Appalachian Cultural Resilience: Implications for Helping Professionals

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This dissertation titled
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Abstract

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Appalachian Cultural Resilience: Implications for Helping Professionals

Director of Dissertation: Christine Suniti Bhat

Appalachia has a culture that has been well studied, but there are few outcome studies that highlight its positive features (Diddle & Denham, 2010; Keefe, 2005). The cultural values that are persistent throughout Appalachia are well defined, but the helping disciplines have seldom considered using them as assets to be used in developing interventions and methods of treatment (Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). There are resilient features in the Appalachian culture values that could enhance the cultural competence of helping professionals and create culturally conscious services for individuals and families. By looking more closely at what helps to create resilience among a group of people from the region, this research begins to explore those issues. Using the emerging cultural resilience theory (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Helton & Keller, 2010; Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011) this research explores how the cultural values help create resilience among the people from Appalachia, specifically those in West Virginia. This qualitative narrative study was designed as an exploration of the Appalachian cultural values that were presented by Jones (1994), to see what kinds of protective factors enabled twelve resilient participants to overcome personal obstacles.

This study creates a better understanding of the Appalachian cultural values (Jones, 1994) that promote resilience through narratives of people who are from West
Virginia. The purpose of this study is to inform the practices for helping professionals who work in the region through the voices of people from the culture in an attempt to educate and to demystify some of the stereotypes that are prevalent in regards to the culture. Nine prevalent cultural values surfaced in the interviews of the participants that serve as protective factors, buffering them from hardships and helping them to overcome adversity. While some cultural values served as barriers that held some participants back, they were able to turn the barriers into protective factors at a later date. Because of this, the cultural values in Appalachia contributed to the overall cultural resilience among the people of the region.
Dedication

To the memory of my wonderful grandparents,

Dolpha and Stanley Reed,

and my beloved Uncle Jim Miller.

Thank you for your examples of wisdom and kindness.
Acknowledgments

Anytime I undergo any major project, my dedicated and supportive family pushes me to finish. Thank you to my husband Chris Linscott and my daughter Herron Linscott, for being my lifelines, my encouragers, my therapists, and my loves; you have made this possible for me and for us. I did not do this alone and I thank you for all of your support. Now you can have the living room back. Thank you to my mom, Susie Jenning for your enthusiasm and kindness. Thank you to my sister Pam Reed for your pep talks and help in so many ways. Thanks to my in-laws, the Linscott’s for being yet another layer of support and encouragement. Last but not least, thank you as well as the rest of my family and friends who cheered me on and showed so much interest in this topic.

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Last but certainly not least, thank you to my participants; the 12 truly remarkable people from West Virginia who let me hear your stories. This dissertation is yours too, and I am so grateful I had the chance to talk with you. I cannot thank you enough. I hope I have done your stories justice and I hope others can gain from them as I have.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Appalachia has a culture that has been well studied, but there are few outcome studies that highlight its positive features (Diddle & Denham, 2010; Keefe, 2005). The cultural values that are persistent throughout the Appalachia are well defined, but the helping disciplines have seldom considered using them as assets to be used in developing interventions and methods of treatment (Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). This may be in part due to the issues surrounding certain cultural values that may be barriers to treatment in the first place. In addition, the negative images carelessly portrayed by the media, literature, and scholars have also tainted the substance of Appalachian culture (Bauer & Growick, 2003). Nevertheless, disregarding culture as a construct capable of enhancing the outcomes of helping professions is somewhat unwise. Culture, be it Appalachian or any other, should be considered as an important context (Helton & Keller, 2010). Many cultures have resilient features, in that they can be a foundation for personal strength. In this way, cultural values could provide a means of improving the practices of helping professionals, particularly in Appalachia (Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Appalachia has both positive and negative elements that need to be understood in order to provide better services for the people of the region.

Appalachian cultural values have received a good deal of attention since their introduction in the late 1970’s (Keefe, 2005). Part of this interest may be due to the nature of research that emerged prior to the work of Loyal Jones (1994). Much of the research was negative and perpetuated the stereotypes and discrimination of the
Appalachian people (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Keefe, 2005). Jones laid out the cultural values in a way that presented a fair look at the qualities that come from people in the region, and pointed out why some values may appear differently to outsiders. The ten main cultural values of Appalachia are: (a) independence, self-reliance, and pride; (b) neighborliness; (c) familism; (d) personalism; (e) religion; (f) humility and modesty; (g) love of place; (h) patriotism; (i) sense of beauty; and (j) sense of humor (Jones, 1994). These values can be considered individually or in combination that either serve as protective factors or as barriers. Taking a fair look at the values as they relate to the experiences of Appalachian people may give some clues to what can help to strengthen resilience on an individual level. In order to make use of the values in a way that is meaningful to both helping professions and to the individuals from Appalachian culture, these cultural values should be fairly and adequately assessed (Helton & Keller, 2010).

Past studies have revealed that Appalachian people are able to overcome adversity through maintaining strong ties to their culture (Bauer & Growick, 2006; Helton & Keller, 2010; Keefe, 2005). At the same time, like the rest of humanity, some Appalachian people struggle to meet their basic needs, requiring help from outsiders to foster better coping skills. This underserved area has been difficult for helping professionals to reach due to various barriers to services, including culturally inappropriate practices (Helton & Keller, 2010; Keefe, 2005). There are resilient features in the Appalachian culture values that could be used to guide helping professionals shape the interventions and methods of treatment and, in turn, provide culturally conscious services for individuals and families.
Little research has been conducted on the resilience of the people or the culture in Appalachia (Helton & Keller, 2010). While Appalachians are resilient in terms of their long-standing history, current circumstances, and culture (Keefe, 2005; Jones, 1994) there is evidence of the dire need for services that bring out this resilience in individuals who need support and that fits with their culture (Helton & Keller, 2010). In addition, others have noted the problem of too few studies existing on effective treatment or services for people from Appalachia (Bauer & Growick, 2006; Butera, 2005; Diddle & Denham, 2010; Keefe, 2005; Owens, Richerson, Murphy, Jageleweski, & Rossi, 2007; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). This obvious gap in the literature and the helping professions is an important issue that needs to be addressed.

The research on resilience and ecological models include bolstering positive coping in order to compensate for negative factors and there are obvious gaps in the literature for using these models with specific cultural populations (Helton & Keller, 2010). Appalachia has a higher prevalence of mental health disorders than any other region in the country with more people using the emergency room for mental health issues than anywhere else (Zhang, Infante, Meit, & English, 2008). As a result, better services and interventions are essential. Implementing interventions that are culturally relevant is crucial in order to reduce these disparities. Understanding the methods of coping within the context of the culture itself is essential to designing better interventions that address the issues that persist within the population (Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011). By listening to the narratives of those who are considered resilient Appalachian people, much can be learned about how individuals, families,
communities, and the culture as a whole foster resilient qualities despite tough circumstances.

**Background of the Study**

Cultural competence is something that counselors have attempted to achieve for decades (Ratts, 2009). While the profession has now widely accepted the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) set forth by the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development, there should be a continuous striving for methods of practice that consider subcultures and experiences that make the profession more culturally conscious (Moodley, 2007). The MCC go a long way to providing a framework that enables helping professionals to think critically about their own culture in relation to that of their clients’ (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). However, it may not go far enough in providing a deeper look into how to integrate culture into practice in order to make it relevant and the best possible fit for individuals and families (Ratts, 2009).

Assumptions made by practitioners, although perhaps rooted in cultural awareness, may still be biased and not accurately portray what is most poignant to the client (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). The best source for the most accurate cultural information is directly from clients (Ratts, 2009). When addressing a client from a specific culture, it is best to consider the entire context of their development. It is within this context that the values they hold regarding their culture and their personal experiences inside and outside of that culture emerge (Harney, 2007). The Bioecological Model, formerly Bronfenbrenner’s ecological Model, provides a framework that helps
shape this kind of understanding from clients (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Harney, 2007). This model delineates layers of influences that have contributed to the development of the individual. In addition, it provides ideas about what has helped the individual become good at negotiating their environment and compensate for stressors or, what has held the individual back to create more dysfunctional coping strategies (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Nevertheless, this model falls short in providing guidance for use in varied contexts, specifically using cultural influences that may bolster resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Culture is not easily defined. However, one way to define culture is as a central component of the growth and development of individuals and, as a shared context amongst a group with both history and traditions as the foundation (Keefe, 2005). Understanding a culture with deep roots is imperative to understanding the individuals and families within that culture (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Appalachia is no exception. Just as people are shaped by their environments, environments and cultures are shaped by people (Keefe, 2005). Appalachia is well documented in the literature for its deficits, but seldom regarded for its strengths and attributes (Keefe, 2005). The people of Appalachia are not immune from this general disregard by mainstream society (Bauer & Growick, 2003). What makes the situation worse is that some of the stereotypes and generalizations appear true due to the socioeconomic conditions of the region and its people, such as poverty, lack of employment, and lower educational outcomes, as compared to the rest of the country (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Butera, 2005). As a result of this, Appalachia is portrayed as a region that has little to offer, with people who are
helpless (Keefe, 2005). Others however, present another side of Appalachia as a resilient culture with people who can be pioneers for the helping professions by illuminating on their resilience (Helton & Keller, 2010).

Although researchers in the area of resilience have focused largely on individual and family resilience, recent studies have taken a broader approach to include cultural resilience as an important influence on human development (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Helton & Keller, 2010; Kirmayer et al., 2011). This perspective does not overly emphasize risk factors, but rather provides a strength-based approach that enlists the help of cultural values in order to strengthen personal resilience. Cultures that are unique and have a shared history of marginalization and discrimination on one hand, and shared ideas of place, people, and traditions on the other, may benefit from a resilience model that provides insight into collective resilience that is critical to mental wellness (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Culture in context helps to buffer individuals, families and groups of people from risk factors that would otherwise hold them back.

**Context of the Study**

For the purposes of this study, Appalachian people are defined as those who were born in the 420-county region, and who have a parent or grandparent who was also born in the region. Appalachia covers a large area and is comprised of parts of 12 states and all of West Virginia. Although this population is far reaching, there are cultural values that persist throughout the region and among the various subcultures that exist within the context of Appalachia (Helton & Keller, 2010). Because of this, Appalachia provided the larger context for this study. In order to gain a deeper and richer data however, this study
took place only in West Virginia using participants who are West Virginian. This is due to the sheer size and number of people in Appalachia. By focusing only on people from West Virginia, the only entirely Appalachian state, this study focuses on one subculture within the broader context of Appalachia.

There are nearly 25 million people who live in Appalachia. Few research studies have focused on the overall cultural values and their benefits in terms of helping people from the region who are struggling overcome adversity (Helton & Keller, 2010). The work of helping professionals in the region has been largely unsuccessful due to the divergent theoretical models and frameworks that fall short of capturing the aspects of the culture that are germane to the well being and positive coping of the Appalachian people. Widely used approaches are often normed for mainstream, middle class white Americans. Although more than eighty percent of the region is comprised of white individuals, practices fail to capture the meaningful aspects of the culture that could prove helpful (Helton & Keller, 2010). In order to better serve this population, representative voices should be heard in order to find the solutions to providing better suited interventions and methods of treatment. The narratives of those who have flourished provide important perspectives into the context of culture as it relates to the individual and back to the culture as a whole. It is for these reasons that Appalachia has been selected.

**Statement of the Problem**

Helping professionals have largely fallen short in providing effective services in Appalachia, with both a lack of facilities and lack of culturally competent service providers (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Helton & Keller, 2010; Owens et al., 2007; Salyers &
Appalachians have mental health issues at rates higher than the national average (Zhang et al., 2008). Many areas in Appalachia are designated Mental Health Shortage Areas, including most of the rural areas (Owens et al., 2007). Emergency rooms are also used at a higher rate than the rest of the country for mental health issues (Zhang et al., 2008). The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) has identified six factors that contribute to the lack of access to mental health services in Appalachia: (a) stigma, (b) transportation, (c) payment options, (d) privacy issues, (e) choice of facilities, and (c) cultural or family barriers (Zhang et al., 2008). This could mean that services are not only hard to access, but those that are available are not culturally acceptable.

While on the surface it can appear as if Appalachian people are resistant to services due to some cultural values being barriers, a deeper inspection suggests that services may in fact be culturally irrelevant (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Using what the Appalachian culture has to offer may be one way to develop culturally appropriate practices that are strengths-based and contextual rather than deficit-based and only focused on the individual. Although media and some research has presented a one-sided view of Appalachia’s negative aspects, the first step in providing better informed and culturally relevant services is to look to the research that highlights the positive features of the culture (Helton & Keller, 2010).

There is research that emphasizes the benefits of incorporating aspects of the culture into services in order to encourage more widespread acceptance of counseling or other types of mental health services (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Kirmayer et al., 2011). “Interventions based on local knowledge have the advantage of fitting community characteristics and
building on community assets” (Walker, Sterling, Hoke, & Dearden, 2007, p. 571). This reference from public health shows that considering and implementing interventions developed by members of a culture or community can reduce health disparities. Appalachia may be just the place to implement some of the same practices for mental health.

The cultural values that have sustained Appalachia for generations may be the key to providing better and more culturally conscious mental health services in the region. Many of the values are consistent with the resiliency factors that contribute to positive coping in individuals, such as having a trusting adult throughout life, having the ability to be responsible for others, being resourceful, and being creative (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Walsh, 2003; Werner & Smith, 2001). Appalachian cultural values exhibit all of these considerations through an emphasis on independence, self-reliance, personalism, neighborliness, and familism among others (Jones, 1994). While research focusing on the role of culture in counseling has begun, many of the studies in Appalachia have been focused on one to five individuals in case studies (Butera, 2005; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Although invaluable as a first step in contributing to the literature, a more in-depth look into the culture through resilient people may provide a more far-reaching examination of the influence of the Appalachian cultural values overall. In order to better serve this population that has been overlooked, research must take a more committed look at how to fill the gaps in the literature and how create more culturally appropriate interventions that can be used on a larger scale.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand the Appalachian cultural values that promote resilience through narratives of people who are from West Virginia. This study is designed to gain insight into the influences of culture and how it can be incorporated into the practices of helping professionals to increase overall cultural competence. Participants were asked to share personal narratives about how they developed strength and overcame challenging circumstances. They were asked to share an object of importance and speak about its significance as a source of strength. Participants were all adults who were selected by Appalachian helping professionals, who are colleagues of the researcher. They recruited people who self-identified as being from West Virginia and having a grandparent who lived in West Virginia. The participants are resilient people according to the recruiters. They were asked to share what they were comfortable with about themselves only. The interviews were semi-structured and followed a loose interview guide that is in Appendix A. The purpose of this study is to inform the practices for helping professionals who work with people from the Appalachian culture through the voices of people from the culture in an attempt to educate and to demystify some of the stereotypes that are prevalent in regards to the culture.

Research Questions

What do the narratives regarding strength reflect about resilient people from West Virginia?
• How do the Appalachian cultural values help or hinder the growth and development of individuals?
• What types of challenges present themselves in the narratives about strength in resilient people from Appalachia?

**Significance of the Study**

Appalachia is often overlooked as having a unique cultural group. Outsiders often have negative views of the region and culture due to stereotypes and stigma that persist as a result of media and literature. Although the scholarly work regarding Appalachian cultural values by Jones (1994) constituted a beneficial step toward rehabilitating some of the detrimental images imposed on the culture, it is important that this marginalized culture continue to have vehicles to voice the positive features and assets in ways that are helpful and relevant to them. The innate resilience of the culture and the people should be emphasized rather than downplayed and used to help others who are also from the culture.

In the helping professions, researchers and practitioners alike have continued to find ways to increase competence in their practices. While much has been done in the areas of multicultural competence, counselors and other helping professionals could increase their awareness, knowledge, and skills (Sue et al., 1992) by learning how to interweave culture into their services, making for more culturally conscious interventions (Moodley, 2008). This research goes a step beyond that to include a social justice framework that brings light to the issues that plague marginalized populations and create action on behalf of those cultures (Ratts, 2009). In addition, considering models that
conceptualize a more holistic view of human development may give more meaningful representations of the internal and external contexts that contribute to coping. Few research studies exist to date that incorporate opinions from a marginalized cultural group, a social justice framework, the resiliency theories, and ecological development models in order to create better ways of developing interventions. Thus, this dissertation is an exploration of the narratives of Appalachian culture and this study and applies cultural resilience as a construct through Appalachian people who are considered resilient for the purpose of informing the helping professions. All the while, the contributions of the participants help to further break down negative stereotypes and give voice to the positive qualities of the Appalachian culture.

**Definitions**

For the purpose of better understanding the study, the following terms are defined:

1. *Appalachia*- A region in the United States that isolated in and around the Appalachian mountain range that covers 200,000 square miles and 410 counties in 13 states (ARC, 2008).

2. *Appalachian*- A term that refers to the culture and context of Appalachia, and is often used as a term to describe the people of the region by outsiders and scholars (Keefe, 2005).

3. *(Bronfenbrenner's) Bioecological Model*- The newest evolved version of the Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model that is the study of human development over time that looks at individuals and individuals within groups over the course of a
lifetime, that encompasses process, person, context and time; this includes
generational time, historical time, and the future (Bronfenbrenner & Morris,
2006).

4. **Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model**-A theoretical model of human development
that emphasizes interrelationships between individuals and their environments
(community, subculture, and culture) on various levels, micro-macro, in terms of
person, process, and context, across the lifespan (Harney, 2007).

5. **Culture**-A way of life and a means of shared discourse among a group of people
that has both traditional and historical context (Keefe, 2005).

6. **Cultural Competence**-A term used in the helping professions to describe practices
that have thoroughly examined the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary for
counseling people form differing cultural backgrounds (Sue et al.,1992).

7. **Cultural Resilience**-The way in “which the strengths of one’s culture promote the
development of coping” (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008, p. 198) which includes the
developmental context of cultural norms, family structure, and peer relationships.

8. **Family Resilience**-A framework that combines ecological and developmental
perspectives to view family functioning in relation to its broader sociocultural
context and evolution over multiple generations and throughout life cycles
(Walsh, 2003).

9. **Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC)**-A framework that helps
counselors increase their awareness of a client’s worldview and provide culturally
relevant interventions and techniques. It is comprised of the following domains:
counselor awareness of their own assumptions, biases, and values; awareness of client’s worldview; culturally appropriate interventions (Arredondo et al., 1996; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006; Sue et al., 1992).

10. **Positive Deviance**- The ability for at-risk individuals to practice uncommon practices that allow them to thrive while their neighbors with equally difficult circumstances may not (Walker et al., 2007).

11. **Poverty**- “The extent to which an individual goes without resources” that are material, social, and psychological in nature including financial, familial, spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, support system, relationships/role models, and knowledge of hidden rules (Payne, 2003, p. 7).

12. **Protective Factors**- Constructs that help to buffer against risk factors and allow the ability to cope effectively through adverse circumstances. Internal protective factors are personal attributes that come from within the individual. External protective factors are things that come from one’s environment that provide support (Helton & Keller, 2010).

13. **Resilience**- The ability to bounce back or rebound from adversity successfully and continue to thrive despite hardships (Walsh, 2003).

14. **Risk Factors**- Issues that inhibit positive coping and development in individuals such as living in poverty, high stress living environment, coming from poor communities with few resources, physical and mental health issues, trauma, and few external support systems (Lietz, 2011).
15. **Social Justice** - A counseling perspective and stance that acknowledges power, privilege, and oppression in order to be a better advocate and activist for clients in order to address “inequitable social, political, and economic conditions that impede on the academic, career, and personal/social development of individuals, families, and communities” (Ratts, 2009, p. 160).

**Conceptual Framework**

One conceptual framework that was used for analyzing the narratives of the resilient people from Appalachia was the Bioecological Model developed by Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In addition the social justice framework was used throughout the study to bring forth the voices of those from Appalachia and specifically, West Virginia. The social justice framework was used during data analysis and as a mechanism for reflexivity. This serves as a stance from which participants were understood and as a way to acknowledge the issues of power, privilege, and oppression (Creswell, 2013; Ratts, 2009).

The ecological framework considers several things; “Ecological models encompass an evolving body of theory and research concerned with the processes and conditions that govern the lifelong course of human development in the actual environments in which human beings live” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p.37). By using this model, the data was understood in terms of lifelong influences that included cultural contexts as well. This framework served to guide the research and analysis process and provided the necessary foundation for understanding the areas that were explored, both
Appalachian cultural values and cultural resilience. The Bioecological Model was used because it provides a way to consider human development in relation to one’s environment over the course of a lifetime (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). This model conceptualizes the various aspects of time, including historical, generational and future orientations of development in relation to the individual (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). What makes this model superior to the previous Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model, for the purposes of this study, is this emphasis on generational and historical development when applied to the context of Appalachia. Although the previous model did consider the micro-macro contexts in relation to culture and subculture, the more recent model expands this to better understand how contexts have been influenced over a period of time (Harney, 2007). Data was analyzed through a person, process, context, time lens and through the micro-macro levels of context.

The social justice framework is relevant on two different levels: as an important lens for underserved individuals and as a tool for reflexivity. Social justice has many applications, but its value in this study was to better conceptualize the participants as people who are unique due to their sociopolitical issues, their collective history, their understanding of what has helped or hindered their development, and what they believe provided them strength in regards to their own culture and subcultures. Social justice is a perspective and stance that acknowledges power, privilege, and oppression in order to be a better advocate and activist for clients in order to address “inequitable social, political, and economic conditions that impede on the academic, career, and personal/social development of individuals, families, and communities” (Ratts, 2009, p. 160). It has
come to the attention of the counseling profession that expanding these considerations to people who may appear similar in background but who may be from different subcultures could enhance the overall approach to working with them (Moodley, 2008; Ratts, 2009). It is for this reason that the social justice theory was used to understand both the contexts of injustice and marginalization within the narratives of the participants, but also as a way to practice reflexivity as a researcher. The social justice theory is a more expansive approach to better understand sociopolitical, sociocultural, and political issues as they affect individuals (Ratts, 2009). As a researcher of an underrepresented group, and an outsider of the culture, I find it necessary to include this acknowledgement as a credibility technique as well (Creswell, 2013).

Limitations and Delimitations

Before the data was analyzed, the design of this study was thoroughly considered. This study was designed to look at a portion of a marginalized population, Appalachia. Although capturing the entire population within Appalachia would be ideal, the depth desired for this study limited the number of people who participated. In addition to this, limiting the participants to only one area within Appalachia was also essential. Although it would be interesting to gain a broader understanding of the cultural values across Appalachia, this study used only participants from West Virginia to ensure that the research focused more intensely on a subpopulation within the region. This may affect the generalizability of the study to other people outside of West Virginia and within Appalachia. As with all research, it is up to the readers to decide if the information presented can be generalized beyond the participants. Because this study is qualitative,
the researcher is the research tool. With this, as with any research, there can be bias in when interpreting the data and because of this, several techniques were established for trustworthiness.

Appalachian culture was chosen as the subject of this study because I live and work within the region. This research was designed as I became frustrated with two aspects of working in the region: a limited amount of literature that is strengths-based on people from Appalachia and because of the lack of culturally appropriate interventions available for people seeking help within the region. Because of this I made a decision to contribute to the gap in research and begin the steps toward providing insight for helping professionals. Although the topic of cultural resilience could be applied to any intact culture, Appalachia is a culture that could benefit from a positive emphasis on the qualities that are protective factors.

**Overview of the Study**

This is a qualitative study that is presented in six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction of the study, statement of the problem, statement of the purpose, research questions, significance of the study, definitions of key terms that are used in the study, the context of the study, and limitations and delimitations. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature that includes a comprehensive overview of Appalachia, including Appalachian cultural values and considerations for helping professionals working in the region, resilience, the Bioecological Model, and the Multicultural Counseling Competencies and social justice. Chapter 3 lays out the methodology for the study and chapter 4 includes the summaries of the narratives of the participants. Chapter 5 presents
the findings, including the major themes and cross-comparison of the data. Chapter 6 includes the discussion, implications for helping professionals, limitations, and future research considerations. An Epilogue is placed after Chapter 6 that explores the experience of the researcher as a means of trustworthiness.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Appalachia and Resilience

The literature on Appalachia is as scattered and far reaching as the region itself. No one discipline has been able to claim a clear understanding of how to preserve the culture and empower Appalachian people. From social work to nursing, from anthropology to sociology, from literature to history, many have attempted to dispel the issues that hold the region back while the people and culture somehow hold together. This region and its culture have shown that no matter what the circumstances, many people from Appalachia possess an innate ability to rise above adversity. This type of hardiness is the heart of the Appalachian spirit and central to the cultural values that persist throughout the region. Although there appears to be innate resilience within the Appalachian culture, methods on how to help Appalachian people who are struggling are limited (Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Developing culturally relevant interventions and techniques for helping professionals is not only needed, but truly deserving of the Appalachian population. By first exploring how the people of Appalachia cultivate cultural resilience despite adversity, helping professionals can come together to develop interventions and strategies to help identify strengths and sources of resilience in order to empower those who need help (Helton & Keller, 2010; Notter, MacTavish, & Shamah, 2008).

Even before President Lyndon B. Johnson declared the War on Poverty in 1964 in West Virginia, Appalachia struggled with issues related to geographic isolation and a lack of social and economic development (Keefe, 2005; Templeton et al., 2008). As a
result, the region and its people have been subjected to stereotypes and general disregard through media and literature (ARC, 2003; Keefe, 2005). Even scholars have helped to further marginalize and reduce Appalachia and its people to the issues that plague them rather than promoting the experiences that show how Appalachia flourishes (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Diddle & Denham, 2010; Helton & Keller, 2010). Giving attention to the positive attributes of the Appalachian culture could help to bolster the interventions of helping professionals, rather than using practices that are normed for mainstream, middle class America (Helton & Keller, 2010; Keefe, Hastrup, & Thomas, 2005; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006; Templeton, Bush, Lash, Robinson, & Gale, 2008).

Resilience is a quality that allows people to master adversity (Walsh, 2002). As a response to pathology-driven characteristics, resiliency focuses on positive attributes in individuals, families, and cultures. By using a resilience-based approach to understanding individuals within a culture, a framework can be built for understanding not only the culture, but the strengths of the individuals within the culture (Helton & Keller, 2010). Considering culture in context is crucial in identifying the social roots of resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2011). The people of Appalachia are often overlooked as a cultural minority (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Keefe, 2005). Thoroughly and critically looking at the models and techniques that have catered to other cultural minorities and people in poverty can support better ways of developing the best approaches and interventions for working in Appalachia (Keefe, 2005).

The intent of this review is to highlight the literature that has helped to break down some of the stereotypes within Appalachia while drawing out the positive
characteristics that help to make Appalachian people culturally resilient. The scholars who have helped illuminate the positive features of both the people and the region are critical to this study and to the dignity of the entire region (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Diddle & Denham, 2010; Helton & Keller, 2010; Jones, 1994; Keefe, 2005; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006; Templeton et al., 2008). In contrast, individuals who have helped to further marginalize and reduce Appalachia will also be considered in the discussion. In addition, defining Appalachia and Appalachian people historically and presently is fundamental. The theories and research that best explain resilience will also be presented and discussed. While some of the ideas about resilience are still being negotiated across helping disciplines, aspects of the literature that are salient to this population will be explored. In addition to the construct of resilience, other ideas from positive psychology will also be presented on positive deviance and learned optimism. Lastly, the two frameworks that are important to understanding culture in context, the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (Sue et al., 1992), social justice theory (Ratts, 2009) and Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), will also be presented as they relate to Appalachian culture.

**Defining Appalachia.**

There is some debate over what makes up Appalachia. According to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), Appalachia is a region that covers 200,000 square miles and 420 counties in 13 states. The term *Appalachia* refers to the region that encompasses the area in and around the Appalachian Mountains, including the foothills (ARC, n.d.; Helton & Keller, 2010; Keefe, 2005). These areas are broken into three
subregions: Northern Appalachia, Central Appalachia, and Southern Appalachia (Pollard, 2003). These subregions include all of West Virginia, southern New York, much of Pennsylvania, Ohio, eastern Tennessee and Kentucky, western Maryland and Virginia, North and South Carolina, northern Georgia and Alabama, and northeastern Mississippi (Pollard, 2003). The region is vast and beautiful, comprised of peaks and valleys, streams and lakes, which is attractive to both insiders and outsiders.

Two thirds of Appalachian counties are rural with one third of the Appalachian population living in those counties (Tang & Russ, 2007). Of the nearly 25 million people who call Appalachia home, roughly forty-two percent live in rural areas and fifty-eight percent live in or near metropolitan areas (ARC, n.d.). Although rural Appalachia is often admired for its beauty and hospitable people, poverty and other systemic hardships do exist in the region at typically higher rates than the rest of the United States. Appalachia’s average poverty rate is eighteen percent overall and higher in rural areas, which is higher than the rest of the country (ARC, n.d.). While some areas have cities nearby, much of Appalachia continues to be cut off from the advantages of urban life with health care facilities and access to social service organizations nearby. This is one of the reasons many Appalachian counties have been declared Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (Owens et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). In addition, the large issue of health disparities in general has also been examined, with a higher prevalence of mental health disorders and more people using emergency rooms for mental health issues as compared with the rest of the country (Zhang et al., 2008).
Appalachian population.

Historically, Appalachia and its’ inhabitants have been as controversial as the research that has attempted to conceptualize it (Keefe, 2005). Many of the people who live in Appalachia have ancestors who have resided in the region for generations. Defining who is truly from the region is tricky. One definition is someone who was born in the 420-county region and whose parents and grandparents were born in the region as well (ARC, n.d.; Helton & Keller, 2010). Appalachians are often overlooked as cultural minorities by outsiders and insiders alike (Diddle & Denham, 2010). Keefe (2005) illustrated this by explaining that Appalachians are “reluctant ethnics” who shy away from coining themselves “Appalachians” due to the history of disrespect and oppression by outsiders (p. 6).

Diversity is alive and well within the population, although not apparent upon first glance (Diddle & Denham, 2010). According to the 2010 census, most counties in Appalachia had less than a ten percent minority population with predominately white residents (Census, 2010). Nevertheless, Appalachia has a rich history and culture that illustrates a different picture of its people than what is typified by television, literature, and scholarship that painted the unfair portrait that exists today (Massey, 2008).

The first residents of Appalachia were the Native Americans who inhabited the region. Many of them were of Iroquois (Northern Appalachia), and Cherokee (Central and Southern Appalachia) descent, making up the various bands and tribes that lived abundantly throughout the mountains and foothills (Keefe, 2005). Although many Cherokees were forced to relocate during the government removal called the Trail of
Tears from 1838-1839 (Keefe, 2005), some stayed behind, disappearing into the landscape and eventually becoming interspersed the newer European inhabitants. Upon the first wave of exploration of the New World, Africans who were brought to this country as slaves by French and Spanish explorers sometimes escaped into the hills, becoming part of the native culture (Diddle & Denham, 2010; Jackson, 2006; Straw, 2006).

Once settlement began by the rest of Europe, Appalachia became inhabited by European families who were largely Scotch-Irish, Welsh, and German who moved to the area for work in the coal mines and railroad construction (Diddle & Denham, 2010; Keefe, 2005). Another influx of German Reform settlers that began in the 1700’s and still persists today, draws individuals from Germany and Switzerland, currently known as the Amish and Mennonite communities (Diddle & Denham, 2010). Diddle and Denham (2010) note that “as diverse settlers in the region became more integrated over time, cultures blended and new practices and belief systems were forged, adding regional and geographical uniqueness that must be considered with any cultural assessment.” (p. 177). Many of these groups have merged, making for a culture that is as exceptional and extraordinary as the region itself.

The impact of Appalachia’s economy.

Appalachia and its people have a long-standing history of being marginalized and taken advantage of by those who have interest in the abundant resources of the region: coal, oil, natural gas, and timber (Keefe, 2005). These resources continue to be the largest economic base for the entire region today (Bauer & Growick, 2003). Although
resource extraction can appear beneficial to the Appalachian economy, common themes in the history and literature portray a rather negative impact (Keefe, 2005). People from the region have seldom been able to define themselves apart from their resources and from the stereotypes that still create discord today. They have been typified by missionaries, resource barons, railroad tycoons, and government agents, who usually hoped to gain something from the region without much regard for the people themselves (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006).

Stripping people of their land and displacing them, removing mineral rights from private property, and pollution issues surrounding resource accrual are all problems with which Appalachians are all too familiar with (Keefe, 2005). Coal mining, mountaintop removal, and clear-cutting forests are common practices with sometimes devastating environmental and aesthetic consequences. Even today, Appalachia is again facing tough issues such as hydraulic fracturing and strip mining that leaves water sources and soils in irreparable condition and air quality at harmful levels (Fischetti, 2010). The promise is always job creation and economic security. History tells us that once the resources are depleted, the interested parties, such as gas and oil companies, fold up and leave the region, taking the jobs and cash flow with them (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Also left behind are the mutilated landscapes, expended ecosystems, and mistreated people (Bauer & Growick, 2003). While the companies that have used up the resources that have benefitted, Appalachia still largely struggles to meet the basic demands of a modern society.
As much of Appalachia is located in remote areas, the region is left behind when it comes to modern advances: communication methods (telephone, television, and internet), transportation, access to social and health services, manufacturing, and utilities (water, sewer, and trash disposal) are all basic services that are sometimes hard to come by in the region (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Keefe, 2005). Low-wage jobs help bring in some income, but many continue to struggle to make ends meet and depend more and more on family to help (Butera, 2005). Being resourceful and pulling together are important parts of being from Appalachia, and being close-knit and willing to help out others is a result of these conditions (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). As a result, the people of Appalachia find ways to make ends meet.

Many people depend on the land by hunting, gardening, gathering edibles from the woods, preserving food and pooling harvest surpluses which are all common practices in rural Appalachia (Butera, 2005). Living with extended family or on family land plots is also a common way to afford homes and property (Owens et al, 2007). Family homes are also commonly passed onto other family members through inheritances or land contracts (Keefe, 2005). Other common practices that are widespread are dependence on Social Security/Disability, Cash Assistance Programs, Food Stamps, and Medicaid, due to lack of jobs and a disproportionate number of individuals who are disabled for vocational, developmental or psychological reasons (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Butera, 2005). Limited by the lack of employment opportunities, Appalachians are often resourceful in their attempt to subsist.
The challenges of poverty in Appalachia.

While the issue of poverty is persistent throughout America, Appalachia is faced with a disproportionate number of people living in poverty as compared to similar regions throughout the country (Diddle & Denham, 2010). While the definition of poverty varies, many agree that poverty is based on financial struggle. The federal government defines poverty on an income scale. For example if one family of two adults and two children has an income of $22,000 or less, they would be considered below the poverty line (Census, 2010). One out of every five children in Appalachia lives in poverty (Bauer & Growick, 2003). There are also more grandparents taking care of grandchildren and more people who are sixty-five years or older living in poverty as well (ARC, n.d.). The struggles of Appalachia are persistent throughout the region, but there are higher concentrations of disparities in the Central section including much of West Virginia, northern parts of Mississippi, and Southeastern Ohio (Pollard, 2003). Several of these areas have also been designated Mental Health Shortage Areas, or MHSA (Owens et al., 2007).

Nevertheless, regardless of the circumstances, seventy-three percent of Appalachian reside in the state of their birth (ARC, n.d.). “People in Appalachia choose to remain where they are born because of their profound dedication to family and community.” (Bauer & Growick, 2003, p. 20). People from Appalachia tend to stick together for family and for the place they call home, especially in the rural areas. Although characterizing Appalachia based on its deprivations is widespread in the literature, it is not necessarily justified upon closer inspection (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006;
Tang & Russ, 2007). Some people who live in poverty do not feel poor because they are rich in other ways, like having a family or a community they can trust and depend on. People in Appalachia are land rich, or have trades that help them have a positive view of their life (Keefe, 2005; Jones, 1994). In this way, poverty is a subjective reality in Appalachia.

Another way to look at poverty comes from the work of Ruby Payne (2002, 2003) who defines poverty as “the extent to which an individual survives without resources” (Payne, 2003, p. 7). These include financial, familial, spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, support system, relationships/role models, and knowledge of hidden rules (Payne, 2003). Considering poverty from a federal perspective and from Payne’s perspective are both helpful in understanding how poverty can look different for close knit families and cultures (Mullin & Arce, 2008; Walsh, 2002; Walsh, 2003). People from Appalachian culture are no exception. If, for instance, someone lacks money, but has family and an extended support system, a strong spiritual connection, emotional, physical, and mental wellness and a knowledge of the surrounding culture, there is a good chance that individual could compensate for their financial situation and be resilient (Diddle & Denham, 2010; Mullin & Arce, 2008; Payne, 2003). Although poverty is often linked to negative outcomes, it may be that for some people, such as those from Appalachia, culture-related assets can help to compensate for some of these negative outcomes.

Although sometimes individuals, families and cultures can prevail over poverty it does come with numerous challenges that should not be ignored. In 2000 ARC identified
“nine states consisting of counties that have been labeled “distressed counties,” having four areas of immediate concern: income, unemployment, poverty, and infant mortality (Bauer & Growick, 2003, p. 18). Poverty can be identified as the lead cause for many of the issues within the Appalachian population. Poverty contributes to the issues that persist throughout much of Appalachia including a disproportionate amount of people who are disabled, retired, unemployed, and who struggle with mental and physical health issues (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Diddle & Denham, 2010; Zhang et al., 2008). More children and people over sixty-five live in poverty in Appalachia than anywhere else in the country (Diddle & Denham, 2010). Poverty, in general, has been proven to be the cause of psychological distress, especially in children, leading to poor coping throughout life (Wadsworth & Berger, 2006).

People looking at the Appalachian culture from the outside often see only the overarching issues related to poverty that present a negative view of Appalachia and its people. Stereotypes are persistent and played out in many forms of media, including scholarship (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Helton & Keller, 2010). Seeing the people only as impoverished “hillbillies” or “rednecks” still taints the views of this culture today (Tang & Russ, 2007). In some attempts to further define the region only outcomes that perpetuate the issues of poverty rise to the surface. Keefe (2005) discussed this in terms of a model of poverty proposed by Oscar Lewis. In this model, rather than seeing cultural difference, culture is seen as a deficit (Keefe, 2005). When this model was used to help illuminate the issues of poverty in Appalachia, it only helped to lay blame on coal companies and did not sufficiently highlight the positive attributes of the culture despite
its’ issues with poverty (Keefe, 2005). What this research pointed out was that using models that placed “authoritarianism, fatalism, present-time orientation, suspicion of authority, a tolerance of pathology, feelings of helplessness and inferiority” on the poor only contributes to the persistence of poverty (Keefe, 2005, p. 12-13).

Even with these struggles, Appalachia shows resilient features. Resilience was once thought to be a personality trait alone, recent research has identified and defined the construct of cultural resilience. Certain protective factors can contribute to the resilience in individuals living in poverty that are more ecological in nature such as the influences of family, community, and traditions (Mullin & Arce, 2008; Walsh, 2002; Walsh, 2003). For the people of Appalachia, it appears that their cultural values may ameliorate the difficult life circumstances with which they are faced.

**Appalachian cultural values.**

The term *culture* has seemingly endless definitions that have evolved throughout time and still create some dissonance among scholars. Culture can be defined as both a way of life and a means of shared discourse among a group of people (Keefe, 2005). Both definitions portray the micro and macro aspects of culture. Culture does not make an individual entirely; however an individual is, in essence, a product of their environment. In order to properly understand cultural systems an examination of the parts in relation to the whole is necessary (Keefe, 2005).

Appalachian culture is one that is well studied but poorly understood in regards to the part it may have in cultivating resilience among the people from the region (Helton & Keller, 2010). The cultural values in Appalachia consist of similar factors that have been
attributed to resilient individuals, family units, and cultures. In order to define cultural resilience in Appalachia, first the culture must be defined. In Appalachia, the construct of culture is even more difficult to illustrate due to the disinclination of the people from the region to identify as Appalachian (Keefe, 2005; Tang & Russ, 2007). At the same time, many people from Appalachia are open to identifying themselves as being from the region. Although complex and convoluted, this separation has done little to inhibit the culture from persisting for hundreds of years.

With a rich history and unique perspective on living off the land, Appalachia has fostered a culture all its own. Even within a vast region spanning many states, many of the same cultural values persist throughout the region into the communities and families that inhabit the hillsides and valleys. The known Appalachian cultural values stem from the work of sociologist Loyal Jones (1994), who studied Appalachian culture and describes ten beliefs that are prominent: (a) independence, self-reliance, and pride; (b) neighborliness; (c) familism; (d) personalism; (e) religion; (f) humility and modesty; (g) love of place; (h) patriotism; (i) sense of beauty; and (j) sense of humor. Other works point out similar cultural values, but none quite as extensively as the work of Jones over several decades. These values are both independent of one another and intertwined, much like the people of Appalachia.

*Independence, self-reliance, and pride* are characteristics of individuals from Appalachia that are prized and appreciated. This drive to be self-sufficient likely stems from the settlement of the region which resisted government enforcement (Tang & Russ, 2007). Settlers became independent by making ends meet with the help of family and
neighbors rather than outside help (Keefe, 2005). The ability to fix something has great implications, too. Not being geographically close to large metropolitan areas, people depend on their own resources to find solutions (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Tang & Russ, 2007). In addition, not wanting to be indebted to anyone is important in keeping with this tradition. Asking for something or asking for help from an outsider may be somewhat humiliating so, suffering through without help is a more honorable position to take (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006).

This applies to helping professionals as well. When people from Appalachia have issues that could be better handled by professionals, there is a tendency to deal with the problem within the family or through trusted neighbors (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Helton & Keller, 2010). Seeking outside help may be interpreted as being weak, and may result is the person feeling humiliated by reaching out for help (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Research on families from Appalachia has shown that there is distrust of outsiders and some fear of being judged by practitioners which are directly related to cultural factors (Owens et al., 2007). A last resort may entail contacting one key person from the outside who is trusted by the family (Tang & Russ, 2007). Nevertheless, it has also been shown that this distrust is not always true if the outsider becomes a trusted person (Templeton et al., 2008).

There is a fine line between interdependence and independence. While individuals are encouraged to develop autonomy from an early age, it is through the efforts of the family and community in which these skills are typically gained (Templeton et al., 2008). Sometimes pursuing personal goals may in fact result in surpassing family,
and change can actually be detrimental to the family or community (Tang & Russ, 2007).

Cooperative independence is often encouraged as a way to better one’s own situation while still maintaining the values of the culture (Keefe, 2005). Nevertheless, independence, self-reliance, and pride are qualities that cultivate positive identity within individuals and garner resilience (Helton & Keller, 2010). It can be equated with empowerment and the ability to set goals (Helton & Keller, 2010). At the same time, too many personal goals can be equated with arrogance and ultimately be damaging to one’s family and even community (Tang & Russ, 2007). If someone is encouraged by their family to set goals, then that can be a favorable quality by keeping within the parameters of the cultural values and respecting the expectations and roles of the family (Helton & Keller, 2010).

Neighborliness is another aspect of this reliance on insiders rather than outsiders. In Appalachia, neighbors are often like extended members of family helping look after everything from gardens to children (Templeton et al., 2008). Neighbors allow people the ability to also practice cooperative independence, which is a tradition that has fostered the resourcefulness and self-sufficiency necessary for this rugged terrain (Keefe, 2005, p. 8). Fellow community members and neighbors kept close watch on each other during the settlement of the region with the intention to keep government agencies at bay, and this cooperative approach helped them achieve their autonomy (Keefe, 2005).

The ability to be independent in Appalachia often means relying heavily on trusted neighbors, friends, and family. This is true in both urban and rural Appalachian communities and most likely a result of the migration of these individuals on a frequent
basis (Helton & Keller, 2010). It has been shown that through the help of these trusted networks the people of Appalachia have helped to create a method of making sure that children develop appropriate social skills and become more competent members of their community (Templeton et al., 2008). This, “it takes a village” approach often includes coaches, religious leaders, teachers, camps, and social clubs that “promoted adult involvement and support with youth” which taught them responsibility and respect as well as independence (Templeton et al., 2008, p. 76-77).

Equality in Appalachia helped to nurture a better sense of community (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). People in Appalachia tend to feel connected to one another despite their careers or educational level. This too is part of the neighborliness that is reflected in the culture. Emphasis is put on respecting your fellow community members and treating them fairly. In addition, neighbors and community members support one another in ways that go beyond just checking in, sometimes caring for one another similarly to how a family would (Helton & Keller, 2010).

Familism encompasses one of the central elements of Appalachian cultural values (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006; Tang & Russ, 2007). A family-centered culture, Appalachian culture prizes family solidarity in which loyalty runs deep (Jones, 1994). With such a long-standing history of isolation from dominant society, Appalachian families have strong bonds (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Tang & Russ, 2007). Even if families are somewhat dysfunctional, there is still a loyalty that is embedded among family members. It is for this reason that family is the single most influential factor in the lives of people from Appalachia (Helton & Keller, 2010).
Families can be biological or not, consisting sometimes of extended family networks or *fictive kin* (Templeton et al., 2008). Fictive kin can be equally valued as family members and are treated as such. Keeping issues within the family is a common response to many hardships, so knowing how to navigate a family system is essential to working with anyone from the region (Bauer & Growick, 2003). Families can be considered protective factors or barriers in Appalachia (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). However, an individual’s dedication to their family should be expected in some capacity (Bauer & Growick, 2003). Even if tensions are high, families often accept each other despite negative feelings. In Appalachia who you are related to is more important than successes like degrees or careers (Tang & Russ, 2007). The bonds of family members often run deep and expand out to even distant relatives who are also considered important supports and kept close as a part of the extended family unit (Helton & Keller, 2010; Jones, 1994).

Another characteristic that is valued as a cultural factor is *personalism*. The culture in Appalachia is person-centered and as a result, people value one another (Helton & Keller, 2010). Personalism embraces the hospitable side of the Appalachian culture. Appalachian people place a high value on respect and not wanting to disrespect others (Helton & Keller, 2010). This type of respect is found in the types of relationships people have with one another. Confrontation is avoided at all costs with an emphasis being placed on respect and not wanting to hurt other’s feelings (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). This is true in a clinical context as well, sometimes agreeing to services or ideas that are not appealing. Another aspect of personalism is making sure not to boast or brag,
which is also evident in the cultural values of modesty and humility as well (Jones, 1994). Bragging may show an edge or advantage over others and is often thought of as disrespectful.

Modesty and humility allow for more emphasis on equality rather than affluence or scholarship (Tang & Russ, 2007). Bauer & Growick (2003) pointed out a leveling tendency in Appalachia with the common statement “I’m as good as anyone else but no better” (p. 19). By having this type of outlook, people are thought of as equals. This attitude allows people from the culture to see that everyone has faults and that working on bettering oneself is lifelong (Helton & Keller, 2010). There is a difference however, between working on oneself and believing that you are better than someone. In this way, equity is an important part of belonging within the community or culture (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). People who have heightened egos are often thought of as arrogant (Bauer & Growick, 2003). Flaunting titles and honors is looked down upon instead of achievements that one should be overtly proud of. For example, modest and humble lifestyles might be thought of as more sensible instead of unrestrained spending on excessive material goods or lavish homes. Instead, using what has been passed down from one generation to the next is more important (Keefe, 2005). Using what has been born out of necessity and utility is more admirable (Jones, 1994).

Religion is often considered a high priority in Appalachian culture (Jones, 1994). Diddle & Denham (2010) went a step further to broaden the term to spirituality when referring to the Appalachian culture to cover various subcultures and ethnicities within the region. They go on to point out that although the foundations of the European settlers
were largely protestant, other religions and forms of Christianity influenced the area as well (2010). They based their definition of spirituality on a broader ecological context that includes various aspects of religion and faith that come from larger cultural constructs such as the collective ideas religion (Keefe, 2005; Diddle & Denham, 2010). Regardless of the religious affiliation, the role of spirituality cannot be ignored for most Appalachian individuals even if their faith is undefined (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006).

Spirituality is part of other cultural values as well, including egalitarianism, neighborliness, and love of land (Diddle & Denham, 2010). Many people draw some meaning from their family’s collective ideas about religion or spirituality (Jones, 1994). A common example of this is in the strong attachment to the land with many people defining their homelands as spiritual places (Keefe, 2005). In this way, religion and faith are collective but also individually based and can vary from person to person, which comes from a long tradition of not wanting to be told what to believe (Jones, 1994; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Nevertheless, the importance of religion, faith, and spirituality cannot be underemphasized because of the crucial role they play within the family and culture itself (Helton & Keller, 2010).

Love of place is a foundational aspect of the Appalachian culture. “Attachment to the land, land symbolizing family, livelihood, and heritage, brought with it a deep loyalty to place and a sense that the mountains themselves, like the hills of Zion in the Old Testament, are sacred” (Keefe, 2005, p. 8-9). Not only does the rugged landscape provide aesthetic beauty, but it also serves as the barrier that has largely kept insiders in and outsiders out. Sometimes when people choose to leave their old home place, they
find that their family is often disappointed and has difficulty understanding why they would want to leave (Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Jones (1994) points out that even if they leave, they come back as often as possible or think about moving back permanently. Home is how many people from Appalachian help define themselves. Even if they leave, this connection to their land and home persists (Helton & Keller, 2010).

*Sense of Beauty* not only encompasses the natural aesthetic beauty of the mountains and foothills, but also refers to the long-standing artistic traditions of the region. This connection is “inherent in the love of nature, land, music, and folk art” (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006, p. 137). Most things were originally made out of necessity and function (Jones, 1994). As time passed, the pride that is also part of the culture began to take hold, and function turned into creativity and beauty in everyday objects. A sense of beauty can be found in everything from artwork, crafts, music and musical instruments, gardens, and homes. Quilting, for example, is a long standing tradition born out of necessity for keeping warm in the winters. Quilts served as a means of communication to people traveling the Underground Railroad throughout Appalachia. They are also passed down from generation to generation in families as heirlooms. Quilting, like other folk art and skilled crafts, promoted creativity and skills taught to youngsters (Helton & Keller, 2010). Today, many of these objects are admired by insiders and outsiders alike. These strong traditions are still passed on to the next generations and considered important pieces of the culture in general. The therapeutic implications of these crafts and folk arts
have yet to be determined although some scholars believe that there could be important possibilities for implementation (Keefe & Green, 2005).

In Appalachia, it is well known that the people of this region value their country highly, even though there is a fine line between bureaucracy and patriotism. *Patriotism* stems out of the long-standing devotion to America as a free country (Jones, 1994).

Many people from Appalachia have committed to serving this country and continue to do so today. Not only are Appalachian soldiers regarded for their willingness to enlist, but their skills as soldiers as well. Jones (1994) tells of an officer who reported that they are valued as point men and patrols due to their motivation, their ability to navigate forests better, and their familiarity with weapons. In addition to service, Appalachians take pride in everyday rights of citizens as well; voting and participation in local political events are also important (1994). The importance on patriotism may be decreasing in Appalachia, however (Helton & Keller, 2010).

*A Sense of Humor* in Appalachia has been an invaluable asset for the Appalachian people who have lived through sometimes adverse living conditions and difficult realities. Humor is a coping mechanism and a source of entertainment (Helton & Keller, 2010; Jones, 1994). For generations it has provided a way to find fun in mundane activities as well as overcome hardships (Helton & Keller, 2010). Appalachian people also often joke about themselves, saying things like “I was hiding behind the door when the looks were passed out” (Jones, 1994, p.123). This is because it is important to be able to laugh at oneself within the culture of Appalachia, due to the leveling tendency and modesty as well (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Humor often
delivered in a somewhat deadpan manner and may not always be picked up by outsiders (Jones, 1994). It is so persistent throughout the region that Loyal Jones and Billy Edd Wheeler wrote a book about Appalachian humor (Jones & Wheeler, 1987). Humor and laughter are highly admired and used frequently. Outsiders should have a sense of humor to engage in conversations with people from the region (Jones, 1994). Regardless of how it is interpreted, sense of humor within the Appalachian culture is a trait that fosters resilience (Helton & Keller, 2010).

Some cross-discipline research has been conducted highlighting how rural Appalachian culture has persisted and contributed to resilience, even though stereotypes from mainstream society threaten its livelihood (Butera, 2005; Diddle & Denham, 2010; Helton & Keller, 2010; Keefe, 2005; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). For example, Helton and Keller (2010) have contributed to social work research that confirms the resilience of Appalachian women and the role cultural values play in fostering resilience. Even though the term Appalachian is often disliked by those who are from the culture there is an unmistakable bond that exists between those who live in Appalachia and the place itself (Keefe, 2005). This connection runs deep through a common history and the closeness of families in the region (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). This is evident in the portrayal of the population through media and literature, although it sometimes leads to negative typifying, discrimination, and persistent inequality by the dominant society, which is true of other cultures on the fringes of society (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Kirmayer et al., 2011). With this type of marginalization, cultural tendencies are to
become more cohesive, depending more on community rather than society. This is true in Appalachia as well.

**Considerations for Helping Professionals in Appalachia**

Appalachian cultural values (Jones, 1994) have been studied by several disciplines with many pointing out the similarity of cultural values that are pervasive throughout the region (Diddle & Denham, 2010; Helton & Keller, 2010). What appears to be at the heart of the culture is its emphasis and importance placed on family. Seventy three percent of those who were born in Appalachia still live in the state of their birth, which points to the long-standing dedication to family and community (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Zhang et al., 2008).

Family remains the biggest support system for many Appalachians due to their strong belief in doing things for themselves or within the family unit (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Keefe, 2005). Families tend to handle things without outside help. Family should be defined loosely in Appalachia, as it may sometimes refer to people who are not closely related or who are not related at all. Kinship networks are common in Appalachia, making for an interconnected group of people who all look out for one another (Templeton et al., 2008). Being leery of outsiders and not asking for help are also common, although once a trusted relationship is established most outsiders are welcomed (Diddle & Denham, 2010; Owens et al., 2007). Nevertheless, family considerations should always be made for clients from Appalachia (Bauer & Growick, 2003).

As the cultural factors of the Appalachian people may serve as protective factors, there is also evidence that suggests that some cultural values may be barriers to treatment.
The six barriers are (a) stigma, (b) transportation availability, (c) limited payment options, (d) privacy issues, (e) choice of facilities, and (f) cultural and family barriers are all barriers to both mental health treatment and medical treatment (Zhang et al., 2008). Although family can be an essential protective factor, family can also serve to discourage outside help and place responsibility for some issues back on the family (Owens et al., 2007). Helping individuals in Appalachia also means considering the family as a whole (Bauer & Growick, 2003). However, this is a delicate dance, and requires more exploration in order to assess the involvement level.

Many helping professionals have neglected to consider the inclusion of family in treatment (Bauer & Growick, 2003). This may be one of the reasons family and cultural factors are among the five reasons Appalachian people do not access mental health services when necessary (Zhang et al., 2008). According to a report given to ARC in 2008, people from Appalachia have consistently higher rates of mental health issues with 13.5% of people experiencing serious psychological distress and 8.2% experiencing major depressive episodes as compared to 11.6% and 7.6% respectively in the rest of the country (Zhang et al., 2008). In addition, Appalachia has the highest rates of people who use emergency rooms for treatment of mental health issues in the country, especially in central Appalachia (Zhang et al., 2008). This may be in part due to the lack of services available overall (Owens et al., 2007). The services that are available are sometimes far distances away (Bauer & Growick, 2003). Those that are available may not be culturally sensitive enough (Helton & Keller, 2010; Keefe, 2005). As a result, people from Appalachia continue to depend on family and other supports that are more accepting of
the contexts in which issues arise. When considering reasons for not seeking mental health services, thirty-seven percent of people from Appalachia said services were either not needed or could be dealt with through other means and twenty-eight percent stated that stigma was the issue as compared with the rest of the country with thirty-three and twenty-two percent respectively (Zhang et al., 2008).

At least for some of the barriers, a solution can be found in enhancing the competence level of the helping professionals. Counselors and other helping professionals alike can lean on frameworks such as the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) that encourage (a) awareness (b) knowledge and (c) skills of both the counselor and the client (Sue et al., 1992). The basis for the framework is to better serve people from backgrounds that are different from that of the counselor. In this way, the counselor can be aware of their own biases, gaining knowledge of the culture by research or by asking the client, and then use these areas to create culturally sensitive interventions (Sue et al., 1992). Although this framework is a good starting point, helping professionals must take a step further when dealing with the Appalachian culture and make approaches and interventions not only culturally sensitive, but culturally relevant (Bauer & Growick, 2003). In order to do this, there must be a closer examination of the culture that is specifically looking at the cultural values and the innate strengths that have served the people of Appalachia well for hundreds of years.

**Resilience**

The construct of resilience has persisted for decades in the helping professions (Walsh, 2002). The term *resilience* is defined as, the ability to bounce back or rebound
from adversity successfully and to continue to thrive despite hardships (Helton & Keller, 2010; Walsh, 2003). As research on resiliency has increased, so have the ideas about what contributes to resiliency. Once thought of as an exclusively individual trait, resiliency has broadened its definitions to include the contexts of family, community, and culture as well (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008). Whatever the focus, work in the area of resilience offers potentials for practice that has numerous applications and can serve to bridge services across disciplines (Werner & Jonson, 1999).

Initially, resilience was considered an individual trait in children who have the ability to overcome adversity and bounce back (Walsh, 2002, 2003). Resilience was thought to be an inborn trait alone, protecting otherwise vulnerable children with character armor (Anthony & Cohler, 1987). The most extensive research for this position on resilience came from the 40-year longitudinal study by Werner and Smith (2001) examining high-risk Hawaiian children. The team followed 698 babies born in Kauai during the course of a year who were assessed every ten years (2001). One third of those children who were considered high risk due to maternal stress while pregnant, being born into poverty and coming from a high stress homes, managed to live accomplished lives despite their beginnings (2001). From this, a set of protective factors was determined that helped buffer these children from their difficult circumstances that included, (a) having a relationship with at least one caring adult (b) having a sense of responsibility to others and (c) involvement in extracurricular activities (Lietz, 2011; Werner, 2001). This study helped to broaden the definition of resilience by showing that resilient children had individual characteristics and environmental supports that
contributed to their resilience (Werner, 2001). In addition to contextual considerations, theories about resilience became centered on the possibility of fostering resilience throughout the course of a lifetime (Walsh, 2003).

Researchers began taking into account both the internal and external protective factors that individuals, children, and adults rely on to buffer against the negative effects associated with risk factors (Lietz, 2011). *Internal protective factors* are characteristics that help support children like problem solving, making positive decisions, and forming positive relationships (Helton & Keller, 2010). Bernard (2004) found that protective factors, or personal strengths, that are internal in nature can be broken into four main categories: social competence, problem solving, autonomy, and sense of purpose.

*External protective factors* come from environmental supports. They include schools, communities, and families (Bernard, 2004; Helton & Keller, 2010). External protective factors also include the ability to set clear boundaries, having caring relationships, and having a strong sense of altruism and cooperation (Helton & Keller, 2010). It was determined that if children had these external protective factors they could find their way through adversity. These developmental assets, both internal and external, can serve as buffers against risk factors (Bernard, 2004).

*Risk factors* include issues such as living in poverty, living in a high stress environment, coming from poor communities with few resources, physical and mental health issues, trauma, and few external support systems (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Hutchinson & Pretelt, 2010; Lietz, 2011). While these risk factors can potentially hold people back from thriving, there is evidence that points to the ability to thrive despite
these challenges (Hutchinson & Pretelt, 2010). This perspective painted a different view of struggling families as no longer being viewed as helpless or ruined. It has given way to more strengths-based and non-pathologizing interventions for families and individuals in need of support (Mullin & Arce, 2008).

Both internal and external protective factors serve to help prevent negative outcomes that are otherwise considered unavoidable as a result of compounded risk factors (Lietz, 2011). What this highlighted in the field was that resilience could no longer be considered a purely individual characteristic. Instead, resilience was based on multiple constructs that included contextual considerations (Walsh, 2002, 2003). In addition, it was found that individuals and families could grow from adversity as well, becoming resilient over time (Walsh, 2003). In essence, resilience can become a learned behavior.

**Family Resilience**

Although individual traits were found to be important, considering children’s environment also became an important aspect of looking at resilience. As a result, resiliency research turned toward family influence (Lietz, 2011; Walsh, 2003). Family resilience theories have become well established in the literature (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Lietz, 2011; Mullin & Arce, 2008; Walsh, 2002; Walsh, 2003). The importance of this fundamental move from individual traits to family considerations was not only necessary but, a response to the pessimistic research regarding children who come from families with chronic stresses or trauma that often described children and families as hopeless and dysfunctional (Mullin & Arce, 2008; Walsh, 2003).
Family resilience is thought to have three domains: belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication process (Walsh, 2002). Within each of these domains, individuals or family units can move through adversity to live meaningful and successful lives (Mullin & Arce, 2008). Walsh (2003) laid out specific areas within the domains. Belief systems include (a) making meaning of adversity, (b) a positive outlook, and (c) transcendence and spirituality (Walsh, 2003). Themes like hope, creativity, optimism, future goals, faith, and relationships all contribute to the ability to construct a belief system that allows individuals and families to cope better (Walsh, 2003). The field of positive psychology has broadened these ideas about belief systems and applied them to how one learns behaviors that can be either positive or negative. Life satisfaction has been included in these ideas to create a better understanding of how someone can rise above their life circumstances, even in the face of adversity, and actually reduce their chances of having depression or anxiety (Bailey, Eng, Frisch, & Snyder, 2007). It is believed by some researchers that both hope and optimism can be learned and help individuals move toward life goals and positive experiences (Bailey et al., 2007). This research has pointed to the ideas that if someone can live a good life, a meaningful life, and a pleasant life, they can rise above to overcome their difficult circumstances and reduce many negative health outcomes (Feldman & Snyder, 2005; Kobau et al., 2011; Seilgman, 2004).

Organizational patterns include (a) flexibility, (b) connectedness, and (c) social and economic resources (Walsh, 2003). The ability to flex or change, in varying situations coupled with the ability to use personal resources like family, social, and
community supports enhances the ability to have organizational patterns that construct a safety net approach to handling stressors and trauma. Lastly, the communication processes necessary for resilience are (a) clarity, (b) open emotional sharing and, (c) collaborative problem solving (2003). Communication that allows for open, clear sharing of thoughts and feelings that includes humor and empathy, and mutual collaboration of ideas and problem solving are features of this domain. The domains serve as a guide for clinical work and can help to foster resilience for families (Lietz, 2011; Walsh, 2003).

**Cultural Resilience**

While the influences of family are extremely important to understanding both development and coping, other researchers have nudged along another piece of the resilience trajectory that includes influences outside of the family. Clauss-Ehlers (2008) examined the influences on resilience that are not only social, but sociocultural as well. She developed a measure that could begin to point out some of the factors that support resilient adolescents and young adults called the Cultural Resilience Measure (CRM) that takes into consideration the personal traits that enhance positive coping as well as the cultural background, values, and environmental sociocultural factors (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008). The measure has five scales that include (a) childhood stressors, (b) global coping, (c) adaptive coping, (d) maladaptive coping, and (e) sociocultural support. The study measured female college students of varying backgrounds. In addition to the CRM other scales used to measure resilience that did not include cultural considerations and were normed on predominately Caucasian participants (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008). What was found is that culture and diversity do support growth and development throughout a
lifetime. It was concluded that resilience can be bolstered by including cultural factors that promote adaptive coping and insight (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008). From this study, application of cultural resilience can begin to take shape.

The idea of cultural resilience is an emerging theory that is rooted deeply in the earlier developments of family resilience theory. Although it maintains the importance of family, cultural resilience takes a step further to make a more thorough consideration of the cultural context of resilience. Clauss-Ehlers (2008) defines cultural resilience as, “the degree to which the strength’s of one’s culture promote the development of coping.” (p. 198). This type of consideration is particularly important for people from diverse backgrounds for whom culture is an influential part of their development and lives. Cultural resilience considerations allow for better ways to approach and incorporate traditional knowledge, values, and practices that are important to individuals, families, and cultural groups (Kirmayer et al., 2011). The advantage of this model is the emphasis on and consideration of issues that are more systemic in nature, including marginalization, discrimination, and overall negative portrayals of groups by the dominant society. Up to this point, many have steered away from confronting such large, systemic risk factors with individuals, but cultural resilience focuses on other aspects of human development and “ecosystemic processes that contribute to human flourishing” (Kirmayer et al., 2011, p. 84). Sociocultural issues can be the source of the problems that tend to hold individuals, families, and groups back due to the damaging nature of treatment by mainstream society.
A significant study that has helped to enhance the area of cultural resilience comes from a group of developmental psychologists and psychiatrists from Canada who have studied multiple First Nations groups. Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, and Williamson (2011) have studied four distinct indigenous groups in Canada: Inuit, Métis, Mi’kmaq, and Mohawk. Their goal was to better understand how these tribes have fostered resilience. What was discovered was that although the groups were very different from one another in geographic location, and in assimilation and acculturation levels, resilience was fostered through cultural values (Kirmayer et al., 2011). The collective history, traditions, language, and the importance of the individual as a part of the culture were all features that proved to be valued among all four groups (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Other themes were also discovered in Kirmayer et al. (2011) that consisted of finding strength in rejuvenating both the culture and the individual. For example, personal growth and development included connectedness to the environment that fostered not only cultural connections but also offered self-soothing and healing, emotional regulation, and guidance as well (2011). The collective resilience of the culture seemed to bolster individual resilience of tribal members through political activism, revitalization of traditions, and revisioning collective history (2011). This study confirms earlier notions that positive ethnic and gender identities are associated with resilience, which are attributes that can be inborn or learned (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008). Negative self-images and negative cultural images are also associated with low levels of resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2011).
Understanding how to implement these ideas about cultural resilience is still somewhat undeveloped. What is known is that there are no quantitative instruments to date that accurately measure cultural resilience with the exception of the CRM that consists of both open-ended and scaled questions (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Kirmayer et al., 2011). Some measures have included general coping that can be attributed to cultural influences, but they are not necessarily specific enough to fully understand the collective cultural resilience that exists or that is possible in underrepresented populations. Clauss-Ehlers (2008) determined that coping, in general, is related to sociocultural factors that include “adaptive culture with traditions and cultural legacies, economic and political histories, migration and acculturation, as well as current contextual demands” (p. 207).

One study focusing on Appalachian cultural competence was conducted by Salyers and Ritchie (2006). This case study focused on one individual woman who was considering moving from her home in Appalachia. Many of the Appalachian cultural values were discussed and considered. The researchers used the MCC as a framework to better their skills as well as to better understand where the participant was coming from culturally (2006). What they discovered was that even though counselors may also be from the same culture, ideas about the culture differ in relation to how influential the culture is to both parties (2006). The researcher was somewhat removed from the culture due to moving away and seeking advanced degrees from academic institutions. Understanding culture in context to the individual was what was missing from the treatment and thus became an issue when helping this woman weigh out her options for moving. The authors suggested that more research be done in order to create a more
comprehensive way of looking at Appalachian culture in relation to the individual and to enhance the overall competence of the counselor (2006).

Another study focused on cultural values of Appalachian women and resiliency by Helton and Keller (2010) found that Appalachian cultural values were influential in the lives of resilient women. These cultural values, as set forth by Loyal Jones (1994), were from internal and external developmental assets or protective factors. The women’s risk factors included being discriminated against, being geographically isolated, coming from poverty, difficulties of living in a rural community in the mountains, among other things (Helton & Keller, 2010). The study found that nine out of the ten Appalachian cultural values were evident and that they played an essential part in the resilience of the ten women interviewed (Helton & Keller, 2010). In this study, the cultural values served as both internal and external protective factors and provided insight into the possibility of helping foster resilience through culture.

**Positive Deviance**

The concept of positive deviance is not far removed from cultural resilience when considering practices that allow some people to thrive among a group of people (Marsh, Schroder, Dearden, Sternin, & Sternin, 2004; Walker, Sterling, Hoke, & Dearden, 2007). As a result, positive deviance is defined as the ability for at-risk individuals to practice uncommon practices that allow them to thrive while their neighbors with equally difficult circumstances may not (Walker et al., 2007). This concept has become increasingly influential in public health. By using the existing influences of culture, practitioners have been successful in reducing health disparities at faster rates by using practices that are
already working within a culture. For example, people who live in low-resource communities who do not suffer from malnutrition when others in the same community do are of interest to healthcare workers devoted to reducing this disparity (Walker et al., 2007). It is from these individuals that interventions can be developed that are not only socially and culturally acceptable, but sustainable and affordable as well (Marsh et al., 2004; Walker et al., 2007). Currently, work based on the positive deviance model being done in other countries to help battle malnutrition and with great success. Not only are community members eager to accept more common practices that enhance nutrition, the interventions are based on existing community assets and eliminate the “top down” and donor-driven methods that tend to damage cultures rather than help them (Marsh et al., 2004).

Positive deviance has proven to be helpful in other fields as well. The worlds of business, education, and agriculture are all using positive deviance in certain areas. The United States and Argentina are using positive deviance to measure educational practices and outcomes (Marsh et al., 2004). Business is excited about how positive deviance can improve achievement outcomes as well as enhance prosocial behaviors like whistle-blowing, organizational citizenship, corporate social responsibility, and creativity and innovation (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004). In rural development practices, positive deviance has been useful in promoting more ecologically-responsible practices in remote areas of the globe. Farmers who are using beneficial practices can be examples and help promote new ideas to better meet the needs of the community at risk of expending their resources (Biggs, 2008). What has been noted is that using local knowledge to bring
forth the good that is occurring in a community can be much more influential than someone from the outside coming in to give ideas that are all unique.

In group processes, positive deviance is being used to better understand the effects of successful people on their culture or community. High achievement is something that is a common goal among many groups. While some researchers are interested in what makes one person stand out of a group, others are interested in how much the group benefits from a high-achieving member (Fielding, Hogg, & Annadale, 2006). What was found was that if high achieving group members credited their group with some of their success, the person was well-received by the group and was found to be more admirable among their community (Fielding et al., 2006). What this may mean for close-knit cultures is that success of positive deviates can be shared and enjoyed by members of the culture.

**Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model**

The work of Urie Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues has persisted for over three decades. Uncovering the process of human development has been central to his thinking and theorizing. The Bioecological Model, once called Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model, has evolved to fit the rapidly changing complexities of children by understanding how personal characteristics coupled with environmental considerations contribute to the person of tomorrow (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Developmental psychology has contributed greatly to this understanding of human development that provides a deeper look into the influences of environment over time. Nevertheless, the working model will continue to evolve in order to further develop
“theories, research designs, and corresponding empirical findings that are required in order to improve our understanding of the conditions and processes that shape human development.” (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 117).

While the model has taken on new considerations, the foundational features persist. There are four main features in human development: person, process, context and time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The former model focused on the “person” over time and within the newer adaptation, the focus is geared toward the “process” and future orientation of what is to come, extending the former ideas about time in general (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner is honest about his theory and does not pretend that it is perfect. Rather, he contends that in order to become more accurate, it will only continue to change with time, just as humans do (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The natural fit of this model with theories about resilience go hand in hand. The family resilience considerations, for example, fit into a systems approach to looking at the context of individuals and their families (Lietz, 2011). This move toward family dynamics and environmental contexts, such as cultural values, as influences on human resilience is supported in many helping disciplines and often accompanied with Bronfenbrenner’s model (Walsh, 2002). Person, process, context, and time (PPCT) all interconnect and interact through the course of a lifetime and include more complex notions of objects and symbols within the environment as well (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The PPCT framework is dependent on the understanding of development that affects the here and now. As a result, the proximal process is a way to think of a person
in their immediate environment. “Proximal processes are distinguished in terms of the two major kinds of developmental outcomes they produce”: competence and dysfunction (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 118). Competence is achieved when someone acquires and demonstrates the knowledge, skill, and ability across contexts, and is present in any domain or combination of domains including intellectual, physical, motivational, socioemotional, or artistic (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Other external factors can contribute to competence as well. People who have a trusting adult throughout their lifetime, or who have a strong attachment to their family are more likely to competent and resilient (Harney, 2008). Dysfunction occurs as a result of compounded difficulties in regards to behavior and control (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Those who have less supportive relationships are at risk for learned vulnerability and helplessness (Harney, 2008). In some ways, these areas of bouncing back from dysfunction to competence are better resolved in the theories that attribute coping with experience found in the resilience literature. A better understanding of how to make the leap from dysfunctional to competent is yet to be defined and could be a starting point for the helping professions.

*Person* is in reference to the individual and their current developmental state in relation to their environment. This may include specific attributes like characteristics or experiences, but may also speak to socially constructed identities like race, gender, or family background (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In Appalachia for example, a person might be further defined as a person based on who they are related to, if their family is overseen
by a matriarch or patriarch and how they will fall into a role in the future, and whether or not they are of multiple races (African descent, Native American decent, etc.).

*Process* reflects the overarching themes that have occurred through development that are reflected in the above mentioned proximal process, allowing individuals to grow from their circumstances or become a victim of them. *Context* is multifaceted and places the individual at the center of their environment who is bombarded with influences and challenges that range from proximal to distal, and are dependent on broader constructs such as culture and social class (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Context exists as microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems that include the patterns of activity, social roles, and interpersonal relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The systems function like the layers on a target, with the individual in the center and the other systems representing the series of rings outside of the center. They can all interact to help or hinder the development of the individual (Harney, 2008). These contexts, for example, help define the individual, the roles they play in their family and community, the places in which they have developed, cultures in which they come from, the opportunities they are given, the struggles they have faced, the social and political issues that challenge them, the country they live in, and the influence of the rest of the world. In Appalachia, those contexts might include family of origin, school, friendship groups (extended kin and neighbors), community organizations (church, activities, etc.), living situations, creative hobbies (quilting, craft making, music, etc.), and responsibilities to family (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Diddle & Denham, 2010; Keefe, 2005; Helton & Keller, 2010; Templeton et al., 2008). The goal of the model in
relation to context is to see how it influences the individual.

The last area is \textit{time}. Time has been difficult conceptualize, and it has been added and taken away from the model over the years (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). One of the latest ideas regarding time is in relation to \textit{time interval}. Time interval refers to the amount of time an individual has been exposed to a particular process and also to the environmental contexts that are being scrutinized (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). For populations who have been marginalized, it may be especially important to understand the length of time in which they have been exposed to the conditions that have contributed to their circumstances. For example, is there an apparent struggle evident in Appalachia since settlement in the region, since the Great Depression, or since the recent recession?

The Bioecological Model is a helpful framework for better understanding the contexts of where people come from and how they develop over generations and into the future (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Harney (2008) points out that this model is an effective “framework for studying the myriad manifestations of resilience across the lifespan and across multiple, progressively larger social contexts (p. 83). In addition, it provides a way to understand the psychological and interpersonal processes that contribute to or hinder resilience (Harney, 2008). In Appalachia, it is important to understand the individuals and the culture on a continuum, taking into consideration the past, present, and future of the contexts that have contributed to their process. Only then can interventions be developed to help foster competence (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The PPCT framework helps connect considerations of context that the resilience literature is now attempting to put together as well. It is integrative and interdisciplinary
and in this way, this model can help to inform practice and policies that affect human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

**Multicultural Counseling Competencies**

The counseling profession continues to find ways to incorporate culture into practice. The need for more culturally conscious practices is increasing and expanding to include other considerations that meet the needs of our clients better (Constantine, Hage, Kindachi, & Bryant, 2007). Not only are counselors called upon to provide services, they are also expected to know how to engage their clients in culturally appropriate ways to help foster development and healing. As a result, in 1992, the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) were introduced to aid counselors to answer some of the cultural needs of their clients and to better address their own cultural identity (Sue et al., 1992).

Prior to the introduction of the MCC, the multicultural movement in counseling began in the 1970’s, after the entire United States was put in a position to make systemic changes to address the inequalities in society (Sue et al., 1992). While this journey began in communities across the nation, the models and theories in the helping professions were largely centered on those who were white, middle-class, and living in metro areas (Ratts, 2009). Gilbert Wrenn (1962) made a call to the helping professions claiming that they were *culturally encapsulated* (Moodley, 2008). This sent a message that counselors also needed to move beyond the existing models to include minority and multicultural clients. A systematic change needed to take place in the helping professions (Sue et al., 1992). That change was not only much needed, but the first step in providing services in a way that put clients and counselors on equal grounds.
Multicultural counseling provides a framework for doing just that. It is defined as the extent to which a counselor can use their awareness, knowledge and skills to effectively help individuals who are culturally different (Constantine et al., 2007). The importance of the development of the MCC was invaluable to the counseling profession. Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) were called upon by then president of the American Counseling Association (ACA), Thomas Parham, to provide a framework for counselors to use with diverse clients (Sue et al., 1992; Ratts, 2009). This work provided the necessary change to move counselors into a place where they could more effectively regard their own cultural values in addition to their clients.’ The changes were important in both counseling and education to provide much needed systemic change (Sue et al., 1992). The operationalization of the multicultural competencies was the next step to getting the 119 behavioral statement and 31 competencies into practice, which was adopted by the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) in 1996 (Arredondo et al., 1996).

The MCC is a 3x3 framework that takes into consideration the role of the counselor and the role of the client. In order to understand how to apply the framework, the AMCD adopted a plan by Arredondo, Toporek, Brown, Locke, Sanchez, and Stalder that laid out the necessary steps to becoming culturally competent (1996). There are three areas: (a) awareness of own cultural values and biases, (b) awareness of client’s worldview, and (c) culturally appropriate interventions. Within each area, there are subsections that cover attitudes/beliefs, knowledge and skills (1996).
The first area of consideration is *awareness of own cultural values and biases*; a counselor must be aware of their own cultural values and biases in order to recognize sources of assumptions and discomfort with clients. This task is easier spelled out than accomplished. The attitudes/beliefs have to do with how the counselor identifies and how they relate to their own background, being aware of things like biases and stereotypes, language differences, and any prejudice (1996). The knowledge has to do with the impressions your own culture has made on you and others, both socially and historically. Skills are dependent on how willing the counselor is to consult others, get more training that enhances cultural competence, and continually seeking a more non-racist identity, especially those who are Caucasian (1996).

The second area is *counselor awareness of client’s worldview*. This awareness provides the necessary steps to working through personal baggage regarding your client’s specific culture, and become more informed about how to work with someone from a specific culture. The attitudes/beliefs are things that the counselor may hold onto about that culture that may not be fair, such as preconceived notions or assumptions (Arredondo et al., 1996). Knowledge is about getting to know the culture, including how your client relates to their culture and the issues they may have had as a result of sociopolitical, immigration, or poverty issues that may have contributed to the client’s low self-image (1996). The skills necessary are in regards to synthesizing the accumulated knowledge about the culture in a way that fosters growth on the counselor’s part (1996).

The third section is *culturally appropriate intervention strategies*. Finding the best way to provide services is the ultimate goal, however this cannot be accomplished
without achieving some success with the prior two competency areas. The beliefs/attitudes area is important in that counselors are expected to keep their own values out of the equation and instead consider interventions that go with their client’s cultural values, rather than against them. Language, traditional practices, and worldview are all acceptable and not looked down upon (Arredondo et al, 2006). Knowledge is important in the areas of culturally fair assessments, social issues that may prevent a client from reaching their full potential, and general knowledge of cultural and familial issues that may discount using certain interventions (1996). Lastly skills is encapsulates all of the prior areas in order to put in place interventions that are culturally acceptable. Traditional practices, for example, may be important for the client to access in addition to the counseling they are receiving. Culturally skilled counselors are well trained, communicate clearly and accurately, consult other professionals regularly, and use instrumentation that is normed appropriately for the culture (1996).

Although the MCC have provided an essential framework to practice from, there are some newer arguments that suggest that certain groups and considerations have been left out. The term *multicultural* has evolved. Arredondo and Toporek (2004) defined it as including the six major cultural groups in the United States: (a) African-American/Black, (b) European/White, (c) Asian, (d) American Indian, (e) Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, or Hawaiian, and (f) Hispanic/ Latino, along with other cultural considerations including gender, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, socioeconomic status, family/historical background, or other factors. While this comprehensive list was much more inclusive than prior definitions, some argued that the
term multicultural should also reflect the sociocultural issues that hold people back from thriving such as discrimination, homophobia, sexism, and racism (Moodley, 2008). In addition, it is not safe to assume that just because someone identifies within one cultural group that it will be relevant. For example, people who are born to one culture who have been adopted by someone from another culture may not relate well to their culture of origin. In addition, subcultures and those who biracial or triracial may not fit into the categories well. Sociopolitical issues are also a problem. People who are white but who belong to a culture or subculture are also often overlooked, which leads to a shortcoming in the MCC framework (Moodley, 2008).

While the multicultural counseling movement has been invaluable in moving the profession in a more positive direction, it is our responsibility to continuously strive for competence. This is true for all of the helping professions. Certain populations are often overlooked in considering culture, like those who are come from poverty or who have suffered marginalization (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Rural Appalachia is such a place. Some studies have suggested that Appalachia is a place where culture is often invisible to mainstream society (Keefe, 2005). Over eighty percent of the people from Appalachia identify as Caucasian, however their history and culture are large considerations for how they need and seek help. To date, there are not many adequate interventions that are culturally acceptable or appropriate for some Appalachian people (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Keefe, 2005; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). While developing these interventions is essential to informing practice, breaking down the barriers to treatment is also important for informing policy (Bauer & Growick, 2003). Taking a closer look at how to provide
culturally competent services to those who are underserved like those in Appalachia, those living in rural settings, and those living in poverty, will hopefully move the profession even closer to achieving a better understanding of how to be a culturally competent counselor.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This study was designed to gain an understanding of how Appalachian cultural values (Jones, 1994) intersect with resilient people in Appalachia. By understanding how culture influences the lives of some resilient Appalachian individuals, an awareness of how to incorporate cultural values into treatment/interventions can be developed by helping professionals who work with this population. This study gives voice to a population of people who are underserved by the helping professions and often overlooked as a cultural group worthy of multicultural considerations (Bauer & Growick, 2003). This chapter discusses the methods that were used in order to complete this research including the research design, the population being studied and the participant selection, data collection, analysis, interpretation strategies, and the ethical considerations, including the IRB requirements.

In this study, I used the narratives of people from West Virginia who were purposively sampled. The participants were people identified as resilient by helping professionals, meaning that they have shown the ability to rise above difficult circumstances. The goal was to gain insight into the influence of culture on the participants’ lives. I employed an emergent design that used qualitative methods with a narrative approach, some ethnographic techniques, and a social justice and Bioecological Model framework (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These approaches helped me to gain a deeper and richer look into the lives of the individuals who took part in the study and provided a new perspective on working with people from this region. In addition,
while aiming to inform policy and practice for all helping professionals I considered the numerous health disparities, including mental health disparities that are prevalent throughout Appalachia and the vital need for advocacy within the region. Qualitative methods were the appropriate research approach for several reasons. Because the population within Appalachia is a marginalized group, the narratives from this small sample of people from West Virginia created a more in-depth way to foster a clearer understanding of their experiences that made them resilient (Patton, 2002). In addition, narrative methods were culturally appropriate and helped to give voice to the participants who are from a culture with a strong storytelling tradition (Jones, 1994; Kirmayer et al., 2011). The tools available for measuring cultural resilience are extremely limited, and so a narrative approach is particularly useful in the study of this construct (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Keefe, 2005; Lietz, 2011). Personal narratives allowed participants to give meaning to their experiences (Lietz, 2011). Purposive sampling was used to find the individuals who could help answer the research question best, who fit the criteria set forth, and who were willing to discuss their own lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). By providing insight into the relevance of culture, helping professionals can begin to foster better cultural competence when working with people from the Appalachian culture. In order to do this, I focused on the following overarching research questions:

What do the narratives regarding strength reflect about resilient people from West Virginia?

• How do the Appalachian cultural values help or hinder the growth and development of individuals?
• What types of challenges present themselves in the narratives about strength in resilient people from Appalachia?

**Qualitative Research**

The instruments used to measure resilience to date have largely left out the influence of cultural factors (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008). As a result, no survey instrument is sufficient in capturing how cultural factors influence resilience in individuals, especially in the Appalachian population. Nastasi and Schensul (2005) pointed out that, “A key element for the researcher who utilizes qualitative methods is the concept of culture and the ways in which culture affects the context of the phenomena under study.” (p. 179).

The methods I used for this study were largely exploratory, and used qualitative methodology in order to understand the role of cultural resilience by using people who live in Appalachia as the target population. Qualitative research is an activity that situates the researcher in the world of the participant and its use can give voice to those who are not always visible, helping to transform the world through a naturalist way of inquiring and interpreting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Appalachia is vast, and it would be nearly impossible to capture the entire population for this study. In order to capture a portion of this population, participants were from West Virginia, the only entirely Appalachian state, and were asked to share their narratives about what were their sources of strength. This study can be viewed as a stepping stone for further research that expands beyond West Virginia and possibly other cultures. As a result, qualitative inquiry was not only appropriate for this study, but essential to gaining the richest data possible.
Creswell (2013) pointed out that qualitative inquiry is a process of research that comes from a philosophical framework that addresses a problem by interpreting meaning through the studied individuals, being sensitive and considerate of context, and delivering a presentation that is representative of the voices of the participants. In order to gain rich data that represented the voices of the participants, qualitative methods were the best fit for this study. This in-depth look at a sample of Appalachian individuals is the beginning process for finding out how cultural values play into the development of resilience in certain Appalachians, highlighting some of the more poignant influences that could be likely for the overall population. Qualitative inquiry is often used for populations that are underserved (Creswell, 2013). Since Appalachian people are often overlooked and underserved, it is especially important to have an opportunity to hear their stories. In addition, qualitative methods are beneficial for populations who have been underrepresented in counseling practice (Creswell, 2013). This is especially true for studying people from Appalachia (Keefe, 2005).

Qualitative inquiry is sometimes faulted for the lack of rigor and the validity issues (Onweugbuzie & Leech, 2007). Although the ability to count or measure something is useful, a quantitative approach would be insufficient to address the goals of this study. In order to capture meaning and describe lived experiences, qualitative methods are known for the breadth and depth that researchers can explore (Patton, 2002). It is especially important to do so when exploring the experiences of people who have been stigmatized or marginalized (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). People from Appalachia have been subjected to discrimination by mainstream society for generations,
faulting them for their lack of personal and community resources, such as utilities and material goods, through media and scholarly work (Keefe, 2005). This research begins to turn that around and bring forth some of the qualities of the culture that are positive.

This study was designed to bring forth some of the diverse viewpoints of those who are from Appalachia, who are considered resilient, and who have stories to tell about their sources of strength. Open-ended questioning aided in gaining insight about the influences of culture and its role in the development of resilience in Appalachia. One goal in using the qualitative approach was to allow differing points of view to be heard, without predetermined assumptions (Patton, 2002). In this way, qualitative exploration focuses on the *emic*, or insider perspective as told by the participant (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). In this research my intention was to assume a position of advocate, with the goal of informing helping professionals’ practice and increasing cultural competence. The narratives brought to the surface the cultural influences that are common in the region. As an outsider of the culture, reflexivity helped to voice my position and unveil some of the bias that could have occurred during the development of the study, throughout the data collection, and during the analysis of the data as well (Creswell, 2013).

Since Appalachia has a long standing history of being an underserved region with a marginalized population (Keefe, 2005) using a social justice framework was important. Because of this, another aim of this research was to better inform the practice of helping professionals who work with people from the region (Creswell, 2013; Ratts, 2009). With this, the participants are the true owners of the information set forth in the results (Creswell, 2013). The participants in this study are the benefactors of the research, and
they helped to voice what was relevant within their culture, but also helped to bring about the first step toward a change in the service delivery of helping professionals. The participants were valued (1) as diverse individuals (2) from a collective culture (3) who had the ability to help contribute to the literature. Their narratives illuminated the cultural values that are prevalent, which may relate back to others in the Appalachian population as well. The primary purpose was to capture the meaning of the narratives as they were constructed naturally by the participants and given from their perspectives explicitly (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005).

**Narrative inquiry.**

Narrative inquiry allowed participants the opportunity to apply their own meaning of their experiences through stories (Lietz, 2011). Over the years, there have been numerous influences that have contributed to the narrative approach of inquiry. Experience has often been a focal point of study, born out of the social sciences and education, and evolving into various forms of inquiry that are used today to examine a more in-depth look at lived experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Patton, 2002). Narrative inquiry embodies much of that history today, using an individual and their personal stories of lived experience as told by them or gathered through other family stories, letters, literary nonfiction, and other media in order to understand the social and cultural contexts in which they gain their meaning (Patton, 2002).

For individuals who come from cultures that have a long-standing history of not being heard by outsiders, narrative inquiry can serve as a vehicle for voice to be heard in a clear and fair way (Keefe, 2005). In this study, the interpretations of the stories were
validated by the participants, ensuring that I did not take liberties that were unfounded.

Narrative inquiry credits the storytellers and uses their narratives as data in order to gain an understanding of, not only the individual as a part of a larger context, but the human experience in general (Creswell, 2013). Through comparing stories and data, narrative inquiry can turn into a means for better understanding and interpreting meaning making into causes, consequences, and relationships (Patton, 2002).

While narrative inquiry as a research method has been used across disciplines, the narrative approach has been a regarded form of therapy for decades. Although narrative inquiry and the narrative counseling theory are different, there are some overarching aspects that are similar. In counseling, story-telling is an essential method of obtaining information and meaning from clients. Oftentimes, these stories are incomplete or do not fit the goals of the individual. The goal of therapy, then, is to help rewrite the story in a way that makes sense to the client, using their strengths and abilities that are evident throughout their narrative (White & Epston, 1990). This effort is collaborative, and the client is the expert in their own life story. This method of therapy is closely aligned with the qualitative method of narrative interviewing, making for a familiar method of collecting data for me.

There are many reasons why narrative inquiry is the best way to explore this research, but it is most important on two levels. First, the participants are the experts on their lives. They alone hold the meaning of their narratives. The research is simply a vehicle for their story to be told and interpreted collaboratively, much like in narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990). It is especially poignant to this research as this project
will hopefully inform the helping professions by providing an understanding of cultural influences through the participants’ stories. Second, the method of allowing participants to tell their own stories is not only a respected inquiry method, but part of the Appalachian oral tradition as well (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Jones, 1994). Storytelling is part of the culture, and has been a means for relaying knowledge, information, and legends for generations (Keefe, 2005). For these reasons, narrative inquiry was the best fit for the data collection portion of this particular research.

*Ethnography.*

While narrative inquiry is a sufficient means of gathering stories and analyzing the data, the methods of narrative inquiry and analysis do not adequately capture the collective cultural influences of resilience in Appalachian individuals. Narrative approaches are helpful in understanding the experiences of one or two individuals to give meaning to their life stories (Creswell, 2013). In this study, ethnographic techniques and considerations will also be apparent as I move from field texts to research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To gain better insights into Appalachian culture, some ethnographic techniques were used in addition to the overall narrative approach. This was done through the participants sharing an object of importance in the interview which was something that symbolized a source of strength for the participants. The goal was to allow the participants to tell their stories, and attribute the meaning they wanted to those experiences; this helped to determine if and how cultural values contributed to their resilience.
Ethnography focuses on an entire culture, taking into consideration shared beliefs and traditions (Creswell, 2013; Fetterman, 2005). The ethnographic technique in this study was important for considerations during data collection and analysis. I did not want to approach this culture in a way that caused more damage, as some scholarly work has done in the past (Keefe, 2005), so the ethnographic techniques helped to provide a more open-minded conceptualization of the culture (Fetterman, 1998). Although people from Appalachia or even West Virginia are not monolithic, an important aspect of this study was to take the time to learn what aspects of the culture manifested in a more universal way within the sample (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005).

**Research Design**

Nastasi and Schensul, (2005) pointed out that “The researcher’s role as instrument, the inductive process of data analysis, and emergent nature of qualitative inquiry influence the role of theory and knowledge.” (p.183). For the purposes of honoring the Appalachian culture and better informing helping professionals working with Appalachian people, data was gathered and analyzed in a way that was transparent, making my intentions and biases known from the beginning of the study to the participants. To ensure that the voices of the participants were emphasized, qualitative methods were used to explore the stories of the Appalachian individuals who were interviewed. Participants were selected by three Appalachian helping professionals (counselor, social worker, clergy) who served as recruiters for the study. They determined if the potential participant met two sets of criteria that I required: (1) they were from West Virginia and had a grandparent who was from West Virginia and (2) that
they were considered resilient, in that they have shown the ability to bounce back from adversity or trauma at some point in their lifetime.

Initial face-to-face interviews was the main source of data collection, through semi-structure, open-ended questioning, using an interview guide (see Appendix A.). These interviews were recorded by audiotape and, I completed the transcriptions and summaries, coded that data, and found themes that were consistent throughout all of the interviews. The participants were also asked to talk about an object of importance that contributed to their personal strength. Some brought in actual objects or shared pictures of the objects. The stories about these items were coded and the item was photographed or a similar object was photographed and included in the interview summaries of this research paper. All data was considered within the context of the individual’s experience. Member checking was used in two ways in this project: (1) summaries with initial themes and transcriptions were sent to the participants to go over and correct and (2) through follow-up communication with the participants to verify the transcription and clarify data interpretation. Besides a few minor changes, like dates and lengths of time, the participants all approved the information they read and allowed me to proceed with the research.

Credibility techniques were also used throughout the study to ensure that the participants were represented fairly and accurately. The intent of this study was to portray both the emic and etic perspectives, with a priority given to the emic, or that of the participant. Because I am culturally different from those being studied, the etic perspective, or my perspective, must be presented in order to not create bias within the
research (Patton, 2002). Although not all influences and bias can be prevented, I attempted to stay as true as possible to the meaning and interpretations made by the participants themselves. As a result, reflexivity was practiced in order to air the etic perspective and included in an epilogue of the research. Reflexive practices occurred in two forms: first up front in a section called Description of the Researcher, stating how I have come to understand the Appalachian culture through my experiences with the culture itself and second, in a reflexive journal that was kept throughout the process explaining my reasons for shaping the findings and conclusions which is summarized in the Epilogue of this paper (Creswell, 2013). This includes my professional training as a counselor, stating how it was influential to my approach to interviewing and analyzing data.

Data analysis and interpretation included a number of steps and followed the methods of constant comparative analysis. Interviews were transcribed by me and the interviewees’ words were chunked and coded (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). From there, the codes were organized into themes (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Initially around 30 codes were determined and those were grouped into 10 themes. Upon closer inspection, the themes were all very similar to the Appalachian cultural values that Jones (1994) described. Because of this, the themes were placed into categories that best fit the cultural value that was closest. As a result, the original 10 themes were turned into nine themes with an additional theme added in. Some of the original themes were combined due to their closeness in nature and turned into a larger theme. In addition, data triangulation techniques were used to
compare data, including interviews, and the objects of importance (Creswell, 2013). During this process, data was compared for similar themes. In this case, themes regarding cultural values in relation to their influence on the participants’ strengths became central to the analysis process.

**Research site.**

The selected site of research was initially going to be within the 200,000-square-mile region of Appalachia. Appalachia, as defined by ARC, is a region that consists of the areas in and directly around the Appalachian Mountains, including the foothills. It is found in parts of twelve states and all of West Virginia (ARC n.d.). Since West Virginia is the only all Appalachian state, was chosen as the primary area for selecting participants. In addition, mental health disparities and disorders are higher in central Appalachia, in which many counties in West Virginia fall (Zhang et al., 2008). Lastly, many of the Mental Health Shortage Areas fall within the state of West Virginia (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). This qualitative study focused on 12 self-identified West Virginians who were referred by key informants/gatekeepers, or recruiters, as a resilient individual (Bauer & Growick, 2003). The participants were from a variety of towns in West Virginia, rural, suburban, and urban, to gain richer data collection. The interviews took place at sites that were determined by the recruiters or by the participants. Some phone interviews were also done for certain participants because of their busy schedules and lives.
Selection of participants.

Qualitative research experts recommend purposive selection of participants who can best answer the research questions of the study (Creswell, 2013). The participants in this study helped to represent the voice of Appalachia that is largely unheard in the helping professions. Few studies focus on how to approach counseling with people from Appalachia (Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). At the same time, counseling theories have not traditionally employed a cultural resilience approach that considers a more social-ecological influence and implications to practice (Kirmayer et al., 2011). This research creates that starting point for future research.

Finding individuals who met the criteria and who could give a more in-depth look into the usefulness of Appalachian cultural resilience was essential to this research. Taking the time to begin looking at some of the things that are persistent throughout the culture could help to enhance the abilities of helping professionals to work with this population more effectively. For these reasons, participants had to be diverse and able to articulate what was influential in their lives as sources of strength. In order to find participants who were willing to be interviewed, but who also embodied the criteria for this study, two methods of sampling were used: purposive sampling and criterion-based sampling. This was intentional on my part due to the lack of previous studies and the delicacy of interviewing a sample of people who traditionally come from a marginalized population. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) point out that, “This is especially true for hard-to-reach, stigmatized, or hidden populations.” (p. 61). The participants had to be appropriate in order to create a broad understanding of the culture.
Purposive sampling is central to the idea that smaller, more information-rich samples produce more in-depth looks at the sample being studied rather than empirical generalizations (Patton, 2002). The Appalachian population has not been the focus of many studies. Qualitative methods are an important starting point for future research that might later include a quantitative approach (Diddle & Denham, 2010). As a result, taking the time to go further into the cultural considerations was important to answering the current gaps in the research literature. Purposive samples were selected for the overall contribution they could bring to the study. They were determined in context, in that the participants were considered because they meet the specific criteria for the study, and could provide the deepest and richest information possible (Patton, 2002).

In addition to the purposive sampling, criterion-based sampling was used. Simply put, all participants met the same criteria (Patton, 2002). In order to effectively select these samples, key informants or gatekeepers, called recruiters, were used as well. This method of sampling allowed me the opportunity to depend on others to help identify people who meet the criteria of the study and who would be willing to be interviewed (Patton, 2002). Having a recruiter proved invaluable due to the Appalachian population traditionally being closed off to outsiders, making access difficult to attain without a trusted person to help bridge the gap between researcher and participant (Creswell 2013; Keefe, 2005). The three recruiters for this study are all helping professionals, one is a social worker and two are counselors, in Appalachia. They personally knew the individuals who were sampled, and vouched for them meeting the criteria. The recruiters negotiated the initial contact between the researcher and the interviewee, which provided
a bridge that helped connect the participants and me. Using a criterion-based approach allowed me to lay out the criteria in a way that allowed for some level of commonality but very diverse experiences and backgrounds of the participants (Creswell, 2013).

In order for the sample to be both purposive and criterion-based, there had to be specific criteria outlined. Although there were varying results, the initial criteria had to be the same in order to apply the results to a larger audience. Anyone who met the criteria was invited to participate by the recruiters. Only one potential participant declined to be interviewed. The following was the criteria for the participants:

1. Participants must be from West Virginia. Individuals must have been born in West Virginia and have a parent and grandparent who were also born in the Appalachian region.

2. Only adults over the age of 18 can participate.

3. Participants must have come from poverty, meaning that they grew up or currently live under the poverty line (Census, 2010), or overcome some situation that would have otherwise put them at risk for not recovering, such as a trauma.

4. The individual to be interviewed must be considered resilient by the recruiter and according to the definition of resilience set forth by Walsh (2002, 2003). Resilient individuals show or have shown the ability to bounce back from adversity (Walsh, 2002, 2003).
Gaining entrée.

The Appalachian culture is collective and people are typically reluctant to accept outside help and inquiry (Keefe, 2005; Templeton et al., 2008). In this way, I have grown to understand some of the cultural nuances that would help to gain trust among the participants. I am however, aware of the implications of being an outsider myself. Because of this, I took steps to ensure that I had recruiters who were trusted by the potential participants. These individuals were able to help select the participants due to their knowledge and familiarity with the culture and the people being interviewed (Patton, 2002). These individuals were also helping professionals who not only had firsthand knowledge of the resiliency criteria, but who bridged the gap between the participants and me. Trust was already established between the recruiter and the participant because they know each other from another context. I entered the picture after the recruiter gave the participant my contact information and the participants made the first contact. This sample of people turned out to be very forthcoming and willing to share great amounts of information about themselves. This may be in part to having an already established relationship with the recruiter.

Sample size.

In determining sample size, qualitative researchers often find that differing opinions are plentiful while a consensus on numbers is difficult to attain. In most cases, qualitative research has not put the same kinds of emphasis on number as quantitative research, although the lack of focus on this one aspect has been noted in the literature (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Most qualitative research is focused on fewer samples in
order to attain high levels of investment in data analysis. Qualitative literature frequently suggests sampling until saturation, as this is the best method of knowing when you have gathered enough information (Onwuegbusie & Leech, 2007). Nevertheless, dissertation research is often limited on resources, time, and participants, so other considerations for knowing how many participants to have are necessary (Creswell, 2013).

Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) pointed out that for purposive samples that are too homogenous, with poor data, and weak inquiry methods, six to twelve interviewees is likely to not yield quality results. Nevertheless, they go onto say that if “…the aim is to understand common perceptions and experiences among a group of relatively homogenous individuals, twelve interviewees should suffice.” (p. 79). This particular sample shared some commonalities regarding where they are from and being resilient. However, they were greatly valued for their individual perspectives and unique experiences within those similarities.

Although having many interviewees is a luxury, it does require more time and resources to manage, especially in a qualitative study where the hope is to gain a smaller sample that can provide rich data (Patton, 2002). The number of participants should be considered and there should be a clear rationale as to why that number seems appropriate, but arbitrarily picking a number is not helpful to the study.

In some narrative studies, as few as one to two participants are chosen (Creswell, 2013). These individuals are interviewed and observed at length, with more emphasis on their own lived experience. Some ethnographic studies can have anywhere from twenty to hundreds of participants, with emphasis on the culture itself (Creswell, 2013;
Fetterman, 1998). This type of study uses participant observations, where the interviewer is immersed in the culture for extended periods of time and relies on a multitude of data sources (Patton, 2002). To meet these approaches in a more balanced way, I aimed to have around ten to twelve participants from various parts of West Virginia and who came from differing ethnic and religious backgrounds. I was fortunate to find 12 participants who met that criteria and more willing to participate if I needed them. In this way, I was very fortunate to find a sample of participants who were eager to share their stories.

**Methods of Data Collection**

Creswell (2013) encourages creative data collection methods in qualitative research projects, including objects that could be part of a visual ethnography, such as a photo elicitation or digital archives. Interviewing was the main method of data collection for this research. Because this topic also considered culture as an important context for lived experiences, other methods of data collection supplemented and enhanced the individual interviews, including some audiovisual materials in the form of photographs that captured the objects of importance the participants shared (Creswell, 2013).

**Interviewing.**

Interviews allow the researcher to enter the world of the interviewee. There is an assumption that participants’ experiences are meaningful and so the researcher gathers their stories and thoughts (Patton, 2002). There are numerous steps that have to be taken in the interviewing process that are in accordance with purposive sampling. Creswell (2013) suggests that the researcher determine the questions, identify the interviewees, determine the interview type, recording method, design the interview protocol, conduct a
pilot test of the questions, select a place for the interview, gain consent, and manage good interview procedures.

The interview process of this research began with rapport-building and trust through a full disclosure of the study which was presented to the participants from the recruiter and then again from me prior to the interview (Creswell, 2013). Prior to signing the consent form, I gave the participants a disclosure statement about my intentions, their confidentiality, and their involvement. They were given a chance to ask any questions or suggest input. The participants understood that their participation was voluntary and they had the ability to terminate their participation at any time. None of the participants had questions and none of them chose to terminate once we met. One potential participant set up an interview and cancelled due to time restraints. Another participant was found to take their place and they were put on a reserve list that was never used.

The interviews for this research consisted of semi-structured questions that were audio taped and transcribed by me (Creswell, 2013). The open-ended questioning followed the Interview Guide (see Appendix A) and clarifying questions were asked in some instances (Patton, 2002). The purpose of the guide was to ensure some consistency of questioning within the interviews in order to make sure all areas of inquiry were covered (Patton, 2002). The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and pseudonyms were given to help protect the identity of the participants. Some participants chose their own pseudonym and others had me choose for them. In addition to pseudonyms to protect the interviewees, consent forms were obtained prior to the interview. The face-to-face interviews took place in locations that were determined by
the participant or the recruiter to ensure the comfort level of the participant (Creswell, 2013). Some interviews took place at a church in Charleston, West Virginia and some took place at Marshall University. Others were conducted at restaurants and some were done over the phone.

In order to address power differential issues that sometimes arise in qualitative data collections, some steps were taken to ensure that the participants did not feel as if I, as the researcher, was in any way superior (Creswell, 2013). Understanding that I am an outsider and having a fair idea of the potential biases that are common against the Appalachian culture was essential, and extra measures are especially important to take to develop a more egalitarian approach. True to narrative approach in both inquiry and therapy, participants are the experts in their own lives (Creswell, 2013; White & Epston, 1990). The interviewer is simply a tool that is helping to bring forward the voice of the expert, giving the participant the opportunity to highlight the meaning of the story in the context of their life (Creswell, 2013). Because of this, I took the lead of the participants during the interviews, pursuing only what they were comfortable talking about and meeting them within their frame of reference. Checking in with the participants again after the transcriptions and summaries were done was another way to help ensure that no liberties were taken. In addition, all participants were able to communicate with me through several methods at all times, allowing them to contact me with any questions at any time.
**Documentation and audiovisual data collection.**

In order to strengthen the data collection for this study, additional information was collected to contribute to the interviews (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Other researchers have pointed out the value in using various types of documentation as another way to gain insight into the lives of the participants and better compare the data between interviewees (Creswell, 2013). To add this element to the research, participants were asked to share an *object of importance*: a photo of someone who has had an influence on them and or, some type of object/symbol that has helped them to foster personal strength, or that symbolizes their strength. While it was expected that some participants may not have the physical object, drawings, sculptures, audiotapes or videotapes, or alternate photographs of objects of importance were also accepted. Some participants had an actual object or photograph to share during the interview. Others only told stories about their object and were not able to provide a photograph. When this happened, photographs of similar objects were taken by me in place of the actual object. One object, which was a memory, was drawn. These items helped to create a visual narrative, along with the spoken narratives of the interviewees to enhance the overall sample (Creswell, 2013). The collection of the materials was handled case by case, considering confidentiality above all else. I consulted with the participants to determine how the documentation will be depicted in the final paper. Stories associated with the object were recorded and analyzed with the text data. Descriptions of the objects and photographs of the objects are in Chapter 4 along with the interview summaries.
**IRB Approval**

In accordance with the ethical protocol put forth by colleges and universities, researchers are required to guarantee that no harm will occur to the participants as a result of the study (Creswell, 2013). Because of this, the federal government implemented legislation that requires institutional review boards (IRB) to approve any research that occurs in that educational facility (Creswell, 2008). The IRB determines if the study is ethical. Because this research project involved human participants, I first gained approval from the IRB before contacting participants (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2008) laid out the areas to cover as well: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Each category is embodied by certain considerations that must be taken by the researcher in order to do no harm (2008). Issues like consent, confidentiality, and rights to privacy are considered 
*respect for persons* (2008). *Beneficence* is the consideration that the benefits of the research do not outweigh the risks to the participants (2008). Lastly, *equality* ensures that all participants are treated fairly (2008). The researcher must obtain IRB approval before the research portion of their study begins.

Once the approval for this study was granted, recruiters were notified, and potential participants were asked if they wanted to take part in the study. Once they agreed, they contacted me and for further questions and information gathering such as contact information. This information was stored by me in files, with pseudonyms for names, which were used from that point on. While some of the interview locations were set up by the recruiters, some logistics were worked out by the participant and me regarding when and where to meet. After that, packets were sent by postal mail to the
participants. The packet included an interview guide, the consent form which will included a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study, an explanation of the procedures, the terms of confidentiality and withdraw, and the possible risks and benefits of the study. Once the participants agreed, they sent back the signed consent form through the postal mail prior to the interview. Communication with the participants was left up to them, and they had the ability to reach me through postal mail, telephone, or email. The participants were allowed to give feedback at anytime.

After the initial interviews, transcriptions of the interviews were completed by me. Interviews were listened to prior to transcription to ensure that all information was clear. Once transcription was complete, participants received a copy of their own transcript and a summary of the interview. They were asked to look over both and check it to ensure that they were accurately understood. All feedback was encouraged, and participants had the chance to give their input before they approved the summary. There were some small corrections, like how many years someone lived somewhere or their title at work, and there were no major inferences on my part that the participants disagreed with. Once all participants accepted the transcriptions and summaries, coding and finding themes began.

My intentions for a timeline were an important part of completing this study in a timely manner. My hope was to spend approximately three months in the field collecting data, but this in turn took nine months. Since I had to travel throughout Appalachia to meet my participants, I had to add time to the original timeline. In addition, working full time made it difficult to squeeze the data collection period into that timeframe. Data
collection began in the Fall of 2012 and continued until the summer of 2013. My goal was to have all ten to twelve initial interviews completed by the end of December 2012 and begin transcription as soon as the first interview was complete. Transcription and analysis took much more time than I had initially planned, taking over a year to complete. Once that was done, the summaries were completed and sent to the participants. Once they approved the transcriptions and summaries, I began the data analysis process.

**Interview Instruments**

In this study, the researcher will be the main instrument (Creswell, 2013). Because of this, the nature of the questions asked were dependent on my care and sensitivity of the participants and the research subject. Questions for the interview fell into two forms: conversational interviewing and the use of an interview guide. In order to form and maintain rapport, a more natural conversational approach was used help to ease the participants into the interview. The pace and the comfort level of the interviewee was also considered as well. The interview guide was used to move the conversation forward and gain knowledge about the individual through stories. By using an interview guide that was reviewed by the participants ahead of time, I was able to go forward with confidence that the questions asked to all participants were fair and stayed within the limits of the study. While the questions were in accordance with the style of narrative inquiry, they were designed to evoke stories about lived experience, and be indirect in nature (Patton, 2002). Some probing and clarifying questions were necessary to help find the meaning behind the stories and assure the accuracy of interpretation. Participants were asked to describe the objects they brought or told about as another data
source. The various types of data were compared to provide rich information that drew out the meaning and influences that have attributed to the participants’ resilience.

**Data Analysis**

Creswell (2013) points out that qualitative data analysis is not an “…off-the-shelf” process, but rather “…custom-built, revised, and choreographed” (p. 182). After data was collected, interviews were transcribed, chunked and coded (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Themes developed from the codes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The personal objects of importance were also coded and put into themes, which provided another layer of data that the participants provided (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Transcription was the first step after collecting the data. I transcribed the interviews from a digital audio recorder in order to immerse myself in the text itself. My hope was to gather as much information from the recorded data as possible. In order to do this, the texts were read and reread by me to ensure that the information was thoroughly explored (Creswell, 2013).

Coding will begin as soon as interviews are transcribed. Creswell & Plano Clark (2011) point out that “…the core feature of data analysis is the coding process.” (p. 208). Information was grouped and categorized according to the participants’ exact words, or *in vivocodes* (Creswell, 2013). Codes emerged for both texts and visual data, as objects encouraged more stories from participants (Creswell, 2013). The three main stages of the coding process are to practice open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Open coding refers to chunking the data into smaller parts, axial coding is grouping codes into similar categories, and selective coding is when the codes
are integrated and refined into themes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). An initial list of 30 codes was developed and included the codes of the objects of meaning as well. This list will remain around thirty categories and was eventually be reduced to less than ten categories in order to not be inundated by too much text, which was especially important as beginner researcher (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

After the codes were determined, the goal was to come up with general themes or categories, which placed data into broader units of information (Creswell, 2013; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). The themes helped to describe the resiliency and cultural themes that emerged (Creswell, 2013). These themes became interrelated and provided the answers to the research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The themes were reduced to nine categories. What was discovered was their similarity to the cultural values that Jones (1994) presented. Because of this, the themes became a simplified version of the cultural values. Since some of the cultural values seemed to overlap, some were combined in order to capture what the participants were emphasizing. Another value also emerged in this process and was added in as another cultural value that provided strength and support for the participants. The reason why it was decided to use the cultural values was because all but one value, patriotism, came forth in every interview. All 12 participants talked about the value of nine out of the 10 cultural values, and that seemed significant enough to become the themes. In this way, saturation was reached in terms of the cultural values.

After the themes were established, the data was represented in summaries and the interpretation process began. The findings were compared to other research as well as
related back to the original research questions in order to determine how well the questions were answered (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In addition, my personal reflections and meanings of the results were explained and added as an epilogue in this paper which, included a summary of what was written in the reflexive journal (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The objects of importance were also analyzed and included in the findings. While analyzing images is an emerging form of data analysis in narrative methods, stories have been shown to unfold from objects alongside the words of the interviewee (Creswell, 2013).

The five main characteristics of constant comparative analysis are (a) build themes; (b) to give the researcher a tool for analyzing data; (c) to help understand multiple meanings of data; (d) to give a systemic and creative process in which to analyze data; and (e) to identify, create, and see relationships among parts of data when constructing a theme (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008, p. 594). Participant involvement was important at every stage in order to help give them a voice as well as improve the overall credibility.

Data was analyzed through the Bioecological Model and social justice frameworks as well, looking at the person, place, time, and process contexts of the information as well as the issues that have held or continue to hold them back (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Ratts, 2009). The goal of this extra step was to gain a better understanding the development of the individual in terms of their resilience. In order to gain a clear understanding of the contexts that have contributed to their resilience, these frameworks were key in gaining insight into the participants’ ideas
about what has contributed to making them strong individuals. This included understanding whether they benefitted from cultural resilience or if they were merely positive deviants within their culture (Fielding et al., 2006).

**Trustworthiness**

Gaining trustworthiness in qualitative research is thought to be difficult in some circles. “The nature of qualitative research and role of the researcher as instrument necessitate particular attention to ensuring that trustworthiness (veracity or validity) of findings… and [is] used to ensure the accurate depiction of the experiences and perceptions of participants (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005, p. 184-185). A higher value is sometimes placed on quantitative research that can be validated, but qualitative research is arguably able to have similar rigor by assessing “…the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants.” (Creswell, 2013, p. 249-250). Since the introduction of Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria for judging trustworthiness, the techniques that enhance trustworthiness have helped researchers find ways to gain respect for their work through *credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability*. Qualitative analysis often reflects the emergent nature of both the methods of inquiry and the interactions that are context laden. As a result, this type of research is inductive, and data interpretation must be negotiated on various levels to ensure a rich and faithful representation of the participants’ stories, especially due to the role of the researcher as the instrument (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). Hence, the purpose of the trustworthiness techniques is to help strengthen the research overall. Several strategies were used in order to establish the rigor of this study and explained in this section.
From the beginning, this study has been an attempt to balance the ways in which an underrepresented population (Appalachia) has shied away from outside help due to their history of marginalization by mainstream society and put forth their voices in order to create a better awareness of what may help bolster resilience among those who need help. As a result, my neutrality as a researcher was of the utmost importance. In being neutral I committed to understanding “…the world as it unfolds, be true to the complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and discomforting evidence with regard to any conclusions offered” (Patton, 2002, p. 51).

Triangulation is a method that is used in data collection and data analysis, as well as in theoretical approach. In this study, multiple sources of data were used for data collection and compared during the analysis phase of the study (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). Participants not only participated in interviews, but they also provided an object of importance that has contributed to their personal strength. A story about the object told as well by the participants and both the story and the object were coded and analyzed. The point of data collection triangulation is to enrich the data through comparing multiple sources of information (Patton, 2002). Constant comparative analysis is an excellent way to triangulate various forms of data in order to determine if the visual data, or object of importance, corresponds to the overall themes that have emerged, and so comparative analysis was completed as a way to accomplish triangulation (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008).
A reflexive journal was kept throughout the study in order to support my self-awareness, to practice ownership of my perspective, and voice my own cultural perspective (Patton, 2002). The journal collected my thoughts and personal exploration throughout the process of research with the goal of maintaining transparency. My personal thoughts about the process and interactions that happen during data collection, analysis, and interpretation were disclosed in the journal and placed in the final dissertation in summary from in the epilogue (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). This process comes naturally to me, as both a counselor and, therefore a researcher. Being self-aware includes voicing experiences and biases that could potentially harm the dynamic between the counselor and client, or in this case, the participant. The reflexive journal more thoroughly documents “…the stability and instability of the naturally occurring phenomenon” (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005, p. 185). In the spirit of counseling, social justice, and qualitative methods, reflexive journaling helped to establish a more realistic development of interpretations that are more egalitarian than prejudiced. This is my way of acknowledging that the researcher and the research cannot be separated (Creswell, 2013). At the same time, the research and the research participants were treated fairly. To achieve this, a reflexive statement has been placed in this chapter and a final summary of my experiences can found as an epilogue at the end of this paper.

Member checking, which is a technique that is thought to be most critical in establishing trustworthiness, was also used in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data was taken back to the participants for accuracy and credibility checks (Creswell, 2013). Participants were given a written copy of their transcript and a summary of the
interview to look over and comment on. They contacted me with corrections and give their opinion about how the wording should read. Above all else, this technique allowed the participants a chance to take part in the study in a different capacity which also levels the power dynamics between the researcher and participants, giving credit to both parties throughout the process.

**Description of the researcher.**

As the researcher’s role is to be the instrument, it is essential to identify all personal values, assumptions, and biases before research begins and throughout the process as well (Creswell, 2013; Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). Not only is this important as a researcher, but as a counseling professional. The ability to acknowledge my own cultural awareness that includes the ability to explain my own upbringing and cultural values as well as how I have come to choose this topic is essential in presenting a fair and honest approach (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). As a cultural outsider, I have the ability to see things differently on a more objective level, but at the same time, may miss key elements to the culture that only an insider would understand (Creswell, 2013; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). As a result, I feel it necessary to explain who I am and where I am coming from.

I am a 38 year old Caucasian female of European descent, from rural Southwestern Michigan. I grew up on a hog farm, with grandparents, other relatives, and family friends all on the same road. While I did not appreciate it thoroughly while I was young, I now know the influence this upbringing had on me. I am the youngest grandchild of my grandparents and my father is their youngest child. Because of that, my
grandparents were much older and seemed far removed from modernity to me. They were simple and relied on their skills and abilities to get them through. They raised chickens, geese, and had an enormous garden from which they canned and preserved food for the whole year.

My grandma was a woman of convictions who always kept a tidy house. She made her own blankets, soaps, and medicines, and was resourceful in most other ways. She read often from the Bible. My grandpa enjoyed humor and found mischief in the simplest of activities, much to my grandma’s dislike. He could whistle through fixing almost anything with the simple tools he had in his garage. He volunteered at a local center to deliver food to people in need. Even though they did not have much money, they were resourceful and seemed rich in other ways. They foraged berries, nuts, mushrooms, greens, and herbs from the woods, sometimes with me tagging along. They honored nature, planting numerous trees, luring birds to their yard with feeders and water, and finding rare plants to propagate. Above all else, they felt that their faith was of the utmost importance, saving them from many difficult circumstances and helping them heal. They believed in helping others, especially family and neighbors, and those who could not help themselves. I spent many days with my grandparents, working alongside of them and learning from them.

As I got older, I think they grew worried that I would begin to discount their teachings, as I moved away and went to college in Florida, a move they were disapproving of. My grandfather passed away during my second year of college, so I began to keep in more consistent touch with my grandma. As years passed, I pursued
more education. My grandma was always more interested in how many chickens I had rather than how many degrees I had. Her, and my grandpa, had different ideas about what made a person successful. Money and education did not factor into that equation. Instead, remaining tied to our family values was far more important. Working hard, making an honest living, and being self-sufficient were central to the way in which they lived and are also central to how I choose to live today. Just before my grandma’s passing, I realized how much she and my grandpa influenced me and I thanked her for her support over the years. In many ways, they helped to keep me focused on what was truly important in life and how to live a life that is authentic.

In many ways, their values were so similar to the values of the Appalachian culture. But as Loyal Jones (1994) points out, “The Appalachian value system that influences attitudes and behavior is different in some ways from that held by our modern countrymen, although it is similar to the value system of an earlier America.” (p. 37). My grandparents were from an earlier, simpler time, when people had to depend on their families, neighbors, and community more than outside entities. They were in their twenties during the Great Depression and both came from a subsistence farming background, which also contributed to their values. Both of them had to overcome many serious issues in their lifetime that were extremely traumatic. Yet, they maintained their abilities to be self-sufficient and loving, dependable and patient. Essentially, this is what made them resilient. My ideas of what might contribute to making others resilient likely stem from their example.
Today I live in the Appalachian foothills of Southeastern Ohio with my husband and daughter. We chose this place because it is beautiful, people are friendly, and my husband’s family has lived here for hundreds of years. We live on family land where we built a house and are attempting to live a more authentic life than the one we lived prior. Our appreciation for our family, our friends, our community, the land around us, and the ability to live a quiet, rural life is what keep us here. Over the years, I have grown to appreciate the people from Appalachia more and more. I am a school counselor in the region in a rural elementary school. What has led me to this research topic comes from my frustration in trying to find culturally appropriate ways to work with students and parents. I have found mainstream interventions and techniques invaluable in that they often discount the things that seem to be important to my students and their families. While I find that working with those who struggle the most is what I like doing the best and while I am a firm believer in the social justice and work from that framework on a daily basis, I still struggle to find information about the cultural values as they apply to counseling. I grow tired of the pathology-based interventions and seek out strengths-based models. I also dislike the stereotypes that are prevalent within the culture of Appalachia as I have found them to be unfair and untrue. I believe that people deserve advocacy beyond the clinic or school. This research is an attempt to begin that process and help to bring forth the voice of Appalachia that has been silenced as a cultural minority and as a marginalized population.

As I am a product of a rural upbringing as well as the knowledge imparted to me by my grandparents, I feel as if I can relate to the Appalachian population on many
levels. Nevertheless, as an outsider, I am aware of my own positionality. Some of the credibility techniques I have chosen I hope are helpful in making sure that my own assumptions, biases, and values get in the way of the meaning that the participants express. I did grow up watching the Appalachian stereotypes play out on television and reading them in books, and although I have found those to be untrue and blown out of proportion, I need to be honest about what I have been exposed to. I have chosen this topic for research because of the gap in the literature of strengths-based approaches with Appalachian individuals (Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Much of the literature paints a negative view of working with Appalachians, often leading in with a harmful portrayal of the history and current conditions in the region. I currently hold a favorable opinion of the people who live in Appalachia. I am aware of their potential struggles and have worked diligently as a counselor to try and help those who seek me out. As I work mostly with people who live below the poverty line, I am often surprised by their resourcefulness and willingness to talk with me. As a result, I do have some assumptions that should be outlined:

1. Cultural values in Appalachia largely exist and are comprised of (a) religion; (b) independence, self-reliance, and pride; (c) neighborliness; (d) familism; (e) personalism; (f) humility and modesty; (g) love of place; (h) patriotism; (i) sense of beauty, and; (j) sense of humor (Jones, 1994).

2. Certain Appalachian individuals might be resilient simply because of personal characteristics and not cultural values.

3. Some Appalachian individuals may be resilient because of cultural values.
4. Some people from Appalachia may not feel comfortable identifying as “Appalachian.”

5. Many people from Appalachia are reluctant to go to counseling, due to a distrust of outsiders and the feeling that issues should be handled within the family.

6. Counselors and other helping professionals in Appalachia could better serve their clients by understanding cultural values and possibly using them in their practice.

In order to put my assumptions and biases in check, I have tried to remain as neutral and as objective as possible throughout the process. One method was keeping a reflexive journal, which is a type of diary that can be used on an as-needed basis to record feelings as well as the process itself (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This reflexive journal captured the issues that occurred that may threaten the credibility and trustworthiness of the study and fulfill my goal of remaining transparent throughout the study.

As an outsider living within the culture itself, I feel that I have an important perspective to use for this study. Having knowledge of the culture, including being married into a family and knowing others who come from families who have lived in the region for decades, I did have an advantage for gaining access to a rich sample. All the while, I was able to understand things differently from someone who may be from the region and not have the same ability to view things objectively. Nastasi and Schensul (2005) point out that the research quality depends on the skill and ability of the researcher to observe, interview, and gather information. As a counselor, I am confident in my
ability to do these activities well, and fairly represent the participants who were interviewed.

**Ethical Protocol**

Throughout the course of research, the guidelines set forth by the Institutional Review Board were followed in order to avoid risks and ensure safety of the participants. A detailed consent form given to the participants detailed the following information: (a) purpose of the study; (b) data collection procedures; (c) participant right to refuse participation, withdraw from the study at any time, or to extract their words at any time without impunity; (d) strategies implemented to protect participant confidentiality; (e) indication statement of known risk to the study; (f) and expected benefits of the study.

Confidentiality was kept by using pseudonyms from the first meeting and throughout the process. All interviews began with a confidentiality and disclosure statement about the purpose of the study and allowed for questions before recording begins. A consent form was mailed to the participants and will be signed prior to interviewing. All recordings and consent forms were securely kept in my home. The recordings will be retained for two years from the point of collection and then destroyed.

**Summary**

This chapter discussed the methods intended to be used in this study along with the research questions that will be the focus of inquiry. The findings of this study are intended to contribute to the competence of helping professionals who work with people from Appalachia, giving voice to those who are resilient in the culture as experts in their culture and its influence in their life. Chapter 4 will present the interview summaries
from this study. Chapter 5 will present the findings, including the major themes and a comparison of the objects of importance. Chapter 6 will provide the discussion, including implications for helping professionals and implications for future research, in addition to limitations of the study. An Epilogue will follow which is a reflection of the reflexive journal that was kept throughout the process.
Chapter 4: Interview Summaries

Introduction

This chapter contains the summaries of the participant’s interviews. Their stories are what drive this research and because of that, they are presented in an extended summary form as to not misrepresent them. The nature of the interview let the participants talk about their lives in terms of what brought them strength at different stages in their lives. As a result, these summaries follow a similar format, beginning with an introduction of the person, an overview of their childhood, and an overview of their adulthood, all focusing of what has made them the person they are today and what has been their sources of strength. Lastly, the participants discussed their objects of importance. Included in this discussion are pictures of the objects. Some are actual pictures of the objects, some are replicas, and one is a drawing. Some people told stories about these objects and others did not. This chapter focuses on the stories alone, and allows the reader a chance to understand what helps to make someone resilient as told from the stories of Frank, Jeremy, Sarah, Rod, Marie, John, Daisy, David, Fred, Anne, Ralph, and Wendy.

Frank.

Frank is from Marion County, West Virginia. He is a Caucasian man in his early 60’s. He has been married for 36 years and has four children and two grandchildren. He is the second oldest of four siblings. Frank’s mother and father were divorced when he was in grade school. Frank’s father was abusive to both his children and Frank’s mother. Frank grew up poor but had a large extended family that all lived in the same small town.
He was raised Catholic and his mother’s side of the family came from Poland. Frank is a college graduate and holds a Master’s degree in psychology. He has been a psychologist for 30 years and is a faculty member for a major university and runs a state involuntary civil commitment hospital. He is a life-long resident of West Virginia.

Both sides of Frank’s family are from West Virginia, although his father’s family has lived in West Virginia longer. Frank’s mother’s family emigrated from Poland. His great-grandmother and great-grandfather were born in Poland and moved to the United States and resided in the town Frank grew up in. Because of his family’s strong ties to their heritage, Frank was raised a devout Catholic. As a result, all of the people who influenced Frank at an early age were connected through the church: church elders, the priest, other members of the church, and his own family. Just the act of going to church was a family event. “You go with your family so, when you walk in, you don’t just sit somewhere, you sit with your family. You wouldn’t just sit with your mom and your brothers, you would sit with grandma, grandpa, great uncle, great aunt, cousins, nephews, you know all of the family and they might take up 4 or 5 rows in the church.” This strong connection to family and then the family’s connection to church had a significant influence on Frank’s young life. This is also true for the traditions and Polish heritage that Frank’s family held onto and passed onto each younger generation.

In a Polish Catholic family, “the children were the precious ones and we were always doted upon and taken care of.” The family unit was of the utmost importance. This was especially true for Frank’s immediate family as it was difficult to make ends meet living in poverty. One advantage Frank and his siblings had was that all of their
family lived in the same town. “My grandmother lived beside her sister and my grandmother’s two other sisters lived together with their brother and their mom lived right down the road, so we were all right there along with my great-grandmother who came from Poland.” Not only was this family close because of proximity, they were also “enmeshed”, doing everything together and taking care of each other as a unit. Everyone had their place, and the elders and the children were central to everything. Frank’s great-grandmother, Mauma was one of these central figures who maintained a connection with the entire family. Frank remembers that when he was young, it was expected that anyone who passed by Mauma’s house paid her a visit.

And, if you didn’t and they found out you went past Mauma’s house and didn’t say “Hi” to her, there was Hell to pay…you had to go in and say hi to Mauma who was 90 years old and ¾ blind. You would come in and kneel because she sat in a rocking chair, and you would go in and she would touch your head, “Frankie? Frankie? Is that you?” “Yeah, Mauma, it is me.” Then, you would give her a kiss and she would say her prayers in Polish and then she would say “Bye-bye!” and pat you on the head and then you could go on your way but, you had to stop!”

In addition to this tradition, Frank was also expected every Sunday at his grandmother’s house for a meal. “We had a family brunch of what is called plotschke, which is fried bread dough in chicken gravy…there was no not being there. You didn’t do anything else. You went to mass, and then you went to Granny’s for breakfast and then you could start your Sunday but, that gives you some insight into the incredibly enmeshed lives that
we had.” Because of this enmeshment, Frank was able to rely on his family for much of his support.

As a child, Frank was aware of the hardships his mother faced. One of those hardships was dealing with his father. “Well, my dad was an abusive husband and an abusive father and we finally kicked him out of the house when we were 8 and 10.” Because of this, they were one of the only families in town who were divorced, but this divorce helped save their family in many ways. When Frank was in Boy Scouts they would sometimes have family nights.

So, here comes my dad carrying this watermelon. I was ecstatic! ‘My dad! My dad! My dad! Well…where’s mom?’ She is coming behind him. So, I look back and just kind of walking real slow…I knew she was sick even though I didn’t know what Crohn’s Disease was, I thought she was walking slow because she was sick. But, I got up close to her and she was walking slow because she couldn’t see where she was going. And, I remember looking at her and saying, “What happened, what happened? Why do you have two black eyes?” And, she said, “I fell off a ladder.” And, you know, that was the time that my brother and I had figured it out and we had been smacked around a fair amount by then, but you couldn’t lie your way out of that.

That was the end of their relationship with their father with the exception of occasionally asking him for money that he never gave them. With no father around, Frank had to find others who could help guide him and serve as a role model for him.
The adults outside of his family who were influences in Frank’s early life were the Priest, coaches, and his best friend’s father. Frank and his brother were altar boys at the church. “In those days you had morning mass. It started at 6:00 am, so every day of the week, every couple of months you had to trudge your butt to morning mass at 5:30 in the morning in the snow or rain or in the dark, so that discipline of the church was there too.” This resulted in a close connection with the priest, Father Jurgonski.

Frank also played basketball, baseball, and Pop Warner football. He had some influential coaches who helped him in more ways that just being a good athlete. They helped to provide additional support throughout Frank’s days in school. One of those coaches was a now famous college football coach’s father; Mike Simon Sr. Frank remembered that he went to his first practice for Pop Warner football in black patent leather shoes. They were the only shoes Frank had to wear. “And, I remember lining up and I had on these black Sunday shoes and Mike Sr. yelled over, ‘Spence, what you got on your feet?’ and I said ‘Shoes, sir (laughs).’ And, he said, ‘Come with me.’ I remember that he held my hand and he walked me over to his bus and gave me some football shoes.” It turned out that Mike Sr. played baseball with Frank’s father, who was very good and got drafted by the Pirates until he hurt his back. But, this gesture of taking Frank under his wing meant more than Mike Sr. could have known. To this day, it is a memory that Frank considers part of the “apex” that he experienced through the support of his coaches.

There was another person who took Frank under his wing, “the father of my best friend was extraordinarily influential.” Frank’s friend John was like another family
member and it was John’s father who played a vital role for Frank. Since Frank could not rely on his own father, John’s father served as the father he did not have. Frank was included in their family and treated like another son. This was reciprocated, and John spent ample time with Frank’s family as well. Nevertheless, it was this level of inclusion that allowed Frank to feel supported and loved. John’s father was able to be the example of a father Frank would not have otherwise known. It was this type of extended kinship network that supported Frank beyond his own family.

Overcoming obstacles was not easy for Frank and his family due to the immensity and nature of their situation. Being a child in the 50’s and 60’s in an underprivileged area, with no father, a mother with Crohn’s Disease, and a large immediate family created a set of major limitations for Frank. Nevertheless, Frank found resources everywhere he went and coming from a resourceful family was a great help. When Frank was asked about what held the family together and how they survived Frank said, “Well, probably my mother refusing to let it get her down.” Frank’s best example of resilience was through his mother, who worked as a secretary at a mental health clinic for $80 a month. She would take Frank and his siblings’ places and do things with them. She would “do double duty and when we saw that, it just instilled in us that there wasn’t a reason to let it get you down.” Because money was one of the major obstacles, Frank and his brother found ways to make it to help their mother out. They would collect the returnable pop bottles after school. “(A now famous politician’s) grandfather, Papa Jake, we called him, owned a store. And, Papa Jake, instead of giving us a nickel for each pop bottle, would give us a dime because we were turning around and buying food with it and
that was every day.” Resourcefulness and resilience were built into Frank’s family as a means to survive.

Today, Frank’s siblings are a lawyer, a biologist, and a chemist. And, Frank believes that it is all credit to his mother, who was very ill but still made the most of everything. “Maybe that is the answer, she never, never complained!” From that example, Frank learned that if she could push through, he could. And, it was her faith and her dedication to her family that kept her going. “So, you see that family, church gratitude kind of thing; if you let it stop and if you let it get you down, you would go to Hell real quick…you didn’t have that leeway of ‘oh woe is me!’ because if you fell off that abyss, you didn’t have anything to catch ya!” To Frank, it was all interconnected, the family and the church, and that is what held him up because that is what held all of them up. “So the people were holding you, the church, the family, they were all holding you and if you didn’t allow them to hold you, if you didn’t eat at Granny’s or stop at Mauma’s, you would fall real quick.” Every person in the family took an interest in the old and the young, and it was “the elders of the family who provided the safety net.” To the family’s advantage, they did not lose many of their elders until just a few years ago, with most of them living into their 90’s. As a result, the family was able to stay mostly intact and function as a unit for Frank’s entire childhood. But, it was his mother who showed him how to receive that kind of support and how to function within that family unit, making it possible for him to succeed just as she had.

Frank has many internal personal strengths and he credits his imagination for helping him to get through and cope with the hardships he faced. Frank was able to use
his imagination to find creative ways to cope with his obstacles. He is a self-described “clown”, always entertaining and always likable. To everyone, he was just “Frankie,” easy to relate to and lean on. Frank is a pleaser and a helper and his imagination was helpful in creating coping mechanisms to buffer him from the unknown. Creating order became Frank’s way to handle his fear of the unknown. Frank knows now that is how he learned how to cope and adapt to fear of the unknown.

At the house there was no dad so, I painted the house, I planted marigolds down the driveway, I cut the grass, I cleaned the house, I did the laundry. You see, the order! I liked that order. I had to have order. Of course, I was scared to death.

My mom was sick. You had to. You were extraordinarily vulnerable so, the way you managed that, in terms of me, was order.

Reducing fear was Frank’s goal, whether it was subconscious or not, whether it was belonging to a certain group of friends who got all of the attention, or being a decent student. He found that anyway he could feel less vulnerable was ultimately helpful. “But all the while in the background, scared to death that my mom would die or that something bad would happen, so you just over controlled but very, very, very vulnerable to being cut loose or rejected or forgotten about.” Frank was determined to find a way to make all of that fade away.

There were other things outside of Frank’s family that were also part of his support system as well. Frank was fortunate to have his best friend John who he is still close with today. Frank and John’s friendship was important because they both felt involved in the other’s life. “He wanted to be in my family and I wanted to be in his.”
John and Frank included each other in everything, and their parents reciprocated that as well. John’s family became an external support to Frank just as Franks’ mother became an important figure to John. Frank remembered that once someone told him that “the greatest predictor of social competence was having a best friend by the age of 12.” Frank had this in John and valued his companionship immensely. He knew he had someone he could relate to and who he could lean on. John accepted Frank for who he was, and frank did not have to try to be anything other than himself around John.

Frank’s major influences stayed the same throughout adolescence. Things did not begin to change for him until he went to college at West Virginia Tech. It was there that Frank ran into his first self-inflicted obstacle, alcohol. When he was in high school, he was in the highest math class. Frank aspired to be a civil engineer and felt confident that he had a solid background in math. “I found out that the sons and daughters of the civil engineers of DuPont and Carbine and other places had that stuff in 6th grade and I was drunk the first semester of college.” Instead of focusing on school, he decided to focus on fun. He had recently told his own kids that “my blood alcohol level was higher than my GPA, my first semester I had a .9 average.” So, Frank switched to humanities and transferred to the West Virginia University.

A similar pattern happened there until Frank finally transferred to Fairmont State and got his grades up. “My mom just kind of said, ‘now is not the time to mess this up’ and, I decided that I am not going to flunk out of school.” There was more wisdom to his mother’s recommendation than just getting good grades and graduating. “I told my son the other day, if you flunked out of school, your butt was going to Vietnam…so, what it
was were the Vietnamese, or the Vietcong, who were really influential at that time in my life (laughs).” There were some other factors as well that influenced Frank to finish his degree. He had a cousin who had gotten his PhD in philosophy from Arizona State “so he was setting the standard, he was setting the pace that there are people who are in this family who are going to college and doing well.” Frank’s brother was in law school at the time was also this kind of example. “I wanted to be a college graduate.” Frank just needed the motivation to finish. “Remember when I told you that if you failed, there was an abyss? You are trying to achieve good instead of avoiding the bad.” He wanted to succeed not only for himself, “that is where my energy came from, being the pride of the family and not wanting to be a loser, which would have identified me with my loser, not so nice of a guy, dad and I didn’t want to be on that side of the equation.” Frank used these examples, both positive and negative, to visualize what he wanted to be like and what he did not want to be like.

Another pivotal point in Frank’s life was when he met his future wife his senior year “and that was the point where, not to sound sappy, everything came into focus in an instant.” He found that meeting her was just enough reason to keep trying and to look forward to the future, “from then I had a reason to continue making the good grades, to go to graduate school because the reason I am going is to, she didn’t know it yet but, to be the husband and father and spouse.” Everything became very clear to Frank from then on and he became intent on not only finishing school, but finishing well and continuing on. Meeting Lyza gave him a focus and a purpose beyond himself.
Frank attended Marshall University for graduate school. It turned out to be a very invigorating environment for Frank. He was fortunate to have two very influential professors who guided him through. These men were, in Frank’s opinion, brilliant and for them to support him felt validating. He took graduate school very serious and even went as far as to ask a very big favor from the Dean. “I asked him for the keys to the building and he said, ‘Why should I give you the keys to the building?’ and I said, ‘Sir, I just learned in my class that performance is best where learning takes place so, I want to study in the room where I will take my tests’” (laughs).” As a result, the Dean went all the way to the President of the University and Frank got the keys to the building. Frank’s intention was to continue on and get his PhD, but he Lyza started their family instead, having one child and one on the way before he graduated. Frank got his license and was content to not leave West Virginia, “I knew I wasn’t going to leave” and raise his family. “I just wanted to be more of a dad and that’s what we did.”

Frank’s life was from then on defined as being a dad. They had four children in nine years. Frank and Lyza spent every moment they had with their children, “we never missed anything the children did…And, I have film (laughs) of them doing cheerleading and just stupid stuff but, I would sit there for hours.” Frank spent the same kind of time with his children that his mom had spent with him and his siblings.

Remember the story about my mother not doing anything else but taking care of her kids? That is how I took care of our kids. There was nothing I would rather do than take care of our kids. They were waiting on me when I came home from work on the banister, ‘Daddy’s home! Daddy’s home!’ I didn’t go out with the
guys. I came home to be with my kids. That’s the lesson. That’s what my mom did. That’s what granny did.

Frank took care of his children that same way he was taken care of and the same way his mother was taken care of by his Granny and so on. He was passing on the family tradition of putting children first. “Everyone was focused on the kids.” Frank and Lyza never missed an event that their kids were involved in and they took their children everywhere, even to the grocery store. They put all of their time and energy into raising their kids, playing with their kids, and supporting their children. “So, the message was to be with your kids and then be with your mom and dad. You see, that is the culture and a very significant theme in our culture; your kids and your family. That’s all you’ve got.”

Today Frank is getting used to not having their children around and this is a huge challenge. All of them have grown up and moved on. “Um, not surprisingly empty nest was really difficult. Really, really, really difficult to go from a noisy house…I hate quiet. Now I understand why my mom always had a radio going.” Now Frank spends time reflecting on their lives, hoping that all of their time spent is being integrated in a meaningful way into their kids’ lives. This is not without challenge. Frank finds it especially difficult to understand certain aspects of his kids’ lives, especially certain decisions they make. Some of their children live in different towns and have busy lives. Frank struggles with knowing what to do now that the bulk of his parenting is over. He wonders what he and Lyza are supposed to do now that they do not have to take four children with them everywhere. Trying to find new purpose has become very taxing and Frank finds that working toward independence is somewhat uncomfortable at times. “I
have never been independent.” The enmeshment of their family is somewhat undone as a result of everyone going different directions and doing things for the first time without each other. How Frank meets this challenge is by applying some of the focus he has on positive psychology in his own life. He seeks peace; peace with his past, peace with his adult children, peace in his work. Frank has also tried to incorporate some Buddhist teachings into his life, just examining his own self and “how quickly you fail and how difficult it is.” This endeavor is somewhat self-serving and Frank finds that he feels somewhat guilty and selfish about focusing so much on finding new purpose and meaning in his life. Nevertheless, he feels like his children need to go through their own struggles and the best thing he can do is to just support them, “realizing that I have a job to do which is to try and find a way to just quiet my mind and do it in the context of not being troubled all the time.”

**Figure 1: Photograph of Frank’s Rubber Mushroom**

When Frank was asked about his object of importance, he quickly brought up his rubber mushroom and laughed. When he was young, he was skinny child but he went out
for teams anyway. After freshman year, he could dunk a basketball with his hands behind his head. So, needless to say, Frank had really grown into something quite different than he started as. During his senior year, they had a sports banquet and a famous football player was the speaker, which was a big deal because this was a local guy but he was also a Hall of Famer. There were many awards given out but some were awards in the form of vegetables. “I was thinking that I would not get anything when (the hall of famer) held up a mushroom, a rubber mushroom, and said that the mushroom was someone who was up and coming and is gonna sprout and it goes to Frankie Spence.” To Frank, that was a defining moment in his life that represented all of the things that he could achieve.

The mushroom is kind of metaphorically the things that sprout up in the middle of the muck. There is something that can grow in some of the worst parts of the forest, places where you don’t think things can grow but, there is something there that can just grow and sprout up and it is resilient, has to be resilient because it is in the dark, there is not a lot of light but something came in somehow to help it along. It somehow, somewhere, somehow made it.

Frank did not know who decided that he deserved the mushroom but that did not matter to him. What did matter was that he was recognized as someone who could make it, as someone who has potential and it served as an “apex” in his life. His coaches, who were such supportive figures to him were telling him that he was going to thrive no matter what, and for Frank, that was worth more than most things.
There are very distinct themes that come forth in Frank’s story. The first and foremost is family. Frank’s family while he was growing up was central to his life. With the family, there was faith and tradition. There was an order to the roles everyone has in the family and respect for owning up to those roles. Frank’s mother was influential in making sure he was included and loved, cared for and supported, given hope and shown how to persevere. This directly influenced Frank’s life with his own family later, using all of the examples and knowledge and traditions he had been shown in order to do the same things for his own children. Another theme is that of faith and spirituality. Frank’s faith has evolved to encompass even some Buddhist teachings today, but the foundation of his Catholic faith still connects him with not only his family, but the important lesson of never giving into the negative, and staying focused on the positive. Growing up it was staying out of the abyss and letting those around you be your safety net. Today it is trying to find peace with the negative and focusing on the positive instead. The last theme is the importance of education and a love for learning. Even though Frank struggled to find his way initially in school, later on school became the vehicle for him to pass on the things that have been given to him throughout his life; strength, reserve, and a focus on things that are good. Frank’s education helped him achieve not only in the ways of finding a career, his educational journey served to help him find more people outside of his family to help him along and support him while he found out how he wanted to become a contributing member of society. Frank’s journey is still occurring as he continues to find new ways to redefine himself and surround himself with people who encourage and inspire him.
Jeremy.

Jeremy is in his early 40’s. He lives in Putnam County, West Virginia in the small rural town where he grew up. He was born one county over in Kanawha County. Jeremy is married and has three children; two sons and a daughter who passed away as an infant. He has a college education and played college baseball. He currently works in medical sales for a large company. Jeremy and his wife, Anne also own a sporting goods store that has been in their family since Jeremy was young, as well as run a 501c3 foundation that puts defibrillators in schools. He is the middle of three children and he is close with his family, both immediate and extended. Jeremy is Caucasian and identifies as a Christian.

Jeremy lives in a small town in just outside of Charleston, WV where he grew up and went to school. When he graduated from high school, he played baseball on a scholarship at the University of Charleston. He married Anne, who lived about three miles from him growing up. “We didn’t go to high school together, I am quite a bit older than she is but, we knew each other, knew about each other.” Once they were married, they moved to Wyoming for three years, “but once we decided to start a family with children of our own, we wanted to get back to West Virginia. We actually moved back literally within 300 yards of the elementary school we both went to.” Aside from his time in Wyoming, Jeremy has stayed close to home, “I have lived in a 30 mile radius and had basically one move.”

Jeremy’s entire family is also from West Virginia. His mother and father grew up in or near Charleston. “There are really very few aunts and uncles who have moved
Jeremy and Anne know this feeling from personal experience. Growing up, Jeremy’s parents owned a sporting goods store but, “they were always around. They hardly ever missed a game or practice or anything like that.” He was able to depend on his parents for support and both of them became very important role models in Jeremy’s life. Both his immediate and extended family is “very, very tight knit.” So, Jeremy could not only depend on his parents for support, he had many family members who he could rely on as well, making a very strong family unit to surround and support him.

Aside from his family, Jeremy depended on other people in his community as well. He played sports and so coaches became very influential to him. “I started playing different sports from early on and had some very influential coaches in my life from little league all the way up to college.” In addition to coaches, Jeremy could also depend on his friends and neighbors, who were one in the same. His neighborhood friends and their parents became like extended family members. “I think their dads and moms probably disciplined me as much as my mom and dad did. Depending on whose house you were in, if you got in trouble they would be the corrector, I guess and, they weren’t shy about it. All of the parents agreed that is something needed to be said, it was said.” Jeremy had this structure all the way through school and relied on the influence of those around him constantly, especially some of the men who lived in the neighborhood. It was this type of kinship network that provided a secondary safety net for Jeremy and his friends.

School and sports also helped Jeremy stay grounded while growing up. “You know, academics were always something that was really stressed. I was never pushed to
be straight A’s but I was always pushed to have good grades.” It was sports however that attracted Jeremy’s attention. “I remember growing up we would cut baseball bat handles out of boards and we would just hit rocks into the river. That was batting practice a lot of times. We played sandlot football and sandlot baseball. We actually had a home plate, a permanent home plate, in our back yard for whiffleball and baseball.” Jeremy and his friends were always occupied with sports and made games out of everything they could.

Church was an important aspect of growing up for Jeremy as well. “Church was a huge influence, I would say even more so than sports. Our faith is very important.” To Jeremy, his faith is not only something that was fostered by his parents; it is part of the community.

The culture of church here is really, really heavy so maybe there are people who don’t believe what they hear on Sunday morning but, church here is almost like a community center or activity center. If you look inside on Friday night, the church has usually got something going on so, it wasn’t just my church, it was church. There were three or four churches in town and it seemed like we were always at one of them doing something.

Their town was small and churches served as hub of activity when Jeremy was growing up. Most Friday nights there was always something going on at one of the churches and everyone was welcome.

Jeremy had a very typical childhood. He was surrounded by supportive people in a supportive and close-knit community. His entire family lived in the same town and they were very involved in his life. Jeremy did not have any obstacles that got in his
way. “You know, the way I was raised, well…my dad was a professional athlete. He played for the Cleveland Indians so, the way I was raised, you didn’t really see obstacles. You know, it wasn’t an arrogance, it was just a high level of confidence in who I was and in my abilities.” Now, Jeremy can see that there may have been some obstacles due to a lack of opportunities and missed opportunities. “I think I would have been a pretty decent hockey player but, you don’t play hockey in West Virginia.” Another example of missed opportunities was in regards to diversity. “I really feel like I missed out getting to know people from different backgrounds and you know race and everything else.” Now that Jeremy travels for work and meets people from all over, he realizes what he may have missed growing up. The circumstances are still like this today and that is why Jeremy makes a concerted effort to expose his children to other cultures and people who are different from them. “That is one thing that I really try to go out of my way with my kids. We try to go on trips and knowing different people and going different places.”

Because the community Jeremy lived in was so small, doing activities with family and friends were very much central to his life. Time spent was usually time spent together and that was the most important thing. His family was very close, so Jeremy spent much of his time with his siblings. They spent time outside together. They fished, hiked in the woods often, spent time on the river and camped frequently. “You know things that don’t cost a lot of money but, are a lot of fun and really just the opportunity to be together.” Another thing that Jeremy remembered doing with his family was going to sporting events. “You know we would look in the paper and see who was playing and if someone was playing within an hour of us, we would hop in the car and go see it, be it
high school or college or whatever.” This kept their family close and made their bond even stronger. “It was just finding things to do together.” Even family vacations often included a friend or neighbor. “We would end up going on 2, 3, 4, 5, vacations a year without our family because you just would go with your best buddy and you would take them on yours. So, it was really just doing things together.” Even though his family stuck together, they always made room for others to join them and so did other families in their community.

One way the extended family kept close was having meals together. “I mean, everything here circles around a meal. No matter what it is, Sunday afternoon you are not at just one, but all grandparents’ it seems like.” This time to connect has a long-standing tradition not only in Jeremy’s family, but with other families in the community as well. “So, there is just something about getting together and typically it is over a meal, you know, if you live around here, anything and everything, you know if you go over to Mawma’s house, you can’t leave without being fed at least 3000 calories before you walk of the door (laughs).”

When Jeremy was an adolescent, he enjoyed spending time with his friends, but his family always managed to make sure that he was not getting too far from their values. In late middle school, dating actually became a trend that was widely accepted by the parents of the community. “It was like they wanted you to date and experience that, but without us really knowing it, they controlled that.” One way Jeremy’s parents did this was by putting in a swimming pool, that way kids would hang out there but, they would be under supervision. Nevertheless, Jeremy and his friends still found way of “pushing
the boundaries” whether it was going mudding or cruising in Jeremy’s Mustang convertible in a shopping plaza. “Looking back, our parents really allowed us to grow up but still kept a real close eye on what we were doing and who we were doing it with.”

Sports became very important to Jeremy when he was in high school. “The athletic thing was so big a lot of us didn’t get in trouble because we didn’t want to jeopardize our athletic standing or our ability to play.” Even though he played other sports, it became obvious that Jeremy had serious talent in baseball. He had scouts coming to see him play. It was during this recruiting process that Jeremy began to value his father on a whole new level. Not only was his dad very knowledgeable about baseball from his own experiences as a professional player, he was also helping Jeremy become independent and make his own choices. This became clear to Jeremy his junior year of high school.

I wanted to go to baseball camp and he, this was back before the internet so you had to look things up and go through magazines and whatnot, and he told me I could but that I had to find the camp and decide where I was going. So, I decided on a camp in Florida and I was going to go over Christmas break. He said that was fine but he asked me how I was going to get there. So, I had to recruit a few buddies and one of the other guy’s grandfather volunteered to take us. He made me be independent and made me make decisions.

This philosophy was true when Jeremy was being recruited as well. “He wanted to help me, but he didn’t. He wanted me to make the decision and he didn’t want to tell me
where to go. He would give me guidance, but he wouldn’t tell me what to do.” Jeremy
did realize how helpful that was until he got older.

Jeremy decided to stick close to home even though he had many offers to go
elsewhere to play college baseball. He chose to go to the University of Charleston.
Although this was not a far distance from Jeremy’s home, he lived on campus and found
that he was fortunate to have a coach that was another positive male role model for him.
“He wasn’t necessarily the best baseball coach around but he was by far a good guy for
bringing someone who was 17, 18 years old from high school to a 21, 22 year old man.”
Jeremy also had the support of men who would come to watch him play.

There are men from the community…who would travel to watch a decent player.
I had a couple of guys like that who would come and watch me play and that,
knowing that people like that are there and know you and not just your stats,
knowing you and your parents, it helps you keep your nose clean.

In addition to all of these people, Jeremy was fortunate to have good relationships with
some of his professors as well. “What it did was put me in an environment where the
student to professor ratio was so small, I got to be friends with and still am friends with a
number of my professors from college 20 years later.” By creating this safety net of
people around him, Jeremy thrived and was able to focus on his studies and baseball
without issue. “I stayed out of a lot of trouble not because I didn’t want to get into some
things but, because my biggest fear was disappointing the men who were the greatest
influence in my life.”
It was during college when Jeremy started dating Anne. “I think that may be another thing that is unique to Appalachia, but I think she was 14 and I was 19 the first time we went out but, our first date was going to church with my grandma.” Their age difference did not bother anyone, including their parents who knew each other. Their relationship was very conservative and all of their dates were chaperoned. “We both knew we didn’t want to do something that would be or seem inappropriate so, for the first four years, we were never alone.” Jeremy also became involved with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes shortly after graduating from college and getting a job with that organization. “Well, I actually went to graduate school for a little bit then had a rude awakening. I was on a full scholarship in undergrad and had to pay my own way in graduate school. That lasted for about a semester.” Instead Jeremy worked and focused on his relationship with Anne. He had a chance to take a position in Casper, Wyoming when Anne was a sophomore in college, so they got married.

Two days after Jeremy and Anne got married, they were on their way out west, but this came at a cost. “It was like someone passed away.” After a long discussion, Jeremy’s parents “sort of gave me a release.” They were sad to see him leave but, they felt like he was doing it for the ministry, which they supported. “But Anne’s side of the family didn’t, they held on. They told us that when we left, they drove to her grandma’s, her whole side of the family, drove to her grandma’s and cried for two days. I mean, it was like a wake, it truly was.” Having Anne go meant that the family unit was somewhat broken. The family was not happy with their decision to leave. “It was horrible, it really was but, what moving to Wyoming did for us was give us a chance to grow up together
and be married.” Living on their own proved to be very fulfilling for Jeremy and Anne. Little things like finding new friends and a church became liberating. “It was the first time in either one of our lives that we had to choose our own church which, we just went where grandma and grandpa or mom and dad went. It was a chance for us to choose our own friends who weren’t someone we went to high school or even elementary school with or relatives.” This kind of freedom brought them closer as a couple and as individuals; they were made stronger and more independent. “I was no longer ‘Roy’s son’ I had to build my own identity. “Financially it was a struggle…which neither one of us was wealthy growing up, but didn’t go without. So, we went without.” The family pressure to move back was difficult though. They found it hard to even have phone conversations with certain family members. Coming home for vacations was even more stressful. Trying to decide who to visit and for how long became very taxing. “Our families got along well but it still felt like there was a score board.” Despite the difficulties, their experience of living somewhere else completely on their own was a positive one. Jeremy now realizes that their relationship even feels stronger than some of their family just because they were able to get away. “I feel like there is a big difference between Anne and myself and the maturity of our relationship.” They lived in Wyoming for three years and then Jeremy had another opportunity.

The Fellowship of Christian Athletes presented Jeremy with his dream job, and it happened to be back in West Virginia. “So, when we moved, it was shocking! It really was. It was like there was a death in the family for someone to leave and go so far away. But, you know, I never left with the intension of never coming back.” Jeremy believes
this is true for many people who live in West Virginia. “It is sort of funny but it is true but, typically it is not unusual to see but you will see a house and around the house will be a number or different trailers because the parents will give the kids permission to just move their trailers right on there.” Leaving can not only be difficult, it can be a strain on your family unit.

Jeremy and Anne ended up moving back “within 300 yards of our elementary school.” There were also two major reasons for coming back. One was Jeremy’s great new work opportunity. The second was that they were thinking about starting their own family and wanted to be close to home and family. They moved to a home and found that they were very close to everyone once again.

Now when I go for my run, about a half mile from our house is her sister’s house. About a quarter mile from there I pass her grandma’s house. Less than a quarter mile from there I pass my brother’s house and less than a half mile from there I pass where her mom and dad live. And, if I do my longer run and go about four or five miles, I pass my mom and dad’s house. So, it is pretty tight.

Jeremy believes that here are positives and negatives to living this close to one another. There are some challenges to having so much family around all of the time, “like our house is not out of the way for anybody, so at any time, we don’t get knocks on the door, everyone has their own garage door opener to our house. You can be sitting around in your underwear and you hear the garage door open.” Because Jeremy and Anne experienced some freedom early on in their relationship, they are the only ones who feel like this kind of closeness can sometimes be intrusive. “I think we have all forgotten how
to knock, so privacy goes out the window living in the…well, you could almost call it a commune.”

However, the positives outweigh the negatives, in Jeremy’s opinion. “I mean, we have the freedom to, if we want, to go out to dinner, we go out to dinner. We call our brothers or sisters or moms and dads and say, ‘Hey, can you take the kids?’ So, we have babysitting on demand and most of the time it’s free!” There are many perks like this that make it all worthwhile. They do not regret their choice and feel as if “now we are in a great situation.”

Our kids see at least one or two of their grandparents every day. They see at least three or four cousins every day…well, they are even in the same class with them. They all play ball on the same team. They like doing the same things. They have built in best friends beyond their brothers and sisters with their cousins. And, they get along very well. We all like the same things and are like minded.

They wanted to be within a day’s drive when they moved back and they were able to manage being even closer everyone. They also have the opportunity to share with their kids what they experienced growing up.

This has been a beneficial safety net for Jeremy and Anne, even more than they could have expected. Two days after their second child Mara was born, she suddenly and inexplicably passed away. “She would have been 10 this upcoming September and that is one of the…if your marriage survives that, it is very rare. And, to be able to survive that, not just in our marriage but mentally, everything was just a huge deal.” Without any explanation, she was gone within such a short time. This kind of loss is beyond words
and getting through it is grueling. Their support network of family and friends coupled with their faith was there to provide them much needed support.

I don’t think we would have come out the other side without our faith, but beyond that, the support group that we have…I mean, we joke about everybody being around and sometimes it does get annoying, but I know anytime of any day there are more than a handful of people that I can call and they will respond immediately. I think most people are lucky if they have one or two people like that in their life.

The challenges that one faces when losing a child are insurmountable. “And, so losing a child was a huge challenge and getting through that was a huge obstacle and we aren’t done yet. It has been almost 10 years and it is something that we deal with every single day.”

Jeremy and Anne began to realize that although their family was extremely supportive, there were times when they could not depend on them. Jeremy found that there were also down sides to dealing with family who were also grieving at the same time. “Another obstacle to that is when you lose a child, most people who haven’t have no clue what that is like. So, dealing with good hearted people who think they are helping but in real life are…well, have said and done things that are very, very offensive and are not helpful at all.” Some of their support network was unable to handle their situation. Jeremy even had a very close friend who said nothing about it, “didn’t offer up a note, a call, a card, a visit or anything and that was very disappointing.” Jeremy and Anne had to figure out how to grieve in a way that made sense to them.
We went through the typical emotion, and anger, disbelief, denial, you name it…deep depression which we never thought we would get out of that one, and that was bad and you know, it was such a unique situation, and I have said, unless you have been through that, it is hard to understand. So, with our family no one could help us. No one could say, ‘We understand and we can get through this.’ So, that was tough but, we came through and we chose to come through, and because of that, I think our marriage is stronger, going on our 17th year, than it ever has been and it was because we chose to make it work. That was a big one! They made it through on their own terms and by their own accord. They managed to find ways to heal and to try to make sense of an ineffably difficult situation.

One thing that Jeremy decided was to take a major step to get out of his depression, if not for himself, then for his kids and Anne. After Mara passed, they had another son. Although they were happy with the arrival of their son, it was still immensely difficult to deal with the residual effects of their loss. “After our daughter passed away, I allowed myself to get extremely heavy and extremely unhealthy, not just mentally but physically. Right before I turned 40, I decided that was not right.” Jeremy struggled through the complexities of grief and fell victim to one major problem his region as well. “Where we live is very unhealthy, the whole region and not just our hometown. Mentally is one thing and I think we are in a great place for mental well being. But it is so easy, with all of the good I mentioned, with all of your family everything centers around a meal and typically those aren’t healthy.” Jeremy made a decision for himself and ultimately for his family. He felt like he was “not being the best
husband I could be for my wife by not being around very long, or just being active with our kids, so I just made the decision to start moving.” Jeremy was always athletic, and he even played golf and occasionally other things, but he knew that he was not healthy. “I started running and when I tell people around here that I run…they look at me like I am crazy and it really is…it is a complete…it goes against our culture almost.” In Wyoming, Jeremy noticed that people would rush home to go outside and do things, but “in West Virginia people rush home from work to watch T.V.” So, running became a way for Jeremy to help himself and at the same time be an example for his community and it has become a very important part of his healing process. “Our habits are very unhealthy and our mindset if very unhealthy and I had to make a very conscious choice to not do that any longer, and so that is my little soap box around town.”

Emotionally, Jeremy had some barriers to break down as well. This too became not only a personal task, it became something to advocate for on behalf of in his culture. “Where we live, a man is supposed to be a man. I wasn’t supposed to have some of the emotions I had and I wasn’t supposed to feel the pain…well, maybe I was supposed to feel it but I wasn’t supposed to express it.” Jeremy had no outlet for what he was going through inside. “I started writing like four years later and I had been talking into a tape recorder for a while. I refused, absolutely refused to go see a therapist because that would…I was raised that if you go see a therapist, you are mentally weak and that makes you a weak person.” But, eventually Jeremy decided that he should seek help. He went to a counselor, but the counselor seemed too distressed by Jeremy’s situation. Needless to say, it was not a barrier-breaking opportunity because it was not an ideal situation. “It
seemed like I was trying to counsel him more than he was trying to counsel me…it sort of backfired.” Because of the circumstances, it was hard to find anyone who could understand. Jeremy reverted inward, even avoiding talking to people or deflecting his feelings so much that he only talked about Anne or their son’s feelings. The reason he did this was because that is what he was expected to do, “because had I let my guard down, I would have been less of a man or less macho or something I and I think that is definitely a learned trait that we create in our area.” Jeremy finally realized that this kind of thinking was stifling his wellbeing. He had no outlet for his emotions and stuffing them back in was compounding them. So, his tape recorder became his outlet.

Jeremy would let people hear different parts of his tapes, and the feedback he got was encouraging. He starting writing and letting people read some of that as well. “A couple of people sort of read more than I wanted them to. One of them was my pastor and he encouraged me because he felt like there were a lot of men who could benefit from this book.” Jeremy found that not only did the writing help him, but that it seemed to help other people. He published the book a few years ago and has gotten positive feedback from many. “The reason I did it was for therapy.” But, the book has reached many other people who also had nowhere to turn after losing a child. He finds that many of his readers are not just men, but women who are trying to understand the men in their lives. In this way, the book has reached many more people than Jeremy expected, making the entire process completely unexpected.

One negative thing that came out of this process was that Jeremy’s father was not very happy with the book.
He raised me with very little emotion. I wrote about it in my book and I still remember the day my dad told me we should quit kissing. And um, at that point, I took it to mean quit hugging, quit kissing, quit showing any emotion to my dad so, I can’t tell you the last time I hugged my dad but, I just had lunch with his two hours ago. I talk to him every single day. We are extremely close, closer than most guys are with their dad but I can’t remember the last time he told me he loved me. I know he does, but it is just not something that is verbalized.

Jeremy knows that the way his father is likely stems from his own upbringing. Just as Jeremy was raised in a home with little emotion, so were his parents. “I have broken the chain though. I am just absolutely not doing that with my boys.” He makes sure that his sons know they are loved and he is not afraid to show it or say it to them. Despite this, Jeremy stands by his statement that his father is the most influential person in his life, he has just chosen in this case to do the opposite of what his father did raising him. In this way, Jeremy is also revitalizing his culture, serving as an example for others.

Figure 2: Photograph of Handkerchief
When asked about his object of importance, Jeremy talks about something he has from his grandfather.

Anytime I go to a significant event, I carry one of my Pawpa’s handkerchiefs with me. I don’t really know why. He passed away when I was in 4th grade, I think and, actually my Mauma, who just passed away a couple of months ago, she was 91, she gave it to me. Then, when I got married, we got married outside and it was extremely hot and I had that in my pocket and I actually ended up handing it to Anne so she could keep her forehead dry during the wedding. And, um, when Mara passed away, and I don’t even remember getting it, but I had it in my suit pocket and, when I spoke at her funeral, I remember holding it. And, when my Mawma passed away a couple of months ago and I was asked to speak, and I don’t even think it was a conscious thing, but Pawpa’s handkerchief ended up in my suit pocket, too. I even mentioned when I was speaking that I had it. So, that is one thing and it is not like I was close to him, I mean I was close to him but not super close, I was only in 4th grade, but it is one of those things to remember where you come from. And, when I was speaking at my Mawma’s funeral, when I was speaking at my daughter’s funeral, when I was getting married…Yeah, it was about me and I was there, but it was about everyone else and maybe even more so.

Jeremy finds strength in his connection to his family, to his heritage, to his faith, and to his region. He is a product of his environment and he feels secure knowing that his connection is strong. This in turn, is a source of strength.
Jeremy’s story has a few recurring themes. He has several protective factors. His foundation early on carried him far in life. It was within this foundation that his family, his faith, his neighborhood and community, and his connection to sports were primary influences. All of these things helped him succeed throughout most of his life and buffered him from any major issues in his life. When he got older, he found a similar safety net. He added in people who supported him in college, including coaches and professors and his relationship with Anne. Their life took a turn when they moved, but it ended up making them both stronger by having to find their own way and make their own decisions outside of their families and community. When they moved back, they were once again surrounded by their family and community. This was extremely important when they lost their daughter. It was their faith and their ability to pull themselves out of depression that proved to be the most helpful. This was done for Jeremy through getting healthy and opening up about his feelings, both things that went against his culture. Nevertheless, he found that he was able to find so peace and make a better start for himself and his family. These are some of the reasons why Jeremy is resilient.

Sarah.

Sarah is in her late 30’s. She is originally from Charleston, WV. She is Caucasian and identifies as a Christian. She is a mother of seven: three biological children, two step children, and two adopted children. Sarah is married to her second husband. Her first husband was an alcoholic and abusive to her. Her parents were divorced while she was growing up. Sarah is the middle of three children, having an older and younger brother. She holds a Master’s degree in education and is a teacher at a
Sarah is originally from the West Side of Charleston as is her entire family. “I am actually teaching in the school I went to as a child.” The school has changed significantly since Sarah attended, however. “I mean, looking back, it was probably a lower middle class to right at middle class school. Then when I moved to Richardson, which is where I teach now, it was kind of upper class kids, upper middle class kids, where as now it is strictly Title 1.” Because of this, Sarah’s school experience was quite different than what her students experience today in elementary school. When she went to middle school things began to change.
We were actually closed two different times for racial riots and, my guidance counselor from school, we are actually good friends, thinks that I am traumatized from that school experience (laughs). I saw teachers get beat up, different things, um, the lady who is now my boss, I saw a kid break a chair over her back. It was pretty crazy. I had a lot of fear and still have a lot of fears although it is not as irrational as they were back then.

This school experience has had long-lasting effects on Sarah as she still struggles with that same fear and anxiety today. This made trying to find her place in high school very difficult. “I was struggling with trying to be a Christian; I was trying to walk the walk but, also trying to be a popular person.” Something that became an advantage Sarah had was her friends. “I had a lot of African American friends so I got exposed to that whole different type of culture. My best friend growing up was African American.” Sarah was able to be around many types of people during school and she feels as if that was a source of strength for her.

Sarah credits her mom with being the person who has helped her through difficult times. “I think it has always been my mom. I joke with her and say she is more of a man that any man.” Sarah describes her mother as not having many emotions, “she is very black and white, right and wrong, you should tell people what you think, you should tell people how it is.” There was a time when her mom was inaccessible. When Sarah was 5 years old, her mother left Sarah and her siblings with her dad due to having some personal problems, “then she married my stepdad and tried to pull that too, she was like ‘I’m leaving.’ And, he said, ‘That’s fine but, I am gonna keep your kids.’ So, she
stayed.” Since then, Sarah has been able to depend on her mom consistently. “I think she is my greatest ally.” To Sarah, her mother is stubborn, but very kind and someone who she can lean on. “She is a strong, strong, strong person.” Sarah uses her mother’s strength to bolster her own. Her mother worked quite a bit, so Sarah could not always have her around. Fortunately Sarah was also very close with her grandparents. “My mom worked long hours so we were always with them.” Sarah had a small family unit that she could depend on and spend time with.

Sarah felt less connected to her father growing up. As a child, she and her brother went with their father every other weekend, but they grew further apart as they got older. “He was married to this really nice lady and it was fun to go over there to their house and she had daughters and he was more worried about them liking him…and, they despised him…then he was about my brother and I and spending time with us.” This was evident to her at an early age and part of the reason for their emotional distance.

One thing Sarah does remember as a source of strength when she was younger was going to the library and reading. She would go with her brother, “we would check out like 30 books at a time.” Reading proved to be an escape for Sarah, helping her to find some peace and also “a way to turn my mind off.” To this day, Sarah still loves the Charleston library and thinks of it as a type of sanctuary during her childhood. It was her love of learning that helped make this place her respite. The books provided the escape she needed and the library provided the solitude she craved.

When Sarah was in 8th grade, she started going to church. It was there that she met Patty. Patty was a mentor at the church and Sarah ended up spending quite a bit of
time with her. She was “like a spiritual role model for sure because my mom at that time
didn’t go to church.” Sarah was able to help fill her spiritual void with church and
Patty’s guidance. “I went to church all the time and did all of these activities with her
and she called us soul mates even though she was probably…gosh…15 or 20 years older
than me.” The church became a very important part of Sarah’s support system.
Although she had family around, the church gave her something else that was not
available at home. She credited her “church family” as allowing her to be “who I wanted
to be…and, when I went to school it just felt like everything fell apart and I don’t know
why.” She became involved in youth group and attended church camp in the summer.
Sometimes these things were very difficult for Sarah, however. “I was a big homebody.
I liked being home. I was really fearful. I used to counsel a lot with the church pastor
and he would ask me, ‘What are you so afraid of?’ and, I don’t know…I was just always
afraid of being killed. I had these crazy, irrational fears that someone was going to hurt
me.” Nevertheless, Sarah had some comfort from her faith which is what kept her fear
from taking over. “I mean, I still have my prayers that I kept, I mean even back then, I
prayed for stupid little things, but I prayed every day.” Sarah felt like the more she knew
and the more she read about her faith, the safer she would be.

I just always tried to stay close to God and I feel like every conversation in my
head is to God and I don’t feel like it is just something…I that is why in my
relationships, like I am able to help Alyssa…it is just ingrained. It is not just me
saying, ‘Well the Bible says…’ it is actually what I believe. I know this can
happen.”
When Sarah was baptized, her mother and stepfather came to the church to see her and have been going every Sunday since. Now they too are part of her church family.

Sarah chose to go to a Christian college in southern Appalachia. “I went to this Christian school thinking that I was really going to get my act together because I had to go to chapel two times a week.” She felt by surrounding herself with other Christians, it would bring the best out in her. “I was finally going to be around all of these people and it was going to be great. I was pregnant with my daughter by October. I found out on Halloween. I graduated from high school in June and was pregnant by Halloween!”

Sarah quickly found out that she was not in the most supportive environment for being pregnant. “I had a lot of professors who just became part of a very frustrating environment.” Many of the people around her were extremely negative about her situation. “They told me that I would not finish, that I wouldn’t make it and that this college had no room for husbands and wives and babies and all of these things, because of course I married him. What else was I supposed to do at 18 and pregnant?” But, Sarah found that even doing what seemed to be the right thing became so much more challenging than she could have imagined.

Sarah called her mother when she found out she was pregnant. What Sarah remembered from this conversation was that her mother just kept saying, ‘I don’t understand.’

And, I was like, ‘I don’t know what you don’t understand. It is what it is.’ And, she hung up and said, ‘I just can’t talk to you right now.’ And, of course I really started panicking and she called me back and she said, ‘We love you. We support
you. We will do anything for you except we will not raise this child. We will not financially support you. We will not raise it, so we just want you to know that.’ And, I was like flabbergasted like, ‘Why would you think that I even wanted you to.’ And, then the child comes and you’re like, ‘Oh please, please take it!’

(laughs).

Sarah tackled her pregnancy like she does everything else and she powered through on her own, using the negativity of those around her as a way to rise up. She also had her mom who offered solid advice. Although she had her mother’s support, she also knew it was going to be up to her to figure things out.

Sarah married Chad. “We had only been dating two months. I was a freshman and he was a senior. He played basketball and was a big sports star. I thought I had really made myself into something at this point (laughs).” What had not yet been revealed were two very important things about Chad; that he had a drinking problem and that he was abusive. There was some support, however during this time from others. “Kimberly was like the mascot of campus.” Sarah was able to find people who would babysit and help her out from time to time. There was support also from people involved with the basketball team. Sarah was the manager of the team, so she had to go to every game, and she found that the families of the players were extremely helpful. “They would pass her around during the game. All the parents of the players adored her, loved her. They would stick money in down in her little outfits. I would get her back and she would have $20-$30 stuck in her little clothes.” Shortly after Sarah had Kimberly, she had Eric. “The goal was the more kids we had, the more I thought he would stay home
and things would get better, like he would stop drinking.” Sarah tried to make it look like everything in their life was going well. “It was horrific as far as what was going on behind closed doors, which nobody knew about as far as what was going on with my husband. I kept the façade that everything was perfect. I kept all that in.” Sarah did not want to let others be right about them not working out. Because of this, her pride held her back and she continued to struggle in silence. She even kept her secret from her mom.

Sarah and Chad had three children together before she graduated from college. They had Noah during her senior year. “I only graduated like a semester late. I think with all of the professors pushing me down, it just made me push harder. The more people push me down, the more I push back.” Looking back, Sarah is glad they were hard on her because it made her want to prove them wrong about her situation. The only part that was made her situation difficult was her relationship with Chad. “Well, he started showing more volatile behaviors. I can’t say that I was physically beaten, but I was definitely snatched on, grabbed on, I had things thrown at me.” Sarah knew that when times were really rough, she had to remove her and her children from their home.

I had a really rough time with the kids. There were a lot of times when I had to leave. I took them and we all drove to Charleston in our pajamas. All I had was my purse and them. Then it got to the point where he would like lay behind the car so we couldn’t leave. I would take out our whole shrubs, bushes, just to get away from him. The last house we lived in had no doors on their hinges, holes in the walls.
Part of the reason Sarah stayed was because she grew up with divorce, “and I hated it!” The things that stood out the most to her were the split holidays and choosing which parent she went with. Her strong feelings and memories about living in such a polarized life was enough to give Sarah hope that her marriage would work out and that Chad would come around.

Their relationship got worse by the day. They moved to another town because of Sarah’s new teaching job. During this time he cheated on her. That same year she had a little girl from her class die from cystic fibrosis. All of this proved to be too much for Sarah to handle. “I started taking an antidepressant, which helped a lot as far as getting my act together, as far as getting stronger but, I was really scared.” Sarah even went as far as kicking Chad out when she found about his other relationship but that was temporary.

But, I was so terrified to be by myself, to the point where I thought that people were going to break in and kill me. It was just like I was scared to be alone. I was scared to be physically alone. We had this huge house that we bought when I got the teaching job and it was way out in the country and the kids were really young and it was just a very stressful time.

Some of the same fear that began when Sarah was young evolved into the fear that prevented her from making clear decisions. But one night, her children helped her gain the clarity she needed. “And, that was the night I left was when the kids came down one night after one of his rants and raves. They had their little stuff packed in WalMart bags and said, ‘You can stay but we are not.’ And, I was like, ‘Oh gosh, are ya’ll done?’ and
they were like, ‘Yeah.’ So, they were very little.” Sarah made a plan to leave for good but, it was tremendously difficult. Sarah called her mother for support. “When I wanted to get divorced I was like screaming and crying and I was like ‘Come get me, please. Why are you making me do this?’ And, she was like, ‘Pack a box a day…but, you have to finish the school year.’” This turned out to be great advice for Sarah, advice that she values to this day.

Getting a divorce meant going against Sarah’s faith. “As a Christian, you don’t divorce, divorce is wrong.” She knew getting a divorce meant that she could be on her own and not get support from church. “I went to three separate pastors and they all said, ‘I have never counseled someone to get a divorce and I am telling you to get away from this man.’ I mean three separate ones!” She even went to churches that were different denominations, but Sarah kept getting the same message from each one she went to. “I remember just wishing that he would die in a car wreck, like ‘God please, do you want this for me?’ And, then I felt like, ‘What kind of a person am I? What is going on? Am I evil?’” Sarah had some serious decisions to make and she needed to move her pride aside to make room for a healthy and safe decision for everyone. What she did not expect was the level of support that came around her, even from her church.

Sarah and her children moved in with a youth pastor at their church for six months. “We had one bedroom and each kid would rotate sleeping with me on the bed and the other two would sleep on the floor.” When the divorce was finalized, they filed for bankruptcy and their house was foreclosed on. “It was worth it! I mean, I ruined my credit, my name and, I don’t care. I don’t care! It was worth it just to be escaping.”
Sarah kept their problems a secret so no one knew the extent of why they divorced. “I never told anyone until we got divorced and then everyone was kind of shocked. They were like ‘Why?’ and, I was like, ‘Well, he has slept with half of the store he works in and our house is like a war zone.’” Sarah and her children stayed in Tennessee for another year to give Chad a chance to be involved in the children’s’ lives, but this too failed. “He never really saw them unless it was convenient.” Chad’s parent’s helped with the children, but he was not a very supportive father to them. Sarah went to school to get her Master’s degree in school administration but after she was finished, she realized their time was finished there. “So, I finally got to the point where I didn’t really feel like I knew what I was doing staying there.”

Looking back, Sarah remembers both what got her through that time and what held her back from making changes in her life sooner. “We stayed together for 12 years because I didn’t want my kids to grow up choosing or feeling like they were being pulled.” She grew up in a split home and remembered how sad it was going back and forth. “What I didn’t realize is how traumatizing that was for them. Now that I work with traumatized children, I look at them and think, ‘Wow, you used to do that?’ and, I didn’t even notice and now it is so apparent in the other children that aren’t mine.” Her children will bring up memories of their life then, both the positive and negative and, Sarah cannot recall most of that time. “I don’t remember because I have blocked a lot of that and I hate that. I hate that so many of my memories are clouded from anxiety and depression.” She realized how traumatizing everything was for all of them and that too helped her to see why she had to leave. “I mean, we have had the police at our house….”
mean everything that I think of is so horrible for these kids now. I have lived through that and I didn’t even think about how it affected them.” Sarah began to process what might have prevented her from seeing this at the time. “It was being directed toward me, but it was affecting them and still affects them.”

Sarah was also bothered that she hid everything from everyone “I even hid it from my mom, the closest person to me.” When she thinks about this now, she realizes that she just did not want people to be right. “It was mainly that I didn’t want to be a statistic.” Because of this, Sarah deflected help and was even defensive when people hinted at there being something wrong. “I was like, ‘I am fine!’…and, I think the main reason was just for them (the kids).” What really got Sarah out was when her children wanted out. What helped pull her through was the strength her mother imparted to her. Sarah’s own strength and pride now needed to be focused not on keeping Chad around, but rather healing the wounds that he inflicted on all of them.

Sarah decided to move back home where she would be near her family and back in a place that made sense to her. “It was very liberating to go through that and be done. I just needed to find myself again.” She also reconnected with Grant, who she had gone to school with years ago. Her mother was supportive of the move, but she once again made it very clear to Sarah that she was on her own. She remembered what her mother told her, “She said, ‘We want you to move home but, you are not moving in with us.’” Sarah had to make a choice about where to live, however. “I didn’t want my kids to go through all that stuff that I had living on the West Side so we came to this area where we live now” which is in Cabell County.
Sarah commutes to work in the city, which has proved to be a better adjustment for her children who grew up in a rural area. “The best option was to move back here but, of course, I am on the West Side and in with the crazies and love it. It is a calling, not a job.” Sarah does have to deal with some residual anxiety, making her stressful job even more challenging at times. Sarah still battles her anxiety at school, but feels as if she is getting stronger the older she gets. “I actually consider myself very strong, but it is even holding me back right now because I want to be a principal but, sometimes when these parents come in all irate…I just get really fearful, like a lot of anxiety about the confrontation that is coming. You know they come in and they seem crazier and crazier and they are so irrational.” Nevertheless, Sarah continues to push through, feeling like it is her duty to be there to help the students she can. “I was actually contemplating not going back this year because of it being stressful and I only went back because of the little girl I have now. I had to see if she was ok and if she had survived the summer.”

One day at the beginning of this year, Sarah fell asleep after work, which she rarely does. She is usually busy taking care of everyone and everything. When I woke up, I felt sick to my stomach and was like, ‘Oh my gosh! You all haven’t had dinner!’ And, they were like, ‘We already ate.’ And, the next morning I was like, ‘Oh my gosh! I didn’t wake Noah up!’ And, they were like, ‘He already caught the bus.’ And, I started to come to this realization that my kids don’t need me anymore. And, Grant and I actually tried to have a baby, we did these fertility treatments last year and we spent way…lots of money and it did
not work. We actually lost two babies. So, I was really frustrated and a little bit angry at God about that.

Sarah was also upset about going back to school for another year as well. She was not only feeling like her own kids did not need her anymore, the pressure from caring for children that are not even her own was taking a toll. Sarah has taken children and their parents to doctor’s appointments. That is how she met Alyssa and her mother. But, Sarah needed a reason to go back and at the same time, she wanted an answer why she was not able to have another child.

She remembered Alyssa and how she had left her at the end of the previous school year. That is when Sarah knew she had to go back for at least one more year. “I felt like I had to make sure she was alright.” Sarah has watched Alyssa struggle for two years. She has called Children’s Services on her consistently over that time. “This child didn’t talk this child didn’t…she wouldn’t do anything. She ran away all the time. We would get reports at 1:00 a.m. that she would be walking the West Side, just crazy stuff.”

In May of the previous school year Alyssa’s mother brought her into the school, pulling her hair and calling her a ‘bitch’ Sarah talked to her. She told her,

I don’t know you, you don’t know me and you don’t talk to me and I don’t talk to you but I’ve got to tell you that there is a God in Heaven and this is not the life he had for you…The counselors will come in here and tell you when you are 18 at least you can move out, and that is not good enough because you are 10. That is not an answer for you.
She told her that she wished she could help her and give her answers but, that she did not know what to do for her. When she saw Alyssa at the beginning of the year she was still having the same issues. “She’s not talking, she is still pacing the hallway, she is not going to class, she runs away or doesn’t show up to school at all. Her mom doesn’t know what to do with her, blah, blah, blah…it was just this huge crazy cycle.” At this point, Sarah came to a realization about her connection to this little girl. “I was like, God is trying to tell me why I can’t have any more babies because this is my new baby. Is this what is happening here?” She called Grant and told him that she had never before thought of doing this but that she felt very strongly about this and he immediately told her that they should take this responsibility on.

Sarah asked for custody of Alyssa, and two weeks later she was living with them. “As a human, I just couldn’t come home and sleep anymore.” About one month after she was awarded custody, she gained custody of Alyssa’s little brother. Both children struggle immensely and the transition to living with Sarah and her family has not been easy. Alyssa had been hospitalized for a short time to get evaluated by a psychiatrist but things are progressing. “We are trying to take her to church as much as possible, talking to her as much as possible.” It is the same church that helped Sarah so much when she was young. Sarah also uses what she has been taught from her mother to help with this situation, drawing strength from her wisdom. At the same time, Sarah’s own children are helpful as well. “It is funny because I have been having a lot of trouble with Alyssa and my oldest daughter looked at me and said, ‘You have never let me be the victim and never let us use it as an excuse that our dad is an alcoholic. You haven’t let us use it as
an excuse so why are you letting her?’ and, so I told her that just last week, ‘Don’t be a victim.’” They also have some challenges with Alyssa’s little brother. “He’s 5 and he’s wild! He pees the bed every night and he has peed in his shoes, so (laughs) I think it is a ‘No you will not!’ thing so, I don’t know, there is just strength. I am the most fearful person in the world…but, then again, there is a strength that is always there and I don’t know…I don’t know where it comes from (laughs)!” Nevertheless, it is apparent where she gets her strength. It comes from her family and her mother as well as her faith. She draws strength from her own internal protective factors as well such as using negativity to make things positive. It is for this reason Sarah is strong enough to help others with things that seem impossible to repair.

Figure 3: Sarah's Song of Strength

When asked about her object of importance, Sarah referred to a song that helped her through her most difficult time. It came along when Sarah’s “awakening” took place “and, Grant laughs at me all the time.” The song is a pop song that was popular after Sarah moved back to West Virginia.
I just love that song because when I was going through everything and that song would come on, it was like…that was my sassy side that would reemerge or something, so even when I hear that song now, it is so corny, and it’s making me sound corny, but to me that song just kind of makes me laugh. I just remember rocking out to that in the car with the kids, just singing it and laughing and yeah! Like, ‘We can do this! We have got this! We don’t need you!’ And, I didn’t say that to them but it was like, we sang it and it makes us feel like there was a rebirth (laughs)!

Sarah acknowledged that there are many objects that she loves; her wedding ring, her mom, her Bible, but there was something extremely enlivening about her ability to move on from her situation with her ex-husband and that is what this song reminds her of. She was able to do the best thing for her and her kids and she continues to draw strength from that today. “When I am running or doing anything, that is my song. I don’t know, it is just a strength song.”

Sarah has lived through a very difficult life and what stands out in her story is her ability to lean on others for strength. One way she did this was through her family. Sarah’s mother has always been a stabilizing factor in her life. Although they sometimes did not see eye to eye or handle things in the same ways, Sarah was able to use her mother as an example of strength and draw her own strength from that. She also depends on her own children for strength. They have also been a voice of reason for Sarah throughout their lives. The other thing that Sarah tends to lean on is her faith. She has continuously been able to rely on her faith throughout her life for strength and security.
She depended on her church as a young lady, taking in as much as she could and finding ways to fill voids in her life. She also turned to her faith when she needed to make tough decisions. Without this guidance, Sarah may have never gotten out of her situation and moved on with her life. Sarah also draws strength from her personality and some of the internal protective factors that are innate in her. She uses humor to buffer against things that get too heavy. She laughs at herself and finds ways to incorporate laughter into even the most difficult of stories. Sarah has fierce independence and she also has a great deal of pride. At one point, her pride is what keeps her from thriving, holding her back in order to prove a point. Once she was able to see what kind of damage that was doing to herself and her family, she was able to redirect her pride and use it to help her start a new life. This is what makes Sarah resilient.

Rod.

Rod is from Huntington, WV. He is in his late 50’s. He is Caucasian and identifies as a Christian. He is married and has two children, a daughter and a son. Rod is the youngest of three children. He has an older brother and sister. His parents divorced when Rod was an adolescent due to his father’s drinking problem. He grew up in poverty but, lived in a close-knit neighborhood. He was the first person to go to college, followed by his mother. Rod is a pastor of a church near Huntington and speaks all over the country to university coaches. He maintains a close relationship with his siblings. Rod comes from a large extended family from Wayne County, West Virginia, but he does not have a close relationship with his extended family. Both of his parents are deceased.
Rod described himself as “typical kid.” He was smart, but he did not care much about school early on. His brother was kicked out of high school and his sister always struggled in school and was held back. This coupled with his mother’s personal hope to attend college gave Rod little choice about his future. He was pushed from an early age to go to college by his mother. Four years turned into six, but during that time he became a Christian, met his wife and felt called to the ministry. So, for Rod, there was more schooling in seminary. His mother, education and his faith were all driving forces in Rod’s life, getting him to the point where he is today.

Looking back, Rod now realizes that he thought his childhood was typical at the time. “When you are in it, you think it is normal. When I look back as an adult, I would never do that to kids. The thing that probably saved me was my mom. The thing that could have destroyed me was my dad.” Rod’s father was a binge drinker, going sometimes for long periods without drinking but when he drank, “the next thing you know is that he is not showing up from work and you know what is coming.” The times in between his drinking, the family held out hope that things would get better, but they never did.

Rod’s mother began planning to leave her husband, first getting a job and then going to technical school to become a nurse. But, she found that anything she tried to do was always countered by her husband’s problems. “Back then anything your husband owed, you owed and so mom was therefore in debt. She couldn’t afford to pay the bills because her wages were being garnished.” Rod’s father would cash his paycheck as soon as he got it. “So, most of the things we had, we had because of my mom.” But, because
of his father’s neglectful money management, they literally had almost nothing. “We lost a lot. The only house we ever lived in that was bought was repossessed. The only new car we ever got my dad bought when he was drunk and it got repossessed.” Rod remembered constables coming to his house from time to time. There was always turmoil. “My dad threw a T.V. at me once, a little portable T.V., and it was cool to have a portable T.V. back then but, it was metal and he threw it at me.” Rod was the only one in his family who stood up to his father, even though he was the youngest. Everyone else was afraid of him. “I don’t struggle with that. It made me tough. It made me resilient. It made me able to do what I do without getting all caught up in it. People who think they are tough, I don’t care about that.”

The experiences Rod had with his father were not all negative. “My dad did some things.” Rod remembered that when he played baseball his father would show up and watch on the sidelines. “I would look up and he would be standing down on the right field line in his uniform, just watching, never yelling, never screaming, and as soon as the game was over, he would just leave and go back to work. So, there were those things.” Sports were important to Rod, but it was Boy Scouts that really reeled him in and his father was there for part of that as well, joining as an assistant Scout Master. “We did a lot together. It was very hard because he was so hard on me but, it taught me a lot. He was great with his hands. And, as I have gotten older I have tried to forgive him and try to see stuff that he did good for me and I have.”

Growing up, Rod was surrounded by other people who supported him as well. His siblings were older than him and they tended to fight with each other earlier on. “My
brother was older than me and he used to beat the stew out of me all the time, but that was good…my sister and I fought all the time.” But, now Rod is very close with both of them, “back then it was kind of typical. It was a real typical childhood.” He lived in a neighborhood with many other kids, so Rod depended on those families for support as well. His friend Mike was one of his closest friends, who later died in the Marshall football team plane crash. “He was an illegitimate child so you know, we just all ran together, nobody said anything about it, there was not a whole lot of judgment.” Rod remembers that everyone’s parents took an interest in the children of the neighborhood, even sharing in the discipline.

Everybody in the neighborhood would whip ya! I’ve been whipped by everybody. If you were over at their house and you misbehaved they would whip you. Mike’s mom always wore flip-flops and she would pull off that flip-flop and whip the heck out of both of us! My mom and dad would whip them…it was just a lot of good memories. Good things, I just try to remember them, but I don’t try to block them out but, I also don’t try to dwell on them…Hillary Clinton, ‘It takes a village’ I have agreed with her on that. It really did. There were a lot of parents who were watching you.

Even though life was challenging for most people in Rod’s neighborhood, the children were central and everyone took an interest in them, in protecting them and in teaching them life’s lessons. One time another parent was looking out for Rod and his brother when they made a troubling decision.
I got in the river once, the Ohio River, and I wasn’t supposed to. I got told on. My brother and I both got told on and, my dad came in and I heard him beating my brother and then he came looking for me and beat me. And, we never got back in the river again. Yeah…it was an interesting night… and, neither one of us could swim! Yeah, we were stupid so dad just kind of beat the stupid out of us both.

Rod remembered that even though they were “whipped” they were never truly “beaten.” “They never hit me in the face or anything like that.” But Rod remembered that “I got a lot of whipping and I can’t remember one that I didn’t deserve.”

As far as Rod’s extended family was concerned, he was not close to any of them. His father was the oldest of 13 children, and there are aunts and uncles that Rod has never met. Every now and then, they would visit Rod’s grandparents but, he did not like going to their house. His grandfather was an alcoholic and a bootlegger. His father’s family was well known and even when Rod was older and went to preach at a church in Wayne County, he knew his last name would mean something to the people there. Even though his family was not close, a name follows you throughout your life, linking you to your family no matter what your relationship is with them.

All my life my dad, if I dated a girl or something my dad would say ‘Hey I know that last name. I know that family. They are this and this.’ They would always associate that way and claim that they knew that family whether they knew or not. So, I got up to preach and said, ‘I know a lot of you notice my name is Johnson. Ya’ll know the Johnson’s out here and you know they are bootleggers. That was
my grandfather.’ Well, this old man came up to me after church and said, ‘I bought a pint of whiskey from your grandfather.’ So, it was that kind of thing.”

This family connection is something that is indicative of the culture in West Virginia, holding more importance in some places than others but, for Rod, it was a reality to be forever connected to people he did not associate with or even know.

Rod’s mother’s side of the family was somewhat more involved in his life, but they too were very disconnected. He remembered that no one even attended his uncle’s funeral. When his grandmother died, he asked his mom if she wanted to go to the funeral home. She did, so they drove there and there was no one at the funeral, so Rod did the funeral. Because of this disconnect, Rod has made a concerted effort in his adult life to do the opposite. “There was no real closeness. I think contrary to that, I have kept a real strong relationship with my brother and sister.” They did visit them occasionally when Rod was younger, however. “When we were younger, we would do things like go out to my grandparent’s and, I liked my mom’s side of the family better. My grandfather was from Bulgaria, emigrated from Lusitania. So, he was real conscious about wanting to keep the family together.” But, for some reason, their family did not stay close. Rod has relatives that he knows nothing about. When his mother was dying, he tried to find his uncle. “Turned out he was living in the area and he came to see my mom and he just cried. It was kind of pretty typical Appalachia.” When another uncle died, Rod remembered how hysterical everyone was, crying and even trying to pull him from the casket but, “they wouldn’t have peed on him if he was on fire when he was alive.” The idea of closeness was just that, an idea and not a reality.
Because of this lack of extended family, Rod’s connection to his neighborhood and community were even more important. This made it especially hard on him when he moved when he was 9 years old. “I just moved across the river but back then, once you moved, you were out of that neighborhood.” So, Rod found that he had to make new friends and fit into a new neighborhood. “I had to create a whole bunch of new friends and in the 4th grade that is pretty tough. And, you get…kids say mean things and stuff, but you just get through it.” This too helped to create some of Rod’s resilience in trying to make another support network for himself.

When Rod thinks back to his childhood, he feels as if something greater was looking out for him. “Well at the risk of sounding over religious, I really think that God’s hand was on me for whatever reason.” Rod’s family was not particularly religious when he was growing up, but he feels like there is some reason why all of these important people were put into his life to support him and guide him. One of those people was his Scoutmaster Woody. Aside from being a war hero with two Purple Hearts and a Silver Star, Woody was much more to Rod. “He was just a rock for me, a guy that taught me the value…he taught me everything that my dad didn’t.” To Rod, he was a “bonafied hero” but, he was also someone to look up to. There were others as well. Rod remembered a teacher in high school named Max, who was his math teacher “and he poured a lot into me.” To this day, they are still close and Rod values their friendship. What he taught Rod was “the value of working hard and getting an education.” All along, there have been these types of role models who have stepped into Rod’s life and made a difference and he is not shy about crediting them with helping him find his way.
“So, along the line, there have been people who came into my life and who I can’t explain other than providential and men that poured into my life and said, ‘There is a better way. You can work hard and you can do the right thing.’”

When Rod went to college, he was not prepared. “My mom really pushed me, I mean yell and scream and cry. There was no ‘if I go to college.’ I wasn’t prepared for college, I was too immature, did really poor but, kept at it and finally finished.” Rod feels as if his mom was the guiding force, encouraging him to finish. He found that even though it took six years to finish school that he dabbled with drinking even though he had promised himself he would not be like his dad, it was his mother who believed in him the most and wanted that goal for him.

And, when I finished, I didn’t want to go to graduation. It was a joke, you stand up and…but, my mom said, ‘you’re gonna go, you’re gonna go or you’re gonna die!’ It is just there’s no in between. So, she got all dressed up, all dressed up to sit in the top bleachers of the arena just to see me stand up and I just didn’t appreciate that until later when I became a parent.”

Along with the positive male role models he found along the way, Rod’s mother was the one who saw him through all of his tribulations and helped him become who he is today.

Rod believes that it was because of many things that came together, including people who surrounded him, that afforded him the opportunities he had. What else facilitated his own chain of events were some of the qualities he possesses as an individual. For Rod, taking what knowledge others have passed onto him and making sense of it in his own life was what got him to where he is. “And, I made the conscious
decision...talk about Appalachia, here is what bothers me about most of my people is they don’t make conscious decisions to do better. They would rather wallow in the mud and be what they are rather than doing better.” Rod saw this in his own father, who also grew up with a father who was an alcoholic and “wanted to do better and he wanted me to get out of that and he was incredibly proud of me even though I was the baby and even though I stood up to him. But, I can’t say that…nobody makes that journey by themselves.” For Rod, it “boils down” to two things beyond the support network of people, “my education and my faith. Those are the two things that changed me and along the way, I met people who steered me in those directions.”

When it came to women, Rod was not maintaining any lasting relationships as an adult. “One thing that happened to me is my sister, of all people, said something to me one time. She said, ‘Why are you looking for all of these beautiful women to date?’ and, there wasn’t a lot of substance to them.” Rod had even been engaged to someone who cheated on him. About that time, he met Karen. They went to seminary together and to Rod, she was the best person he had ever known. “We started dating at seminary and the light didn’t come on.” For Rod, it was different with Karen because there was substance rather than mere superficial attraction. But, this took some getting used to on his part. He had to learn how to appreciate this type of attribute in a woman. He decided that he would be more cautious with her, to the extent that he did not even say he loved her until he was sure that he wanted to marry her. “And so consequently, I never asked my wife to marry me.” Instead, he told her that if he ever said ‘I love you’ that meant that he wanted to marry her. “So, one night I told her, ‘I love you’ and that was it.” It was then when
Rod learned about integrity and commitment, “taught me about the better things in life and I have tried to live by those things.” Because Rod never had a positive male role model in his life, he felt that he needed to have more examples of men who treated their wives better and who valued their spouse.

There were men who came along in Rod’s life after he was out of school, “who weren’t well educated men but, who were just strong men, who taught me how to be a dad, how to be a husband. One of those men was Gary, who happened to marry Rod and his wife. He had two children who were like Rod’s siblings. “But Gary, just the way he treated his wife, the way he talked about his wife and he always…he was never…well, some men say things about their wife and they may be kidding, but never ever said anything about her. And, I have done the same thing.” When Rod and Karen had children, Rod extended this respect to his kids as well. “I never want them to think that they had to do something because they were the preacher’s kid, but I would hold them accountable for doing the right thing and both of them are great, great adults. I think I learned what not to do.” Rod uses the things from his past to make him a better dad father and husband. “I learned how to be strong. I learned how to apologize because I never heard an apology, never heard my mom and dad say they loved each other, I never heard my dad say he loved me.” As a father and husband, Rod makes sure his family never experiences this. These qualities have helped him to become a better pastor as well.

Rod feels as if his life as a pastor has been a very positive thing for him. “I have a great deal of compassion for people who need compassion. I have no compassion for
people who don’t need it and get really fired up about it and don’t back down.” Rod’s position on this stems from a few sources. He has used what he has learned, both in life and in his studies as a pastor, to help him wage these types of discrepancies.

I think part of that is I have tried to find a balance in how I was raised and what the scriptures teach me, the things I have learned from other people and how to apply those to all of the people I am with and I try to treat everybody with respect and I try to treat everybody with some kindness. But…don’t push me! If you want push back, push me and I have just become that for good or bad.

Rod has found that he is truly a product of his rearing as well as his education. He continues to grow as a person and learn continuously. “Consequently, I have never had a lot of trouble in church because I don’t play politics, I don’t back up. If I have screwed up, I will tell you. If you want to yell at me about it, I will listen but I am not going to let people push me.” It is that feisty attitude mixed with good humor that makes him authentic and accessible.

Rod is proud of his accomplishments. This is especially true because of where he comes from. One of the things he is most proud of is being an Eagle Scout. “I don’t know why.” But, he has been able to share with his kids some of the things he gained as a Boy Scout first and an Eagle Scout later. “I teach my kids stuff, how to trail stuff in the woods, I taught them how to find the North Star, just all that stuff, how to tie knots. I am going camping this weekend all because of that.” Rod has also had some accomplishments that are things he never thought he would do. “I became a campus minister at Marshall.” One time, someone asked him to say a prayer before a basketball
game and 25 years later, Rod is still doing it. Now he travels all over the country to
speak to college basketball coaches through an organization called Nations of Coaches,
which is a coaching ministry that he is involved with. “It is amazing. And, I sit here as a
product of the providence of God. I really am so, not of anything else, because I am not
smart enough to figure any of that out.” Nevertheless, he is very proud of his
accomplishments. His buddy Rudy once told a group of people, “If you had been in the
delivery room Rod was born and I would tell you what he is going to do and where he is
going to be, if you knew his family and knew his background, you would think that I was
nuts.”

Another thing that Rod is proud of is his state. “I love West Virginia! I would
hate to move. And, everywhere you go you find people from West Virginia. It is really
amazing…um, there is something about the culture.” Rod finds that no matter how much
he travels or where he goes, he is always ready to come back home. “When I go to the
beach, the ocean is ok. When I go out west, the flat land…I want to come back to the
mountains.” Rod is not only appreciative of the place but, of the people as well even
though sometimes he finds it difficult to deal with some aspects of the culture. “I think
the culture…I get aggravated about it. I get angry sometimes because I have had to deal
with it but, I can deal with it.” This also encompasses the pride he has for his alma mater,
hate them. I just…well, most of them aren’t from West Virginia. Most of the kids that go
to Marshall are from West Virginia.” Despite Rod’s frustration with certain aspects of
the culture, ultimately he is proud to be from West Virginia and sees much of the good that exists in his state.

What Rod becomes agitated about is some of the mindsets that do not appreciate all that West Virginia has to offer. Rod appreciates the out of doors. He enjoys being in the mountains, in the woods, and out in nature.

Maybe it just influences me in how I see God. I have been on…up in the hills hunting before the sun comes up and uh, when the sun comes up and I look down in the valley and the fog is settling in the valley and I am up in the woods, crystal clear beautiful woods and the sun is coming up and I look and…how in the world does anybody not believe in God?

There is a strong tie between his love of West Virginia and his connection to God. Nature serves as not only a source of spirituality, but as a reminder of what helped him as a child being in Boy Scouts. It has come full circle for Rod. What he finds aggravating are people who take advantage of this beauty, this sanctuary Rod has come to find so important. When he was younger, he dated a girl from Mingo County and what he saw disturbed him greatly. “People just take the refrigerator if it’s broke and throw it in the creek and I just get so mad about that stuff, but that is just who they are. I just love the beauty of it. I love…I would go anywhere the Lord asked me to go, but I would hate to leave.” Of course, Rod finds the best way to sum it all up by saying, “So, I think Appalachia…I don’t even like saying that, I think West Virginia, we’re a lot better than Kentucky and those other states.”
What Rod has tried to create in his family a better ability to be close. “And, now we have broken the mold, you know, our families are real close. We have extended family that is real close. My kids are involved in the lives of their cousins.” That void in Rod’s life from when he was growing up has now been filled with his own family. He does not want the same struggles of not being close or connected to family to plight his own kids. He does not want the same outcome for them, and it has worked. He did recall a story that embodies the dysfunction that he grew up in. When Rod’s father died a few years ago, he took his own kids to the funeral but felt compelled to prepare them for what they were going to see. “My dad’s funeral…this is real funny. I had to set my kids down and tell them there are going to be some people who walk in here and you are going to be like, ‘who are these people?’” Rod and his father made amends and ended up having a good relationship before his passing. But, the family was still fractured and his children had never been around them. There was a man who was staring at Rod until Rod acknowledges him. “Well, this one guy, and this will kind of tell you, got an unlit cigar in his mouth and this big floppy hat, which he should have taken off at the funeral.” Rod continues with the story, “Can I help you?” and he goes, “Yeah, I’m with your aunt Tilley.” I don’t know who my aunt Tilley is. “We got a camper out here…and we want to take this camper and we want to hook it up at your church.” And I said, “No, that won’t be happening. There is a camp ground down the road here.” And, he gets kind of ticked and he walks off. Well, I go to the church the next morning to check on everything and his camper is hooked up in my church. He’s gone down there and
told the deacons it’s ok. Now the camper, her is the coup de gras, this camper, you know the campers that guys used to buy that slid up into the back of your truck? Well he had one of those but his truck didn’t have a bed. The camper was sitting on the frame of the truck with two big log chains wrapped around it, holding it to the truck bed… I was so mad I couldn’t stand it!

It is for reasons such as this that Rod has such a difficult time dealing with some people from his culture. He is a comes from people who tend to make very few decisions to better themselves and Rod sees himself and his accomplishments as very different. Rod has tried hard in many ways to better himself and learn from the mistakes of his extended family. That is why he maintains such a close relationship to his siblings and their kids as well.

When asked about his object of importance, Rod almost brought something different than he had.

And as a matter of fact, I said to my wife, ‘she wants me to bring something that symbolizes where I have gotten my resiliency or strength from.’ And, she said,
‘It has to be the Bible.’ And, that is where I felt really guilty about that because I have a cane that my Scoutmaster carved and it looks like a totem pole and when he died, he died in South Carolina a few years ago and his sons asked me to do his funeral. To this day, I consider that the greatest honor I have had…but that…because I recognized what he did for me. So, I almost brought the cane but, I thought well…the Bible really is the source of it, so anyway…those things and my mom…”

Both items make sense for Rod. The cane symbolizes the support he was given as a child and the Bible symbolizes the thing that has helped him evolve into the person he is today. Both objects are valid in his life as sources of strength and reasons why he is where he is today.

Rod has many themes in his story. What seems to stand out without him acknowledging it is his humor. Rod uses humor as a way to connect, as a way to deflect, and as a way to cope. It is engrained in almost every sentence he speaks. He finds light is some of the hardest topics and it is his humor that allows him to do this. Another thing that stands out is Rod’s family. Although much of his extended family does not directly affect him, somewhere inside Rod made sure that he was learning from their disconnection. Later in life, he made amends with his siblings and his father. He also makes a large effort to keep his children and their cousins’ close. The family member that has meant the most to Rod has been his mother. She was someone who guided him and protected him even when she was struggling just to provide basic needs. She is the one who pushed him through school and made such an impact early on in his life. Faith
is a theme that shows up later in Rod’s life. Not only was faith important, it led him to his wife who he met at seminary and it led his to his career as a pastor.

Another big theme that has played out throughout Rod’s life is community and mentors. Rod made community wherever he went, whether it was his neighborhood growing up or the people who have come into his life as role models. He found community in Scouts, in school, in his friendships and in his educational experience. Through these communities, he found individuals who could help provide for him what he needed to learn most at certain times. Education was another important theme for Rod. Without his education, he would not have gotten as far as he has and he would not have the perspectives that he has gained. Rod’s education was not simply about learning what was assigned, it taught him the value of hard work and persistence. Lastly, Rod has a great deal of pride for his state. He believes that West Virginia is a special place that he is happy to be from and live in. He finds when people are ungrateful for what they have been given in West Virginia, he becomes angry and intolerant. He admires the beauty, the sanctuary, and connects his faith to the woods and mountains. Rod is an amazing person who has been able to draw together all of the positive and negative influences in his life to create a lifeboat on which he dwells and pulls others aboard.

Marie.

Marie is in her early 60’s. She is from rural Randolph County, West Virginia but has lived in Putnam County, WV for 30 years. She has two daughters and a grandmother of four; three girls and one boy. Marie’s husband passed away in a car accident when they both were 33 years old, and when their girls were very young. He was a state
trooper. Marie is a physician, specializing in pediatrics as well as abuse and neglect cases. She is the oldest of seven children. Marie’s father died when she was 17 years old. She comes from a very large, close-knit Italian family and maintains a close relationship with her family and extended family. She is Caucasian and identifies as Catholic.

Marie grew up in north eastern West Virginia in a coal mining town. Not only was she born and raised there, she initially went to college there in Elkins. When she was younger, her community mostly consisted of Italian immigrants. Her family was no exception with all of her family members descendents of Italy. “My father and his family owned multiple businesses. They owned a general store, a gas station and garage, had a coal mine and coal mining properties, so they were involved in the coal industry, which is what drives that county and had for many years.” Marie’s paternal grandparents emigrated from Italy, so her father was a first generation American who was the youngest of eight children. Her mother was also born in Randolph County and still resides there today.

When Marie was growing up, her family was her biggest influence. Her parents had the largest influence on her. Her father’s family was from a very traditional Italian family. They had a very strong work ethic and the family that was very close. “So there was a very strong nucleus of family that lived close together, obviously a very large family and in addition to my own nucleus of just mom, dad, siblings, I had a myriad of aunts, uncles, and cousins.” Their family was very much “oriented toward the Italian culture, where it was centered on “family gatherings, food, and there was just family all
the time and I was as comfortable in one home as the other.” Marie’s mother’s “family was more dysfunctional.” Her mother did have a close relationship with her sister, who became Marie’s Godmother and someone who she considered a “guiding force.”

Marie’s father was a businessman. He was quite successful and even though he did not go to college, he “was very much a proponent of education, which is quite interesting because my grandfather was not a proponent of education. He believed in hard work and actually disowned an uncle who went to dental school because he attended college.” Because of her father’s beliefs, Marie took school very seriously even at an early age and had “strong support from home about the importance of education.” She attended a small Catholic elementary school and went to another small school for middle and high school. This gave her a great deal of one on one attention. As a result during her early years, Marie could depend on family, her faith, and her education as sources of strength in her life. She was well supported by everyone who was around her.

When Marie was in high school, things began to change. Her father became ill for a few years and then passed away when she was a senior in high school. Her mother and the seven children ranging from 5 to 17 years old were mostly on their own. Emotionally, it was very difficult to manage for Marie. She felt as if no one would talk about their grief, instead holding it inside.

As all seven of us would probably say… I was his favorite (laughs), so I felt like I was the favorite oldest daughter and had a very difficult time during his illness and during the time of his death because nobody talked about it and there was
nothing for us…I felt like., knowing what I know now, there was nothing as far as anticipatory grief or support afterwards.

This left Marie feeling very isolated in high school as none of her friends had ever lost a parent. Looking back, she feels like she should have known that her father was going to pass away that day, but as she was left in the dark about his condition, she “went to school that day not knowing that, but in retrospect it should have been obvious, you know. But, nobody prepared us for that. So, it was obviously very emotional.” Initially there was extensive family support, with places to go and people to watch over them when it was necessary, but there still was very little emotional help. Since her father was a successful businessman, he made sure they had the financial support they needed. Unfortunately, the family support and the financial cushion only lasted for a short while; the family was in turmoil over the businesses and money was running out. Marie’s mother had to find work. “My mother had never worked outside the home.” This was a major transition for Marie’s family. By this time, Marie started attending college and although it was nearby, she “wasn’t there to help with the day in, day out challenges that perhaps my siblings had.” In addition to the emotional turmoil, the family tension grew greater over the businesses that they all owned together. Marie remembered this time as being particularly stressful, with her aunts and uncles “being at odds with my mother.”

One thing came out of this time that was unexpected. The general store that her father owned was in need of someone to help run it. Marie’s uncle did help run the store, but with the family tensions so high, Marie and her brother had to help run the store when they were 16 and 17 years old. Her uncle agreed to run it while they were at school, but
evenings and weekends they were in charge. He eventually left altogether and they had to close the store. Nevertheless, this time has become valuable to Marie. “Now when I think about the things I learned, even as an adult and business person having a medical practice, much of it came from when I was a teenager (laughs). The challenge served me well even many, many years later.” Although she learned a great deal and was able to draw some good from her difficulty, there were some other things that helped to pull her through this tough time. “That had to be the grace of God. There was still family, there still was the consistency of my mom and siblings and even though my mom was at odds with some of the aunts and uncles, they made a point to continue to care for us. They didn’t let those differences interfere with being available to us.” Once again, Marie found that her family, faith, and new found education in college and in running a store was what helped her find her way through.

It was also during this same time that Marie’s future husband came into the picture. He was also from Randolph County. She found that he was another support for her during this trying time as well. “And, obviously that was a strength at that time. We dated for a very long time and we didn’t get married until after I graduated from college.” On and off for five years, he became a constant in her life and became one of her biggest encouragers to pursue her dreams.

Marie’s life was very limited to the area in which she lived. She had no major outside influences. “There was very little connectivity to the outside world now that I think about it, especially in that day.” The only escapes Marie had were through reading, as she had a love for fiction, but there was something more pulling her to branch out. “It
was as small as now it seems, it was my world.” Marie decided to go away to finish college at the West Virginia University. Although this was nearly 90 minutes away, she still had a family connection. Marie and two of her first cousins all attended there together. “I still had that family support at that time, even in college.” One of her cousins was in the nursing program. Marie always had an interest in medicine, especially because of her father’s influence. In addition to her cousin encouraging her, Marie had a high school science teacher who she looked up to, “she was just a really strong encourager” and she was “helpful in helping me discern that I wanted to be in medicine.” So, Marie pursued nursing as well, but after her first semester, her cousin convinced her that it was going to be too easy for her, so “I went to premed and obviously graduated with a degree in biology.” She graduated in three and a half years and got married.

By this time, Marie’s husband joined the military. “He was stationed at the time in Turkey, so I moved to Turkey with him and we were there for about six months.” During this time, Marie was not only out of the state of West Virginia for the first time, she was in a completely different country and culture. “So, I was suddenly in a different world, an extremely different culture with no family.” Although she was isolated for the first time in her life, she found that the military family became important. “There was a military brotherhood that helped.” Marie also worked and took some classes. Always the learner, she found that this new world was fascinating yet very intimidating. At the time, it was 1976 and the United States was turning 200 years old. “I was living in a country that was millenniums old.” She took an archeology class and went to digs that served as eye openers to Marie as to how small of a world she came from. Another piece of this
experience that was not expected was that “it was the first time in my life that my freedom had been limited” due to the difficult relationship between the U.S. and Turkey at the time. Her husband was there as a military policeman to guard empty silos where nuclear warheads had been. Because of this tension, Marie had to be very careful at all times. There was no military housing so, they had to live in a village. “We had an apartment with bars on the windows and they would riot in the streets and I would have to turn off the lights and sit in the hallway until the riots were over.” The whole experience was very frightening to Marie and made her appreciate even more what she had back home.

When they returned, Marie’s mother met her at the airport with her acceptance letter to West Virginia University medical school. This way, she would be close to her family again and her husband’s family as well. The unfortunate part of this was that her husband was stationed at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, which was nine hours away. They maintained a long distance relationship, and Marie went to medical school and lived with some of her friends from undergraduate school. This was a very positive thing because she found that her school cohort became like a second family to her. This was especially helpful with her husband so far away. “So, I had that continuity of friendships and that certainly was a help and, we did this back and forth thing during breaks and vacations where we would visit each other…a lot of driving.” To this day, Marie is still close with a number of the people from her “medical family” who served to be very supportive to her. She also went home frequently and maintained her family connections as well.
When Marie was a fourth year medical student, she had their first daughter. By then, her husband had moved back and was in the state police academy. They moved to Charleston where Marie had her residency. Having her daughter made her decision to go into pediatrics solidified, in addition to all of her experience with her siblings growing up, she felt quite comfortable around children. Eighteen months later, they had their second daughter. “So, we were finally in the same household and having a family very quickly.” Marie was not sure how she managed such a tricky professional time, as well as her new family life, “all I remember is being very tired and just doing what I had to do.” She did lean on her faith and the support of her husband immensely. “My husband was my big support. He was and continued to be one of those very involved fathers.” When her residency was over, he was a new state trooper and their schedule became extremely hectic. They were both on call throughout the week and had a difficult time finding people to care for their daughters during such odd hours. It was difficult to maintain a marriage under these circumstances, but they managed to make time for each other and continue to be each others’ main source of strength. Another thing that made their marriage work was the chemistry they had.

He was…we were a very good balance for each other. Obviously I am very type A, goal oriented, pretty much obsessive compulsive, and he was just a very good balance for that. He was much more laid back and had a good insight into things and could calm me down when I got to the edge. He was certainly…all things for me, obviously a partner, a parent, and probably my therapist as well, now that I think about it.
They continued to find ways to be together as a family and as a couple. Marie took the whole family to medical conferences with her. And, her and Grant managed to get away for “24 hour dates,” getting away for a night somewhat regularly. They managed to make it all work for them. When their girls were 6 and 7 years old, something went terribly wrong one night when her husband was working.

My husband died in an accident in his cruiser. So, it was a very...he died at the scene. There was no anticipatory preparation for that. It was very...he was there and then he was gone. We were 33. I had a 6 and a 7 year old and that was obviously and still had been the biggest emotional blow. Even though I was very taken aback with my father’s death, this was even more devastating to me. And then, to have the responsibility of two children and by this time a private practice by myself and so, I had a lot of things going on at that time.

Family became a crucial support for Marie and her daughters but, with her most of her family a few hours away and some even further away, they had no close relatives nearby. One support network evolved very quickly and was somewhat unexpected. They lived in a small community outside of Charleston. Because of the nature of their jobs being helping professionals, they were very well known throughout the community. “My husband was one of these caring, always willing to lend a hand people, truly an officer with compassion. So, people he had touched came forward that I had no idea about. You know, they helped us.” In addition, they had best friends who also had young girls who helped their daughters grieve as well. What Marie found was that it was necessary to
have a very extensive support system in place that included several protective factors. This included their faith and the support of their church.

Church was obviously very influential although my foundation…I mean I felt like my faith foundation was very shaken and I wasn’t sure where I was but, eventually as the grief was processed and there were people to help my children through grief, with grief counseling, supportive neighbors, you know, they processed grief each step of the way.

Their daughters became very resilient as a result of losing their father, and in turn, helped Marie manage to heal as well. One daughter even started a group in high school called “Good Grief” for other children who lost a parent. The things that made the biggest difference to Marie were their family unity, her faith, and the community family that wrapped around them.

The way in which their community helped Marie’s family through their most difficult time is reflective of the things that Marie admires most about West Virginia and the things that are indicative about the people from her state. “I think that…well, at least the people in my world have been very people-oriented and not so much self-centered and have been the kind of people when they ask ‘How are you?’ they really mean ‘I am interested in how you are’ and they listen to your response.” Marie acknowledges that there are self-serving people in West Virginia, but that her experience, both in the town she is from and in the town she resides, that people generally share these qualities. “I feel like as a general group and certainly the people in my world, people are not narcissistic and are caring people who want to be fair and want to be treated fairly and are genuinely
kind and compassionate people.” Marie meets and knows many people around the state and extends this to all of them. “This is probably being very general but I see that and that is what has been given to me and I hope I give that back and have taught my kids that.”

Figure 5: Photograph of Rosary

When asked about her object of importance, Marie quickly names her rosary. “Certainly my religious object is a rosary because that was something as a child, we prayed and I continue to pray and still is a strength to me especially during stressful times, is my rosary.” Even though Marie’s faith foundation was somewhat shaken when her husband passed, she has consistently returned to that foundation when she needs it most. For her, her faith has maintained her throughout her life, changing and evolving with her and serving as her connection to not only her religion but to her family as well. To this day, Marie is very active in her church, “in youth group and working with young people.” She hopes to give the same kind of support she has been given.

The themes that come up consistently for Marie is her family, her faith, her education, and her community support. Her family has been a mainstay for her whole
life. Even when times were made more difficult after her father’s death, Marie’s family has been there for her whether long distance or in person. They supported her through her times of achievement and her times of difficulty. Marie’s faith is an extension of that family unit. Just as her religion was part of her Italian heritage and a way to share that tradition with her family, her faith was also a large part of her primary education. When she became older, her faith carried her through the toughest times of her life and helped her find peace once again. Marie had also always had a strong emphasis on her education. Even though her grandfather was against education, her father and mother both supported Marie and for a good reason, she was a bright young woman who would go on to be a very important helper to many people. Marie has used her love of learning to achieve personal goals, but to reach out to others as well through medicine. Lastly, when Marie did not have her family close, she was able to create networks of support wherever she went. In Turkey, in medical school, and in the community where her daughters grew up, Marie has created family wherever she went. These networks served to be very important throughout her life and continue to serve as her support systems today.

John.

John is from Charleston, WV. He is 19 years old. He is a first generation college student and he plays college football. John is the youngest of six children. He is an African American male and identifies as a Christian. He was raised by his grandmother until she passed away and then he was adopted by a Caucasian family when he was in high school. John’s biological father passed away when he was young from illness and
his mother struggles with substance abuse. One of his brothers died when John was an adolescent from a gunshot. John comes from a large extended family who are all from West Virginia as well.

Shortly after John was born, his mother moved him to Michigan for a short time. When they returned, his mother lost custody due to her drug addiction and John became a ward of the state. His father had passed away from illness and so there was no one to care for him in his immediate family. John’s grandmother stepped forward and obtained custody of him and one of his brothers. He lived with his grandmother until she passed away when John was 14 years old. John grew up on the West Side of Charleston living only on his grandmother’s income. Needless to say, they struggled to make ends meet. This struggle of coping with the many negative outcomes of living in poverty proved to be a major obstacle in John’s life.

John is “a firm believer in everything happens for a reason and that God has a plan for everybody…everything kind of plays into a perfect plan.” With this philosophy, all of his early childhood experiences, although intensely difficult, have led him to the place he is today. But, dealing with poverty in addition to the compounded issues of having a mother addicted to crack was catastrophic to John and his entire family. Finding footing in such dysfunction was insuperable and it took John and his grandmother together to try and figure it out.

And, if the series of events would not have played out over a series of years, I probably wouldn’t have been in the situation I am right not; being in college, making it in college, first generation. Throughout the years when I was told the
story of why I was with my grandma and how my mom was strung out on crack and that…well, I come from a family of six and I am the youngest, so all of us got dispersed throughout the family and, you could see how it took hold of my mom and how it affected my family.

What made the largest difference in John’s life was the care and support his grandmother offered. Although she struggled with her own children falling into the patterns of substance abuse and being in and out of jail, she was the most solid figure in John’s family, providing the only stability anyone had. “So, my grandma was kind of the foundation of my family…my grandmother has been the stronghold of my life and the reason why I have gotten through what I have gone through.” She took in two of John’s cousins as well as both John and his older brother, who is currently in jail.

John recognized the breakdown within his own family at an early age and as a result, he also recognized the things that held them back. “Growing up my family was not top notch.” He knew this because he too began to fall into the patterns that had entrapped them in a lifestyle that is not only unfulfilling, but that damaged them and the people around them deeply. “I mean, growing up I was told that I would not make it because no one else in my family had made it, at least past high school.” John’s mother was one of 12 children and only one of them went onto college, but they dropped out after the first semester. “I come from a family who had all the talent and couldn’t put it together. They didn’t use what they had around them, their circumstances, to push them and inspire them to what they wanted in life.” John eventually gained the ability to do just that, using his own situation to spring forward from rather than being held back. He
also began to listen to the people around his who sent him messages of hope rather than
the others who triggered helplessness, but this did not happen quickly.

John had very few role models during his early life. Because of this, he found
that he would purposely go against certain people who tried to help him. He shielded
himself with a type character armor that protected him from others, but it was not in a
positive way. “If they would say ‘pull’ I would say ‘push’ because it was hard at times
because I didn’t believe in myself. I mean, in my immediate family, it was just drug
dealers…it was drug dealers and prostitutes and drug dealers and strippers…and at a
point in my life I was falling into that.” John saw those kinds of choices as his only
options. He was surrounded by people who he looked up to but who were not able to
provide any kind of respectable example for him.

Thankfully, there were some signs along the way that fostered the realization that
there were other choices. This was especially true when his brother passed away from
being shot. “I didn’t want that in my life.” He was still pressured to fall back into those
patterns. “I definitely had cousins, aunts, uncles that said, ‘Hey John, won’t you sell this
for me? Sell this for me.’ But, when his brother died, “I thought there was a different life
for me so, that is how things transpired from there.” It was then that he started to
cautiously look outside of his immediate environment for a way out.

John credits his grandmother for helping him see that he had other choices and
that he could make what he wanted out of his situation. Although she was often
disregarded by others, John began letting her encourage him. It was through simple acts
that she would do this and John was beginning to pay attention. “The only thing we have
done together as a family is probably eat Sunday dinner and that was initiated by my grandmother, and that was the only thing, just eating Sunday dinner that is all she ever asked of anybody.” Always hopeful, his grandmother never gave up trying to help her family do what was best. She always wanted them around even during troubled times. She tried to hearten and empower John to attain goals, “all she asked of me before she passed away was to graduate from high school.” It was a simple goal, but one that was within his means. “On her deathbed she said, “Just graduate, be something.” And, because John had her support and “because she believed that I would be something greater” the seed was planted and John had to decide if he was going to nurture it or not. “At first, I didn’t believe it because no one in my family had made it that far. So, for me to accomplish graduating high school was a big accomplishment.”

During his adolescence, John was a troubled child. “I was pretty much a Hell child.” Since he was the youngest child in the family, he hung out with his older brothers. “It was kind of just boys doing boy things, but like ten times worse.” John had very few people to give him guidance besides his grandmother. When he was in 6th grade, he was expelled from school for frequently getting into fights. At the time, he was staying with Sheila, a friend of his mother’s, who had gotten herself straight because of her own kids. She let John stay at her house while he was out of school and because his grandmother had become ill. “She first got in my mind, ‘Hey John, you are better than this.’” She influenced John at a very important time, and she continuously reminded him that he was able to be more than what he saw. “She would say, ‘Do this for your grandma because you are a better person’ so, she helped me through that.” She was also
able to help him get into another school, which was an alternative school, and once he was did well there she helped him get into traditional school.

Another influence during this adolescent period was getting involved in a summer program at a local church that he had heard about. One of his uncles had a wife who worked there but, John did not know her very well and he knew even less about the center. He had a brother who went there sometimes and some cousins who also attended. They would tell him things about it to get him there. “You play basketball and chill.” Since he had nothing else to do in the summer, he went during the week. It was at the center that John met his best friend, Deshawn. John and Deshawn had similar stories. His dad passed away when he was young from cancer and his brother passed away when he was young from cancer. He was also living with his grandma at the time and his mom and my mom had known each other previously at another time, but I just had never met the guy. So, I started to relate to someone and I think that helped me.

This connection motivated John to stay at the center. He even began to get involved with other aspects of the church. It was Deshawn’s “home church” so it gained some credibility in John’s eyes.

Eventually John began to rely on the center more. His grandmother was very ill by this point and meals were hard to come by, “and, it was always like a joke because I always said as long as they have food I will keep coming and that is when I met Todd.” Todd was a youth pastor and associate pastor at the church who recognized that John had
some anger problems but, he also recognized that John had a tremendous amount of potential. Little did he know the impact they would have on each other’s lives.

Todd began to take an interest in John and to some extent, it was reciprocated. Their relationship began to gain trust. John figured out that Todd was genuine and wanted to help him. Todd worked out that John could leave school early and go to counseling, “just to talk to somebody.” Although John had opened up somewhat to Todd, he was not ready to open up to a counselor.

And, it was funny because the first 10 sessions I didn’t say anything. We sat in there for about an hour and a half and he looked at me and I looked at him, and we didn’t say anything. And, he was just waiting for me to say something. Sometime around the 11th session, I finally said something and then it just kind of flowed out of me, everything from the abuse in my family to how discouraging everything was. I mean, it was good to relieve some of that.

Things began to click for John, and he began to think about making changes and setting goals. “And then one of the sessions he took me to a bridge and he was like, ‘You are right here on the bridge and your goals are at the other side. You have to take all of those steps to get there, to your goal.’” He asked John where he pictured himself in the future. John was able to apply that visual to everything he did from then on: to school, to his decisions, to his behavior. “So I started developing behavior habits, proper behavior habits, that my family didn’t teach me to begin with, so that started to push me into a wave of ‘this is how you treat people, this is how you react, you don’t act thug, just have
fun and play around and it just showed me the difference between people.” John started to change and gain some insight into his issues.

It was not until this time, the summer between 6th and 7th grade, that John “stated seeing that my environment affects who I am and what I am because, I started surrounding myself with Godly people at the time, and that separated me from the thugs at my old school, which still is in the bad part of Charleston, which is West Charleston.”

What changed for John was his perspective. “I started looking at the good and surrounding myself with the good instead of the bad: with church people, with musicians, that community started to grow on me as I started to grow on them.” He was finding that this new community filled a void and in turn, filled him with a new kind of hope that he had not experienced before, one that was positive and made him appreciate things about himself and others that he had not been able to appreciate before.

With this new found mindset, John also became a regular at the church. He began branching out and trying new things. He knew wanted to do something with music, so Todd introduced him to someone at the church who taught him how to play the drums. “So he kind of trained me up on that and I started expressing myself through music and art.” John began to figure out positive ways to cope with his problems and worked through the changes in his life. He found it was easy to use music and art as a way to work through his feelings, “so that was really helpful and I was at my highest point.” He was making huge strides in every area of his life, but at home things were deteriorating. His grandmother was not well. “I was at my highest point with people and I was at my highest point with God and I felt like I was on top of a mountain until my grandmother
passed away.” This was a major setback for John. He lost the one person who stuck by him the longest and helped him believe in achieving something. “When my grandmother passed away, it was pretty much drastic because like I said, she was pretty much my foundation and I knew that I wanted something better in my life.” Not only had John lost his grandmother, he now had to think about where he would live.

John’s mother had been clean for a short time so she could take care of her dying mother. Once his grandmother was gone, her house was also gone. John’s mother was living with some of her sons and promised that she would get her own place for her and John. But, John knew that although his mother’s promise was heartfelt, she would not follow through because “she doesn’t follow through…on anything.” He had only one option.

So, I didn’t want to move back in with my mom because I knew I would probably hang out with my brothers and if I hung out with my brothers, I knew I would probably fall back into the same old ways…I didn’t have anywhere to stay. And that is when Todd was like, ‘Hey, you can stay with us for two weeks until your mom gets back on her feet.’

John felt awkward being in Todd’s house, with two very young daughters and Todd’s wife. Culturally they were very different. Todd and his family were Caucasian and lived a middle class lifestyle in a small town outside of Charleston. But, they made him feel very welcomed.

So two weeks passed, then a month passed, then a couple of months passed and it was about six months and I was like, ‘I don’t think she is going to get a place.’
And, Todd was like, ‘I don’t think she is going to get a place either. Do you just want to stay here?’ And, I was like, ‘If you don’t mind.’ And, he said, ‘You are always welcome here.’

John’s life changed completely. He was surrounded by a completely new environment and he had to figure out how to fit.

Because of this shift, there was a major transition period for John during this time. “When I moved in with Todd, it was kind of like a culture shock because I was surrounded by a whole bunch of white people (laughs) and it was like, ‘Oh man, this is not the way I am!’” Nevertheless, Todd’s family was able to ease John into their lives in a way that made him feel accepted. They did not force him to fit; they allowed him to influence their lives as much as he did theirs.

We had Sunday dinner but, Sunday dinner was like, sit in front of the T.V. and watch a game. Their Sunday dinner is…they sit around a table and talk about each other’s day, you know. It was just very different but, it was healthy. It is not like they just threw me in and were like, ‘Let’s help him.’ It was more gradual, like, ‘Let’s help him get used to how we do things’ which is a different, more civilized way, not saying that my way, the old way, wasn’t civilized, it is just a different way.

Because of this, John was able to thrive, feeling respected and appreciated. He was in a completely new environment but, he felt comfortable. Todd’s family made room for John and allowed him to be a new part of their family.
John had a new support system. “So, at this point I was like, ‘I have a new foundation and a family I can trust in and who is going to follow through.’ They helped me build that trust, just things I was involved in as a family, being welcomed in.” He learned that there were people who would support him consistently and who he could depend on. He learned a new skill, “to follow through on my word, to do what I say I am gonna do.” John also had a strong male role model for the first time in his life. “He saw in me what I didn’t see in myself.” Todd showed John how to treat women well and how to use his “gift to talk” in a positive way. Todd helped John get into a different high school because the high school he would have gone to would have been filled with old friends who were not the best influences and John knew that. It did mean that he would not go to the same high school as Deshawn. In fact, they were going to go to rival schools, and even though this made him sad, John knew it would be for the best.

When John moved schools, he had to make another large transition. He was used to the way in which school had been for him up to that point, largely unsuccessful and discouraging. “And, then I started to surround myself with people who are cool, who I would describe as cool: no drinking, no drugs, and ‘I am here for school.’” That was another thing that Todd helped John with as well, focusing on learning in school. He would say, “You are in school for one reason and that is to learn, not to socialize.” John felt like that was one of the important things about his new school, “I was surrounded by people who wanted to do something for themselves, to better not only themselves go say that, or to have a family say that, this is what my child accomplished.” John found that the support of his new family coupled with the support of the school made a large
difference in his drive to graduate and follow through on his grandmother’s wish for him. This took some reflection and time to sort out his issues with school.

John remembered back to when he was in grade school. He realized why the possibility of succeeding academically seemed attainable for the first time. “I mean, a community definitely helped, teachers and schools where it was, well...to be completely honest, in elementary school they see a poor black kid. They don’t really care. They think, ‘He is going to fail the system’ and I was already part of the system and teachers knew that.” What John wanted most in school when he was younger was the opportunity to do well. He found that because he was falling behind and because of his background, teachers were less likely to help him. “So, I failed 3rd grade and that’s when I knew I had some serious anger problems because I couldn’t get any help and, I was really frustrated because it was the one time that I really wanted help. I didn’t get it so, I threw a desk at a teacher and it didn’t turn out in my favor (laughs).” John felt like the school environment in which he grew up in was biased in some ways which was why he became so incensed about school. “It was just how judgmental everything was...when they saw potential in that kid, they harped on that potential.” But, John felt that his school only tried to help students who were the most likely to succeed. This excluded him and he knew that. His behavior prevented him from learning and made school a place to hate rather than a place to thrive.

It was not until he went to South Charleston that John had this new perspective about succeeding. He also realized that there were more students around him who wanted to succeed as well. Nevertheless, John knew that “you have to want to have to
help yourself before someone will help you.” John had to discern all of the positive and negative things that could serve as a catalyst for his new work ethic and new set of goals. He was behind due to his sporadic attendance up to that point. He found that he was able to make progress quickly, however now that he was not getting stopped by the barriers that held him back before. John was surrounded by people who wanted him to succeed and he began to buy into that notion. He found the motivation to stay in school, and “it wasn’t until I was surrounded by good people my whole mentality was boosted.” He found that he was surrounded by people who were behind him and supported him rather than those who held him down. “So, I think that was one of the best things…one of the best decisions I made was being surrounded by people who were going to push me more, to challenge me more and not only in my educational life but my…relationship with Christ, my relationship with friends, who I surrounded myself with more.”

Todd took him to meet the football coach and although he was not a great player yet, he became focused on training and this helped keep him out of trouble. “Just working out in the weight room kept me out of things that 9th graders do because it is cool. But, I took football very seriously.” John was on the varsity team by sophomore year and one of the captains by his senior year. Today he plays on a college football team.

When John thinks about all of the hardships he has endured, he does not resent his past. “And, so looking back…I look back on my life and see if this didn’t happen, if my mother didn’t do what she did to give us up or split us up, if my grandmother hadn’t raised me when she was raising three other cousins and still had two sons and a daughter
living with them…and she decided that she was gonna invest into me so, that was life changing in itself.” Without these experiences John would not have the point of view he does today.

John has been active in community service and continues to give back in many ways like raising money for causes around the world. He also realized that value of community. All of the people and places that have supported him over the years have come to mean a great deal to him. He now has a community to congratulate him, to back him, and to see potential in him. He explains that when he was young, he did not know what it was like to have all of that support and “how people just let these kids go by the wayside. But somebody took the time to see the potential in me which, pretty much caused a butterfly effect.” Now he can use that to his advantage. “I think that, just to put it plainly, it just plain sucked as a kid. I was low income and I guess you can put it in that kind of bracket. It sucked but it was also ok at the same time because those experiences taught me how to fight and find my way through.”

John recently went to visit where his grandmother and grandfather are from in Welch, West Virginia, which is in southern West Virginia.

It was a real small place probably with a population of 400 people. Back in the day it was pretty big because it was a coal rich community and now that all of that has fallen off it is just like…I walked through and didn’t know anybody but, everyone knew who I was. And, it was just like, ‘Wow!’ My grandpa is still just staying in this shack.
John realized the some of the traits his family has are positive to some degree, but that their choices are what got them into such dire circumstances everywhere they ended up. “I feel like everybody has that opportunity to do more and I feel like my family made that choice…Like I said, my family are fighters but at the same time, when they could have gotten a better job, they didn’t and when they could have gotten a better education, they didn’t.” John believes this is a result of being part of certain social classes. John has lived in both low and middle income classes and he feels as if this has added to his perspective, changing his perception of who succeeds and who does not. “It is just working and there is no point in which we can quit. That is what both classes have taught me.” John has kept on dreaming and setting goals, continually building on those that he has already achieve. “The small picture came from, ‘Hey, let’s pass the 3rd grade’ to ‘Hey, let’s graduate high school’ to ‘Hey, let’s get a master’s degree in college’ to ‘Hey let’s try to work for the FBI.’ That is how the end picture was. That goes back to that bridge. Where do you see yourself in X or Y years?” The words and visuals he gained in counseling years ago on the bridge stick with him and continues to be a guiding force.

Figure 6: John's Ceramic Tile
John’s object of importance comes from the summer camp he attended right after his grandmother passed away. “I was feeling very low in my Christian life.” The camp was located in a very remote part of West Virginia. It was one of the first times that John had gone there.

And, it was this Bible study and when I go into the Bible study, there is ‘Be still and know that I am God.’ I think it was just to quiet your mind but, I really liked that. I started thinking that I have a lot of stuff going on in my life and that is when I was sad but, that is when it comes to the street signs, like I am at an intersection in my life. Where will this crossroad lead me? Which way will I pick? So, this was a very influential point in my life where I had to choose from that point where I was going to go. And, I had to basically stop everything that I was doing, mentally and physically and just stop. I mean at that point, I wanted to give up everything in my life. I just wanted to be a stereotypical black thug. Who makes me more special than anyone else in my family? And, that is the kind of thoughts I had going into this camp but, they had us make this and I think they gave us like a half hour with these times just out among the camp and just taking in nature…so I drew this. So, it was just like my intersection.

The picture John drew on his tile was of his crossroads and how he digested all of the things that affected him during that time. This turned out to be the point in his life when everything changed for the better. He accepted the help that was around him, he used the resources within himself in a positive way, and he allowed himself to be something other
than what he had believed up to that point. John was finally content with what he had been given throughout his life.

There are several themes that come out of John’s story, the most poignant being support systems outside of his family, including his church, camp, and the center he went to. It was through all of these influences that John began to believe in himself and actually accomplish some new goals and perspectives. It was through these support systems that he found more resources, including individual people who took an interest in him and counseling which helped him visualize what change looked like. It was through these systems that he was able to create two other themes: family and faith. John had a very solid foundation with his grandmother, who encouraged him to succeed by graduating from high school. She saw potential in him at a very young age, but it was sometimes diminished by others who were from the same family and did not see that potential in him or themselves. It was not until John found more support in a new family that he began to accept outside support and assimilate it into his life. The other theme, faith, was also important as it became a vehicle for John to find a more meaningful connection to his religion. It was through church that he met his best friend, found mentors, was introduced to music, and deepened his relationship with God, which he still maintains all of them today. John’s story illuminates how self-reliant and independent he is, especially when it comes to attaining his educational goals. John put education as a main priority and made sure that it was never going to be something that would hold him back again.
John has succeeded by using the support systems around him when he needed them, and through church he was able to connect with others who saw the potential he did not see. It was there that he met his new family and began to realize that he was capable of achieving whatever he put his mind to, never again letting his past hold him back but rather using it as a way to move forward.

Daisy.

Daisy is in her upper 70’s. She is a Caucasian woman, originally from Wayne County, West Virginia. She has one younger brother and her parents were married. They are both now deceased. Daisy has been married two times and the first time ended in divorce and her second husband passed away. Daisy grew up Methodist but converted to Judaism when she was in her 20’s. She has two adopted sons and a grandson. Daisy has a teaching degree. She enlisted in the Air Force to become a pilot, but she got married instead. Growing up, her parents owned a country store and gas station, and although they had electricity, they had no plumbing until she was 12 years old. She attended a one-room school until she was in fifth grade. Daisy takes classes at Marshall University.

During her childhood, Daisy was a good student. Although she went to a public school she remembered that her teacher, Mrs. Reed, who would read them the book of Ax and taught them, “that the only people that were going to Heaven were the people that belonged to her church” and that “anybody that went to that church [Daisy’s Methodist church] were going to Hell.” One memory that stands out after hearing this was the day that someone caught the field across from the school on fire and Daisy knew that was
Hell. She ran home crying, trying to save her mother and father. “I will never forget that day (laughs)!” It left a lasting impression, to say the least.

Daisy went to school during World War II and the overtones in the country were somewhat dreary. Mrs. Reed was there to tell them, “those evil Germans were experimenting with some kind of plane that would fly faster than the speed of sound and that was against God’s rules.” She told them that there was a crash from one of the planes and they found a baby skeleton in the cockpit because “when you went faster than the speed of sound, you would go back in time (laughs).” Daisy’s advantage with her teacher was that Mrs. Reed decided that Daisy was very smart, so she became the class pet and got to sit next to the pot-belly stove and work in the victory garden “because we were going to beat those dirty Japs (laughs).” Although Daisy’s good humor and patience for that kind of thinking was immense, she still wanted to finish school early so she could leave. She managed to get “double-promoted” and she graduated before she was 17 years old.

Her home life was not as rewarding as her school. She spent much of her time alone and disconnected from her family. They were not supportive of her in many ways.

I grew up in books. Mom and dad never had any time for me. I grew up an orphan. I had a mother and a dad, they were always too busy. Growing up, their mother and dad ignored them. I am sure they did me the way they were done. I can’t remember my mom or dad touching me other than to spank me. I can’t remember any other kind of hugs…the way I was taught, I was ugly and it was
silly for me to be so smart and spend my time in books. Thank God there was a book mobile (laughs)!

For Daisy, finding ways to escape her life was the best coping mechanism she could find with the limited resources she had. Books became that method of coping. She would load up on books when the book mobile came around and read them in their store, atop of a stack of cloth feed bags where she would make a nest among the “beautiful calico cloth.” She decided that she was going to be an astronaut or at least a pilot, “so I would set in the tree across from the house and I would shoot down dirty Japs (laughs)! That is the only way I could make up…that I knew I could make up another world.” Daisy looked for ways to reinvent her life, even at an early age. Daisy negotiated her childhood by adapting. “I learned to become a loner”, which is one way she learned to survive. She hated high school, and even her friends made fun of her for being smart. “I didn’t fit in. It was a case of me being in a place I didn’t belong.” Daisy found inspiration in nature. “Somewhere inside of me there was a sense of beauty so I could really always go up on the hill with a book and sit under my favorite tree on a rock. I guess it was nature that I drew from.” Daisy found peace when she combined her two favorite things: books and nature.

Another hardship for Daisy was at church. Although she was active in the church and played the piano, “there were two men who were shouting at me the loudest, who were both regular molesters of me because I was always alone.” This damaged Daisy deeply, but also led her to distrust religion. She began to discount certain teachings. “Because in reading I heard about these wonderful people in these other native lands and
how could they become damned to Hell just because they didn’t know about Jesus? I was a strange person (laughs)!” This was especially difficult to have this type of worldview in the 1940’s. But, Daisy remembered, “I was at church, that’s all there was to do.”

When Daisy was 19, she finished college with honors and graduated early. She became a teacher in the same school she attended. With such a strong sense of adventure and patriotic foundation, Daisy knew after a year of living there, “I had to get out of there so, I joined the Air Force.” Daisy decided to enlisted and on her way to Officer Candidate School when she met her first husband and because of her engagement, she never officially joined the Air Force. Back then, women were not allowed to be officers if they were married. So, she gave up her dream and followed her husband.

Although Daisy was ready to marry, there was a difficulty. Her husband to be, Syd, was Jewish. This did not bother Daisy in the least, but her parents did not approve. Despite her parent’s beliefs, she married anyway and moved to Charleston, West Virginia.

I always wanted to get out and see and do and my first husband and I shared that. We were divorced after 22 years but, we both shared that sense of adventure and wanting to go and see. He ended up being a big shot politician. I can tell you a little about that. He did so much good. We started the environmental movement in West Virginia.

Daisy and Syd had an adventurous and positive start to their marriage. She converted to Judaism and was quite happy to do so. It suited her better than Christianity. Things were
working out well but, there was an initial challenge. They were unable to have children. “And in those days, Jews were not allowed to adopt Christian Children…this was in the 50’s.” One day they got a call from Daisy’s doctor. There was a baby at the hospital from a Jewish woman passing through West Virginia who did not want to keep it. “…they didn’t know what to do with a Jewish baby at the hospital, now this sounds impossible to you because a baby is a baby is a baby (laughs).” Nevertheless, the doctor was correct and the baby was theirs if they wanted him. They agreed and less than four weeks later they had a baby boy. “The social worker told us never to bother applying again because ‘we would never allow our babies to be adopted by Jews’ (laughs).” So, we didn’t and three years later, we got a call from my doctor again who asked if we would like another boy. So, we did and I have two boys.” Before that time, “no one in Charleston had ever adopted to a Jewish couple so we broke ground there, too!”

Times were not easy for Daisy once the boys came into their lives. Even though Syd was a politician, he did not get paid well. They survived on Daisy’s $7000 a year and around $500 from Syd. He got into the family music store business, which was the biggest music company in West Virginia but, Syd did not have the focus to keep the business running, “when Syd got into politics, he discovered women, lots of women.” This took up too much of his time and attention and the business went bankrupt. He attempted to sell real estate, but that too was not profitable. “He eventually got tired of the pressures of home,” and Syd left Daisy and the boys with $50, and a car payment and a house payment.
“So, I went back to school to get my Master’s degree.” Daisy’s love of learning and her willingness to move on from difficult situations allowed her to keep going forward. She recalls, “Sounds easy now that it is over…It was not easy (laughs)!

Working full time and dealing with a divorce and the boys, but I got there with all A’s. I did get one B and Ben said, ‘Mom, we’re so glad you got that B!’” A few years after that, Daisy met her second husband, Daniel. “Daniel was a keeper, a wonderful, gentle man, and in fact, my kids liked him so well, one of my sons named his son Daniel.”

They lived in Huntington. Eventually her sons took it upon themselves to find out more about their real dad. “I sheltered them for so many years. There were so many handicaps. They were adopted, which in those days…and, they were Jewish, which in those days…It was hard and I didn’t want them to be from a broken home and they were, which in those days was a downer.” The boys learned about many of the things their father had done and they both chose to keep him out of their lives. One son even chose to not attend his funeral when he passed away.

Daisy made a new life again for herself Huntington. This was not without hardship, however. “Well, when I married Daniel my mother and dad almost disowned me because they thought once I was divorced, I would move back to the fold…In fact, when I moved to Huntington, my dad had his first will written and wrote me out.” When her father was ill, she came home to help take care of him but, when he died, Daisy’s brother inherited “$600,000 plus all of the property, my mother got the rest.” Daisy received nothing. Nevertheless, Daisy’s positive attitude and outlook allowed her to look past that, “but, that’s besides the point.”
Several years after she moved to Huntington, Daniel died in 2002, along with her parents, her aunt Ester, who she was close to, and four of her close friends, “all died within two years, and that is hard.” Daisy found that for the first time, she had to start making new friends and “I never had to do that before. They were just there.” It took some time but life got better for Daisy, “life is getting back together and I’m going to school now. I love to be around young people.” She audits classes at Marshall University and has even told friends about the benefits of being over 65 and paying $50 to audit classes. “A friend of mine is going to be a geologist, for Christ’s sake (laughs)!” Her love of learning has once again gotten her back to school, this time for fun, “No tests, no papers to write, thanks God for that! It’s a form of recreation that I thoroughly love.” When she went to school before, “My parents never came to any of my graduations and, each one of them I was honored…no, I take that back, my mother came to my Master’s degree and she and both of my kids stood and cheered.” Despite any deterrents, Daisy has made the most of her life, continuously learning and always redefining herself to find the best fit.

Judaism has been an important facet in Daisy’s life. It satisfies her drive for learning and connection to things. It has been a support and outlet for her.

I actually like Judaism because it’s the most rational other than Buddhism. I’m fascinated by Buddhism. But, at the time it encouraged thinking and arguing…the religion itself is something I love because of the intellectual pull. Because, after reformed Judaism you could do anything you damn well please. If you don’t
believe in God, don’t believe. The basic tenants are live a good life, take care of those around you and be part of life such as death.

Daisy was curious about Judaism even in her youth. She remembered around World War II being so horrified about the Holocaust. “There was just so much I liked about Judaism…I wanted to be one of the underdogs, I guess. I wanted to do something different and, I wouldn’t want to be anything else.” Today, Daisy’s Rabbi is a woman who also converted to Judaism, “we call it Jews by choice.” Daisy feels secure in her faith, and she is content that she landed where she belongs. “It has been good for me, unlike the Hell fire and brimstone where there is so much prejudice, oh my God, so much prejudice!”

There has been some adversity with being Jewish in a place and during a time when Jews were largely not accepted, but Daisy rarely looks at this as a challenge. “It has been difficult at times. It is not hard now.” Daisy remembered that when she was first married to Syd, there were places that they were not allowed to go for their honeymoon. Jews were also not allowed to join the Rotary Club, Junior League, or the country clubs, “which was fine because I don’t want to belong to a country club anyway, what the Hell (laughs)! Being Jewish in a place without many Jews was not such a large challenge. Syd was elected repeatedly and Daisy never found it difficult to find a job. “By then, they were keeping religion out of the schools. See, when I was growing up, we were indoctrinated everyday by Mrs. Reed.” Daisy does not find much to be offended about. She has brushed off difficulty from a very young age and continues to do so through humor and a positive attitude.
I was in Bali, of all places, and these were people I had never met before and we were sitting on the beach and they were talking about their church activities and I learned to go, ‘Oh!’ because no one ever asks so, you get them to talk about themselves and that’s fine. But, then one of them turned to me and said, ‘Well Daisy, tell us some of the things you do at your church.’ And, I said, ‘Well, I am Jewish’. And there was dead silence and, one of the women said, ‘You can’t be Jewish, you’re fun and love to spend money.’ (laughs)…she didn’t even realize what she had said (laughs). Really, I don’t find any difficulties.

Daisy is comfortable in her faith. She takes the positives more seriously than the negatives, always laughing off the intolerance and unknowing of others. “My brother who is still Methodist has decided that when he dies, he wants a Jewish funeral because they’re short (laughs).” Daisy also likes Judaism because it is “more tolerant of mavericks.” If there is one thing Daisy can be described as it is an individualist.

Figure 7: Drawing of Grand Canyon Memory
Daisy was asked about her object of importance. She talked about two different things that both had to do with nature and her spiritual side.

I’ll have to tell you how it happened…I was hiking out of the Grand Canyon and a full moon was coming up over the road. It was late in the day, sunset, and the whole world was bathed in this silver light, this magical rock and I don’t know why it was such a spiritual moment and I retreat to that in my head.

This moment touched Daisy deeply. To this day, it continues to be a memory she can visit anytime, which serves as a vision of serenity and spirituality.

She said that if she were to bring an actual object, it would be a picture of something in nature, such as the oak tree on a hill in Wayne County that she used to hike to. “I call it my church because I can climb up that hill and I’m huffin’ and puffin’ and when I get to that oak tree I can cry, I can laugh, I can scream…whatever and that’s where peace comes into my soul.” Unfortunately Daisy cannot hike now due to a car accident she was in a few years ago, but she managed to find light in this situation. Before the accident, she was talking to a guy she worked with and told him she was taking Route 666 home and he told her that those were “the Devil’s numbers.” She
laughed, but three weeks later a drunk driver hit her head on while driving on that road.

“I obviously decided never to be on 666 again (laughs)!” Daisy pointed out that although
“I can’t hike anymore but I can still get to the woods. The beauty of nature is very, very
important.”

Just as it was when she was young, Daisy finds peace in nature, whether it is in a
tree or hiking, she finds harmony even in the mists of chaos and can not only grow, but
thrive as a result. Daisy has had a life filled with challenges that she continues to meet
with a positive attitude, humor, and faith. Her love of learning and thirst for knowledge
have only given her more courage to explore and given her the resurgent spirit that has
made her so resilient. Daisy has many themes that show this including familism, love of
place/sense of beauty, independence, self-reliance, and pride, and education/love of
learning. Also patriotism and religion/faith play large parts in her life.

David.

David is in his early 30’s. He is originally from a small town in Wood County,
West Virginia, where he was born and raised in a lower middle class family. His parents
divorced when he was young and he lived much of his life with his mother. He has 2 half
siblings from his dad and stepmom. David is a Caucasian male who identifies as a
Christian. David is a college graduate and he completed graduate school. He is currently
a college professor. He is newly married.

David’s story begins with his family, all of whom on both sides are form the same
small town, outside of Parkersburg, West Virginia. His mother and father were from the
same town, and there was a time they were growing up when the families even shared a
phone line. The families knew each other well and still live near one another today. “I had some friends who moved into the neighborhood where my mom and dad and grandpa and where my great uncle and my great-great grandma used to live so the whole neighborhood was like the Smith’s and they said ‘We had no idea we were moving to Smithville!’” David’s parents dated through high school, “and it was kind of like a quote/unquote ‘cultural expectation’ that they would get married…My dad told me that it wasn’t really something that they wanted because they got divorced when I was about in the 2nd grade.” They stayed within close proximity of each other, so close that David could walk from one home to the other. Shortly after the divorce, David’s father remarried and had two more children. David’s mother also was married two times after divorcing David’s father.

David remembered very little about his parents being together. He recalled when they told him they were getting a divorce. He remembered asking, “Do I get two Christmas’s now?” His recollection is of having two very different parents and two different living environments meant having two very different sets of standards for him. My mom’s family is very emotionally enmeshed…like if you don’t say ‘I love you’ at the end of a conversation, then something is…it is a big deal then, something is wrong. My dad’s side is very opposite that…You will never hear ‘I love you’ unless it’s like a bad thing or an important that or you just need them to say it.

Growing up with such contrasting families, David found it difficult to relate to either side completely. “I guess my story is a little bit different than a traditional Appalachian close
knit kind of thing because I grew up with two very polar opposite kinds of expectations for what emotions were and how to express them.” His response was to find his own path and rebel against the examples he had been given. David tried to find out who he was on his own terms.

As a young child, David remembered his mother “was always just sort of in chaos, just never sure of money, just always asking dad for extra money.” His father’s side of the family was very financially stable, and found it easy to criticize his mother. This deterred David from wanting to associate with his father, losing respect for them and essentially siding with his mom. “I didn’t really understand why they were so mean in my mind to my mom and why they talked so badly about her.” While his mother worked, she was never able to make ends meet, worrying constantly about bills and being very distraught over money all of the time. This became a constant theme throughout David’s life.

David did seek some solace from his somewhat confusing and chaotic life by spending time in the woods. His father quit hunting when David was young, but taught him the value of spending time in nature. They would sometimes track animals together for fun but, David mostly spent his time in the woods alone, “getting lost and finding my way again” repeatedly. He recalled a story about a local family who vividly remembered how David would disappear into the woods.

They would tell these stories that I don’t remember, that I would call myself this explorer and I wore this fold-up lawn chair on my back and called it my
‘exploring backpack’…and, then I would just go throughout the woods and just set my chair down and just kind of hang out and just kind of be there for a while. David remembered that if he did not have anyone to play with, he would just go off into the woods to be by himself for long periods of time. “I just remember a lot of my time was spent just alone in the woods.” The peace and solitude of the woods was what David was seeking along with a chance to create a world in which none of the stressors of his daily life existed, giving him a chance to get away from the constant distrust between his parents.

Another issue that existed between David’s parents was their views on religion. This further polarized his parents and David’s relationship with his father’s family. He recalled one memory from when his parents were still together that sticks with him.

Dad was always really religious, his family was really religious. My grandpa retired and became a licensed, local pastor and my dad was like a lay-leader in the church and things like that. I remember my mom would not want to go to church and I would just try to stay home with her while dad still went to church. So, I think that was one of the reasons why they didn’t work out so much. After the divorce, David followed his mother’s example and did not go to church unless he was with his father. “It was just kind of something that was expected and not something that I really ascribed to until I was probably in junior high and made some friends with some kids in youth group.” Up until that time, David’s mother became one of the only people he could relate to and feel supported by throughout his childhood.
When David was an adolescent, he began to meet other people and find interests in different things. He became more interested in sports, which was an important influence in many ways. He had a coach in during his adolescence who became a role model for him. “I loved this guy so much…I would go to my games like two hours early because he was there working on the fields.” His coach had the only African American family in town and David saw the prejudice that they were victim to. This was upsetting to David as he knew this was an injustice. David enjoyed his company and gained many things from him. “You know, just talking with him gave me my only exposure to any kind of diversity, at least from a racial standpoint, early on in my life and I just respected the guy a lot for, you know, just taking the time with me and teaching me about what people were differently about what color was or what other people might have taught me.” David did not have any male role models he admired during this time with the exception of his coach. Although his coach did not have the intension to be David’s role model, he was available to spend time with David and David felt like he taught him quite a lot about acceptance and differences in people.

The one thing David remembered connecting with his father’s side of the family about was sports teams. “My dad and grandpa both grew up being fans of the Cleveland Browns and the Atlanta Braves and obviously the West Virginia Mountaineers was our college football team so like, that was something that was a constant between us.” Because of this connection, David did go on family vacations with his father to see some sporting events. In addition, they went camping occasionally as well.
David and his mother tried to fold in fun as well. Although money was an issue, she was able to take him camping from time to time at states parks. This was something that David felt was an important part of his time with his mother. They were able to leave their stressful life behind and take a break in the woods. David did have some connections through family time with both sides of his family; it was just not enough to help David feel the kind of support he needed to overcome some of his obstacles.

During adolescence, things began to shift majorly for David. Because of his disconnect with his family, David sought his own ways to connect with others. Being financially limited prevented David from joining traveling sports teams, which important to progressing in sports in his community. This was somewhat devastating for David as he had always identified as an athlete up to that point. As a result, he found it difficult to fit into any roles that made sense during this time. It was during this time that he began to try to make some of his own decisions about his faith and participation in church. Initially, he found that youth group was a positive influence during middle school. However, David had some friends who were getting high and making different choices than his youth group friends. At first, he found it easy to distance himself from that kind behavior, “You know, I don’t get high but, you’re my friends who get high, that’s cool.” But, during the beginning of high school, David had a class that he was taking for college credit with one of those friends outside of school. They carpooled and one day David took him up on his offer to smoke pot.

With David’s hope of a serious sports career dashed, feelings of being unaccepted in his father’s family, his faith lacking meaning, and feeling like it was just him and his
mom “against the world,” David made the choice to control his life in his own way. “So, I think my journey into substance abuse at that point was like my own way just to say ‘f-you everyone and this is my kind of Independence Day!’ I couldn’t make someone put me on the baseball team but, I could buy a whole bunch of dope and get real high and I had control over that.” Things spiraled downward quickly for David. “I got high one week, and I got some coke and some acid the next week, and then after that it was just kind of a blur throughout high school and then into college.”

There were times when David could be off drugs to meet goals. He played tennis later on in high school and would refrain from using during tennis season. But, David found that during his senior year of high school, “…things just really got out of control.” David was hooked on speed. He started buying or even threatening to steal other kids’ prescription medication. Once he could no longer find anyone to exploit, he began looking to crystal meth, which was easier to obtain.

I think this speaks to a lot of the Appalachian culture struggling through poverty and trying to make something of yourself even though it might illegal, it was something that people could do and it was still within their frame of education and training and things like that. We met a lady who knew a cook and we met the cook’s daughter and we started hanging out a lot and we could just get a lot, a lot of crystal meth for the same price I could get anything else, so we just started stealing a lot of stuff and trading it and we just really started going wild with it…I probably averaged two nights of sleep a week.
David and his friends were consumed with meth, even taking others’ stolen goods to get them drugs. But, when the cook got busted, David and his friends began to panic. The FBI was involved and David felt like it was just a matter of time before he was arrested. He called his mother and told her to meet him at home. “And, this is something, you talk about things that are important, I went to the movie store because there was something I remembered from my childhood, something about being home with some movies, it was just a very comforting place to me.” When his mother came home, he told her everything. She told him that she did not want him to do crystal meth anymore but, she was alright with him drinking and smoking pot at home to get him weaned off of crystal meth. “It was kind of the devil she knew versus the devil she didn’t know, kind of thing, you know.”

With the struggle of substance abuse came other challenges David had to face, including losing friends and the support of his church. He did manage to graduate from high school and get accepted into a small liberal arts school in West Virginia. David came to a point where he felt that if he got out of his hometown and away from the things that were holding him back he could reinvent himself without barriers. Nevertheless, David’s barriers were self-created, and “throughout college, the same pattern as high school” happened. David failed many classes, got deeper into drugs, and even got drunk at work frequently. One day was particularly bad, when David got drunk at work during the day and then had a party at his house into the night.

My friends were carrying me back up a flight of stairs, so I had fallen down. I don’t really know what happened. They were trying to take me to the hospital and
I said ‘no.’ I wouldn’t let them take me. Um, but after a day and a half of puking, and not being able to keep anything down I finally let them take me to the hospital.

David found out that he had suffered a subdural hematoma in his right frontal temporal lobe. He was in the hospital for five days before they let him out. David felt like they released him because of his behavior, which was difficult to deal with. His girlfriend agreed to take care of him, but David was soon off to a concert and back to drinking and smoking pot within hours of his release.

For the rest of his time in college, David continued to use drugs and continued down his path of attempting to gain control. “I screwed off a lot senior year and they tried to kick me out of school like three times. They ended up kicking me off campus. I finally graduated by the skin of my teeth and then I was like, ‘I have got to leave here’, just like I said, ‘I have to get out of Parkersburg.’” He found it was easier to fall back into the same kinds of patterns than to forge a new path. He met up with old friends, broke up with the girlfriend, and two summers after he graduated, he was arrested in his hometown for selling pot.

And, that was like an ‘ah-ha’ moment, I guess, for me. Um I hadn’t seen my dad in probably six months I’d say. I hadn’t even talked to him and when they asked me where I lived, I said my dad’s. I was actually living at my grandma’s in her basement, but I said I lived at my dad’s. So, they were cooking burgers out front (laughs) and so … “Hi dad! Homecoming! Meet my nice task force friends!” So,
that was just really…I guess I was really just pissed off, I was angry but I was also glad that it was finally just over.

David moved in with his father and went back to the church he had rebelled against so diligently. He devoted his life to staying on a better path and staying out of jail. The legal implications for his actions went on for two years, and his lawyer passed away in the middle of the process. David worked on building his resume back up in an attempt to show that he did not need to be in jail. He should have gotten 1-15 years in prison, but instead he got two misdemeanors and unsupervised probation, along with fines. “So, I was really a lucky, blessed guy.” David took this as a positive sign.

David did not do all of this by himself, however. He found that his father and his family he tried to keep away a few years stuck by him every step of the way. The church he belonged to also played an important part in his journey.

I can remember every time I had a court date there was at least ten people there with me. I mean, we had prayer before it, we had prayer after it. We brought my lawyer into it. So this idea of religion and spirituality, even though I had turned my back on it for so long, it was still something that was important for my foundational years…well, until today, you know.

Looking back, David knew that he was on a path of destruction. Not long ago he found something he had written when he was in high school. “I wouldn’t say that I was actively trying to kill myself but I wouldn’t have been upset if I had.” He felt that without the help and support of his family and church, he would not be where he is today. David has been sober since 2006.
The things that lined up in David’s favor were essential to his healing and ultimately his protective factors. His faith and the people around him were the main reasons for his success. Another thing that David realized was that he always had the ability to let people help him when he needed it most. This has been a consistent theme in David’s life. He realized that back then, he never wanted to just help himself, but rather he put himself in a position where others could help him. “I just wanted someone to come rescue me because as a kid I thought I was entitled to that attention or to that savior or whatever and it just never came until I got arrested.”

David was ashamed of how he behaved to the people who tried to help. “Really a punk kid was all I was. I was so arrogant and disrespectful and all these things until I got arrested and I finally get this new identity.” There is a scripture that David was given when he visited with his pastor that has become the mantra for his life, both professionally and personally. It says, “You are once shown compassion so that you can therefore show compassion to others in the way it was shown to you.” This has not only helped David move forward from that experience, but helped him to help others as well. He can now try to make up for his behavior in a way that cultivates respect and compassion for others as well as for himself. Because of this, the relationship he has today with his pastor is an important one to David. He felt that his pastor took a chance in helping him, giving him a job at the church and supporting him through his transition, but above all else, he showed him the compassion he needed most. It was his pastor who gave him the saying and helped David see another way.
David also recognized the support of his mother throughout his life. He realized that without their “us against the world” attitude, they would not have survived. Nevertheless, it was at a cost to both of them.

It is kind of a conflictual kind of thing because my mom supported me so that I could have better than she had…but she did that at her own cost and made some really bad decisions to provide for me. She sent me to an expensive school, took out loans to do that and embezzled money for ten years or so…I know I am not responsible for that, but still in some regards I was supported by that.

His mother had been embezzling money for 10 to 15 years before turning herself in. The reason was not to buy expensive things, but rather to make ends meet and support David through school. She spent six months in federal prison. She got out last year and is trying to put her life back together. She currently lives at David’s grandmother’s house, which is where many people in the family have ended up when they are trying to get things back together, just as David did.

David recognized that he had many enablers throughout his life. Even in college, David had people who would help him, whether it was getting class notes or talking to the Dean to keep him in school. “I was able to organize people in a way, and again, maybe it was illegal or immoral but I was still able to get people to buy into something they, at least at that point in their life, believed in.” David knew nothing was ever going to be handed to him. Even though he had the support of his mother, “I still had the need to make due for myself and had to create out of nothing in order to get it.” This one way David became resilient, by being creative. “So, there was always this creative view of
what I could do in my head that nobody has done before and I don’t care if you say I can’t do it because I am going to do it anyway.”

David is proud of his journey. To him he felt somewhat lonely as his friendships shifted; he lost some due to his choices, and some due to their choices. Instead he was able to focus on graduate school and on work. This helped pull him through. “I wanted to create for myself whatever I needed…plus, I wanted to share the compassion I had been shown.” His career goals have turned out well, and he finds that being a counselor is the best fit for sharing that compassion. Now, he is working toward being a tenured professor. He depends on his faith and his relationship with God. “It is the constant in my life where so much was not constant, that has been a constant for me.” David is also recently married and finds his new life with his wife very rewarding.

Figure 9: 24 Hour Coin

Figure 10: Cross from a Christian Perspective
When asked about his object of importance, David brought up two things. “One would be my 24 hour coin from being sober.” David even carries it with him as a “tangible thing” when he has especially rough day. It serves as a reminder of how hard things can really get and how transformation is a process. The second object “Would be a cross, from a Christian perspective.” This is helpful to David as well, serving to remind him of his faith which helped him get through some of his roughest times and serves as the foundation for his life. David keeps evolving and as he does, so does his faith and the compassion his faith has taught him to share with others.

The themes that are continuous in David’s life are his family, his faith, and his ability to lean on others when he needs help. His mother served as his constant supporter throughout his life, but was struggling with her own issues in order to do that in a way that she felt was necessary. David’s father was supportive even though David felt as if he was not due to his parent’s divorce. Nevertheless, it was his father who came through and made it possible for David to truly get on his feet again. Other parts of David’s family life also played a supportive role like his grandmother, providing a home when there was nowhere else to go. His family, although disconnected in its own right, was a constant support. David had some conflict with his faith from a very early age, connecting it with the mother versus father conflict rather than a support system or expression of faith. However, it was his foundational faith during his middle school years that provided a safety net for David that he would again return to when his life got back on track. He not only finds meaning in his relationship with God, he finds the spiritual support needed for himself both professionally and personally by focusing on
compassion and giving back as a means of healing himself and helping others. Lastly, David has been fortunate enough to have people around him to help support him during every stage of his life. He is skilled at organizing and motivating people and getting them to be on his side. At the same time, he knows when to ask for help which is essential in being resilient.

Fred.

Fred is in his early 60’s. He was born in Huntington, West Virginia and grew up in Logan County in southern West Virginia. Fred is Caucasian and identifies as a Christian. He grew up in poverty, even though his father had a job repairing appliances for the coal company. Fred is the oldest of six children. His parents stayed together and his family is very close-knit. Fred attended college at Marshall University and went to seminary in Texas. He is married and now lives in Charleston, West Virginia where he has been the pastor of a church in West Charleston for 30 years.

Fred’s entire family is from Huntington, including his parents, grandparents on both sides of their families. When Fred’s father returned from World War II, he found that there was little work in Huntington, so he and his wife moved to Logan County in the “coal fields” to find work. He ended up working for the coal company replacing coal furnaces with gas furnaces in company homes. When that task was finished, he was trained to work in the store, repairing washing machines and dryers. Fred’s father’s family trade was carpentry, which is what he always wanted to do but could not afford the expense of being an apprentice. So, they stayed in the coal mining community and started their family. “Mom and dad ended up having six kids. I’m the oldest of six kids.
If you look back, it was probably poverty but we didn’t know it, if you look at the poverty guidelines, it very much was so.” Usually in a coal mining community, the schools were not anything exceptional, but Fred’s town was different. “The coal company brought in a lot of their top executives…and a lot of their wives were teachers so they brought in very good teachers, so we really ended up with an excellent school system.” This served as a great advantage for Fred that many other children in coal mining communities did not have.

There were some things in place that helped provide a support system for Fred beyond just his immediate family. Because his town was so small, the community was very close knit. “You didn’t have to lock your doors and everybody kept an eye on everybody else’s kids. That was just the way it was.” Communal parenting and having lots of friends close by was beneficial. This served as a source of strength and support for him during his formative years. He also belonged to a local Boy Scout troop “that was very helpful to me and gave me a lot of opportunities to do things I wouldn’t have gotten to do and excel at some things.” Fred had a very large extended family that lived a few hours away in Huntington that Fred’s immediate family stayed very close to. “We’d all get together and we did visit often and spent a lot of time together.” Even though they lived away from their family, Fred’s parents made a point to include them in their children’s lives. This bond has lasted Fred’s whole life, as he is still very close to his extended family. This support network made up of his small community, Boy Scouts, and his extended family was what helped Fred become resilient despite some of the
hardships that he faced. “So, I had pretty good support all around, just in general. I was grateful.”

Fred recalled how difficult it was financially for his parents while he was growing up. “I remember from a very early feeling like I couldn’t ask my parents for money even to go to a movie or anything extra because I knew they just didn’t have it.” While his friends had some money, Fred had to be more resourceful. “We’d find a set of bottles that needed to be thrown away and sell them for two cents apiece but I also got a paper route and did that until I finished high school.” This allowed Fred to have some spending money. “I didn’t feel like I was broke all the time. As a matter of fact, my senior year I was able to buy an old car, big time car, $150.00! It ran (laughs)!""

Fred was a good swimmer. One of the advantages of having the coal company executives in their town was that there was a community pool. One of the Boy Scouts in Fred’s troop had a dad who was an executive with the coal company. So, the troop was able to use the pool for life-saving trainings. Fred became very good at life saving and when he was in high school, the pool manager offered him a job as a lifeguard. “So, I got the job and made a little money but, it was also neat that they had recognized something in me.” Later on, the man who ran the gymnasium near the pool quit, so Fred was offered that job as well. “Not even in college yet, so that was a neat experience.” He was resourceful and hard-working, even at a young age. He found ways to make up for the hardships that could have otherwise held him back.

One disadvantage Fred remembered during his early childhood was dealing with some of the prejudices that come with living in such an array of people from different
backgrounds. “I grew up in a melting pot of people from all over the world.” Because of the coal industry, people came from all over to work in West Virginia. Fred especially remembers how difficult it was for people of color. “So the prejudices were strong because they were all in little pockets at that point and, some of them still spoke their language and made wine or whatever they did, but my mom was always teaching me not to think like that. I was grateful but you saw a lot of the other thinking, the racial slurs and sorts.” To Fred, this was “an interesting part of the Appalachian culture” but that eventually this type of severe prejudice started to break down over the next generation. This was in part due to schools becoming desegregated. “The funny part about that is I played basketball and we hated to play them (the black schools) because we always got beat…they closed the black high school and we won the state championship in basketball, so that was cool and I think it helped overcome some of the prejudice.” Growing up in this kind of environment proved to be very significant later in Fred’s life. It allowed him to be more open-minded and accepting of others, and it fostered a level of respect and humility that proved to be a major strength for him in life.

Another impactful focus in Fred’s late childhood and young adult life was education. His parents encouraged him to be successful in school and go onto college. His father wanted for him to find a job that he truly enjoyed because of his own experience not following his dreams to be a carpenter. “He would say, ‘Now son, find a job that you really, really like. Don’t do what I’ve done.’” So, it was decided that since Fred was a good student he would attend college. “I said, ‘Mom, I don’t know if I want to go to college.’” And, her answer to me was really cute, she said, ‘I didn’t ask’
(laughs).” Because of Fred’s hesitation and because his parents were tired of living away from their home and extended family, “the whole family moved to Huntington.” Fred began attending Marshall University. Fred’s mother, who had not graduated from high school due to getting married, had taken the GED at an earlier point and had also taken some college classes in Logan County. She too was ready to go to college.

So, then we went to Huntington and my first two years of college were her last two. So, we went to college together…I got to tease her and everything else. I’d see her in the hall and she wouldn’t see me and I’d tease her and say, ‘You didn’t even speak to me, you don’t want anyone to know that you have a child this old, do you?’

Fred’s family was very proud of their mother and she set an example for everyone. She went on to be a high school English and literature teacher for 20 years. Her sister had gone to school and become a professor at Marshall and Fred’s mother “was always disappointed that she didn’t go” so it was even more poignant when she graduated.

“And, out of the six kids, five of us went to college, and my brother who didn’t go to college went into carpentry stuff like my dad.” Fred’s father also ended up following his dreams as well. He joined his father and brothers in their carpentry business and did quite well. Even though they took a risk going to Huntington, it turned out to be the best decision they could have made.

Another defining moment occurred for Fred occurred at Marshall. “My first year of college I became a Christian and that was major in turning things around and making me a pastor.” Fred had not grown up with an emphasis on religion. He had gone to
church with his family occasionally, but it was not until college when his faith began to take a different form. Fred kept finding people who were skeptical about faith and he felt that he needed a better understanding of why that was. It was the way in which Fred found his new faith that makes his story unique.

One story in particular was just cruel. I was in this English composition class freshman year and the teacher was really smart and when you were writing, he would go along and walk on the table tops and make comments…really arrogant character. And, somewhere along the year, he asked how many people were Christians and a few raised their hands and this one girl raised her hand…a nice, attractive girl, and he berated her terrible to her face and what it did was make him look so evil and she was so gracious with a few tears. I decided that I wanted to know more about what was going on with this so I decided that I was going to church. And, I actually did start going and started meeting people…It almost seems backwards but, I just kept thinking, ‘I don’t want to be evil like that guy. I don’t care how smart he is!’

It was the journey to his new faith that led Fred into a life of service that helped him in many ways, including breaking out of his shyness. The kindness and respect he was shown by others won him over and convinced him to join youth group. Fred met many good friends and found a group of people he could laugh with and be himself around.

Midway through college, Fred felt called to the ministry. He was majoring in chemistry and mathematics and felt as if he should switch to something in humanities. Financially, Fred’s parents were struggling and so he worked three jobs in order to stay in
school. Nevertheless, Fred got the best grades during that time and even met his future wife. During his last year of college, he spoke at a small church once a week. Right after college, Fred and Sharon got married and moved to Texas for seminary school.

They lived in Texas for three years, “which was a broadening, very broadening experience that was very helpful. We ended up in quite a different culture but a friendly and warm culture where we were allowed to fit.” Sharon and Fred made lifelong friends and found a community that was accepting and open to them. “I had the opportunity to be a pastor at a small rural church in north Texan cattle country and it really got my attention; huge farms, lots of cattle, but folks in overalls that you’d never know had a dime.” Fred and Sharon had to stay with members of the community because the church did not have a place for them to stay. “Those people really accepted us well.” When he began speaking there, there were about seven people in the congregation and when he left a year later, there were 45. What changed for Fred the most during this time was his approach to preaching. “In the early days, I was very harsh and would always tell people you had to do better than you were doing.” The difference with this congregation was that, “they would come up after church and say, ‘ok, let’s do it!’ It changed my whole attitude.” That has been a lasting lesson for Fred that he has carried all these years. “I have never gone back to being that negative kind of person, I was very formative.”

When Fred graduated from seminary, he had the opportunity to stay in north Texas, “they offered me a part time job…and 10 acres and said, ‘We’ll help you build a house if you’ll stay.’” And I said, ‘Gosh!’ but, something was driving me to come back. I felt my ministry was here and I’m not sure why.” Fred has always tried to keep an open
mind about people and places but, there was something stronger at work. He had an urge to come back to West Virginia. “There was something that kept driving me back here. There was a desire in me.” So, Fred and Sharon moved back to West Virginia.

The need in West Virginia was immense. Fred came back right as the coal mines had stopped using script instead of money, but he still saw that there was still “bondage mentally, almost mental slavery to it. We buy all the stuff from the company store, we pay our bills to the company…And, I wanted to proclaim some kind of freedom to that. I wanted to help people get out of that sense of just being trapped.” Fred felt called to help alleviate some of the pain and devastation the coal companies had caused in their wake, especially now that many of them had moved on. “And, I am grateful that my family had the courage not to stay trapped.” About 3 or 4 years after Fred’s father took a risk and left for Huntington, the coal company moved their headquarters and left their little town. “If you go back now, it’s a ghost town.” Fred felt very connected to this cause and felt compelled to help.

Fred ended up with a church on the West Side of Charleston where he has been for nearly 30 years. He has the privilege to now work with people who came to his church as young people and now bring their children and even their grandchildren. This has given him a new perspective on his own culture, “from growing up here, I just couldn’t see it. It’s like a fish in water, it’s just there.” But, going to Texas and traveling extensively helps. “It has caused a world view of things and to look back on this culture from it.” Many of the worldwide issues he has seen during his travels overseas have made Fred really focus on the issues that are going on in his own neighborhood. About
30 years ago, people started moving out of the city into the suburbs of Charleston. Demographically, the West Side of Charleston has seen a lot of changes over that time. Today, many people who live on the West Side of Charleston live below the poverty line. In addition, there is a large population of African Americans.

Right now this is the largest black population in West Virginia in this part of Charleston. The percentage is about 35% and most of West Virginia is about 4 or 5% or 6 or 7% or something like that. So, yesterday I was meeting with black ministers, so it is a constant cross-culture. And, I am part of the Black Minister’s Alliance and even though they’re from here, it’s a different culture than the rest of Appalachia. Some things are similar but, a lot more of the hurts and the prejudice from years past are very deeply ingrained but, we’re getting to a place now where I’m starting to understand it.

Fred’s life has come full circle. The lessons of tolerance, fairness, and respect that were instilled at an early age are evident in his choices as an adult. One way this is illustrated is in his decision to pastor at the same church for 30 years. He has found that sharing culture is what is most important. He is accepted and welcomed into not only the church family, but he is now part of many families that he feels connected with and stays involved with.

Fred sees that there are both positives and negatives about the Appalachian culture. “The negative is that we tend to view it as so isolated and provincial that we are not sure where we fit in the rest of the world.” Fred remembers when he went to college and felt that his education would not be good enough as compared to other students.
“That’s the negative and it causes us to easily have poor self-image. It is breaking down. I see it breaking down as people travel and the world gets smaller. I see it breaking down and I am grateful.” On the positive side, Fred recognized all of the special aspects of the culture, “The positive side is the warmth, the laughter, the sense of humor, even the mountain music.” These are the features of the culture that make him proud to be from West Virginia although there is another aspect that has made the biggest difference in his life, “the sense of family and loyalty to family.” From his own family to his church family, Fred finds that he is appreciative of the way in which people connect and stay loyal to one another, making sure that they are in each others’ lives consistently. He used the story of when his nephew was getting married as an example. Fred was asked to say the prayer before the meal.

As soon as they asked me to do it, the memories of this kid, he’s like 30 now, and my sister, just started flowing. And, I thought, ‘Gosh, how special to have this heritage.’ He was born on Christmas Day, talk about loyalty to family! That’s the first time that all of my brothers and sisters, their spouses and mom and dad weren’t all together at my parent’s house for Christmas. It was the very first time. This is the interesting thing, so all of us went to the hospital. The crowd has to see the baby. And, my sister she was a little sad about it. We were together, she just didn’t get to go home that day. And, to this day…well, I have one brother who doesn’t show up like he used to, but we all get together on Christmas, even if it’s just for an hour or two.
This kind of dedication to family is something that is not only noticeable in his own family, but in other families as well. It is also an important aspect of who people become and how they are supported. “It gives you roots and a sense of belonging that kind of defines who you are and, I’ve learned to experience that with the church as well. People who allow you to be part of their family and part of their culture of the church, I think that is why I have stayed so long. I like having those kind of roots and that kind of a part of what’s going on.”

Figure 11: Photograph of Crystal Pyramid

Figure 12: Photograph of Hammer

When asked about his object of importance, Fred named two: one from his childhood and one that symbolizes his spiritual side from his adult life. “Growing up, the
way things were, and it’s more a desire for possession of it would be tools…something symbolic of my dad like a hammer and my grandfather.” Even today, Fred finds that he acquires tools, even if he knows he might not use them, as a way to connect to his own family traditions. “Part is our heritage and part is that I like to do those things on the side when I have time.” He maintains that link to his past through tools. The object that symbolizes his faith is something that he obtained 20 years ago after a year of working on his life mission with his friend. Fred and his friend would meet and write and discuss what they had produced and in the end, the final product was this life mission statement. “And, we wanted to find symbols of what that was so, I found this little glass pyramid about this tall with the four points and a point that faces up to God.” It is something that Fred reflects on often and keeps in his office. He had recently shared it with a group of people writing their life missions. “It’s really neat because it’s a prism and colorful like life. If you hold it this way, it’s a real pretty purple so, I think of myself as the child of the King. It’s got all kinds of symbolism in it.” It is through these objects that Fred finds his own symbolism, one signifying his heritage and his foundation and one symbolizing his life’s work and commitment to his faith and the people he serves.

There are several themes that evolve in Fred’s story. First is his family. Fred’s family has been a constant throughout his life, creating both a strong foundation and giving him much of the support and encouragement he needed to become the person he is today. With his father’s emphasis on hard work and dedication and his mother’s strong push for education and tolerance, Fred was taught that things can pay off for someone who is persistent and hard working. Additionally, his family created a warm and loving
environment for him to thrive in, despite their financial strains. Because of the closeness and connections even with his extended family, Fred knew he had many people to depend on. What Fred’s family did not provide, he found for himself. This is true for his resourcefulness and his desire to be spiritually fulfilled. In this regard, Fred found that his aspiration to be tolerant and accept people, just as his mother taught him, would carry over to into his fascination with people who are kind and those who are not, leading him to youth group and ultimately leading him into the ministry.

The second most common theme in Fred’s story was his faith. His journey to become a pastor was intertwined with his need to understand people better and to break out of his shyness. It was because of this that he was able to grow in so many ways, including becoming the pastor he is today and remaining in the same place for so long. Fred aspires to be even more understanding of those around him and continues to find ways to expand his learning, both of himself and others. His faith is the vehicle for his service. His gifts are his humility and his ability to relate to those around him, even if they come from the same or different cultures. Fred continues to grow and learn from others and it is his ability to do that which enables him to reach out to them in the ways that he does.

The last theme in Fred’s story is education. Fred’s life was made very different from his level of education, from the time he was a small boy to when he went to seminary, education was what helped him gain the ability to go on and affect so many people. Because of his mother’s experience with not finishing her own education until she was much older, Fred and his siblings were encouraged to pursue their dreams.
through education. Fred continues to be a student even to this day, studying and learning as much as he can from those around him. In doing this, he seems to find joy and satisfaction in everything he does. This is why Fred is resilient.

Anne.

Anne is in her mid-thirties. She is from a small town in Putnam County, West Virginia where she has resided most of her life. She is married to Jeremy and has three children; two sons and one daughter who unexpectedly passed away after her first three days of life. Anne is Caucasian and identifies as a Christian. She was raised by a middle class family who she is very close to. Her parents are married, and she has one sister who she is extremely close with. She has an education degree and helps to manage a family-owned sporting goods store in her hometown with her brother-in-law and sister-in-law. Anne and her husband are the cofounders of a 501c3 organization that puts defibulators in schools which she also helps to run.

Anne lives in the very small town she grew up in along with her immediate family and much of her extended family. Her husband’s immediate family and much of his extended family also live there. As a child, Anne depended on two things for her strength: her family and God. Although going to church was not an option, she and her sister found that they wanted to go. “Definitely, I feel like my strength and who I am today would not be without Jesus Christ but I also have extremely supportive parents and we have a very close knit family.”

In addition to her family, Anne depended on others during her childhood as well. “We had some very close friends who were like kin to us, like if their kids got in trouble
and we were over at their house and we were in on it, we got in trouble too” (laughs).

Being involved in sports and Girls Scouts also served as important activities that helped her to stay focused and make positive decisions. Friends from school also played a large part of her support system.

Another facet of Anne’s family life was the benefit of having 5 great-grandparents in addition to both sets of grandparents living nearby. “I knew all of them and was very close to all of them.” Although this was an asset in her life, “the flip side of that as a child is that they are all old. So, it was like from the time I was in 2nd grade to the time I was a junior in high school, someone died every year.” The first person who passed away was Anne’s grandfather. She was in 2nd grade and “he was a very large part of our lives and it was very sudden and we had the funeral and no warning at all that it was coming…it was the first time we had experienced death and he was part of our everyday life.” While struggling to cope with this grief as a young child, what made a difference to Anne was spending time with her grandmother who was then living alone for the first time. Anne found that spending time with her was helpful to both of them.

The reality of losing people continued to be somewhat recurrent in Anne’s life. A very close family friend, Anne’s best friend’s father, was killed in a car crash while they were kids. Again, Anne found the role of helping others through grief to be alleviating to her own grief, “I mean they were like family to us too so, dealing with that and helping them to get through that was hard.” One difficulty of losing so many people in such a short span of time for Anne was the onset of her own fear of losing more people, with many triggers, “like every time you hear a fire siren you are like, ‘Oh my gosh!’ just
worrying that someone you know dies in a car wreck.” This has continued and intensified throughout her life.

It was Anne’s faith that helped provide the foundation she needed to help make sense of her loses. When so many loved ones passed away during her childhood, Anne found that her trust in God helped give her the strength to get through her grief. This type of practice was emphasized by her parents from a very early age. “Going to church wasn’t an option, we were there. And, that didn’t take us long to realize that we weren’t going just because we had to, but because we wanted to.” Anne felt that “God and family” were what made her feel so secure. One way this showed was in Anne’s approach when she dealt with death. “I mean, tomorrow, regardless of what happens, it kind of helps internalize where we are now. You know, somehow we will see everyone again.” This reflection of her faith and willingness to move through grief has served her through her most difficult challenges in life.

Growing up, in addition to her family, Anne was able to depend on her friends and her involvement in sports. She had a very close-knit neighborhood and community that also provided support. She was also into sports. Her and her sister played through the seasons and found that basketball and softball were positive ways to spend their time. “So, I think that helped us make our decisions too because if we were in trouble we wouldn’t be allowed to play (laughs)!” Anne also had the advantage of having the same best friend since 4th grade, “so we have been through a whole lot together and been through a lot of years!” Anne had someone to confide in and share experiences with
beyond her family. As a result of all of this, Anne had a very supportive childhood and everywhere she turned, there were people around to help her.

In high school, Anne was still involved in sports. She made a conscious effort to surround herself with people who had positive influences on her rather than negative. “I think not caring what everyone else was doing as well. I didn’t care if I was popular, I didn’t care about whatever. I just did…well, you know how you just get to that point!” Anne believed that who she surrounded herself with was what would make a difference in her life, and it did. She also began dating her future husband when she was in high school. “Well…I knew his beliefs and his morals and whatever and I think that kind of helped me not do like some of my friends and stay on the right path.” Anne kept her own ideas about what decisions to make and she was not influenced by others to do things that would have gotten her into trouble. She was able to be her own person and focus on positive things instead.

Her faith also played a part in one of Anne’s biggest life transitions in her college days. During her young adulthood, Anne and her husband moved to Wyoming for three years. This was not an easy decision as Anne remembered that time.

My husband is five years older than me and he was already done with college and was in college for ministry and we prayed and prayed about what we should do and where we should go and he had a job offer in Huntington, one in Florida, and one in Casper, Wyoming and, we just knew that God was calling us to Casper. Well, when your entire family lives within two miles of each other and you are like, “oh, we are going to move 24 hours away… (laughs).
Due to the enmeshment of her family, Anne and her husband found that moving proved to be both a trying experience and yet very positive at the same time. Her grandmother was not happy with Anne’s husband because felt the move was Jeremy’s idea alone. “Everyone back home got 1-800 numbers… (laughs)!” Anne’s family had a very difficult time letting her go. Even though it was for the ministry, they were upset at the idea of Anne living so far away. Her role in their family was vital and they wanted her there. Nevertheless, Anne felt that moving was overall a very positive experience for them, especially starting out on their own and making their own decisions for the first time without family. What they found was that they were able to find a new network of people whom they became very close. These people are still involved in Anne and Jeremy’s lives today as well. They managed to remain close to those at home while carving out a new life on their own and finding a new support system while they were there. In this way, they fostered a new kind of independence that people from their families rarely know.

Reflecting back, Anne remembered some of the disadvantages of living away from home, like not running into people at the grocery store or not knowing who to buy a car from. Living away was like being dropped somewhere that was more like a “foreign land.” Moving back was not without its own ups and downs. Getting back into the routine of things and trying to fit back in again was tough. Anne found that little things like being expected for dinner at her mother’s house, for example, was not always what they wanted to do, especially since they had enjoyed so much freedom while they were
away. Anne does love being around their family and since that time, family has become more important than they could have imagined.

Anne and her husband settled back into life at home. Anne got a teaching job and Jeremy actually got a job before they moved back. They lived at Anne’s parents’ church, in the parsonage until they found their own place. Their lives were busy and they were thankful to have the help and support once Anne was pregnant with their first son. Her pregnancy was high-risk, and she was hospitalized for a month. He was born premature and with some health concerns as well, so there were many times when family played a huge part in making their lives easier. “I was so glad we were back here because we could have done it on our own but, you know, everyone was helping out and helping take care of the house.” Even when they had to take him to Duke Medical Center for treatment, they were able to stay with family in North Carolina.

Two years later, Anne was pregnant again with their daughter. Her experience was similar to the first pregnancy, with complications and bed rest. Family once again helped with caring for Jack, their son, while Anne focused on taking care of herself. When the baby was born, they spent two days in the hospital and then brought Mara home.

We had no idea that anything was wrong. She seemed really healthy when we came home from the hospital and the night we came home from the hospital she wasn’t breathing. We did CPR on her but, they couldn’t save her. So again, fortunately we were surrounded by family, which was our support system. You know, sometimes good and sometimes bad…well, I wouldn’t say bad but, you
know, people don’t always know if they haven’t been through exactly what you have been through they have no idea what it’s like. You know, they mean well or whatever…they don’t know exactly how you feel.

The doctors could not figure out what happened with Mara. She was healthy by all accounts and too young for SIDS. She passed without warning and to this day there is no explanation why she went so suddenly.

One thing that made their situation more difficult was that Anne’s sister had a little girl three days before Anne had Mara.

So here we are, you know, it was her third child and our second child. We were all so excited and she was excited too, but it was a total surprise and we had been trying to get pregnant for a while so, we were due at the same time. And, once we had Mara, we had babies that were the exact same age and we were used to being with our family all the time and now we have this newborn baby…it is just right there, constantly. And, don’t get me wrong, it is not that we don’t love her. It was just hard and to this day, she is 9 and Jeremy has never been to one of her birthday parties and probably never will. But, she is…he has her spoiled. I mean, there is a bond there that might not have been there if the circumstances would have been different.

Working through their own pain was made more difficult on some levels with their niece being the same age as their daughter, serving as a constant reminder of what they could have. To make matters even more difficult, Anne’s mother gauged their well-being on how they interacted with their niece. She sometimes counted how many times Jeremy
talked or looked at the baby as an indicator of how he was doing and then reported this to Anne. At the same time, the family was also grieving and having a difficult time knowing how to support and respond to Anne and Jeremy.

Anne’s resources are a natural safety net, with “the closeness of family and having someone to lean on” being of the utmost importance, even if it is sometimes misplaced or even offensive. One thing Anne can rely on to buffer her from that is her personal coping mechanism which is “probably sense of humor.” She pointed out,

We were even laughing last week. My grandmother is very sick and in the hospital and my mom was like, ‘you and your dad!’ Well, everyone just jokes all the time to get through things. And, I was like, ‘Yeah, I totally fall into that too,’ kind of like you don’t know what to say or what to do, so we just carry on and act stupid. It might not be totally appropriate, but it is how we…cope!

Anne can use humor and laughter to help her find her way through difficulty. She has the ability to bring light even to dreary situations and make the most of her time with people.

About a year and a half later, they were pregnant again with their son Cale. “The pregnancy was wonderful and I had no problems.” When he was born, they did an EKG on him just to be sure if everything was alright. What they found was that he had a long QT interval.” They had never heard of long QT syndrome, but Anne’s fear began to increase, especially since the loss of her daughter. She insisted that her oldest son get checked out again. What resulted was that both boys had a heart condition that put them in a low risk category. Nevertheless, Anne and Jeremy took preventative measures to
ensure that their sons would be safe. They were both put on heart medication that they still take today.

One thing that helped Anne move through her grief was having a friend who had also been through a similar situation. “Until you lose a child of your own, you just don’t know that love and you have no clue what it is like to lose a child.” As time passed, Anne was connected with others who had also lost a child. “The way my family says it is, it is the club that nobody wants to be in.” This network of people has helped her tremendously. One way Anne thinks of it is “Ok, we have to do something with this, you know, we can let it ruin our lives and eat us alive or I can help other people and, you know, make something good come out of it.” Anne went to counseling for a short time, and the counselor also put Anne in touch with people who had lost children, which she found helpful and it made her feel like she was extending that support that was given to her. Part of this urge to help might come from Anne’s pleasing nature, always wanting to fix everything. And, even though she knew she could not fix what had happened to any of them, she felt like she could at least be an example of someone who was functioning in the aftermath of such a difficult experience.

Anne still worries about her children at night, fearful that they may stop breathing. She checks on them frequently, but as time passes, this too wanes. Anne and Jeremy have continued to face new challenges and find new ways to combat them. A few years ago, it was brought to their attention that they should have a defibulator, or AED at their house, due to their sons’ heart conditions. Just the thought of this was too much for Anne to think about. With her fear of losing anyone, let alone her children, she
was not prepared for this type of aggressive life-saving approach to be in her hands. “I
am ok coping with everything and they throw this AED thing out there.” The subject was
dropped until their next doctor visit when the doctor asked if there was an AED at their
son’s school. It was then that they decided that they really needed to do something.
They made up their minds that they would raise the money to get one in the school. An
AED unit cost around $1,500. She realized this was not something that would benefit
just them, and Anne remembered saying, “And, maybe we will do Putnam County.” The
approval and fundraising process was lengthy but school by school, they began placing
AED units all over the county. Today they are the founders of a 501c3 not-for-profit
dedicated to the memory of their daughter that puts these units in schools. They are up to
24 units and counting and they reached their goal of having one in every school in
Putnam County. Each year they hold a 5k race to raise money for the project. There
were over 200 people there this last year, with most of them being people they knew from
being in school, church, or other circumstances. Their support network was apparent,
with most of them together on that day to raise money for that cause.

The closeness of Anne’s family and her community played an important part in
supporting and helping her and her husband meet their goals, whether it was coping with
the loss of their daughter or meeting the needs of thousands of school children in their
county and other counties in West Virginia. When Anne was asked what she is trying to
pass onto her sons, she said, “The biggest thing I try to teach them is to look out for other
people and not just worry about themselves.” She does this not just through words, but
actions. Anne and her sons take time to visit older adults from their church and bring
them things on special occasions. She tells them, “I hope when you are adults, you will look out for or take care of people other than yourselves.” She believes that caring for people outside of the family comes from the example her mom gave her as a child. There was an older man who lived on their street who had no family. As children, they would talk with him and take time to spend with him. Her mother would also care for him. When he became unable to take care of himself, Anne’s mother was the one who helped place him in assisted living and clean out his house. “She had no ties to this man at all. She didn’t have to do anything but, she gave of herself and did what needed to be done and I just hope someday that I can pass that on to my kids because I guess I got that from my parents.” This quality of helping and looking out for others is what Anne values most about West Virginia. She feels that people from her state are “people who care about each other and look out for each other. They are proud of where they come from.”

Figure 13: Photograph of Bible

Anne was asked to share an object of importance. “Um, I don’t know of anything other than a Bible, but I think that is pretty much everything that we have talked about…I mean, I am really kind of like a plain, boring person (laughs)!” Aside from her humor, the proof of her faith was woven into the stories she shared, and it is woven into the
fabric of her life as well. What symbolizes Anne’s strength most is her faith and the best object she thought of to embody that was her Bible. It symbolizes her religion, her beliefs, and her ability to spring back from difficult circumstances. Her faith has been the foundation of her life, and continues to give her the support and guidance she needs, and Anne feels like she would not be the person she is today without that.

Anne’s story has many themes, including her faith. She also leans on her family for support. Although they do not always have the perfect answers, they are there to help create a network of support. When support cannot be found within the family, Anne tends to create support networks wherever she goes. She surrounds herself with people who can help her and people who she can help as well. Besides her resounding inner strength, Anne uses humor as a coping mechanism. Being able to laugh, even at truly difficult things is what helps Anne stay uplifted and positive. This was evident throughout her interview. Anne is a remarkable person who believes that helping heals. She shows this everyday in what she does and what she passes onto her sons.

Ralph.

Ralph is in his late 40’s. He is married and has two sons. He is Caucasian and identifies as a Christian. Ralph grew up and resides in Jackson County, West Virginia just as his family has before him. His parents divorced early on in his life and his mother remarried his stepfather, who Ralph is close to. He grew up poor with few resources. Ralph has a half-brother who is 13 years younger than him but remains close with him as well. Ralph’s mother is the oldest of 14 children, and as a result, Ralph has a large extended family that also mostly lives in Jackson County. Ralph’s father was killed
several years ago, although Ralph was never very close with his father. Ralph is the
director of a Christian camp for children and has a degree in education.

Ralph is a first generation college graduate. None of Ralph’s aunts or uncles
finished high school, so one important factors in his life has been education although
Ralph was not planning on that being a focus for him. “In this area, when you graduated
from high school, you were supposed to work in the aluminum plant.” This is what
Ralph had planned on throughout high school and because of this Ralph did not take
school very seriously. There were some cutbacks in the early 80’s at the aluminum plant
which cut down on hiring. Ralph was planning on going into the military, but “God
changed that when some things happened my senior year.” So, when Ralph decided to
go to college he “broke family tradition.” But, school was always a challenge for Ralph.
His parents divorced when he was in 2nd grade because his father was an alcoholic.
Ralph missed almost 40 days of school that year. “That bothered me a bit because I
didn’t develop very good reading skills.” It was not until college that Ralph caught up.
Nevertheless, he focused on his education and ended up getting an education degree.
Ralph had to work his way through college, “When I graduated from high school, my dad
didn’t have a job and my stepdad didn’t have a job.” But, Ralph persevered and
graduated on his own terms.

As a child, Ralph’s father was in and out of his life. “He’d show up at these crazy
times for a week, even a month at a time and I would think, ‘Oh, my dad’s back’ and then
he’d be gone again.” Ralph credits his mother for not letting this get him down. “My
mom did something very good, she didn’t allow my dad to be the object of my anger and
she never devalued my dad.” The divorce could have been very bitter, but Ralph’s mother made sure that her son focused on the positives and encouraged having a relationship with his father. “So when he would show up, she would make sure I had time to participate.” Because of his mother, Ralph learned a valuable lesson in respecting others and working things out, “even though they were divorced, they worked well together and I think that helped me in figuring all that out.”

Ralph credits his resilience to his mother. She had been a constant example caring for others and being compassionate to them as well. “Even today my mom is the oldest of however many siblings are still alive and she’s probably the healthiest physically and emotionally. My mom is still the mom of the entire family.” She is also Ralph’s role model in determination and persistence. She went back to school to get her GED when Ralph was in middle school “because at 14 she quit going to school so she could take care of all the siblings.” His mother has always taken care of others “if it was family or neighbors.” Ralph admitted that he tries to display that same kind of compassion for others but, struggles in ways that his mother does not. “I think my personality is truth not grace, but because of the way I’ve seen my mom take care of her brothers, who at least 4 or 5 are alcoholics.” She goes out of her way to make sure that their bills are paid even when others tell her to cut them loose, “my mom continues to take care of them and I think that’s a beautiful picture of grace.” She also takes care of a neighbor named Larry, “and about the end of every special meal that we have together, she’s boxing up food to take to Larry…she says, ‘Which one of you is going to take this to Larry?’ I don’t know if he expects it or wants it, but she sends it.” Again and again,
Ralph’s mother has not only ensured that he is taken care of, but that others are as well, all the time teaching Ralph valuable lessons about humility, respect, and selflessness, which he then shares with those around him.

As a kid, a major influence in Ralph’s life was sports and the people who supported the teams he played on. “Sports and coaches were a vital part of my life and in this area baseball was king when I was growing up.” He found that although he was a good player, the thing that made the biggest difference in his life were the people who supported him while he was playing. It seemed as if the entire community of Ravenswood was behind him when he was playing baseball and even other sports. “They invested in me and that was an important community.” Ralph found that from little league all the way through high school, coaches were extremely supportive and encouraging to him.

In middle school, Ralph still had sports to lean on, but he also met a man named Ken who proved to be a very important figure in his life. It was even before Ralph started going to church when he met Ken. Ralph then joined Ken’s youth group. From there, Ralph felt as if he had finally found something that helped to further mold who he is today. It was through this group that he met some friends and became even closer with Ken. “We would ride motorcycles all day and come home and get cleaned up and go to church.” Although he went to church occasionally when he was younger, it was not until this experience that he feels “I was really introduced to, now what I would say, an authentic community.” Even though it felt like “a bunch of my friends getting together”
it was more than that and carried Ralph through some trying years as an adolescent and young adult.

This experience with youth group led Ralph to a camp that became very influential then and continues to be today. “Because that’s when I really got introduced to a community because when you go to youth group and there’s 10 kids there, you say ‘there are 10 who believe in this Jesus stuff.’ But, when you go to camp and there’s 150, that really changes your opinion.” To this day, Ralph is connected with the people he met during camp, sitting with them at Marshall football games and raising their children together. Ralph is now the director that that camp. “It has been fun to go back and build those communities for other people.” Over the years, he has even raised his own family at the camp, living there in the summers with his wife and boys.

When Ralph went off to college, he attended Marshall University. Even there, Ralph found that he needed some type of community or network of people to support him.

There were these two young ladies that were already at Marshall and their mommas’ told me this story. When we got to Huntington, we went to church on Sunday and they had already been there. This was way too big for me, there were 500 people and choir robes and stuff. So, they called home and said, ‘Ok, Ralph doesn’t like this church, so find us somewhere else to go.’ So, they were willing to make that transition for me.

These were just some girls from Ralph’s hometown, but they made an effort to include him and make sure he felt supported. These young ladies, who were about Ralph’s age,
invested in his life and that is part of the reason he feels so strongly about investing his
time in others’ lives; because that is what people have done for him throughout his life.
“So that’s really a part of my desire and passion is to help young people understand that
they need to invest in people their own age and really reach out to them but, also to
surround them with people who are older that have some wisdom and guidance and can
help them do that.”

Looking back, Ralph believes that being surrounded by good people has made a
large difference in his life. Whether it was his grandparents, or his friends’ parents, he
has always been supported by people who have taken the time to invest in him.
Regardless of whether he was at his friend’s house or at his own house with his friends
for “spaghetti dinner night”, he was always surrounded by caring people. He even went
to the beach for the first time with his friend’s family. It was having that kind of support
network that helped bolster Ralph’s own resilience.

Ralph gives some credit for his resilience to nature and the activities that have
always been important to him growing up. “I’ve always been an outdoorsman and spent
a lot of time outside.” From riding motorcycles to riding bicycles, to hunting and fishing,
Ralph has made sure to fold in time to spend outside whether he is alone or with
someone. Fishing was an activity that Ralph used to do with his father. When his father
was killed, it took Ralph some time to get back into fishing. “I enjoyed it growing up.”
He also hunts with his brother and that connection is important to Ralph and has helped
create a connection between the two of them despite their age difference.
Even during Ralph’s young adulthood, he found that were always people there to support him and help him along the way. Out of college, he needed a place to stay once he got his first teaching job. He ended up living with Ken and his wife. After that, he moved in with another friend from camp. “Sometimes I tell people that God must have been really worried about me because of the number of people who at the Baptist church group influenced my life.” Ralph named dozens of people who went out of their way to help him or guide him during very crucial times in his life. It was through those connections that he ended up gaining the job he has as the director of the camp. Some of the same people who were involved in the camp when he was young, are the people today that he works with and continues to build relationships with today. “So, outside of my family, those men, that long line and even the church I went to were men, that long line that invested in me.” Ralph is grateful to all of the people who have helped him get to where he is today who allowed him to give back as well. He believes in the power of connections and is proud to have the connections he has. “And I’m from West Virginia and when you all make fun of us for being inbred it’s not a bad thing because of the connection.” When his son sat down in one of his first classes at Marshall, a lady said to him, “Are you Ralph’s son?” “And he’s like, ‘Are you kidding me? Does my dad know everybody?’ So, I think those connections are greatly important.” Ralph not only stays connected himself, but he has tried to make sure that his own children are connected with people who can influence their lives as well.

Today Ralph not only directs the camp, he also travels and preaches all over the country and even in Northern India as part of a ministry he is involved with. In regards
to his experiences when he has preached there, it is not just about him. “People are going to see through, so with that privilege comes great responsibility and knowing that I can go over there and be whoever I want to be but, they are going to see through that…nobody knows me so, you better be authentic and be good at what you do.” This has been another important influence in Ralph’s life, helping him to practice humility and authenticity wherever he goes. He takes this responsibility very seriously and knows that others are relying on him constantly. “I think you have to respect everybody whether you like them or not, whether they live the way you do…I try to spend a lot of time with people who are not like me.” In addition to his work, Ralph does this through another hobby of his, racing dirt track cars with his brother. “It gives me a lot of time with my brother and it also gives me a lot of time with other people.” Ralph believes that if you share time with others, the better chance you have to impact their lives and have them impact yours. This is evident on the dirt track, in Northern India, and in his work with youth.

As a father, Ralph has tried to pass on as much to his sons as possible. He has taken lessons from every stage of his life to share with them. “I don’t remember my dad being in my life so, just the whole concept of being in my boys’ lives and allowing them to be their own people and being involved in what they want to be involved in but also passing on family skills and traditions.” Ralph feels like he has learned immensely as a father and continues to learn from his sons. This seems especially important now that they are moving on, going to college and deciding what they want to do with their lives. He has tried to keep conversations open, especially about barriers that could get in the
way of them leading healthy and successful lives. “Before my son went to college, I had him come to work with me for three days and each day we talked about something different and alcohol was one of those.” Ralph felt like information about his family history and his own struggles surrounding alcohol should come from him. There was a time when Ralph felt like he might fall into the family path, but he was strong enough to take another road. This is his hope for his sons as well, knowing that they do not have to fall into that struggle. “And, I feel like that is just vital. I feel like I have broken the chain.”

Figure 14: Photograph of Ravenswood Welcome Sign

Ralph chose to share two objects of importance: a hat with the camp logo on it and a picture of a sign with the name of his community on it, Ravenswood. The hat, which does not have a photo due to confidentiality, is symbolic of both Ralph’s past and present. It represents the connections he has made throughout his life and the ones he continues to make through the camp. From the time he was a young boy attending the camp until today as the director, he knows that the camp is something that means so much to him and so many people. The picture of the Ravenswood sign also represents community. Ralph remembers how the community he is from supported him through so many endeavors and became such a stabilizing place for not only him to grow up, but his
sons as well. He is proud to be part of his community and happy he can now give back and be one of the supporters.

There are a few consistent themes in Ralph’s life. First there is the strength and love of his mother and family. He credits his mother with teaching him compassion, strength, respect and perseverance. Other people like his brother, his stepfather and grandparents also provided support and encouragement throughout his life. Secondly, Ralph values the importance of community and connectivity. Wherever he has been in life, Ralph tends to find a community that mimics the one he grew up in to create a safety net for himself. Whether it is a church, camp, his network of friends, college, or through sports or hobbies, Ralph connects with those around him in a meaningful and authentic way. Lastly, Ralph believes his faith is a guiding force in his life. This is evident in the way he approaches most things, but traveling to other countries to talk about his faith is testament enough. Ralph was guided into his religion by people he respected and looked up to and now he does the same thing for others. Ralph leads a life of conviction, making sure that he gives back what has been given to him. He tries to not only connect with others but, tries to encourage people to connect with one another. That is what has helped Ralph be so resilient and how he tries to help others be resilient as well.

**Wendy.**

Wendy is 19 years old and lives in Cabell County, West Virginia where she goes to college. She is a single mom, raising her 1 year old son on her own. Wendy identifies as a Christian. She is an African American woman, who is one of five children: four brothers and one sister. She did not know her biological father but lived with her mom
and stepdad. She is originally from Raleigh County, WV in the mountains but, she grew up in Kanawha, County on the west side of Charleston.

Wendy grew up a religious home. “I guess we went to church like every Sunday and on Wednesdays. I guess that was a positive influence during my early years of life.” She spent much of her time with her family and they did many things together. When Wendy was young, “I just liked being with my family and doing what they did and most of the time we went to church.” In addition to church, Wendy felt that basketball is very important part of her life and thought of it as a wonderful influence back then and even today. It was family who helped create this outlet as well. “My brother taught me to play it when I was like 6 and I loved it ever since. So, I just go outside and shoot hoops.” When her family could get away, she remembered that they would take vacations or go places around the state together. “Usually around spring break we’d take family trips, picnics, Busch Gardens, Virginia Beach, doing family things. Sometimes they would host little carnivals around here and we would go.” Both her mother and stepfather worked, but they found time to be together “and those were good times.” The family connection was important and strong for Wendy and, it has been a continuous theme throughout her life.

Another source of strength for Wendy was her love of books and reading. She found that books provided a positive way for her to find out about new information and escape to other worlds.

I found a lot of escape routes through books, just being able to be by myself and read. It just made me smarter and made me learn more I guess. I guess if I didn’t
start reading I wouldn’t be as willing to learn as I am now. I just want to know why everything works. Questions that you really aren’t supposed to ask, I want to ask so I can find out.

Wendy was a natural learner, and she could have done well at school. She was sometimes discouraged to learn, however due to some obstacles that came up on her quickly when she reached adolescence. Her motivation to learn quickly dissipated and turned into rebellion.

There were some difficult obstacles Wendy had to overcome during childhood. One void in her life was that she did not know her biological father. This was made more difficult because her siblings knew their fathers. “It was hard but I have a stepdad so, it was ok.” He was in her life since she could remember but that too ended due to her mother and stepfather getting a divorce. Other family problems weighed heavily on Wendy as well. “My brother went to jail and that was hard because he was like my playmate. He’s way older than me, 7 or 8 years older, but we did everything together.” This was especially hard because Wendy took it somewhat personally when he went, “that really set me off because I really needed him and I felt like he didn’t need me because he was out doing his own thing and got into trouble and went to jail and didn’t really need me anymore and I kind of felt left out.” Wendy was also dealing with issues related to her sister. “She got pregnant first and had my niece and then she got sick. I was about 10. She had this rare blood clotting disease so she had to get a transplant and, she has been sick ever since.” This was hard on Wendy because she had to step in and help take care of her niece while her mom took care of her sister. “When you are 10 you
really aren’t fit to take care of a kid.” Wendy resented her inability to make choices for herself. She began hanging out with friends and doing things that were more dangerous.

“I was out of control, on the wrong path: drugs, drinking alcohol, doing things that I shouldn’t have done, just going crazy and having fun.”

She attended an after school program at a local church that proved to be one of the most important things she could have done. At the church, they would work on homework and there were people there to assist them. Wendy remembered there was a lady there named Dee who helped her. “She helped me out a lot because I was a pretty bad kid. So, she would set me straight.” In fact, the center was filled with caring people who put Wendy “…on the right path, tried to make me do better and stop doing stuff I wasn’t supposed to do.” What Wendy remembered about her younger years is that she was really smart, “I just found trouble but, I tried to find trouble everywhere. I was an attention seeker.” And, even though she truly hated going to the center, she went because of her mother’s insistence. The youth center at the church provided the program for free and looking back, she thinks of it fondly. “I am glad they get grants and stuff because it’s just an amazing place.” It took many years of back and forth to get Wendy to the point she is today with the youth center.

When asked about what pulled her through that phase, Wendy credits the people at her church. She had stopped going but, when she returned, she found that they welcomed her. She attended youth group and connected with the people there. “They really helped me out. I don’t know what they saw in me. I couldn’t see it, of course. They just really stuck by me and tried to be there for me.” Although Wendy enjoyed the
connections at the church and wanted to do well, there was another side to her that just wanted to do whatever she wanted. This was in part due to her unforgiving guilt about what kind of decisions she had been making. “I didn’t want to belong to the youth group because everything I was doing was so bad and I didn’t deserve to be treated nice.” Wendy almost gave up but she stuck it out and believed that there was hope. “I did start going back and it was good. I just felt comfortable there and loved. That’s important.”

Another opportunity came to Wendy through the center and the church. During the summer Wendy’s mother would try to get her into camps since she worked. “My mom tried five different camps in all but the only camp I liked was Camp Collin.” This was the time when she began to figure out who she was and what she really wanted. “I found who God was and tried to incorporate it into my life and things like that.” She really enjoyed the ways in which they were allowed to express their faith, “we had devotions that you did by yourself and not in a group so you could really express yourself and you didn’t have to anybody else to think about.” Being part of these religious communities gave Wendy the support systems she needed during the more difficult times in her life.

Since Wendy graduated from high school, she has been attending college. Her own self-worth rose due to her ability to believe that she was worthy of succeeding. She also became a mother, which has changed everything for her. “I don’t have any negatives about being a mom. I love being a mom because I have Ki and if I didn’t have Ki, I don’t know what I’d be doing…really acting out…he saved my life. I don’t know what I’d be doing. I’m serious. I just love life now.” Wendy truly finds meaning in
being a mother. Her roots of being with her own family and spending such quality time with them have been rediscovered. She now shares that same kind of time and love with her son while trying to better herself with a college education. It is a good balance for Wendy. She is adjusting to her new life and doing it with the same curiosity and drive she approaches everything with.

When Wendy was asked about being from West Virginia, she is quick to joke, “You know what is different about West Virginia? Nothing (laughs)!” She mentioned how much she likes white-water rafting and talked about how fun it is, but then she said, “Oh man, there’s not much else but, I’m proud to say I’m from West Virginia! Just the beautifulness, it is really pretty here. People are so down to earth here.” Wendy appreciates the interconnectedness of West Virginia. “People know their neighbors here…I like that about West Virginia. We aren’t stuck up. We work with what we have.” All of these things are true for Wendy. She appreciates and emanates all of these qualities. She values people connecting to help one another out. She is proof that having a community to stick by you can make all the difference in your life. She is friendly and values that as well in others. Wendy is resourceful and tries to make the most of her life. She knows when she needs support and even though she has resisted it at times, she knows when it is the right time to seek out help.
Wendy’s objects of importance are a tie between two very important things: her church and youth group and her son, Ki. She feels like the church has known her for a long time and seen her through some very rough times. They have stuck by her and treated her with respect the entire time. “They may not have known all of my problems, but they really know how to keep people up, that’s what I like because they aren’t too nosy but, they help you in any way they can and that’s really cool.” This lasting impact will forever be something that Wendy values as something that pulled her out of her path of self-destruction. At the same time, she feels similarly about her son. “I just love Ki because he’s my son but, he’s just really been a positive influence and got me off drugs because I wanted to be a good mom for Ki and a role model. But I did fall short sometimes, but I don’t know, I’ll just give him what I have.” Her son has given her another reason to live her life in a positive way since sometimes she has felt as if she was
not worthy of good things. Wendy now has a reason to succeed not just for herself, but for Ki as well.

The themes that continually come up throughout Wendy’s story are the importance of family, the importance of support networks, especially those that are faith-based, and the love of learning. Wendy has always found support in her family even when times were hard and she did not have a say in what going on around her. She was supported by her mother and stepfather and now passes that onto her son. Wendy also consistently brings up the value of having people around who can push you but, do it in a way that does not feel intrusive. She values people and the ability to connect with others. She also values her state of West Virginia and the people in it while carrying on some of the same things she finds most important. Wendy is intelligent and has always been able to fall back on her ability and love of learning to help her along. That is one of the reasons why she can juggle being a single mother and going to school at the same time. Wendy has made the most of what she has, just like one of the things she values most about West Virginians. Wendy is resilient and continues to define herself in a positive way.
Chapter 5: Findings

Introduction

This section tells the story about how the narratives of the participants exemplify how they were able to development resilience and how their cultural values helped to foster some of that resilience. The data from the interviews was collected, summarized, and then coded. While there were many codes found within the interviews, the codes were clustered into themes that were consistent throughout each interview. Because of the similarities between the themes and the Appalachian cultural values (Jones, 1994), the themes that emerged were placed within the corresponding cultural values and turned into major themes that are highlighted in this section. This was done because (1) the cultural values were evident within the narratives of the participants, and (2) because the cultural values served as major protective factors in the participants’ stories.

The cultural values are broken down in this section and discussed in relation to the information that has already been presented from the participant’s narratives. In addition, the comparable data about participants is cross-referenced within each section, showing how a particular cultural value affected different participants either similarly or differently. Because of the nature of the cultural values working together and overlapping with each other, the values prove to be just as interwoven as the culture itself. As a result, some of the cultural values were combined in order to better elucidate the ways in which the stories came together. The original ten Appalachian cultural values (Jones, 1994) have been reduced to eight. One protective factor, education and love of learning, has been added in as well, as it was present in every interview as a
source of strength. In addition to the Appalachian cultural values, this chapter also summarizes the objects of importance shared by the participants.

**Appalachian Cultural Values**

Appalachiastudied in some ways but very little has been produced to show the positive attributes, especially when it comes to the culture that exists in the region (Bauer & Growick, 2003; Diddle & Denham, 2010; Helton & Keller, 2010). There is very limited research on the benefits of using the culture as a way to help individuals who are struggling (Helton & Keller, 2010). Nevertheless, it has been shown that certain aspects of intact cultures can promote resilience within the people from the culture (Keefe, 2005). By looking at parts of the culture that recur within the interviews, we can begin to understand the positive aspects of the Appalachia culture. Most of the cultural values presented by Loyal Jones (1994) were evident in all of the interviews and contributed to the resilience of participants. Cultural values promote better understanding of the individuals who are products of the culture itself, and more specifically, those who are from West Virginia. In addition, this data serves to better inform helping professionals by adding to the research on cultural values of Appalachian clients. Certain cultural values can serve as protective factors by buffering individuals from negative outcomes (Helton & Keller, 2010). Although it is never safe to generalize about a group of people, there are some consistent themes among the participants that show the importance of having multiple support systems or protective factors in place to overcome hardships that are systemic or traumatic in nature. The Appalachian cultural values can provide that kind of support (Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006).
Jones’s (1994) cultural values are evident in all 12 of the interviews and are interwoven throughout their stories. Every cultural value, with the exception of patriotism, was important to each participant as a source of strength during some point in their life. This is similar to the findings of Helton and Keller (2010). Cultural values represented not only what tended to uphold people, but what gave them the ability to spring back from either adversity or a traumatic event. However, in some cases, certain cultural values held participants back and served as barriers during certain points in their lives. Even so, it was shown that most participants were largely protected from their challenges as a result of their cultural values, and in some instances they were able to turn those barriers into protective factors at a later date. Not only were these values ingrained in their lives, but also in the lives of those who supported them, indirectly affecting them. If a cultural value was a barrier, there were other aspects of the culture that served as protective factors. Many times, it was an individual or group of people from the culture who helped to provide a safety net for the participants. This is consistent with prior research. Helton & Keller (2010) reported that resilience among women ages 5-18 was fostered by systems providing supports such as youth programs, quality time at home, and congregational involvement. Each influence came from within the culture itself, and created opportunities for children to learn how to become resilient from those around them. Ultimately, “the study helped to understand how Appalachian women’s cultural values fostered their strengths and resilience” (Helton & Keller, 2010, p. 159).

What is evident within the stories of the participants in this study is that one thing alone was not responsible for protecting them and making them resilient. Instead, it was
a combination of factors that came together, that were both internal and external in nature, which helped pull them through their hardships. These narratives demonstrated sources of strength or protective factors for the 12 resilient West Virginians interviewed for this study, providing a glimpse of what contributes to resilience for those who are struggling. Other studies have pointed out the importance of culture in the development of resilience as well (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Helton & Keller, 2010; Kirmayer et al., 2011).

The following section is broken down into nine themes: Familism, Religion/Faith, Neighborliness/Sense of Community, Love of Place and Sense of Beauty, Humility/Modesty and Personalism, Independence, Self-Reliance, and Pride, Sense of Humor, and Patriotism. These are a condensed version of the original cultural values by Jones (1994) and better capture what was found in this particular research. Education and Love of Learning is presented as an additional theme as well.

**Familism.**

The theme of familism was present in every participant’s story as a protective factor. A family can be loosely defined, including immediate, extended, kinship networks, and individual family members. Familism also encompasses concepts of interconnectedness and family as a safety net. Familism can be influential through keeping family traditions alive or creating new ways of protecting and including one another (Helton & Keller, 2010). On the other hand, families can also be a barrier, making it difficult to navigate around or create healthy distance from certain family members. This can be due to high levels of dysfunction or from an inability to connect with family in a meaningful way (Walsh, 2002; 2003). Nevertheless, even those who
reported family as a barrier were able to turn that barrier into a protective factor later by using certain family members as motivators or by creating a newly constructed family or extended kinship network that was a positive influence. The theme of familism is broken down into four subthemes: *family unity, important family members, newly constructed family, and extended kinship network*. Ways in which families served as barriers is also discussed throughout these themes in order to paint a more complete picture of how family, even when negative, can influence people to ultimately become resilient.

*Family unity.*

Family as a unit can serve as an intricate support network for people who have experienced something traumatic or who have lived through challenging circumstances. It is the family and their unity that can rally around an individual or band together to create a safety net for those who may need it. A family unit can include immediate family members such as parents and siblings and can include an individual’s spouse and children. Immediate family can include step parents as well as step and half siblings. Family units can also be broader to include extended family as well: aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. Many people would consider family as an important influence in their life, but for some individuals however, family served as buffer against high-risk situations. Traumatic situations can be devastating and have lasting negative outcomes. But with *family unity*, family served as a protective factor, shielding family members from negative outcomes and in turn, creating resilience. Findings regarding the theme of family unity in this study are consistent with the findings of prior researchers (Helton & Keller, 2010; Walsh, 2003; 2003).
Frank grew up in poverty with an abusive father and limited opportunities. When his mother divorced his father things became better emotionally, but financially things became very difficult. Frank’s immediate family survived on by very little. Thankfully for Frank, he had family unity. Because of the extremely close-knit nature of their family unit that included both immediate and extended family, Frank was protected both at home and within the rest of the family unit. “And, so in the sense of what influences you the most is your immediate family. And being a child of that Polish Catholic family, the children were the precious ones and we were always doted upon and taken care of and so it was the family unit.” Frank and his siblings were buffered from the potential negative outcomes. Instead there were elders who looked out for him and meals that brought everyone together; this provided the safety net to keep Frank and the rest of the children safe. Even though things sometimes felt very much out of control to Frank, he knew he could rely on his family for support and that everyone looked out for him. “So, people were holding you, the church, the family…if you didn’t let them you fell real quick.” Frank raised his own family in a similar manner, spending as much time with his wife and children as he could. “So the message was to be with your kids and then be with your mom and dad. You see, that is the culture and a very significant theme in our culture; your kids and your family, that’s all you’ve got!” Frank was protected by the bond of his family and their unity. Frank’s experience of family unity is similar to the findings of Tang and Russ (2007), who found that extended family networks can buffer against the sometimes damaging effects of poverty by providing resources, and most importantly, security.
This same type of family unity was true for Fred. Fred also grew up in poverty in a very large family and although his parents were hard working, they were at the mercy of the coal company for financial stability. When Fred was growing up, his immediate family lived away from his extended family, but they were still a source of security and strength for them. Nevertheless, his mother and father were able to keep their children close, teaching them the value of independence, but also the value of sticking together. When it came time for Fred to go to college, something that he was not excited about, his entire family moved with him. They moved back home to where their extended family lived, supporting Fred’s goals and creating a needed support network for him during a very impressionable time.

Once again, Fred’s story supports Helton and Keller’s (2010) research that highlights the value of extended family fostering resilience among family members. Fred’s family unity helped promote his resilience and not only did this help make him resilient, his family bettered their situation as well; his mom finished her education and his father finally got to work as a carpenter with his brothers and father, which was something they had aspired to do. Their entire extended family provided a safety net. This tradition continues today as Fred’s family is still connected by spending every Christmas together, and making sure they are invested in each other’s lives. This is one of the things that Fred values most about his family and the other families in his culture, the loyalty and the way they connect and stay connected. Jones (1994) pointed out family as a cornerstone of the Appalachian culture. Family may be one of the reasons that Fred chose to have a hammer be one of his objects of importance. The connection to
his own family is a profound one, not only giving him the skills he needed in life, but the ability to hold onto his family heritage and use it to better his own life.

In both Frank and Fred’s stories, their siblings also became resilient, bouncing back from adversity and becoming contributing members of society as well. It was the whole family unit that provided the safety net that kept Fred and Frank and their siblings from being held down by poverty. They were able to benefit from the support of extended family and community supports, validating Mullin and Arce’s (2008) findings in their study of resilience and poverty that family was the vehicle for resilience.

Marie grew up in a rural community with a large, Italian Catholic family. Although they were not struggling financially while Marie was growing up, problems arose when her father became ill and passed away. Initially Marie’s immediate family was financially stable, which was a privilege because her mother had never worked out of the home. Once their savings were depleted and some family members were at odds with Marie’s mother regarding the family businesses, things became difficult to manage. Thankfully for Marie, the entire family unit was still available for her and her siblings, despite the hardship amongst the adults. Because children were at the center of their family, the children were always able to depend on their family for support. “And, I was as comfortable in one home as the other, so there was that very tight family group.” Because of this unity on behalf of the children, Marie’s family was able to support the children and buffer them from some of the difficulties they faced.

Closeness within an extended family seemed to create a very strong foundation for Marie, Frank, and Fred. They all knew they could lean on family members when
things were troubling. The children were buffered from any hardship and that helped them thrive in the ways that they could. All three of these participants were encouraged to go onto college and better themselves which helped to create some resilience as well. Marie and Frank had their Catholic faith to hold them up, and Fred had both parents and extended family encouraging him. Their family was able to give them what they could and push them in the direction of attainable goals.

Anne and Jeremy also grew up in an enmeshed family and when they lost their daughter, it was their family that surrounded them. They were unified in the attempt to support Anne and Jeremy through their tragedy. When Anne and Jeremy were growing up they were not financially wealthy. But, there were no real financial hardships or major obstacles, with the exception of Anne losing so many grandparents throughout her childhood. Anne and Jeremy came from the same small, supportive community where most of their extended families lived in close proximity to one another. They spent ample amounts of time with family, and family gatherings tended to center around a regular meal, which kept the family close and ensured that they saw each other frequently, much like Frank’s family. This is the strength of their family unity that allowed this type of extensive support and helped to create resilience early on. Templeton et al. (2008) pointed out that having this kind of extensive family and community support can help to create resilience at a young age.

Anne and Jeremy were both tied to their families and their communities and that is why moving to Wyoming offended many of their family members, especially in Anne’s family. Leaving their community meant leaving their family and this threatened
their family unity. Tang and Russ (2007) and Jones (1994) write about the difficulties of leaving family. By leaving, Anne and Jeremy they threatened to unravel the fabric of the unit. Although they believed that leaving gave them a chance to strengthen their marriage and “grow-up together,” they ultimately decided to move back to once again be part of the family unity. They wanted to ensure that their children knew and were raised around family who could be part of their daily lives. When Anne and Jeremy lost their daughter, they found that having family there was a great support even though their family did not always have the answers they needed. The family was there as a safety net to provide the love and care they needed to process their grief. Without their family, they would have been isolated and could have become victims of their grief, but their family helped them pull through and find ways to heal that worked for them.

*Important family members.*

For some participants, it was not an entire family unit that helped them during challenging times. This might have been because of the composition of their family or circumstances which prevented the whole family unit from being valuable to them. In some cases, the extended family unit was toxic and presented more of a barrier to their wellbeing than a protective factor. Some participants were able to depend on one key person or a couple of family members to serve as guides in their lives. This created some challenges for certain participants in knowing how to navigate through their family in a way that helped them rise up out of their circumstances rather than being held down by them. Walsh (2002; 2003) discusses this phenomenon in her work on family resilience, noting that people rely on family to bolster their own resilience, whether by staying close
to the positive influences or learning from the negative influences. Certain participants had to learn how to effectively lean on those around them in order to thrive.

John’s grandmother was the first to give him the idea that he could become something different than others in his family. “Because she believed that I would be something greater, and at first I didn’t believe it because no one in my family had made it that far.” With his grandmother’s optimism and encouragement, John was able to have graduating from high school as a goal that served as his driving force in life. John’s grandmother was his foundation who took him and his brother in during a time when she already had many other family members to care for. It was her dying wish that he would find a way out of the poverty and crime that plagued his family. After she passed away, John found a support network of people to sustain him. John’s story is consistent with the findings of Templeton et al. (2008) that by finding people who can provide the necessary support to meet goals, a young person can become resilient. If it were not for John’s grandmother planting the seed of possibility within him, he would have likely not nurtured it. Her influence gave him a vision for his future and the hope to fulfill his goals.

This type of foundational influence was true for Ralph as well. His mother was his biggest supporter, encourager, and role model. Although his advantages were limited growing up, Ralph’s mother was able to make the best of their situation by her example of “grace” and “compassion” towards others. Being the oldest of 14 children, Ralph’s mother was not only the big sister in her family; she was also the matriarch, holding everyone together. These types of roles are a common support within the culture as
Helton and Keller (2010) point out, especially having such a strong female influence. Ralph knew he could not only depend on his mother, but he saw how she remained positive through extremely negative conditions. Because his dad was in and out of his life, Ralph could not depend on the support of his father. Instead Ralph was able to use his mother’s example for many things, including the ability to care for people who were both family members and non-family members. Her ability to have respect for everyone around her, including her husband who left them, and her willingness to better herself by going back to school, proved to be a powerful influence on Ralph. Ralph not only had a pillar to lean against, he had an archetype to show him how to compensate for his disadvantages without being negative or angry.

Sarah had a similar situation with her mother who also served as her role model. Her mother handled things differently than she did and served as a voice of reason for Sarah helping her work through her fear and anxiety. Looking back, she knows that her mother was the person who encouraged her the most to be independent and fix her own issues. “I think it has always been my mom. I joke with her and say that she is more of a man than any man.” Along with her mother, Sarah could also depend on her grandparents, but she did not have an extensive extended family or a father as major influences. When Sarah chose to leave her abusive husband and move home, she remembered that her mother did not rescue her, but rather gave Sarah the ability to stand on her own two feet. Her mother encouraged her to gain the skills necessary to gain control of her life.
From early on, David depended on his mother as they were a team “against the world.” David’s mother was his biggest supporter; she made sure he had what he needed and made sure that he was well loved and cared for. Nevertheless, there was a lack of push from David’s mother in some circumstances. For example, when David needed to recover from his drug addiction, his mother compromised, letting him continue to abuse drugs she was comfortable with, just not the drugs she did not know about, “the devil she knew versus the devil she didn’t.” Although she supported him, she did not encourage him beyond that point, possibly avoiding losing her one companion. One negative outcome from this was that David prolonged his drug problems and eventually got arrested. David could have had a family unit to support him earlier on but he resisted their help and chose to figure things out on his own. Once he realized that he could not personally fix his life, he used his family as a way out of the negativity that surrounded him. This is what eventually led to him finding his resilience.

Similarly, Wendy’s family was supportive and they spent quality time together while she was growing up. Her mother encouraged her to stay in school and get the help she needed. Nevertheless, due to her other kids and a strenuous work schedule, Wendy’s mother was not able to encourage her beyond a certain point, because Wendy resisted being told what to do. Salyers and Ritchie (2006) reported in their findings that resistance indicative of the culture, due to the fierce independence of the people from Appalachia. Wendy’s resistance led to her faltering on her own for some time. One valuable thing that her mother did was to get Wendy into a summer camp that allowed her to be exposed to other supportive people. This proved to be extremely helpful to Wendy and allowed
her to finally let others in who could provide the different kinds of support she needed to succeed beyond what her mother could do for her.

Rod’s mother also played a huge role in helping become resilient. “The thing that saved me was probably my mom. The thing that could have destroyed me was my dad.” She encouraged him to achieve and set goals, and even if he was not quite ready to take on the responsibility, Rod’s mother made sure he went to college and even walked in graduation. Because his extended family was largely dysfunctional and not connected to his immediate family, Rod and his siblings had to depend solely on their mother. She went back to school to become a nurse so she could leave their dad and make a new life for them. Rod saw all of this and remembered how influential that was to him, which is something he still draws form and truly appreciates today. Rod had to overcome the examples of dysfunction within his life, rather than fall into the same patterns, which is something that Walsh talked about in her family resilience theory (2002; 2003). Because of their disconnect, his extended family was not unified in any way, with many family members struggling with substance abuse and other issues that held them back. Rod was aware of this level of dysfunction from an early age, and tried hard to distance himself from any of the negative attributes they embodied. His problem with his family was that he did not respect them or their choices, but Rod he found that he easily fell into those patterns by drinking and being superficial. He learned that everyone had faults and had to try harder in order to succeed. It was when Rod was in college that he realized he could not just ignore his family, but that he had to use their example, although negative,
as a way to better himself and learn from their mistakes. Today, Rod prides himself of his ability to stay positive and keep his own family involved in each others’ lives.

*Newly constructed family.*

When someone is able to take the negatives from their life and create a healthier way to live with family, they form a *newly constructed family*. This includes the ability for people to create a new family at a certain point in their life that serves as a protective factor. For example, if someone’s family growing up was not supportive in some way, they later use that as a way to bolster their own family and make right what they were denied. A newly constructed family can also mean redefining a family to make it better. It is this ability to use negative influences or circumstances to create better ones later in life that contributes to resilience (Mullin & Arce, 2008; Walsh, 2002; 2003).

Rod was not raised by a positive male role model. As a result, he was never taught certain things, like how to be a loving and affectionate father or how to treat a wife properly. Rod determined that when he had his own newly constructed family, he would first be a good husband and then be a good father. He had to look for people to be role models, which he was fortunate enough to find in his community. He was able to incorporate their examples and apply them to his own newly constructed family. Rod chose to always show his wife high levels of respect, beginning when they were dating and making sure that he treated her in a fair and honest way. He also made sure that his children felt loved and appreciated, even if they had different interests than him. He frequently tells them he loves them and supports them in their lives. This is the opposite of what his own father did and Rod prides himself on that.
When Marie’s father passed, no one was willing to talk about their grief. Although her family was a strong physical presence that cared for her, emotionally they were unable to help her beyond a certain point. Perhaps they too were grieving and that got in the way of helping her. Regardless, she had to process her grief on her own. When her husband passed away, her family was there for her along with some other support systems, but Marie knew that her daughters would need additional support to better deal with their grief. She learned this from her own experience and was able to adapt it to fit their lives and help them grieve in a healthier way. Even though she was also grieving, she was able to provide that vital communication that she lacked when her own father passed. She also knew when to provide outside support when she felt she could not provide it.

Anne and Jeremy were not able to solely lean on their family when their daughter passed, but they were able to draw strength from each other. Because they learned that getting through that kind of tragedy is difficult to do without the support of others who have also experienced something similar, they were able to depend on each other for support. In this way, their newly constructed family, consisting of their son and themselves, was a source of strength. Their move to Wyoming as a couple, away from their extended family gave Anne and Jeremy a chance to strengthen their own marriage, “grow-up together,” and gain independence. Their marriage was made stronger from this quality time together and as a result, they were able to make decisions together about how to process their grief. This also made it possible for them to branch out from their extended family to meet some of their needs. Anne was able to find a network of people
who were grieving the death of a child as she was. Jeremy felt physically unhealthy and made some changes to become healthier. He chose to use his newly constructed family as the motivation to get healthy and begin to heal mentally and physically.

There was another layer for Jeremy as well. He realized that his own upbringing, although supportive, was not filled with affection. Although his father was his biggest positive influence growing up, he felt that his father was emotionally unavailable to him. For Jeremy, this was something that needed to be improved upon, making sure that he did the opposite and provided the love and expression of emotion that he was denied to his own children. In this way, he was able to break that cycle and improve upon his life and his children’s’ lives, much like Rod did.

Daisy was unable to depend on her own family growing up. Although she was provided for, she remembered how busy her parents were with the store and how they were never able to show very much emotion. “My mom and dad never had any time for me. I grew up an orphan.” Daisy felt that this was how they were raised, with parents who ignored them as well. Their ability to love her was limited by what they were taught and what they had time for, and the moment Daisy stepped out of their lives to create a new life for herself, they were unable and largely unwilling to support her. Because of this, when Daisy started a new family, she chose to do things very differently from her parents. When she adopted her sons, she made sure they were loved and cared for and that she had time for them. It was their father who did not show much interest in their lives, so Daisy tried to make up for that lack of support. Later she married Daniel, who was the father and husband that her first husband would not be, and thus, Daisy once
again created a newly constructed family that was supportive, loving, and that made time for each other. She learned from her own upbringing that there were different ways to be a parent and a spouse and she made sure that her own children benefitted from a strong safety net.

Both Rod and Ralph have similar ideas about why they are such dedicated fathers. Both of them had very strong maternal figures and absentee fathers. As a result, they had to find male role models that could teach them how to be the fathers and spouses they aspired to be. When it came time for them to start their own family, they used their past experiences in order to create a better environment for their wives and their children. Just like Rod, Ralph made an effort to be a good father. He worked very hard to have open and honest communication with his sons as often as he can, which is important to resilience as Walsh (2002; 2003) pointed out. Although he lacked a positive male role model, he looked elsewhere to find men who could teach him what that looked like. Ralph and his sons maintain a very strong relationship and he has made sure that he is involved in their lives even if they have different interests. Ralph understands the value of being accepted and having someone invest in you. That is why when he had his own family, focusing on his children was central.

Although Wendy and her family they spent time together and they were supportive of their children, they had challenging circumstances that made it difficult to focus intensely on each child. She was one of six children and coupled with hectic work schedules and meeting basic needs, her mother and stepfather had very limited time to offer to her. Now as a single mother, Wendy understands the importance of simply
spending time together, which is something Helton and Keller (2010) point out in regards to resilience in Appalachia. For Wendy, this goes beyond just wanting to provide what she did not have but rather because her son has been one of the most positive influences in her life. “He got me off drugs because I want to be a good mom for Ki and role model.” It is this gratitude and lived experience that gives Wendy her ability to create a new family that is supportive and open. This is consistent with the finding of Mullins and Arce (2008).

Sarah found that when her family was broken, she needed to recreate a better life for all of them. Her resistance to do so earlier was based on her own negative experience of coming from a divorced home coupled with her own pride about others being right about her situation. Sarah hated moving back and forth between parents, the act of choosing parents for events and holidays. Initially Sarah tried to create a new family with Chad and their children that would function as a supportive unit. However, when Chad refused to make better choices, Sarah simply covered up the negative aspects of their life so that her children did not have to suffer through a split home as she had. Once her children made it known that living away from their father would be the best option, Sarah realized that they all had been suffering through something much worse. They eventually moved and constructed a better family life that did not need to be hidden. Together with Grant, Sarah was finally able to create a life they can all be proud of. They have even invited new members in, adopting two children who lacked a stable and loving home. In this way, Sarah has not only constructed a new family that is supportive to her and her
children, she has created a new family that supports two children who would otherwise not have the opportunity to have a family.

*Extended kinship network.*

John was lost when his grandmother passed. She was his foundation and although he had some positive influences in his life just before her death, when she was gone, his entire foundation was shaken. Because of this, he contemplated his choices and when it seemed that the only option was to return to his former dysfunctional lifestyle, he decided to let others help him. Knowing when to let others in to help is an aspect of resilience that is in the research of Walsh on resilience (2002; 2003). John let Todd in and because of that John was invited to stay with Todd’s family until his mother found them a place to live. Todd’s intentions were not to adopt John initially. Allowing John to stay at their home kept him out of harm’s way and made it possible for him to grieve in a more stable environment. When weeks turned into months, both Todd and John knew that the situation may need to be more permanent. This new kinship network provided John with the support and security that his biological family could not offer, which is consistent with the work done by Templeton et al. (2008). Because John was eased into Todd’s family, allowed to be himself, and given the choice to be there, he became attuned to the ways in which he could add to their family. It was not a matter of fitting in, but rather John had the opportunity to influence them as well.

Growing up, Frank was well supported by his family. They were a large presence in his life and gave him most of the security he needed, but when his father left, Frank found that he needed a male role model that would show him what it was like to be loved
and accepted by a father. Frank was absorbed by his best friend John’s family and they provided a kinship network that was very much like his own family. John’s father became a guiding influence in Frank’s life. Frank was enveloped into their family, as John was part of Frank’s family. Instead of one mother, Frank had two and instead of two brothers, Frank had three. It was because of their level of involvement and the ways in which these families, with no biological connection to one another, were able to accept and support each other in a very profound way. This finding is consistent with the work of Keefe (2005) and Templeton, et al (2008).

When Rod was young, he lived in a working class neighborhood where most people lived below the poverty line. Times were difficult, but the children of the neighborhood were extremely important to the families. That child-centered viewpoint was the reason why everyone took a vested interest in each other’s children. The notion of shared parenting, as Templeton et al. (2008) discussed, is also a result of the neighborliness and community that existed. In Rod’s neighborhood the children had an open invitation into each other’s homes and the parents had an agreement that they would also discipline the children if necessary. This kind of shared discipline was also discussed in the study on Appalachian resilience by Helton and Keller (2010). It was the influence of the extended kinship network that provided the security and discipline that children needed even if their parents were not around. Now that Rod is older, he integrates this notion of that taking care of others who are not your blood relatives into his own life. He and his sister help care for their mother’s boyfriend who is 91 years old. When their mother passed, there was no one to care for him, so Rod and his sister took on
the responsibility. “She was never treated good but that last six years of her life, she was treated good.” Because of his kindness towards Rod’s mother, Rod feels indebted to this man and has made caring for him a personal responsibility.

A similar kinship network was present in Jeremy and Anne’s neighborhood. Everyone took some responsibility in raising the children of the neighborhood. Both Anne and Jeremy’s parents were part of a network of parents who allowed their children to grow up together. That meant that when the children were at each other’s houses, the parents had the right to correct the children if they were misbehaving. All of the parents in their neighborhood were invested not only in their own children, but in everyone’s children. Jeremy went on several vacations with other families and others went on vacation with his family. In Anne’s family as well there were many friends who were like family to them, and they took no hesitation in helping to correct a behavior that was unacceptable. Anne’s best friend’s mother was also like a mother to her. She felt like their house was hers as well. Taking care of people who were not relatives was something Anne saw her mother do as well. When Anne was young, her mother took care of the neighbor. Anne and her sister were expected to visit with him if he was outside, just as they would visit with a relative. Anne remembered how her mother was the only person who could help him move into an assisted living facility when he was unable to live by himself. The extended kinship networks that Anne and Jeremy were a part of not only protected the children of the neighborhood but anyone who needed it. As a result, they carry on that legacy today, caring for people who are not in their family, and this is something that Anne passes onto her sons today just as it was passed onto her.
Fred experienced similar benefits when he was young, with neighborhood parents who helped look after other children. There was also an agreement with the parents that they would help discipline the children if they needed it. Fred’s neighborhood provided much needed safety and support, especially because his own extended family was in a different town. This extended kinship network was very natural to him. It is something that he experiences today within his own church family. Not only is Fred included in their lives at church, he is included in many of the families lives outside of church. This notion of inclusiveness of non-relatives is something that has been shown in other studies on Appalachia as well, and highlights the beneficial outcomes of having such a close network of people to care for each other (Helton & Keller, 2010; Templeton et al., 2008). Fred believes that his church family shares many things, including their cultures and the benefits of being supported by one another. Being in the same neighborhood for 30 years, Fred has gotten to know the members of his congregation on a new level, and it is for that reason that he is incorporated into their lives and they are incorporated into his. The extended kinship network he is in provides support both ways.

**Religion/faith.**

Religion/Faith was another theme that showed up in every participant’s story as a protective factor. This cultural value was salient for all of the participants but it manifested itself differently in all of their narratives. Religion/faith for most participants was predominantly Christian, a traditional orientation that is similar to what Loyal Jones discussed in his work (1994). It was an extension of their family belief system and passed onto them. For others, their faith came to them in at different times, helping to
foster more meaning and drive in their lives than they would have had otherwise. Yet for some, their faith was a chosen path that may have gone against the grain of their family traditions, but it became a protective factor for them and enriched their lives in a way that made sense to them.

For some participants religion/faith was an internal protective factor, that is, something within them that gives them the ability to have purpose and drive, as well as the ability to navigate and mend difficult circumstances in a way that was productive. For others, religion/faith was something that existed externally, such as a place of worship or a group of people associated with a place of worship that serve as a support system, and thus creates an external protective factor. There are also participant stories that tell of their religion/faith that served as both internal and external protective.

Nevertheless, all of the participant’s stories had some degree of religion/faith that was an important and supportive part of their lives. For some participants, religion/faith served as a barrier to overcome. For others, religion/faith came in the form of a mentor who provided support during a difficult transition or time in life. Because of the complex nature of religion/faith, this section discusses both the positive and negative influences of religion/faith that played out in the stories of the participants. Ultimately, it was religion/faith that proved to be a protective factor for all participants in some way, and helped them to create resilience, which has been shown in other studies as well (Helton & Keller, 2010).

Wendy grew up in a home where going to church and participating in church activities was important to her family. It was the act of actually going to church that her
parents felt was important; it was time spent together doing something positive. Wendy never minded going to church, “I guess it was a positive influence during my early years of life. I just liked being with my family.” They attended church on Sunday’s and Wednesday’s, and it served as an external protective factor that kept their family close. Wendy did not feel in internal connection to church until she was older. In fact, when she was an adolescent, she was involved with an after school and summer program at a church not far from her house. “I really hated it. I wanted to stop going but I couldn’t because of my mom.” Wendy’s struggle was not so much with the faith itself, but rather she did not like doing the activities they required, like doing homework or being told what to do. Eventually, through the church and the afterschool program, Wendy began to find some value in attending. She had a mentor at the church who helped her feel more connected. She joined youth group, which also solidified her commitment to the church. Templeton et al. (2008) pointed out that having a mentor and a connection to a community church can help cultivate resilience in young people. However, it was still only an external protective factor because Wendy did not feel connected to the messages during church. She even felt guilty about some of the choices she made outside of church, but she never addressed the issues she had with them, and she avoided confrontation just as Salyers and Ritchie (2006) pointed out in their study on Appalachia. Still, she continued to attend and when her mother signed her up for camp, things began to change for Wendy once she went. The camp was inspirational to Wendy and it was there that she figured out how to “incorporate” God into her life and make some meaning of the things she was learning. After that, her faith was both an internal and external
protective factor, just as Helton and Keller (2010) pointed out it can be in their study on Appalachian women and resilience.

David’s journey into his faith was similar. As a child, he would sometimes attend church, but it was mostly an influence by his father and his side of the family. Because his mother had different beliefs and did not attend church, David often sided with her and did not go. Once his parent’s relationship was over, he seldom went to church because that was something his dad and his new family were involved in, and this made David feel even more like an outsider. At the same time, David and his mother were comrades and David did not want to cross that line and potentially damage their bond. When David was in middle school, he began going to church more. He joined youth group and made some friends which helped keep him grounded for a couple of years and served as an external protective factor. Once he began doing drugs, he quickly lost touch with church and it took many years before David’s faith became a protective factor again. When he moved in with his dad after he was arrested for selling marijuana, he began attending church again. It was there he made friends with the pastor, who proved to be a spiritual role model for David. David also began his own search for meaning and found “the God of his understanding” which became an internal protective factor for him. David’s faith not only helped him to stay clean, he was able to attain some career goals that would not have happened without the support of his church, his church family, his mentor the pastor, and his new found understanding of God. David is able to now spread some of the compassion he was shown through his work and more importantly, through is belief in his faith.
John’s story about his faith is similar. He was not raised going to church however; there was a church in his neighborhood that offered food and a place to play basketball. This is what got John interested in attending. He quickly found that there were people at the church that saw more in him than he saw in himself. As he continued to attend, he met his best friend and that helped to establish his connection to the church itself, which became an external protective factor. John also met Todd, his mentor, at the church. He began to play music there and that proved to be a great release for him and helped him to “express” himself in more positive ways. Todd also got John involved with a counselor, who eventually helped John open up even more. All the while, John was getting stronger in his faith and emotionally more settled. When his grandmother passed, it threatened his faith altogether, because John felt like he deserved no better than anyone else in his family. But, through the kindness of Todd and the church family he had grown to love, he was able to find his way again and he started to see what others had seen in him so early on. Now John had his faith as an internal protective factor as well.

Rod, Ralph, and Fred all grew up without going to church more than a few times throughout their childhood. Their family had little to no connections to a church and faith was something that was not emphasized in their homes. For Ralph, he met some people who got him involved in a youth group. From there he began understanding and appreciating the Christian faith. This served to be both internal and external protective factors for him beginning in his adolescence and through this, he fostered some of the most influential relationships in his life. Rod and Fred did not gain a deeper understanding of faith until they attended college. Fred became interested in Christianity
as a means to steer away from some of the arrogance in academia. He was very shy and seemed to find comfort around the students who were Christians. From there, he joined a youth group for young adults and a church, finding it very satisfying for him both internally and externally. Rod found that he was not very focused in school and making a leap to become a Christian kept him out of trouble and motivated in school. He appreciated the discipline that helped him guide him through issues such as overusing alcohol and gave him some insight into his own belief system, serving as both internal and external protective factors. Coincidentally, both Fred and Rod became pastors where they help foster faith in others. Ralph now directs a Christian camp for youth.

Anne and Jeremy’s religion/faith was something that was passed down from their families, which is common in Appalachia (Diddle & Denham, 2010; Jones, 1994). They both had family churches that they too were expected to belong to. Jeremy spoke about how this is indicative of his culture, with people often associating with a church, even if you do not attend, simply because your family has gone there for generations. Keefe (2005) has also found this in her studies of the culture in Appalachia and this was true for both Anne and Jeremy’s families. Going to church was part of Anne’s life for as long as she can remember and she “wanted” to be there. Her connection to church and her faith was both internal and external, and served as a protective factor throughout her life. Her faith helped her through the loss of many grandparents while she was growing up, giving her reason to believe that she would someday see them again. According to Anne “my strength and who I am today would not be without Jesus Christ.” Jeremy’s faith was also ingrained in his family and “a huge influence…our faith is very important.” He recalled
in addition to attending his own church, going to other churches for events and activities was also important and a natural extension of the community. “The culture of church here is really, really heavy” and in this way church for Jeremy was more a way of life. This type of commitment to having an ingrained religion/faith has been pointed out in the literature (Diddle & Denham, 2010; Jones, 1994; Keefe, 2005). Jeremy spoke about why his faith is so “strong” today and how these features of his religion/faith are so prominent, making it both an internal and external protective factor. Jeremy was even employed by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes for many years, helping young people develop their faith as well as their athletic abilities. When their daughter passed away, their strong faith was one thing that helped them through such a difficult time. Although it was not the only thing that provided support for them during that time, it was the foundation they needed to get through that tragedy.

Sarah found her church on her own when she was an adolescent. Her family was not connected with a church, but Sarah found one that helped her with her desire to be connected to God. It was at her church that Sarah found her “church family” and her mentor Patty who made such a large impact on her life. She joined youth group and felt comforted being around others who “worshipped” and served as a major source of strength. Because of her intense fear and anxiety Sarah was frightened of things that became irrational thoughts. Her faith helped safeguard her from some of those fears, providing a connection to God, who she felt would help protect her. Sarah maintained her faith throughout her life, and when she made the decision to leave her husband, it was her faith that helped support her. Today, her faith has helped her adopt two children who
have had difficult backgrounds. Because of her faith and her belief in herself, she is able to reach out and help others. Sarah’s religion/faith is both internal and external.

Frank and Marie had similar upbringings. They were both raised Catholic in an ethnic, first generation family and their family and their faith were intertwined. The children were at the center of the family, with the elders guiding them in the ways of religion. Not only was going to church important, attending church with family was of the utmost importance, which is something Diddle & Denham (2010) point out in their work. Because of this level of faith and tradition, their lives were defined by their faith and their family. Frank’s church was a place that he was very much a part of; being an altar boy and having a positive relationship with his priest kept him focused while things at home were somewhat difficult. This is one way that he stayed afloat, with the elders of the church helping him along. Marie’s faith was also entrenched in her family. She was brought up with the influence of prayer and to this day, her rosary is her object of importance. When her father died, she felt alone, but she had her faith to help her cope. When her husband died, her faith was “shaken” with so many questions and no answers. However, she regained her faith and still considers it very important today. Frank has found that incorporating new ideas into his traditional Catholic belief system helps him to grow both personally and professionally. He has found that blending some Buddhist philosophy into his life has promoted a sense of positivism that did not exist before. Marie still maintains her Catholic belief system, allowing for further growth in the involvement of youth group and other activities. For both Marie and Frank, religion/faith
served as both an internal and external protective factor that developed as a result of their family.

Daisy was raised Christian and she was very active in her church growing up, playing the piano and spending many hours at the church each week, simply because there was not much else to do in her town. When men from the church repeatedly took advantage of Daisy, she began to lose interest in not only church as an external protective factor, but as a safe place to be. She also had the negative ideology of her teacher, Mrs. Reed, who was very descriptive in her explanations of what religion ought to be, often times scaring the children in her class, like the time the field was on fire. Because of this, Daisy’s faith became a barrier when she was growing up and due to the very tenuous start to Daisy’s faith; she looked elsewhere to define her spirituality. Always the scholar and avid reader, Daisy found Judaism to be very “rational.” She is a believer in the basic tenants of her faith, “live a good life, take care of those around you, and be part of life, such as in death.” Daisy’s beliefs speak more deeply to her than her Christian upbringing did which seemed filled with “Hell fire and brimstone.” Today, Daisy has found a Temple that she feels connected to and many of members are “Jews by choice.” Daisy’s religion/faith is comfortable and helps provide her with strength and a positive outlook on life. This serves her as both internal and external protective factors.

Neighborliness/sense of community.

For many participants, the role of their neighborhood or community was not only important but served as an influential protective factor in their lives, just as other studies have pointed out (Helton & Keller, 2010; Templeton et al., 2008). This theme was
present in multiple stories and in various forms. Participants’ perceptions of what makes a community varied, ranging from their actual neighborhood and neighbors to a new community of people that enveloped them to create a new support system. It also included friends as well people who lived their community who were valued as mentors. Sports and coaches are included in this section as they too surfaced as influential community supports, which were also found in the work of Templeton et al. (2008). All of these connections proved to be critical in the narratives, helping participants to get through trying circumstances. On the other hand, sometimes where someone is from can hold them back in certain ways, serving as a barrier. This included the people who were around the participants and the things that were commonplace in their neighborhood that negatively affected them from moving forward. For that reason throughout this section, neighborhoods and communities that served as barriers will also be discussed. This section is broken down into three subthemes: Neighborhood and Community Support, Friends and Friendship Networks, and Sports and Community Organizations.

**Neighborhood and community support.**

Marie and Frank’s neighborhood and community consisted largely of their own family in addition to the people who went to their church. Both of them recalled living in very close proximity to their families, making them their neighbors as well. Frank recalled not being able to ride his bike past Mauma’s house without stopping. His Mauma was visually impaired although she might not know that he went past, neighbors and other relatives who would tell her that he had. The community had a shared value system that held up elders as important community members, and thus children were
expected to spend as much time with them as possible. This was not only a protective factor by keeping children visible, as part of their heritage they were expected to be involved with the wisest members of their community, their elders. The neighborhood, the community, and the family were all intertwined in a way that made it difficult to differentiate between the parts.

Marie’s family collectively ran their community, owning the general store, the coal mine and coal mine properties, the gas station, and a garage. Because of this, her family essentially made the community they lived in, operating everything that made it viable. Many other families in the community also “came from Italy as well.” In this way, her community was also very entrenched in the Italian culture and focused on children and their welfare. Because of this, children were central and the objects of attention, which made Marie’s community a protective factor. This was best shown when her father passed. Although the family was at odds with one another over the businesses, the community was there to focus on the children and make sure they were cared for. Marie’s community was similar to Frank’s, the family and the neighborhoods were all indistinguishable and interwoven as well. The result was having children who were well cared for and at the heart of the community.

Anne and Jeremy grew up in the same community, living around “three miles” from each other’s homes. While their families knew each other well, so did many of the other neighbors and community members who helped watch over the children from their town. From the activities that were held “most Friday nights” at the area churches to having the extended kinship network of parents who all took care of the children, Jeremy
felt very protected. Anne remembered having neighbors who were like family members as well. She also remembered having close friends and neighbors “who were like kin to us, like if their kids got in trouble and we were over at their house and we were in on it, we got in trouble too.” Her next door neighbor “was like a second mom growing up.” For this reason, her extended kinship network was also a product of her community and neighborhood, which is a common occurrence in Appalachia as other studies have pointed out (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006; Templeton et al., 2008). This type of kinship network is the middle ground between family and neighborliness.

Rod experienced something similar growing up with parents who took care of each other’s children. Rod said, “It takes a village, I have agreed with Hillary Clinton on that one” because that was the way he was raised. Templeton et al. (2008) also pointed out that it takes a village to sometimes raise children and that is a common practice within Appalachia. Even though his neighborhood was filled with people who may have had just as difficult of circumstances as Rod’s family, they banded together to ensure that their children were safe and cared for. In this way, they were protecting their assets. Money was difficult to secure, but making sure your children were being looked after was not hard to manage with so many willing people around. This is consistent with prior research (Helton & Keller, 2010; Mullin & Arce, 2008).

Fred grew up in a small coal community. He was part of a large extended family, but they all lived in Huntington and Fred’s family was isolated. As a result, they made new connections in their community. Fred remembered how there were many children in the town. “You didn’t have to lock your doors and everybody kept an eye on everybody
else’s kids. That was the way it was.” In his neighborhood, everyone came from
different ethnic backgrounds or different parts of the country to work in the mine. Even
though they were all had different backgrounds, this did not prevent them from taking an
interest in each other’s kids and in their community and this made it safe and secure.

Ralph grew up in the town of Ravenswood which is a small community on the
Ohio River. Although it is not a wealthy community, there is plenty of community pride,
especially when it came to taking care of the children. Ralph knew how important his
community was to him growing up, “there were people who invested in me.” Many of
these people became role models for Ralph and took him under their wing. This was
important because his father was not consistently around for him. Instead he was able to
depend on the kindness of others for support beyond what his mother could provide
which is an aspect that has been pointed out in other studies as well (Helton & Keller,
2010; Templeton et al., 2008). This is part of the reason why Ralph chose to raise his
own children in his community. He now tries to give back that same kind of support to
children who need it the most.

Marie has had two other types of community support systems evolve during her
life. The first time she depended on her community was when Marie’s husband passed
away unexpectedly in a car crash. She was somewhat isolated from her family and
although she was able to speak to them on the phone, she still lived a couple of hours
away from them. She had lived in her community for several years and Marie and her
husband were well known due to their occupations as a doctor and a state trooper.
Although she felt connected to her community, she did not realize the extent of her
connection until after his death. Things were extremely trying, “But, I had a community
around us.” Her husband was a very kind and helpful person, and Marie had no idea the
number of people he helped. In return, “people he had touched came forward that I had
no idea about, you know, they helped us.” Her closest friends also had daughters the
same age as her daughters and they too became very important as sources of strength and
support for Marie and her girls. It was these “supportive neighbors” and friends who
helped them while they processed their grief and gave them the scaffolding in order for
them to heal.

Friends and friendship networks.

The second time Marie depended on others outside of her family was when she
was in medical school and her husband was in Virginia. She was fortunate to have a
cohort of people around her who were also in school and they provided support and
encouraged each other. Marie had been well supported throughout her life up until that
point and she was always surrounded by a caring network of people. Even when she was
in Turkey, the “brotherhood” of military personnel served as that support during a
potentially dangerous time. Because of Marie’s ability to allow others to be around her to
support her, she naturally found ways to have a support network even when family was
not around.

Frank grew up with many people around and just as his best friend’s father played
an important role in his life, his best friend John also played an important part in Frank’s
life. Frank remembered something that was once told to him regarding having a best
friend, “one of the best predictors of social competence was having a best friend at the
age of 12.” Together, they became part of each other’s family and were included in everything. For this reason, John was more than just a friend to Frank, he was part of his family and a main support and they are still friends today.

John’s story told of a similar experience with a best friend. Deshawn and John were very much alike. In some ways, their lives were parallel to one another; they both lost a father and a brother, they both had a mother who struggled with addiction, they both lived with their grandmothers for a period of time, they were interested in the same things, and they both were at risk of making negative choices that would affect the rest of their lives. When John met Deshawn, he remembered “having someone to relate to” for the first time in his life who was not in his family. And, it was Deshawn who helped encourage John to continue going to the programs at church. Deshawn was one of John’s main motivators to keep moving in a positive direction, and even when John moved schools, he and Deshawn remained friends and continued to support one another. In this way, Deshawn was very much a part of John’s support system.

Anne and her best friend grew up together, lived next door to each other, and they supported each other during tough times. When Anne’s grandparents passed away and when her friend’s father died, they were there for each other. “So, we have been through a whole lot together and been through a lot of years.” They were there for each other when they got into high school, “and, I think a lot of high school is who you surround yourself with.” Anne had her best friend to help keep her on track and provided another layer of support. Because of this, Anne did not feel pressured to succumb to the negativity of high school. “I think not caring what everyone else was doing and well, I
didn’t care if I was popular.” Anne could stand on her own two feet and make better decisions as a result of having a best friend and they are still best friends today. In this way, she was able to build resilience.

Because of the close knit nature of his neighborhood, Jeremy grew up with a core group of friends who supported each other. What made their friendships even stronger was being part of a small community; the parents of Jeremy’s friends were also friends of his parents. To this day, Jeremy feels as if, “I know anytime of any day there are more than a handful of people that I can call and they will respond immediately.” His close network of friends also included some family members as well and they all contributed to a support network that Jeremy relied on.

In college Fred met the friends who made such a difference in his life. Fred was already unsure about college, and he felt undereducated and unprepared coupled with being intensely shy. When he got there, he realized that some people were arrogant and even sometimes cruel. Fred wanted no part of this and he began looking to the people who seemed to be the most humble and kind. About this time, he was invited him to youth group and he not only found his faith, he found a group of people who supported him and who he felt comfortable around. Having a group of friends was truly wonderful for him, and it allowed him to “get some of that backwardness out of me.” Fred began feeling comfortable. “I found a place that I was allowed to fit and if I messed up they might laugh but, they laughed in good humor, no one was mean or cruel and it became an atmosphere that I could blossom past that and I’m grateful for.” This served as an
important step for Fred as he overcame past his reticent nature and eventually became a minister who speaks to hundreds of people each week.

**Sports and community organizations.**

A supportive aspect of community and neighborhoods that consistently came up during some interviews was the importance of sports and coaches. Although there is little written about the influence of sports in Appalachia, Templeton et al. (2008) discussed it in their findings as well, and they reported on the impacts both sports and coaches can make on youth. While some sports are offered through school others are offered by the community through recreation leagues or community pools. The importance of sports appeared in half of the stories, and although sports came up in more interviews, they seemed particularly pertinent in the stories of Frank, Anne, David, Ralph, Jeremy, and John. Their involvement was not merely for fun; in some cases, sports are what helped keep these individuals grounded and made them apply themselves in ways that they would not have otherwise. In addition to sports, other community organizations were also influential such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Those organizations produced role models and other caring adults, as well as an added layer of support and opportunities that would have otherwise not existed.

Frank played sports all through school, both for community teams as well as school teams. Both were important and both were influential. What he remembered was how he kept playing sports up to high school even though he had very little playing time. “I was a skinny little kid, but I went out for teams.” He persisted because he knew that he wanted to play. This applied to all sports for Frank. When he was young, he went out
for Pop Warner Football. His coach, the father of a now very famous college football coach, was the person he remembered making an enormous impression on him. When Frank arrived for practice, he was in his Sunday shoes, black patent leather lace-ups, while the other kids had on tennis shoes or cleats. The coach said, “Spence, what you got on your feet?” This could have been a debilitating moment for Frank, but instead it was inspirational. Instead of the coach giving him a hard time, he quietly walked Frank over to his van, holding his hand, and gave him a pair of football shoes to keep. From that day on, his coach took him under his wing. From then on, Frank continued to try out for sports teams and he even learned to “dunk a basketball with my hands behind my head.” He was part of something bigger than himself, and being part of sports teams gave Frank the chance to not worry about his home life, at least temporarily. He was just a child but he pushed himself to do things that were otherwise unattainable, with the support and attention of some very important influences, his coaches and teammates. That is why Frank’s object of importance is the rubber mushroom he was awarded at his sports banquet senior year, for someone who was “up and coming” and “going to sprout.”

Sports were a way to be active and stay focused on positive things for Anne. “Sports were a big part of our lives, things like basketball and softball, they followed the seasons.” Anne and her sister found that sports were something that not only kept them healthy but sports also helped them stay on the right path. “I think that helped us make our decisions too because if we were in trouble, we wouldn’t be allowed to play (laughs).” This lesson continued on throughout high school as well. Sports were a way
for Anne to avoid other high school issues, keeping her grounded and able to make positive choices.

Ralph was involved in sports from a very early age. “Little league and up through high school, baseball was my community.” Ralph was a good player, but he was also compelled to play because he was surrounded by coaches who he found to be inspirational. Ralph felt supported by the coaches and he felt supported by the entire community. These people “invested” in him during an impressionable time and helped him feel valued as a person. Their influence on Ralph has carried him throughout his lifetime and that is why today he tries to give back some of what he was given as a child. This is why one of Ralph’s objects of importance is his community of Ravenswood.

David was athletic early on and sports were something that got him away from sometimes polarizing life he lived. Sports were a way for David and his father’s side of the family to connect, but because he felt as if he had to choose sides, David often found that being involved in sports was not enough of a draw for him. David had a coach who made a big difference in his life. Because of David being at odds with his father, his coach became his role model. David remembered that his coach was one of the few African Americans in his community and there was some racial tension with other people because of that, but to David he was dynamic and kind. David would go early to practices and before games just so he could spend extra time with him, riding in his truck readying the fields. He taught David some valuable lessons, not just about sports, but about life and how to appreciate people for who they are. One thing that became a barrier for David was money to continue playing in recreational leagues. Because of that, he
quit advancing in sports while others played beyond him. This could have been a contributing reason why he was so easily swayed by drugs during high school, lacking that type of structure to support him. With nothing to encourage him otherwise, he was quickly drawn in to that lifestyle. When he did manage to abstain from drugs, it was while he was playing tennis during his senior year.

Jeremy played sports from the time he was a very young child through college. His path was similar to Ralph’s in that he was a skilled player, but it was the influence of the coaches that meant the most to him. With their guidance and patience, Jeremy thrived as a person and as a player. Baseball extended beyond his practices and games and was part of his life, “We actually had a home plate, a permanent home plate in our backyard for whiffleball and baseball.” Because of this commitment to sports, Jeremy was recruited for college, where he met another very influential coach. Jeremy believed that his coach’s skills for handling young people surpassed his skills as a coach, but that is what Jeremy valued about him most. It was through this experience that Jeremy gained some local fans who also influenced him to make positive choices and “keep your nose clean.” Jeremy found that sports were an important way to stay out of trouble by not letting down the people who supported him.

John did not grow up playing organized sports. Because of his chaotic life and the influences he had during an early age, sports were not something that was important. It was not until he moved in with Todd’s family that sports became a focus for him. “I took football very seriously.” He went from not playing in middle school, to being on the varsity team by sophomore year, to being one of the captains during his senior year, then
onto playing college football. John felt like he was not just supported and encouraged, he felt like people, such as his coaches, would not let him fail. He found that focusing on football gave him an outlet other than drinking or smoking or getting into other trouble in high school. He was able to concentrate on getting better at football and that is exactly what he did. For John, football became a key reason why he stayed in school and succeeded the way he did.

Rod played sports, but he was also involved in Boy Scouts. His experience in Boy Scouts taught him many things about the outside world and how to be a good citizen. But, the thing that made the largest impression on Rod and it was his Scoutmaster Woody. To Rod Woody embodied all that a man should be, “He taught me everything my dad didn’t.” It was for this reason that Rod quit playing sports and became more involved in Boy Scouts, eventually becoming an Eagle Scout. It was the influence of Woody that truly impacted Rod and deeply affected him throughout his lifetime. Rod even taught his own children some of things that he learned from Woody as a child. It was when Woody died that Rod realized what a tremendous impact he had on his life. Woody’s sons asked Rod to perform the funeral and they gave him a cane that Woody had carved in appreciation for that service. To this day, it is one of the greatest honors Rod has had and why the cane was almost one of Rod’s objects of importance. This influence of Boy Scouts, Eagle Scouts, and his scoutmaster is something that makes him who he is today.

Rod is not the only participant who had the influence of Scouts. Anne, Fred, and Frank were also involved in Scouts and that was a positive influence on them as well. All
of them mentioned in their stories the importance of their involvement in scouts. Frank and Fred were able to experience things that they would not have been able to be involved in otherwise. Fred’s Boy Scout experience gave him the opportunity to learn how to swim, which later turned into not only a great skill, but a job at the company pool as well. Frank’s Boy Scout experience gave him the opportunity to do things like go camping. Being involved in something outside of school gave Fred and Frank the chance to escape some of the effects of poverty and feel like typical kids. Anne talked about how Girl Scouts, was something that her sister and her did to keep active and stay focused on positive things. Although for these three participants it was not the most important influence, it made an impact that carried them through certain periods of their lives.

**Love of place and sense of beauty.**

Being tied to the land of your birth is important for many people, but when you live in a place that has been somewhat isolated from mainstream society those ties can become stronger, as Keefe (2005) pointed out. This came through the stories of some participants, especially those who left for a period of time and returned. *Love of Place* encapsulates not only a dedication to the land in West Virginia but, it is tied to other features as well. It is an overall appreciation for the geography, the people, the history, and even for some of the negative aspects as well (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Added to love of place is another theme, *Sense of Beauty*. Sense of beauty was tied into the apparent West Virginia pride as well, making it an overall theme about how people see beauty within their state. These are the things that make them feel connected to, drawn
to, or value their state and the people who dwell in it. There are some participants who felt as if certain aspects of their culture and state were negative presented barriers for them. Additionally, there is an overlap in themes in this section due to their interconnected nature. Just as many of the participant’s stories included why they value their state, many of the stories included the theme, *Humility/Modesty and Personalism* in regards to the qualities and characteristics that the participants appreciate about the people from their state. Because of this, this section will have an extension that includes the theme of humility/modesty and personalism.

Fred grew up in southern West Virginia. It was there that his awareness grew about how entrenched coal mining was in his state. His family was dependent on the coal industry, just as all of the other families in his community were. Although he lived in poverty, he rarely felt the constraints of living under those circumstances. He received a good education, due to the corporate headquarters being in his town, he became a good swimmer because of the company pool, and he was offered jobs by entities that were extensions of the coal community. Fred felt that this was all very positive at the time. When he was older, he began to realize just how difficult it was to live at the mercy of the coal industry. It is for this reason Fred felt called to come back to West Virginia after living in Texas, “For some reason I had this drive to come back inside.” This same “drive” has been written about in the literature about Appalachia (Helton & Keller, 2010; Jones, 1994; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). This urge went beyond wanting to feel accepted by a community because Fred had that in Texas, so much so that he was offered 10 acres and a his own house. Instead he came home right after the coal mines had stopped using
script for money and even though that system was gone, Fred still saw the mental “bondage” that still existed. “And, I wanted to proclaim some kind of freedom to that. I wanted to help people get out of that sense of just being trapped.” It was because of his deep connection to his state and his people that drew him back in. Fred talked about how there are positives and negatives about his culture and his home. The negatives have to do with the entrapped mentality, sometimes thinking that others are better, “not sure where we fit in the rest of the world.” This causes poor “self-image” and Fred spoke about this as the plight of his people. The positives, however are many in his eyes, ranging from the “the warmth, the laughter, the sense of humor, even the mountain music, the sense of family and loyalty to family.” All of these features of the culture have been pointed out in the literature as well (Helton & Keller, 2010; Jones, 1994). But, Fred has seen firsthand how these are helpful not only in his life but in the lives of others. He appreciates the way that people connect and stay connected in his region. Because of that, Fred is proud to be from West Virginia.

Ralph feels similarly about West Virginia and the people in his state. Not only does he appreciate the natural beauty, he feels that his state is a place where people band together, much like they did when he was younger. The community-focused aspect of West Virginia spans beyond individual communities for Ralph as he about this being true for the entire state. Ralph has felt connected everywhere he goes within the state and that is why he is always glad to be home after his travels. Ralph joked that people on the outside “make fun of the people from West Virginia for being inbred but, that is not all bad because it is really about connections.” His story about when his son went to college
and someone knew right away he was Ralph’s son just from looking speaks to this deep connection that Ralph admires. He chose to raise his own family in West Virginia because of this closeness. He also values the out of doors, hunting and fishing, and simply doing things outside. Ralph spoke of the many outdoor opportunities that not only bond him to his brother but to other West Virginians as well and that is why Ralph makes an effort to surround himself with as many different kinds of people as he can.

Wendy, David, and Daisy all appreciate the outdoor beauty of their state. Wendy talked about how she enjoys being outside and doing anything that puts her in nature. In fact, Wendy opened up her story with her connection to West Virginia. “I am 19 from West Virginia, Charleston, college student, have a 1 year old son. I like to read, take pictures and just anything, I’m down for anything, anything outside because West Virginia, it’s so pretty here, I just like doing anything outside.” Wendy enjoys everything from white water rafting to shooting hoops outdoors. “I am proud to say I am from West Virginia.” While David was growing up in West Virginia it seemed special because he was able to escape into the woods. He recalled the story that others in his neighborhood still tell about him disappearing into the woods with his lawn chair. It was in the woods where David would lose himself and then find himself again, and that gave him a sense of peace and adventure. Ultimately, it was another way for him to get away from the turmoil of his home life. Daisy has always been connected to the natural beauty of her home state. When she was young, it gave her the much needed respite from her family who ignored her and the issues that stemmed from her church. She would spend hours outside just enjoying the peace, usually up a tree or by working in the “victory garden”.
When she got older, she was instrumental in helping to initiate the environmental movement in West Virginia. Her love of nature evolved into activism that helped safeguard so many places she appreciated. Even today, Daisy still finds that going to her favorite tree in Wayne County, “I call it my church” or, just being able to “get into the woods” is a source of her strength. “The beauty of nature is very, very important.” The natural beauty of their state allows them opportunities to feel peaceful and refreshed as well as connected to their land, which is what the literature reflects about the much deeper connection to hoe and place that people from the region experience (Helton & Keller, 2010; Jones, 1994; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006).

Because of Rod’s involvement with Scouts, he too has an appreciation for the natural beauty of West Virginia. He despises when people take advantage of nature, like when people throw old refrigerators in the creek, “and, I just get so mad about that stuff.” When Rod is in the woods, for example, is a way to not only connect with this beauty, but also connect with God. Other authors have touched on this spiritual connection between land and God as well and the importance it holds for people from the region (Keefe, 2005; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Rod described a beautiful scene in the woods, when was hunting and as he watched the sun come up in the “crystal clear beautiful woods” he thought, “How in the world does anybody not believe in God? You know, it is a majesty and it is a sanctuary.” It is this love of place that keeps him here. “I would go anywhere the Lord asked me to go, but I would hate to leave.”

Even though Rod says with enthusiasm, “I love West Virginia!” he has also seen some negativity within the culture of Appalachia. Because of the upbringing he had,
being disconnected from his own extended family and having a father that was not very consistent, Rod associates this negativity with the culture itself. “I think the culture, I get aggravated about it. I get angry sometimes because I have to deal with it but, I can deal with it.” Rod believes differently than other participants because he feels that families are typically not close in West Virginia and for this reason he has made a concerted effort to break “the mold” with his own family. He also spoke about his feelings that many people from his state are not strong and that they make poor decisions repeatedly to continue to live in substandard conditions. Nevertheless, in the same story he said jokingly, “So I think Appalachia…I don’t even like to say that. I think West Virginia, we’re a lot better than Kentucky…and those other states.” Rod seemed pulled between the positive aspects of his home state and the negative, but what stands out is his intense love of West Virginia.

Jeremy also spoke about feeling connected to the beauty of his state as well as some of the other qualities. West Virginia appeared to be important because it is part of his heritage and part of who Jeremy is; being connected to West Virginia means being connected to his family. This is consistent with the existing literature regarding Appalachia serving as a place where people feel connected as a result of their heritage (Helton & Keller, 2010; Jones, 1994; Keefe, 2005; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Jeremy recognized both the positive and negative aspects of his state and culture. What he seemed to appreciate were all of the outdoor opportunities. What seemed to trouble Jeremy was the culture around lack of activity in West Virginia that has become apparent since he returned from Wyoming. There, people would rush home to “get outside and do
something.” In West Virginia he has seen that “West Virginians will rush home to go watch T.V. and then they pour gravy all over everything they eat.” This is something Jeremy believes is a shame because “West Virginia has all of the outdoor opportunities that Wyoming had.” This is why he has taken it upon himself to become more active by running half marathons even though it “goes against the culture.” Jeremy has felt like coming from West Virginia means dealing with some other barriers. He has not been able to accept promotions at his work because accepting them would mean relocating. Jeremy explained that many people from outside West Virginia believe it is geographically isolated, but he pointed out that many large cities are less than a day’s drive from most places in West Virginia, making this more of a misconception rather than a fact. Nevertheless, he is unwilling to move because staying connected to his family and his home is much more important than more money.

Another aspect of the culture that Jeremy felt was negative has to do with the emotional expression of men. He was raised to stifle his emotions, if not because it is not a manly way to handle things, then because it is not kind to bother people with troubles. This has also been discussed in the literature, with emotional expression and not wanting to trouble others as aspects of the culture (Helton & Keller, 2010; Keefe, 2005). Both issues stem from the culture itself and Jeremy started handling things differently. He has made a point to show his children emotion and tell them that he loves them frequently. He also wrote a book that is filled with his feelings that he had to work through in the aftermath of his daughter’s death. Daisy and Rod had similar experiences regarding lack
of emotion on the part of their parents as well. In turn, both Daisy and Rod have gone on to be very open with their own children and break the cycle of not showing emotion.

On the other hand, Jeremy’s appreciation for West Virginia runs deeper than the negativity that he has experienced. For example, he spoke about how people stay connected to West Virginia and how that is special. He has few aunts and uncles who have left the state and many of those who have, typically moved back, which is consistent with what Jones (1994) pointed out. He also appreciated the influence of religion when he was growing up. He contributed this too to the culture of his region as well. It has been a positive influence for Jeremy and he is happy to be connected to this aspect of the culture. Overall, seemed very proud to be from West Virginia and that is why he chose to raise his children in his hometown. The things that he feels are negative he has made an effort to turn into positives.

Humility/modesty, and personalism (love of place and sense of beauty).

Although many participants seemed to value the beauty of West Virginia, there were many participants that talked about the importance of the people from their state as one of the things were equated with Love of Place and Sense of Beauty. The qualities that the participants valued most about the people from their state all had to do with humility, modesty, and personalism. As a result, this section is combined with love of place and sense of beauty in order to create a better picture of what makes West Virginia beautiful. A theme that often did not stand alone in the stories of the participants, humility/modesty, and personalism are all qualities not only of many of the participants, but they are also qualities that the participants value in terms of what they admire in other
people. This section looks further into what makes these qualities so unique to people of West Virginia and serves as protective factors for them.

Another positive aspect about West Virginia to Jeremy is the connectedness of the people, and he talked about how that is evident in people’s decision to not leave the state and even live on their parent’s property. In addition to that, Jeremy sees how caring the people from his state are, being taught from a very early age how to treat people well. This kind of personalism is something Jeremy was taught and that he passes onto his sons. “I think that people around here are very generous and very caring to want to help, almost to a fault.” He thinks saying “no” is something that is hard for West Virginians and is something that they are taught at an early age. He does admire the “work ethic” of people, stating that “there are not a lot of lazy people around here.” Because of that, people are eager to help. “If you see someone who needs something you don’t think about it, you just help.” This level of respect and concern for other people is consistent with the findings of other researchers as well (Helton & Keller, 2010; Keefe, 2005; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006; Templeton et al., 2008).

Marie, Wendy, Sarah, Frank, and Anne all felt that one of West Virginia’s best assets is its people. Marie felt that it is a culture of caring people who are “not so much self-centered” and want to be “fair” and in turn, “treated fairly.” Her experience has been that most people are genuinely “caring and compassionate” and although it may be a generalization, “I see that and that is what has been given to me and I hope to give that back and have taught that to my kids.”
Wendy values how open people are in West Virginia. “People aren’t stuck up here.” She appreciated how people pull together and help each other out when necessary. “We work with what we have.” In this way, she has seen how people know their neighbors and seem to genuinely care for one another. Sarah felt as if people from her state are also genuine. She admitted that she did not fully appreciate this until she moved to another state. She also did not realize the level of prejudice people from outside of the state have for the people from West Virginia. She remembered going on vacations and when people found out they were from West Virginia, they would say things like “Oh, did you marry your cousin?” Sarah never understood these comments until she got older, but she felt that the people where she moved were even more “backwoods.” None the less, Sarah talked about how she admires the people from her state who are “more real” and not so superficial.

Frank spoke about how people from his state are family oriented, which is true for his own family as well. Because of that, his connection to his state runs deep and Frank has never had any reason to leave. He has always known that he would stay in West Virginia, which is part of the reason why he never went on to get a PhD. “I knew I wasn’t going to leave West Virginia and I didn’t care about being a Dean of a department.” Frank knew that staying meant continuing on his family legacy of putting the children first and being the best parent you could be. Anne felt as if people from her state are kind and want to take care of each other. She saw this at an early age with her mother taking care of the neighbor, but Anne talked about how she has seen this quality in many people. Anne seemed to value how people are not self-centered and she has
tried to teach this to her sons as well, making sure that they do special things for the elders in their church.

Rod, Ralph, and David all seemed interested in fostering more humility/modesty and personalism, especially in the sense of respect and compassion for others. Rod talked about how he is able to be very compassionate. It is evident in the ways in which he has reached out to people and has cared for them, like how he cares for his mother’s boyfriend. But Rod has found it difficult to have compassion for people “who don’t need it.” In this way, he has insulated himself from those people and this may contribute to his indifference with some of the people from his state. He has struggled with people who lack respect either for themselves or others. It has been a life-long endeavor for Rod to foster respect, from finding examples of respectful men to showing respect to his children and their choices, so it makes sense that he would value that trait and expect it in others as well. Nevertheless, he has continued to become even more compassionate and therefore, more humble and modest.

**Humility/modesty, and personalism (without love of place and sense of beauty).**

Ralph has always felt as if his mother is the picture of “compassion and grace” and while his gift was “honesty” but, he has constantly used her example of “caring” and personalism to better himself. He has seen how she continually cared for others, even if they do not ask for help or expect help, and to Ralph, that is what he has strived to be like as well. He spoke about how respect is also an important quality. Ralph has made it a point to “respect everybody whether you like them or not.” This is why he has chosen to
surround himself with people who are different from him. He had the opportunity to practice this in India. Ralph realized early on that he could have been anything he wanted over there. But, he also understood what a big responsibility it was to speak there. He realized that being anything but himself would be inauthentic and defeat the purpose of his being there. Instead, Ralph tried to make himself as accessible as possible by being transparent and real. It is this level of personalism that helps him be resilient.

David felt that he lacked respect for others for a period of time during his life. This included how he felt toward his father and his family and the church they went to. When David found that he had run out of ways to pull himself up, it was his dad, his dad’s family, and their church that took him in and made sure he was safe. Because of this, David has struggled through some guilt about being a “punk kid” with little to no “respect” but, just as he was shown compassion in a time of need, he has worked toward giving that compassion back to those who need it most. David has made a concerted effort everyday to treat people the way he would like to be treated. He spoke about how he feels deeply about one barrier that he often sees people from his culture grappling with and that is struggling through poverty, “trying to make something of themselves that is within their frame of education and training.” David spoke about how certain people can easily get caught up in drugs just to make ends meet and he believes that is something that endangers the people from West Virginia and their culture the most.

Fred was also taught the importance of respect early on and he learned his personalism from his mother. When others in his neighborhood were prejudice about people of color or people from different cultures, Fred’s mother encouraged him to think
differently. This lesson has followed Fred throughout his life. During college, he found it difficult to tolerate the level of cruelty his professor showed his friend, just because she was a Christian. Fred felt as if he wanted to be far removed from that kind of “evil” and instead surrounded himself with people who were kind to others. To this day, Fred makes sure he is constantly giving people the respect and personalism they deserve.

It was evident in the interviews that many of the participants did not want to come off as arrogant or boastful, which is discussed in the literature as well (Jones, 1994; Keefe, 2005). Many of them steered away from giving themselves credit for achievements. At the same time, they were reluctant to describe themselves as humble or modest. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that these qualities are not only valued in others, they are apparent as the participants’ own personalities as well, serving as internal protective factors. It is the humility, modesty and personalism that allows these participants to not only let people into their lives during times of need, it is the way in which they give them back to those who need it. In this way, these traits are always being recycled within the people of West Virginia.

**Independence, self-reliance, and pride.**

The theme of independence, self-reliance, and pride played out in the stories of the participants. At some point in all of their lives, all participants were able to show at least some of these qualities by pulling themselves through trying times. Many of the participants found it necessary to lean on others as a source of strength during those times. Although they seemed dependent to a certain extent, they were able to use that dependence to help them forge through their circumstances. The ability to use what is
around you, such as letting a group of people help or individual help you to get through a difficult situation, but then going onto becoming independent later can be referred to as cooperate independence (Keefe, 2005). This is typical of the region, with people banding together in order to meet their needs (Helton & Keller, 2010; Jones, 1994). And so, this was another protective factor in many stories and will be included in this section. While independence and self-reliance are innate in some, they were fostered in others.

Pride is another quality that showed up frequently that helped illuminate how ingrained some of these cultural factors were in the lives and personalities of the participants. As with the other themes, independence, self-reliance, and pride can also serve as barriers. All of these points are discussed in this section.

Daisy stands out as one of the most independent and self-reliant participants. Her story is a tale of someone who has been repeatedly neglected, mistreated, misunderstood, and underappreciated. From the time she was young Daisy had parents who ignored her forcing her to find her own way. She did this in many ways, but she seemed to know for a very early age that she never really fit into her environment. Daisy questioned everything, and was reluctant to adhere to the norms that most people around her readily accepted. This was true at home, at church, and at school. Daisy was adaptable enough to fit where she needed to, but she also had her sights set higher than most around her. She focused on finding ways to supplement the things being taught to her, looking other places for information, such as in books. Daisy knew she wanted to be on her own and make something different of herself. When she left home to be a pilot after teaching a year, she met her first husband who proved to be yet another oppressor in Daisy’s life.
Again, she was taken advantage of, neglected, and mistreated. Thankfully Daisy had the level of independence she did to get away from her husband and make a life for her and her sons that made sense. She had her new found faith and her education to help her along, and Daisy was able to thrive. Today Daisy still exudes this same independence, taking college classes at the age of 77, just for fun and for the chance to learn something new. She is the epitome of independence; she strong and stable and willing to take on any challenge.

Wendy has a similar kind of drive. No matter what Wendy has gotten herself into, she has been able to get out. She is extremely independent in her own right. Unfortunately, her independence was initially used as a form of rebellion instead of a way to flourish. She was given some help and Wendy first resisted this support because of her own guilt. She felt that her choices did not afford her the opportunity to be surrounded by caring people. Nevertheless, she realized that everyone makes choices, but the ones made in the present counted the most. She used her own inner strength, but she did not truly thrive until she involved the influence and help of others and once she accepted it, she thrived. Wendy is now able to not only go to college, but she is able to manage being a single mother at the same time. It is from the cooperative independence she was a part of that has led her to this stage in her life. Wendy’s fierce independence allowed her to not only accept this new challenge, but to excel beyond what most people could do in the same situation.

John found his own independence through the help of others as. Even though he felt similarly to Wendy in that he did not deserve the kindness and help that was offered
to him, he reluctantly took it anyway and saw how far he could go. That support countered the negative influences and lack of support he was deprived of early on. He had his grandmother, but she was spread thin, taking care of many family members on very little resources. John had the opportunity to get support elsewhere and once he did, he was able to thrive in a way that he could not have imagined. While his environment growing up made him tough, he was not as resourceful without that extended support network. Once his support network was in place, he thrived academically, socially, athletically, and spiritually. This cooperative independence coupled with his own natural independence and self-reliance made a huge difference in his life, which is consistent with the findings of other research as well (Keefe, 2005; Helton & Keller, 2010; Templeton, 2008).

Jeremy and Anne were both independent in their own ways growing up, resisting peer pressure and making positive decisions, but in their world it was not important to be extremely independent because of their extensive family support. They were actually interdependent, in that they were able to rely on many people for help and support at any time. Their first experience with independence on a different level was when they moved to Wyoming. It was there where they experienced the freedom to choose who they surrounded themselves with and what church to attend for the first time. Because of this, they felt that their marriage was made stronger than other people in family. This became very important when they lost their daughter. Their level of independence allowed them to look outside of their family for support when they were grieving. While they had the luxury of interdependence, they realized that their family alone was not able to provide
the level support and empathy they needed. Because of this, Anne and Jeremy were able to not only find their own independence; they were able to fill a void by reaching out to others who had gone through similar circumstances. Anne became part of a network of people who have lost a child and Jeremy has reached many people through his book. In this way, they used cooperative independence and formed new forms of support outside of their family that helped them as well as others, which is something that can be found in the literature (Keefe, 2005).

Marie’s story about independence is similar. Although she was surrounded and supported by her large family, when her father died, she felt very alone. She had to find her own way to grieve. It was her strong independence that helped her make it through this time. When her husband passed, she was able to rely on that independence but she knew from her past that she and her daughters would need more. She began to rely on her community and her family to help her and her daughters get through. Although she was somewhat reluctant initially to take the help form the community, she soon realized that she needed to make sure that her daughters were being supported in every way, especially in the areas she “could not give them.” From neighbors, to friends, to other community members she did not even know, this cooperative independence was what helped pull them through their most difficult challenge. One of things she is most proud of today is her daughters’ “fierce independence” coupled with their ability to create a cooperative network whenever others need it. An example of this is when her daughter formed a grief group in high school called, “Good Grief.” Marie and her daughters are proof of the power of cooperative independence.
Frank was also surrounded as a child with family and an extended kinship network. He had support from home to school to church. He was interdependent, with his family and faith enmeshed in his life and because of this he was able to depend on others for help. Frank admitted “I have never been independent.” And, because of the way he was raised, he naturally raised his own children the same way, creating another enmeshed family system. Now that his children are older and have their own lives, he has found for the first time in his life that he has to try to be independent. This feels more like a barrier for Frank and it has created some feelings of guilt because it feels “selfish.” He has found that he has to figure out how to use his time and make changes that will help him ease into this new phase of his life. Frank spoke about how this has been one of his largest challenges to date, but he was confident that he will find what he needs and foster the independence he knows he is capable of.

Sarah was somewhat independent as a child, but her fear and anxiety were barriers. In school she tried to fit in and her choices were not always positive, bouncing back and forth from wanting to be popular to wanting to be faithful. Sarah continued to be dependent on others through college, depending primarily on a husband who was neither supportive nor kind. It was during that time when Sarah began to listen to her mother, who she feels is one of the most independent and self-reliant people she knows. It was through her mother’s guidance and strength that Sarah began to develop a plan to make the necessary changes in her life to start over. Although Sarah found it frustrating at times, she knew that her mother was right about many of the things and because of her advice Sarah was able to once reignite her own independence.
Because of the level of humility in most of the participants, it is difficult to envision them prideful. Their stories tend to showcase their pride in others. This is something that happened many times throughout the interviews. There were some who chose to talk about their own accomplishments, but most people shied away from being proud. In other respects, some of the participants know that their achievements are positive forces in their lives and they are proud of where they are. This should not be confused with boastfulness or arrogance. Those qualities tend to go directly against the values of the participants. Rather, they are proud of the things that have helped get them to the point they are in life. This simple and humble way of pointing out success is discussed in this section.

Rod’s greatest achievement was being an Eagle Scout. It was something that he worked toward all through school, beginning with Boy Scouts. It was in being an Eagle Scout that Rod found a great sense of pride, but even when he talked about this, it was followed by him saying that it might be “silly.” His greatest honor was speaking at his Scoutmaster’s funeral. He believed that although Woody had such a tremendous impact on him, Rod had no idea how he might have impacted Woody until that day. Getting his cane was also a great honor and something Rod is extremely proud of even today.

When Fred and Ralph were in school, their mothers went back to school. Fred’s mother went to college the same time he did and even though he would tease her sometimes, he and his family were truly proud of her. Her fortitude showed Fred that you never stop growing and achieving. She influenced and encouraged him to go to college as well, which has turned Fred into a life-long learner. Ralph had a similar
experience with his own mother, who finished high school shortly before he did. He remembered how neat it was to send her “flowers for graduation” and how proud it made him. His mother continued to make him proud too, teaching him about caring and kindness. She taught Ralph many things and he is thankful for her example and, Ralph is proud of his mother and admires her for the many gifts.

Jeremy is not boastful, but he has worked extremely hard for the things that he has. He runs a non-profit, he works as a medical sales representative, and he helps run his family’s business. He is proud of his achievements and talked about how he was raised with a “great deal of confidence” but he was “not raised to be arrogant.” He has kept this in check by always putting his family’s needs first. Even though he could get a promotion if he wanted, because it would mean moving away from his hometown, he “politely declines.” It is for this reason Jeremy is proud, but not too proud.

John is extremely proud of where he is today. Part of this pride is because of where he came from. John is hard-working and dedicated. When he puts his mind to something, he manages to accomplish it. Because of his extensive support network and his own abilities, John has managed to come further than he could have known he was capable of. The only person who may have seen his potential from a very early stage was his grandma, and it is because of his willingness to prove her right, that John has so much pride today.

Frank grew up the “clown” of his family. Everybody liked him and he was very good at distracting people from their problems. When he went off to college, he found it easy to get caught in the center of activity. It was not until he had to switch schools and
almost lose his opportunity to graduate altogether when he realized that he just wanted to be the “pride of the family.” Frank felt that by flunking out of school or not finishing, he would become a “loser.” He felt that being a loser “associated me with my loser father” and that was not an option for Frank. He decided that he wanted to graduate and ultimately it was that pride that made that possible.

Sarah had a different path. It was her pride that allowed her to stay in a marriage that was harmful and unhealthy. When she reflected about this, she regretted her decision to stay. She knew from her children that there was some emotional damage done that can never be completely undone. She realized once she was out of that situation that it was her pride in not wanting others to be right about her life that kept her there. She wanted to prove them all wrong, even going to the extreme of hiding what was really happening from everyone, including her mother, and suffer through her situation. It was her pride that constructed a barrier so dense it took Sarah 12 years to break it down. Today, she is stronger and more resilient than she has ever been. She is proud of getting her kids and herself out of that situation and into a new life that is nurturing and inviting. Sarah was able to turn her pride around and make it into something positive.

Many of the participants talked about their pride in West Virginia. Although it was discussed in love of place and sense of beauty, it is briefly discussed here as well. Wendy, Rod, Frank, Anne, Jeremy, Ralph, Fred, and Marie all talked about being proud of their state. They not only like where they live, many of them have consciously chosen to stay in West Virginia despite opportunities elsewhere. Many of them talked about how important it was to raise their children here as well. They value their connections to West
Virginia, they value the people of West Virginia, and they value the beauty of West Virginia, to name a few things. Overall, this creates a sense of pride that all of them have in regards to their state.

**Sense of humor.**

For many of the participant’s, a sense of humor was an obvious trait. There was only one participant who talked about humor as a coping mechanism, but there were many others who used humor throughout their interview, either through laughing about something in their stories or at themselves or through telling humorous stories. This section will take a look at how humor can be used as a way to connect to others, as a way to show humility, as a way to cope with difficulty, and ultimately serve as a protective factor.

Rod had many stories that were humorous. Although he never said humor was something that he valued, it was obvious through his interview that humor is a big part of who he is. His dry wit and his ability to take even very serious situations and turn them into something funny, is indicative of not only him, but the culture in Appalachia as well (Jones, 1994). One of the stories that illuminated this best was his story about his father’s funeral, which he began by stating, “I just think a real sense of…it is really funny, my dad’s funeral…this is real funny.” For some people, talking about their dad’s funeral would have a somber tone to it, but not Rod. He folded in laughter where he could and made a point to bring light to any circumstance he could.

Frank also used a great deal of humor throughout his interview. Many of his stories were extremely funny and they brought out his personality that he lightly touched
on in one of his stories about his childhood. Frank explained how he was the “clown” as a way to deflect some of the hardships they were experiencing as a family. This behavior was not just something reserved for home; it followed him to school as well. Frank had many friends and got along with his peers well, and it was in part due to his ability to laugh and make people laugh that he was so well liked as a child. Even today Frank’s sense of humor is an obvious strength and protective factor.

Daisy also folded in laughter and jokes into her stories as well. An example of this was when she told the story about when a lady told her, “You can’t be Jewish, you’re fun and love to spend money (laughs).” This was not offensive to Daisy but rather humorous. She also told about her brother’s thoughts on her religion saying, “And, my brother who is still Methodist has decided that when he dies he wants a Jewish funeral because they’re short (laughs).” Daisy seems to take things very lightly and it was apparent that is contributes to her resilience. Her ability to laugh off difficulty is certainly a strength of hers.

Sarah also told many stories that were difficult but they were offset by her sense of humor. She often laughed about herself and others, even when she talked about something that was challenging. One example of this was when she was talking about her current situation with her children. “I’ve got one peeing the bed and one filling out a FAFSA!” Sarah was able to use her humor to talk about some of the challenging details of her life. This may be how she remains positive and why her outlook is so optimistic.

Anne grew up surrounded by a family who loves to laugh. She talked about how humor is a coping mechanism for them, making it easier to get through tough things.
This is consistent with the literature on Appalachia, going back several generations to times when humor was a necessary way to manage the difficulties many people faced (Jones, 1994; Keefe, 2005). She talked about how it may not always seem appropriate to other people, like when her grandmother was in the hospital and they were all laughing about different things, but that to her and her family, laughter and humor are very important parts of them. It is something that she values as a source of strength, and something that adds to her resilient nature.

**Patriotism.**

The last theme is patriotism. While it is thought that patriotism is an important cultural factor throughout Appalachia, it was the least mentioned of all of the cultural values. This was also true in a study done by Helton & Keller (2010). This could be for a number of reasons. First, when the cultural values were first discussed, it was during a time when many people enlisted in the military. Although joining the armed forces is still common, there are other options as well that are more accessible today, such as going to college or taking up a trade. Over the last few decades, there have been numerous wars going on that the United States has been involved in as well, which could deter some from considering joining the military. Another reason why it may not have come up in these particular interviews is because all of the participants are either in college or college graduates. Nevertheless, it did come up in five interviews: Ralph, Rod, Marie, Daisy, and Frank. Patriotism helped shape all of them in some way and was important enough to come up in their stories about their lives. For some participants it was a career option, others an ideal, and others something that was important to their
family. Patriotism encompasses many things including military service, politics, military heroes, or a family value (Jones, 1994). In this section, the theme of patriotism is discussed.

Ralph came from a family who did not emphasize education. Although his mother was extremely supportive of his education, he had other options after high school other than college. In his hometown, going into the military was looked upon as a respectable option. But, Ralph felt that he would just work at the aluminum plant in town just as many other people did. It was not until his senior year when the plant began laying off people due to cutbacks and so, Ralph’s second option was to join the military. He felt that “God had other plans” for him, and because of that, going to the military was no longer an option. Nevertheless, this notion of joining the military was something that many people in Ralph’s home town decided to do. In some ways, it was even a more acceptable option than going to college, which is why Ralph was surprised that college is where he ended up.

Growing up Daisy was exposed to many of the issues that happened in the United States as a result of World War II. Although she was young, much of the talk in her town had to do with the war. This was especially true with her teacher, Mrs. Reed. She felt that the children in her class should know all about the war and made a point to “indoctrinate” them in her philosophies about war and religion. Daisy grew up with people saying phrases like “dirty Japs” and she too got used to saying those things as well. Daisy would spend her time in the “victory garden” or in her tree pretending to “shoot down those dirty Japs.” Her early introduction into prejudice was thanks to her
teacher and others in her community who were deeply affected by the war. Daisy was able to turn this influence into a positive, though. When she worked as a teacher for a year and knew that she needed something different, she decided to enlist in the Air Force to become the pilot she had always dreamed about. Somewhere in her, there was a high level of patriotism, and she wanted to help protect her country. When this did not work out, Daisy became involved in politics. She and her husband were involved in getting the environmental movement started in West Virginia. Again, her love of her place and dedication to it, gave her the focus to try to make some positive changes. While her husband was a politician, Daisy was also active in politics, which she still considers important today. When she was interviewed, she even wore a political button on her vest.

Marie’s husband joined the military when they were dating. It would seem that patriotism would be a protective factor for him rather than her, but it was through their experience in Turkey that developed Marie’s patriotism. For the first time in her life, she was in a place where her “freedom was restricted.” She had to live in a house with bars. Her village was often raided and she would have to turn out lights and stay on the floor. She had to stay within certain perimeters while she was out because certain areas were considered unsafe. Her communication with home was also limited. They had to be careful what they said and how often they spoke with people from home. Marie realized very quickly that she never fully understood the value of her freedom until she had such limited freedom. Although she had a positive attitude about her experience in Turkey, she was glad to return home. Today she has a greater appreciation for not only West Virginia, but her country as well.
Growing up, Rod had the influence of Woody. Woody was a “bonafied hero” because of his time in World War II and Rod quickly named off the many awards Woody received from combat in his interview. As a kid, he was amazed when they went swimming and saw Woody bleeding from shrapnel that was still in his back. That coupled with Woody’s nature is what impressed Rod the most. Even though he was a combat hero, he never cursed and he was always kind and patient. Rod felt honored just to be in his presence and when he got older, he never found another person who equaled the value of Woody. When he passed away, Rod had the “honor” of performing his funeral. Because he was a war hero, this meant even more to Rod to be included in the ceremony.

Frank’s patriotism surfaced differently than in other stories. He felt like one of his major influences during his time in college was avoiding going to war. It was the “Vietcong” that Frank credited with helping him to get his act together so he could finish college. His mother told him, “This is not the time to mess this up” meaning that if he flunked out, he would be off to the war. It was not that Frank was not patriotic. When his mother told him that he should not mess up, he took it as her telling him that she could not lose him. She was ill and divorced, and that made things complicated enough for her. Having Frank home meant that she did not have to worry about having him fighting in a war. As a result, it was their need to be together that served as his protective factor, keeping Frank in school and helping him to avoid losing the opportunity that his mother wanted for him. In addition, Frank was able to see that he did have choices. He
could join the ranks of certain members of his family and go to school or he could join
the ranks of thousands of young men his age to fight in a war. Frank chose his education.

**Education and love of learning.**

For every participant, education or their love of learning has played a crucial role
in getting them to where they are today. It is the only theme that is not in the original
Appalachian cultural values and for this reason, it has been added on as another cultural
value and protective factor to this research. It should be noted that all of the participants
are either currently in college or have college degrees. Six of the participants have
Master’s degrees. Because of this, education might be valued more in this sample,
however just as the importance of some cultural values has lessened, some have likely
risen or evolved. Regardless of the cause, all participants found some value in their
education in that it served as a way for them to better themselves in some context, or
proved to be an obstacle to overcome, resulting in their ability to become resilient.

For some, education was influential from a very early age, either through, school,
a teacher, or school activities that helped to push them. For others, education became
important later, serving as a vehicle to get to another phase in their life. Yet for others,
the most important education was not formalized, but rather something they used as a
way to enhance and enrich their lives, like through reading or visiting the book mobile or
library. This section discusses how education proved to be a protective factor for each
participant during certain times in their life. At the same time, there are participants who
believe that their education was at times a barrier, creating a sense of fear or anger within
them and preventing them from succeeding. These barriers are also presented. This
theme of education and love of learning will be presented chronologically, beginning with *Early Education* and end with *College Education*. Role models and mentors are also interwoven throughout this section.

*Early education.*

Growing up in a large family with little financial support was not always a problem for Fred. His family was loving and supportive and his parents worked hard and they had enough to get by. But, Fred remembered feeling somewhat differently when he was around certain peers. Many of them had parents who had higher paying jobs with the coal company and as a result, they were able to afford things Fred could not. This could have been a hardship that caused a divide between Fred and his peers however this did not happen because of one leveling factor that made them all equal, school. Fred’s education early on was enhanced by the coal company having their headquarters in his town. Because of this, they “had very good teachers brought in.” Although the interest of educating all of the children was somewhat self-serving, it worked to Fred’s advantage and provided solid grounding for him upon entering college. Because Fred assumed that he would not be able to do college level work, he tried to get out of going to college. When he told his mother he was thinking about not going, he remembered her saying, “I didn’t ask.” His poor self-image was somewhat of a block for Fred, feeling inferior to other students, simply because he came from the coal fields of West Virginia. Much to his surprise, when he got to college, he found out what a quality education he had and how much it prepared him for what was ahead.
Anne, Daisy, and Marie were all excellent students in school. Education was encouraged but they also had the drive to do well. This carried them throughout school. Daisy was encouraged only to a certain point early on and later she was discouraged by her family and peers for spending so much time reading. It was up to her to foster her education. Her teacher Mrs. Reed, although a bit unorthodox in her teaching, truly enjoyed having Daisy in her class. She was the teacher’s pet and even got to sit by “the potbelly stove.” When it was obvious to others that she was very bright, her family made her feel “silly” for putting so much energy into her books. Daisy did not care, she continued to get books form the book mobile, and asserted “thank god for the book mobile!” which enabled her to delve into topics that she found interesting. It was this love of learning that led her to want to be a pilot. Daisy graduated when she was quite young due to her “being double promoted” that is, skipping two grades.

Anne and Marie were encouraged throughout their childhood. Both ladies had supportive families that felt strongly about education being part of their lives. Marie was interested in science and made it a point to learn as much as she could. She was also an avid reader, finding fiction fascinating and making a point to read when she could. She was fortunate to have “strong support from home about the importance of education” and therefore she was never discouraged. Anne was a diligent student with many things on her plate, such as sports and other activities. She knew that if she did not keep her grades up, she would not be able to participate and that was encouragement enough for Anne. Both ladies went on to college.
Early on, John and David were discouraged by their education, but for different reasons. School was easy for David; he was smart and caught on quickly, but he would become bored easily and would then disengage. David also had other things on his mind, worrying about his mother and trying to distance himself from his dad. School was something that he did not put much energy into. David remembered just doing enough to get by, not putting extra effort into much of anything. Although his family was supportive of his learning, he was always able to do the bare minimum to get by. When David began doing drugs and drinking heavily he was still able to pass, but he did not gain much academically. This same pattern repeated itself in college as well. It was not until much later that education became a focus for David.

School was difficult for John. Learning did not come easily and with so much chaos within his family and bouncing around between houses, John did not have very solid footing in his education. As a result, gaining new concepts in school was an insurmountable task without the support and help he needed. His issues were compounded by the lack of encouragement he fell victim to. The only person who saw more in him was his grandmother. Otherwise John was surrounded by people who did not emphasize formal learning, and so he quickly became a product of his environment. He felt this lack of support in school as well, recognizing that teachers would quickly give up on him because he did not “know his times tables.” John felt that they just saw “a poor black kid.” And, they did not care about putting extra effort into him because he was so far behind and already “part of the system.” This made John incensed, and he began to act out, even throwing a desk at his teacher in 3rd grade, just because he did not
feel like he was getting the attention he needed. John’s education kept going downhill until he was thrown out of middle school, which just increased his frustration. Nevertheless, he was still encouraged by his grandma to make something of himself and to “just graduate from high school.” It was not until the people from the church and his youth group began to take an invested interest in him that things began to turn around. John’s issue was never a matter of intelligence; it was instead a lack of proper encouragement and support from others. One person, no matter how impactful, was not enough to discount the negativity that surrounded him. Once that support was in place, he thrived, even finishing high school with honors and going to college.

Sarah was a naturally good student. During elementary school her grandma was the secretary of her school and she was encouraged by her family to do well. Sarah loved to read. She was a frequent visitor of the Charleston library and checked out books with her brother frequently. She became fearful of school during junior high due to the racial tensions that arose among the students. Sarah recalled the “racial riots” were overwhelming, and made it difficult to feel safe at school. This had a deep impact on Sarah. Nevertheless, she continued to go to school and make an effort. Although she was a good student, she did have some trouble navigating in high school due to “wanting to be popular” and wanting to be a “person who worshipped” at the same time. This conflict made her focus on college with the intention of surrounding herself with Christians and so she chose a college that would provide that.

School was encouraged by Ralph and Jeremy’s families. There was something else that kept them interested in doing well and that was their involvement with school
sports. This was important to both men and made school a focus by default. If they did not do well in school, they would not be able to play sports. Because of this, they were able to not only do well in school, they were inspired by coaches and teachers who encouraged them to achieve academically and both men went on to college. In high school Ralph did not plan on going to college but when working at the aluminum factory and enlisting in the military did not work out, he went to college instead, being the first person in his family to do so. College was an extension of Jeremy’s athletics, getting recruited for baseball and playing on a scholarship in college. Their educations only strengthened their ability to go on and make something of themselves later in life.

Frank and Wendy were able to use school was a way out of poverty. It was not always their emphasis, however. It was encouraged by their families but with so much going on, and having parents who worked very hard to provide for their large families, Frank and Wendy had to make school a priority themselves. It was somewhat easier for Frank. He was involved in sports, and like Ralph and Jeremy, sports provided a way to do the academic work and then participate in sports. Coupled with the support and inspiration of coaches and teachers, he was able to stay in school and do well. Frank also had the encouragement of his family. It was when he got to college that he realized his preparation was not as strong as he had hoped. Wendy, on the other hand, was not into organized sports. She was somewhat unmotivated to do her work and when her mother signed her up to go to the center at the church for help with school work, Wendy “hated it.” She did not want to be there, in fact, she hated being told what to do in any circumstance, especially going to a place after school that insisted she do her school
work. It was not until Wendy was given a mentor that things began to change and she began to feel positive about school. All along, Wendy had a love of learning through reading, which she was able to finally tap into and make some changes. She went to college despite her struggles. Both Frank and Wendy were naturally smart and that carried them even when there were initially disengaged.

School for Rod was something that his mother pushed. He was not always the best student, and not because he was incapable of doing the work. Instead he found that hanging out with friends was more interesting. Rod was smart, but “not always the best student.” One thing did make a huge difference in Rod’s education and that was his involvement in Boy Scouts. Because he was a Boy Scout and eventually became an Eagle Scout, Rod had to do well in school and make good decisions. He had some people along the way to encourage him as well, including his Scoutmaster and some coaches. He also had a teacher in high school “who poured a lot into me.” These kinds of relationships afforded Rod the chances he needed to finish school. This led him to college, even though he felt he was not ready, he went because his mother insisted.

\textit{College education.}

Every participant went onto college, and some of them still attend. For some, college was a way out of their circumstances. It gave them the ability and opportunity to get a better job or expand on a calling. It provided the means for them to follow their dreams or to be paid more in order to better provide for their family. For some, college was something encouraged by others. Regardless, all participants were in some way strengthened by the ability to go to college.
Frank, Rod, Ralph, and David, had a bit too much fun at college initially. All four men used college as a chance to socialize and have some fun. Rod and Frank felt like they were not ready for college when they began, but because of their mothers’ influence, they went anyway. Frank also had the added influence of not wanting to go to Vietnam. His mother made that point to him very clear, saying “this is not the time to mess this up.” He was able to see that his education was not impossible as there were people in his family who had succeeded academically. Frank just needed to find his own motivation and once he met Lyza, he was able to buckle down and finish strong. College was fun for Rod, but he also decided that he was living a shallow existence. Things for him changed when he became a Christian. Both men eventually figured out how to become better students and focus on their academics. Surprisingly, both men went onto graduate school; Frank got his Master’s in psychology and Rod got his Master’s in divinity. Frank thrived in graduate school and was fortunate to have two mentors looking out for him. It was their encouragement that allowed Frank to finally reach his full potential. In seminary, Rod was able to meet his future wife and begin to make some personal changes that helped to define who he wanted to be rather than falling into the patterns of his family.

Ralph was able to find his way in school fairly quickly. His faith helped keep him grounded as well as his mother’s pride in him. It was in college that he realized the gap in his education while he was young, but college gave him the chance to become a better reader and finally catch up. For this reason, Ralph had to take college seriously and
apply himself intensely. He was the first person in his family to go to college and with that, he was proud to finish.

David floundered in college much of the way through. He found people to give him notes and speak up for him when he was flunking out, but this simply enabled him to continue to be self-destructive. His barrier was his substance abuse. He did the minimum to pass his classes but he eventually graduated. His choice to continue to abuse substances clouded his focus, making it difficult to have college feel meaningful in any way. It was not until later when he was sober and began to think about his future that things changed. He went to graduate school for counseling and he was able to thrive in ways that were more suited to his intelligence and abilities. Until that time, David had not lived up to his potential.

Marie and Daisy went onto college with high hopes. They were not only prepared, they were able to achieve beyond their expectations. Daisy finished college in three and a half years and then became a schoolteacher at her old school. When she realized that she did not want to live that life, she enlisted in the Air Force to become a pilot, following her dreams. When she met her first husband she had to make a choice to get married or go into the military because of the rules regarding marriage back then. Nevertheless, when her marriage did not work out, she went back to school to get her Master’s degree to better her and her sons’ lives. Daisy thrived in school, only getting one “B” that her sons’ were glad she got. Marie went to college for nursing and was encouraged by her cousin as well as some teachers to pursue medicine. She also graduated in three years with a degree in biology. She moved to Turkey with her
husband after that, and even though she had applied for graduate school, she still took classes in Turkey just because she was interested in the history. When Marie returned, she attended graduate school and despite living away from her husband she thrived. Both women were ahead of their time; going to graduate school as women in the 60’s and 70’s was not very common. They were encouraged by their teachers and peers and found a place where they truly fit in. They made school about the learning experience which was a natural extension of their own love of learning. Both women went to school on their own terms and thrived as a result. Daisy continues to take classes today at the age of 77.

Going to college for Sarah proved to be something she could not have expected. By the time she graduated, she was married with three children, but even with this, she only graduated a semester behind schedule. This was truly an amazing accomplishment because contrary to what Marie and Daisy experienced, Sarah was discouraged in college by many of her peers and teachers. She was constantly told that she would not succeed, but she did anyway. Many years after she graduated, she was able to use education again in a way to boost her up, choosing to get her Master’s degree in administration so that she could provide for her children on her own after leaving her abusive husband. Because Sarah has such an intense love of learning early on in her life, she was able to use education as a way to get her from one point to another. She became much more self-sufficient because of her education and was able to make big moves in her life.

Both Sarah and Daisy were able to get out of their circumstances by going to graduate school. What this opportunity afforded them was the chance to get away from their husbands who were holding them back and neglecting their children. Both women
knew that if they obtained a master’s degree, they would be paid more money and could afford to live on their own without needing to depend on their husbands. In this way, by furthering their education, they were able to better their own personal situation and be better mothers to their children.

John found his way to college through tremendous amounts of support and encouragement that were largely missing from his life early on. He was often told how he would not succeed by those around him, and there was even a time when he believed them because he felt he was no better than anyone else. But, John began to realize that having an education did not make someone better than others, it just afforded someone the chance to do something better with their own life. He did not have the example of anyone from his family deciding to make that a goal. John used his experiences to finally see the potential that others did. John found that having people around him, whether they were coaches, teachers, peers, his new family, or his church family made all the difference for him and they were one large reason he was able to exceed his grandmother’s dream for him.

Wendy had a similar experience. She was not expected to go to college. Her choices in high school were sometimes negative. She continued to do things that got her into trouble and although she had the support of the center at church, she sometimes let her guilt get the best of her and that prevented her from accepting their help. It was not until she made some different choices that Wendy was able to thrive. She finally let others into her life and allowed them to help her and influence her. She currently goes to college in West Virginia. She is raising her son by herself while attending college, which
can be challenging for some, but Wendy feels an immense amount of pride taking her education seriously while being a “good mom” for her son. Her goal is to be a “role model” for him and to show him that there are always other choices.

College was not difficult in the ways Fred suspected. He expected his challenge to be centered on academics, but to his surprise, academics were not problematic. It was his shyness, or “awkwardness” that proved to be a barrier. Thankfully for Fred, he found a kind group of people who he trusted and could be himself around. Because he found them through youth group, this also perked his interest in Christianity, which became a large part of his next phase in life. Fred not only overcame his shyness, he went on to divinity school where he found his calling in life. With his mother’s encouragement and support, Fred went on to achieve things that no one expected, including himself.

**Objects of Importance**

All participants talked about an object that symbolized their strength or that served as a source of their strength. The object could have been anything from a memory to something they could hold in their hand. The purpose was to understand how the participants’ objects related to their story and then how those objects related to one another. This section discusses how the objects of importance are relevant to the stories of the participants and if they are consistent with the overall themes presented.

There were five participants, Daisy, Ralph, Wendy, David, and Fred who chose to share two objects of importance and one, Rod, who brought one but shared the story of another object he considered bringing. The six participants’ objects shared something in
common; one object symbolized their past or childhood, and one object symbolized their present or adulthood.

Daisy first shared a memory. Although it was not an actual object, she told a story about a time she went to the Grand Canyon. When she came out of the canyon she experienced one of the most spiritual moments in her life. It serves as a reminder to stay connected to her spiritual side making it a peaceful place from her past that she can mentally visit. It is a reflection of her religion/faith and her connection to nature. Her second object was an oak tree in Wayne County that she sometimes hikes to and that she calls “my church.” It is a place where Daisy can go and share her emotions. The tree is very sacred to her, and symbolizes her connection to her faith and spirituality. It also signifies her connection to her home state and her love of place. This is her present day object of importance. Both objects foster spiritual strength in Daisy and both objects are consistent with Daisy’s life story of resilience.

Wendy shared the two objects that helped to pull her out of the negative patterns she had fallen into. The first object was from her past; it was a picture of her church in Charleston and to Wendy it was a place of acceptance. The members of the church were accepting of Wendy, and eventually, Wendy became accepting of them as well. It also served as a place where Wendy was able to construct some meaning in her life and because of this it is a reflection of her religion/faith. Her second object was a picture of her son Ki. He is a present day reminder that Wendy needs to try as hard as she can at all times, never giving up and always trying to achieve goals that are positive. She credited Ki for getting her off of drugs and turning her into his role model. Wendy is proud of her
son and their life together and although it is not easy to be a single mother in college, Wendy takes great care to ensure that both she and Ki’s needs are met. He gives her hope for the future and helps her strive to be something better than she thought she could be. Ki is a reflection of Wendy’s familism as well as her strong sense of independence, self-reliance, and pride.

David also shared two objects that that symbolized his sources of strength that helped him to get away from his self-inflicted barriers. The object that initially became important to him during his childhood is “a cross from the Christian perspective.” Although David was resistant to church when he was younger, he started attending again when he was in middle school on his own terms. It was during this time he started to form some of his own ideas about “the God of his understanding” and make some of his own choices. He formed some friendships in youth group and was able to maintain those relationships until he began to use drugs in high school. It was not until many years later that David found his faith again, and returned to the same church he attended before. That phase brought David the healing and health he had needed for years, but it was his faith that saw him through and made such a large impact in his life. Because of the faith foundation he had, David was able to find his way quickly and make the changes that were necessary to move forward through fostering compassion for himself and others. This serves as a symbol of David’s religion/faith. David’s second object was his 24 hour coin from his anonymous community. Although David has many coins, the 24 hour coin keeps him present. It reminds him that everything is a “process” that has a beginning point. In David’s world, that first step was the one that allowed him to make many more
in a positive direction. David’s life has changed drastically in the several years since he began his recovery process, but his coin helps remind him that everything challenging begins with a first step. He takes his coin with him when he knows he needs that encouragement because it speaks to who he is and where he came from. It is a reflection of his independence, self-reliance, and pride as well as his humility and modesty.

Ralph shared two objects that are both symbolic of his past and present. The first object, which is his community of Ravenswood, has been in Ralph’s life since before he was born. His entire family comes from Ravenswood, and serves as a great source of pride. Nevertheless, it was his community that wrapped around him when he was younger making it possible for him to flourish and become the person he is today. Ralph recognized that the people from his community took an interest in him and that alone had a tremendous effect on Ralph throughout his life. He still lives in his hometown, content to raise his own children there. He now gives back the same type of support he received as a child. This is a natural extension of Ralphs’ neighborliness/sense of community and his independence, self-reliance, and pride. Ralph’s second object was a hat with the logo of his camp on it. Ralph began going to the camp when he was in middle school. It was at camp when he began to find his identity as a Christian and form strong relationships with people outside of his family and community. Today, Ralph is the director of that same camp where he helps youth, much like himself find their way and feel supported. He still maintains lasting relationships with many of the people who he met at camp so many years ago. Ralph feels as if he is now able to see that same kinds of growth he experienced in others and for him that has made everything come full circle in his life. It
is a symbol of his religion/faith, neighborliness and sense of community, as well as his independence, self-reliance, and pride.

Fred chose to share a prism and a hammer. The hammer represented his past and it served as a reminder to him of his family heritage. Many of the people in Fred’s family were carpenters. It is a long-standing tradition that provided a way for his family to survive throughout their time in West Virginia. And, even though Fred chose to pursue a different calling, he still carries that skill with him, valuing the ability to use tools the same way he was taught by his family. This connection to family and heritage strengthens Fred’s bond to his past, serving as a symbol of his familism. The ability to make something necessary beautiful and historical meaning is symbolic of his sense of beauty/love of place. The skill of building and fixing things himself is evident in his independence, self-reliance, and pride. Fred’s second object, his prism, is representative of his religion/faith. Fred found the pyramid when he was writing his life mission, and he was looking for something to symbolize both his commitment to God and his own personal growth. Fred cares deeply about others and uses his faith as a vehicle to help serve those in need. Because of this, he feels that by following God’s example and always “looking upward” he can find the strength and guidance to help those he serves in meaningful ways. His pyramid is symbolic of his religion/faith but also his potential. It is also representative of Fred’s humility/modesty and personalism.

Rod only brought one object, but before he explained the object he brought, he told the story of an object that he did not bring. He talked about the guilt he felt when he told his wife about bringing something to the interview. This was because he thought he
would bring the cane that was given to him by his Scoutmaster’s sons that Woody carved himself. That was when Rod realized that he also meant something to Woody. Growing up, Woody was Rod’s role model in every way. He was the kind of man Rod thought all men should be like. He was someone who Rod leaned on a great deal growing up and that truly made a difference in Rod’s life. Because of that, the cane symbolized the neighborliness/sense of community Rod benefitted from as a child and the independence, self-reliance, and pride he gained as a result of his time with Woody. But, when Rod’s wife said that he surely had to bring his Bible, Rod could not disagree. Although he felt that the cane was an honor to receive and something that symbolized a major reason Rod persisted through his childhood, he also realized that his Bible was his present. Since college, Rod has depended on his faith to not only help him, but help countless others as well. Rod believes that his faith is the major influence that guides him in his life. The Bible symbolizes what Rod is and what he will continue to become as he continues to grow and change through his religion/faith. It helps him reach out to others and be a support for them as well, fostering a greater sense of humility and modesty and personalism.

The objects that Daisy, Wendy, David, Ralph, and Rod all shared as well as aspects of their lives were similar in several ways. They all come from families where they had only one person they could depend on. Daisy had her aunt, and everyone else had their mother. Both Ralph and Wendy had stepfathers that were helpful in many ways, but their mothers were the most consistent people they relied on. They also all had some trouble at certain points with their personal decisions and had to deal with the
repercussions of those decisions, making large changes in their lives and figuring out how to turn things around. Daisy was stuck in an unfulfilling marriage with two small children and a disinterested husband and Daisy had to make some changes to get them out of their old life and into one that they could be happy in. Wendy and David chose rebellion in the form of substance abuse. They both felt that they controlled their lives and made their own decisions but that only proved to be self-destructive. There were people around them willing to help, but they had to learn to let others in. Their resistance only landed them deeper into their habits and ultimately they were not just hurting themselves but those around them. Their faith played a large part in that process. As a result, they both chose objects that represented their faith and one that represented the constant reminder they needed to stay on their path.

Ralph and Rod both got temporarily lost in college. They both drank a little more that they intended to and with both of their fathers being alcoholics; their experimentation became scary to them. Ralph and Rod both realized that they did not want to fall into the patterns of their family. Not only did their fathers abuse alcohol, other family members did as well. For both men, there was a history that followed them and they both felt it was up to them to change it. Both of their past objects symbolize the thing that kept them afloat when they were young; that the people and support systems that invested in them and made time for them when their own fathers could not. Both of their present objects represent their faith and their professions. This is what holds them up today and ensures that they stay on the path they are on.
There were some other similarities among the objects of importance. Fred, Anne, and Marie all shared objects that represented their faith. This was the only object they shared and it had to do with their faith foundation, which supported them all during trying times. Anne and Marie’s faith helped pull them through the tragedy of losing loved ones unexpectedly. And because there is no preparation for that level of devastation, they found that their faith played a large role in getting them through grief. Although neither woman depended on their faith alone, it was ultimately what guided them through and what continues to hold them up today.

Fred’s childhood had some hardships and he did not realize the extent of his circumstances until he got older. While he does not feel that his childhood was traumatizing, in his adulthood he began to see just how unjust the ways in which people from his community and state were being treated. Fred saw the “bondage” and “mental slavery” that people were victim to even after coal companies began using money. He felt that he could help “declare some kind of freedom to that” and as a result, Fred moved back home and began his work in his home state. Fred was able to use his faith to right wrongs and help people who need it the most. He remains in a neighborhood where many people need help, and he continues to thrive there because of his willingness to serve those who truly need to be served in order to overcome their traumas. Fred’s Bible symbolizes his faith/religion and his humility, modesty, and personalism.

John and Sarah both shared objects that represented turning points in their lives. John described his tile as symbolizing his “crossroads” when he had to choose between his new path and his old path. John felt conflicted about feeling better than others, but
once he realized that he was not better than others just for bettering himself, he was able to make that decision. John’s tile symbolizes his faith/religion as well as his independence, self-reliance, and pride. Sarah also had two paths to choose. She could have stayed with her husband, who endangered her life and the lives of her children, or she could have moved on and made a new life on her own terms. Sarah decided that she was not the only one affected by her husband’s actions and her children made a very clear statement when they packed their things and confronted her. Sarah’s song is about leaving someone who does not treat their partner well and takes advantage of them constantly. It came along during a phase in Sarah’s life when she needed to feel empowered about her decision to leave, and even though it was scary, this song gave Sarah the confidence she needed and a way to laugh about her situation. Because of that, it symbolizes her independence, self-reliance, and pride and her sense of humor.

Frank, Fred, and Jeremy shared objects that were given to them by someone else and gives them strength by connecting them with their past. Frank’s mushroom is an object that symbolizes his potential. He was given the mushroom as a way to illustrate to him that he came from difficult circumstances but “blossomed” anyway. It was an honor to receive it; it was elevating to be recognized by so many people he admired and it represented a positive link to his past. Even though it is just a rubber mushroom, it is something Frank appreciates as a symbol of his potential and persistence. Because of this, it represents Frank’s neighborliness/sense of community, his sense of humor, and his independence, self-reliance, and pride.
Jeremy’s grandfather’s handkerchief also represents a positive link to his past. His grandmother gave him the handkerchief years ago, and even though Jeremy feels as if he was not extremely close to his grandfather, it helps him feel close to his heritage. Somehow it has always ended up in Jeremy’s pocket when he needs it the most, whether it is a joyful occasion like his wedding or a tragic one like his daughter’s funeral. Jeremy values having his grandfather’s handkerchief and appreciates the way it always appears in his pocket in times of need. In this way, it serves as a constant support and source of strength. It symbolizes his familism, his independence, self-reliance, and pride, and his love of place.

Fred’s hammer has become a symbol of what his father and grandfather have handed down to him through his family heritage. The ability to build and fix things is something that Fred values both for utility and for the connection it provides to his own past. His deep connection to his family and their traditions is a reflection of familism and his love of place/sense of beauty.

**Conclusion**

None of these participants in this study were able to get where they are today on their own or because of one protective factor. Resilience is thought to be a process (Mullins & Arce, 2008) and although their resourcefulness, hard work, and self-motivation carried the participants far, without the compassion and caring that was shown to them the others who supported them they would not have thrived the way they did. In some ways, the culture of Appalachia could foster more resilient people based on these cultural values that are ingrained in many of the people who live in states like West
Virginia (Helton & Keller, 2010). It is through these stories that we are able to see just how people become resilient, not in a vacuum, but rather as a result of their environment that includes their family, their faith, their opportunities, their mentors, their culture, their charity, and their own personal qualities.
Chapter 6: Discussion and Implications

Introduction

This chapter includes an overview of the study and a discussion of the major findings from this research. Also included is a discussion about the limitations of the study, implications for helping professionals as well as the implications for future research. Lastly, there is a summary and an epilogue, which explains my own positionality as a researcher that is a summary of a reflexive journal that was kept throughout the process of data collection and writing.

Overview of the Study

While there is some research that presents the influence of the collective cultural values in Appalachia, there limited research available that provides insight into the nature of these cultural values and how they could help to promote resilience among people from Appalachia who are struggling with issues such as poverty, trauma, systemic issues, and other personal obstacles. By using the known Appalachian cultural values set forth by Loyal Jones (1994), and the emerging work on cultural resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Clauss-Ehlers, 2008), this study illuminates some of the features of the culture that serve as protective factors and barriers in an attempt to better inform helping professionals who work in the region. The narratives of these resilient people from the state of West Virginia illuminate some of the qualities of the culture that work as protective factors and can elucidate how the culture in Appalachia can foster resilience.

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the Appalachian cultural values and to look deeper into their existence and how they emerged in the stories of
participants. This insight can help to create awareness, knowledge, and skills for helping professionals to become more culturally conscious and competent (Ratts, 2009; Sue et al., 1992). By understanding what served as protective factors for the participants during obstacles in their lives, this research begins to look at the influences inside and outside of the individual in order to create a greater awareness of what can help foster resilience in others. Some of the literature that exists regarding Appalachia often paints a negative picture of the region, the people from the region, and the culture within Appalachia. This research aims to add to the limited literature that serves to highlight the positive attributes of the region, the people, and the culture of Appalachia from this sample of people from West Virginia. The study was guided by the following questions:

What do the narratives regarding strength and resilience reflect about resilient people from West Virginia?

- How do the Appalachian cultural values help or hinder the growth and development of individuals?

- What types of challenges present themselves in the narratives about strength in resilient people from West Virginia?

A qualitative approach was used to answer these questions. Recruiters, who are helping professionals from Appalachia, were used as a means to find participants and gain entrée. They explained the study to the potential participants and helped coordinate where some interviews were held. An initial phone conversation from the researcher provided more information about the study and a chance to solidify interview plans. Many of the interviews were done in person, and others were done over the phone.
Because of the narrative approach used in this study, the participants were asked to share stories from their lives that described the things that have helped them overcome obstacles. There were not made aware of the cultural values. The interviews were semi-structured to create the freedom necessary to tell their life story in a chronological way, beginning with childhood and moving into adulthood, but also in a way that felt unrestrictive to them. Because of the ethnographic influence on this study, the participants were also asked to bring or talk about an object of importance that symbolized a source of their strength and talk about its influence on their life. This information was used as a way to balance the data and provide another layer of insight into the lives of the participants. Once the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and then summarized, both of which were sent to the participants for review and input. Once that was received, data analysis began.

Each interview was coded and then grouped into themes and they were all comprised of protective factors: sources of strength and major influences. They were then grouped into larger themes that naturally corresponded with the Appalachian cultural values (Jones, 1994). The original ten cultural values were reduced into eight themes, which seemed more relevant for this research. An additional theme that was not part of the Appalachian cultural values (Jones, 1994) also emerged, education and love of learning, which made nine themes total.

The goal of this study was to describe the culture within Appalachia with the voices of those who know the culture best, and to better inform helping professionals who work with people from the region.
Discussion

Appalachia is a region that struggles with health disparities of all types, and mental health disparities are a major problem. In addition to systemic limitations, one of this region’s struggles is with inadequate cultural competence on the part of helping professionals from outside of the region. Although their intentions may be noble, many helping professionals are ill-equipped to meet the needs of their clients due to a lack of understanding of the intact culture and the value system that is persistent throughout the region. As a result, many people who seek help are dissatisfied with the services they receive and terminate (Bauer & Growick, 2003). Even though the systemic issues within the region need to be addressed, the level of competence of helping professionals in the region needs to be enhanced. This research begins that step and looks more closely at what helping professionals should pay attention to when working with people from Appalachia.

What this research brings forth are some of the stories about resilience among people from West Virginia who have overcome enormous hardships. Their stories are unique, but not so unique that others could not benefit from knowing them. Not only do they illuminate some of the things that are positive about the culture in Appalachia, they show how people have the ability to rise up out of their circumstances and become stronger as a result (Kirmayer et al., 2011). By understanding coping strategies used by participants, helping professionals can see how to best use not just the resources within individuals, but their entire support system that is naturally ingrained in the culture they are part of. In this way, both internal and external protective factors can contribute to
wellness (Helton & Keller, 2010). In addition, the treatment practices used can be geared more toward the value system of the culture to which people belong (Sue et al., 1992). It is within these cultural values that the true protective factors reside (Helton & Keller, 2010). This type of awareness can help create practices that are not only culturally conscious but culturally competent as well (Moodley, 2007; Ratts, 2009).

**Appalachian cultural values.**

The major protective factors that appeared in the stories of the participants were largely consistent with the Appalachian cultural values that have become known as a result of the work of Loyal Jones (1994). It was Jones who first laid out the original ten cultural values: (a) independence, self-reliance, and pride; (b) neighborliness; (c) familism; (d) personalism; (e) religion; (f) humility and modesty; (g) love of place; (h) patriotism; (i) sense of beauty; and (j) sense of humor (Jones, 1994). There is evidence to support that by maintaining strong ties to the culture itself, people from Appalachia have been able to overcome adversity (Bauer & Growick, 2006; Helton & Keller, 2010; Keefe, 2005). And, while people from Appalachia can be considered resilient because of the adversity that has confronted them historically and faces them currently, there should still be adequate ways for helping professionals to help meet their needs when they seek help (Diddle & Denham, 2010; Helton & Keller, 2010; Keefe, 2005). It is within these cultural values that we can begin to understand both what helps protect the people of Appalachia and what can be fostered within them (Helton & Keller, 2010; Kirmayer et al., 2011).
Often overlooked as a cultural minority, the people of Appalachia do not typically benefit from the interventions and techniques in the helping professions that are geared toward cultural minorities (Bauer & Growick, 2006). Because of this, the methods used are typically normed for the dominant culture. This is dangerous because of the numerous ways in which those techniques can be incompatible with the Appalachian culture (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). In order to better understand the culture, it is best to seek information from people within culture itself. That was the purpose of the interviews. This research provides some insight into prominent aspects within the culture that serve as protective factors. At the same time, this research examines aspects of the culture that can serve as barriers as well.

All of the cultural values from the work of Jones (1994) were evident in the narratives of the participants. All but one theme, patriotism, appeared in every participant’s story, which was true in prior work as well (Helton & Keller, 2010). This section presents the values as they emerged in the stories of the participants with the addition of the theme education and love of learning. The following nine themes evolved in this study: (a) familism; (b) religion/faith; (c) neighborliness/sense of community; (d) love of place/sense of beauty; (e) humility and modesty/personalism; (f) independence, self-reliance, and pride; (g) sense of humor; (h) patriotism; and (i) education/love of learning.

**Familism.**

Proving to be one of the largest and most complex of the themes, familism was something that was a protective factor for every participant. Because of this complexity,
it was broken down into four parts: *family unity, important family members, newly constructed family, and extended kinship network*. Even though familism was broken down into sections, the evidence was clear that through family people find strength and meaning. Appalachia is a family-centered region, with family central to the value system that creates solidarity and loyalty which runs very deep in the veins of the people (Jones, 1994; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006; Tang & Russ, 2007). This was evident in the story of Fred, who still maintains very close to his extended family and talked about the “loyalty” and “heritage” that are so important to his family. That type of loyalty and pride in heritage that is passed down from generation to generation has been written about in other works as well (Jones, 1994; Keefe, 2005). This level of familism was also true for Frank who remembered how “children and elders were central to the culture” and this made it so that no one went uncared for. It was within the family that things were taken care of and necessities were provided, even if resources were low. Often, family is “all you’ve got” as Frank pointed out and that is consistent with other research on the region as well (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006).

It is this strong bond and ability to band together that provides an intricate network of support for family members, even with extended family members and people who are like family (Bauer & Growick, 2006; Helton & Keller, 2010; Jones, 1994; Tang & Russ, 2007). This was how Jeremy and Anne explained their family as well, made up of immediate, extended, and even people who were like kin, or fictive kin, all interacting and spending large amounts of time together. This was usually done through a meal, bringing everyone together regularly to check in on one another. It is this type of
closeness that can help provide emotional support, which is often part of being in a large family (Bauer & Growick, 2003). When family cannot provide the necessary support or when a family is fractured, individuals tended to rely on certain family members who could provide the support they needed. In this way, family, no matter the configuration, was essential to all of the participants and served as a protective factor, which is consistent with other research as well (Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006; Templeton et al., 2008).

In some instances however, family can be a barrier. When family systems are dysfunctional or family members are not able to provide the necessary support, family can actually get in the way of moving forward through a hardship (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006; Walsh 2002; 2003. This was true for John. He was able to depend on only one family member, his grandmother, for constant support. Once she passed away, his foundation disappeared and he had to find another protective factor. It was through many support systems that John was able to find his way, but what truly made a difference was his involvement with a new family that supported him and allowed him to live with them. The bonds that they formed together proved strong enough to help him get through and achieve many things and it did not matter that he was not a blood relative. Other participants also had family barriers to overcome as well. Sarah and Daisy both had to find ways to get away from unhealthy family members and surround themselves with family that was a positive influence. Regardless of the past experiences of the participants they found a way to make family at the center of their life and make it work,
which has been shown to be a source of resilience in other studies as well (Helton & Keller, 2010; Jones, 1994; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006).

In these stories, family was either strong and protected participants or it was somehow damaged and it was up to the participants to learn from that experience and either make new family bonds or rejuvenate that ones that were broken. What stands out is the way in which family always surfaced in the stories as a redeeming aspect of their lives. By learning from the negative, participants were able to use what they had seen and experienced to make them stronger, which is what some of the literature on family resilience makes clear (Walsh 2002; 2003).

**Religion/faith.**

Religion/faith also proved to be a very influential part of the participants’ lives and served as a protective factor for each one of them at some point in their lives even though it manifested differently in each participant’s life. The importance of religion, faith, and spirituality in Appalachia is part of the culture and often ingrained in the lives of individuals and their families even if it is undefined or deeply individualistic (Diddle & Denham, 2010; Jones, 1994; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Jeremy pointed out that his own faith is something that was taught to him by his parents and that his family has their own church that everyone was expected to attend. He talked about how many people relate to a church even if they do not attend simply because their family goes there. Jeremy’s faith was a protective factor that helped him grow and develop in to the person he is today as well as safeguarded him when he lost his daughter. Frank was raised Catholic, and his faith was deep-rooted in his family heritage as well as his community.
Now that he is older and that same faith-based network is not around, he still draws from that foundation, making meaning in new ways that incorporates Buddhist thought.

For some participants, faith proved to be a barrier because of the way it was ingrained or practiced. Daisy struggled through Christianity as a child and eventually found Judaism to be the best fit for her own personal beliefs. She spoke about how it is now guides the way she interacts with others, treating everyone fairly and respectfully, and how her deep appreciation for nature is also ties into her spirituality as well.

Rod’s faith developed when he was an adult. As a child, he went to church very seldom. In that way, his faith has evolved from the newly constructed parts of his life. Nevertheless, his faith encompassed more than his Bible. Rod finds other ways to strengthen his relationship with God, such as going to the woods, where the “sanctuary of the woods” provides a deep connection not only to his faith, but to the land he comes from. This too serves as a protective factor because religion/faith is more than just an external entity, it is something that draws from many sources and provides a way to make meaning of certain aspects of life. This aspect is present in prior research (Diddle & Denham, 2010; Keefe, 2005; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006).

In the stories of the participants, religion/faith is something that is different for everyone and is thus defined differently. It is evident how important it is, however whether it was something that served as a foundation from their youth or whether it evolved throughout their lifetime. Religion/faith plays a major role in defining who people in this study are. It is also a very important way of life and protective factor that
sustains many people in this region (Diddle & Denham, 2010; Keefe, 2005; Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006).

**Neighborliness/sense of community.**

Being a good neighbor and taking part in a community has evolved from the need of depending on one another in Appalachia, oftentimes with neighbors and community members becoming extensions of the family (Keefe, 2005; Templeton et al., 2008). This became very apparent in the stories of the participants as well. The original cultural value of neighborliness was expanded to fit some of the outcomes that also had to do with communities and how they enveloped the participants. The new cultural value, neighborliness/sense of community includes three subthemes: *neighborhood and community supports, friends and friendship networks, and sports and community organizations.*

Neighborhoods proved to be very influential to many of the participants. For some, like Jeremy, Rod, Anne, Ralph, and Fred, the adults in their community played a role in watching out for them and disciplining them (Keefe, 2005; Templeton et al., 2008). This kind of shared parenting is something that has been part of the Appalachian culture for quite some time (Templeton et al., 2008). Because of the seclusion of some of the areas within Appalachia, people depended on their neighbors and communities as support networks, watching out for each other, caring for each other, and forming tight bonds with one another (Keefe, 2005). Anne, Ralph, and Rod all shared examples of this with older adults in their communities and neighborhoods. Growing up, Anne’s mother took care of their neighbor who was aging. Because he had no family, she cared for him
and included him like a family member (Helton & Keller, 2010). Ralph’s mother did something similar, making sure their neighbor had food “whether he expected it or not.” Rod and his sister take care of their mother’s boyfriend who is 91 years old because of the gratitude they feel for him taking such good care of their mother. This becomes a protective factor in the way that people become accountable for each other and care for people beyond themselves, fostering respect and responsibility (Templeton et al., 2008). Not only does this create cultural resilience, it creates a sense of caring that restores ones’ ability to heal through helping others (Keefe & Green, 2006).

Friends and friendship networks are also a natural extension of this cultural value of neighborliness and sense of community (Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006; Templeton et al., 2008). It was through friendships that some of the participants were able to connect, relate, and open up to others in a meaningful way. Marie benefitted from a friendship network in graduate school when her husband was living in another state and she was a few hours from family. Her friends created a network that supported and helped her through otherwise trying circumstances (Helton & Keller, 2010). This happened again for her when her husband passed away. Community members and neighbors came forward and provided the help and support she and her daughters needed. This ability to depend on others who are within a close proximity is one reason why people from this region foster cooperative independence, and rely on trusted neighbors, friends, and family (Helton & Keller, 2010; Keefe, 2005). This protective factor allows another layer of safety, especially when family is not available. This was true for John and his friend Deshawn. Without his friendship, John may have never opened up to
anyone about his life. Because he could relate to Deshawn in a meaningful way, he was able to continue allowing others in to help him at various points in his life.

One of the most surprising themes that came forward was the prevalence of the influence of sports or community organizations on the lives of so many participants. For Jeremy, David, Anne, John, Frank, and Ralph, sports played a huge part in their lives, influencing all of them in different ways. Ralph’s involvement in sports not only brought him closer to his baseball-loving community, it afforded him the opportunity to have many coaches positively affect his life, which is consistent in other research as well (Templeton et al., 2008). Because he did not have strong male role models in his life early on, he was able benefit from his coaches’ examples. The same was true for Frank as he also lacked a father figure but found that in his coaches took an interest in seeing him succeed. This influence still impacts him today and his object of importance, a rubber mushroom demonstrates his appreciation for their influence. David became very close to his coach who taught him more about life than baseball such as how to treat and appreciate people. Having trusted coaches proved to be very inspirational to these participants and provided another level of support when they needed it, which has been shown to have some bearing on positive personal and social development in other studies as well (Templeton et al., 2008).

**Love of place/sense of beauty**

Love of place and sense of beauty were difficult to separate in the stories of the participants and that is why there were put together as one theme. Love of place/ sense of beauty incorporate many of the reasons why the participants feel drawn and connected to
West Virginia. This theme speaks about the physical qualities that West Virginia has: mountains, creeks, rivers, lakes, and woods, and the deep connection people feel with the land. This aspect is present in prior work as a factor that keeps people connected to their state (Keefe, 2006; Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). That is why part of this theme was also included in humility/modesty and personalism as well. What the stories of the participants brought to light was that they not only felt connected to their state for its natural beauty, they also feel connected to the inner beauty of the people of West Virginia as well. As a result, these themes were combined to show that connection.

The participants seemed connected to their state in a way that went beyond just admiring the mountains. Their connection to West Virginia was profound and it included a meaningful connection to many of the aspects of the state as well as the people. This attachment to the land, which embodies the families and the heritage that is apparent in many of the stories, creates a loyalty to their home that is almost unbreakable (Keefe, 2005).

The physical beauty of West Virginia provides a way to connect with God because of the natural beauty (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). This is true for Rod, who reported that when he has visited other places, he felt that they were “ok” or “alright” but to him, none of them compared to West Virginia. This connection is sacred to Rod, just as the literature points out is true for many people from the region (Keefe, 2005). That is why he becomes so “angry” when people disrespect the land and take advantage of its beauty. Fred and Jeremy feel similarly. Their home is where their families have lived for so long and it is that heritage that means so much. Prior work, on Appalachian cultural
values points out (Jones, 1994; Keefe, 2006). Fred moved back to help the people of his state overcome the “mental slavery” of the coal industry. Even though he felt connected to his community in Texas, he had a strong “drive” and “desire” to come back. This is not just true for Fred as many people often feel as if they need or want to come back to their home state in Appalachia (Helton & Keller, 2010; Jones, 1994; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Jeremy and Sarah felt similarly when they moved away, wanting to be home with their family. Jeremy felt as if many people who leave either come back or want to come back, which is also reflected in the literature (Jones, 1994; Helton & Keller, 2010). This drive to be home is something that few can explain but many people feel.

Fred now appreciates all of the features of his culture. Besides the aesthetic beauty he feels as if the music, the traditions, and the folk art that comes out of the region add to the beauty of his home. Born out of necessity, the ways in which the people of Appalachia turned everyday objects into works of art, and kept skills which were passed down from generation to generation is indicative of the heritage that people hold onto so dearly (Jones, 1994; Helton & Keller, 2010). Fred’s own family is comprised of a long line of carpenters, which is a heritage he is proud to have. That is one reason why one of his objects of importance is a hammer which reminds him of his family’s legacy. As a result, this theme indicated that the participants not only value where they come from, they depend on it to provide a part of their identity and that is why it is also a protective factor.
**Humility and modesty/personalism.**

If participants did not mention the natural beauty of their state, they talked about the inner beauty of the people who live among them. Many of the participants valued the people of their home state and equated it with the best qualities of West Virginia. Marie interacts with hundreds of people each week working in a busy hospital. Although she wanted to be careful not to generalize, she felt as if the people in her state are “fair” and “compassionate” in the ways in which they relate to others, which is consistent with other research (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). This is important to her because she tries to give that back to them. A high priority is placed on respect and being respected, and Marie embodies that as well. This is how personalism is practiced within the culture of Appalachia with a high emphasis placed on respecting others (Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). David felt some guilt for being so “disrespectful” to his family and to his church for so long. He talked about how he now tries to find ways to give the compassion he was shown back to people who need it.

In the culture of Appalachia, confrontation is avoided at all costs, sometimes in order to avoid hurting other’s feelings (Helton & Keller, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). For some people, this can serve as a barrier. Wendy wanted to do her “own thing” when she was in high school, but her mom wanted her to go to the center at church for help with homework. Once she went, she realized that the people there were genuine and kind. Because she did not want to hurt their feelings, she avoided telling them why she did not want to come. Instead, she would just not show up and avoid the possible confrontation. Sarah avoided confronting her husband in the hopes that things would
smooth out. This led to many years of turmoil and drastic measures to move away from him. Because avoiding others can cause more harm in some cases, it can be a barrier within the culture.

The aspects of the culture that show how these themes can be protective factors is in how they help members of the culture successfully navigate through the social norms that are expected. For example, Frank holds very important positions at both an involuntary commitment hospital and as a faculty member of a major university. Nevertheless, he does not boast about his accomplishments. Instead, he talked about how important it was to be a dad. Marie has a similar position that is very demanding and has required major accomplishments to attain however, she is most proud of the fact that her girls are independent and that she is a grandma. This leveling tendency is prominent within the culture and allows the people within the culture the benefit of being equal (Bauer & Growick, 2003). That is the type of humility, modesty, and personalism that creates a connection among the members of the Appalachian culture (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Who you are related to is often more important that what you have accomplished and many of the participants made that known (Jones, 1994).

**Independence, self-reliance, and pride.**

As some of this theme has been touched on is other themes, the qualities of independence, self-reliance, and pride are all present in the participants of this research. While the independence aspect is important to the stability of the individual, what was apparent was that others make it possible for independence. This kind of cooperative independence resulted in the betterment of the participants’ situations, which is what the
literature points out about this aspect of the culture (Keefe, 2006). For example, when Sarah was thinking about leaving her husband, she needed the strength to begin the process. It was her mother who helped her set small goals, like “pack a box everyday” that helped her gain the ability to finally leave. She became self-reliant as a result of her decision. Coupled with her fear of confronting her husband, it was Sarah’s pride that prevented her from moving on in the first place and presented a barrier. She did not want others to be right about their situation, instead suffering through her issues and avoiding help, which has been shown to be a barrier for others as well (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Nevertheless, she was able to compensate for her pride and gained much more independence and self-reliance in the years to follow.

Anne and Jeremy gained independence by moving away from home for three years. This gave them a chance to make decisions on their own, apart from their families. They “grew-up together” and solidified their marriage more than they could have in their hometown. When their daughter passed away, the bond that formed during those years helped to buffer them from some of the devastation that follows an unexpected death of a child. Jeremy felt that many couples do not make it through such a tragedy, but because he and Anne learned to be independent together, they came out stronger. In addition to themselves, they were able to reach out beyond their family for support and the necessary steps to heal.

*Sense of humor.*

All of the participants showed the ability to laugh and make difficult topics light. Not only can humor be a coping mechanism, as Anne pointed out, it can be a source of
entertainment and a way to relate to others, which is consistent with the literature on Appalachia (Helton & Keller, 2010; Jones, 1994). Humor was evident in the stories of the participants, interwoven in ways that proved entertaining and as a way to offset some of the difficult terrain they covered during their interviews. For example, Sarah was able to laugh at many of the things about her life including the object of importance she chose, a pop song. While Frank talked about the difficult phase of life he was in, Frank began joking about how his children sometimes have bumper stickers that upset him, laughing while he talked. Rod told story after story that had so many funny parts, they could not all be included in the summary. It is this ability to relate to others in a personal and funny way that helps bring joy to everyday events (Jones, 1994; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006).

The way in which the humor was delivered was in sometimes a dry and dead-pan manner and it may not always be picked up by outsiders (Jones, 1994). This was evident when Wendy said, “What’s so special about West Virginia? Nothing!” and then she proceeded to say, “I’m just kidding, I love West Virginia!” Daisy also threw in comments that were dry but funny, like saying “what the Hell!” after she talked about something or by saying “I am a strange person.” She laughed through many of her stories and her optimism and good sense of humor prevailed. This is a positive coping mechanism that allows people to laugh at themselves and not take things too seriously (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). It is through this coping mechanism that participants have another protective factor. Humor gives them the ability to laugh at difficulty and find light moments in hardship (Helton & Keller, 2010). Humor also provides another way to connect and communicate with members of the culture (Jones, 1994).
Patriotism.

Patriotism was the least common theme, with five of the twelve participants alluding to it. In a study by Helton and Keller (2010), patriotism did not surface in the interviews of the participants either. Nevertheless, patriotism did surface as a protective factor for some of the participants in this study, just not for all of them. Patriotism spans everything from military service to an appreciation for a soldier to political activism (Jones, 1994). It comes from a long history of people’s connection to their state and their country and although Appalachia has a varied history with the federal government, the importance of freedom prevail (Jones, 1994). That is what Anne discovered while she was in Turkey when her husband was stationed there. During that time, her “freedom was limited for the first time” in her life and that brought on an entirely new appreciation for not only what her husband did, but for her country as well.

For some families, going into the military is sometimes expected (Jones, 1994). This was true for Ralph. Whose back up plan to not being able to work in the aluminum factory was to join the military. This was a decision that required little thought as many of the people from his town joined as well. But, Ralph’s plans changed and he went to college instead, breaking tradition and expected norms.

Daisy wanted to join the military was a way for her to escape her life and fulfill her dreams of being a pilot. Daisy’s patriotism began when she was young during World War II and this made a big impression on her. She worked in the “victory garden” and shot down imaginary planes from her favorite tree. Her plan was to enlist in the military,
but she got married instead. Daisy’s patriotism did not end there, as she became active in politics and the environmental movement in West Virginia.

Patriotism is a way in which people from the region protect themselves and the people and things around them. It is a natural extension of how the people of Appalachia band together and make do with difficult circumstances (Keefe, 2005; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). In this way, it is a protective factor that serves to literally protect, but at the same time, create means to reach goals as well. The lack of patriotism in other interviews may have resulted for several reasons including the United States being involved in two major wars over the last decade as well as access to other options than the military such as college. Regardless of the why this theme was less prevalent in the interviews, it still appears important in the lives of some of the participants.

*Education/love of learning.*

The theme of education and love of learning was not in the work of Loyal Jones (1994) or any other work about Appalachia. Because it emerged in every participant’s story as a source of strength and a protective factor, it was included with the other themes in this research. One reason this theme may have emerged is because all of the participants are either in college or have a college degree. In addition, since Loyal Jones wrote his book, accessibility to college and vocational options has likely increased, making it easier to go to college now than in the past. Nevertheless, the ways in which it emerged so differently in each story may prove its value as a cultural factor, including how education was a protective factor for many participants prior to college. Love of learning also captures the ways in which the participants valued learning on their own as
well. As a result, education and love of learning includes school, teachers, reading, and other learning environments.

Not every participant had a quality educational experience growing up. John fell behind in class and became frustrated by teachers. Because of this, his behavior in school was a problem as well. He went to many different schools, became violent with teachers and peers, and got expelled. John was not able to thrive until he switched schools and began again. It was this new supportive environment that made such a huge difference to him, which is consistent with the research in resilience (Walsh 2002; 2003). It not only saved his academic career, it made it possible for him to graduate with honors and go onto college and play college football.

Many participants had good learning experiences. Fred received a great education due to his hometown being the headquarters for the coal company. This provided him with an incredible foundation and the opportunity to go onto college prepared. This was true for Marie as well. Coupled with her naturally inquisitive nature, she was able to thrive in college and add on an even more demanding major.

College proved to be very important to other participants as well. College was initially a barrier for Sarah. She chose her college because it was faith-based. From there, things got very complicated for Sarah, having three children before she graduated and getting married to someone who was abusive and distant to her. Her professors and peers were unsupportive and tried to put her down. This barrier became a strength for Sarah and she found that the “harder they pushed” the harder she pushed back. She eventually went to graduate school so she could get a better job to provide for her
children on her own. Rod, Frank, and Ralph thought college was too much about fun at
first. All three men were unprepared and got into some trouble with their use of alcohol.
Once they figured out how damaging that was, they all managed to gain some momentum
and graduate. Frank and Rod went onto graduate school.

Education served as a way for some people to rise above their circumstances or
better their situation. For others, college was the beginning of something bigger in their
lives that helped to define who they were. School can be a barrier by blocking people
from their potential by holding them back. For these participants however, school
became something to be mastered and taken seriously. It created a challenge that these
participants were ready for and they ended up becoming stronger as a result. It is for this
reason that education and love of learning is a value that all the participants share.

Positive deviance.

Positive deviance is the ability for someone to thrive in an at-risk environment
despite others who are around them who are not able to thrive (Marsh, et al., 2004;
Walker, et al., 2007). Although many of the participants lived in at-risk environments
growing up, there were many people around them who also did well. In other cases,
some participants were able to rise above their circumstances and do significantly better
than those who they grew up with. This section will examine those who may have had
different reasons other than their culture that helped to make them resilient. In addition,
this section will discuss how some participants were able create change that broke
tradition in an attempt to better their life. Lastly, this section will cover some of the
positive adaptive approaches that helped bolster resilience as well like community organizations and outreach programs.

Daisy and John had the least connection to their family, and thus their heritage. Both of them grew up in environments that did not seem to suit them, even from an early age. Their stories show that from the time they can remember, they tried to make different choices than those around them. Even when they were unable to make different choices, they still questioned the systems that were in place that seemed to hold people back. Although they come from West Virginia and their families also come from West Virginia, there seemed to be a tear in the fabric of their heritage big enough that members of their families and communities were not bound as closely together.

John’s issue growing up was the extreme urban poverty he lived in coupled with the issue of substance abuse that surrounded him. To use the Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), John was connected to his environment (person) and could connect and relate to it even though it was broken. Both his immediate and past environments (proximal and distal process) were broken and he was surrounded by a system that did not help him or the people around him who were also struggling immensely. His family, home, school, neighborhood, and city (context) were all substandard in that they were not able to meet his needs throughout his young life (time). Because his situation persisted for such a long period of time, he was less able to accept help, not knowing or trusting anything other than what he had been exposed to up to that point in his life. In his resistance, he perpetuated the level of dysfunction that he was raised on, feeling helpless to do anything differently than what he had been show, which
is consistent with the literature on resilience (Walsh 2002; 2003). All the time, there was an undercurrent of change because John knew that his grandmother saw something different in him that he was unable to see. Nevertheless, it stuck with him and gave him the hope that he might be able to do things differently.

It was not until he gained the friendship of Deshawn and his mentor Todd that things began to change for John. His hunger and his lack of something productive to do landed him at the youth center and that is where everything began to take shape. Not only was his environment shifting, his ability to let people in was also shifting. He quickly began to build competence, letting trusting adults in and gaining new skills and knowledge across his context. It was this type of competence that helped him stay afloat and adapt to this notion of him achieving something entirely different than he planned. He deviated from his toxic environment and began to surround himself with people and systems that were not broken. In fact, the things that became safety nets in his life were put in place to help children just like him, and many others were able to use it as successfully as John. His family, home, neighborhood, and city all changed. He also added in many other adults who served as mentors, a new found faith and church, sports, and new friends who were making positive choices. In order to counter the negativity that John experienced early on in his life, much of his context changed. This is important to the theory of positive deviance, as it took many supplemental and contextual adjustments in order to pull him out of the dysfunction in which he had existed for years, and move him toward competence.
Daisy’s situation was somewhat different. The level of dysfunction in her life was far less systemic in nature and much more about the circumstances in which she grew up. It was difficult for Daisy to feel connected (person) to her family who had little time for her, as she felt she grew up an “orphan” (process) and had to figure things out on her own. Her parents had very little time for her, her education was limited, her church was superficial and dangerous, and her community was limited in resources and diversity (context). She grew up always feeling like an outsider for being smart and interested in things like flying (time). This created and compounded difficulties that were difficult to escape. So, Daisy blended in by playing the piano at church, getting good grades in school pretending to buy into her teacher’s belief system, and staying out of her parents’ way. Instead, she quietly escaped into nature and into her books, finding ways to make sense of her and the world she lived in.

Daisy went away to school and came back to teach in the same school she attended. She thought that she could help fix the environment that seemed so dysfunctional, but once she went back, she knew that she had never fit and never would. Daisy had to create her own competence, leaving her hometown and fulfilling a goal that she only dreamt of. When she met Syd, everything changed again, with her withdrawing her enlistment from the Air Force and getting married instead. Initially she was able to fulfill some of her dreams of traveling and meeting new people from other cultures. She had successfully deviated from her environment, making something of herself that no one else in her town had. But, when her problems with her husband began to compound, she found herself in a similar situation to the one she grew up in, surrounded by people who
she was disconnected from and a place she did not feel tied to. One of the only changes that made sense was converting to Judaism and in a way that helped to carry her through her next transition. It was then that she decided to start again with her sons and go back to school. She moved to another town and she eventually met Daniel and things were positive for the rest of their marriage.

Daisy was not necessarily a product of her environment. Instead she was an individual who had a unique perspective on life. It was different from anyone she was around, and even though she was made fun of for being different, Daisy held fast to the ideals she had, eventually getting out of the environment that held her back. It was in this replacement of her context entirely that she was able to make some changes in her life and not be subjected to the neglect and abuse she endured. Her family, home, faith, neighborhood, and city all changed and that made a tremendous difference for Daisy in achieving her goals. This too is important to positive deviance, because although Daisy feels tied to her culture in some ways, she readily let go of the aspects that did not fit her ideals, instead creating her own ways of making her life work.

The stories of John and Daisy are exceptional in that they both had to completely remove themselves from their environments in order to achieve something different. It was not so much their culture that contributed to the issues in their life, but rather their families and environments. Once they were able to recreate those things on their own terms, they both thrived. Although this helps to answer the questions about how one person stands out among their group through a positive deviance lens, it does not answer questions of other researchers who are interested in how a group affects a high-achieving
individual (Fielding, Hogg, & Annadale, 2006). In order to answer this latter question the theory of cultural resilience may be able to identify how culture affects individuals and how individuals affect their culture. In the cases of John and Daisy, they used their past situation in order serve as a catalyst to reach their new goals and are examples of resilient individuals who could not depend on their family early on for help. It was not until later when they were able to have the support of their faith coupled with the formation of a newly constructed family that they were able to truly thrive. Nevertheless, all of the cultural values were prominent in Daisy’s interview and all but patriotism was evident in John’s. This is why it is important to look at the cultural values as the reason participants in this sample were able to cope with their challenges.

Certain aspects of the culture in Appalachia are not positive, just as in any culture. One feature Jeremy, Rod, Sarah, and Daisy all pointed out that was part of their upbringing was having parents who did not show much emotion, especially among the men in the family. What this created was a barrier between them as children and their parents that continued throughout their lives. As men, Jeremy and Rod have made a concerted effort to change that heritage with their children. As a result, both men are very open with their children, showing affection and telling them that they love them frequently. This was something that they never experienced but that affected them deeply. This is why they decided to break the cycle even though it went against tradition. What they missed as a child was something they did not want their children to miss as well. Recognizing what needed to be changed and making an effort to fundamentally
change it is what positive deviance embodies. Because Rod and Jeremy were able to take this step, their children know what it is like to receive love and compassion.

Positive deviance is the ability to overcome challenges despite challenges but, in order to do this effectively; there have to be opportunities for people. What emerged in this study was that there were a number of things that were in place to help the participants to do just this. One example that was brought up by a few participants was their involvement in youth groups. This activity seemed to provide the company and space for David, John, Wendy, Sarah, Fred, and Ralph to be themselves and find companionship while deepening their faith. It helped David, John, and Wendy to keep them away from negative activities like doing drugs or drinking. Sarah, Ralph, and Fred were able to feel comfort around kind people who accepted them.

Youth group was not the only opportunity for the participants to use as a way to overcome their challenges. Wendy and John also talked about after school programs that afforded them opportunities to work on school work and find mentors. This supportive environment was helpful in many ways but also provided a number of outlets for Wendy and John to work on themselves through playing music or playing basketball. John began writing and going to counseling as a result of going to the youth center. Wendy found a supportive group of people who were not intrusive but simply kind and patient enough to wait for her to accept them. Both John and Wendy initially rejected the youth center, but after some time, it became a very important support for them in many ways.

Another support that showed up was through coaches and sports and Boy and Girl Scouts. Although this was already discussed, it should be pointed out that the
opportunity to be in sports and have caring coaches was yet another way for the 
participants to overcome their challenges. Having a caring adult who consistently 
supports a child, like a coach, is sometimes what helps someone overcomes their difficult 
circumstances or resist getting involved in risky behaviors (Templeton et al., 2008; 
Walsh, 2002; 2003). This was true for Frank, Ralph, David, Jeremy, Anne, and John. As 
for Rod, Frank, Fred, and Anne, Scouts made a big difference in their lives, providing 
opportunities that they would not have otherwise been available to them. Rod found his 
mentor through Scouts and that made a large impression on his life.

What all of these supports have in common is that they helped the participants to 
deviate from their issues to a certain extent. Some of these supports are relevant to the 
study of positive deviance due to the systemic implications of what helps people 
overcome challenges. Things like youth group or church, after school programs, Scouts, 
and sports and coaches all made lasting impressions on the participants. Without these 
supports, they may not have flourished as much. What this highlights is the importance 
of support in various forms and what communities and neighborhoods can work toward 
to provide that type of opportunity.

**Bioecological model.**

In relation to the Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), the 
stories of the participants can be broken down into the person, process, context, time 
framework. This framework, similar to the original Ecological Model, shows how 
participants were able to move through their lifetime, interacting and interconnecting 
with elements of their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In addition, this
multidimensional framework allows a clearer look at a person across contexts and over a lifetime. It emphasizes that people do not develop in a vacuum, but rather their personal characteristics coupled with their environment contribute to the whole person. Although the area of context captures aspects of culture the overall model falls short in elucidating the importance and impact of collective cultural values from intact cultures. Nevertheless, the Bioecological Model is often paired with resilience as a means of understanding how a person develops and gains the ability to be resourceful in life.

To better break down the findings using the Bioecological Model, the person, process, context, time, or PPCT, framework can be used to tease apart some of the findings from this study. It is important to use this model because it emphasizes the proximal process of a person, which determines if someone gains competence from their experiences or develops dysfunction (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Competence shows advanced skills acquisition across contexts. All participants were able to gain some level of competence in many areas of their life. One example of this is Wendy. She used her love of learning to go to college while raising her son. She includes in her life time to take photos, read, enjoy the outdoors, play basketball, and be involved in church. Since competence can span a multitude of skills, knowledge, and abilities that can be physical, socioemotional, intellectual, or artistic (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000), Wendy has shown that all areas of have become strengths for her. In addition, Harney (2008) pointed out that having a trusted adult consistently involved also promotes resilience and competence, which Wendy has also found through her church. This began when she had a mentor, and now Wendy has many trusted adults in her life that support
her. This is an example of how competence can be conceptualized within PPCT framework.

Dysfunction can also contribute to flourishing in human development as well, and depending on the compounded issues that a person must overcome, dysfunction can help or hinder someone’s resilience. Further, dysfunction can contribute to someone’s behavior and control over their life, sometimes leading to learned helplessness (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Harney, 2008). Although the Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and the original theories on resilience fall short of expanding on dysfunction, other theories such as Psychological Capital, or PsyCap, have explained that dysfunction can bolster resilience, and the ability to use dysfunction as a springboard can make someone stronger as a result (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013). An example of this is Sarah. She was in a difficult situation with her ex-husband and because of her pride and inability to move on without confronting him and her own deficits; she began to falsely believe that her situation would fix itself. By covering up their life and pretending that things were fine, she eluded herself and others. Her learned helplessness was an extension of her deep-rooted fear and anxiety that stemmed from childhood and her belief that coming from a split family was worse than living in a dysfunctional one. These compounded issues, coupled with her falsely positive outlook became detrimental to her and her children’s own well-being, which is consistent within the PsyCap literature (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013). Nevertheless, Sarah found the ability to move on, through her faith, her cooperative independence on her mom and children, and her own independence; she was able to begin the steps to competence, using
her dysfunction as a motivation. Sarah not only fixed her situation, she went on to teach at a high needs school in a disadvantaged neighborhood, marry someone who cares for her and treats her well, adopt two children with special needs, and begin mending the trauma her and her children experienced. In this way, her dysfunction led to advanced levels of competence.

To use the PPCT framework further, each area can be broken down to show how it can be applied to this research. Person refers to the developmental state of a person in relation to their environment and can include things like race, gender, and family. Frank’s development throughout his lifetime and his current developmental state are a direct result of his Polish Catholic upbringing. Because he was the “clown” and always wanted to seek positive attention but also maintain control, he became extremely personable and interested in what contributes to the development of people. This naturally led him to the helping professions, and because of his natural ability to be a leader, he is now in a very important role at the hospital. Nevertheless, because of his cultural values, he does not flaunt this, but rather emphasizes his work as a father, a role that has always taken priority over his profession. His involvement level as a father is due to his family’s enmeshed nature, and Frank learned how to be an involved parent from them. Although he did not have a strong male role model, he sought out others who could fill that void such as his best friend’s father and coaches who took a vested interest in him. This increased his competence as a parent and has contributed to his own development as well.
Process describes the overarching themes that have occurred over someone’s lifetime that contribute to their ability to overcome obstacles. It also considers a person in a future orientation, taking into consideration where they are going as well. Process addresses whether someone has been able to grow from their experiences or if they have fallen victim to them. This speaks directly to resilience, making this part of the framework fit with the ideas that are found in the resiliency literature (Harney, 2008).

Fred’s life can illuminate how process evolves throughout a lifetime and into the future. Growing up in the coal fields of West Virginia had a large effect on Fred’s perception, but not until he became older. As a child, Fred enjoyed many of the aspects that went along with living in a coal community, especially those that came with living in a town where the headquarters were situated. A quality education, tight-knit community, diverse neighbors, and opportunities like learning to swim and getting a job were all things that were advantages Fred enjoyed. Because of all of those things, Fred was able to naturally extend all of them beyond his time in the coal fields. He went onto college and gained new insights into himself and others, and he found a career that was also a calling. After college, he went to graduate school, met his wife, and began his life as a preacher. What Fred’s eyes were opened up to after he left West Virginia were the negative aspects of the coal industry that held people back. Fred thankfully had the love and support of his extended family and the example of his hard-working parents to push him, but he felt a strong urge to help “proclaim some kind of freedom” to the “mental slavery” and “bondage” that went along with a community’s dependence on the coal company. This contributed to Fred’s desire to return home and help those from his home state. He
landed in a neighborhood that had needs beyond coal mining issues and has stayed there for 30 years as a result. The emphasis on and appreciation for diversity his mom showed him coupled for his flair for social justice has contributed to his joining an association for black ministers as well as maintaining close ties with people who are culturally different from him. In these ways, Fred has grown from his experiences, using everything he was exposed to as a catalyst for strengthening his own development. This is a theme throughout his life and has continued to evolve.

*Context* is perhaps the most expansive of the parts as it encompasses numerous aspects of someone’s life, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. All of the influences and challenges that someone meets in their lifetime is encapsulated in their context and includes their activities, social roles, and interpersonal relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Considering context places a person at the center and illuminates the contributing factors that have helped or hindered their development. Context is dependent on culture and social class (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Because of this, it is one way to explain how the cultural values are influential to the participants in addition to other influences as well.

Rod is a very dynamic person. His life has been filled with challenges but he meets them with a kind of fierceness that few people have, with a mixture of confidence, humor, and intelligence. While his upbringing is not something that he considers atypical, he knows that he narrowly escaped another fate that is typical of many of the men in his family. Rod prides himself on the changes that have occurred in his life in relation to those who were his examples growing up, using the negative experiences of
his surroundings to better himself and his own family. Things like staying away from alcohol, going to college and getting a Master’s degree, having a close relationship with his children, respecting his wife, and becoming a pastor are all things that were not typical of his family. But because of this, Rod has very little patience for those who fall into those patterns over and over. While Rod struggles to have compassion for some people, he finds that it is easy to give the same compassion to others. As a pastor, he is aware of this challenge and again meets it with the same fierceness and humor he meets all challenges with. Rod’s appreciation for his state and his culture prevails over his struggles with certain aspects of living in West Virginia and because of this, he is extremely enthusiastic about his love of place and sense of beauty. Rod has left behind his previous social class, rising out of poverty and never returning. What he carries with him is the pride of correcting some of the things that seemed more oppressive like not having a close-knit family, not having a loving relationship with his father, and escaping alcoholism. Rod has found that having an appreciation for the outdoors, being openly affectionate with his children, having a close relationship with his siblings and nieces and nephews, being a community leader, and speaking all over the country to coaches, are ways in which he is using his experiences to affect all levels in his system, out to the macrosystem. Rod is proud to be from West Virginia and his ability to carry that with him despite the problems he sees within the culture show that he has been able to use his various contexts to help his own personal development.

*Time* is the last element of the framework. While the concept of time is somewhat difficult to explain and because it has been removed and placed back into the model over
the span of many years, it remains one of the more difficult aspects of the Bioecological Model to explain. Nevertheless, it is valuable in that it helps to examine how long someone has been exposed to a particular process or context. Anne and Jeremy’s stories can help to illustrate how time is important to personal development. Because of their upbringings that were filled with loving and supportive people, family, neighborhoods, communities, and a culture that placed family and faith at the center of life, Anne and Jeremy were born into circumstances that naturally cultivated resilience. Those circumstances existed for much of their lives, creating a support network that held them up even when difficulties arose. When they moved away, their absence threatened that network and made it difficult to communicate with certain members of the family. What they gained over their three years in Wyoming was the chance to be independent for once and build their relationship while building other new relationships as well. When they moved back, they were able to pick up where they left off, but they had developed something different than most people around them had. Their relationship was stronger and because of that, when their daughter passed away, they were better able to cope with the devastating reality.

Over time, Anne and Jeremy have made some major changes and a contribution as a result of their daughter’s passing. First, they have managed to stay together and become a stronger couple. They started a non-profit that puts defibrillators in schools. Jeremy has written a book, which has gone directly against certain aspects of his own upbringing, talking openly about feelings and emotions, but he has become stronger as a result and made a conscious decision to treat his sons differently. He has also decided to
get healthy so that he can be an example to his culture as well as ensure that he is around for his children and wife. Anne has reached out to many people who have also lost children. Because she can be an example of someone who can come out the other side of grief, she is happy to provide the support to those who seek her assistance. Ten years have passed since their daughter died, and Anne and Jeremy have bettered themselves and positively impacted hundreds of people. Although nothing will ever end their sorrow, they are examples of how someone can be stronger in the aftermath of a trauma. Even though a lifetime of support can be disrupted by a single event, Anne and Jeremy show great reserves of resilience. This is consistent with some of the literature on PsyCap as well (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013). A lifetime of positivity can be wiped away from a single negative event, but if someone can use that positivity to promote even more hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, they can actually become stronger from a negative event (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013).

The Bioecological Model contributes to a body of literature that gives numerous ways of thinking about a person and how they develop throughout the course of a lifetime (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Although this framework is helpful in understanding how individuals become competent or dysfunctional, it is complicated. In addition, Bronfenbrenner points out that it is also evolving, and therefore it is not complete (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). It seems likely that in the future, this model will consider context even more influential and extend the ways in which the model can be applied to better understand culture in context. Since all of the participants in this study highlighted the importance of the Appalachian cultural values in contributing to their own
resilience, their stories are can be further examined by using the theory of cultural resilience.

**Cultural resilience.**

In order to better explain why the Appalachian cultural values are protective factors, the emerging theory of cultural resilience can be used. Because all of the resiliency theories are embedded within cultural resilience, it serves as the best way to help tease out the features of the values that make them protective factors. Because all of the participants told stories about how the cultural values, with the exception of patriotism, were sources of strength, this research can show that the Appalachian cultural values can foster better coping in the lives of the participants. This was found in another study by Helton and Keller (2010) as well.

The research on cultural resilience is limited, but what exists does provide some exciting new information about how to look at a whole person in regards to their culture and what can make them resilient. This research found that the Appalachian cultural values are present and they did promote resilience in the 12 participants that were interviewed. The nine themes found in the stories of the participants are the very similar to the cultural values that were originally set forth by Jones (1994). Cultural resilience theory offers the capability to look at why those values are helpful. In a previous study on cultural resilience, it was found that personal growth and development included a deep connection to the environment which cultivated cultural connections as well as self-soothing and healing, emotional regulation, and guidance (Kirmayer et al., 2011). When compared to the Appalachian culture, the values of love of place and sense of beauty as
well as humility, modesty, and personalism also fostered similar outcomes. While there were some barriers in these areas, most participants talked about the ways in which their home served as a way to connect to not only West Virginia, but to the people within the state as well. What this brought forward was the ability for people in this region to connect with one another, care for one another, and feel connected to one another. When they experienced their hardships, it was through the systems set up by people from their culture that helped push them through.

John found help in a place that he went to just for food and to play basketball but that led him to find art and music as an outlet. Daisy found ways to combat her neglect and abuse until she was an adult and then made some major changes that fulfilled her needs in a way that her childhood could not, including finding a religion that fit her belief system and a family that functioned better than her own. As a result, many of the participants went onto doing things that provided guidance, such as Sarah adopting two children and Anne connecting with people who recently lost children. The participants are resilient in their own right; however their resilience was bolstered as a result of their cultural influences, which is consistent with the research on cultural resilience (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Helton & Keller, 2010; Kirmayer, et al., 2011).

In a study by Helton and Keller (2010) cultural values in Appalachia helped to foster strength and resilience among the participants. This was an important finding to resiliency theory as well as in the application of helping professionals in Appalachia. Cultural resilience considerations allow for better ways to approach and incorporate traditional knowledge, values, and practices that are important to individuals, families,
and cultural groups (Kirmayer et al., 2011). This includes historical contexts as well as current systemic and sociocultural contexts that influence their lives. That is why, even though it is an emerging theory, cultural resilience is the best framework available to use for understanding how Appalachian culture can help to create resilience. In doing this, helping professionals can be better informed and have better ways to practice.

**Implications for Helping Professionals**

Because of the complexities of the Appalachian culture, the historical and sociocultural aspects of the culture, coupled with the economic and geographic limitations, many of the people in Appalachia have been unable to find adequate assistance from helping professionals (Bauer & Growick, 2006; Diddle & Denham, 2010; Helton & Keller, 2010; Keefe, 2005; Zhang et al., 2008). Mental health disparities are high and without proper training or knowledge of the culture, helping professionals may do more damage than good when trying to work with some people from a population they do not understand (Keefe, 2005; Ratts, 2009). In counseling for example, many of the theories, techniques, and assessments that might be used are likely not culturally appropriate (Bauer & Growick, 2006). This not only makes for ineffective therapy, it serves as a barrier for the clients, deterring them from seeking help in the future.

As a natural extension of the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC), social justice is another layer of competence for counselors and other helping professionals to create better awareness, knowledge, and skills in order to meet the needs of the people they work with (Ratts, 2009). What this provides is a better look into not only the culture a person comes from but the issues that have held that culture back that
are systemic in nature and include both past and present barriers (Moodley, 2007; Ratts, 2009). In this framework, helping professionals can begin to address some of the things that hold their clients back both inside and outside of the clinic, school, office, hospital, or elsewhere. The social justice framework also provides a more culturally conscious helping professional who is not only aware of the issues, but who makes it their responsibility to gain knowledge of that culture directly from the source (the client) and then acquires skills that provide the culturally relevant interventions to the person they are serving (Moodley, 2007; Ratts, 2009). Because of the limited availability of culturally appropriate tools, conceptualizing a client through the social justice framework and the cultural resilience framework together can be one way to identify the cultural values that serve as protective factors or barriers and implement interventions that are culturally conscious.

Since the culture of Appalachia is resilient, it follows that the people of the culture can be resilient as well (Helton & Keller, 2010). Although the framework for cultural resilience has been critiqued for not being sufficient (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008), it is necessary to lay out a way for helping professionals to use the theory in practice. By (a) understanding the collective history of the population, as well as the collective social norms and traditions that come from that, a broader picture of the culture can be painted. Once that is established, (b) understanding the community history, community norms, and community traditions, there can be clearer lines drawn about where resources are and where barriers occur. From there, (c) looking at the individual’s family history, family values, family roles, and family traditions, the focus can become more exact, finding
things that serve as supports and things that create obstacles. Lastly, (d) by looking at the individual and their personal history, their values and traditions, their roles within their various environments, the practitioner can zero in on the protective factors as well as the barriers in that person’s life. By including other factors such as their goals and ideals, the clearest picture possible can emerge and the then the most appropriate techniques and approaches can be implemented.

Cultural resilience offers an opportunity to look at the parts that make up the whole individual. It is a way to apply social justice and create a more active way to gain the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to work with people from an intact culture (Ratts, 2009; Sue et al., 1992). Because of the considerations the cultural resilience framework takes into account, the model provides a better way to alleviate discrimination and the negative outcomes of marginalization (Ratts, 2009). People do not exist in a vacuum and that is especially true for the people from West Virginia who were interviewed for the current study. Although none of their lives are the same, they all depended on similar types of supports to get them through challenges. Ultimately, it is their culture that provides the constant sources of strength that are present in their lives.

Generalizing is never safe and that is why it is so important to ensure every measure is taken in order to accurately and thoroughly examine the protective factors and barriers in someone’s life. People are individuals first, and making sure that someone is honored for who they are is essential. This study is designed to better address the dimensions that affect someone that pertain to culture. It provides another way to conceptualize someone beyond what is apparent or initially understood. Being culturally
competent means being culturally informed and culturally conscious; that is why it is essential to not only be aware of the cultural values that are present in West Virginia, but it is necessary to have ample knowledge and skills that are valuable as well.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study presents a myriad of possibilities as far as future research is concerned. Because very little has been done in the areas of Appalachian cultural competence and cultural resilience, certain aspects of this research could be splintered and applied in many different ways. Looking at urban versus rural Appalachian cultural values is one way this study could be extended. It would be interesting to see how different cultures within Appalachia are effected by or incorporate the Appalachian cultural values. Of course, one of the best ways to expand upon this research would be to replicate this study and have a larger representation of participants from all over Appalachia, comparing the variations of the cultural values in different areas. Finding ways to extend this research to different disciplines would also be exciting. Since there are many health disparities within the population, finding better, more culturally relevant ways serve the entire population and finding interventions that involve patients better would also be beneficial. Another focus could be on specific cultural values looking more closely at how they evolve. Lastly, the expanding study of psychological capital or PsyCap (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013) is something that could naturally fit into the study of Appalachian cultural resilience and how the people within the region use hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism to bolster and perpetuate the strength within the culture. There is much to explore beyond this study. Hopefully this research will provide the foundation
for many more studies that highlight the strengths and positive attributes of Appalachia as opposed to viewing from a deficit perspective.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this research. Due to the nature of this research, information cannot be generalized to the entire population of Appalachia. Although the Appalachian cultural values (Jones, 1994) are used and the participants were all Appalachian participants, there are some limits to how these findings can be extended to the entire population. This research is emerging and can provide a glimpse into the lives of people from the Appalachian culture in West Virginia only. Many of the participants are from a centralized area in West Virginia and having a representation of people from all over the state in future studies could provide more extensive data. Lastly, because all of the participants were college educated, it would be beneficial to have other participants who did not go to college but rather chose a trade, went into the military, or just simply worked. Even if the same criteria were laid out, broadening the subregions of Appalachia from which participants are drawn could render greater clarity regarding the influences of cultural values, especially when it comes to the newest theme of education and love of learning.

Summary

The information presented in this research is the story of 12 participants who are resilient. They are from West Virginia and embody the cultural values that are common throughout Appalachia. Their stories have been interpreted for the benefit of informing the practice of helping professionals who serve in the region. These stories of resilience
embody the features of the culture and the parts of themselves that are positive and negative. In this way, the protective factors and barriers in their lives can be examined to create a better understanding of what helps to make someone resilient. This can go a long way to helping people find ways to foster resilience from the cultural values that exist in Appalachia, specifically helping professionals who work in the region.

This research can be added to the body of literature that exists regarding Appalachia and resilience. It cannot be used to make predictions about people within the culture or generalize about a particular population. Instead it can be used as a guide for further inquiry, and provide helping professionals with the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to work effectively with people from some Appalachian regions who are culturally different from dominant society. With that, this research should appeal to helping professionals who are interested in working with or who work with people from Appalachia and specifically West Virginia. It should also be of interest to people who are interested in expanding the cultural resilience literature.

**Epilogue**

Over the past two years, I have had ample time to reflect about the interviews, the process of analyzing the data, and the process of writing this dissertation. What strikes me as most profound is that this topic is still very interesting and exciting to me. As I have kept careful track of my thoughts and feelings throughout this process, I have also made sure to keep a close eye on my own judgments. This epilogue provides the insights I gained throughout this process, from beginning to end and it hopefully addresses any
questions of partiality in addition to bringing forth the evolution of my own personal awareness of the Appalachian culture that exists in West Virginia.

At the beginning of this research, I had very little experience with West Virginia. When it was decided that I would narrow my population down from all of Appalachia to just West Virginia, I was somewhat relieved and also worried. I know a few people throughout Appalachia, from the far north to the far south, but I only knew a handful of helping professionals with ties to West Virginia. With West Virginia being the only all Appalachian state, I figured that gaining entry would be much more challenging and feared that people might be somewhat guarded or closed off. What I experienced was quite different. I only had three recruiters, and it did not seem possible to get enough people to find the 12 participants I needed. But before I knew it, the benefits of the interconnectedness of West Virginia showed through and I had the twelve people I needed and a few more participants on reserve. This was a surprise and a relief.

Before I met the participants, I felt it necessary to put my own values and biases in check. I did everything from listening to bluegrass radio shows to talking with people who were from West Virginia. I also took some time to reflect on my own upbringing and what led me to explore this topic. I found that I was able to not only clear up some of the ideas I had that were unfounded about the state; I was able to see some of the similarities and differences between their culture and mine. Interestingly, I found by accident that I have relatives who lived in West Virginia for a few generations and my great-great-great grandparents are buried just across the river in West Virginia, not far from where I live in the foothills of Appalachian Ohio.
Once I made contact with my participants, I was quickly making arrangements to interview everyone. There was only one person who seemed truly uncomfortable, although they were willing to go through with the interview, they no-showed and called me later to apologize. I took this as a sign that they felt awkward and I put them on a reserve list of potential participants instead. Otherwise, everything else came very easily as everyone was extremely accommodating. I not only had interviews set, I had multiple places to have the interviews as well. My recruiters were simply wonderful at explaining the interview, getting people who fit the requirements and who were more than willing to participate, and they also found places for me to interview. I got to see some of the cities that my participants came from including Ravenswood, Charleston, and Huntington. Some of the interviews were done in the church that certain participants went to and I even got to meet some of the people who were their mentors. I had the chance to see where some participants went to college and where others grew up. I felt so honored to be let in so willingly by people who knew so little about me. I do believe that without the recruiters having such important relationships with the participants though, I would not have been able to be included in the way that I was.

It was amazing to see some of the cultural values in action like personalism, sense of humor, love of place, religion/faith, and education. This was even evident with the people I had to interview on the phone. I was initially worried about not having the same kind of rapport or connection to those participants, but what turned was completely different. Not only were those some of my longest interviews, participants went out of their way to send me things and reconnect with me after the initial interviews. After a
while on the phone, I felt like I was talking to an old friend, laughing and tearing up right along with the participants. We were still able to connect in a meaningful way and make the best of the situation. Jeremy and Anne even sent me Jeremy’s book. This was true for the in-person interviews as well. Daisy invited my family and me to her temple and to go on a hike to see her tree. I felt very accepted and extremely grateful for the kindness of my participants and the quality of their interviews.

I knew some things about certain participants as the recruiters would sometimes run by me their situation to see if it fit the description. But, I was truly shaken when I listened to some of the stories. Although reading about it can be emotional, hearing what they had to endure from their voice was very different. I realized that I would have to work very hard to do their stories justice and not put anything else into it than what was there. On the other hand, everyone was able to bring some light to their story and I also wanted to ensure that I brought that out as well. That wonderful sense of humor always came through in every participant.

The thing that was the hardest for me during the interview process was trying not to be their friend or their counselor. Even though I may share some of the same qualities as the participants such as personalism and sense of humor, I had to make sure that I stuck to the interview guide and did not, as we say in the counseling profession, “go down any rabbit holes.” Talking with them sometimes felt like a counseling session, so it was also hard to refrain from going with a hunch they had about something or helping illuminate a pattern in their life. Instead, I just asked questions and kept as linear of a progression as possible.
The interviews were as easy as transcribing was difficult. As the most time-consuming part of the project, transcribing took what seemed like an eternity, with interviews running from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes. Transcribing them took sometimes 4-5 hours per interview, due to my somewhat obsessive attention for detail coupled with my slow typing ability. What it did provide was an opportunity to get very familiar with the interviews and the data in general. Everyone told me about this and I read many times in books and articles, but I found it to be true. Unfortunately this stretched out my timeline significantly, and prolonged my defense by a year. Because of working full time, being a mom and a wife, having a farm, remodeling a house, and being part of a very close-knit family, it was difficult to find time to work on this project consistently. After transcribing, I made outline interviews for the participants to go over with the initial theme breakdown. This too proved to be very time consuming, but it gave me another chance to think about the data and get some feedback from the participants. Almost everyone responded with something, either a quick change or just to say it was fine. It was great!

Writing sometimes came easily and sometimes not so easily. I think because of the denseness of the interviews, along with the vastness of the cultural values, writing sometimes felt endless. There were themes I was more interested in than others, but I needed to equally represent all of them in a way that was fair. Ultimately, writing once again made me pour over the data and come up with the ways in which I wanted to highlight what seemed most prominent. Because it is such a long paper, I found that I would literally run out of words. My mom asked me if I had writer’s block one day and I
explained that I had plenty to say, just not enough ways to say it. In the end, writing was cathartic...exhausting, but cathartic. I feel closer to this topic than I ever have but I also feel like above all else, I have some truly remarkable people to be thankful for: Ralph, Fred, Rod, Wendy, John, Daisy, Anne, Jeremy, Marie, Frank, Sarah, and David (that’s the order they were interviewed, too). Not only do I admire their eloquence, I admire their bravery in telling their stories. They are stories that need to be heard and that helped me to feel motivated to finish and finish well on their behalf. I am so glad they shared their amazing stories because they are not only resilient, they are truly inspirational.

While I was going through this process over the last two years, I was asked to present the Appalachian cultural values and cultural resilience a number of times to various community organizations and groups. The funny thing was that I did not ask to present. I would have never guessed initially that this topic would be valuable in so many ways. What I realized was that since very little has been done with the positive attributes of Appalachia, people are often excited to hear about what makes the culture special rather than simply hearing what plagues it over and over again. Many of the service organizations in Athens County are beginning to include cultural competence training for their workers. Because of this need, people found out about my research and asked me to present. It began with my husband telling his work and from there it has spread. As a result, the topic has stayed fresh in my mind and I am happy to begin presenting on the results of the research as well.

This has been a very fulfilling process. I am glad that I chose the topic that I did. I am glad my committee had me include some of the various aspects of the research that I
did not originally want to include. I am grateful to be applying what I have learned, slowing way down and taking my time with people and truly getting to know them. I have realized that no matter what, the things that make people resilient will eventually come out if there is trust and time to develop rapport. Now I know what to ask about and what to consider that could be more culturally relevant and appropriate. But at the end of all of this, I am mostly glad to be finished with this process. I am glad to be a regular mom again and spend time with my family. I am happy to play in the garden and with our animals without feeling guilty for not working on this project. I am also ready to move onto other aspects of learning and advocating even more about West Virginia, Appalachia, resilience, and whatever else comes along.
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Appendix A: Interview Guide

The following interview guide consists of a set of guidelines that have been laid out for the purposes of the research study, Cultural Resilience Appalachia: Implications for Helping Professionals, conducted by Jamie Linscott. This is an open-ended interview in which this guide provides the structure. The interview will consist of 4 sections: rapport building, childhood stories, adulthood stories, and stories about the object of importance. Questions will be asked in terms of stories associated with these topics. Participants can decline any questions.

I. Rapport Building
- Is there anything you would like to know about this study?
- What name do you want to go by?
- Would you tell me a little about yourself?
- Where are you from?
- Who in your family is from the Appalachian region?
- Is there anything you would like to know about me?

II. Childhood
- Would you tell a story/some stories about some of the things helped you the most as a child?
  - People
  - Other sources of strength
  - Overcoming obstacles
  - Internal strengths
  - External strengths
  - Important things (animals, places, opportunities, etc.)
  - Accomplishments
  - Healing/wellness
  - Support system/s
  - Mutual sources of strength
  - Things outside of West Virginia

III. Adulthood
- Would you tell a story/ some stories about some of the influences that give you strength as an adult?
  - People
- Other sources of strength
- Overcoming obstacles
- Internal/external strengths
- Important things
- Accomplishments
- Healing/wellness
- Support system/s
- Mutual sources of strength
- Things outside of West Virginia

IV. Object of importance
-Would you tell me a story about how and why this is important to you?
- Current influence
- Past influence
- Value
- Origin
- Other people it has touched