be a woman in Appalachia, a term she introduced into the conversation. She said that
she had and wrote me this. In this poem, we can read the tension of having pride, so
much so that you cannot help but be a bit “racist” as she says. And when I asked April
about what she means by being “racist” she said, “It is about having so much pride in being Appalachian, that nothing else can come close.” April believes that her friends and she have so much pride in their Appalachian heritage that no other race or ethnic background can compare. In chapter I, I argue that this “racism” is more like a localized xenophobia, a fear or distrust of outsiders, which is a more fitting way to narrate what April is defining. This poem holds the gravitas of re-appropriation by younger generations to have pride in one’s Appalachian identity.

Another clear and obvious example of this re-appropriation process was brought to my attention through one of my co-participants and close friend, Terry (Terry’s story is told in chapter four). Terry is a few years older than I (30-years-old), and grew up mostly in Albany, Ohio. Decades ago, Albany was a small but predominately black community settled by black coal miners and their families. He and his mother are two members of the very few black families still living in Albany since the closing down of the mines in the 1980s. Although Terry and I have been friends since my second year in Athens—we took a Human Sexuality class together where he “outed” himself as a transman to the whole class—we met at a restaurant in Athens to complete a formal interview. One of the stories Terry shared with me was about a recent moment when he and his mother were driving down Highway 55 or the Appalachian Highway, they passed a sign advertising the I am a child of Appalachia project. On their website, the project’s mission states:

Telling the region’s stories of outstanding individuals who are making a difference in their community and the world; people who are proud of their Appalachian roots; and people who authenticate the importance of educational
opportunities to life, business and community achievement. The campaign encourages our region’s communities to invest in our students so they can expect, pursue and succeed in attaining post-secondary education.

Through the lens of individual examples, the campaign encourages positive alternatives. *I’m a Child of Appalachia* promotes greater investment in the region to increase student access and success in higher education.

Terry’s mother, Aletha, had an adverse reaction to these advertisements.

Describing this reaction, Terry told me:

My mom had a negative reaction to the billboard; she was kind of offended by that, come to find out. And I said, “well why?” she said that she felt as though that were a slur, like it was negative thing to be associated by Appalachia, you know? Umm, so I thought that was kind of unusual, I never thought, never given it one weight one way or the other.

Me : Well wait, so is that a term you would use to describe yourself?

Terry: Ummm, yeah, I would say so. It describes the region that I live in. I look at it more from a geographical standpoint, but it’s also a cultural thing. But you know, I mean Appalachian goes all the way from New York down to Tennessee. So it doesn’t just represent people from backwater West Virginia or something like that…

Two fascinating things are presenting themselves for analysis. The first is the idea that the *I am a child of Appalachia* program is a structural intervention to incite pride in
younger generations. The second is a focus on the different generational approaches to “Appalachian” identity.

The *I am a child of Appalachia* project is just one of the many outreach projects sponsored by *The Foundation of Appalachian Ohio* (FAO). The FAO was made possible through donations from the ARC (Appalachianohio.org, homepage, 2006). The nonprofit serves to bring in endowments into the region, awards grants, and promotes leadership in the region. The *I am a child of Appalachia* campaign was in effort to fulfill these goals. Specifically, the campaign was to:

Challenge the stereotypes eroding expectations for student success, encourage young people to make informed choices after high school, advocate life-long learning to improve skills, earning and employability, increase availability of scholarships and other direct financial assistance to support college access and success, and strengthen our region’s charitable investment to reach these goals (Appalachianohio.org, ICAN! Page, 2006).

In order for students within this region to write about being “proud of their Appalachian roots” for the essay contest, the foundation first asked the students to separate stereotypes about the region from their experiences within the region. Although, I cannot be certain about this foundation’s political aspirations and affiliations, the re-appropriation of Appalachian pride is an admirable and important lesson to promote to students. The machinations of one’s cultural pride can certainly bolster academic success, as it did for me. Additionally, this essay contest supports my contention that the re-appropriation of cultural heritage is rampant and powerful amongst younger generations.

135
This linguistic process, of re-appropriating labels and names, can be seen from a variety of contemporary examples. Words such as “queer,” “dyke,” and “bitch” have been taken up by the GLBT community to resignify the signifier. Long before these contemporary linguistic turns occur, Mikhail Bakhtin discusses the philosophy behind these turns in essays like *The Problem of Speech Genres* (1953). Bakhtin thinks that all writing should be concerned with the nature of language and think about the nature of language within that particular time period because language is a reflection of the zeitgeist. Bakhtin writes that the meaning-making behind words is not as simple as “the fact is that when the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it” (1986, p. 68), the process is not quite that linear. But rather once someone hears and understands a word, they may have an initial reaction to the word, but this word cannot stand alone, we must think about this word in terms of its wholeness, who’s using this word and why are they using it? What emotion, expression, or evaluation are they hoping to get from the receiver? Thus live communication is always contextual in nature. Language, in this way, is “shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others” (p. 1245). Since meaning behind language is always shifting, “Appalachia” for young people, can come to mean something other than poverty or mountain range.

Terry’s dialogue with his mother about the *I am a child of Appalachia* billboard adds an extra complexity to this perspective of language shifting and changing. Aletha is

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4 Arguably one of the most controversial re-appropriation of terminology; “Bitch,” is now the title of a very popular feminist magazine which claims to be, “a feminist response to popular culture.” This is a very clear example of how language gets taken up by those subject to the oppression of it and subverts its discursive power.
in her early sixties, grew up near the pristine Ohio River, and associates Appalachia as a “slur.” She cannot separate the stereotype associated with the Appalachian region and finds being called Appalachian, offensive. For her, the Appalachian narrative is a “single story,” one that can only signify a monolithic and offensive connotation (Adichie, 2009). Aletha’s generation, has only had negative interactions and associations with the term “Appalachia.” Whereas, Aletha’s son, who is around the same age as I, cannot only see Appalachia as a geographical region, but can proudly speak “Appalachia” into the narration of his own cultural identity, re-shifting the meaning. Terry agrees that the Appalachian label is changing:

The connotation is definitely changing. But our generation is definitely trying to revamp a lot of things…a lot of the traditional definitions I think as a whole are being undermined. I think there has been a stir with the environmental movement, in terms of trying to get our country away from coal as a primary source of power, and it seems like there has been a reconnection, people trying to reconnect with their roots, with the whole American source of ethics and hard work that comes from coal mining, I definitely see a resurgence of that, of people wanting to use clean coal, and this our economy, and this our lives, and this our land, trying to reconnect with the earth….and I think that has a lot to do with the connotation of Appalachia…

Terry believes, as do I, that this new found meaning of Appalachian pride is embedded in the investment of the preservation of the environment in this region which is spreading in and through discourse. The term, “going green” globally has never been so popular and it
evokes an emotion to local commitment. If it is possible that if Appalachia is interpreted as aesthetically beautiful geographical space then shouldn’t the culture of this space be seen as just as worthy of praise and representation?

\textit{A Rootedness to the Land}

The attraction to this Appalachian space, for outsiders, is indubitably the geography, but the pull to return to this space for the women that I spoke with was often entrenched in the land as well. For instance, Mary returned to this space after living in both Texas and Columbus. Mary is the wife of an ex-military, thus involuntary rootless soldier, and now the owner of a local and profitable salon in town.

Mary is what you expect a hairdresser to be, well put together. Her hair is a sharp, bright blonde, cut fashionably right at her shoulders. Her hair tucks right behind her ears with just the slightest curl created only by an experienced hand holding a hair dryer. She wears light makeup around her eyes, but only in neutral tones. Her top, on the day I met her, is three quarter lengths, and her patterned pants match accordingly. I was led to Mary through one of her loyal clients. In talking to me about her life, Mary mentioned a variety of things that are germane to a discussion about the pull of the geography of Appalachian.

While living in Texas, Mary missed the uniqueness of the geography of Appalachian Ohio. What she missed the most was “The tall trees, and green grass, and the comfort of the hills.” Mary feels the pull of the foothills of Appalachia because she finds “home” in the landscape. The hills provide the qualities of home she was not conscious of until she experienced the un-homeliness of the sand, heat, and plains of Texas, where her husband served in the military. Similarly, when Mary discussed where
she and her husband went after his tenure with the military was over, she said, “It was either move north, which was really flat, and that didn’t appeal to me, or move south, where there’s no winter, and that doesn’t appeal to me either.” This Appalachian space is home to Monica because of the commodities and delights—the hills and changing seasons—it provides her (Rybczynski, 1986). Rybczynski (1986) in his book, *Home: A Short History of an Idea*, discusses how home is both subject and object, more than what we traditionally think about as home, as a physical space, but also as a space of the we find comfort. These feelings of comfort extend beyond four walls and are culturally defined. The phrase, “The comfort of the hills” has expanded my cultural meanings of comfort in ways I was not conscious of before my fieldwork.

I had a similar conversation about the admiration of the hills with one of the co-participants I briefly introduced earlier, Summer. Summer, in her own words, is the “badass from Amesville who rode a motorcycle to school every day, even in the winter time and everything.” I met her a couple of years ago through a trail running group I joined on Saturday mornings. A small group of us run through Sells Park, which is a space most famous for its Appalachian hills.

Summer left Amesville as a young adult to go to an Art School in Pittsburgh. In Pittsburgh, an urban Appalachian city, which is also very hilly, she would have conversations about this space with people who were outsiders to Appalachian Ohio:

People, even in Pittsburgh, think that Ohio is just flat, in their opinion. Gosh, I guess I have been to Columbus and Cleveland, but I haven’t traveled around Ohio very much to realize that was the impression that Ohio gives to most people, that
is was so flat. And um, I know there’s tons of hills, and then I realized that to claim foothills in order to explain to other people, that I had to claim the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, that’s where I got used to using “foothills of Appalachian” a lot when I was at school in Pittsburgh, like no, very hilly, no flat lands…

This paragraph reveals Summer’s approach for others to understand the geography of her home. She does not want outsiders to confuse her home-space as something flat, because of the inherent specialness the hills have in her imaginings of her home. Her persistence in moving others to understand and even appreciate the hills continues after I tell her that the hills make me feel rather “closed in.” She has heard this before:

… This girl from Michigan, I don’t know where she’s from in Michigan, but she said that she felt claustrophobic, that the hills were too much. That they made her feel stuffed, but I think they’re cozy...

She crosses her arms over her chest, shrugs up her shoulders and smiles, despite the record high humidity that day.

In that moment, I had an epiphany that only an outsider to the field can have. I do not think about land and landscapes, as often, or in the same way as my co-participants do. I am one of Zencey’s rootless academics (Zencey, 1996). Zencey, who teaches at a university thousands of miles away from where he went to graduate school, writes that as a profession, academics are trained to:

Owe no allegiance to geographical territory; we are suppose to belong to the boundless world of books and ideas and eternal truths, not the infinitely particular
world of watersheds, growing seasons, and ecological niches (Zencey, 1996, p. 15)

Although this genre of thinking is a bit elitist because not all mobilities and displacements are equal, it is relevant here. I am from a cosmopolitan, urban space. In Detroit, I do not think about the growing seasons or the watersheds where I live. I love Detroit, I am through and through a Detroiter, and in this way I have allegiance to my geographical “home” space. However, as embarrassing as it may be to admit, I am one of those who are “likely to see nature as so much visual furniture—a barely differentiated backdrop to life’s important activities, the land [I] drive through or fly over to get where [I] am going” (p. 16). That’s how I think about geography, mostly disconnected from nature, as I think many people from urban environments are. I shared this flippant perspective with Summer, and she said:

That’s the thing about this area, it’s important to who you are, you know? We grow up four wheeling, fishing, and hiking old man’s cave, we think about what’s happening with our water, where your water comes from, where your food comes from, that type of stuff is important to us.

These are also the commitments of most agrarian communities. And mining, while the opposite of agriculture, is also very much about the land. This thought also reveals a great deal about Summer’s existence, as very much so connected to nature, which informs her personal identity.

The overwhelming majority of women who shared with me their lives, their histories, and their everyday stories could not do so without incorporating the landscape
into our discussions. They are conscious of their existence to and with the land around them. My co-participant, Kathy, has a garden so robust she has to can all of her vegetables every summer and give them away as gifts, or else she would “have green beans coming out the ear.” Betty, a local artist and the grandmother of one of my former students, has owned the same seven acres her entire life. Even after she was widowed three times, each time she returned “home” to her seven acres, with her three horses (pictured below, appropriately named Air, Wind, and Fire). One of my first conversations shared with Betty (who I met two more times) involved my asking about the stunning apple tree in her yard. Betty made 15 apple pies from her tree last fall, and so I asked her, “Do you make a good apple pie?” She modestly responded, “Well, they say I do.” Betty’s art was often of local scenery or country-like settings. The second time I returned to Betty’s house was so that she could drive me to an old wooden toll bridge that sits back in seclusion in the country. A scene she often likes to paint.
One day, on the way to the wooden bridge, driving entirely too fast down the meandering country dirt roads, she broke so suddenly and so abruptly, that my seat belt stopped my torso from colliding with the ash-grey dashboard of her Buick. Alerted, but also aware that we were and have been for a while, the only people on this road, I asked if everything was okay. She “shhed” me and pointed to a big-bodied, skinny legged bird in a small creek that ran the same way as the road. I learn later that it’s a blue heron.
Apparently those are rare enough to risk ruining my face on a dashboard. In that moment, it was reinforced to me that for Betty and many other Appalachians; thoughts, insights, imagination, and experiences are manifested through and with the natural world around them. It is not unusual or peculiar, to Betty or to others, to stop, to view, and to take it all in.

In speaking about this Appalachian context, Stewart (1996) wrote that the social imaginary is often in tension with the cultural real. Stewart wrote that the problem with tracking how the ideal emerges raises the question about “how cultural forms simultaneously produce both naturalizing claims to order and identify and denaturalizing critiques and dissimulations” (p. 187). In Appalachian Ohio this oneness with nature is both real and imagined by women in this space, and the culture naturalizes this desire and de-naturalizes those who do not have an intimate connection with the land in and around them.
Lauren, another friend from my running group who is also local middle school teacher, recites a similar experience from her childhood. Beyond science and math, Lauren also teaches members of the community how to properly grow a garden. She specializes in beans and underground gourds. When I asked her where this all came from, this intuitive relationship with the earth, she tells me an elegant and symbolic story:

We grew up with woods, surrounding my house, and I used to go walking there when I was stressed out, that was the most peaceful place for me to be. And my
mom was always interested in nature stuff; she always had bird feeders out and loved to keep the woods, like she didn’t cut the woods down around our house. My brother tells a story that um, in the middle of winter, we were hiking through the woods in the back of our house, and we came to these grapevines, I just completely stopped, these vines covered over all these dead trees, and the dead trees had almost formed like a tepee, which is unusual because when a storm blows, usually it blows everything in one direction, so this was usual. So these grapevines had kind of formed this big dome and all of the frost and snow had, you know, done like a one inch layer, so it was just like this opened white, glistening white basket above us. And I just stopped, and laid down and was looking at it and just admiring the pattern and the beauty, and my brother was just like “C’MON!” and I was like “NO! I’m just, leave me, leave me be, I’m just looking at it.” And he told that story like after I had gone to Hocking. And he’s like, do you remember that? But I guess I was always sort of like taken by the woods…

This connection, the ability to get lost in nature, to escape into one’s gardening, or canning, bird-watching, or dead-tree formation seems incomprehensible to me. This is not to say that I am unappreciative of the beauty of the hills in Athens during the fall, I most certainly do, but my conscious existence in the world is not informed nor shaped by it. I have never stopped mid-traffic to see the top of the Chrysler building, or got lost in watching the waves crash over the Detroit River and land on the Canadian shore. My co-participants’ politics and everyday lives are embedded in protecting the watershed, in
stopping Fracking, and ending mountain top removal. They share an ambivalent relationship with the land—they are both dependent on the exploitation of the land to fuel their economy, yet opposed to the destruction of their land, their beloved hills, their water. Their hobbies often include the intimate interaction with mud and animals in ways that I will never be able to appreciate. Their social worlds consist of participation in the sowing, planting, weeding, and plucking a garden. Their conscious self-concept involves the narration of themselves in natural settings. I can only conclude that their personal identity is in the prideful conditioning of protecting and honoring the natural world around them.

Becoming and Unbecoming

These small self-stories about my co-participants’ identities, about having pride, ambivalence, or even disgust in their Appalachian selves provide me with a larger cultural understanding of this Appalachian space. These small stories about a connection with the land, the stereotype that they either see and not identify with or embody themselves, their orientation to the language of “Appalachia” affords me a “locus” of culture (Geertz, 1973). Amongst their stories and experiences, I can find a place upon which to build a text to help better understand the culture of this Appalachian space. My hope with this chapter is to provide the reader with a better understanding of how women, from various counties, generations, and other social locations weave together for me a larger and deeper understanding of Appalachian women. It is also my hope that the heterogeneity of these experiences demonstrates, that Appalachian female identity cannot be a monolithic representation, but rather a multiplicity of stories and experiences. To
borrow the metaphor from Lauren, their stories are much like the logs and branches that have blown together to create this dome of understanding, and give us, “a glistening white basket” which rests above our heads, sheltering us in, and allowing us to take in its complicated existence and construction.
CHAPTER VI:
BETWEEN THE RIVER AND THE RAILROAD TRACKS: SPEAKING MARGINAL
BODIES TO CENTRAL SPACES IN APPALACHIAN OHIO

Where the body begins and ends is not quite as simple as locating flesh, or
configuring from the top of our heads, down to our feet. The question is much more
complicated than that. As feminist rhetorician Judith Butler tells us, the body is “at the
nexus of discourse and materiality” (Butler, 1993). The body is both very real and
material, we can touch skin, we can endure physical discomfort, we can feel hunger—but
we also discursively (de)construct the body. We speak bodies into and out of existence.
This chapter is meant to do just that, speak Othered bodies into existence in the world of
communication studies but also to make those Othered bodies central, not peripheral to
discourse. This chapter is not meant to serve as a survey of the spectrum of literature
across divisions such as; people with disabilities (e.g., Braithwaite and Harter, 2000;
Westhaver, 2000; Quinlan & Bates, 2008; Scott, 2008, 2012) and Gay, Lesbian, and
Transgender issues in communication studies (e.g., Adams, 2011; Bryson, et al., 2006;
Morris, 2007; Alexander, 2006) this would be an onerous task too large to speak to in one
chapter. But rather, I hope to show how the body “becomes and is the unit of analysis for
the storied self” (Chawla, 2012, p. 99) in a space that has been rendered Other in America
(Stewart, 1996).

In the coming pages, you will be introduced to three key characters in my
dissertation research: Terry, Maddie, and Becca. Their stories are arranged in three parts.
These people’s stories are the ones that often go untold about this Appalachian Ohio
context, but also embody the counter narrative of more than just Appalachian Ohio. Their story weakens the master narrative of “the” female body. They are the counter narratives. In unique and interesting ways these women resist and undermine all that I have learned and read about disability, gendering, and sexuality. Through the interlocution of their experiences, I learned and hope to share with others, anecdotal information that shapes our epistemological orientation to and with the body, particularly to the modernly colonized bodies of Appalachia.

The Appalachian body was colonized through a series of economic injustices. Beginning with the genocide of indigenous people, Andrea Smith, a prominent Native American scholar and author of *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, says that the “connection between the colonization of Native people’s bodies—particularly Native women’s bodies—and Native lands is not simply metaphorical” (Smith, 2005, p. 55). This Appalachian space was not immune to the violent colonization of native bodies. The Cherokee nation was the dominate power after the 1600’s until circa 1780 (Drake, 2001), when Europeans, through deliberate and violent force, took control of this land and the native peoples who inhabited it. Since then the “Appalachian case” of colonization has persisted through various forms of domination and exploitation of the region and its people. The many forms include; “from coal mining in West Virginia [and Southeast Ohio] to tourism in North Carolina, from TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority] development in Tennessee to educational [un]development in Kentucky…” (Lewis, Johnson, & Askins, 1978, p. 3), and I would presently argue to add, fracking and mountain top removal.
This colonial model helps us to not only understand how land gets exploited, but how bodies that make this space home are subject to an inherently unjust distribution of resources and power. In order to justify the colonization of bodies “at home” on the land, dominant discourses must dehumanize and uncivilize these “Appalachian” bodies. The raisons d'être for Appalachian bodies to continue existing post economic colonization is to provide tangible evidence for the “need” to intervene, to occupy, to control, to “help” (Spurr, 1993). Since the label “Appalachian” gained corporeal meaning through the formation of the Appalachian Regional Commission in the 1960’s (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2012, homepage), the term was synonymous with poor, unemployable people. Through totalizing stereotypes (re)produced through U.S. media, bodies “at home” in this space are storied as ignorant “hillbillies” living in “crushing poverty” (Drake, 2001). For the rest of the world, unless they have experienced why the beauty of the land is “overly romanticized” or seen the diversity of the bodies on/in it, they would never know any other story.

The stories I want to tell are the Other stories, the unpopular ones, the uncomfortable ones, the ones that rarely get told, the ones that are often intentionally ignored. The ones that defy, undermine, and re-imagine what it means to be a woman living in Appalachian Ohio. In writing through the ideas of major thinkers on the body, such as—Foucault (1977), Grosz (1994), Goffman, (1959), Merleau-Ponty (1989), and Butler (1990)—I engage the discourses of queer bodies and (dis)abled bodies. First, I tell you how I first encountered these characters and then I highlight some key moments in
their life-course which shifted my understanding away from mere words, to my understanding of their bodies as lived performances of corporeal theory.

Part I: One Body, Two Gender Performances

In 1949, Simone de Beauvior, one of the most prominent thinkers of the second wave of feminism said that, “Woman is not born, but made.” I agree that our sense of femininity and masculinity is constructed by our social worlds; however, I would argue that our dis-identification with our biologically-born-body cannot be wholly explained by examining just the social world, especially when dominant narratives about gender tell us how to conform to our body’s biological prescription. But to understand our conscious orientation to our bodies, we must turn the microscope inward. Here I examine a uniquely subjective experience that rarely gets told about in this Appalachian Ohio context, the story of a black, female to male, presenting body. Rather than diluting Terry’s story with my words, and because of Terry’s sharp introspection paired with his acute social consciousness, for this section, I would like to highlight his words and in doing so embody his presence.

First Encounters, Prefacing the Presenting Body

I met Terry in a human sexuality course where he announced publicly and proudly to the class that he had “lived as a woman for 24 years.” With Terry’s “outing,” he had carved a clear presence in that classroom that could not be ignored or silenced. That day, after he revealed his self to the classroom, I thought deeply about what Kevin

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3 By ‘biological prescription,’ I mean biological sex. This is also controversial, as it assumes that biological sex is the best descriptor and predictor of one’s gender script. I hope that this chapter serves to undermine and reconsider the meritocratic assumption that biological/scientific/medical models are the supreme source of knowledge production. For more of a discussion about this, see for example, Iris Marion Young’s On Female Body Experience: “Throwing Like a Girl” and Other Essays.
Barnhurst calls “the paradox of the closet” in his chapter *Visibility as Paradox: Representation and Simultaneous Contrast* (2007). Barnhurst writes, “Coming out is supposed to reap benefits but often destroys personal relationships and may lead to social death in some circles or physical harm in others” (p. 1-2). Coming out could very well mean harm for Terry, at the very least could incite the uncomfortable stares of his peers. Terry risked himself, making him vulnerable in a very public way to a bunch of young college students—dude-bros and pristine sorority girls in pearls—this left me impressed. I wanted to know more about Terry and his audacious identity politics. After that class, I asked Terry out for some beers and we have been friends ever since. Over last summer, I interviewed Terry for this project and I later found out that he often “outs” himself to preface his radical, sometimes feminist-offending, thoughts in class. One of the first questions I asked Terry was about that day when he revealed to the class that he was born as a woman and whether or not he “outs” himself in a very public way often:

> It depends on the situation and the setting. For instance, I was in this Women’s Studies class and looking the way I do now and I’m assuming that no one in there had a crystal ball and knew that I was trans, you know? So, I would make comments in class, and I would feel like because of the type of class it was I couldn’t speak. Jamal and I were the only black guys and the only black people period. And two is a lot here. But I’d feel that when I made some comments that I was received differently than if I had been a white woman making the same comments, you know? And one day I just felt compelled to qualify my statement by, you know, saying that I have a little bit of authority making these
generalizations about women’s gender roles because I was a woman for 24 years... It’s important to me in some situations to have people understand the perspective that I’m coming at this, you know? From looking at it a little bit differently then how maybe you’re looking at it....

Terry must deconstruct the assumed masculine privilege his body might carry for him to be invited and/or welcome to speak in feminist spaces. This dialogue demonstrates both Terry’s bold character and the constant explicit identity negotiation he must engage in to preface the assumed masculine privilege his presenting body holds, in order to be heard in public spaces, especially when engage in conversations about feminist politics.

Terry is thirty-two and lived as “Michelle” for 24 years before starting testosterone treatments and having what Terry called “top surgery” (his breasts removed, known to the non-trans world as a mastectomy). Although he has one body, he has lived as both a woman and a man in Appalachian Ohio. Because of his passing privileges he has navigated the social world with both gender performances, while being critical about how others perceive him as man and/or woman, and how he has perceived others while being a man and/or woman in this Appalachian space. His front stage and backstage performances of his self were/are constantly overlapping, blurring, and shifting (Goffman, 1959).

Both Goffman (1959) and Butler (1999) help us understand this front stage performance of gender to social audiences in relation to Terry’s body. First, in his book the *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman writes that a performance can be defined as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to
influence in any way any of the other participants” (1959, p. 15). For Goffman, life is like a drama and we are constantly engaged in performances.

The specific performance we are discussing here is the performance of gender. Butler (1990) in her very famous article, “Performativity Acts and Gender Constitution: A Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” argues that we “do” gender. For her, gender is accomplished through words, acts, gestures, and desires. Terry’s performance is the “doing” of masculine gender. It is clear from our exchanges that Terry’s body is the surface upon which he performs his desired gender identity (male), through the deepening of his voice, the way he dresses, the language he uses, etc. Goffman discusses three regions in relationship to the audience; front, back, and outside. The front is where the “part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” (1959, p. 22).

Terry performs his identity to the “front,” the “front” is the space where all interactions occur for Goffman. Terry’s appearance and manners are performed to and for the “front” and this is where standardization occurs. This physical surface of his gender identity, where Terry performs his appearance and manners, is what Goffman calls “the front stage.” The body that Terry presents (male) is his front stage and becomes the mode through which people understand and learn how to interact with Terry.

When I first met Terry his front stage performance was convincing, I had no idea he was born a woman. He is handsome, light-skinned, trim, and soft-spoken. He looks like the man he desires to be. Terry talks about his front stage passing privileges and how that affects the way people perceive and interact with him:
And you don’t know who I am. I look manly, but you don’t know my history and I’m going to share that with you, but that’s why I made a comment. I don’t even know what it was that we were talking about in that class, but I felt like I needed to give you a little bit more background so my position made a little more sense to you. But if I don’t come out, I feel like people, depending on what it is we’re talking about, that people are like here is some chauvinistic dude, you know, talking shit about women… Or something like that, and it’s like, well I might be those things too, but I might also have something to share, and I feel this way is because I’ve lived the life. I know that’s a whole other community…

Butler writes that gender is “a corporeal style, an ‘act,’ as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (1999, p. 177). In this conversation above we witness the story of the disrobing and re-ordering of his prescribed gender identity (female) to the creation of a new performance of his desired gender identity (male). Terry does not want to transcend or re-signify the gender binary like Butler (1989) theorizes we should move to, he wants to work within the field constraints of his everyday life. But in Terry’s transformation of genders, we witness the fragility of gender, the unstable nature of this major social ordering construct. On one hand, one’s gender used to script our labor (housewife, infantry), our limits (athleticism), our expectations (childrearing and childbearing)—gender was the construct that determined our place in the social and lived world. On the other hand, one’s gender no longer has the intense rigidity to define our
lives as it once had. Bodies, like Terry’s, provide us with embodied proof that gender is nothing more than a corporeal act, a social construction, a body performance.

*Intersecting Identities: The Trans/Black Body*

Terry grew up in what was a predominately black community in Appalachian Ohio, called Albany (since the mines have closed, black laborers have left and mostly traveled to northern, more-employable cities). Albany was settled in the early 1800’s. As one of the last stops on the Underground Railroad just miles above the Ohio River, which served as the natural Mason-Dixie line, some slaves escaping to the north did not travel much further. And thus, there are/were small enclaves of predominately black communities in Appalachian Ohio. Terry’s family history of migration tells a similar (his)story. Here is Terry’s story of how his family settled in this area:

My grandmother, she was born in 1923, in Point Pleasant, which is in West Virginia. They moved over here to Ohio, so my Grandma could go to school. She couldn’t go to school in Point Pleasant, not as of 6th or 7th grade because they didn’t have black high schools in most of West Virginia. I would say they moved here, to Ohio, because it was integrated. She could go to school with white kids here in high school. I don’t think she was the only black person in her high school because there were other families’ members and other people from West Virginia who moved over here for that reason, in Gallipolis.

Simply by existing, Terry is the embodiment of the interstices of race, sexuality, and gender. He grew up in a high school that was predominately white because of its consolidation with other communities. He experienced being a racial minority in high
school setting, centered in a “small-minded” Appalachian space. He is the grandson of a woman who had to relocate to another state just to attend high school. He was raised by a fairly light-skinned mother and is light-skinned himself. During his high school years, he was an “out” lesbian partnered with a white woman. Together they made up an interracial and gay relationship in a rural environment. As a black woman, he was Other to his racially homogenous white classmates. As a gay black woman, he is both Other and queer. He is doubly Othered in this Other space. All the while, Terry felt like the body he was born in did not match his desired gender performance.

Terry’s past and present bodies present a layering of identity, rich with the possibilities of Other/other’s interpretations. As a black queer woman in a mostly white space, Terry could not fully comprehend other’s interactions (or lack thereof) with him. As in, was it whiteness or heterosexism that led people to act and react with hostility? Terry’s narrative about how he was treated by his white ex-girlfriend’s family, attempts to speak to this ambiguous animosity:

I told you about that one right? That I wasn’t welcome in her house, her grandparent’s house and her parents too…Well, they were rude and I didn’t feel particularly welcome, but I went to their house, went inside, and sat on their furniture. But it’s hard to judge what it is because…it could be homophobia, or racism, it could be anything… It could be backwardness because they weren’t necessarily people that would have done that otherwise? I wouldn’t be surprised if I looked like anybody else in here and walked in their house and receive the same treatment. I can’t say. I didn’t feel a warm embrace because I was black.
But maybe they may just not be a warm embrace kind of people. I think you have to be sort of taught that. My mom is like “come on in, here’s some of this, eat some of that, take your shoes off, relax for a while.” So, I go into things like this expecting that sort of, you know, welcoming a stranger into someone’s home and if I don’t get that, then you got to wonder, is it for this reason? Is there a reason for that? Maybe it’s not knowing how to deal with guests, you know?

Terry is investigating aloud where his ex-girlfriend’s parent’s derisive behavior stemmed from. This is the subjective/objective position of being both black and queer; you cannot be sure where these poignant interactions arise. In *Performing Black Masculinity: Race, Culture, and Queer Identity* (2006), Bryant Keith Alexander, discusses the layering of identities and other people’s action, reaction, or inaction to his body. He writes, “without the presumed-to-be-natural presentation of my Black masculine identity, I am not seen—though I am standing in clear view” (p. 77). Because Alexander does not fit other people’s definition of masculine and black, they do not even see him at all. Alexander’s material existence is that of a “big black gay man” and that often clashes with people’s perception of what a black man should be and act like. Alexander discusses the nature of texts and their political role on our perception of the body, “these are texts that establish specific sites of contestation that are located in/on the body, but within the psyche of the social communities who assign meaning and value to bodies and lives” (p. xvii, 2006). Without experience, living and being with people who are different from yourself, your default ideas are predicated on popular cultural representations, which is beyond
problematic, considering the often (mis)representation of people of color (Alexander, 2006; Calafell & Holling, 2011; Pattisapu & Calafell, 2012).

Terry’s ex-girlfriend’s family, who are white and accustomed to working and being almost exclusively with other white people, swim ignorantly in the pool of white privilege (McIntosh, 2001). Peggy McIntosh, who is white and writes about privilege from her own personal standpoint epistemology, describes white privilege as “an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious” (p. 86-87). One of these privileges that McIntosh outlines is the luxury, if one wishes, to be in the company of people who are her own race most of the time. Consequently, Terry’s ex-girlfriend’s family, coming from Southeast Ohio can be and are exclusively in the presence of other white people. Thus Terry cannot be sure whether it is his black body, that fact that he is queer and dating one of their own, or both which causes them to make Terry uncomfortable, or even themselves uncomfortable in the comfort of their own home.

_Colliding the (Pre)formed with the (Per)formed_

That relationship lasted for years, on and off, in what Terry calls “typical lesbian drama.” As a heterosexual and/but a feminist, I am bothered by that statement, but who really is the authority to speak on the subject? Certainly, I do not belong to that community, and my personal politics do not allow me to speak for communities of which I am not a part.
But finally, after the on-again, off-again relationship ended, when Terry was 24, living on his own in Columbus, he began the transition to present in the form he always felt his body should have been. Here, I let him tell his story of what Terry calls his “transitioning”:

I was probably 19 or so, and I was here, at OU [Ohio University], and I came across several different books that talked about people actually ‘transitioning.’ They talked about trans-theory, you know? The idea of gender combining, you know all that, and that really opened the door and my thinking that this was possible. I heard other people’s stories. I could see my own story reflected in the pages. Then about a year or so after I was settled in Columbus, Trish and I had broken up. And I was kind of seeing somebody online. I was on the internet, in all these chat rooms, where it’s brand new, you know? And so I met someone who was a student. A woman who was going to school in Oberlin and she was doing Women’s Studies. She had all the background on gender, she was from Chicago. Had dated a guy that was trans, so she had like first person experience, direct knowledge. So she would share a lot of the different papers that she had read, lectures, and things like that and I knew then that everything that I had felt before as a child, all of that had led me up to where I was then, you know?

For Terry, the very introduction of Other stories change his imaginative practices. By simply exposing himself to other stories of Other existences, Other bodies became possible. Before meeting this woman, Terry knew that he had “felt” a gender different from his material body since childhood but did not know what to do about it. This woman
gave him the intellectual and theoretical tools of trans-identity to put his body into trans-praxis. The narrative of his physical transition unfolds:

So I knew there was something I wanted to do, change my name, be seen by the world as a male, you know? So I had already shaved my head off. I was already dressing manly, but it’s sort of like a gradual move toward being seen by society a man. It was slow. Four years, it’s a process. I started dating someone else and got into another relationship, pretty much doomed from the get-go. But after that, that was sort of like the last straw. I quit my job because I didn’t feel comfortable transitioning while working there. I was working as a collection agent for a construction company. It was a decent job for no degree. But it was not a national company, the office people ran it like it was a tiny, little family, kind of thing. A Mom and Pop kind of place and they weren’t going to be accepting. So I found a new job, it was closer to my house and I told them, I’m going to be transitioning, this is what that means. I was an assistant store manager there, so I had a little meeting with my boss and the general manager and I told them that I had already changed my name at that point and had the legal paperwork done. I told them what that was going to be like and I’m going to be taking shots and my voice is going to change. I was going to start grow hair and I might be a little crazy because it’ll sound like I’m going through puberty. They were like “wow, okay, do we need to do anything?” I’m like “no” and they’re like “okay” so…

Merleau-Ponty, in his treatise, *Phenomenology and Perception* (1962), theorizes about the interconnection of the body and the mind. The mind thinks and the body
behaves and the body experiences and the mind make sense of the experience in/through the body. It is by the means of the body that we perceive and relate with objects. The mind and the body are not as separate as the notion of Cartesian dualism suggests, which was and is, the basis of the medical world. Merleau-Ponty wants to argue against this dualism, that one (the mind) must be treated in relationship to the other (body) and vice versa. This interrelatedness of the mind/body is illuminated by Terry. The body was the site of the transformation of an idea (a fantasy of becoming a man) into a thing (male) (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Terry had the desire to present his body as a man’s and after being exposed to the idea of it (with the literature provided by the woman he met online), he could make that desire a reality by morphing his physical body. The materiality of his body, the “thing,” now “mimics” the idea. This metamorphosis of Terry’s body is both intentional; the cutting of the hair, and the putting on of men’s clothes, but also unintentional. As his body transformed, what occurred is what Merleau-Ponty calls “defacto situations” (1962, p. 164), that is some things changed without his activity in doing so. The defacto situations in this case are his hairline receding (which is a side effect to testosterone) and his voice cracking, making him sound as if he was “going through puberty.”

Once that metamorphosis was complete: his presenting body matched what the body he metaphysically felt on the inside, it was hard for Terry to return to that idea; the dream of being a woman or the materiality of that existence. Terry shares with me a story about looking at a photo of himself while he was Michelle and being totally disillusioned by it:
I was speaking to a class the other day and I was trying to come up with a new way to explain how it feels when I look at pictures of Michelle, you know, and it was me. It is me. It was me. But when it was me it didn’t feel like me. To explain that to somebody, about my pictures and my previous self or whatever, that was the best thing that I could come up with was to imagine the feeling being very similar, as if you are twins. If you had a twin sister that looked exactly like you, talked exactly like you, y’all had the same experiences, the same everything, you could finish each other’s sentences, like all that stuff. The other people out in the world, when they see one, they see the other. They don’t know if you’re Jeanette or Jenna. But when you look at a picture of your sister, you know that it looks like you and maybe for a split second you have to ask yourself, but no, I know that’s not me because I wore my hair on the side that day or whatever. So you know that it looks like you and you have a relationship with that person, but it’s not you. That’s how I feel when I look at pictures of Michelle. I know that was me. I remember being there, but I feel like I didn’t look like that at the time, if that makes any sense? And I don’t connect with that person looking back 20 years later. So I don’t know if the twin analogy works for people and they can understand what I’m talking about, but it’s the closest way I can describe it. It’s you, but it’s not.

Even through the experience of seeing the photograph, he could not return to the memory of that existence or the sensation of that body, even though it is the same body. Images are supposed to evoke memories that words cannot. Harper writes about
photograph elicitation, “Thus images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness that do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain’s capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words” (Harper, 2002, p. 13). But for Terry, the metamorphosis of his body was too complete, too congealed, to re-experience and re-member in and through the same body. Terry cannot return to what it felt like to be a woman, to experience life as a woman. Merleau-Ponty (1962) talks about the ability to escape into the body that I find to be germane to this discussion, he writes:

At the very moment when I live in the world, when I am given over to my plans, my occupations, my friends, my memories, I can close my eyes, lie down, listen to the blood pulsating in my ears, lose myself in some pleasure or pain, and shut myself up in this anonymous life which subtends my personal one. But precisely because my body can shut itself off from the world, it is also what opens me out upon the world and places me in a situation there. The momentum of existence towards others, towards the future, towards the world can be restored as a river unfreezes (1962, p. 164-165).

For Terry, after his “metamorphosis” (Merleau-Ponty) or “transition” (Terry) of his body, the presentation is finally in sync with his desired identity performance. His front stage is finally, at least in part, in sync with his backstage (Goffman, 1959). He has morphed into a body that he can comfortably escape into, a male body, while maintaining comfort in knowing that the body he presents and interacts with to the rest of the world is the same. For Terry, the river has unfrozen, and he can take solace in knowing that the
world is acknowledging and interacting with the body he has always wanted others to see and now he can be “at home” in the gender performance of his lived body.

My Cisgender Privileged Position/Obscuring Trans Understanding

Trying to relate to the lived experience of Terry’s body or even Terry’s story might be very difficult to understand because this is not something that most people have to think about. Most people are unaware of the existence of their body. Although Julie-Ann Scott (2012) is talking about people with disabilities specifically, she articulates this position of hyperawareness in an insightful way that I would like to extend to Terry’s trans-body:

Narrators reveal that the cultural gaze toward their bodies, combined with the visceral experience of living through a body that demands physical attentions provides a hyperembodied awareness of how humans continually become who we are through embodiment. In turn, stories from disabled bodies illuminate understandings that ‘normal’ bodies arguably ‘know’ but largely choose to ignore” (p. 103).

Most of us choose to ignore the physical conditions of our body because we can. That is a machination of privilege that “normal” bodies get to enjoy, to be so “at home” in our body that we do not have to even think about it, or talk about it, because our gender behavior matches the dominant culture’s gender expectations (Wight, 2011). On the other hand, Terry never felt “at home” in his old female body. Although he could not pin-point or justify why he never felt fully comfortable as a woman, this dialogue narrates the (dis)identification with his biologically born body in a very powerful way:
I like being out there and team sports like that, but uh, I just wasn’t very graceful when it came to softball or basketball really [Laughs]. But, I used to like swimming a lot until I hit puberty and then I didn’t want to do it anymore, you know? I just, my body type, I was feeling at that point of time it didn’t match with what I was feeling on the inside, you know? So, displaying your body like that, kind of sucked. I didn’t swim for years, not swimming in public, until I had the chest surgery…

Through this brief dialogue we can see how simple joys can be taken away from us by simply existing. Terry felt that his born female body, which was accentuated by puberty, did not “match what he was feeling inside.” The flesh of Terry’s growing breasts moved him to conceal his body and took away his ability to appear in public spaces in something as conforming to his feminine figure as a bathing suit. Although Terry feels that the “wrong body” discourse can be problematic (because it assumes there is a right one, it privileges one body over another), he thinks it gives us a language to at least enter the conversation about trans-people. For most of us, it may be unfathomable to gain phenomenological insight as to what trans-people experience, think, or feel, especially in regards to confusion about our body and our gender. A fact that cisgender (i.e., non-transgender) people, do not have to worry about because to be cisgender is the very privilege of our gender identity performances matching our biological sex. Thus that confusion, stress, angst about “our parts” on our body being aligned with what we feel inside, we do not have to bear (Serano, 2008).

But Terry, who had years to reflect and gain introspect about his lived life, living in the flesh of his own skin, shares a bit of what having that knowledge is like with me:
I remember I would be at home, I would be getting ready to go out for the dance. I’m 18, I have no curfew, my mom lives somewhere else, I had the whole house to myself. I got friends who are college students. I got a motorcycle, head-shaved, leather jacket, you know? I’m feeling good and in my mind I remember thinking, someday, someday out there, in a year I’ll look this way, be a man and all that, and I remember thinking that, and looking at myself in the mirror and thinking how I would look in the future, you know? I imagined it happening but I didn’t think I was actually going to do it. If that makes any sense? Or what I would really look like, it just seemed like a fantasy. So, that was kind of how I was about it and then I actually started to make steps for that to happen. It just seemed like it was something I was supposed to do, you know?

Even though Terry often ends his sentences with “you know,” I could not possibly know. Bakhtin (1990) discusses the inability to experience true empathy for another, he writes:

> When I project myself into another’s suffering, I experience it precisely as *his* suffering—in the category of the *other*, and my reaction to it is not a cry of pain, but a word of consolation or an act of assistance (p. 26).

I tell Terry that it is and would be very difficult for me to understand because the conditions of my body are not constantly in my consciousness. And I can only offer a word or an “act of assistance,” listening to and hearing his story. Being cisgender, I did not experience angst about whether my gender performance matches the material conditions of my body. If I want to wear long shorts or other stereotypically masculine clothing, it does not come with the presumption that I want to perform my gender identity.
as something more masculine. For me, the expression of my gender identity was not even a question, struggle, or something I dedicated thought to, but a performance that just seemingly came “natural” to me. I wanted to understand this struggle a bit more, why I think my performance is so “natural” and why he thought his was “unnatural.” I knew, that as a woman, the “mediascapes” a scene that women’s bodies are not enough; hair not shiny enough, legs not thin enough, stomach not flat enough, but that is only my projection of self as a failed attempt to understand his experience (Appadurai, 1996). He acknowledges my halfhearted but honest attempt at connection:

I think that’s the hardest thing for me to understand, like you said, most people don’t think about their body, but I think that a lot of women think about their body, but only in terms of critique. You know what I mean? Like you never appreciate it, per se, you know, but I think it would be hard for me to understand looking at my reflection and knowing this is exactly what I was meant to look like or to feel like.

But Terry’s body for me created the impetus for a shift in my thinking about gender, a level of body consciousness I had not experienced before, and in this shift in thinking, I realized how dependent I was on language to situate my position. Nor did I have an adequate language system to draw from in order to represent the material and performative conditions of Terry’s trans-existence.

**Politics of Language**

Although progressive academic thinking recognizes and situates gender as only a mere corporeal performance (Butler, 1990; Bornstein, 1995), there are very real lived
consequences in switching these gender scripts. On one end of the spectrum, there are people who have been beaten for the queering of their gender performances like Chrissy Lee Polis, who was attacked by two women in a McDonald’s, or Paige Clay who was found shot in the face, or Brandon Teena who was murdered in 1998. On the other end, there are people like Terry’s boss, who try to refigure their lives and language to create a more tolerant and comfortable space for trans-people. But Terry’s transition was not met without at least some scathe. I knew Terry was from a small town and black, therefore I knew there must have been some pain involved in the process of transition, so I asked, “What about your mom?” And his response was somber:

Yeah, it was difficult. It was very difficult at the time for her, for pretty much the same reasons, like what do I call you and how do I get over the awkwardness of the new you and what do I do with the old you, you know? How do I realign those two different things? I wish it were that easy, you know? It took a while for her to come around, but I think by the time I came out as trans, the shock factor has already been exhausted because I came out as bisexual, then I came out as a lesbian, so it put me off the hook when I came out as trans…

Me: You already ruined the element of surprise for her. You know how people say homophobia in the black community is so much more intense?6

Terry: Uhm, yeah, I don’t really know. I mean I think that our family, both my immediate family and city family, I don’t know if we really follow the very norm.

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6 I was raised in an environment that was predominately people of color; this question was motivated by my personal standpoint epistemology (Hill Collins, 1990). It has also been suggested through a documentary, Beyond Beats and Rhymes, by Byron Hurt, as well other popular culture artifacts, such as the independent film, Pariah.
Me: What norm?

Terry: The stereotypical norm, like when it comes to “the black family.” You know, I think we operate a little bit outside of that realm...

Me: Why do you think that is? Because of where you live or?

Terry: Luck of the draw. I don’t know, I think it’s like, generally speaking, I think that our family is like, at least my Grandma’s side, my Mom’s side, I don’t know much about my Dad’s side, and what their physiological beliefs are, but it took my Grandmother a long time to get over the whole gay thing when I came out. But back in the day her brother, my great uncle, was gay…

Terry’s life embodies the “interlocking systems of oppression” that Patricia Hill Collins addresses in her essay, “The Matrix of Domination” (1990). As I mentioned before, Terry is at the nexus of oppression, born a black female, from working class social strata in a small rural environment, preliminarily coming out as bisexual, later a lesbian, and then finally owning and performing the identity he had always emotionally experienced. When Terry states that they were not the “stereotypical norm” when it comes to “the black family,” I wonder what he meant by this statement. Why does he feel as though his family fits outside of “the black family” especially if they were the only black family in a rural white high school? I would imagine his difference would feel extra emphasized there. He later explains that his uncle Buck was gay, thus, he “paved the way” for Terry. As an out gay man, Terry’s uncle makes their family (for him) a non-stereotypical black family. By the very introduction of homosexuality into the family system, his family no longer constitutes the stereotypical black family, because “the black
family” is only defined as comprised of heterosexual relationships exclusively. Alexander, whose book is discussed above also relates to this tension of being gay in the black family system. As a child, his father made him get a haircut but his experience in those barbershops for Alexander, was both an oppressively heterosexual experience, “a confusion between choice and voice” (2006, p. 143) and the space where he was enculturated with the cultural politics of his community. His experiences are presented in the book through autoethnographical accounts that further crystallize the intense difficulty in being both black and queer. To be black for Terry and Alexander is not to be gay.

“The black family” is a terministic screen (Burke, 1966) that sifts out Terry’s family. They are black, yes, but because they have gay family members, they no longer fit the very definition of “the black family.” And because Terry’s family did not ostracize Terry’s gay uncle, they move even further outside that norm.

Terry is an only child in his nuclear family system. His mother met his father while living in Long Beach, California. She was older and more mature than him, so when she found out she was pregnant; he told her he was not ready to be a father and he remained an absent dad for Terry. As a consequence, for most of Terry’s life, his primary socializing agent was his mother. And they remain very close. Their relationship was shaken only a bit by the announcement of Terry’s decision to live as he felt which is hinted at above and is detailed a bit more below:

She knew it was going to be difficult but for the most part when people express that they have an issue with it, in transitioning, it’s been about “what do I tell
other people?” It’s not so much that they say I don’t want you to do this, it’s more of the physical need, what’s physically going to happen to me, health wise. But mainly it was, “what do I tell people when they ask me how’s Michelle doing? How do I explain to them that Michelle is Terry now and she’s now a he? How do I explain it to my friends?” So, that was her main concern. Which is legitimate…

Me: Did you give them a language, like well maybe you can say this?

Terry: Yeah but that still didn’t help, that wasn’t the relative question that they were saying, it was like I’m scared that I’m going to have to talk about this now.

Here we can see the power and the limits of language in relationship to the body. Terry’s mother must have a language system to be able to speak about her son’s body.

We often hear this seemingly well-intentioned concern when people talk about transgender transition, how do we talk about the “problem of the body” as Merleau-Ponty positions it (1962)? The fear of not having a language to speak about Other bodies reinforces patriarchy and keeps us locked into strict, rigid, scripted gender performances. How does one narrate for others that he is becoming a she? This limit of language has the potential to create social chaos. If we do not have a coherent language to speak about bodies, then how will we ever adjust? This heightened concern over pronoun usage becomes a reflection and deflection of our lived fears becoming real: how does one speak about such an Othered body? Especially when that Othered body (object) once belonged to our body (an experience)? As fellow young researcher and trans-scholar, Julie Wight,
discusses this very dilemma of gender performativity and restricted nature of language is limiting. (S)he writes:

Although performativity as discourse is not binary in its multi-dimensionality (in terms of history, culture, and agency) or in its phenomenological status in particular preformative moments, the way we talk about and categorize that performativity —and the way it is understood culturally—still exists in the binary choices of language. Regardless of how I choose to perform my gender, I will always be categorized as either male or female…man or woman… (2011, p.77)

The limited nature of language about the body serves as a major social obstacle that transgendered bodies have to overcome in order to not only to deconstruct gendered power structures but to just simply exist.

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After his mother’s preliminary concerns about the language she would have to get used to, and what to say when people ask about her daughter, it did not take long for her to adjust. She became accustomed to Terry’s transition, and developed appropriate language to speak about the transition. They did this so well that he and she have decided to help other families with transgender transitions through their consulting group. Starting a consulting group, they design and disseminate new language systems to talk about trans-bodies and they want to share that language system with whoever cares to learn. Their group helps organizations and individuals design a safer way to discuss and maneuver gender transitioning. In addition to manuals, Terry and his mother help people
with proper pronoun usage and answer other concerns that cisgender people typically have in order to create a more progressive and accepting organizational culture. The company is still small but they are trying to grow their current clientele to transform the existing status of trans-people in the work place.

The following narrative is an interesting metaphor that gives meaning to their caring and resilient relationship, Terry says:

Yeah I was very much a tomboy. Much to my Mom’s dismay, she hated that, she always wanted me to bloom into skirts, cheerleading stuff.

Me: And you were just like no, Mom, no. Did she buy you the things that you wanted or the things that she thought you should have?

Terry: She bought me the things that she thought I should have. We had this incidence once with this jumper, I hated it. It was like plaid and it had like straps here and it came down in the front and had a really high waist and then it had a flowy thing, ah, I hated it. It was one of those things in your closet that causes so much friction and I didn’t want anything to do with that, that one article you just refuse to wear and it’s the only article of clothing that your parents want you to wear. It’s one of those situations, and so after months of refusing to wear it, we finally had it out about this thing and I was like “fine, I’ll go and put it on just to prove to you that I look ridiculous in it Mom.” And I went in and put it on, and I put it on to the best of my ability, I didn’t have it all crazy or nothing, and I came out and my Mom took one look at me and was like “you know what, you’re right.
You don’t have to wear this again.” She just realized it didn’t fit on me. So, I think from then on I had a little more freedom on what I wanted to wear.

This narrative about the jumper serves as a metaphor for the discursive nature of language. Like jumpers, we can try on new words, and when we see that they do not fit our bodies perfectly, we can simply put them down and lay them to rest if we are permitted. And when we can finally find words that fit us, words that we can identify with, then we have more personal freedom, room to be our self. That is the insidious nature of language, it holds the power to both limit our imagination, to imprison us, and/or give us the resistance required to gain personal freedom from other people’s expectations of who we are and who we should be.

*Other in an Other Space*

The experience of trans-people has recently been gaining some traction in the public sphere with the recent scandal with the Girl Scouts (A trans-girl being asked to leave her local troop by the troop leader because she was biologically a boy) and the trans-woman Miss Universe contestant (who was originally told she could not participate in the pageant but that positions was rescinded). However, this visibility of trans-people is not necessarily a reflection of the public collectively moving to a space of acceptance of people with trans-identities and trans-bodies. As noted earlier there has been a list of hate crimes committed against trans-people. And from my friendship with Terry and my experiences in this field, Terry is viewed as doubly Other in this Othered space. Throughout our conversation the phrase, “especially here” resonates with me time and
time again. Terry’s body does serve as an impetus to design a new language system for people in this Appalachian region but that assumes people want to establish and maintain a level of comfort in being with trans-people. Wight reinforces, that just because there are more obvious examples of non-normative gender expressions does not mean we can fully understand the “dynamics involved in transgender oppression” (2011, p. 85), especially here.

In a space that has a history of sun-down towns and collective expressions of “small-mindedness,” (See, for example, chapter IV for a larger discussion) it is hard to imagine Terry’s life and Terry’s struggle. But casting light on Terry’s body and the social conditions of that lived body in this Othered space allows us to gain a small slice of insight about how one body can have more than one gender performance, especially here.

Part II: The (un)becoming (dis)able body

If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.

-Lorde, 1984, p. 63

Conversations about people with disabilities often revolve around just that, what they are and are not able to do. Inherent in the very definition of “disabled” is incapacity, restriction, and disqualified (Webster, 2010). The etymology of “disability” carries an ideology that is “haunted by phantoms of the past—in terms of literal intellectual lines of descent and reactions to this heritage” (Snyder & Mitchell, 2006, p. xii). Snyder and Mitchell in their book, Cultural Locations of Disability, trace beliefs instilled in the medical and cultural worlds back to the eugenics era. These beliefs have since shifted to
benign rhetoric about people with disabilities and are at odds with the very well-being of people with disabilities. The section of this chapter is to speak to their charge, to demystify and unclassify human difference with a conversation about one of my co-participants, Maddie.  

In dominant (ableist) discourse, a body becomes disabled and inscribed by language that limits possibility (Lindermann, 2008). Even in academic discourse centered on people with disability, the focus is on “compromised mobility,” “imagining a different body,” or “the increasing complications” with disabled bodies (Scott, 2012). Conversely, this section of the chapter is about a young woman who unbecomes disabled through the narrative possibility of her language. Just as Rita Charon (2006), an influential doctor who practices and teaches narrative medicine at Columbia University, reassures us, that language can translate into control of our condition, it can also translate into the controllable-ness of our conditions. As you read Maddie’s story, her words will become embodied resistances to dominate discourse about women in Appalachia writ large, but also about women living with disabilities.

I first met Maddie when I was devilishly accomplishing a double feature at the local cinema. I noticed her right away. She was wearing her uniform shirt, her blonde long hair back in a pony, and shorts so small that I could practically see where the flesh of her leg ended and the metal of her prosthesis began—far up her thigh. I describe her physical appearance not as a means to objectify her body but rather to demonstrate her

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7 Maddie is one of my few participants whose identity I do not try to conceal. Not only would it be impossible to create an alias for a woman with prosthesis in a very small town, but it is important to Maddie to keep her identity intact and on the radar.
unabashed confidence with her body, her “disability” (although that term is not in her everyday vernacular). She was working behind concessions, standing far away enough from the counter to fully showcase her prosthesis to all the customers. She didn’t try to hide it, she didn’t try to mask it, she didn’t try to cover it up. Her shorts were an artifact of her bold politics, showing us that her personal is indeed her political.

*Positioning Subject/Object, Object/Subject*

Before I go any further I want to recognize two researcher tensions, both my thirst for the marginal narrative (Greiner, 2010) and how that was satiated once I found Maddie. Greiner (2010) recognizes a seemingly innocuous theme common in literature set in an Appalachian context. In the context of Appalachia—Greiner argues—writers and researchers have a thirst to represent only the tragic and/or the heroic, not the ordinary existences. I fell susceptible to this trend; I wanted to hear the marginal stories. And I wanted Maddie to agree to participate in my research before I even had all the facts; I wondered: is she second generation Appalachian, was she even from here, or was she just a student here? I was motivated to hear her story because I wanted to tell untold stories about women in Appalachia. And when I saw Maddie, in my romantic naïveté, I thought she would fill that void.

But I had no clue that the woman I seemingly objectified as a “sexy researcher story” would be this bold, this interesting, the embodiment of resistance to the dominant narratives about women living in Appalachia or women living with a disability. Below is a dialogue about me sheepishly being reflexive about my research process, and why I wanted to interview her. I am revealing my ethnographic “I,” to the reader as I revealed
myself to her (Chawla, 2006; Ellis, 2004). I tried to be as transparent to her as possible, so that she would be aware of my subject/researcher position and my readers can be aware of how I arrived here at this analysis (Chawla, 2006). I ask her if she was offended when I recruited her to participate in my research project that day at the movies and her response is best displayed when situated in her own words:

I actually thought you were coming for a refund because I had just sold you your ticket and we had just had a string of really mean customers, and I was like, “Oh, what did I do?” and I thought you were going to say something and I was trying to think back to selling you your ticket, “Did I…Was I rude or something?” [laughs] I didn’t know, but someone else had just come up to yell at another girl for something silly, I was like, “Oh, man…” I had been there for ten hours also…Maddie is witty and young and full of spunk. At 18, she has had experiences that most people can only read or hear about. She is not oblivious that others see the conditions of her existence but still she tries not to assume others are confined to seeing her as only that, she wants to see the best in others, which assumes others have a more panoramic view of her self. She jokes with me in a way that put me, the researcher, at ease although I should be the older and more comfortable one in the interview. Chawla (2006) writes that the ethnographic locales are the spaces where ethnographer and co-participant, native and Other intersect (see also Appadurai, 1996; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Maddie’s comical words move us to a mutual understanding, a quality of honesty and openness but also vulnerability that most researchers strive for but not all of us receive. Maddie stories,
with resignation, other people’s fascination with the lived conditions of her marginal existence:

I get this kind of all the time, especially with like, with photojournalism people. There was a VisCom professor at OU who knew I apparently played soccer or some sport and he recognized me at the high school, he would give final projects to his students and they had to do a piece on someone, and he would say, “there’s a girl at the high school who plays sports and has one leg. Call the high school and ask for her,” and so the high school principal would call me in and say, “there’s all these people asking for you,” you know what I mean, and I was like, “whatever. Let them.” And they came out. There was one guy who did a really big one on me. It’s usually just like a little interview, but he followed me around for like two weeks and took pictures. Everywhere I went he came with me…

Me: Does that bother you? Like, “Hey are you the girl at Athens High School with the one leg?”

Maddie: The basketball coach printed out a really funny email from one of them once. It was like, “I am looking for the one-legged girl who does sports…” [laughs]. He must have been really desperate looking for someone, you know what I mean? [laughs] I didn’t know the basketball coach at all and then he walked up to me and he was like, “I think this might be meant to be for you…” [laughs]. I looked at it and I was like, “Oh! The one legged girl who plays sports, that probably is me.” [laughs]
Being present in her story, of others seeing her only as “the girl with one leg” and consciously understanding of my own pull to her was mostly because of her prosthesis, I feel hurt for her and ashamed of myself. This ethnographic moment and this interview give me deep insight about the vulnerabilities of fieldwork and what it means to be reflexive (Behar, 1996). In Ruth Behar’s, The Vulnerable Observer (1996), she asks her readers about the limits of fieldwork and what lines should never be crossed like “respect, piety, pathos,” especially when you know you are charting sensitive territories. I hope they remain uncrossed with Maddie. Behar encourages reflexive research practices in order to “check” in on yourself. Reflexivity is the turning-back of personal experience upon itself (Mead, 1962; Steier, 1995; Myerhoff & Ruby, 1982). As Myerhoff and Ruby (1982) put it, it is the “consciousness about being conscious; thinking about thinking” (p. 1). I am being reflexive here to show the significance of looking back, to make me the object/subject under study, and to show the reality of my thinking in that fieldwork present.

I explicitly asked Maddie whether or not she minds that I “tackled” her in the theatre that day explicating that we used a similar strategy at my undergraduate to recruit women with ambiguously tanned skin into my historically Latina sorority. I say this to assuage the fact that I was and am embarrassed by my approach to get access to this woman, to “tackle” her in her public work space. She confides:

I mean…it seems different. You know, I mean, my leg is a different quality and yeah. If you want to kinda say, you know like, you can decide how different I am for yourself, um…mmmm…I think um…you know a lot of people come up to me
as the “one legged girl who plays sports” and I think a lot of people take this stance, and I think it’s silly, but “Oh what an inspiration…” you know what I mean? “Look at her persevering through,” but I’ve never known any differently. It’s not like I lost a leg. So a lot of this is me, kind of like, it’s just kind of normal, you know?

Maddie lifts me off the hook, giving others and me the permission to see and access her self, even if it is through her human difference. And although Maddie is conscious of the exact words she would like to use to describe some people’s perceptions of her, she is too modest to use them directly. Maddie knows she is an inspiration to others, not just “different” as she says but an exceptional case. Her communicative performance of normalcy gives me insight to the ways in which she performs her (dis)abled identity.

Performing (dis)ability

Just as we perform our gender identities, like discussed above with Terry, disability is an identity performance, something we “do” in the spirit of Judith Butler (1990). In a special issue of Text and Performance Quarterly (2008), Henderson and Ostrander question us, “if disability, like gender and sexuality…is always in the process of becoming,” then is disability something we do rather than who we are? They also reminds us that we all come to conversations about disability with various conditions of “well and ill” and to view such performances as “intrinsic to all human experience” (p. 1). To pretend not to see Maddie’s prosthesis that day in the movie theatre is to deny my ableist position of sight but also remove my humanness as a curious being.
Maddie performs her disability in a fresh and inspiring way which is obvious both in her bold personal political choice to wear short shorts and in the communicative practices we can read about above. Maddie says that she is “different” and recognizes that her leg holds the potential to be seen as a human with “a different quality.” For her, the absence of a leg is what is normal. Maddie was born with a leg that did not fully develop and thus is “dependent” on prosthesis (you will read more about her physical condition as the story of the conversation unfolds chronologically as it occurs), she has existed in this mode her entire life. Maddie does not know an Other existence, an Other body.

Julie Ann Scott (2012), who is disabled herself, enters into this conversation about disability from her culmination of personal narratives “of and through physically disabled bodies.” In this collection of personal narratives, she postulates, people with disabilities perform who they would be if they had a different body, who they will become through changing bodies, and where they will go when their existence in that body is no longer. In this article, Scott constitutes physical disability as a “bodily deficit” and “physical dependent.”

As a feminist researcher, I too am conscious of the ways our stories become embodied, recognizing the importance of the body (See also, Ellingson, 2006). Scott (2012) offers a word that helps me understand Maddie’s stories in relation to her body; I became aware that Maddie’s stories were/are “hyperembodied.” But not in the same sense that Scott (2012) and other research on people with disabilities have to offer, Maddie’s stories are not about what her body “permits” her to do, but rather what she
does in spite of her body and its abilities. To return to a reflection of the day I met Maddie, to extrapolate this indication of what Maddie does in spite of her body, I tell Maddie “I think what struck me more, was your shorts, they were pretty short that day.” Maddie laughs and questions what she already knows to be true “were they pretty short?”

Me: I thought, your confidence…I think it’s incredible that you wear shorts. You don’t even have the desire to cover up?

I explain to Maddie about a special relationship I have with a woman whose arm never fully developed and that she cannot afford to wear prostheses. And that she hides her arm all the time, underneath long sleeves. And despite the fact that we have been friends for many years, we never talk about it. Not because I never bring it up, I do, but because it makes her uncomfortable to have a conversation about her arm. This relationship with my friend helped shape and center my gaze on Maddie that day in the theatre, I tell her:

So, not only do you not hide it, you just have a confidence about it, to be who you are, to be “the one legged girl who plays sports,” and that’s cool that you’ve never even been bothered by people calling you that.

Bakhtin (1990) calls this phenomenon, “the excess of seeing,” the ability for me to see Maddie as a whole human being, for these photographers—that emailed Maddie’s high school desperately in search of “the girl with the one leg who plays sports”—to see Maddie as more than that. But in return Maddie has this opportunity as well, this “excess of seeing” both the photographer and I as more than thirsty journalists in search of a good story. The “excess of seeing,” Bakhtin describes as:
I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face, and its expression), the world behind his back, and a whole series of objects and relations, which in any of our mutual relations are accessible to me but not to him. . . . This ever-present *excess* of my seeing, knowing, and possessing in relation to any other human being is founded in the uniqueness and irreplaceability of my place in the world. (p. 23)

I have the capacity of seeing and experiencing Maddie, not just in her bodily form, by way of objectifying Maddie’s body, but seeing the totality of Maddie; her personality, her presence, her optimism. Initially, I saw Maddie as a young woman with a prosthesis wearing short shorts, working at a movie theatre. But after a dialogical encounter with her, I realize that in that theatre my gaze is the opportunity to have this “excess of seeing” this whole other being, beyond just her body. As Bakhtin proposes, it is only I who saw her from this angle, at that position, at that proximity, and knew she had a position of outsideness with me to share. And this position of outsideness is both what makes her special to me and what makes her outside of others. It is this position of outsideness that pulls me in to her story and pushes others to the periphery of her experiences:

It has given me a lot more, oh the, recognition that comes from it. This is silly. It’s been much more of a blessing than a hindrance. And my sister gets so mad all the time because I went through the same school and now she’s going through all the same teachers and they’re like, “Oh, you’re Maddie’s sister!” You know what
I mean? My leg makes me stand out but I think my personality is kind of stand out as well. You know what I mean? I am pretty confident; I am pretty comfortable with adults. So I think I stand out amongst adults and my leg definitely, because it’s not to say that a lot of my friends aren’t also good, smart, charismatic kids. We’re all like that. But my leg makes me more remembered than them, I think…

Because Maddie’s body is outside of our ableist assumptions of “the” female body (Lindemann, 2008), she is remembered for her “re-membering.” Just as Bates and Quinlan (2008) find in their examination of journalistic and blogger reactions to Heather Mill’s performance on Dancing with the Stars, Maddie and Heather’s (dis)abled existences reveal both empowering and disempowering potentialities for their bodies. They are remembered for their notable existences, overcoming extreme odds, so much so that they become what is dubbed by Nelson (1994) as “supercrip.” Maddie and Heather are representations of those who “excelled so much in spite of his or her handicap that others who do not measure up are regarded as inadequate” (p. 185-7). Maddie, like Heather, perform beyond their “corporeal limitations” (Quinlan & Bates, 2008). I may position Maddie as a “supercrip” in this chapter, I might be guilty of reproducing another extraordinary tale of disabled existences. This is exactly what attracted me to her, leads me to this conversation, and to write these words. I acknowledge that and I warn that the “supercrip”-ing does not end with this paragraph but rather informs the rest of this section. These ableist assumptions about the corporeal limits of disabled bodies are both
harmful and helpful. Maddie discusses a myriad of opportunities she has as a result of the cultural obsession with marginal existences:

And there have just been a lot of like cool opportunities that I’ve had because I have one leg. Umm…like…did you ever watch that show, *Kid Nation*? It was a reality show during the writer’s strike. Well, the premise of it was, there were forty kids and they dropped them off in an old west town and they make their own government and live for forty days. And chaos ensues. But, I was bored, and there is nothing to do here in the summer. David and I were watching that show and it was like, “If you want to apply to be on the next season, print off the application here” and so we did. We filled it out and made a little video and I was like, “look I have one leg!” And we sent it in, just being silly. It occupied us for a day. A couple weeks later I get a call from *CBS* or whatever, and they did a phone interview with me, they did a phone interview with my mom and I made it to the next cut. I went to Detroit and did an interview there and filmed an interview with the people, producers, and then I made the next cut. And then I made that cut. And they were going to fly me to L.A. for the last sixty kids and they were going to cut it to forty, but then the second season got cancelled because the writer’s strike was over. But umm…I know I got that far because of my leg. You know what I mean? That would’ve been an interesting look on the show, you know?

I do know; her marginal bodily existence is what brought me to her. But Maddie never allows her “one leggedness” to define her self, but it certainly defines the way
others see her. Her self-concept is almost autonomous from this identity discourse that
others use to describe and identify her. In *Mind, Self, and Society*, Mead (1934) tells us
that it is through self consciousness that individual organisms have some sense of the
field in which they are operating and through experience with the social world we learn
to act and react with reference to ourselves, but also with reference as to how that self
then relates with others. Mead thinks that the core of the self is structured by the self
conscious, not the body, and that our thoughts about the self, originate in our social
worlds. Mead writes, “The body is not a self, as such; it becomes a self only when it has
developed a mind within the context of social experience” (p. 50). Mead’s mode of
thinking is a bit contrary to the discussions presented here, in terms of Merleau-Ponty
(1962) and Grosz (1994), who think that it is through the body that we can perceive and
interrelate with others and objects. But in this contextual example, both ideas help us to
understand Maddie’s subject position, she does come to know her world through social
discourse, and her body helps her to move through that world. Both her social
experiences and her body have a symbiotic relationship because one informs the other.
Her body constitutes her social experiences and her social experiences constitute her
body.

From Maddie’s earliest memory, her parents, our primary socializing agents,
ever talk about her leg in the context of ability. They socialize Maddie to have an
attitude about her leg that is not centered on disability, she says, “I was always taught, it’s
not a big deal.” And you can see the internalization of this attitude through the stories
that Maddie tells about her leg: about the possibilities of her leg and what she can do. As
Mishler (1995) contends, the told is constructed in the telling. In order to substantiate Maddie’s parents’ orientation to her and her body, Maddie shares with me the story her mother tells about the day she was born:

So everything was there, it’s just this is moved up [Maddie is talking about her leg]. And um, so it’s never been a big deal for me… I think that just because that’s the kind of attitude I was grown up with. To not give in… But when I was born they didn’t know, ultrasounds didn’t show it or anything, and there was no medical reason to look for it. So my mom had a c-section and she was still out of it and they came and told her, “oh, her legs are a different sizes.” And, “We’re not sure what’s going on. It doesn’t look like it’s a big deal, but we don’t know.” And so, they freaked out a little, obviously.

Me: Your mom did?

Maddie: Yeah. Um, and they thought it was like a dislocated hip for a while. I think I had a cast for a couple of days, and they were like, “Oh, it’s not a dislocated hip,” so they took the cast off and it was probably a couple weeks before we made it in to see an orthopedic surgeon at children’s hospital. And they decided what it was, but it’s a really rare thing. I don’t know the numbers for it, but it’s pretty rare and this guy had never seen it before. Like I was his first case of it…

Maddie’s condition is rare, her birth was confusing, and her parents “freaked” out at first, but only because they feared the unknown about their child. But the way Maddie tells her birth story is a reflection of how her parents speak and feel about that day. The
telling is calm, historical, and mostly reserved, but Maddie, being born with a short leg, is “no big deal.” The told is that Maddie internalized the meaning behind this narrative: that she is a rare case, not disabled.

*Seeing and Being (Dis)Abled*

She and I speak for almost a half hour before she broaches “the subject” of her leg though she sits with her legs crossed, prosthesis side up. Bakhtin argues that this is because we cannot see ourselves at all:

Myself I *experience* from within myself. Even when I dream about the admiration that my exterior calls forth in others, I do not have to represent it to myself; I represent to myself only the result of the impression it makes on others (1990, p. 28).

Although others, including myself, see Maddie’s leg as integral to her identity, Maddie does not. By not drawing attention to her leg, I have the excess of seeing, seeing more than just her leg, and I believe that may have been motivated consciously by Maddie, for me to see her, before I see her leg. I comment on this absence, “That’s funny because we have been talking for maybe an hour before you talked about having PFFD…?” I fail miserably at pronouncing her condition, she corrects me, “Proximal Femoral Focal Deficiency.” I try again, mumbling and mispronouncing, “Proximm… Yeah. That’s pretty deep. Do you have to take any pills?” And Maddie answers:

Nope. I just wear a prosthetic.

Me: And you said you used to break knees all the time?
Maddie: Yeah. [laughs] But they just won’t make them strong enough for me. I’d break them. Accidentally. It wasn’t like I beat it off with something. It was just that I ran cross country and I used to have a little, like um, sleeve kind of thing that covered it. It was for a different knee, because it was oily and it would mess my pants up. So I ran a whole season of cross country and went backpacking with the Girl Scout’s and came to my doctor to have it checked out and we took the sleeve off and it literally fell apart, right there. I was like, “the sleeve was holding it together.” [laughs]

Me: So you were in girl scouts too?

Maddie: Yeah we’ve been in girl scouts since kindergarten.

This dialogue, about what Maddie does and what Maddie can do, is the Maddie that I have come to know and wish to acknowledge here. In the time spent with Maddie, I learn that she has played soccer, ran cross country, went backpacking through the upper peninsula of Michigan, and rows crew for Ohio University. Maddie’s narratives embody resistance to dominant narratives about people with disabilities. The everyday conversations about people with disabilities from people with disabilities is highlighted in Scott’s (2012) article:

Narrators reveal that the cultural gaze toward their bodies, combined with the visceral experience of living through a body that physically demands attention, provides a hyperembodied awareness of how humans continually become who we are through embodiment (p.103).
Dominant discourse about disabled people is centered on limited mobility, limited agility, limited labor capacity; on limits of ability (Scott, 2008; 2012), and thus this discourse becomes embodied. People with disabilities (re)reflect the discourse centered on abilities. But the same is not true for Maddie who is encouraged through her social experiences to be more and do more.

James Scott (1990), in his book, *Domination and the Art of Resistance*, writes that structures of domination and forms of resistance tend to bear resemblance to each other. Every gesture of power reinforces hierarchical order. And Maddie is fully conscious of ableist discourse and the discursive tools that ableist forces use to try to put her in her place, by underestimating what is and is not within her realm of possibility. Like the disabled dancers that fill the middle of the stage, instead of the fringes of the auditorium as usual, Davies (2008) can see, “looking through impairment at disability: a row of wheelchair users in the audience enforced the agency of the wheelchair dances on stage and challenged the minority/majority ratio of disabled/non-disabled spectators” (p. 47).

Seeing and witnessing Maddie’s stories of going backpacking, running cross country, and rowing crew with a prosthetic leg could be me making her a “supercrip,” or her making herself a “supercrip,” or seeing her through embodied stories that unmake her disabled.

Maddie reappropriates discursive tools which centers Otherly abled bodies as disabled. Her life story is about places she went, things she’s done, and things she’s going to do. Every one of her stories is a gesture to dissolve the hierarchical order. Since elementary school Maddie had, what James Scott calls, this open exercise of resistance, which is the “open refusal to comply with a hegemonic performance” (p. 205). Maddie is
an “insubordinate,” in the words of Scott. She refuses to comply with authority in legitimate positions of power, such as her gym teacher. She shares with me this narrative of “insubordination”:

The biggest problem I had was not with bullies necessarily, but with adults who underestimate my abilities and then keep me, or try to keep me from doing something, because they thought it was “in my best interest.”

Maddie says “in my best interest” with two fingers, gesturing to indicate her sarcasm with a soft laugh. She continues in a voice a bit more serious, (re)performing and (re)experiencing the emotions:

Really it wasn’t. I was always like I can do it! There was a gym teacher I had at the middle school who had been there for years, she might have been 80. She was a crazy lady. She had that short hair cut, always wore those crazy gym suits. The first day of school we were like “Oh my god, that’s the lady from Recess!” She’s an awesome woman, but she’s old. And kind of thinks, in an older time…. Never having seen the show Recess, I ask Maddie to explain the plot a bit more to me. After we finally get on to the same page about what Recess is and who this gym teacher is, Maddie returns to the story:

So I was on the playground and I was playing flag football with the boys, cause that’s what I liked to do. And she pulled me aside and was like, “I don’t think that’s a good idea, I don’t think you should play football with boys. I don’t want you to get hurt.” I was like, “No, really, it’s fine.” You know, I wasn’t quite old enough to explain it or like, I was a shy kid too, and didn’t want to tell a teacher,
“No! I am going to play football!” So it upset me and I went home and told my mom and she obviously got upset and said “No we can’t have adults tell you can’t do things.” So we went back to the school and she talked to the principal and was like, “She will play flag football, darn it!” And the principal apologized and the gym teacher took me aside the next day and was like, “I’m sorry. I don’t mean to single you out or anything. I was just trying to look out for your best interests.” Of course, but I can play football…

When people in legitimate positions of power, like Maddie’s gym teacher, try to tell Maddie what is within her realm of possibility, Maddie resists. Scott (1990) writes that even in protest, the subordinate will still observe the rules. Maddie does not publically challenge the teacher when she tells Maddie to sit out during flag football because that is breaking the rules. Instead, she disguises herself as retreating, which may soften the forces of her resistance. But ultimately, she resists “offstage” by telling her mother but “beyond direct observation by powerholders” (p. 4). And her mother corrects the teacher’s behavior. And the next day, the public transcript of what disabled people can(not) do is exposed—Maddie publically (re)defines what disabled young women are/not supposed to do: play flag football with the boys. Maddie was able to put others in touch with the public transcript (one about the limits of the disabled), so others can take contention with it, revise it, and change it. Scott (1990) posits that often resistance does not originate from material appropriation but rather a pattern of personal humiliation. Maddie’s mother goes to the principle to chastise this gym teacher who tries to command Maddie’s play. Maddie’s principle agrees and she is able to gain traction to resist and the
teacher publically apologizes for her mistake. She does not have material appropriation but she does have the public apology, which subverts the hegemonic understandings of power.

This is Maddie’s biggest hurdle, redefining for others, the limit(less)ness of her body. I ask about, what Scott calls the “zones of constant struggle,” are for Maddie: “so you think that your biggest problem is adults underestimating your ability, do you think it always comes from a protective place?” And Maddie, in a typical unpretentious fashion, minimizes her struggle:

Yeah. I don’t think they’re ever trying to be mean. They’re just trying to be good natured and like, “Oh I don’t want you to be embarrassed by your inability to play this sport” or something…

Maddie is exposing the public transcript that dictates our language about people with disability and in doing so—she reframes it in powerful ways. Maddie’s stories are centered on capabilities and experiences of her body and she leaves me impressed. Her body represents the very art of resistance that Scott emphasizes and her body recaptures a sense of human dignity.

Through my interpretation of her (dis)abled narrations, it is possible that I am making her “supercrip,” or maybe she is making her self “supercrip,” or maybe she is unmaking her self the problematic erotic image of the prosthesis that Smith and Morra (2006) argue often happens to people who wear prosthesis. In the introduction to their edited book, The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future
197

(2006), Smith and Morra discuss how prosthesis are not only an extension or an enhancement of the body but rather are embodied, material, and metaphorical. They argue that we, as a culture, are obsessed with prosthesis and what people can do with prosthetics far outweigh our ambitions for what we want to do with it. Smith (2006) writes specifically about Aimee Mullins in a chapter, who is a model and a well known athlete, and how she has become (in)famous for her collection of prosthetic legs and what she can do in and with those prosthetic legs. This limitless(ness) with her prosthesis is one example of what has led to “technofetishism,” which is the:

Well-known and widespread series of cultural practices acted out by academics, writers, artists, and others who fetishize technology in their writings and art making—both within the confines of their intellectual communities and in everyday life (Smith, 2006, p. 43).

Maybe I am guilty of technofetishism but I am not entirely convinced. Maybe I am making Maddie “supercrip” but I am not entirely convinced of that either. Maybe I objectify and romanticize Maddie’s body in ways that are reducing or superfluous to the world of Otherly abled bodies. Maybe I wanted to demonstrate a uniquely subjective position that draws attention to the lived experience of one woman who happens to live in Appalachia and happens to be differently abled. Or maybe it’s all of the above. I cannot be certain; I can only be self-reflexive.

In the spirit of reflexivity, I want to share with my readers Other/other’s interpretations of Maddie. Earlier in the dialogue, Maddie mentions the email that asked to be put in touch with the “girl with one leg that plays sports.” Although this email
seems to have a quality of detachment from Maddie’s wholeness, Maddie agreed to participate nonetheless. I told Maddie that I would share the article with my audience, and I want to leave you with its powerful and connected message:

![Article from The Athens News about Maddie](image)

*Figure 17: Article from The Athens News about Maddie*
Runner
Continued from page 22

walk during the entire race, but I also felt bad
because Rachel deserved the attention, not
me,” Mattey said.

Eschewing attention is nothing new. Most
notably, she looks up to people who don’t view
or treat her differently because of her disabil-
ity. “I don’t want special treatment and, for the
most part, I don’t get special treatment,” she
said. “I’m supportive of my friends, and they’re
supportive of me. It’s really nothing more than
that.”

What’s more, Mattey herself didn’t realize
she was disabled until fourth grade, when she
first attempted to rollerblade. The year prior,
Mattey told her mom — after seeing a wheel-
chair-bound child with cerebral palsy — how
“glad she was that she wasn’t handicapped.”
Her mother, overcome with emotion, respond-
ed, “So am I, honey, so am I.”

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Figure 18: Article from The Athens News about Maddie, Continued
Part III: Queering the Queer Body

I don’t know, it’s kind of a thing with anybody that you date, because growing up in Appalachia, especially being gay, it’s easier now to come out as gay, but definitely when I came out being gay, it was like a big problem kind of thing, and I think the big problem was people wanted to stay closeted because it caused a lot of problems for you as a person…So it’s kind of like you had a very small community and you didn’t get out that much so you may have only known three other girls who are gay and basically that’s the whole thing, you kind of take turns dating each other because you can’t really expand beyond that, but then I think as a lot of us got older, like me and my brother, we were able to go to the bars in Athens when we were old enough to drink. Then you can kind of meet people from different areas, so I guess the big thing was if you enjoyed the area a lot of people didn’t enjoy the area along with you because all of the stuff you lived with because they’re like, “well I don’t want to put up with that. But if I go to the city I can go to the gay bar every night.” It’s a trade off [Laughs]…

Becca is a gay pregnant woman living in the poorest, most rural county in Appalachian Ohio (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2011). Her body represents a new narrative about what it means to be both a lesbian and pregnant to the people with whom she interacts with daily. Elizabeth Grosz, in her influential book, *Volatile Bodies*, which laid the groundwork for new corporeal theories, philosophizes that “it is by means of my body that I am able to perceive and interrelate with objects; it is my mode of access to objects” (1994, p. 92). In *Volatile Bodies*, Grosz wrestles with the phenomenological
ideas of Merleau-Ponty (1962), extending and amending them to speak with Feminist
epistemology. The idea that our bodies are the tools through which we experience the
world and, as women, we come to acquire a subset of knowledge simply because of the
processes our bodies experience; like menstruation and child birth, she popularized and I
borrow here. I argue in/ through this chapter that this relationship with others is
symbiotic, that others perceive and interrelate with you in/through your body as well.
And if we perceive and interrelate with people in/through our body, then the stories we
share with others about our body become critical to our understanding of how and why
people interact with (or ignore) bodies in the ways that we do.

Arriving at this understanding would afford us the possibility of creating new
narratives about the way people could perceive and engage with bodies. Freeman, a
narrative theorist with a long career, calls this “narrative freedom,” the freedom to chart
our own paths (2010). Freeman posits in his book, *Hindsight*, that by looking at the past,
in the narrative present, we are able to gain new understandings of experiences that might
have escaped us while we were still experiencing them. With hindsight comes both perils
of living and dwelling in the past, but also offers us the opportunity rethink our present,
therein lies the promise to chart a new future. In the social queering⁸ of Becca’s body in
this already queered space, we are able to chart new understandings of what it means to

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⁸ “Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing
in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer’ then, demarcates not
a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative” (Halperin, 1997, p. 62). My intention to use queer
here, is not pejorative, but in the spirit of re-appropriation by GLBT persons, but also in a snarky mode to
situate the socially ambiguous but insidious nature of “strange.”
be both lesbian and pregnant in an Othered space where both was once thought to be impossible.

A Strange Body in Strange Land

As previously mentioned Becca lives and has lived in Meigs county most of her life. During a tour of Meigs, by a local Mayor, I learned that Meigs was once thought to be the heart of Appalachian Ohio. During the height of the coal mining era in this region, Meigs had three mines within its county limits, and thus, the land was very exploited but very lucrative. Coal mining, for this town, became more than a job, it was an identity. Since most of those mines are now closed, and the capitalist colonial forces which stripped the land of its natural resources have mostly left, Meigs has transitioned to one of those places with “persistent poverty and growing economic despair” (ARC website, History, 2012). One of the places that the Appalachian Regional Commission was founded in order to help.

Although Meigs struggles with rising poverty rates, it resists what Appadurai (1996) calls “the social forces of modernity,” in a very obvious ways. In Modernity at Large, Appadurai explains that these social forces of modernity are circulated by global flows which regulate “people, machinery, money, images, and ideas” (p. 37). The consequences of these global flows create a more globalized nation-state. This globalized nation-state is often at the cost of the local—local labor, local people, local social life. In Meigs, the social forces of modernity are not as powerful simply because of the lack of two major forces that Appadurai believes to be key to this global flow: mass migration to the area and mass access of electronic and virtual communities. Meigs does not have
work with the closing of the mines which “drives people to migrate” elsewhere and people are too poor and too rural to have uninterrupted access to broadband internet in Meigs (Stenberg, et. al., 2009).

What Meigs does have is a “sort of localization” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 191). Most of the rolling farmlands remain in-tact and family owned and operated despite the growing need for section eight housing. The family remains the central socializing and political force in life. The local high school sporting events remain the raisons d'être for leaving the house on Friday nights. Meigs County is what you would imagine a county comprised of small towns in rural Appalachia to be. But this “sort of localization” comes with a high price, “severe constraints, even direct obstacles, to the survival of the local” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 191).

In Becca’s words Meigs a “hickville place where no one has no money.” Too much resistance to modernity, too much emphasis on the local, can mean stagnation, it can mean “incubat[ing] and reproduce[ing] compliant national citizens” (p. 190). Because of Meig’s focus on the local, as a result of the protection of the rural and simple ways of living and being, people remain ignorant about Other lifestyles, popular culture, and Other self-representations. In previous chapters, I argue that Appalachia has been Othered through totalizing “landscapes of images” that globally flow in and out about the land as strange and full of strange bodies that inhabit this space.

Meigs is one of those Othered spaces and Becca is one of those Othered bodies that inhabit this Othered space. Becca is subject to this Othering process which is evident in her description of Meigs, the Othering of her home space rendered in her imagination.
Kathleen Stewart in her ethnography, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an “Other” America*, she discusses this “just talk” in West Virginia coal camps and “hollers.” Becca shared with me the “just talk” about Meigs County. In Becca’s description of Meigs, it “give[s] rise to a social imaginary that grows dense with the tension of a cultural real” (Stewart, 1996, p. 184). Becca’s imagination is not immune to the dominant discourse that positions her home and her body as Other. And in saying that Meigs is “hickville place where no one has no money,” demonstrates how the Other is reproduced by its own inhabitants who buy into this Othering discourse.

By Becca referring to her home space as “hickville,” she is incorporating dominant discourse in speaking about her Other self. This is a *show* of what I call in the first chapter “internalized orientalism” in the spirit of Said (1979). Said discusses a passage written by a representative of the West about Arabs which I amend to make relevant to the discussion here: “the governing verb is *show*, which here gives us to understand that the [Appalachian] display themselves (willingly or unwillingly) to and for expert scrutiny” (p. 247). Becca shows me her self and her language which reveals an internalization of Othering discourses and a reproduction of that discourse. And when the Other re-appropriates the language of the dominant the hermeneutics of the discourse is complete and congealed. The knowledge produce by dominate forces is heard, read, internalized, and then reproduced (Said, 1978; Fanon, 1952).

In this Othered space, Becca is doubly Othered. She is an Appalachian Othered woman, but she is Othered for being a lesbian by other Appalachians. Becca is living on the borders and in the margins, in the words of Anzaldúa (1987), forced outward because
of the cultural tyranny. Her identity inscribed on and by her body. Growing up in a space where Otheredness (gay is at the margins of the margin) is not welcome by those who are already Other was/is especially difficult for Becca. In a space where myopia seems more like the standard practice than the view of a few, I wonder about Becca’s coming out experience and whether it was meant with violent resistance? I ask Becca how old she was when she came out to broach the subject and her eyes grow big and a slight smile breaks across her face and she questions to clarify, “Well, when I personally came out of the closet or when everyone decided to pull me out of the closet?”

Although Becca retells this narrative with laughter, her face reveals the pain of being socially ostracized and “outed” by others involuntarily. She continues:

Well, it’s kind of weird because the big thing growing up around here in junior high and high school was to call each other lesbians or dykes or fags, even though I didn’t have a clue what any of that meant in the early 90’s. The only thing I really knew was that fags lived out in New York and California, and they all had HIV and AIDS because that was the big thing in the early 90’s because HIV was everywhere. It’s like if you touch a toilet you’re getting HIV, if you touch this, or if you tough that, you know? It’s like that was the whole thing, that’s all I knew because of what I’d seen on the TV, or the news, or read in magazines. And plus, when I look back now they were only doing studies on gay men. They weren’t doing studies on anybody but gay men. They all were gay men. So I always heard it in that way, but I heard it and it made me dislike it and not want to be attached to that. I never really dated guys, but that had nothing to do with it
because I wasn’t interested in dating. I was still interested in swimming in the pond and riding my bicycle [laughs]. I was still interested in that stuff when I was 16, you know? But I certainly wasn’t gay, I thought.

To be gay in the early 90’s in a place more cosmopolitan, like New York City or San Francisco, was acceptable and even in vogue. There were entire communities comprised of gay bodies in those spaces. Charles Kaiser, in his historiography of gay life in New York City, calls the city, *The Gay Metropolis*, which is conveniently the title of the book as well (Kaiser, 1997). To be gay was viewed as “an adversity” in New York City (Kaiser, 1997).

To be gay in Appalachian in the 90’s meant to be sick, to get HIV as a consequence, and thus, be unnatural, abnormal and even potentially contagious. HIV was the only word that the gay bodies spoke in Appalachia and was heard in the 90’s. In Ragan Fox’s autoethnography on having HIV, he writes that “blood signifies” and that “blood determine[s] who is valued in a culture” (2007, p.4). In the Appalachian case, where multiple gay representations were filtered by a television that displayed gay as only men who have HIV, gay blood matters only as it was (dis)eased. Everything that Becca heard was filtered through masculine images of homosexuality; TV, magazines, and research studies focused on gay men, specifically, gay men living with HIV. To be gay was to be plagued in Becca’s young mind.

Goffman (1963) writes about this human tendency to make meaning of people and things we do not understand, this is “the means of categorizing persons and the complements of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these
categories” (p. 2). Categorizing, for Goffman, is the very production and reproduction of “natural” and “ordinary” in which all other existences (and sexual identities) are compared. Thus anything that falls outside of the dominate trope of “natural” is subject to stigma or even pathology. In this way, heteronormativity is conceived, born, lives, and reproduces itself. In the 90’s, the media constructed and codified gay as men having HIV, and because Becca was not a man, nor did she want to be sick, thus she “could not be gay” she thought. Her friends, people she went to school with everyday, used the term “gay” or “dyke” as a means to stigmatize and degrade people and Becca did not want to be strange, stigmatized, or degraded. Their words discursively (re)shaped Becca’s (in)existence. And the painfulness of being stigmatized moved her to try to belong to a body that was not her own. I asked Becca, “So you tried not to be ‘gay’?” And she replied:

I don’t know because I think a lot of the times, even after I figured out that that’s what I am, I tried to still deny it. It’s kind of easier sometimes if you just do the easier thing. *It’s easier if you try to fit in.* It’s easier if I let my hair grow out because I won’t stand out as much. If I wear girly clothes I don’t stand out as much or whatever...

Goffman (1963) cautions us that stigma can be deeply discrediting. Just as the title of the text suggests, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), to have a stigmatized identity is to become spoiled, blemished, stained, and flawed. Goffman believes that the very introduction of difference can produce stigma, and that difference can be isolating, he elaborates:
[S]he is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive, sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap (1963, p. 3)

The day-to-day messages Becca received and internalized, before she came out, was that belonging to anything other than the categorization of “natural” was to be defined as queer and in Goffman’s world, “a failing.” Tony Adams echoes this sentiment in his powerful autoethnography, *Narrating the Closet* (2011). Some of the very first words in the book, he writes is that he felt “deviant, immoral, and ashamed for possessing such an attraction” (p. 7). Adams shares similar feelings of deviance and shame as Becca in being gay. And queer bodies in Becca’s world in the 90’s were more than deviant, they were spoiled with HIV or excluded entirely. Goffman, writing in 1963, when homosexuality was still considered pathology, he writes:

The stigmatized individual tends to hold the same beliefs about identity that we do … the standards he has incorporated from the wider society equip him to be intimately alive to what others see as his failing, inevitably causing him, if only for moments, to agree that he does indeed fall short of what he really ought to be (1963, p.6).

Because Becca did not want to be socially ostracized as strange, and Goffman would argue most people would avoid stigma at a high cost, she tried to adopt these “defensive practices” and “proactive practices” (1959, p.13) that Goffman discusses. Defensive practices are actions that protect the face of the individual’s self image and
proactive practices are those actions which serve as protection for the face of others. Becca adopted the defensive practice of convincing her self that she was not gay and tried to enact proactive practices of growing out her hair and dressing more “girly.” But these defensive and proactive practices did not work. Because this was not Becca. This metaphysical, highly feminine ideal could not be materialized for Becca. Becca is strange, Becca is queer. These defensive practices to conceal her identity, by changing the material conditions of her body, were unsuccessful, because in changing the physical body with these proactive and defensive practices cannot change one’s sexual identity. When Becca stopped engaging in these defensive practices, and embraced her sexual identity as gay, her queerness and the stigma that follows, did not seem to matter to her as much anymore. She resolves:

… Now I am just old enough and I’m like I don’t care and plus I think it’s a lot easier around here now. I mean there’s still things being said, still comments being said, but I think I’ve just learnt to be like “whatever.”

Goffman thinks of homosexuality as an “unnatural passion” (p. 4). He also believes that both, the body with the stigmatized identity, and the other “normal” bodies feel a mutual uneasiness in each other’s presence. But what if the stigmatized person no longer wishes to participate in these feelings of “uneasiness”? Becca grew too old, though she is only 34, to care to participate in this mutual relationship of uneasiness, instead she grew comfortable in her own queer flesh. Goffman recognizes this potential to grow “wise,” despite his disregard for human agency. Goffman thinks that because stigmatized identities often face these situations they are “more adept at managing them” (p. 19).
Whether Becca just stopped caring about the burden of stigma or became better adept at managing them, I cannot be certain. But when I meet her on this day to have a conversation with her, she is fully “out” and performing her queer, stigmatized identity inscribed on her body in plain sight; her hair short and spiked, long men’s basketball shorts, and a face free of makeup.

_Queering the Queer_

To make things even queerer, Becca’s brother is also gay. Both she and her brother are two of very few presently openly gay people living in Meigs County. Her brother, who is my friend and who introduced me to Becca, is a nurse at the local hospital. Her brother is extremely flamboyant, performing an overtly queer masculine identity to dissuade intruding questions about his sexual identity, as he has shared with me. Here’s what Becca had to say about being gay and having a gay brother:

People already thought we were weird. But to have a gay brother AND a gay sister, now people think we are really fucking weird. [Laughs]

Me: What do you think about it?

Becca: I don’t know because we always joked about who in the family is gay, like it has to be hereditary. So we kind of joke like, “did we get it from Mom’s side? Did we get it from Dad’s side?” And he’ll joke all the time like, “cousin so and so I think might be gay,” and just try to joke around, but I don’t know. It kind of makes it a little easier because I never wanted to think I was born this way. It was kind of like that whole thing, was I born this way or did things happen in my life that made me be this way?
Becca and her brother have what Pérez and Goltz calls “coalitional subjectivity” (2010). Both she and he have “differently situated queer subjectivities” (p. 247) and each other. Together they “potentially open up spaces for alternate imaginaries” (p. 249). Becca and her brother are Other as a lesbian and a gay man living in a rural environment, but both reigning for the same family system makes them “really fucking weird.” But in that “perversion” of the family system opens up the space for the potential to be gay, to be brother and sister, to live in a small town in Appalachia, and to be happy.

Also in the narrative above, we see Becca’s brother jokingly making sense of their same-sex attraction by medicalizing it as a “hereditary” condition. As is evident in Goffman’s text (he is a psychologist) medical discourse until the 1970’s situated homosexuality as pathological. This again, is a form of the internalization of dominant discourse. Foucault in his book, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1978), tracks the development of sexuality across the 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th century. He discusses the power of the medical world in defining sexuality, he writes:

*Medicine made a forceful entry into the pleasures of the couple: it created an entire organic, functional, or mental pathology arising out of “incomplete” sexual practices; it carefully classified all forms of related pleasures; it incorporated them into the notions of “development” and instinctual “disturbance”; and it undertook to manage them* (p. 41).

The medical model ruled and still rules knowledge production, because it was/is “grounded in truth” (Foucault, 1978, p. 54). Medicine had the power to police people’s bedrooms and their desires by either repressing them, pathologizing them, or even make
them illegal. In David K. Johnson’s historical text, *The Lavender Scare*, we learn how the hysteria of the cold war over-spilled into a public condemning of “sex perverts” in Washington, D.C. in the 1950’s. This public condemning led to the myth that “homosexuals” were threatening national security, which led to thousands of lives ruined and even some pushed to suicide (2004). Foucault links this attention and control of sexuality back to political economy. Foucault claims that ensuring exclusively heterosexual practices is about protecting the reproduction of labor. But as we know from Foucault, “where there is power, there is resistance” (1978, p. 95). And in this case, Becca and her brother, by their very existence is a tactic in dissolving the power of the medical and historical discourses. And by Becca’s brother engaging in this mockery of the medical model, by poking fun at the possibility that there is “a gay gene” is another display of, what Scott (1990) calls, a “strategy of everyday resistance.”

But Becca raises the question about the genealogy of her sexuality, was she born this way or did something happen to her that made her this way? At this point in the conversation, I tell her about my own “coming out” story to ease the palpable tension:

Everytime I came home my family asked me, “where’s your boyfriend? How come you don’t have a boyfriend? You’ve been in college for eight years, you can’t tell me you’ve never met a guy that’s cute and interesting? Why don’t you ever bring anyone home?” So, to stop their questioning, I looked at my great aunt across the dinner table and said, “I don’t need a boyfriend…I’m gay.” My great aunt Lupe grabbed her chest, to mimic a heart attack and gasped for air raucously, “Don’t say that! No tienes verguenza! Are you trying to kill me?” Typical Latin
drama queen reaction. I skeptically asked, “Really tía? Me, being gay, would kill you?” “Absolutely! Why would you say that?” This banter went back and forth. And until this day I still haven’t set them straight. But they stopped asking… Together we laugh over my family story. But I cannot ignore the obvious question, nor do I want to, it is just a tough question to broach. Why would anyone choose a life of stigma, potential social ostracism, and family isolation? I engage her with, “Well, what boat are you in now?” Her answer is immediate:

I think the obvious is I was probably born this way, but I think a lot of times it’s hard to think that way because there was a period of time from when I was in 8th grade to 10th grade I was really involved in the church so I had that whole Christian conflict. The rest of my family wasn’t involved in church.

Me: Why were you?

Becca: I think the reason I got involved was because this girl invited me to go to camp and I didn’t want to go to camp. I was like, “that’s stupid to go to camp and pray all weekend” [laughs] and she told me, she’s like, “we won’t have to be home all weekend” and I thought “I could get away for three days…I’ll go ask my Dad for $35-40, whatever it was and if he’ll give me the money I’ll go.”

Seriously the only reason I said I’d go, at first, is because I did not want to be at home because my Dad dated this girl I did not like and her daughter I did not like, so I said, “I’ll go” [laughs] and I really liked it. I really like the people. For the first time I was with a group of people who didn’t care if I had Nike shoes or Wal-Mart shoes because they were all from different classes, but they all got along.
because they knew each other. They just wanted to be friends and I really think I fit in and they kind of liked me because I was different. They liked me because I was funny. So, they liked me and I just decided I wanted to keep going. So I kept going to the church and the youth groups. I was going to church three days a week. I went to church every time they had a church service.

In the dialogue above we see how Becca’s desire to be “part of the crowd” was so intense that she joined a Christian faith and went to service three times a week. Her desire to belong was stronger than her need to express her individual identity. In this group, it did not matter what shoes you wore, you could still be part of the crowd. But in being part of this homogenous Christian crowd, her sexual identity was closeted. This state of belonging came at the cost of silencing her sexuality. Adams (2011) writes, in *Narrating the Closet*, through a sequence of the closet; becoming aware of the closet, living inside the closet, and leaving the closet. Adams believes the closet is a relational construct which is applicable to Becca’s church experiences. Through a series of interactions with members, she realized that being gay was unacceptable. This discursively constructed the closet up and around her.

Becca joined for the appeal of homogeneity that the church had to offer. But once Becca (re)claimed her gay identity, she was back to being queer, and since she was strange, she was no longer invited by her friend to go to church, and out of the discursive closet, she came.

Becca and her brother have chosen to stay and live in Meigs County. They live only miles apart from one another, their mom, and their dad, all live within a ten mile
radius. And although they are seen as “really fucking weird” by others within their community, they stay. By their acts of defiance, to not be pushed out and to not only stay, but to make their existence (and their queerness) known to their community, they are forcing people to acknowledge difference and engage queerness. Goffman writes, what I think is applicable here, “Together the participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored” (Goffman, 1959, pp. 10-11). And they do agree and honor their situation, together, in a “coalitional subjectivity” (Pérez & Goltz, 2010). Together they affirm each other’s subjective realities and try to cope. Becca acknowledges, unprovoked, the impact her brother has had on her lived life, which ultimately informs her own queer body:

I’ve always wanted to live close to my brother and when he was 17 he moved out and bought a trailer. A lot of it had to do with her [Becca is referring to the woman who her father once dated]. I don’t know if he would admit it though because a lot of things he’s like, “you’re being crazy, that really never happened,” because he just kind of brushes things off. But I think because she would sit and call him a fag and she would call me a dyke all the time because I did not want to give boys blowjobs like her daughter and I think that’s the main reason because he moved out. It was hard on him. But if you asked him, he probably wouldn’t say that. And then when he started college he moved in with my mom at that time, who had rented the house. I wanted to live with him because as a teenager, in my eyes, he was the closest thing to a parent that I had because if I didn’t know
which dress to wear to Homecoming it wasn’t Mom I would go ask, it would be him. If I wasn’t sure what haircut to get I would go ask him. It was… I would always ask him.

Me: You guys are inseparable now, aren’t you?

Becca: I think we’re pretty close, like I said, I tell him everything. Like when I found out I was pregnant this time, I text messaged him [laughs] when he was in Honduras and I said, “I think you’re an uncle because I took a home pregnancy test. I hadn’t went to the doctor yet”, and I hadn’t told anybody else for a couple weeks...

Making the Queer, Pregnant

If things weren’t queer enough; Becca who is queer, living in a Other space where being queer is mostly unacceptable, with a queer brother, is now pregnant. Her belly bulges just a bit at the time of our conversation. Becca has always wanted to be a mom. But when Becca owned her sexual identity and queer body, she didn’t think having a child would be possible. She explains:

It’s something that I’ve wanted for a long time. Since I was a kid I wanted to and it was kind of like that thing where I wanted to raise my kids, right? But I think that one of the reasons why being gay was so hard for me. All of a sudden, all of this was out of the picture, and I think a lot of the reasons why I got involved in alcohol and drugs was because of being gay. I think being gay and dealing with my own kind of shit, it was an easy way of dealing with it and even though it was something that I still wanted, to have kids, I would date one crazy girl for a while and then another. And I couldn’t see myself, my life with this crazy nut.
Because Becca is gay, she used alcohol and drugs to disassociate for a long time, which only drove the wedge between her and motherhood even deeper. She thought for a long time that being gay meant resigning to a life of childlessness. She knew that adopting was not an option available to gay people and for a long time, she didn’t know what to do with this desire to be gay and want children. She did not think you could do both, and since we do not have very many popular culture examples of gay people with children, the possibility seemed impossible. Additionally, she did not know anyone who was gay and had kids, and she did not have people with whom she could discuss her child-making options. But after several failed relationships with women (“If they’re white trash I would end up dating them”), and a long bout of celibacy, she was ready to explore her options in having a child. Preliminarily, Becca used what she called “the lesbian method” in getting pregnant. She explains:

Well they give you medicine to make you ovulate because I had actually tried for several months on my own. I’m sure you’ve heard of the lesbians with the turkey-baster-method...? Yes I’m another one of those lesbians that’s tried with the turkey baster method, but not technically with a turkey baster…

Becca is legitimately asking me whether or not I am aware of this method, I realize from her pause and her stare. Although I have heard about some things, I do not want to embarrass myself by assuming. I am not certain exactly what she means, so I question her to get some clarification. She says:

But I did the whole method and got online, read up about it, like the perfect timing, how to do it, the best way to do it, and then finally I went to the doctor
and I don’t know if the reason was or was not, but I guess the problem was I wasn’t ovulating because he said you can have a period without ovulating. I’ve never been a regular person because I always thought like I’m never going to get pregnant otherwise...

Obviously this method did not work. Becca is working-class, she has a job but it is non-profit work, which is often synonymous with low pay. She has some college education and works at a detention center for teenage boys. Her social class did not permit her access to the options that are available to the middle class, experiencing infertility. And even if she did have money, questions about her sexuality disguised in questions about her marital status might expose her to ignorance, or even prevent her from receiving infertility treatment. Her situated Otherness is a complex one; queer, working class, single woman with the desire to give a child, home, and love. But finally after years of long thought, saving, and selling her beloved scooter, Becca went to the doctor to get artificially inseminated. She describes:

But actually the first month I was able to take the pills something happened and I was not able to do the insemination the following day and they were like well you can try it at home on your own if you want. I was like oh okay, so I tried it and then the next month he was able to do it and I got pregnant. So I got pregnant the first time the doctor did it, the first time the first pregnancy. But then I lost it. But this time, I got pregnant on the 6th time and I kept thinking what’s wrong here? Because I got pregnant the first time, last time. It was very expensive…I had to sell my scooter…I love my scooter…It was just a little thing, I’m surprised you
never seen it because I used to drive it all the time. Bianca hated it when I would drive it.

Becca had a few, but very tragic miscarriages before one embryo finally grew. During our conversation Becca was apprehensive to talk about her pregnancy, because of the previous miscarriages and because she was not yet out of her first trimester. Foreshadowing the future, I ask Becca if she thought her brother would be excited about a baby, she exclaims:

I think he is pretty excited because I think he’s always wanted kids too and I remember when I was younger, like 22 or 23, he had talked about wanting kids and I told him I’d have his kid for him at that point because he was dating somebody at that time and I was said, “I’ll use his sperm and I’d give you the baby” and he just said, “well that would be weird.” Because he thought it’d be weird, probably at that point in my life I really didn’t think anything about it. You know, even though I wanted kids, but I was in no place in my life to have kids and he just kind of blew it off, but I had offered…

Presently, Becca is at home with her child. She and her brother co-parent a baby boy. Recently, I called Becca, she says “they” might just have another. Becca and her brother engage in unconventional sibling co-parenting. Although it is hard to be certain just how many children are raised by same sex parents, some estimates are around 6-14 million children (American Civil Liberties Union, 2010). How many of those children are co-parented by a gay brother and sister would be even harder to quantify, but I can assure you, Becca and her brother are a rare case, and even rarer in this space.
Queering the Status Quo

Becca’s body represents one of the many the emerging narratives about social queering of the status quo. Her body also represents a challenge to the very ideology of who gets to be a mother and what makes a good mother? More and more, we hear about stories that either make us shake our heads or light up with hope. Stories of Otherness, of strange anomalies, are becoming ubiquitous with the help of our cultural obsession with social media. With the circulation of these stories comes both the hope to challenge cultural tyranny to move towards acceptability of Otherness or to the potential to reproduce structural hierarchies. But one thing is certain, we can finally see difference. We are being exposed to queerness, to Other stories and in doing so, removing stigma. We are seeing everyday lesbian women become everyday lesbian mothers. And that visibility, of seeing what was once thought impossible to same-sex working class people becomes possible.

Through the circulation of these stories and experiences of Other bodies, holds the potential to soften the gaze of Otherness. By softening the gaze of Otherness, we become open to seeing difference not as an essentializing characteristic that translates into inferiority but to move Others to see an other and engage (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). And this engagement holds the transformative power to open up our consciousness to see the ways in which our bodies reproduce dominant narratives about bodily existences. Once we become conscious of our privilege position, we can negotiate a more shared understanding through dialogue, instead of relying on medical or historical models which were once positioned as the Truth.
Moving Marginal Bodies to Central Spaces

*You build a world as you represent your choices on a map, you can always change those choices. But to try to go without a map is to go not just into unchartered territory, but often into a void. Instead of freeing you, it can bind you, leaving you lost.*

-Ellingston, 2009, p. 93

These stories are the sail of Appalachia that just don’t get any wind. What does get wind, are the narratives that have already reached our consciousness through problematic popular culture representations and literature about those living in this Appalachian Region, the easy stuff. Bodies set in the context of this Appalachian space, are represented as bodies that are backwater, inbred, barefoot, and pregnant (see, for example, Chapter I). Judith Halberstam (1993) cautions, often times what is represented is blurred with what is real and then has greater potential to become real for you. If you do not experience for yourself this space, to see how it has become Othered, or why its land is often romanticized, than these essentializing representations have a quality of realness for you. Likewise, if you never engage with bodies in this space, have the insights (and sometimes drawbacks) of the “excess of seeing,” than the bodies that are problematically represented by dehumanizing forces become real, we see Others as inhumane.

Bodies are subject to manifestations of power and domination, but bodies are also the sites of exposing and resisting expressions of power (Young, 2005). In and through Terry’s body, we learn the enabling and constraining social functions of gender, but we can also view Terry’s body as the surface upon which more than one gender can be
performed. In and through Maddie’s body, we see how dominant discourse tries to
constrict her abilities, but in and through her body we can see it as a site of resistance to
the dominant narratives about people with (dis)abilities. Finally, in and through Becca’s
body, we can see how sexuality tries to force a narrative future on Becca that she did not
want. Instead her body produces a new model of Motherhood not often seen, especially in
this space.

I have written this chapter as a way to evoke and honor presence, the meeting of
flesh and discourse, in a discussion about corporeal theory. Once asked, how do you
justify a discussion centered on bodies, which is ultimately objectifying and reducing, in
relation to post-colonial gazes, when post-colonialism is supposed to be about bringing
humanness, not objects back to the central (Anzaldúa, 1987; Appadurai, 1996; Spurr,
1994; Said, 1978)? I think about this question a lot. And as James Clifford (1986)
reminds me, I can only offer partial truths. So here’s my partial truth: the body, especially
in terms of Otherness, “becomes and is the unit of analysis” (Chawla, 2012, p. 99) to
access how we understand and thus value humanness. If it is through the body that we
experience and interrelate with the world (Groscz, 1994), than understanding one’s
body—the limits and/or the possibility of the body—shapes the way I do or do not
experience and interrelate with Others, or I do or do not experience and interrelate with
an other. Our bodies are the sites through which we give or receive physical harm,
discursively create or dismantle power, engage or ignore Others, and honor or humiliate
an other.
Allow this chapter to embody a map, through which you chart uncharted bodily territories (Ellingson, 2009), engaging bodies with which you once thought unfamiliar, strange, or queer. Bring back a familiarity, so that the strange is not as strange anymore, so that no one is left behind or left unable. And move those bodies once thought of as strange, un-useful, or marginal, back to the center, back to where they can be seen as whole and human. Changing western rhetoric about the body, to see the body as a site for the potential beauty of engaging other bodies, is key to critical and socially just scholarship (McKerrow, 2009).
CHAPTER VII:
SPEAKING AN ELDERLY BODY INTO A VISIBLE SPACE: DEFINING MOMENTS

In 2008, still feeling unsettled after my move to Appalachia, I decided to volunteer to aid elderly people in the local community with the hope that this involvement would make me feel more rooted in the area. Through an outreach program, I was paired with an 82-year-old woman, named Joan. Over the last four years, for me, she has become my obligation and sometimes my friend. For her, I am at times, “a dirty rotten rat” and other times, “like a sister” (I’m young enough to be her great-granddaughter). Moments shared with Joan over the course of four years have taught me more about corporeality, gerontology, and social abandonment, than any formal academic training could ever do.

For the first two years, I believed that I was too impatient, too rude, and too young to fully understand Joan or her experiences. Like Sally Roberts’s nursing students, I had trouble thinking of Joan as anything other than only “old” (Roberts, et al., 2010). She was difficult, and I was not trained in gerontology, I was unaware if this was an “end of life phase” or if all elderly women behaved in this way (Chan, 2011). I sensed that my mind was too a washed in Western conceptions of elderly people, seeing them only as the stereotype—the body that is dependent on others (Adams-Price & Morse, 2009). Cuddy and his colleagues (2005), found that people over the age of 80, like Joan, cannot shake the stereotype of being incompetent. At times, I fell into this stereotypical mode of
thinking. I could not enter into Joan’s reality, one with a mind that has experienced 82 years and a body that has been the site of over eight decades of experience. I grapple with how “our” relationship evolves into a narrative that disrupts our understanding of and interaction with elderly bodies and moves us into a mutual place of visibility. Giving us the opportunity to see elderly people as more than a “draining of resources,” or “incompetent,” or “useless” (Adams-Price & Morse, 2009).

Figure 19: Joan in the Summer of 2010
The Elderly Body

Before I moved to Appalachian Ohio, and ever since I was in the second grade, I have had a special love for elderly people. My second grade teacher, Mrs. Walton, walked our class over to a nursing home located nearby and matched us up with elderly people for whom we would read for the next coming months. I was paired with a woman who while not especially old but was obese enough that she needed rehabilitation. She smelled of ice tea and seemed to attract ladybugs like I had never seen before. When we were out in the garden, little red dots would swarm her as I stumbled reading aloud, trying to pronounce the syllables, one at a time. I felt this woman’s love for me. She was excited to see me in a way I was not accustomed to. In fact, most of the people that my class visited with regularly were excited to see their second grade reading partners. When I was seven, it made me feel special and influential. I loved that we brought some level of happiness and excitement to people living in this residential home community.

In my memory this old woman is only remembered as “ladybug lady” because my mother moved us away from the projects in Virginia Beach and back to Detroit after that year. Ever since that first experience, I have maintained some sort of nonfamily interpersonal relationship with an elderly person in my community. This feeling of being happy to visit with people who are excited to share my presence grew with me as I grew older. The older I got, the more I became cognizant of where that joy to see me stemmed from for these elderly people. It was not my nose ring, ambiguously tan skin, and crooked smile that brought them joy, it was a face, on a body, with ears to listen and a mouth to
talk that brought them happiness. It was not me specifically, but someone who recognized their existence and tried to honor their personhood.

When I moved to Athens, I knew being reconnected with elderly people would help me feel more settled, because this time it was “I” who was craving the connection. I learned about Good Works from another graduate student also involved in community engagement. Good Works is a local homeless shelter with several service programs. The day I called Good Works, I was redirected to a woman with a young voice, Amanda, who told me about all the programs Good Works offered. When she got down the list to “Senior Friends,” I excitedly told her, “that one!” My intentions were both benevolent and selfish—I wanted a grandma in Athens. Amanda directed me to come in to Good Works for an interview, go to the police station for a background check, and called every reference (playing phone tag with my best friend, Sabrina, for weeks). And so began my four-year-long relationship with Joan.

Elderly Subject Positioning in “Zones of Social Abandonment”

First Encounters.

Today I meet Joan. From a phone call beforehand, Amanda and I were instructed to go around the house to the back door and knock, so we do. Through the small window in her back door, I can see an elderly woman sitting at her kitchen table, her chair positioned so that she faces the back door. As she comes to the door, I can see she is wearing a faded blue flannel buttoned down with brown slacks and heavy, dingy orthopedic shoes. She lets us in. Joan is a tiny woman. She is no taller than my clavicle bone and has a hump on her back that makes it impossible for her to stand up straight. Her at-rest position is
always with the tops of her shoulders pointed towards you, instead of straight up towards the sky. She balances her unsteady steps with a walker around the house, moving like “molasses,” as she likes to say. Her hands resemble claws, they curl over the knuckles but loosely dangling, and her thumb makes more of a right angle than parallel with the rest of her fingers. She probably cannot make a firm fist or give a high five if she wants to. She has no upper front teeth and the ones on her lower jaw are hoary. Her curls still bounce fully and fulgently on the sides of her head. Her skin is more gray than white and wrinkled, although not nearly as wrinkly as you would envision an 82-year-old woman’s face would be. Her crow’s feet are barely disguised by her big pink plastic frames.

She invites us to sit down. Her house smells like vinegar and bleach. A smell I never get use to. Laid out like a circle, one could enter her house through back door, move through her tiny kitchen, through her dilapidated living room, into her spare bedroom, past her hospital bed and then land back to where you started from.

After only a few minutes, I observe that Joan begins every thought with, “well…” We perform the usual greetings and exchanging of surface level information; where I’m from, what I do, how long I will be here. I learn that she is 82-years-old, has one child named Tom who lives in The Plains, and a husband in the nursing home “down the road” in Jackson, which is not really down the road. She seems sweet and flashes her toothless smile often and with confidence. She is not like the grandmother I don’t have, she’s white and brittle, my abuela was one of those flashy older Mexican women who always wore bright colors and high heels. But she is old and seems nice enough. Judging from the
apparent conditions of her house and her health, I bet she could use an extra friend. She loves coffee, just as much as I do.

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Over the years, Joan and I have become close. Not quite like a grandmother/granddaughter relationship but more that of a visiting nurse capacity. In Nussbaum, Pecchioni, Robinson and Thompson’s book, *Communication and Aging*, they write that in Western society, one of the greatest compliments is to call someone your “friend.” They also recognize the potential for friendships with elderly people to become complicated (2000). Joan and my relationship, has, at times, admittedly become co-dependent and even unhealthy. Rawlins, also recognizes this tension with friendships later on in life, he finds that one person can become uncomfortable when they have to rely heavily on the other member and cannot reciprocate (1995). Joan and my “friendship” is unique, not fitting neatly into the literature on friendships with elderly people. She is 82 and I am 24 (Rawlins, 1995), I am not her care-taker per se, but I certainly perform that role at times (Chan, 2011; Roberts, et al., 2010), we are not family, but I certainly feel a filial obligation to her (Stewart, 1996).

In the years that we have known each other, I witness the steady deterioration of her aging, elderly body and her aging, elderly mind.

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It’s 7:00 a.m. and I am awoken to my phone vibrating my whole bed. I try to ignore it, but it inevitably persists. I don’t even remember pressing the green telephone widget to accept the call but her voice is already in my ear. “Rebecca? Rebeccaaaaa?! Are
you comin today or not? Are we gonna go to the Dollarr General or not? Don’t upset here. Don’t upset me. It’s cold outside, and it might rain, and I don’t wanna be upset. Are you gonna come? You told me you were gonna come. Are you comin?”

“Yes, Joan, I’m comin. I said I was gonna come and I will. I thought we said 10?”

“Are you gonna come? Don’t upset me now. I don’t like to be upset, now. Well, well…? Are you gonna be here at 10? Are you gonna come? I went to Walmart the other day and I hurt my back, and I thought the least you could do is go with me to the Dollarr General and carry in some bleach and vinegar and stuff. It’s heavy. Well, are you going to come or not? ”

“Yes, Joan, I’m coming.” As hard as I try to speak with patience, it’s challenging, and my voice is starting to reveal my impatience.

“Well, are you gonna drive? Are you gonna drive or am I? Do you want me to drive? I want to drive. I haven’t drove lately, I want to drive…Oh God, I never get to drive. No one will drive with me anymore. Everyone is too scared to drive with me….except you.” She sounds distressed like she might cry, but within the instant, her voice snaps back like the sting of a rubber band and she commands, “pull in beside me. Pull your car up the driveway, next to my car. I wanna drive. Don’t upset me okay, are you comin?”

I want and need to go back to sleep. It’s Saturday. It’s 7 a.m. At this point, I will say anything to shut her up, “yes, Joan, I’m comin. I’ll be there at ten.”

“Okay, I’ll be waitin for you. Don’t upset me now. Too many people let me down, don’t you let me down.”
“Okay, I’ll talk to you later.” I hang up before she can nag me anymore.

I pull my duvet covers around my shoulders, tuck my hands underneath the pillow, and go back to sleep for a few more hours.

7:43 a.m. My phone rings again. And again, I do not remember accepting the call.

“Rebeccaaa, it’s Joan. Are you comin? Are you gonna come? Because I don’t want to wait around for you all day, if you’re not gonna come. I’ve got things to do. Are you coming?” Her voice starts to break and it’s the all too familiar sniffle. “Oh god, I don’t know what to do. What should I do? Are you gonna come? Don’t keep me wanting now. I don’t want to get upset.” And just as easily as her voice breaks, her voice comes back together by the end of the thought.

“Joan, I told you I was comin and I’m comin. I will be there at 10.” She calls three more times within the next hour. By the end of the third call, I just get up an hour and half before the alarm and I dress and I drive over to her small red brick house over on Stimson Avenue. As I walk up to the house and get up to the door, I can see through the window that she is sitting at her kitchen table, facing the door, awaiting my arrival.

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This episode is neither fantastic nor fictional. It is not an every-weekend occurrence, but it highlights the moments of Joan’s struggle with the fragility of her body and the subtle deterioration of her mind. Merleau-Ponty (1963) speaks to the fundamental interrelatedness of the mind/body connection. He looks beyond the division of the subject and the object to see how sensation informs thought. For him, the body is “my point of view upon the world” (p. 70). One’s bodily existence, he notes, is the “barest raw
material of a genuine presence in the world” (p. 165). It is through the body that we are present and aware of our existence, the body dictating that awareness and presence.

Consequently, as a body grows old, so too does one’s experience of the world. As a body deteriorates, the site in which we perceive and interrelate with the world, the mind deteriorates those experiences. The mind is the site that makes sense of bodily experiences. In summary, as Heidegger famously says in, *Being and Time*, we do not have a body but we are bodily (1962).

As Joan’s body moves as slow as molasses and more painfully (her inability to carry in her groceries), so too does her mind slow her down from making sense of my agreement to accompany her. She does not dial my number again and again because I have “let her down” in the past—I always keep our plans—but she calls because she cannot trust her memory to recall my agreement to go, nor my record of always appearing whenever she needs help. Her body experiences the anxiousness of her mind; the inability to decide whether she will go, whether I will come, and this is all performed through her stiff fingers punching the dial pad. Dialing and redialing my number assuages the mental and physical anxiety she feels in her mind and in her chest. In that moment (in the early hours of my Saturday morning) and in my unknowing and inexperienced twenty-four-year old mind and body, I am unable to make of her incessant phone calls.

I cannot imagine what it would be like to live in her body; I agree with Bakhtin, that there is no true place of empathy. I can only experience her suffering as it is *her* suffering (Bakhtin, 1990). One cannot fully understand another’s subjective positioning. I cannot “step into her shoes,” because they do not fit, and my perception of her world, her
lived reality still would not be the same. I sense, that when I think of Joan, my brain activates only stereotypes, seeing our relationship as “her” dependent on me, and only “her” benefiting from our friendship. Adam-Price and Linda Morse have attended to this very idea—do perceptions of elderly people affect their ability to receive care (2009)? They hypothesize that young people think of elderly people as only a burden, often incompetent, and unable to receive any real benefit from helping the elderly (Adams-Price and Morse, 2009). And what they find suggests that “dependent older people may be seen as a drain on resources, making those who help them seem particularly generous and selfless” (2009, p. 2979). I do not feel particularly selfless or generous; I just cannot imagine living in her condition, and as Adams-Price and Morse report, helping others does not eliminate the stereotype (2009). I cannot not set aside my own ontological orientation to this world, and enter into her reality, one with a mind that’s experienced 82 years and a body that has been the site through which she experienced life in all those years.

At our Senior Friends Quarterly Meetings, other Senior Friend matches happily debrief with one another about how they have cups of coffee with their seniors, their seniors bake them apple pies, and laugh together over fond, “olden time-day stories.” I go on an internal (and in safe company; external) diatribe! I change light bulbs and old socks, “comb down” her hair in the back, help her change, and wash out her trousers when she has accidents. This was not part of the advertisement to coax people into the program, nor is it required in the program, but it is simply Joan’s real need and my real moral obligation. I distinctively remember the first time she calls me over to change her
socks because she has an appointment with a “foot doctor.” Obliviously, the ubiquity of stereotypes about the elderly, not hindering Joan’s ability to ask for help as Adams-Price and Morse suggest (2009).

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I tell her, “No. I’m sorry, but I hate feet. All feet. Not just your’s.”

She replies, “Well, I’ve been wearin the same sorcks for days now, the girl from Coolville forgot to change ‘em before she left….”

Oh geez. I know the girl from Coolville only comes twice a week and she will not be back, until Tuesday, and that’s not for another five days. Oh geez.

I relent with an audible sigh, “Okay, I’ll be there in a few minutes.” On the brief car ride across the neighborhood and on to her street, I am absolutely dreading this experience. Sincerely, I do really hate feet. I once vomited because, my slightly older and not so slightly irritating cousin, Rico, wiped his sweaty, moist, bare sole of his foot onto my leg, he was wearing tennis shoes without socks. It was an instantaneous physical reaction.

I pull in to her gravel driveway, trying to hype myself up. You can do this, Rebecca, you can do this. It’s just feet. Everyone has them. And she’s old. And if you don’t do this, no one will. You can do this.

I knock on the door, and I can see through the door’s window, that’s she is sitting at her kitchen table, facing the door, socks in hand, waiting for me.
She motions me to come in, without a greeting or even a hello, she says “Well, that was kinda quick. I was wonderin if you would wresh my feet before you put some new ones on, I pulled the wresh basin out…”

You have got to be kidding me. I agonized before about just simple changing her socks. I was scheming how I could do it without actually placing the flesh of my hands onto the flesh of her feet. But now, she wants me to wash her feet. Suddenly my eyes revert to her hands, and I can only imagine that her toes had similar characteristics as her hands, digits permanently overlapping other digits.

I try not to reveal my panic, “Oh, Joan, you know how I mentioned…” And as soon as I start the sentence, I know I cannot finish it. I am engulfed by complacency and just overall defeat. There is no sense in protest because I know in the end, I’ll do it. I have to do it. No one else will and I cannot allow this old woman to be embarrassed at the doctor’s office, which is her only excuse to leave the house. When you’re this old, you lose your pride involuntarily. You are so vulnerable you have to ask some punk-20-something-year-old-girl from the big city to wash your feet. If she has to feel that, I can do this.

I walk over to the bathroom, grab the pale yellow bucket, bring it back to the kitchen where she is sitting and fill it with lukewarm water. I place it next to her feet. I bend down onto my knees, breathe one last breath of fresh air in through my mouth, and reach down to un-Velcro the two straps across her shoes. I gently pull one shoe off her foot and it hits. The smell invades my nostrils almost immediately. It swirls up and is cloyingly reminiscent of my dread of it. Her feet smell like Cool Ranch Doritos Chips.
I hurry myself with the task. I wipe the bottoms of her feet and the top with soap and a washcloth, moving as fast—without compromising my gentleness—as I can. First, her left foot. It’s a veiny, scaly thing I hold in my hand. And then without hesitation, I move on to the right one. As soon as I switch feet in my hands, Joan chimes in. “Can you get in between the toes, there, a bit?” I look up at her face, her eyes are focused on my hands, washing her feet. I can tell from reading her face that she thinks her request is perfectly reasonable. I look back down at her feet, hoping to mask my horror.

I could feel my mouth salivating the way it always does when I’m about to vomit. My friend, Bryan, calls this the “warm spits.” I cough a bit. No, no, no, no. You may not throw up. Get over yourself. I blink away moisture from my eyes, breath through my mouth and press on. Her toes are very stiff. The digits did, in fact, resemble her hands and they barely budge. I cannot even fit the thickness of the washcloth between them. She notices my struggle, with her toes (not the experience, writ general), and relieves me, “that’s good.” She says. I grab the towel lying next to the basin and towel dry each foot. As I wipe the last one clean, my shame hits me and my shoulders shudder.

Cuffed in my hands are this woman’s feet. It does not require an exceptionally observant human to notice how uncared for these feet are. The skin is dead and ashy, on the bottoms and the tops, the toe nails are long and yellow, splattered with brown spots in the nail bed. No one has cared for these feet in years. I am too embarrassed to ask, but I assume she has never had a pedicure. She has not had her toenails trimmed in awhile or her feet scrubbed with the cheese grater tool that I love, or her nails painted. What took me less than minutes to suffer through, she has not been able to do herself since she was
23 and first diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. Her husband has been gone for two years at this point, and he himself, would not have been in the physical condition to do this since I first met him. Her feet have not been scrubbed, touched, or cared for in at least three years.

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I walk out Joan’s door and when my own feet hit the gravel driveway, I call my tía to debrief, needing to share with someone my traumatic foot experience. I need someone with whom to share this repulsive, but also tragic situation. My tía is a religiously conservative (Mexican catholic, which tends to be an odd blend of Catholicism mixed with overt superstitious-ness) woman, as all the women in my family are. She reminds me of the biblical story, about how Jesus had washed people’s feet and assures me that I am, “just earning my jewels for my crown in heaven…” Being likened to Jesus is too disturbingly sycophantic and outlandish to even begin to console me. I let my tía go and sit in my car, parked in my driveway, making sense of this interaction for a while.

Sure, I am grossed out by feet, her needing me to do things that I have nightmares about, but this experience cements for me something much graver and much more macro. The experience is layered with meaning; washing Joan’s feet is not about altruism, or some religious hogwash about humbling the self. This experience enlightens me to the tragic reality that confronts elderly working class women, especially those living in rural communities in Appalachia. Two sociologists, Debra Henderson and Ann Tickameyer, who have worked with the elderly in Appalachian Ohio, note:
For older women in small rural areas, the consequences of poverty are exacerbated when communities do not have the economic and social resources to provide for the necessities of an older population. Older adults are at a disadvantage in that they are on average poorer than those in urban areas, experience more functional impairment, and are less likely to have access to needed health care (Henderson & Tickmayer, 2008, p. 156-7).

Henderson and Tickmeyer explore the intersection of gender, age, and geography to understand, on a more macro-level, the subjective experience I am showing you here with Joan. She is not alone. Joan is one of many older women whose lives are complicated by the fact that they are old, lack social capital, and live in a rural geographical space, and thus “fell through the cracks and were ultimately ‘Lost in Appalachia’” (Henderson & Tickmayer, 2008, p. 165). Joan’s story is a subjective experience that defies social theory and moves beyond critical analysis for me, and hopefully gives a quality of realness to her lived reality.

“You’re the only one who hasn’t forgotten about me”

My invocation here of a very honest “show moment” above is to perform the unfavorable existence, the socially abandoned existences (Denzin, 2001; Denzin, 2002: Denzin, 2003). I am purposely trying to give you the phenomenological insight to Joan’s body, her life, her experience. Dominant discourse sees the body as having purpose; it has form, it can produce labor, it is docile, malleable, it can grow to be stronger and work harder (Marx, 1867). As far back as 1867, Marx discussed the exploitation of the body as a means to gain capital, in his tome, Capital. For Marx, even legislation that protects the
body does so as a means to protect the production and reproduction of labor. Every structure and institution is designed for the maintenance of capitalism. The body is conceived, birthed, lives, deteriorates, and dies for work (Marx, 1867).

Michel Foucault, a prominent thinker on the body, discusses the body, as “active,” “useful,” capable of dominance, growth, or discipline (1977, p. 138). But what happens to these bodies when they are no longer useful? What happens when they can no longer produce labor? What about when the body wilts? When muscles become flaccid and weak? When we cannot produce the strength to pump our own gas, turn the key in our ignition, or are toppled over by the weight of a screen door? When we cannot reach our own feet, or lift ourselves up from the ground? When we have outlived our death scripts physically but with moment-to-moment struggle? The existence of this body, although inevitable for us all, is abandoned, forgotten about, hidden from society.

The working-class elderly woman without a family system in this rural geographical space becomes a body that falls within “zones of social abandonment.” The anthropologist, João Biehl, in his book *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment* (2005), discusses “zones of social abandonment” as places where people who are unwanted or undesirable are left to die, alone on “the end-station on the road of poverty” (p. 2). Although Biehl is speaking about a specific context, those living in a zone called “Vita” in Porto Alegre in Brazil, his concept of “zones of social abandonment” can be extended here. A “zone of social abandonment” is a place where people without social or economic capital, or families who care, go to die miserable—often slow—deaths. In abstractly describing “zones of social abandonment,” Biehl writes, “it is the place where
beings go when they are no longer considered people” (p. 2). These “zones of social abandonment” form from a culmination of factors; poverty, failing family systems, inadequate medical care, which all results in “a state of abject abandonment” (p. 2). Biehl, speaking about “Vita” as a “zone of social abandonment,” he writes:

Disciplinary sites of confinement, including traditionally structured families and institution psychiatry, are breaking apart; the social domain of the state is ever-shrieking; and society increasingly operates through market dynamics (2005, p. 41).

Thus, those who can no longer produce labor or capital become invisible—dispensable. People in “Vita” are already socially dead but just waiting for the disappearance of the body. Biehl’s book tracks the life of one woman, Catarina, who was dropped off and left to die in “Vita.” She is thought to be insane and is paralyzed. Biehl is haunted by this woman and tries to uncover her life to learn more about the conditions of her existence. Through fieldwork, unraveling a cryptic dictionary kept by Catarina, interpreting medical documents, and interviewing Catarina’s biological family and old friends, Biehl investigates how her subjectivities are made, unmade, and remade. His detective work unveils the medicalization of mental illness and old age. Ultimately, the inevitable becomes the real, and Catarina slowly meets her demise in this institutionalized “zone of social abandonment.”

It is not too much interpretive speculation that suggests that Joan falls within a rural “zone of social abandonment” in the American context, what Stewart has referred to, “the Other America” (1996). Although the topography is well known for its beauty,
Appalachia is a space that is forgotten about and has almost been written out of modern American history. In Caudill’s controversial (because of its myopic representation) book about the Appalachia region, Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Era (1962), the author suggests that this abandonment occurred after the bust of the coal mining industry. The bust could not have been predicted, Caudill claims, but happened nonetheless. And when the “big bosses” of the coal mines left, so too did all the investment, “the spick-and-span gave way to the dull and disordered, and the women sat down on the front-porch swings and in chairs before the fireplaces and allowed the victorious enemy run riot through the towns” (1962, p. 146). Caudill notes that this “vacuity, resignation and passivity” still marks the people of Appalachia today, those who stay in the region, despite the unavailability of jobs. The region remains in this malaise, says Caudill, an outcome of the export of all its natural resources and the devastation that resulted. This rural “zone of social abandonment” is structural, as a result of economic colonization, decolonization, and structural rejection. Alongside, Stewart’s ethnography of coal mining regions in West Virginia, Appalachia stands as a kind of “back talk” to the dominant mythic claims of “American progress” (1996). Here, Appalachia, is only “a spaces on the side of the road,” not a part of “real” America. It is like a distant cousin forgotten about by the whole family (1996).

Joan’s family traces back to Athens County’s first families—they were “early settlers” in this rural/industrial/socially abandoned zone. She is an elderly body in this Other space that falls between the crevices of two broken down localized social institutions—the family and the state. Joan has eight brothers and sisters, and none of
them feel the familial, moral, or the ethical obligation to take care of their own kin. She is the oldest of nine, with seven below her in the birth order with the youngest of siblings only in their early 60’s. Joan also has a son, who in my non-academic and highly crude opinion is unworthy. He does not care for his own mother in any financial, physical, spiritual, or emotional capacity. The “breakdown of the family system” is an Other story, but this story is atypical of Appalachia. What is typical of Appalachia, is kinship being “as natural as the air you breathe” (Stewart, 1996, p. 191).

Most of the people I work with or conduct research with have a profound and at times oppressive familial identity that tends to the elderly within their systems. Stewart writes that “the ideal loyalty to kin has the status of a fixed law writ larger on the Real” (1996, p. 192). Family loyalty is not an idea or a mere feeling, it is the unwritten Law. Appalachian scholars, Lewis, Johnson and Askins (1978), have suggested after the industrial era was over, this area was forgotten—economically and politically; as a consequence, kin became, “an integral part of the total operation,” key to survival (Lewis, Johnson, & Askins, 1978, p. 115). The family in Appalachia is more than a support system—it is a way of life.

But Joan is one of the unlucky ones. She is an anomaly in a system that favors extended family ties. Yet she is a part of the topography of this place. Typically, a woman in Joan’s physical condition can turn over all their assets (their homes repossessed and their stocks and other assets liquidated), and be cared for by the state. I learned this through several conversations with social workers. Feeling partially implored by Joan, and lost in this total consciousness of social abandonment in the first year, I
sought help and more information about ways to assist Joan. Joan was failed by her family, and she was and is continuously failed by the state and programs designed to protect and serve elderly populations.

*Institutionalized Abandonment*

After a few months into our relationship, Amanda (the woman in charge of Senior Friends) resigns from her position with Good Works, and some months later another woman transitions into her position. I seek help in the midst of these months, but I lose contact with Good Works as they change leadership. I await their call. In the meantime, I call a friend who was a social worker, and ask her advice. She tells me that she does not know much about gerontology casework, but suggests I check and find Adult Protective Services in the area. After looking around on the internet, I call Adult Protective Services but the social worker tells me, “they have their rights,” and that all I can do is call in Joan’s license plate number to the Highway Patrol and they will intervene and take her license away, and then she will become immobile and realize that she can no longer maintain her independence, and finally join Albert (her husband who has since died) in a nice nursing home. I tell her I think that is stupid and an impractical solution. Losing her license, without securing her in a residential home, will only induce more dependency upon me.

During my hiatus from Good Works’ guidance and after the futile phone call with Adult Protective Services, I maneuver my relationship with Joan alone. In this time of disconnect from Good Works, considering calling Highway Patrol as my only option in helping Joan. She decides she does not want to be separated from her husband any
longer. They have been married for 62 years and she needs to be present with him, but rather than joining him at the nursing home, she decides to move Albert home. This is a turning point for me, especially vis-a-vi coming to realizations about how nuanced both aging and abandonment is. I share here an excerpt from my diary-turned-field notes from that day:

Yesterday, Albert fell and, of course, he doesn’t have the strength to lift himself off the living room floor. So Joan screamed into the phone receiver for me to get over there quickly. Once I got there, I couldn't life him so we had to call “the squad,” as Joan puts it. They were able to lift him and put him back on the bed without being too rough. Albert wasn’t wearing anything underneath his shifty, thin, checkered robe. Seeing an 85 year old penis, twice...in one day, isn't healthy for anyone. Least of all someone like me, who is already a commitment phobe. If that's what I have to look forward to, no thanks, cross my name off the list. Today, he couldn't get himself out of bed, and she demands that he sits at the kitchen table with her for meals but he barely has the strength to move out from the bed. Yesterday, I saw her shove the back of his bald head, because she said he wasn’t close enough to the table. I can't leave her, I can’t leave him, I can’t leave her with him. I feel terrible when I do because I know she just wants me to stay, but I can't stay all the time. I feel empty. I'm not helping anyone. And they aren't getting younger or healthier, what do I do? What can I do? Working with Joan and Albert have been my most hopeless volunteer project yet…
After Albert falls down numerous times and cannot produce enough strength to
get out of bed, he stops eating and drinking, and Joan is forced to readmit him to the
nursing home in The Plains. A few weeks later, he dies, gasping for air and holding his
wife’s hand. She calls me to the nursing home and I watch her dry lips kiss her husband’s
cold forehead before they move his body. To my knowledge, I am the only other one who
comes to say goodbye to this man at the home. Now, for the first time in 62 years, she
really is all alone. At Albert’s funeral, I meet their son, Tom—the only time I ever see
him. It is also the last time Joan sees him. I feel both unexpressed rage for Tom and
unequivocal understanding for him at the same time. At the funeral (only ten people were
in attendance, two of which were Amanda and I), I have to repress the desire to punch
Tom in the face for his inexcusable abandonment of his parents’ emotional,
communicative, and physical needs. This emotional dimension is the position we might
find ourselves at when we are involved in the lives of our participants. Chawla (2006)
discusses this tension that might arise:

We might find ourselves in fields of ambiguity—being and becoming insiders,
outsiders, or partial insiders—positions invoked and orchestrated by our
participants. When I use the word orchestrate, I am suggesting not manipulation
but a rhythmic dance and a merry medley created when lifeworlds mingle. In
evoking these rhythms, I am acknowledging the power inherent in the locales we
make our own (p. 3).

With Joan, I am not clearly outsider and not naïve enough to think of myself as an insider
to her world, but our “lifeworlds” certainly do “mingle.” Sometimes our rhythms are far
too dangerously in sync. But after years of negotiating a tumultuous relationship with Joan, I transition to a new, softer orientation to Tom’s abandonment. He probably has to cut off ties with her contact to protect his own emotional health and well-being.

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My relationship with Joan is complex. We have weathered four years together. I move from being frightened by her suicide threats and driving, to being completely unfazed. We share the loss of her husband, my breakup of an engagement, excruciatingly vulnerable moments with her accidents and physical needs, long drives out to the greenery of her “home” in Amesville, doctor’s visits, grocery store trips, holiday meals, and a litany of nothing special moments at her kitchen table. Her phone calls filled with unreasonable commands used to shake me and I would feel compelled to drop whatever I was doing at that moment and complete them. I once tweeted to God about Joan, “Dear God, if I die because I let this 82-year-old woman drive, “cuttin country,” can I please stop and get a beer before I go to heaven.” But now, I demand to drive or I won’t get in the car with her, or I stop answering her calls when she’s being abusive. We have grown together, apart, and back together in four years. To be honest, I am not sure what form our relationship will take once I move away, we do not talk about the inevitable.
Institutionalized “Help”

When a new staff member finally moves into Amanda’s position and manages Senior Friends, she schedules a meeting to meet with each of us and then together. She calls them “Senior Friends Quarterly Meeting,” they were the same as before, other volunteers sweetly reminiscence about all the memories they were creating with their elderly other, while I get all bent out of shape. I think it is asinine that everyone else is eating pie and drinking coffee while I try to create, establish, negotiate, and maintain psychological boundaries with one of the most ornery old ladies I have ever met. I am told after that meet and greet with the new manager of the program, not to come to the
group meetings, but rather, schedule my own individual updates, so as not to scare other and future Senior Friends.

Through these one-on-one conference meetings, I beg for more help with Joan. I am frustrated that this organization pairs me with her to help her, and then leaves me alone to maneuver a difficult situation with a difficult woman on my own. The new Senior Friends Manager directs me to another social worker who works for the Visiting Nurses of Appalachia. This social worker confirms my suspicions. She has previously met Joan, six years ago, while she was under their home care. Joan does, in fact, have a personality disorder which has been ignored and undiagnosed her entire life. And suddenly Joan could be the Catarina of Vita—the body that feel through the cracks of the health system.

My fears, as well as Joan’s fears, are made real. Joan once told me, “I just don’t want them to find me, dead with my pants down, on the latrine.” Her fear of dying in her home alone is repeated often enough for it to become my fear of her end of life narrative as well (Chan, 2011). The social worker says that it is not only possible, but quite likely, that she will die in her home, alone, without someone discovering her for days. She tells me, “if Joan does not have sustained home care, or someone who checks up on her daily, then she probably will die, at home, all alone. She’s probably gonna die lying on top of a mattress full of cash.” This social worker informs me that the undiagnosed personality disorder that Joan has prohibits her from trusting and utilizing banks, as well as harmless people like me.
This interaction with the social worker reminds me of the story of Yvette Vickers, once a *Playboy* extraordinaire, found in her home alone, dead for probably a year. Below is more of that story from the May 2012 issue of *The Atlantic Magazine Section*:

YVETTE VICKERS, A FORMER *Playboy* playmate and B-movie star, best known for her role in *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*, would have been 83 last August, but nobody knows exactly how old she was when she died. According to the Los Angeles coroner’s report, she lay dead for the better part of a year before a neighbor and fellow actress, a woman named Susan Savage, noticed cobwebs and yellowing letters in her mailbox, reached through a broken window to unlock the door, and pushed her way through the piles of junk mail and mounds of clothing that barricaded the house. Upstairs, she found Vickers’s body, mummified, near a heater that was still running. Her computer was on too, its glow permeating the empty space.

The *Los Angeles Times* posted a story headlined “Mummified Body of Former Playboy Playmate Yvette Vickers Found in Her Benedict Canyon Home,” which quickly went viral. Within two weeks, by Technorati’s count, Vickers’s lonesome death was already the subject of 16,057 Facebook posts and 881 tweets. She had long been a horror-movie icon, a symbol of Hollywood’s capacity to exploit our most basic fears in the silliest ways; now she was an icon of a new and different kind of horror: our growing fear of loneliness. Certainly she received much more attention in death than she did in the final years of her life. With no children, no religious group, and no immediate social circle of any kind, she had begun, as an
elderly woman, to look elsewhere for companionship. Savage later told Los Angeles magazine that she had searched Vickers’s phone bills for clues about the life that led to such an end. In the months before her grotesque death, Vickers had made calls not to friends or family but to distant fans who had found her through fan conventions and Internet sites (http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/8930/#.T4wo2IkduUk.facebook, May 12, 2012).

Although the article is not about Yvette Vickers specifically, but about our growing dependence on social media, it goes on to say that this is the nightmare narrative that places fear in our hearts about dying alone. This nightmare narrative might be re-inscribed as reality for my Senior Friend Joan. The social abandonment of elderly people is evasive and structural. In a world where someone with a extraordinary (albeit temporary) existence (Vickers was a former Playboy Playmate) can die and not be discovered for “better part of a year,” it begs the question of how long those with an ordinary rural existence can be dead before they are found? If you do not have family or friends to check in on you, to find out whether or not you are well/ill/dead, then whose responsibility are you? And those living in rural poverty, “lost in Appalachia,” do they fall even deeper into the crevice of the abandoned, the gap widening with the crumbling of the state (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2008)?

The social worker assigned to Joan’s case gives me two more bits of advice, she (like the social worker at Adult Protective Services) tells me that the only thing I can do
is call the Highway Patrol and have her license taken away, and/or she emails me this as an attachment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medicare Certified Home Care Agencies</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AccentCare Home Health Services</td>
<td>800.285.9098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambercare</td>
<td>614.542.0668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Nursing Care</td>
<td>740.594.2440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge Home Health Care</td>
<td>740.589.5555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim Healthcare</td>
<td>800.640.6943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Valley Home Health</td>
<td>740.441.1393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twin Maples Home Care</td>
<td>740.596.1022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinton County Home Health</td>
<td>740.596.5233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Care Aide Services</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Senior Care</td>
<td>740.992.0990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Bridge</td>
<td>740.594.1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Care of Southeast Ohio</td>
<td>740.662.1222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a list of agencies that are similar to Appalachian Community Hospice and Health Services of Athens, Ohio. The Home Care Aide Services are only for personal/homemaking care.

*Figure 21: Services Provided, a List of Numbers*

This is it. This is all the state, and social services have to offer elderly working-class women. It’s just a list of home care agencies. Without wealth to secure your stay in a functional nursing home or obtain home care, without family to help you go grocery shopping and carry your groceries inside the house, without social programs ensuring your livelihood will stay intact, you are just that—a without. The social worker also tells me that with Joan, I should develop an “exit plan” for when I leave this June. Joan wants
me to take her with me, and if I was not so sharply aware of my co-dependent tendencies, I think I just may have. But I print this list out and post it on Joan’s kitchen. She knows I’m leaving, but refuses to talk about it in any detail. Recently, Joan hurt her leg and in the last few days she is especially dependent on me, which heightens her anxiety and her vulnerability and makes her increasingly difficult to be around. She needs full-time care but refuses to go in to a nursing home. My everyday reality is this—let her sit in her own feces—or go over every morning and night to prepare her for the day or bed.

So, I call Adult Protective services again today, April 25th, 2012. The lady on the other line simply said, “Joan Smith? Yes. I’ve heard about her. You think she needs to be in a nursing home? Ok, thanks for calling. Buh-bye.” And that is it. A body named. A body dismissed.

Final Thoughts on Elderly Bodies

The elderly remain indoors, off television screens, and out of our consciousness. In the Western world, they are culturally and physically out of sight and out of mind. Except when, of course, they cause us inconvenience, when they are driving too slow because we are in a rush, or when they are walking in front of us in a crowded corridor and we are unable to pass. We notice elderly people only when the stereotype is activated, seeing them as “useless” or as a “drain of resources” (Adams-Price & Morse, 2009). It is only then that we become acutely aware of elderly existences, but only temporarily and hastily, because in those moments they are a nuisance to our social order of fast-paced living and high efficiency. The dominant gaze on to the elderly body is brief, a temporary unfortunate illusion, which foreshadows what we fear we will become,
but a thought we would rather not dwell on because it is a taxing and unpleasant
treatment (Roberts, et al., 2010). Instead, the elderly body waits, alone at a kitchen table,
to be recognized.

Those bodies, the elderly in rural Appalachia become not even that, mere bodies,
they become less than bodies. Not a subject, not even an object. In our culture, elderly
people are treated like the “alien generation,” as if they were subhuman (Roberts, et al.,
2010). They become things, dusty things left forgotten about on shelves, or at kitchen
tables, waiting to be acknowledged, waiting to be spoken to, heard, not just recognized
but made meaningful. They are abandoned when they do not have children to care for
them. When children are neglected, they have an authority which protects them. The
elderly, on the other hand, have nothing. They become a telephone list of agencies you
could call, who would swoop in and take away their homes, and place them into chairs,
left waiting but in a different setting which masks itself in hospital wear. What must it
feel like for Joan to have that list on the fridge staring at her every day? How long can
you push off making that phone call? If you’re Joan, how long do you hang on alone?
One more day? Two? Then what? I’ll call Tuesday. I’ll call Saturday. Ooops. It’s
Saturday and I went to call but they’re not open. But if you stay one day too long—just
one more day—you are stuck dying alone where no one will find you and no one will put
your story in The Atlantic Monthly because here in Appalachian Ohio, you are already a
nobody—death merely erases you from the landscape, even further. Death has taken the
form of a sheet of paper on her fridge. She lives with it on her fridge. Biehl writes
something that resonates strongly with me:
This was a socially authorized dying, ordinary and unaccounted for, in which we participated by our gazing, both foreign and native, in our learned indifference and sense of what was intolerable. Yet rather than remaining paralyzed by moral indignation, we felt compelled to address life in Vita…Not to represent it would equally be a failure (Biehl, 2005, p. 38).

Joan is ordinary and unaccounted for, her life in Appalachia is absent of extraordinary tales of when she appeared on the cover *Playboy*. I doubt she has even perused a *Playboy*. Her story is not marginal enough to appear anywhere else. Subjectively situated in Appalachia, her life and her body do not even appear in the dominant narrative of “America” (Stewart, 1996). Poor, old, and invisible, she does not even constitute “a space on the side of the road.” Instead, her body falls within an Other space, a rural “zone of social abandonment.” Joan’s body redefines where the boundaries of the zones of the socially abandoned exist. Socially authorized ways of dying are not contained to the four walls of Vita in Brazil. There are elderly bodies everywhere, around the world, tucked away in homes, made invisible to our eyes, off the streets and off the screens, waiting—all alone at a kitchen table—for an ending.
Figure 22: Joan and I at a Senior Friends Event
CHAPTER VIII:
CONCLUDING THE (UN)CONSTITUTING OF APPALACHIAN WOMEN’S LIVES

I guess it’s like, that was one of the reasons why I kind of agreed to be
interviewed, because I was afraid your paper might end up being like the *Dateline*
Appalachian thing, you know, I think people should know that not everybody is
like that here. There are successful families, and there are families who work hard
and do things, and have nice lives, even though we live in Appalachian, in the
foothills down here in Ohio. There’s another side.

–Christy, co-participant

There is one story about Appalachia consistently told by the media—the story of
poverty. For outsiders, Appalachia is the fertile, beautiful, green landscape you drive
through on your summer vacations to Florida, you hope you still have a full tank of gas
because you really hate to have to stop because people there are toothless and scary. But
there is another side to the story for insiders—old coal mining money, like where Christy
comes from, where people have houses built into the top of the hillside and stare down,
shaking their heads at the poor, toothless, hillbillies below them. Sure, there are at least
two sides to the story.

*My abuelo* used to say there are three sides to every story; there’s yours, mine,
and the truth. And in this case, the Appalachian Ohio case, I collected 20 women’s
stories, in 20 different contexts, with 20 different language systems, with 20 very
different (and very similar) lives. Stories are not like two sided coins, but there are
always plenty more to be gathered, that tell a different tale.
I cannot offer you Truths about Appalachian Ohioan women. I can only introduce you to 20, tell you a little about their lives, how I understood and interpreted them, and then sum it up into a few important themes, and leave you with the feeling that a story is neither True nor complete.

Conceptual Contributions

Entering this field began as a service project. I had just moved to Athens, I felt uneasy about my new conditions because of popular culture representation, of this reason in tandem with isolated initial interactions. Doing service work, helped diminish the feeling of loneliness at my undergraduate community in Michigan and so I assumed the same could and would happen here. So I rolled up my sleeves and got to down to business with two organizations working with women on two chronological ends of the age spectrum—young (Girl Power) and old (Senior Friends). And through these experiences, being with women in this Appalachian context, I found myself being surprised by things I should not have been surprised by like braces on the girls’ teeth, or the absence of twangy accent, or mansions on hillsides. Through reflexive researcher analysis and becoming conscious of postcolonial literature and paradigms (Said, 1979; Anzaldúa, 1987; Appadurai, 1996; Spurr, 1993), I knew this field was layered in nuances I am still trying to make sense of.

So I began my field work. Every interaction that caused me pause, piqued my interest, brought me joy, left me sad, or felt just plain ordinary (Conquergood, 1994; Stewart, 2007)—I wrote it down. I went on historical tours of the area, I ate at places “off the map,” I took long drives into the countryside, and I just “hung out” with folks (Agar,
1996). For four years, 20 formal and recorded interviews and thousands of informal conversations, being fully immersed in or observing from afar, I have been trying to understand, participate in, and be present in this field. I have interrogated the history of this rhetorically constructed Othered space, the meaning of Appalachian identity, bodies in this Othered space, and my reflexive ontological orientation to this field, this context, and these people. From this time-intensive research project, I have three conceptual contributions that I feel comfortable in extending forth about this field and about these women—Home, Identity, and Bodies.

*Being at Home*

When we understand home only as something that brings us a feeling of safety, warmth, nostalgia, and comfort (Rybczynski, 1986), then everything outside of the parameters of that space, becomes something foreign, strange, uncomfortable, and unfamiliar. For me, both my homes—the one from which I was raised and the one where I presently live—have been positioned by national and popular cultural discourse as unhome-ly; the strange, the foreign, and the unfamiliar. Detroit, once known for its musical legacies and the birthplace of innovative modes of transportation is now known as the dangerous, out-of-control place that gave rise to the need of Robocop. It is an American space represented as Other, a dangerous land with unemployed people. Similarly, Appalachia has been rendered Other, through the labor and land exploitation by the coal mining industry and other political and social forces. Appalachia is an American space positioned as hilly lands full of hillbillies. Presently, both Appalachia
The philosophical underpinnings of home spaces are imperative to understand and position in subjective researcher projects, such as ethnography and life history. One cannot attempt to constitute an Other space and Other people without interrogating the social/political/economic conditions that filters what we see as important to report. To constitute something as here or there requires an astute understanding of where we are in relation to the subject/object of study. In Chapter One, I try to explicate my phenomenological standpoint of here and there through an analysis of the socio-political and geo-political conditions of my homes; both new and old. Equipped with a historical narrative of how these homes have become Othered, I show my readers how my paradigms have been shifted, blurred, and refocused. Interrogating, what Burke (1966) calls terministic screens, what aspects of reality I pay attention to, and more importantly, what aspects of reality I ignore, is highlighted in this intermingling of micro/macro discussions of my homes.

In uncovering my “terministic screens,” I show how both home spaces have shaped my ideological, interpretive and imaginative practices. Both homes are positioned as poor in and through discourse, so I decided to focus mostly on middle class Appalachian women. My “old” home was dominated by my single-mother but from within a familial system that recognized and practiced a Mexican system of patriarchy (Otherwise known as Machismo, see Anzaldúa, 1987 for a larger discussion). My abuelo’s word was rule, even in our house. Additionally, the most profound influences on
my life have inarguably been my female mentors, both of these “social facts” have sensitized me to the nuances of gender, class, and color, and intimately shaped my feminist perspective. Thus, I wanted to focus on the experiences of women in this Appalachian context. This passion for concentrating on the experiences of women is further fueled by my past and current service commitments to women who have struggled with issues that complicate our home spaces—sexual violence, abandonment of elderly women, and the neglect of young women.

Conceptualizing the differences between homes and being at home, for me, is the space between and amongst these two home spaces, when I am in my car driving to and fro and I have the space to be “me.” The destabilizing of what is and is not home, creates more spaces for us to feel the ideal qualities of being at home—safety, nostalgia, comfort, etc (Rybczynski, 1986). And whether we find that feeling confined within four walls, the parameters of our flesh, or simply existing within our minds, is not as vital where we locate it, but how we found it—in and through communication.

Unbecoming and Becoming “Appalachian”

The social tension between an other and Other in this Appalachian context is most finely tuned in Chapter V: the Unbecoming and Becoming “Appalachian.” Identity can be robed and disrobed, but not as easily as we would like to think. There are implications of being in various states of becoming and unbecoming an identity. Our identities are shifted and molded by geo-political forces in ways we are not even conscious of. In chapter V, I detail the establishment of the Appalachian Regional Commission (herein, ARC) and its impact on the individual identities of bodies within the region. ARC was
founded in the 1960’s because of the area’s growing need for economic intervention, thus since the inception of the Appalachia Regional Commission—Appalachia had became and is synonymous with poverty. ARC had the power to construct and place the borders and boundaries of Appalachia for the past sixty years. These borders have been in flux, and thus, the identities of the people living within or near the borders have mirrored this trend.

I argue in chapter V through the voices and subjectivities of my co-participants that the becoming or unbecoming “Appalachia” has an interesting relationship to/with one’s generation. Older generations, women born and raised before this term to became corporeal and embodied, are disgusted by outsiders referring to them as “Appalachian.” Those who fall in the late 30’s to early 60’s have mostly ambivalent feelings and orientations to the term “Appalachian,” they may have grown up hearing outsiders use it, but do not necessarily incorporate it into their own descriptions of their selves. Whereas young people, the youngest cohort of women I interviewed, are re-appropriating the term to signify something meaningful, an identity within which they can find pride.

This chapter interrogates my understanding of “Appalachian” identity by likening it to my own Mexican-American identity. Drawing from similar themes, like the discursive and physical construction of borders in the southwest of the United States, and the re-appropriation of Mexican cultural pride by young people, I show how these two seemingly unrelated spaces and people share a common connection. Understanding our experiences, theirs and mine, help close the gap of difference and moved us closer to a space of intersubjectivity. The overt and covert social forces of the dominant push for
homogenization. They make it appear, as though we are all of one social class, speak in a shared tongue, have a shared history, and the same shared desire for the use of the geographical space, in order to sediment the hierarchical ordering of things. But as we know, where there are systems of power, there is potential for resistance (Foucault, 1977; 1978). The resistance to and with “Appalachian” identity, is found in very idea that identity is always in a state of flux. Identity, as it relates to the Appalachian case, is always in oscillation, swaying in and out of states of becoming and unbecoming.

_Marginal Bodies_

The material existence of the body is almost as important to understand as the discursive conditions that give rise to the body’s material presence (Butler, 1999; 1990). In investigating this Othered Appalachian space, I became cognizant of the bodies and experiences that are central to national discourse about women from this area—white, poor Appalachian women with uncontrollable bodies that reproduce uncontrollable children. This was not the story I was interested in reproducing. Thus, I purposefully recruited women who were seen as marginal by other middle class Appalachian women. I wrote about their stories and their experiences, not to re-Other their bodies, but to move their experiences to spaces where they could be seen and heard. The reframing of their experiences as Other bodies in a Other space helps craft novel realities and representations of women living in Appalachia.

In chapter VII, I wrote about my tumultuous relationship with an elderly woman in my community to show how this micro-experience reflects a larger cultural trend in the United States—the social abandonment of elderly working-class women. My relationship
with Joan speaks to the everyday struggles faced by elderly bodies, of the inability to open heavy doors, carry in their own groceries, or wash their own feet. But also my unintentional aloneness with Joan, sheds light on the breakdown of two institutional structures—the family and the state. I end that chapter with a sense of utter hopelessness because it is the very real lived reality for not only Joan but the reality for many poor, elderly bodies who fall in the crevices of institutionalized breakdowns and remain “Lost in Appalachia” (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2008).

The disabled body often falls within the cracks of discourse about what it is and is not able to do. Thus, in chapter VI, I introduce you to a person whose body discourse is outside of this discussion entirely. Maddie is the embodiment of the counter-narrative of what it means to have a differently-abled body. Maddie has a prosthetic for a leg, which neither fixes nor replaces her otherwise autonomous body discourse (Smith & Morra, 2006). Everything that Maddie talked about in our three-hour-long conversation was about the limitless potential of her lived body. She resists the public transcript about Appalachian women as a whole, but also resists discourse about (dis)abled bodies.

Through two other body representations; Terry and Becca, I access a conversation about the body and social queering. Terry is a black female to male transperson and Becca is a pregnant lesbian. Both existences are not only queer to dominant cultural understandings of “the” female body as a whole, but these bodies are almost virtually ignored in the context of Appalachian Studies (personal communication with Carissa Miller, Appalachian Studies scholar, in January 2012). Both of these bodies confront our social silence of Other bodies and require us to develop a new language system to speak
about Other bodies, in order to move us from seeing these bodies as Other, to engaging these bodies as an other. I wanted to instill in my readers that seeing bodies as essentially different, thus inferior, is what made these bodies Other in the first place. I discursively moved these bodies to more central locations with the goal of recognizing and learning about marginal bodies and marginal experiences as central to knowledge production and dissemination.

These conceptual contributions are the foundations for my future study. I hope to engage more and larger conversations about home, identity, and bodies in both the Appalachian context and in my new/old home, in Detroit. I would like to continue my ethnographic research with a focus on diasporic communities, particularly undocumented Mexican citizens who flow in and out of southwest Detroit. Eventually, I will investigate how global cultural flows varies across generations and social economic classes in southwest Detroit and the resulting material and discursive consequences of this process on homes, identities, and bodies. I want to compare actions, reactions, and inactions to those who migrated during “legitimate” labor movements such as the Bracero Program, as well as present day labor migrants. Both groups of people have material and legal pressures to assimilate and/or resist cultural hegemonies like language change and to de-emphasize their differences in this supposedly “postnational” context. This is the direction I see myself shifting into/out of.

As with all subjective understandings and interpretations of human behavior, I experienced researcher struggles, that I would like to re-narrate as two “researcher tensions.”
Researcher Tension One: Feminist Critique Vs. Other Understanding

While I was interviewing for an academic position early in the year, and explaining my orientation to this field, this context, how I arrived here, I was confronted with a conversation that made me inexplicably livid. I was explaining an upcoming event that Girl Power was hosting, our end of the year formal dinner. I was explaining to a white, middle-class academic woman, about how we collect formal dresses for the girls, they get dressed up, we put on makeup, do each others’ hair, and are served by men from a fraternity on campus. The girls love it, they are taught how to perform proper dining
etiquette, and we try our best to mimic a “formal” dining experience. I was capriciously smiling as I unfolded the night’s events to my hosts.

This woman’s response, boasting a smile as to glaze her critique was, “you know that’s hard. You’re teaching them gender roles and expectations in a highly problematically gendered way. You are trying to empower these girls but by dressing them in dresses and high heels…well, is that empowerment?” At that moment, I was infuriated. She asked how I arrived at this field and so I humbled myself as a feminist academic to the most honest answer I could give. And my anger was not rooted in her critique of me, but in her critique of something she cannot possibly understand. She perpetuated what Appadurai asks us to be wary of, using only one translation. He thinks we must be pragmatic in the sense that words used by political actors and thus their audiences may be subject to different sets of translations in differing contexts, which “mediate their translation into public politics” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 36). This bourgeoisie, white feminist academic, in her expensive boutique clothes and immaculate smile, imposed her cultural and political meanings of critical gender analysis to an event that she could not experience, with persons she did not know, under economic and political conditions she could not understand.

I cannot say much with certainty, but what I can say is that this event is presented to the girls and every year they have await it with excited anticipation. We go to great lengths to ensure these girls are made to feel special and glamorous, but more importantly, comfortable. We ask if any of them want to wear suits or dress pants or some variation of what we have gathered. And we deliver.
It is indeed easy to critique, this is what we are trained to do, as academics. We are indoctrinated to be critical thinkers, constantly analyzing the racist/capitalist/imperialist/patriarchal structures that serve to reify power hierarchies and reproduce them (Giddens, 1979). But when we are trained to have only a critical eye, we struggle to see what’s working well, how it works, so that we can implement “it” to other areas. I was trained in a similar way, as a critical ethnographer, to spot out the peccadillo, try to understand the nuances of it, and how we can correct it.

For this feminist academic to critique my explanation was easy since it is an easy, highly gendered, target. One week later when I read about it in the local newspaper (article shared at the end of this chapter), and if I had not known my girls as I do, I would have thought the same thing. And from her politically and economically affluent place as a white, middle class, feminist academic, completely dislocated from a fifth grade girl in Appalachian Ohio deemed “at-risk” because she was identified as sexually abused by her own teacher, she executed a gender-based analysis perfectly. What could she know about what we were doing?

What I have learned through these interviews, by being in this field and in these experiences, and in writing this dissertation, is that “critique” is an easy way out. Understanding who someone is and why they are that way, beyond the default explanations of oppressor/oppressed in a racist/capitalist/patriarchal society, is hard. Really hard. And impossible to understand the nuances and idiosyncrasies over one dinner conversation, or even over several dinner conversations, but it’s those conversations that I live to have and will continue to have as a feminist and an academic.
But this conversation, which led me to my frustration, is only a reflection of my own insecurity about this project, about this field, about my service practices. I am constantly struggling between the dialectic of critique and appreciation.

The Feminist Struggle: Critique and/or Appreciate

Appreciative inquiry was not discovered and articulated by self-proclaimed feminists, but rather by a couple of dudes who are organizational communication scholars (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987). The words “feminism” and “critique” look just as good together in print as “communication” and “studies.” How then does a fierce feminist, like myself, negotiate the tension between ethically representing a woman’s life and experiences as she willingly shares them and critiquing them as evidence for systemic colonization of women’s self understanding (Gordej, 2011)? Can we, as feminists, critique another woman’s words while simultaneously trying to understand and appreciate them? How do we ethically recruit women to participate in research interviews on intimate subjects and then critique their language for being patriarchal, racist or classist, when their words are an extension of their very selves? To critique and/or appreciate an organization, is much easier, less personal, and easy to cast off failure/reward as a result of someone else’s (in)actions. But in an interpersonal context, this tension is more pronounced and potentially hurtful.

When one of my co-participants told me she had no sense of herself outside of her roles as mother and wife, I insolently thought, how pathetic. Here we were, at her place of employment, at a higher education institution where she is earning her Master’s degree concomitantly, while her husband stays home and collects disability, how in the world
can you honestly believe that your self-understanding can only be thought of in terms of your interactions and responsibilities as a wife and a mother. When I was ten, I read *A House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, and a line in her short autobiography in the back of the book has never left the forefront of my brain, “Sandra is currently living in New York City and she is no one’s mother and no one’s wife.” Mother and wife was so naturally inherent in Mexican women’s identity, that for her, she wanted her personal politics to be clear; being a mom and a wife is not her life’s prerogative. This settled in my memory because of it was piercing nature, almost as piercing as that this woman’s proclamation that the understanding of her life cannot be known in isolation from her role as a wife and a mother.

My feminist, critical ethnographic training did not adequately prepare me for these types of interactions (Visweswaran, 1994; Stacey, 1991). I went into data collection with rose-colored goggles on; the women were going to be insightful and introspective, for they are, after all, mostly educated and mostly middle class women in Appalachia, not like women depicted in movies like the Wild Whites of West Virginia or the PBS documentary, “Friends of Athen’s County.” I thought that the women I spoke with, their words would be able to stand alone, without analysis or explanation, because for me to explain the meaning behind their words, I thought, would cheapen them. I romantically thought, as it appears in my proposal “this project is salient because I believe as Gluck and Patai (1991) write that ‘by documenting women’s representations of their reality, we were engaging in advocacy. We [feel] that our work [is], indeed, political and that it [is]
for women” (p. 3).” I was wrong. Documenting women’s representations of their reality isn’t always advocacy and sometimes is just plain ordinary work.

But this is the tension, the struggle for feminist researchers hoping to document another woman’s life with the goal of believing that documenting women’s representations for reality is only ever advocacy. Sometimes it is. Sometimes our writing of another person’s story can move people to a place of inertia, sometimes it is just writing, and sometimes we must critique other people’s representations of their reality, no matter how icky it feels (Behar, 1996).

And every so often, the clouds part, and we are moved by people’s words, people’s actions, and the ways in which people narrate their lives. And in these moments we can appreciate, think about how these stories can be vehicles of social change, and how we can all arrive there. For example, in chapter VI, when I discuss Terry, Becca, and Maddie’s stories and how their queer and (dis)able bodies are the impetus to designing and creating a new language to speak about disability and queerness, and the new language systems that result from this dialogue, this becomes the world I “wish to discover” (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987).

This tension will persist; we will also be walking the tight rope between critique and appreciation for activist-scholars or scholar-activists. The lesson it all boils down to is the age old adage, the golden rule, or what I think Gandhi says best, “we have to be the change we wish to see in the world.” One must produce theoretical and conceptual knowledge that you are comfortable with people putting into praxis. And for me, the
lesson to be learned through my research experience and the knowledge production that results is about engaging an other in and through dialogue.

Researcher Tension Two: Other Understanding vs. Self Projection Understandings

During a conversation with one of my co-participants, Cheryl, I became increasingly aggravated. We were having a conversation at her kitchen table which was muddled with stained plates, where she has several “guests” living with her, and they all wanted to put their own two or ten cents into the conversation. People kept coming in and out of the house, the screen door slamming behind them each time. They would act as if they did not see me or as if they were not listening until something piqued their own interest and piped in, “that’s not true, when I was…,” “why the hell you wanna hang out here…?” “If yous from De-troit then how’d ya end up here…” all with varying levels of “Appalachian” twang and vulgarities (which is something I typically appreciate). I had two small children in only their diapers, climbing on to and off of my lap. Kids I have never even seen before. Reese Cup and Kylie would take turns, climbing on my lap, grab my pen from out my hand and drawl all over my consent forms and interview protocol. They would get off my lap and go play in another room taking my pens and my paper with them. The house phone (with a cord preventing them from taking the conversation elsewhere) would ring incessantly, all summoning different people to come to the phone. The kitchen sink was in total disarray, overflowing with dishes, diverting my attention. Two hours in to our conversation, Cheryl’s husband spontaneously interrupted our conversation, playing an acoustic guitar, and bellowing a song he wrote for Cheryl about the night they first met, “The night an angel came to Perry county…”
In that ethnographic moment, I was thinking about how long this recording would take me to transcribe, who were all these people hanging out here were, who actually does live here, if these other interlocutors have anything insightful to add, the pseudonyms I would have to make up for them, why the hell they didn’t wash this woman’s dishes if she fed them, and how all of their presences “tainted” the quality of realness I was getting from Cheryl. I was annoyed by their presence and I was even more annoyed that Cheryl kept inviting them into the conversation. At that moment, the whole scene was just entirely too busy to make sense of and when midnight arrived and we were immersed in the pitch black darkness rural living tends to create, I decided our conversation did not feel complete. I made plans with Cheryl to come back in a week.

When I returned I was prepared. I brought candy, coloring books, and crayons for the kids, beer for the guys who just kind of “hung out” indefinitely at Cheryl’s house, extra pens, extra paper, some homemade banana nut bread and a finely tuned attention span. I was ready to hear and be present with Cheryl. Not but 15 minutes later, all the same distractions were present and once again invited by Cheryl. All I wanted to hear was Cheryl, the historian, the teacher, the community advocate. I wanted to hear her stories, her life history, and her experiences. Instead I got a whole lot of “white noise,” I thought.

With hindsight, the retrospective looking back on the past, from the position of the present (Freeman, 2010), I have moved to seeing that “white noise” as a purposeful complication of the seemingly “smooth” research process. How much did what I want to hear, affect what was actually heard? How much of this “white noise” was a distraction
for me and part of living for her? If I want to know more about her experiences what does my vision allow me to see?

*(Mis)recognition of Self and Other*

Paul Ricoeur once said “a struggle against the misrecognition of others at the same time that it is a struggle for recognition of oneself by others” (2005, p. 258), this quote for me lies at the heart of my second researcher tension—there is never an adequate amount of time to fully understand an other in relationship to the self without potentially blurring and overlapping the self and the other. How do I know what is an other/Other experiences and what is my tainted subjective projection on to the interpretation of other/Other’s experiences?

Research about an other is definitively about seeing someone as other, outside of the self. Bakhtin, although a literary critic, but germane to the discussion of interpreting and representing an other, says that we must have a level of outsideness, “other human beings are outside me” (1990, p.23). We must recognize the boundaries of self and other in order to perceive and understand what is other and what is self. To know the self, Aristotle says, is the beginning of all wisdom. We must become cognizant of the boundaries of the self in order to see the other. As researcher selves, we must unearth our political stakes, interrogate our ideological positions, and understand where we are, what moves us, in order to know when we have been moved.

Without acknowledgement of the boundaries of self—where we are and what we see—we are subject to the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the other. From the position of a researcher, trying to recognize and understand an other, a level of
“outsideness” or otherness is required. Chawla writes, “Otherness is quite obviously a pre-condition to mis/interpretation (Chawla, 2008).” Although some otherness is a necessary condition to interpreting and “contextualizing” an other (Geertz, p.66), too much otherness can (re)produce Othering identities and ideologies (Said, 1978). Too much rigidity in the boundaries of self and other can become problematic and easily shift into a hierarchy of self over Other. So how much otherness is too much Otherness? What is self and what is other? How do we avoid solipsism in exchange for reflexivity?

This misinterpretation of the other because of an unawareness about the boundaries of the self, is what I will call “narrative imposition.” Narrative imposition is the imposing of the self on to the other, in the form of stories. To extend the academic colloquialism of “I think, therefore I am” and amend it to understand narrative imposition, “I think you are, therefore you are,” narrative imposition is the self projected onto the other. Narrative imposition can lead to the misinterpretation of the other, and ultimately, has the potential of reproducing Othering discourses. How does one avoid narrative imposition?

My only decent response to these questions and tensions is a constant interrogation of reflexive researcher position and more time in the field, to see the other with a sense of “wholeness” (Bakhtin, 1990). In order to be reflexive and be cognizant about the potential perpetration of narrative imposition, I acknowledge(d) what I wanted to hear from the women I interviewed. I crafted a protocol that inquired specifically about what the term “Appalachia” means to my co-participants and if anyone had ever told them what it means to be “an Appalachian woman” (for more information, see Interview
Protocol in the appendices). I “mis/interpret” Appalachian identity in and through chapter V, trying to contextualize women’s understanding of Appalachian identity, through an interrogation of the geo-political and historical discourses unfolding during their life course.

As a feminist of color with a thirst for the marginal existences, I worried about the potential for myself to commit narrative imposition. I, purposefully, did not recruit women to hear stories about incomprehensible suffering or dire poverty, those were the stories already represented in literature about people in Appalachian spaces (Caudill, 1962; Walls, 2005; Kahn, 1972; Pollock, 2008). I attempted to search and recruit the ordinary women with ordinary existences (Stewart, 2007), I wanted to tell an other story, about an other existence, outside of myself. I did, however, find women who were thought of as marginal by middle-class Appalachian women because of their bodily existences. In the end, the unique stories and experiences of their lives, were not always that unique to me and from me. Some could occur in other places and/or Other spaces, and sometimes I could relate and sometimes I could not. Some communicative practices required deep interpretation of the other which may have lent itself to deep misinterpretation of the other. I am unable to write with veracity that I have successfully uncovered “hidden truths” about the other, it is possible I have not (Chawla, 2008). I can only contextualize my self and the other, and hope that in the end they can recognize their selves and I can recognize what is my interpretation of their selves (Rawlins, 1998, p. 360).
If I could turn back time, equipped the infinite wisdom of hindsight, in the present (Freeman, 2010), I would have focused less on raising the number of co-participants and more on the time I spent with each co-participant. I would have returned to everyone’s house at least twice, asked them if there were things they gained insight to or remembered since having the conversation? I would have taken more photos and elicited more artifacts and tried harder to give my readers an “experience-near” insight into the lives of my co-participants (Geertz, 1983). I would have spent more time listening and re-listening to the recorded conversations. I would have sat longer in those “off the map” diners, observing, recording interactions and conversations. I would be unrestrained by the time I spent volunteering with Girl Power or helping Joan. I would have ignored the cacophonous constraints of time.

Ending Thoughts

After it rains here, mist rolls down and over the hills forming thin clouds that cover the foliage like soft cotton balls. The hills look almost as if they are burgeoning florets of broccoli bound together in a steamer. The sheer clouds of mist hovering over the hillsides, for me, do not have a “haunted” quality to them, but rather a feeling calming effect. It reminds me of rebirth, revival, and resurrection. The same place that used to make me feel closed in, changed for me, as I continued to “stay-in-place” in a landscape.

I began this project as an attempt to re-story the representation of women in Appalachia, seeing them represented only as Other “inbreeders,” “living in the back woods,” or as Said would say, as “exotic beings, haunted memories . . . landscapes, [and] remarkable experiences” (Said, 1978, p. 1). I wanted to tell a different story, not an Other
story. I engaged with 20 women, listening to their stories and trying to be present, albeit temporarily, in their lives. I met, I listened, I perceived, I thought, I interpreted, I reflected, and then I constituted. I question whether this knowledge production and dissemination was a success. Do I think differently now about Appalachian women—who they are, where they have been, where they are going—than I did then? Or better yet, for my readers, did I reframe the paradigm through which you once saw Appalachian women’s lives? I do not know. I hope I have.

For me, this project was deeply moral and deeply political. I entered this field four years ago, answering my own call to get connected to my community that had been rendered Other, even for me. I have connected, made good friends, and became cognizant of and sensitive to the realities and subjectivities of women in Appalachian Ohio. In a space with a long history of corporate colonization and exploitation, no woman’s life history remains sovereign in the turmoil of struggle over lands and bodies. But what they do and do not do in spite of this shared struggle is the site where the potential for novel narratives of rebirth, revival, and resurrection can flourish.
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APPENDIX A:

OU BAKER CENTER OPENS ITS DOORS TO TRIMBLE 'GIRL POWER'

By Alisa Caton

Photo Credits: Photo by Meg Vogel
Photo Caption: Girl Power members Larissa, Edith, and Cheyenne dance with Britt Wolverton, a Future Women of Appalachia member at the second annual Girl Power Etiquette Formal after party in the Women’s Center in Baker Center on Feb. 10.

On Feb. 10, the Multicultural Center in the Ohio University Baker Center transformed into a classy restaurant, with white twinkling lights lining the halls and girls from Trimble Middle School running around twirling their dresses, showing off their new formal wear to their friends.

Male waiters came out one by one and escorted the girls to the dining room by table. Each girl waited on the edge of her seat, bursting with excitement and anticipation for her name to be called. The annual etiquette formal put on by Future Women of Appalachia (FWA) for the girls of Girl Power was about to begin.

Girl Power, an after-school program put on by Athens County Children Services in the Trimble Local School District, started in March 2006 when Kerri Shaw, the school's then social worker, ran across a national initiative by the federal Department of Health and Human Services for a wellness program for young girls.

"I thought it would be good for the girls to be healthier and make goals for their future," Shaw said. "If you are not an athlete, there are not a lot of extracurricular activities."

The program has two different groups that meet weekly: A third- and fourth-grade group and the middle-school group, grades fifth to eighth grade.

"We try to find girls who are working with a social worker in the school. Also, teachers will refer girls to the group," said Emily Cline, an AmeriCorps volunteer with Athens County Children Services and the current facilitator of the program.
Girls are referred to the program for all types of reasons, according to Cline. Recently, she said, a girl lost her father, and a teacher referred her to Girl Power for a support system to help her with grieving.

Shaw said in the beginning there was not a lot of funding for many of the projects she wanted to do. Once Girl Power became more established, the agency and community sponsors began providing money for the group. "I would have people call and say I want to help, how can I help, can I make a donation," Shaw said.

At the weekly meetings, the girls will do a lot of crafts, as well as discussion about their school day and recent fieldtrips they have been on or have coming up. Before attending the etiquette formal, the girls looked at the "Dove Campaign for Real Beauty," an effort to create "a wider definition of beauty," and also discussed beauty expectations in America.

Other field trips the girls have been on have included gardening in Glouster last spring and cooking a free meal with United Campus Ministries in Athens last fall. "That was a really cool thing. They got to cook the meal, serve the meal, and interact in the community," Cline said. "Investing in their community is something we want to instill in them."

Other annual events for the girls are the Girl Power Leadership Conference and the Girl Power Lock-in, coming up March 2. The lock-in invites Girl Power groups from all over the area to come for a variety of workshops, and a DJ hosts a midnight dance party. This year's theme is peace, and Shaw will be returning to work with the girls as keynote speaker.

Cline said the purpose of these events is to empower the girls. "It's not just about being a leader in the professional field; it's trying to be a leader of their peers and make good decisions," Cline said.

In 2009, FWA, an OU student organization began working with Girl Power. The group was a service project requirement for the Appalachian Scholarship program, by students Brittany Wolverton and Shea Daniels. Besides the formal, they volunteer with the lock-in and help at some weekly meetings.

"For us, it was addressing the need of empowerment," said Daniels. "We think empowerment can be fun in things (such as) braiding hair and painting fingernails."

Daniels said that events such as the formal and lock-in allow FWA members to really connect with the girls and learn about them. "They become less aware of themselves, and more comfortable in their own skin," said Daniels. "We get to listen to them, which is really great."
Shaw and Cline agreed that watching the girls' self-esteem blossoming is one of the most exciting things about being a part of a program like this. The girls become more self-confident and outgoing. Shaw said that many of the girls then become involved in other school activities because their self-esteem had increased.

"There's a lot of kids who have incredible life stories by the time they are in fourth grade," Cline said. "It's really cool watching the growth of these girls in the program."

At the end of the etiquette formal, after the last of the chocolate milk had been served and the girls prepared to pile into a Hummer limousine that had been donated for the event, a girl told Daniels that her favorite part of the night had not been getting to dance in her new dress or talk to all of the new people; instead, it had been seeing her friends all dressed up and happy.
APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

I am collecting the life histories of 15 women who have lived in Appalachian Ohio for at least two generations. I am most interested in how women narrate their life experiences.

Name:

Age:

Town:

Schooling:

Pseudonym:
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Childhood

   a. Please, tell me a little bit about your childhood?

      Probe 1: Can you recall specific moments/images?

      Probe 2: Was it memorable for you? Why? Why not?

   b. Please, tell me a little bit about your parents.

      Probe 1: Describe your relationship with them. Can you give specific instances of what it was like to grow up with them?

      Probe 2: How would you describe their marriage?

      Probe 3: Did they tell you stories when you were little? What kind of stories were these? Can you give me some examples?

2. Appalachia as Space

   a. Appalachia is a unique area and culture in American life. As a native of this region, how do you understand this space?

      Probe 1: What do you think is Appalachian culture? Is there one Appalachia?

      Probe 2: If yes, what is it? If no, why not?

   b. Do you think there is something unique about physical spaces in Appalachia?

      Probe 1: What images come to your mind when you think of it?
Probe 2: How do you think Appalachia is generally viewed by outsiders? Can you describe this? How does it make you feel?

3. Schooling or no schooling
   a. I would like to learn more about your school experiences. What was your elementary school experience like?

   Probe: Can you provide me with specific instances that you remember about this time in your life?

   b. Please, describe some moments from middle and high school.

   c. What did you learn about being a girl and a woman in school?

   Probe: For instance, were you treated differently? Were there different expectations for you? Can you provide me with some specific examples?

   d. In general, did you enjoy your experiences in school? If yes, then why? If not, then why not?

4. Life changes/marriages/tragedies
   a. Are you married? If yes, when did you marry?

   Probe 1: Can you tell me about your wedding day?

   Probe 2: What were some of the biggest changes that happened in your life as a result of marriage? Can you give me specific examples?

   b. Please talk to me about a time when you felt tragedy or some big life change? What was it?
Probe 1: How did you manage? What kind of support system did you have?

Probe 2: What lessons do you think you learned from it?

c. Narrate for me some stories you would consider ‘peaks’ and ‘valleys’ (or highs and lows) of your life. How have these shaped you?

5. The everyday

a. Describe to me what typical days for you might look like, right now. You can start by talking about a regular weekday and then tell me a bit about your weekend life.

6. Appalachian women

a. Can you remember a story that really speaks to the essence of your character?

b. What stories were you told, or do you tell, that has taught you about what it means to be an Appalachian woman?

c. [Last] Are you aware of any stereotypical images that get circulated about women in Appalachia?

Probe 1: Do you think such images about Appalachian women are legitimate/correct? If yes, then how?

Probe 2: Do you identify with any of these images? If yes, then how? If no, then how?
7. Would you like to share anything else that you think will enhance my experience of your life? Anything that I have not asked?

8. Would you like to ask me any questions?