Expectations, Choices, and Lessons Learned: The Experience of Rural, Appalachian, Upward Bound Graduates

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
The Patton College of Education of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Tiffany G. Pennock Arnold
December 2017

© 2017 Tiffany G. Pennock Arnold. All Rights Reserved.
This dissertation titled
Expectations, Choices, and Lessons Learned: The Experience of Rural, Appalachian,
Upward Bound Graduates

by
TIFFANY G. PENNOCK ARNOLD

has been approved for
the Department of Teacher Education
and The Patton College of Education by

Frans Doppen
Professor of Teacher Education

Renée A. Middleton
Dean, The Patton College of Education
Abstract

PENNOCK ARNOLD, TIFFANY G., Ph.D., December 2017, Curriculum and Instruction, Social Studies Education

Expectations, Choices, and Lessons Learned: The Experience of Rural, Appalachian, Upward Bound Graduates

Director of Dissertation: Frans Doppen

Students from the Appalachian region, even those who participate in federal TRIO programs such as Upward Bound, face barriers preventing them from succeeding in post-secondary education. High performing, college educated students leave their hometowns for more urban environments, resulting in rural brain drain, while students who did not finish college stay in the community. This study uses a phenomenological approach to explore rural Appalachian Upward Bound graduates’ experiences in high school and beyond to gain insight into what programs can do to assist student’s success in college, as well as foster desire to live in Appalachian communities. This population has been found to want personal, individualized experiences in college even at the higher price tag of small, private institutions. They felt Upward Bound was of great value in preparing them for college academically and socially, but would have liked education in life skills. Participants also lacked understanding and appreciation of their Appalachian culture. Those who completed college were unwilling to stay in their hometowns because of the lack of diversity and social opportunities. Those who did not finish college planned to stay in their home communities. Rural Appalachian Upward Bound programs and educators from the region should incorporate positive cultural assets into the curriculum.
of their programs and schools. Upward Bound Programs should strive to include more education in general life skills, so students are able to function independently away from home. Additionally, larger colleges and universities should seek to provide an individual experience for rural Appalachian students.
Dedication

For my family who has supported me the entire journey, and all my former Upward Bound students who have taught me what it means to have resilience, courage, and grace in the face of hardship. They helped me become an educator and a better person, and keep me passionate about Appalachia’s young people and helping them achieve their dreams.
Acknowledgments

My sincerest and most wholehearted thanks to go my husband Nick, my sons Alden and Jude, and my parents and sister who have been my biggest cheerleaders this entire (long) journey. Without their support, I could never have embarked on this journey, let alone finished it. From my parents caring for my two boys who were only 3 and 5 when I began, while I was in class, to my husband for loving me even when I was frustrated, making dinners and keeping the children occupied so I could study, write, and complete coursework. Thank you.

Thank you to my advisor and chair, Dr. Frans Doppen who stuck with me the entire way, through countless emails, often asking the same things repeatedly, to encouraging me to incorporate a study abroad trip to Northern Ireland in my second semester in the program, to tirelessly reading many, many drafts of chapters. Thank you Dr. Steve Scanlan, Dr. Geoff Buckley, and Dr. Yegan Pillay who were possibly the most supportive committee in the world and made my various defenses an enjoyable experience that felt like talking to colleagues and supportive friends rather than the intimidating meeting it could have been. Additional thanks to Dr. Pete Mather and Dr. Mike Hess who provided many pieces of advice and encouraging words even though they were not on my committee.

Thank you to my best friend, stand in editor, and person I will always view as an inspiration, Dr. Amy Wolfe, for supporting me, commiserating with me, and giving me advice the entire six to seven years that this endless journey took. Thank you for paving the way for me first. Thank you to Heather Hare for being that person I could just text or
email one sentence to in frustration and completely understand what I mean. I also want to acknowledge so many friends who have been there for me along the way and who are taking this journey with me, Sarah Mitchell, Lisa Flowers Clements, Chris Fowler, and more. As well as Dr. Greg Lester who put the seed in my head when he began his program so many years ago and has called me Dr. Arnold ever since. “Thank you” to Kenna Reynolds Warren for being an inspiration for this study, and being a friend who I know wants to fight the same fight that I do.

Lastly, but by far not the least, I need to thank my former students who were participants in this study and the focus of this dissertation. Although they are not all the students who have made a lasting impact on me, they are some of the most amazing people in the world, fighting their own battles, overcoming barriers that most young people in this country will never have to face in order to go after their goals. I want to thank them for letting me be part of their lives while they were in high school and for sharing their stories with me for this study so that I could see the fantastic adults they have become. They inspire me to continue this work and hope that I can make a difference in the future of this region and the lives of other young people who are from Appalachia.
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Rationale for the Study</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Research Objectives</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Significance</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Review of the Literature</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Rural Appalachian Experience</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Appalachia in context</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Industry and economic decline</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Exploitation and the construction of culture</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Appalachian Cultural Traits</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Identity</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Familism’s relationship to social and psychological capital</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Connection to place versus economic pull</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Appalachian Education</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Valuing education</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Challenges of rural schools</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Rural Brain Drain</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Federal TRIO Programs</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Creation of TRIO</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Upward Bound</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. The purpose of Upward Bound</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Appalachian Upward Bound/ Waylon State Community College</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan of operation</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmatic outcomes and objectives</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upward Bound Eligibility</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First generation college students</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-income students</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduation and the College Transition</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human development</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer melt</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Methodology</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the Methodology</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epoché, Bracketing, or Bridling</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling Strategies</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Participant Narratives</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brutus</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Appalachian experience</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and psychological capital</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upward Bound</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary success</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracie</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Appalachian experience</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and psychological capital</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upward Bound</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary success</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Appalachian experience</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Post-Secondary Success ........................................................................................................... 192
Leaving high school ............................................................................................................... 193
Barriers to post-secondary success ...................................................................................... 197
College success and struggles .............................................................................................. 201
Retrospective and Participant Words of Wisdom ................................................................. 210
Looking back ......................................................................................................................... 210
Currently ............................................................................................................................... 212
Words of wisdom ................................................................................................................... 214
Conclusion of Analysis .......................................................................................................... 216
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications ........................................................................... 217
Purpose of the Study .............................................................................................................. 217
Scope of the study and data gathering. .................................................................................. 217
Phenomenology .................................................................................................................... 219
Research Questions .............................................................................................................. 220
Question One: What Can Rural Appalachian Upward Bound Programs Learn from the Experience of Graduates of the Program to Increase Matriculation into and Reduce Attrition in College? .................................................................................. 221
  Finding 1. ............................................................................................................................. 221
  Implication .......................................................................................................................... 222
  Finding 2. ............................................................................................................................. 222
  Implication .......................................................................................................................... 222
  Finding 3. ............................................................................................................................. 223
  Implication .......................................................................................................................... 223
Finding 4. ............................................................................................................................... 226
Implication .............................................................................................................................. 226
Question Two: What Cultural Factors Play into Student’s Decision to Stay or Leave the Region? .................................................................................................................. 223
  Finding 1. ............................................................................................................................. 224
  Implication .......................................................................................................................... 224
  Finding 2. ............................................................................................................................. 224
  Finding 3. ............................................................................................................................. 225
  Implication .......................................................................................................................... 225
  Finding 4. ............................................................................................................................. 226
  Implication .......................................................................................................................... 226
Question Three: How Does this Knowledge Inform Understanding of Rural Brain Drain? .......................................................................................................................... 227
Question Four: What Deficits Prevent Engaged, Rural, Appalachian Upward Bound Students from Succeeding in College? .......................................................... 230
Finding 1. .................................................................................................................. 231
Implication. .................................................................................................................. 231
Finding 2. .................................................................................................................. 231
Implication. .................................................................................................................. 231
Finding 3. .................................................................................................................. 232
Implication. .................................................................................................................. 232
Finding 4. .................................................................................................................. 232
Implication. .................................................................................................................. 233
Finding 5. .................................................................................................................. 233
Implication. .................................................................................................................. 233
Question Five: How Does this Experience Shape What Choices this Population Makes for its Future? .......................................................... 233
Contributions to the Field .......................................................................................... 235
Implications ................................................................................................................ 236
Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 237
References .................................................................................................................. 239
Appendix A: Interview Schedule ............................................................................ 252
Appendix B: Informed Consent ................................................................................. 254
List of Tables

Table 4.1 Defining characteristics of participants ........................................................... 91
List of Figures

Figure 2.1. Map of Appalachian counties. ................................................................. 31
Chapter 1: Introduction

“They always seem to be the ones struggling to make it financially in a lot of ways, and culturally in a lot of ways”

---Gerry describing Appalachia

College access programs such as Upward Bound were created to serve low-income, first-generation college students, including those in rural areas such as the Appalachian region, but may do so at a cost to their families and their communities. Programs support students by providing assistance in preparing for college, but rural Appalachian students who participate in these programs may feel conflicted about going to college and possibly having to leave the region due to their cultural disposition, which refers to their attachment to place and other cultural values and characteristics, as well as a lack of opportunities for those with a college degree (Ali & Saunders, 2006; Lichter & Campbell, 2005; McElroy & Armesto, 1998). Ali and Saunders (2006) suggest that more research on the cultural values of Appalachian students from a qualitative perspective could help to discover what specific traits of Appalachian culture have an impact on students’ career aspirations. Research on this population could provide an understanding of what academic and non-academic preparation Appalachian students might need to succeed in college and motivate them to remain in the region.

The Appalachian region spans from the southern part of New York through areas of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Mississippi, with West Virginia being the only state entirely in the region (The Appalachian Regional Commission, n.d.). This area has
historically suffered from brain drain and may suffer at a more critical level than other regions due to the messages it is getting from society about the need for higher education combined with the loss of high paying mining and manufacturing jobs (Ali & Saunders, 2006; Lichter & Campbell, 2005). Young, educated students are leaving to seek opportunities in major cities leaving those behind who are often undereducated and unable to earn a high enough income to contribute to the tax base of the area. This is due to being both unqualified for jobs paying a higher wage as well as the loss of manufacturing and other low skill jobs once available in the region (Zilliak, 2012). As a result of brain drain the cycle of poverty continues in small towns that will always have an abundance of low-income, first generation college students. In an effort to even the playing field for low-income, first generation students everywhere, the federal government sponsors college access programs to provide youth with assistance to gain admission into college. These are called TRIO programs, which began in the 1960’s with Talent Search, Student Support Services, Upward Bound and later added McNair Scholars, and Educational Opportunity Centers. College access programs such as Upward Bound exist to serve low-income, first generation students by providing assistance in the college process (McElroy & Armesto, 1998).

Upward Bound emerged out of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty legislation in 1964 as a way for the federal government to respond to the issue of low-income students who lack the knowledge and the resources to navigate the college process (McElroy & Armesto, 1998). The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended in 2011, states that “Upward Bound shall be designed to generate skills and motivation
necessary for success in education beyond secondary school” (Higher Education Act of 1965, 2014, p.202). The program addresses a variety of needs that students may have from academic to social and cultural opportunities. Most Upward Bound programs are located in cities and serve primarily low-income people of color. The greatest percentage of students being served by Upward Bound is African American at approximately 45%, with 25% of participants being White, 19% Hispanic or Latino, and 5% Asian (Anderson & Larson, 2009). Due to the urban location of most programs much of the research focuses on programs located in cities, as does most research on education. However, during the 2010-11 school year 20% of the nation’s public-school population was enrolled in a rural school district (Johnson, Showalter, Klein & Lester, 2014). This is a sizable population that warrants study as well. Upward Bound programs located in rural areas such as the Appalachian region are forced to discover innovative ways to serve geographically spread out schools and students, and to address the issues that prevent rural Appalachian students from going to college.

**Rationale for the Study**

There is limited research on rural Upward Bound programs and even less so on ones in rural Appalachia. Focusing on the lived experience of a student who has experienced the phenomenon of being a rural, Appalachian, Upward Bound graduate can provide insights into how all of the components involved in this identity shape the subsequent lives of this population in a way that can impact the region economically and culturally in the future. Studying Upward Bound students after they have completed the program can provide for greater reflection rather than studying those who are currently in
the program because, “Our experiences may sometimes carry significance that we may only experience later, sometimes much later when certain events haunt us or return to us in memories that seem to come not from the past, but from the future – the future latency of past events” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 59).

As young people enter high school and decide to become a part of programs such as Upward Bound they demonstrate that they have the desire to obtain some form of post-secondary education. When they join Upward Bound they declare that they are willing to do the work required to get a post-secondary education. Choosing to participate in Upward Bound commits students to the academic work necessary to matriculate and succeed in college. They are agreeing to spend time on the weekends and during summers in program activities designed to help them achieve their academic goals.

Economically speaking, students who spend three or four years in a program such as Upward Bound have the potential to make a significant economic impact in the Appalachian region, either positively or negatively. When a student does not attend college or stops attending college after taking out loans, he or she then is only able to secure employment paying usually a fraction of what he or she would have been able to earn had he or she completed college. There is a stronger likelihood that students who do not attend post-secondary institutions or drop out will end up on public assistance. According to Pew Research on Social and Demographic Trends (2014), college graduates, ages 21 to 32, who work full time earn approximately $17,500 more a year than employed young adults who only have a high school diploma. Undereducated parents are likely to have children who do not seek higher education either, further
continuing the cycle of poverty and first-generation college students. Lichter and Brown (2011) explain that in rural areas “persistent rural out-migration reinforces cultural homogeneity and shared social values among those left behind” (p. 572). Therefore, when out-migration occurs in rural areas the attitudes about gaining education persist. A study by Brown, Copeland, Costello, Erkanli, and Worthman (2009) on the influences on educational outcomes among Appalachian youth found that “participants with more exposure to family poverty reported less educational attainment, whereas those who had lived with a college-educated parent reported higher attainment during emerging adulthood” (p. 801). Pew research (2014) states that the typical high school graduate’s earnings fell by more than $3,000 between 1965 and 2013, driving home the need for post-secondary education in some form. According to the Rural School and Community Trust (2014), low socioeconomic status can impact not only the student but the community that he or she comes from as well. “Family income level is closely related to the level of preparedness for children entering school, while the educational level of adults in a community is closely related to both community economic well-being and community support for education” (p. 14). When people consistently live in poverty, priorities emerge that may put cultural capital on the back burner. Parents spend time working and trying to pay the bills to get by, rather than having the ability to provide opportunities for their children to learn the necessary skills to succeed in college and beyond. Therefore, the children of parents in poverty are more likely themselves to end up poor and struggling like their parents. Due to the cyclical nature of poverty it is critical
to make sure that students enrolled in Upward Bound have all the tools necessary to succeed in college.

The rural Appalachian component of these Upward Bound students’ identity lends itself to an even more dynamic experience for the students. Because of its history of economic exploitation and their efforts of self-determination, Appalachians have come to value place, community, and economic liberty in addition to a desire to live near their extended families (Howley, 2006; Shaw, DeYoung, & Rademacher, 2005; Wilson, Peterson, & Wilson, 1993). When it is often necessary for students to travel elsewhere to go to college it is difficult to overcome their kinship and place ties. Barcus and Brunn (2009) found that social and familial standing within a community is a more important gauge of place satisfaction than economic conditions. This can lead to students who have a wealth of social capital to want to stay in their community and not work to establish themselves in a new place, therefore they often forfeit post-secondary education to retain their status at home. Additionally, Appalachians are identified by their mistrust of governmental and outside agencies, including schools, which makes the case for a college education an even harder sell (Tang & Russ, 2007). Rural students, and Appalachian students in particular, are often also faced with issues related to low socioeconomic status that affects their levels of academic achievement (Johnson et al., 2014). “Rural residents in Central Appalachia, the Southeast, and the mid-South Delta are least likely to graduate from high school” (Johnson et al., 2014, p.14). All of these factors suggest the need for more research on those rural Appalachian students who would qualify for a program such as Upward Bound.
When students graduate from high school they are at a turning point in their lives. They must rely on their education and values system to guide them on a chosen path. The path of rural Appalachian Upward Bound graduates has many layers that should be explored in order to deconstruct what goes into their decision-making process as well as what contributes to their ultimate success.

**Statement of the Problem**

Federally funded programs such as Upward Bound spend a large amount of public funding per student. The government requires documentation of positive outcomes to ensure continued funding. Parents, students, and program administrators also want to document positive outcomes, particularly when a student has participated in the program for three to four years. Ideally Upward Bound will have provided gains in social and psychological capital for its participants. McElroy and Armesto (1998) found that the more years a student has participated in Upward Bound, the more successful the outcome. Upward Bound students have the resources they need from participating in the program to be successful in college. However, there is a variety of outcomes for students who have been in Upward Bound. There are students who follow their post-secondary goals through to completion and graduate from college as planned. There are also Upward Bound graduates who, despite best laid plans, take an alternative path to the one they have been striving for and ultimately become a negative statistic for the program by not enrolling, dropping out of college, or having many stops and starts in their journey. This results in negative economic and social impacts on the region due to their underemployment and lack of confidence in their own abilities and in pursuing new
opportunities, both educational and vocational. This increases the impact of rural brain
drain on the Appalachian region when college graduates who leave could have
contributed more positively to the local economy and the community as a whole.

Small rural towns often end up spending most of their resources on students who are certain to leave the region. Patrick Carr and Maria Kefalas explore these issues in their 2009 book *Hollowing Out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What it Means for America*. Carr & Kefalas (2009) maintain that it may be best for rural areas to focus on students who are destined to stay in their small towns. In a study on migration among residents in Huntington, West Virginia, Heinemann and Hadler (2015) found that those who plan to stay in the Appalachian region often do so because of strong family ties and local identities rather than economic reasons. This means that it is possible to have educated young adults become stayers despite local economic conditions. However, often stayers are those who end up not getting an education or the training they need to contribute to the sustainability of their community. It would be valuable to discover what makes a student choose to stay in the region even after they have a college degree and what it is about the region that makes them more inclined to leave. It is useful to learn how rural Appalachian Upward Bound students can be better prepared for post-secondary education and their lives in the region. Learning what components of their upbringing contribute to the decision they make to attend or not attend college can help schools and Upward Bound programs understand how to meet students where they are. The problem that is being addressed is: rural Appalachian Upward Bound graduates experience a phenomenon that can inform the way educators approach preparing students for post-
secondary education. There is little research to assess what constitutes that experience. Knowledge of their experience can inform educators, educational policy makers, and rural scholars about how to better prepare students to stay in the region after obtaining an education.

**The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the experience of rural Appalachian Upward Bound students who have during three or four academic years participated in the program and graduated from high school. This study focuses both on students who have gone on to attend college as well as those who have attended and dropped out, or never attended at all. Its purpose is to examine the lived experience of students who have chosen both post-secondary education, and those who, after having had similar high school experiences, have not or began and did not complete college. Consequently, this study is guided by a central research question:

- What is the lived experience of being a rural, Appalachian Upward Bound graduate?

Additional questions that guided the study include: What can rural Appalachian programs learn from the experience of graduates of the program to increase matriculation at and reduce attrition from college? What cultural factors play into students’ decisions to stay or leave the region? How does this knowledge inform understanding of rural brain drain? What deficits prevent engaged rural Appalachian Upward Bound students from succeeding in college? How does this experience shape what choices this population makes for its future? In answering these questions, other rural Upward Bound programs
will gain an understanding of best practices for their programs to help rural students succeed. To answer these questions five following research objectives will be addressed.

**Research Objectives**

1. To describe rural Appalachian Upward Bound graduates from the Appalachian region of Ohio, both those who participated in the program but did not complete college as well as those who did continue to college and finish a degree.

2. To determine what, if any, life events prevented them from succeeding in college and their attitudes toward those life events.

3. To examine students’ beliefs about their Upward Bound and college experience in order to discover ways to address the issues that inhibited their post-secondary success.

4. To discover what activities may have assisted successful Upward Bound students in continuing in college.

5. To determine what values and qualities rural Appalachian students demonstrate that have inspired them to stay in the region.

**Significance**

According to Petrin, Farmer, Meece, and Byun (2011), youth growing up in rural areas encounter a wide array of challenges that can adversely affect their development as they prepare for adulthood. Some of these issues are similar to schools that serve urban populations who face “poverty-related issues, including receiving low scores on school report cards, having lower than average graduation and attendance rates, and enrolling
higher numbers of ‘economically disadvantaged students’” (Drotos & Cilesiz, 2016, p. 226). While the underlying causes of these challenges – poverty, first-generation college status, lack of family knowledge/support – are similar to urban populations, they need to be approached in specific ways in order to help address the effect of brain drain and stop the cycle of poverty in rural Appalachia. By examining these challenges as well as the ways that Upward Bound programs can address them, this study will help Upward Bound programs understand how to meet the unique needs of rural students. This study will also be significant in that it will help address a deficit in research conducted on Appalachian Upward Bound students. According to Anderson and Larson (2009), “mainstream literature rarely takes into account the point of view of students and their experiences within programs designed to help them achieve” (p. 79). This study will take those experiences and perspectives into account.

Methodology

This study will be a phenomenological inquiry of rural Appalachian Upward Bound graduates and their lived experience during the time they were in Upward Bound through high school graduation and what they have experienced in the two to four years following high school graduation. This study includes interviews of ten students who committed three to four years of high school to completing program requirements. Data were analyzed in a systematic way to interpret the essence of the experience as well as program activities that sought to assist the participating students in their life choices. As stated by Sartre, “a human being creates his or her own essence by making certain choices and commitments in life” (Van Manen, p. 123). This study draws on choices and
commitments made by the participants in an effort to learn from them and help those who may come after them.

**Summary**

This chapter outlined the problem that was researched as well as the purpose for the study and its research questions and objectives. The following chapters seek to further explore this phenomenon. In Chapter Two I organized and synthesized the relevant literature regarding components of this study, including what it means to be rural Appalachian, what Upward Bound is and who its participants are, the developmental theory regarding the place in life a student finds himself or herself when he or she graduates from high school, as well as theoretical perspectives pertinent to this study. Chapter Three explains the methodology. Chapter Four includes a case by case analysis of each participant and their story. Chapter Five presents a cross-case analysis, while Chapter Six discusses the research questions and implications for future research and practice.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

In this chapter review the research literature has been examined to deconstruct the many facets of being a rural Appalachian Upward Bound graduate. It includes discussion of the rural Appalachian experience, rural education, rural brain drain, and background on federal TRIO programs, including Upward Bound and those who qualify to participate. In addition, human development theory pertaining to the transition from high school to college was reviewed.

Understanding individual lived experiences is essential to understanding what creates a broader phenomenon. It can guide further inquiry into deeper issues and meaning of a shared experience. Uncovering meaning in individual experiences allows researchers, educators, and those who seek to understand a phenomenon the opportunity to do so through the lens of one or more individuals who experienced it. Van Manen (2014) expands on the idea of deconstructing phenomena by referring to common human experiences to promote the understanding of the importance of phenomenology. “We need to be prepared to deconstruct phenomena such as true love, genuine friendship, and gift giving, so that we may thoughtfully and tactfully aim for the perfection of love, friendship, and gift-giving in our actual personal lives” (p. 71). In this vein, we need to deconstruct the experience of being a rural Appalachian Upward Bound graduate so that we, as educators, may thoughtfully and tactfully aim for a model in which we prepare these students for a life in which they feel supported and successful, no matter what path they may choose.
According to Moustakas (1994), phenomena, or experiences, “are the building blocks of human science and the basis for all knowledge” (p. 26). If this is the case, studying the experience of humans is the most basic and fundamental beginning for building knowledge about the phenomena at hand. Studying the experiences of these students is the beginning of knowledge about how we can foster a student who both seeks a successful post-secondary experience as well as sees the importance and the value of being from Appalachia. On a much larger scale, developing young people who hold these values can potentially address several issues that the region currently faces, such as poverty, education gaps, and rural brain drain.

Approaching the issues of the region through a phenomenological lens can ensure a thorough and more complete understanding of students’ experience. This can help reduce the historical pattern of misunderstandings around which much of the culture of the region was constructed (Batteau, 1990). It will allow scholars to construct meaning about what it is like to be a young person in the region from the ground up, from practical, real experiences of those who are from the region rather than pre-suppositions from those who may view the region through a proverbial microscope and out of context. “Sartre explained that he was drawn to phenomenology because it provided a philosophy of realism, the concrete, and the ordinary things of everyday life” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 118). Moustakas (1994) explained the process of phenomenology by discussing how it is meant to eliminate all pre-judgements. It is meant to help the researcher “reach a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of
the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience” (p. 41). It is from this position of the importance of understanding lived experience, that this study moves forward in reviewing the literature on multiple elements involved in the identity and experience of the population involved. It does so through examining the complexity of the rural Appalachian experience, the background and purpose of Upward Bound, what it means to be a high school graduate on the verge of transition, and by reviewing some of the possible developmental theories that may be applied to this stage of life.

The Rural Appalachian Experience

Appalachia in context. The Appalachian region spans from the southern part of New York through areas of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi, with West Virginia being the only state entirely in the region. It comprises 205,000 square-miles – of geographically diverse landscapes ranging from mountains to rolling hills and farmland. The Appalachian Regional Commission has classified Appalachia into five subregions: Northern, North Central, Central, South Central, and Southern Appalachia (Appalachian Regional Commission, n.d.).
Unfortunately, the region has come to be identified by the historic poverty that has been its prevalent economic state for decades (Couto, 1994; Eller, 2008; Thorne et al., 2005; Ziliak, 2012). According to Black and Sanders (2012), from their chapter entitled “Inequality and Human Capital in Appalachia 1960-2000,” Central Appalachian men were earning just over half the income compared to men from outside the region, and between 1980 and 2000 Appalachian men’s earnings actually fell by 9% (Ziliak,
The statistics on poverty in the region are well documented. The poverty levels in the region reliably are above those of the United States. According to the Appalachian Regional Commission’s report *The Appalachian Region: A Data Overview from the 2008-2012 American Community Survey Chartbook*, published in February of 2014, between 2008-2012 the Appalachian region as a whole had a two percent higher level of individuals living in poverty than the United States. This also takes into account the more economically stable metropolitan counties in the region, notably those in New York, Maryland, and Pennsylvania which boast a lower than the national poverty percentage. Whereas the U.S. median income was $64,585 and the Appalachian median was $54,925, in contrast, in 54 counties that were either rural and/or located in Central Appalachia the median income was less than $40,000. “At $23,486 per capita income in the Appalachian region in the 2008-2012 period was 84 percent of the U.S. average of $28,051” (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2014, p. 42). Additionally, there were 16 Appalachian counties that had a per capita income of less than $15,000. The report notes on many measures that the counties with the highest per capita incomes were usually located in metropolitan areas while the ones with the lowest were located in rural areas (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2014).

According to Thorne et al. (2005), poverty rates are typically much higher in Central Appalachia and in rural counties. Richard Couto (1994) states that the “core of severe family poverty appears in Eastern Kentucky, West Virginia, and contiguous counties of Appalachian Ohio, Virginia, and Tennessee” (p. 160). Ronald Eller (2008) argues that no one seemed to be able to agree on the cause of Appalachia’s poverty or the
solutions to it. For some its “backwardness was a result of geographic isolation and insufficient development, and for others the problem lay in the culture that preserved anachronistic values and prevented people from lifting themselves out of poverty” (p. 40). Although it is dangerous and misguided to only view the region through the lens of poverty, it plays a significant role in how young people develop and view the world. Eller (2008) discusses “insufficient development” as an issue in the region referring to a history of boom and bust cycles that refers to not only economics but also helps to characterize the cultural values that many people in the region hold dear.

**Industry and economic decline.** Appalachia has been known for its contribution to the rest of the nation primarily through the logging and coal industries. Although not entirely rural, the rural areas are where most of the economic decline and poverty has occurred over the last one hundred years (Couto, 2002). In *Forgotten Places: Uneven Development in Rural America*, editors Lyson and Falk (1993) state that “conditions in urban and in rural Appalachia often bear little resemblance to each other” (p. 10). The extinction of rural towns has the potential to be catastrophic for the rest of the nation. Rural America is where the food and raw materials for textiles come from for the rest of the nation (Stauber, 2001). “According to rural development experts, for every five to seven farms that go out of business, one business in town folds. Each job lost in town means there is that much less money circulating in the community, being spent at the supermarket, hardware store, or barber shop” (Davidson, 1990, p. 57).

The manufacturing and extraction jobs in rural Appalachia simply no longer exist. The jobs of decades ago that required little to no education or skill have disappeared,
leaving an undereducated workforce with little opportunity for advancement (Irvin, Byun, Meece, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2012; Roscigno & Crowley, 2001). According to Molly Killian and Lionel Beaulieu (1995) in their chapter “Current Status of Human Capital in the U.S.” there is an ongoing debate among those who study rural issues regarding the match between the types of skills that rural workers typically have and the type of skills that manufacturers require. Stauber (2001) maintained that even if these jobs did exist that the type of manufacturing that would come to rural areas is not going to be the basis for rural economic development.

When coal was the king of energy production, according to Harvey, “coal mined in Appalachia was the source of more than half the bituminous coal mined in the country and almost all U.S. coal exports” (as cited in Maggard, 2002, p. 247). After World War II, the mines became mechanized and shifted from underground to surface mining to the extent of reducing the need for labor. “By decreasing labor costs, surface mining allowed large companies to invest in huge pieces of equipment that transformed the coal-bearing flatlands and hills of the Appalachians into massive quarries” (Black, 2011, p. 44). In response to regulations against the original surface mining called strip mining, coal companies began changing the geographic makeup of the land all together with the invention of an even more destructive method of coal extraction, mountain top removal (Black, 2011; Buckley & Allen, 2011). While Appalachia depended on the coal industry to be economically viable, its residents resented the exploitation by the coal industry. Eller (2008) describes this cognitive dissonance between local residents and the coal industry. “Some of the most bitter and enduring struggles, however, challenged the power
of the coal industry over the economy, health, and lives of coal country people and struck at the heart of systemic problems such as land use, taxation, and the hidden human costs of an extractive, single-industry economy” (p. 144). According to Fisher and Smith (2012), “the coal industry has successfully positioned itself alongside its workers and the union as an embattled ‘insider’ forced to fight for economic survival against extremist ‘tree-huggers’ and other presumed ‘foreigners’ to the region” (p. 4). This history of economic strife takes its toll on the young people of the region both in terms of identity and opportunity.

In *An American Challenge: A Report on Economic Trends and Social Issues in Appalachia*, Couto (1994) stated “in West Virginia, Appalachian Ohio, and Eastern Kentucky schools are more likely to face the prospect of preparing a workforce for either distant employment opportunities or for changed and declining employment opportunities at home” (p. 10). Leaving for outside opportunities is not a new phenomenon in the Appalachian region. According to Heinemann and Hadler (2015), migration out of a region in the U.S. can be for different reasons than in other parts of the world, and it is important to consider what those factors are. They posit this is especially important when rural out-migration today occurs primarily among the more educated residents.

The stress of poor economic conditions can affect more than just fiscal matters. Rural poverty can play host to a multitude of not only economic issues but social issues as well that can snowball into a cycle of despair for rural towns and residents. While poverty is something that affects most Americans at some point in their lives, Couto (1994) suggests that the rural poor are more likely to experience long-term poverty than
the poor in cities (p. 35). The poverty in small towns influences more than just those who lack income. Tickamyer and Duncan (1990) suggest “it is becoming clear that the socioeconomic characteristics of communities have an impact on the economic success of residents regardless of their own socioeconomic background. Location in social space affects economic opportunity and life chances of persons in that locale, providing the parameters for aspirations and opportunities” (p. 80).

It seems Appalachia is often lumped into generalizations about rurality in the rest of the nation or is ignored in discussions about the effects on poverty, when it is a distinct region that requires a scholarly literature all its own. Tickamyer (2006) has commented that “even though the War on Poverty was prompted by disturbing images of rural poverty, specifically the hardship and deprivation clearly visible in Appalachia and Deep South landscapes, their primary focus quickly turned to urban ghettos, especially in the wake of civil unrest and urban disturbances of the era” (p. 421).

Oftentimes measures of economic hardship rely on unemployment statistics; however, in rural areas this is not an accurate measure. Simply using these figures can leave an inaccurate impression of poverty in Appalachia. Rural poverty differs from urban poverty in that one needs to examine unemployment in rural areas by multiple measures. Davidson (1990) states that they should include discouraged workers who are no longer looking for work and involuntary part time workers. He argues that compared to urban workers rural residents are oftentimes discouraged and no longer look for employment, more often work inadequate hours to support their families, and because they more often live in two-parent families than the urban poor they are less likely to
qualify for assistance programs. While clearly impoverished, this leaves Appalachian families even further disadvantaged compared to their urban counterparts. “Social and economic policy both within and across nations largely neglects rural poverty and directly or indirectly supports efforts to turn the rural poor into the urban proletariat and underclass” (Tickamyer, 2006, p. 411).

**Exploitation and the construction of culture.** There are many events that occurred in the long history of the region that have led to the state that it is in today. There have been many “booms” stemming from the logging and coal industry, as well as the subsequent “busts” that occurred after those industries had passed their prime due to new technology and mechanization. Many authors, such as Allen Batteau (1990), Harry Caudill (1963), Cynthia Duncan (1999), Ron Eller (2008), Stephen Fisher (2012), and Henry Shapiro (1978) have written about these industries and the way they transformed the region in some positive, but also many negative, ways. They discuss the injustices and exploitation that has occurred over time and have contributed significantly to the way that residents of the region and outsiders view Appalachia today. Some suggest that the rest of the country has created the “construction” of an Appalachian culture that has since been somewhat adopted as Appalachian characteristics by the people themselves. It is outside the parameters of this study to say that this culture is a construction or not but it is a viewpoint that should be taken into consideration when examining the role that industry and exploitation have played in the culture and values of the region.

Scholars, such as Batteau (1990), would say that some of this cultural construction occurred by those in the region who believed that by drawing attention to the
region’s problems, the region would obtain the help that it needed. For example, some of this exploitation was a result of authors such as Harry Caudill, who in his 1962 book *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area*, wrote about the abject poverty, lawlessness, inbreeding, and lack of intelligence that he saw as prevalent in the region. Although Caudill’s representation may not be factual, it is not any less real in the minds of those who have read it. Despite proof of his inaccuracies it creates more of the distorted image that people have of the region than any others. Batteau (1990) believes that “reading about Appalachia will always have a different poetic unity than personally experienced Appalachia, despite any amount of effort to correct its semantic inaccuracies” (p. 8).

This construction of Appalachian culture in the minds of those from outside the region occurred as a result of color fiction in the late 1800’s, the benevolence of missionaries in the early 1900’s, the coal wars and struggles of the 1930’s through the 1970’s, as well as through elements of popular culture today such as television shows, movies and fiction. It occurred because of exploitation by missionaries who came to the area believing it was without churches and schools and portraying it as such to those outside to establish need in order to show success in alleviating need, through coal mine owners and operators who took advantage of ‘dumb, backward’ landowners and minorities to obtain mineral rights and cheap labor, and through the media who sensationalized poverty through images such as those in “Christmas in Appalachia,” a 1965 CBS documentary (Batteau, 1990; Shapiro, 1978). As Henry Shapiro wrote in his 1978 book, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, those that originally wrote about Appalachia and
can be somewhat credited with “discovering” Appalachia in the 1890’s, “were the first to assert that ‘otherness’ which made of the mountainous portions of 8 southern states a discrete region, in but not of America, and which after 1890 would seem to place Appalachia and America in radical opposition” (p. 4). This opposition would continue through today, both economically and culturally.

Gaventa (1980) wrote about the region in terms of exploitation and powerlessness of those who live there to affect change immediately following the decline of the coal industry, and it can be argued, up through today. “In a word, Central Appalachia is a region of poverty amidst riches; a place of glaring inequalities. And yet, at least on the basis of social science literature on the region, the inequalities do not appear to have prompted major challenges from those deprived” (p. 35). Both Gaventa (1982) and Tickamyer (2006) described the methods of the federal and state governments to “help” people of the region, not by creating local economic opportunities, but by trying to connect them to more urban areas. Instead of seeing the value of rural spaces and towns in Appalachia, this meant that “government policy focused not upon rural reform but upon building highways to connect rural regions with urban centers and on establishing ‘growth centers’ in which to encourage industrial development” (Gaventa, 1982, p. 127). All of this served to further alienate those who felt connected to, and passionate about working and living in the rural areas of the region. Authors such as Gaventa and Duncan do not claim that all who live in Appalachia are victims, they also point out that there are many natives from the region who have benefited greatly from the power dynamics that have come into play since the “invention” of Appalachia. Gaventa describes the “local
elite” as business owners and professional people who “in certain circumstances may emphasize their identity with the local culture; and at other times .... are likely to express contempt for those beneath them who retain more traditional ways” (p. 130). In Worlds Apart, Duncan (1999) describes the town of Blackwell, a town in an Appalachian state, which has many local families who have historically been at the top of local society, including a bank manager who regularly gives loans to residents based on their family name, or the employees at the Department of Employment who give the best jobs to their neighbors. Fisher and Smith (2012) contend that “every place, even the beloved home place of Appalachia, is marked by and implicated in the exploitation and injustice that are produced beyond but also within its boundaries. The privileged and powerful are not only ‘outsiders’ but also in our midst – indeed, in some instances are us” (p. 269). The issue of exploitation is not one that is solely focused on those who are outside the region, but also on the minority of residents inside the region who have the means to socially and economically stratify their local communities so that they continue to benefit and remain at the top.

Viewing the region through a historical lens recognizes that poverty is not a new phenomenon and has made the region the focus of more than its fair share of debatable government interventions seeking to alleviate poverty and curb migration out of the region. In his book Uneven Ground Ronald Eller (2008) details the various ways that outsiders have tried to “help” the Appalachian region since it became the focus of the War on Poverty during the 1960’s. The media surrounding the War on Poverty portrayed mountain people as victims and in need of the benevolence of outside assistance, in turn
often serving to exacerbate the already negative views that the rest of the country had of the region. This came in the form of documentaries such as “Christmas in Appalachia” and other news stories documenting the state of Appalachia. Eller states that “education and health programs were designed to encourage out-migration from rural areas rather than improve public services where people lived” (p. 193). The even more unfortunate side effect of out-migration is that in this region people leave when it is in decline but others do not move in when the region is prosperous (Ziliak, 2012). It has been shown that those who leave are often times the most educated residents of the region (Haaga, 2004).

**Appalachian Cultural Traits**

As a culture, Appalachian people possess many characteristics that have developed over time to make the region a unique subset of the country. “Often considered as simply part of a lower socioeconomic group rather than as a cultural minority, people of Appalachian culture have their own distinct cultural values that differ from those of mainstream Americans” (Tang & Russ, 2007).

Throughout history the Appalachian region has been subjected to ridicule, stereotypes, and prejudice in the media and people’s views of its culture (Jones, 1977; McGuire, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). The media often choose to portray Appalachian people in a way that leaves little desire for those who go elsewhere for post-secondary education to come home, and leaves little confidence for those who might stay that they will ever succeed in higher education. “The dilemma is that Appalachians are often forced to choose between two equally unacceptable identities; on one hand, that
they are just like everybody else and undeserving of special attention; on the other hand, 
their culture is inferior and to blame for most of the problems in the region (Keefe, 2005, 
p. 12). Many who have studied the region subscribed to the culture of poverty mentality 
to explain the ongoing economic conditions of the area. Those who believe this view 
continuing poverty in the region as part of the culture of the area and feel that it continues 
because being poor has now ingrained itself so firmly in the culture that the residents do 
not know how or desire to be anything but poor (Batteau, 1990; Eller, 2008). Despite 
inferiority and the Culture of Poverty model being the dominant thought about the culture 
by most outsiders, careful study of the commonly understood traits of the region can 
provide insight on how to best help its sustainability (Batteau, 1990; Billings & 
Tickamyer, 1993; Shapiro, 1978; Tickamyer, 2006; Whisnant, 2009). Turning to regional 
scholars such as Loyal Jones (1977) can provide a positive perspective on Appalachian 
culture and how to recognize values in its young people.

**Identity.** Many studies on Appalachian culture have generated a multitude of 
unique characteristics that have contributed to Appalachian identity. These characteristics 
can be developed in positive ways in young people who wish to stay and contribute to 
their home communities. Cooper, Knotts and Livingston (2010) found that a highly-
educated person is more likely to have a sense of identification with Appalachian identity 
than someone who has little education. This is an indication that the region can have a 
positive association for those residents who can be the biggest contributors to its success. 
The problem can become, according to Cooper et al., that the more someone identifies
with Appalachia, the less he or she sees growth of the region as positive, mainly due to the appreciation for small towns and disdain of outside influences.

Appalachian people are known for their egalitarianism, person-orientation, tolerance, faith, self-determination, sense of place, individualism, and traditionalism (Jones, 1977; Maloney, 2005; Reiter, Katz, Ferketich, Runnin & Paskett, 2009). However, they also have some less productive cultural traits that make it hard to convince them of the value of education, such as a mistrust of authority, including the government and schools, which has evolved over time after repeatedly being taken advantage of by those who claim to have come to “help” (Eller, 2008). Eller described such episodes in Uneven Ground as over time eroding the belief that Appalachian people could lift themselves out of poverty, and enforcing the idea that the region itself was to blame for its economic condition rather than “as the product of inequities fostered by society or economic modernization” (p. 91). Richards-Schuster and O’Doherty (2012) comment that young people in the region “grapple with confusing messages and experiences that both celebrate and denigrate their cultures and communities, disconnecting youth from their homes and from positive individual and collective identities” (p. 78).

**Familism’s relationship to social and psychological capital.** The region is arguably best known for the strong kinship ties among its people as both an asset and a hindrance. In the case of educational attainment and brain drain in the region, if a student’s family influence helps him or her decide to pursue post-secondary education, it is an asset to a young Appalachian student; however, it may also influence him or her to decide against going to college. As Ali and Saunders (2006) have noted, a student’s
interpretation of parental expectations has a strong impact on the decision to seek post-secondary education. It is a common theme in the region for students to want to stay and live close to their families, perhaps more so than rural students from other areas (Howley, 2006). The strong value placed on the opinions of family members has evolved out of the isolation of Appalachian communities throughout the region’s history from mainstream culture and more metropolitan areas (Tang & Russ, 2007). As a result of the belief that families in the region discourage higher education, in an educational setting kinship ties can be often undervalued as a resource for educational attainment (Howley, Harmon, & Leopold, 1996).

It has been found that the community can work to promote engagement for youth that are found to be of high competence, yet can work against youth who are identified as high risk (Petrin, Farmer, Meece, & Byun, 2011). When influential people in the community, such as teachers, coaches, and civic leaders deem a student to be someone who will be successful in college and career, they are likely to be a positive influence on a young person’s decision-making process regarding pursuing higher education. However, if a student has not performed up to their standards or has fallen through social cracks and is not seen as a future leader, the community influence can be negative. This concept is known as social capital and can be used to study how social ties can promote well-being (Dufur, Parcel, & McKune, 2008). Most of the research literature uses the concept of social capital to focus on how community, school, and family relationships can help students succeed (Dufur, et al, 2008; Dyk & Wilson, 1999; Vorhaus, 2014). This specific use of social capital primarily originated with James S. Coleman and his
expansion of earlier theories that hold that family background plays a central role in the success of students. Coleman expanded the idea by stating that “family background is analytically separable into at least three different components: financial capital, human capital, and social capital.” (Coleman, 1988, p. s109). While most theorists on this issue maintained that social capital was a positive attribute in students’ lives, Coleman also saw the ways in which it might affect a student negatively. He saw that, “although social capital may enable certain goals, it may also constrain others. The relative access to social capital might account for within group differences and shed light on why adolescents who grow up in particular families or communities are more likely to behave in a manner that enhances their educational progress” (Dyk & Wilson, 1999, p. 479). When applying this to Appalachian students from backgrounds that may be low-income and first generation, this means that the communities they come from may not support their educational attainment, thereby showing that social capital can also affect psychological capital and self-efficacy. It is not only that social capital might be absent but that it may also have negative impacts on the student.

Psychological capital is “an individual’s positive psychological state of development that is characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success” (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007, p. 3). All of these
factors contribute to a student’s success, and may affect students from Appalachia due to their close ties with family and their communities.

Bandura’s Theory of Self-efficacy is based on the premise that in order to be effective in one’s goals that individuals must possess self-efficacy. “Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). If Appalachian students do not have high self-efficacy they may not be able to overcome the social capital that they have obtained that may not support post-secondary education. Students from the region may feel that their options are limited in what they can do after high school and therefore do not have the ability or the desire to achieve post-secondary success. Bandura (1997) argued that “given the same environmental conditions, people who have the ability to exercise many options and are adept at regulating their own motivation and behavior will have greater freedom to make things happen than those who have limited means of personal agency” (p. 6). Students who do not have the social support to set challenging goals will also lack the self-efficacy to believe they can achieve set goals. According to Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons (1992), those who believe they can be effective set more challenging goals, they put forth more effort, and they are able to persist even when faced with difficulties. Appalachian students may have families or social networks who undermine their sense of self-efficacy, particularly because the culture is known to have such strong kinship ties.

Appalachian natives are known for their strong ties to family and place. This can be an asset in many ways because it instills a desire to remain and work in their
communities but can also become a barrier for students deciding their path after high school. The importance of kinship has been referred to as a “pre-modern” characteristic in which family and kinship obligations come before individual activities (DeYoung, 1991). Students feel the need to remain with their families to provide financial support preventing them from fully participating in extracurricular school or community activities that may require practice or time outside of regular school hours (Witherspoon & Ennett, 2010).

Kinship ties can create an unwillingness to leave the region and severely limit students’ post-secondary options. Rural students are often more attached to place than non-rural youth, and physical distance from educational institutions makes choosing post-secondary education an even bigger decision (Brown, Copeland, Costello, Erkanli, & Worthman, 2009). A parent’s attitudes about higher education can also affect a student’s willingness to attend college. “Parents are particularly distrustful of career education programs that prepare their children for opportunities not available in their home area and that could require them to leave the region” (Tang & Russ, 2007). Because parents are aware of the limitations in the region for employment they realize the high probability of their children having to leave in order to use their education.

**Connection to place versus economic pull.** There are students who may be so attached to their hometowns that they do not pursue educational opportunities and the potential for financial security. These students should be the students that communities look to for sustainability because of their commitment to place. In *Hollowing out the Middle*, Carr and Kefalas (2009) discuss the connection to place that rural students are
often known for. They differentiate between “Stayers,” those who typically do not seek post-secondary education, choosing to stay closer to home and “Achievers,” those that the community puts many resources into so that they go to college and oftentimes in the process lose that connection or desire to return. The parents of stayers typically believe that college and education can change you. They believe that college graduates act differently and feel that they are better than those in the towns they came from (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Caitlin Howley (2006) found that rural parents are more likely than non-rural parents to have turned down a job because it was not in their community by a margin of 33.2% to 7.6%. Stayers often take on adult type responsibilities at a young age, unlike those who pursue a four-year degree. Stayers get married early, get full time jobs early, and have children at a young age as the culture of the area emphasizes, especially for women (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Killian & Beaulieu, 1995).

The literature has shown a strong connection to place as a fundamental Appalachian value. This creates a cognitive dissonance in those “achievers” who have been groomed their whole lives to leave the region and prosper elsewhere. Howley (2006) characterizes connection to place by “meanings and relationships associated with land, nature, and local history and knowledge.” She argues that these attachments can be advantageous to rural youth but are typically ignored or devalued (p. 65). Loyal Jones (1997) elaborated his connection to place noting:

I have an abiding feeling about place – my place – where I grew up and about the people who live or lived there… It has been twenty-five years since I lived there, but home in a special sense, means to me that long gone house that faced fields
rolling to the Hiawassee. I go back in my mind to discourse with those who shared this place with me (p. 55).

Connection to place continues to be strong even amongst those who have left the region due to economic circumstances. Appalachian identity is one that is carried with residents wherever life may take them and can be cultivated to inspire young educated residents to remain in the region or return to it. This is a great advantage to those seeking to draw achievers back into the region or work with those remaining in the region to gain post-secondary education. In fact, Cooper et al. (2015) contend that the less education a person has the more likely he or she is going to reject the region. This may be because with less education comes a feeling of fewer options for going elsewhere. It is important to note that the ideal stayer or achiever/high-flyer is he or she who remains or returns to the region by choice, not by default which is what often happens with those lacking post-secondary education (Howley, Harmon, & Leopold, 1996). Howley et al. (1996) comment that “for rural teachers, the inevitability of students having to choose to stay or leave usually compounds the difficulty of encouraging scholarship and academic excellence among rural students … rural youth can choose to stay, but they are likely to believe – with most of the world – that the choice is a mark of their failure” (p.159). This is primarily due to the prevalence of those who stay not having the resources to leave. Therefore, educated youth believe that success means having the ability to go elsewhere, and if they do not, they have failed.

Karl Stauber (2001) believes that the primary reason that brain drain occurs is not due to a lack of interest in staying, or the fact that all of those who leave dislike their
hometowns. He and other researchers indicate that many want to stay because they want a nice place to raise kids where they know their neighbors and their families are there to help (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Petrin et al, 2014; Stauber, 2001). In fact, Petrin et al. (2011) found that high achieving rural students experience tension between seeking post-secondary education and their attachment to rural lifestyle (p. 1093). However, in combination with community expectations and those of school teachers and administrators, an uncertain economic future is a force that even the most committed achiever cannot deny.

**Appalachian Education**

There is a noticeable education gap between the Appalachian region and the rest of the country. The 2011-2015 Survey (2017) for the Appalachian Regional Commission reported that 13.3 percent of the population in the United States, age 25 and over, had less than a high school diploma, while Appalachia had 14.5 percent and North Central Appalachia, which includes southeast Ohio, was at 14.3 percent, a full percentage above the overall level of the U.S. The gap grows wider in regard to post-secondary education. In the United States population, age 25 and over, 29.8 percent held a bachelor’s degree or more, Appalachia had 22.6 percent. In Central Appalachia only 19.3 percent of the population, age 25 and over, held a Bachelor’s degree, more than ten percent below the national statistic. The report concludes that “regardless of age, the prevalence of four-year college completion among adults remains well below the U.S. average in many parts of the region” (p. 52). In his report for the Appalachian Regional Commission entitled
Educational Attainment in Appalachia, John Haaga (2004) commented on the education gap and brain drain and the effect it has on the region:

To the extent that Appalachian residents who complete higher education within the region stay, and both original residents and others completing higher education outside the region move in, then the working-age population with higher education grows. Appalachia will lose ground to the rest of the country if its “balance of trade” with the rest of the country is not positive, that is, to the extent that those moving into the region have lower levels of education than those moving out (Haaga, 2004, p. 11).

Lichter and Campbell (2005) provide concurring statements regarding out migration from Appalachia stating that the region has been the victim of out migration for decades as more of its “best and brightest [have] fled for better economic opportunities, leaving behind the less educated, the unemployed, and the impoverished” (p. 22). They state that it is commonly believed in the region that the investment in education is not worth the return that one gets from it when one plans to stay. The benefits do not materialize in a region with too few employment opportunities for graduates creating “disincentives” for the area to invest valuable dollars in education at both the community and personal level (Lichter & Campbell, 2005, p. 23).

Valuing education. In the limited literature on rural education there is much discussion on the educational aspirations of rural students (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Hektner, 1995; Howley, 2006; Petrin, Schafft, & Meece, 2014; Rosicgno & Crowley, 2001; Sherman & Sage, 2011). The research addresses the types of students who choose
to pursue post-secondary education as well as the gap between education in the region and the rest of the country.

Wilson, Peterson, and Wilson (1993) found that educational attainment is influenced by different variables for low income students than for middle class students. Among low-income Appalachian female students, it was found that the father’s education and the parent’s attitudes towards education were variables when determining the student’s educational attainment. Attitudes such as feeling threatened by formal education and the idea that it runs counter to ideas are “distinctively rural” (Howley, 2006, p.66). They feel that education is getting students ready to be away from home and learn the ways of somewhere new.

For some discussion about Appalachian educational aspirations and attainment means understanding that school oftentimes reinforces the dominant culture of which Appalachian children do not necessarily feel they are a part or can relate to. Bean (2006) makes the point that “when students are called upon to take on the voice of the academy, many see that voice as representative of the culture of others, a culture to which they do not belong” (p. 243). However, learning to relate to middle class culture is essential for student success. Van der Jagt and Madison (2006) posit that “school achievement and successful employment are dependent on the individual’s ability to demonstrate middle class values and customs as required” (p. 317). They suggest that low-income students can break into the dominant culture by employing a number of mechanisms such as code-switching, or being able to move from one social class to another by using two different sets of “rules” or information. Code-switching is something that is often discovered late
and can impact the way that students interact with others in a higher education setting. If students do not know how to employ this strategy early on they may have a hard time relating to school and may not feel like they belong there. Parents might view this strategy as students betraying their culture and the way they were raised.

Wallace and Diekroger (2000) found that Appalachian students had been exposed to discouraging messages regarding the pursuit of higher education. Negative messages to those students who are less likely to have positive interactions with school officials and community members can have a big impact. In their discussion of how low-income students can achieve in school, Stephens, Brannon, Markus and Nelson (2015) state that Students will have a greater chance of gaining access to higher education and performing up to their potential when they have the sense that ‘students like them’ – with backgrounds, cultures, or selves similar to their own – can fit in the academic environment and are empowered to do what it takes to succeed there (p. 3).

**Challenges of rural schools.** Rural schools are faced with a multitude of challenges that students have to overcome before going to college. With depressed property tax revenue, there is less educational funding available for rural schools, leading to an even worse educational situation (Roscigno & Crowley, 2001). In *Teaching with Poverty in Mind: What being Poor Does to Kids’ Brains and What Schools Can Do About It*, Jensen (2009) illustrates that poor schools are often on the receiving end of inexperienced teachers which can result in poor teaching abilities. He argues that “high poverty, high minority schools receive significantly less state and local money than do
prosperous schools, and students in such schools are more likely to be taught by teachers who are inexperienced or teaching outside of their specialties” (p. 38). With poor education, the cycle of poor people continues.

Stayers are often the children in rural schools who at an early age are identified as at high risk. Similar to Carr & Kefalas (2009), Petrin et al. (2011) found that despite staying in the area these students may not have a positive view of their communities, possibly because of the lack of positive attention they receive in school. They maintain that “the more pressing issue may be identifying ways to support high risk youth who may not have the necessary skills or resources to leave the community but who also may have the desire to stay” (p.1103). Students in rural and small schools have less access to full time and certified counselors (Irvin et al., 2011). The access students get to their high school guidance counselor can be limited, and many schools cannot afford to hire more than one guidance counselor to serve the school or entire district. The Ohio Department of Education (2017) states that the recommended ratio should be 2.3 counselors per 1,000 students. However, according to the Department’s school report cards, during the 2015 - 2016 school year none of six Ohio high schools in one Appalachian county in Ohio had ratios that were more than 1.9 counselors per 1,000 students (Ohio Department of Education, 2017). Since time is limited counselors often spend more time with students they see as potential college students, rather than those who do not appear to be college bound. “The fact that disadvantaged, rural, and minority students are less likely to receive program planning counseling than are their more advantaged and white counterparts
implies that students who need good advice most probably get it the least” (Lee & Ekstrom, 1987, p. 306).

“Participation in school activities may improve student’s educational aspirations and be especially important for youth that struggle to maintain a positive view of school” (Irvin et al., 2011). Yet many schools have difficulties providing school activities for all because of a sheer lack of resources. Rural schools lack adequate teachers, guidance counselors, coaches and academic supports that are often needed to provide an advantageous school experience for all (Buchmann, Condron, & Roscigno, 2010; Irvin et al., 2011; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; ODE, 2013).

A barrier to educating Appalachian residents who have the desire to stay is often access to post-secondary education or a lack thereof. This lack of access can be attributed to the first-generation status of most of the youth in the region (Aronson, 2008; Witherspoon & Ennett, 2010), the absence of positive role models who have obtained a college education (Durlauf, 2012), the lack of quality schools with guidance counseling and curricular options (Duncan, 1999; Irvin et al., 2011; Shaw, DeYoung & Rademacher, 2005), as well as a knowledge deficit about financial aid procedures and options if they do want to go to college (Aronson, 2008; Buchmann, Condron & Roscigno, 2010).

**Rural Brain Drain**

Across the United States there are thousands of small towns that are devastated by the loss of educated young people. Towns are on the brink of collapse because there are not enough taxpayers, consumers, and workers to keep themselves afloat (Carr &
Kefalas, 2009). The impact of this rural brain drain can be felt far and wide across the country (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Davidson, 1990; Killian & Beaulieu, 1995).

Rural outmigration is not a new phenomenon. Following World War II nearly four million people left the primarily rural Appalachian region for larger mid-western cities seeking greater economic opportunities (Obermiller, Wagner, & Tucker, 2000). Davidson (1990) states in his book Broken Heartland: The Rise of America’s Rural Ghetto that in a one-year period between 1985 and 1986, rural America lost 632,000 people. This loss was felt from New York to Appalachia to the Pacific Northwest. However, during the Great Migration and in 1985 it was sheer population loss that was the issue, not necessarily the loss of its most educated, economically viable residents. That is not the case with the more recent occurrence of rural brain drain where young people are leaving to get an education and not returning.

Although overall the national achievement gap in education is narrowing, in rural areas it is increasing. In 1970 only five percentage points separated the most educated regions from the least educated regions in the nation in terms of degree attainment. By the year 2000 the gap had more than doubled to 13 percentage points, thereby proving that it is not just a population loss that is occurring but a brain drain (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). The number of college educated people in rural areas is narrowing faster than just overall population loss. The loss of this earning potential leaves rural areas in danger of extreme levels of poverty and joblessness.

It is vital for discovering ideas on how to curb the rural brain drain that we must first understand the students who leave as well as those who stay. Although Petrin,
Schafft and Meece (2014) disputed some of Carr and Kefalas’ claims, many other studies have affirmed their findings (Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Howley, C.W., 2006; Irvin, et.al, 2012; Sherman & Sage, 2011; Witherspoon & Ennett, 2011).

_Hollowing Out_ follows the premise that small towns are contributing to their own demise by cultivating certain students for and alienating others from higher education. The authors maintain that rural brain drain is actually enhanced by towns and will ultimately cause them to lose their brightest and most highly educated graduates.

According to Carr and Kefalas (2009), towns are missing an opportunity to thrive by ignoring the stayers to focus on the achievers and the returners. They believe that if those young people who want to stay in the area are trained and invested in, that rural brain drain will not have the same negative impact on small towns that it currently has. This investment may best begin in the local schools. Sherman and Sage (2011) found that although rural areas often look to schools as a “source of community cohesion” they actually become a cause of brain drain. They describe in detail how a rural area in California engaged in the same sort of funneling out of achievers as did the town of Ellis (pseudonym) in _Hollowing Out the Middle_. Sherman and Sage (2011) agree that it is critical to look at how rural children are sorted to become stayers and leavers. They found that it is important to examine how both family and community influences impact the educational systems in small towns. Petrin et al. (2014) maintain that their data indicate that school and educational professionals are not the main reason students plan to leave their homes. However, it is possible that their positive attention can give resources to students who are already high achieving that would make it easier for them to leave.
Although Petrin et al. found that positive contacts with school personnel are not indicative of achiever status, Witherspoon and Ennett (2011) found contradictory evidence indicating that participation in extracurricular activities may reflect school engagement which in turn positively affects the students who participate. Carr and Kefalas (2009) note that achievers are typically more involved in extracurricular activities, meaning they have more positive contacts with school than those who do not pursue post-secondary education. The literature shows that achievers learn that it is in their best interest to leave parents, schools, and the community as a whole (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Hektner, 1995; Petrin et al., 2011; Sherman & Sage, 2011).

**Federal TRIO Programs**

**Creation of TRIO.** Historically the federal government has recognized the need for programs in Appalachia to assist low-income first-generation college students in order to break the cycle of generational poverty in the region. The most well-known response to Appalachian struggles and poverty across the nation began in 1964 with President Johnson’s fulfillment of President Kennedy’s promise to view Appalachian poverty firsthand (Eller, 2008). These visits helped to spur the creation of the Higher Education Act of 1965 which provided for the creation of a college access program called Upward Bound. The act states, as amended on December 26th, 2013, that “the secretary shall carry out a program to be known as Upward Bound which shall be designed to generate skills and motivation necessary for success in education beyond secondary school” (Higher Education Act of 1965, 2014). Eller (2008) notes that the small mountain colleges that received federal funds for Upward Bound in the late 1960’s were able to “extend their
traditional mission of community based service into more distant hollows while providing financial support for their students and enhancing institutional growth” (p. 113).

**Upward Bound**

**The purpose of Upward Bound.** Upward Bound is a pre-college program that is designed to provide academic, social, and cultural opportunities for low-income, first-generation college students. Data from Upward Bound evaluations have found that the program “seems to raise enrollment at four year institutions and as a consequence, raises overall post-secondary enrollment” (Myers et al., 2004). The expenditure per student in Upward Bound can be as high as $4,000 per year in the program, totaling between as much as $16,000 and $20,000 per student over the course of four to four and a half years, from the summer before the student’s freshman year in high school until the end of the summer after they graduate. For a population of students who are low-income and first generation this can be a great asset to their secondary education. Upward Bound provides much more intense services than other federal pre-college programs to provide a more intense experience (Myers et al., 2004). The intensity is due to built-in programmatic features such as a six-week summer program, higher frequency of required contacts, and more money spent per student than in other TRIO programs.

**Rural Appalachian Upward Bound/ Waylon State Community College.** There are many studies of Upward Bound programs and best practices for programs located in urban areas in the country, and most Upward Bound programs are located in inner city areas with high concentrations of low-income first-generation college students. There is
limited research on rural Upward Bound programs (Grimard & Maddaus, 2004), and virtually no research on best practices for rural Appalachian Upward Bound programs.

It is essential that contemporary scholars recognize that Upward Bound was created out of a desire to reach out to Appalachian communities. This is often forgotten with the current primary focus of Upward Bound and the existing research on inner city/urban areas (Anderson & Larson, 2009; Laws Jr., 1999; McElroy & Armesto, 1998, McLure & Child, 1998; Walsh, 2011). In the limited research on rural Upward Bound Programs, Grimard and Maddaus (2004) found that

[a]s of 1993, 40% of the target high schools that regular Upward Bound students attended were located outside metropolitan areas…hence, assuming no change in the rural-metro distribution of projects, target schools, and students over the past decade, an estimated 22,000 rural high school students from 2,200 rural high schools would now be participating in Upward Bound nationwide each year (p. 2).

This means a significant number of students attend rural Upward Bound programs that have little to no research to guide their best practices. Grimard and Maddaus (2004) quote Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) regarding the importance of providing rural students with a culturally appropriate education:

Most districts rely heavily upon the materials designed for urban and suburban populations that dominate commercial publishing and have little meaning for life in rural and small-town America. The curriculum must give students a sense of options about their adult lives. The best curriculum, we think, equips students to
live successful, complete lives in their own community or in an urban community. Small-town schools seem to do neither; they do not provide students with skills to manage their lives successfully in other communities, nor do they provide options for students to engage as productive persons in the development of their own communities. (pp. 26-27).

Rural Upward Bound programs are charged with assisting a population of students to go to college who are at a greater disadvantage than their urban counterparts, and it can be argued that rural Appalachian Upward Bound programs are at an even greater disadvantage given their cultural context. Grimard and Maddaus (2004) studied a rural Upward Bound program located in Maine that had a much higher retention rate than reported in national studies. They cited that 84% of sophomores recruited and admitted into the regular Upward Bound program at the study site in 1998-1999 remained in the program through high school graduation. In contrast, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (2004) using an average of all Upward Bound programs, the majority of which were urban, reported retention in regular Upward Bound projects of no more than 45%” (Myers et al., p. 9). This indicates that rural Upward Bound programs, a minority of the data used in the retention figures, may have a much longer period to influence their participants than urban programs do, and may require a different approach with their students given the amount of time they are in the program. This may also mean that rural Upward Bound programs have a higher retention rate than urban programs.

In the rural program study, Grimard and Maddaus (2004) found that 40% of students indicated that Upward Bound had lived up to their expectations and 58% stated
that the program “somewhat” lived up to expectations. Based on their research, Grimard and Maddaus developed some recommendations for rural Upward Bound programs and high schools serving Upward Bound eligible populations. They recommended that Upward Bound programs and schools be “attentive to the economic development opportunities in rural areas, and must encourage students in rural communities to pursue higher educational opportunities that will prepare them to work in and contribute to the communities in which they live” (p.10), and that teachers, counselors, and community leaders learn what Upward Bound is in order to support participants in the appropriate ways.

Grimard and Maddaus’ (2004) recommendations can be somewhat generalizable to rural Appalachian Upward Bound students but is lacking emphasis on possible cultural and place-based practices that could enhance students’ experience and assist them even further into post-secondary completion. Similar to the program in Grimard and Maddaus’ study, Waylon State Community College’s [WSCC] (a pseudonym for a community college in a north-central Appalachian county where this dissertation study is focused) Upward Bound program has a higher retention rate than the Upward Bound programs nationally. In accordance with the grant objectives from the 2009 to 2013 cycle WSCC meets at least a 65% retention objective each year. The students in this program are often in the program the full length of time and in addition have the opportunity to participate in a summer “bridge” program the summer after high school graduation.

The Waylon State Community College Upward Bound (WSCCUB) program faces somewhat different challenges than the program in the Grimard and Maddaus
(2004) study on rural Upward Bound Programs, including where it is housed and geographically located. This program is based at a community college rather than at a university, is rural, and is also located in the north-central region of Appalachia. This program has an annual total of 63 students each year who participate across three counties considered to be rural according to the Office of Rural Health Policy List of Rural Counties and Designated Eligible Census Tracts in Metropolitan Counties from the 2010 Census (April 30, 2014). The federal government requires two thirds of the program participants to be both low-income and first-generation college students. For the 2013-2014 academic year the WSCCUB program was made up of seven low-income only students (11%), ten first generation students (15.8%), and 46 (73%) students who are both low-income and first generation. Federal regulations require that in Upward Bound at least two-thirds or 66% of students must be both low income and first generation. The community college that the program is administered through is located in Southeastern Ohio, which was designated as a “transitional” county by the Appalachian Regional Commission for the fiscal year 2017 (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2017). The Appalachian Regional Commission categorizes counties as transitional those that are transitioning between strong and weak economies. They make up the largest economic status designation of all counties in the Appalachian region where most are designated as transitional. Transitional counties rank between the worst 25% and the best 25% of the nation’s counties. The program serves all six Waylon County public high schools. WSCCUB also serves one high school in neighboring Nestor County and one high school in Mary County. Nestor County is also considered “transitional” by the
Appalachian Regional Commission. Mary County has been designated as “at-risk” which means that it is at risk of becoming economically distressed and is ranked between the worst 10% and 25% of the nation’s counties. There is a clearly established need for Upward Bound in this region of Southeastern Ohio.

**Plan of operation.** Upward Bound accomplishes outcomes through a variety of approaches built into the program design. The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 states that all Upward Bound projects have certain required services and permissible services. Required services include: academic tutoring, advice and assistance in secondary and post-secondary course selection, assistance in preparing for entrance exams and college applications, as well as providing information on federal financial aid and assistance in financial aid applications, and education on financial literacy and financial planning for postsecondary education. Permissible services include: exposure to cultural events, academic programs, and other activities not usually available to disadvantaged youth, information and activities on career options, on-campus residential programs, mentoring programs, and work study positions (Higher Education Act of 1965, 2014, p.203).

Students are recruited into the program either at the end of their eighth-grade or start of their ninth-grade year. Program staff visit each target school and make presentations to either an entire class of students or to students who have signed up with their guidance counselors to attend. Presentations include information on the program, expectations, time commitment and eligibility criteria. Students complete and return an application to the program office, including required tax information. Once a student is
deemed eligible to participate, an interview is scheduled with the program director, the student, and their primary caregiver. Students and parents receive information about the requirements and benefits of the program and decide if they want to participate. Following the interview, the applicant receives a decision letter. If selected to participate, the student will be invited to attend the next scheduled monthly Saturday session.

WSCCUB serves its students in two phases during the program year. The academic year consists of monthly Saturday sessions focused on academics, college campus visits, cultural trips, financial literacy and planning, as well as guest speakers discussing careers and other relevant topics. Staff also conduct monthly school visits to meet with students and counselors on a more individual basis. Although most UB programs are required to have contact with students on a weekly basis, rural programs are permitted to reduce visits to two times monthly due to transportation issues and geographic distance of the high schools from the college.

A unique aspect of the WSCCUB program is that, although based on a non-residential commuter campus, it is able to provide a six-week residential summer program for its participants on the campus of a small liberal arts college located approximately two miles from WSCC. During the summer students live on the campus in a residence hall with a roommate for a college simulation. They may be roomed with friends in the program or with students they do not know. Students eat in the dining hall, use the campus library for study time, and take classes as though they were college students. Classes are provided on the WSCC campus and taught by instructors hired by WSCCUB to provide enrichment classes and help them prepare for their next year in high
school and for challenging college classes. In the evenings and on Fridays the program takes students on additional college visits, cultural field trips, and organizes activities such as talent shows, field games, and movie nights. Students leave each Friday to return home and sign back in on Monday to participate in community service and begin their week. At the end of the program students are rewarded with an end of summer out-of-state trip. Trips are designed for students to see regions that they would not typically have had the opportunity to visit and get an experience outside of their small rural towns. Past trips have included cities such as New York, Chicago, and Washington D.C., as well the Outer Banks in North Carolina. By the time they go to college students who have stayed in the program all four years will have had the opportunity to see multiple cities, colleges, and options. This is not to encourage them to leave their rural community but to expose them to diverse locales where they might want to attend college. Students are required to participate in their first Upward Bound summer but are allowed to choose not to do summer in favor of working or engaging other extra-curricular activities the rest of their time in high school. Despite having the option to not participate in summer, approximately half of the summer participants are students who choose to return from previous years. This is especially relevant given the high dropout rate of Upward Bound programs nationally (Myer et al., 2004).

**Programmatic outcomes and objectives.** Contingent on a number of factors, research has provided significant evidence that Upward Bound can have a positive impact on participants. In the report *The Impacts of Regular Upward Bound: Results from the*
Third Follow-Up Data Collection, Myers et al. (2004) found many significant results that can impact rural Appalachian students, such as:

- Upward Bound had a large positive effect on enrollment at four-year colleges for students who had lower educational expectations.
- Staying in Upward Bound for longer periods of time is associated with better student outcomes. (p. xviii)

Myers et al. (2004) found that Upward Bound students gain a more positive outcome from the program the longer they stay in it. They found that students who began participation during the early years of high school, usually the summer after eighth-grade or the beginning of their ninth-grade year, spent more time in Upward Bound than other participants. Their study also concluded that “[t]he typical number of months participants remained in Upward Bound was 19 months” (p. 16). This is a short amount of time given that Upward Bound students have the option of starting the program before or during the ninth grade, and with the Bridge component that allows graduates to participate in the summer phase of the program and take college classes, they can oftentimes participate until after they graduate from high school. This means that very few students are getting the full benefits of being in the program. However, those that do participate for the full duration of the program receive many years of college preparatory curriculum and assistance that, if done effectively, prepares them well for many facets of college life. Although there are a number of formal objectives the program must meet in order to receive continued funding, its primary objective is to prepare students to matriculate and
succeed in post-secondary education. Since the students for all Upward Bound programs come from high-risk populations, post-secondary success can be a difficult goal to obtain.

**Upward Bound Eligibility**

All TRIO programs, including Upward Bound, focus on first generation college students who are also low-income. Upward Bound requires that two-thirds of its participants be both, while one third can be either first generation or low-income. A report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education (2004), *A Profile of the Upward Bound Program: 2000-2001* explains eligibility requirements by stating that students must be between the ages of 13 and 19, two-thirds must be low income, which is means they have taxable income less than 150 percent above the poverty level, and they must potentially be first generation college students, meaning that neither of their parents has completed a Bachelor’s degree. There is much research to support why these students are high risk for not matriculating to post-secondary education and are in need of the support Upward Bound provides.

**First generation college students.** Many students in Appalachia are first generation college students (FGC) due to many college educated people leaving the region. Barriers experienced by first-generation students include a lack of information about preparing for college and educational options. Families may not realize what college entrance exams such as the ACT and SAT are, let alone have the money to pay for formal test preparation (Buchmann, Condron, & Roscigno, 2010). FGC students often need help understanding requirements to attend college, such as a rigorous high school course schedule, and may be unaware of college admissions processes or how to obtain
financial aid. FGC students are more likely to drop out, to require remedial education, and to enroll in vocationally oriented majors (Aronson, 2008).

Bradbury and Mather (2009) found that factors that affected the transition to college among the FGC students in Appalachian Ohio included the pull of their home life, academic adjustment, belonging, and financial issues that came from being low-income and attending college. While many FGC students are low-income, it is not the only factor that contributes to being at risk in college. The authors also found that students were intimidated by talking with faculty and lacked the study skills necessary to succeed in college. A lack of preparedness and difficulty adjusting to college has been found as a factor across research on FGC students (Ali & Saunders, 2009; Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Stephens et al., 2015).

The feeling that they do not belong can have a deep impact on FGC student success. FGC students may fear that it is obvious to other students and faculty that they do not belong in a college environment. This feeling of being seen as an imposter can impact their success. A theory posed by Steele and Aronson (1995) calls this feeling “stereotype threat.” Inzlicht and Schmader (2012) state that this theory “suggests that the mere existence and awareness of cultural stereotypes creates a fundamentally different experience for those who are stereotyped to be less competent, an experience that systematically impacts their ability to perform up to their potential” (p. 7). While this theory was originally developed based on studies of African American students in higher education, it can also be applied to the feelings that Appalachian FGC students have when they attend college.
Many studies have also pointed to the high instance of FGC status in the region as having an impact on students because of a general dearth of college-educated professionals in the region for students to see as models of academic success. Economist Steven N. Durlauf (2012) emphasizes the importance of peers and other role models in Appalachian youth’s making educational decisions. “One behavioral explanation is that educational investment decisions are interdependent because of both role model and peer influences, so that factors such as parental education and the educational choices of peers affect each individual’s decisions” (p. 198). If role models do not value education, it is unlikely students will. Educational outcomes of rural youth look much different than those of suburban youth because of a lack of school resources, less access to college educated role models, and an enhanced connection to place (Witherspoon & Ennett, 2010).

**Low-income students.** There are a multitude of examples of how low-income affects students’ post-secondary success both at an institutional and developmental level. The above discussion regarding Appalachian and rural education has referenced many scholars who have documented the impact of socioeconomic background on rural students. Patrick Finn (1999) argues that the way education is delivered contributes to the unequal power dynamic between those who are of a higher socioeconomic status (SES) and those who are lower. He believes that education in the United States is used not only as a way to control people and prevent low-income students from causing problems but also prevent them from being socially mobile. Programs such as Upward Bound are charged with leveling the educational playing field for students who are deemed at risk
because they are low-income. The sub-par education that low-income students often receive in elementary and secondary school leaves them at a disadvantage in comparison to those who are fortunate enough to be born into a middle class or more affluent family. This concurs with Annette Laureau’s work on class and family in the United States. In her book, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (2003), Laureau examines families from multiple races and SES to determine whether class has an impact on how a student is educated and develops as a person. She found that low-income students experience many factors in school and at home that lead them to be especially at risk. She found that poor and working-class parents were consumed by simply providing the necessities for their children and were unable to spend time at home cultivating student’s cultural capital to help them succeed in college. She states that

> the greatest gulf we observed is one that has not been fully recognized in the existing literature; a class-rooted difference in the organization of daily life, whereby middle and upper-class children pursue a hectic schedule of adult-organized activities while working class and poor children follow a more open-ended agenda that is not as heavily controlled by adults (p. 68).

Laureau also found that middle-class parents, regardless of race, tried to cultivate capital in their children, affirming that SES is a more critical factor in development. This not only can be applied to low-income students but also to rural Appalachian students who may not have access to cultural capital due to the geography of their region and its proximity to new experiences and opportunities.
Aronson (2008) states that “we should view class differences in post-secondary education as a funneling and filtering process that leads to cumulative disadvantage for working class and first-generation college students” (p. 50). She argues that the way the post-secondary system functions often serves to recreate the existing inequalities, rather than reduce them. When students who do not have a support system, such as the one that Upward Bound can provide, they are being set up for a difficult time when they attend college. In her study on SES and students’ likelihood of attending multiple institutions, Goldrick-Rab (2006) found that low-income students were more likely to have their pathways to a Bachelor’s degree interrupted during their time in college. She also found that low income students had close to three times the odds of dropping out of school and over three times the chance of moving among different schools in comparison to those with a high socioeconomic status, which demonstrates the need for support for low-income students. Additionally, multiple scholars have suggested that it is harder for low-income students to obtain a Bachelor’s degree when they are more likely than their high-income counter-parts to start in or transfer from a community college rather than a four-year institution (Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006). As reported by Rosenbaum et al. (2006), the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) survey of 2002 found that only 26% of students who began at public two-year colleges completed any degree by five years after they matriculated.

Low-income students face problems that do not just amount to not having the financial resources to go to school, but are compounded by lifelong poverty, which typically means that they could only attend poorer schools, and had parents who often
had more to contend with than helping their children prepare for college. Jensen (2009) states that low income students chronically deal with stress that impacts their wellbeing in a multitude of ways and may ultimately affect their coping skills and ability to be successful in school. Helping these students must include more than simply providing the necessary financial resources to attend college.

**High School Graduation and the College Transition**

Although the period between high school and transitioning to college can be difficult for any young person, it can be argued that for rural Appalachian students who are likely low-income and the first in their family to go to college it can be especially difficult. In a population that is known for having strong kinship ties and taking on adult responsibilities at an early age, it is important to consider the shift to being an adult and what factors play into the transition to college in order to grasp what this specific population may face that can help or hinder post-secondary success. According to Guiffrida (2009), studying human development and the transition to college is essential for understanding the transition process and providing the most support possible for students. He argues that the U.S. Department of Education, which funds TRIO programs, “does not require that these programs consider the developmental needs of students when designing their interventions” but the programs would greatly benefit by doing so (p. 2419).

**Human development.** In terms of the development of late adolescents, transitioning into adulthood, it is important to consider the mental and emotional stage in which college students from rural Appalachia find themselves when they graduate from
high school and consider attending college. Arnett (2000) determined that this is a stage between adolescence and young adulthood. He calls this stage in human development “emerging adulthood,” specifically between the ages of 18 and 25. According to Arnett (2016) this period is different than adulthood because this age period is “rarely stable”, as “commitments have not been made in love and work that constitute the stable structure of an adult life” (p.228). This expands Erickson’s idea that in some societies there is a prolonged adolescence as well as a “psychosocial moratorium” that young adults have on adulthood. Arnett claims that this is an important period to be studied in that some young individuals can use this time to explore their futures without the burdens of adulthood. He argues that “the years of emerging adulthood are characterized by a high degree of demographic diversity and instability, reflecting the emphasis on change and exploration” (p. 471). This may indicate that during this period in an individual’s life, his or her goals and ideas about what life may become are the most subject to change. For rural Appalachian students, their goals for what they want in terms of post-secondary education can change to be more or less ambitious than what they originally intended.

In discussing Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, Guiffrida (2009) posits that adolescents have identity issues that need to be resolved, one of which is the choice of vocation for the future. He believes that adolescents “must begin to pay more serious attention to realistic career possibilities,” which in the case of a population that consists primarily of FGCs may mean that college is deemed unrealistic (p. 2419). Expanding on this, Marcia (1967) states that there must be a crisis for adolescents to commit to a vocational choice. He said, “Crisis refers to times during adolescence when
the individual seems to be actively involved in choosing among alternative occupations and beliefs” (1967, p.119) Such a crisis may spur FGC’s into committing to a different more attainable career choice than originally intended.

In his study of a Midwestern town, including a variety of ages and socioeconomic statuses, Arnett (2001) found that most people considered individualistic criteria a mark of obtaining adulthood which meant that the ability to “accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions, decide on personal beliefs and values, establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult, and being financially independent” are the top criteria for being an adult (p. 141). The study also found that “family capacities and norm compliance” constituted the next highest set of criteria for adulthood. When students view themselves as adults they are able to comply with social norms and are more likely to want to do what their community expects of them or what is considered acceptable in their community, which often implies not going away to college. It can be argued that although during high school Upward Bound students may have believed that going to college was what they wanted, as they matured into adulthood they come to realize that it might be an unrealistic goal based on the social norms of their community.

In studying human development in regard to college transition, Guiffrida (2009) proposes a cultural motivational theory (CMT) to take the cultural aspects of development into account in the process of transitioning into college. CMT projects that students from cultural groups are more likely to be successful when they have had teachers and parents in the past who have provided them with support rather than have sought to control their academic endeavors.
Summer melt. Extant research shows that the period between high school graduation and the time that students begin taking college classes can be one of great turmoil for all college-bound students, but even more so for low-income, first-generation college-bound students. Therefore, it is important to consider what effect this phase in the college-going process has on rural, Appalachian, Upward Bound graduates. The period of time between graduation from high school and before attendance in postsecondary courses is referred to in the literature as “summer melt” (Arnold, Fleming, DeAnda, Castleman, & Lynk Wartman, 2009; Castleman, Arnold, & Lynk Wartman, 2012; Castleman & Page, 2013).

Arnold et al. (2009) describe summer melt in terms of college admissions as a time when students who have already paid deposits and committed to a college forfeit their money and decide to attend another school. This is typically the case among a small number of middle-class students who have the ability to change their minds and go somewhere else. What Arnold et al. focused on studying was a variation on this phenomenon as it applied to low-income students who, although they might have secured financial aid, still find themselves exploring their options, or lack of options, as they see them after high school. The study by Arnold et al. has led to a more recent focus on this phenomenon which originally focused on graduates from urban high schools. In their study, they found that among the 500 urban students at least one third who had planned to attend college in the fall changed their mind over the summer following high school, with one in five deciding not to attend college at all. This was largely attributable to a lack of support they received or perceived that they had during the period of time when they
were no longer assisted by their high school or pre-college programs and were not yet being supported by their intended college. Like rural students, the urban students in this study often talked about their family’s lack of understanding college and being hostile about college plans. Also, similar to rural students, urban low-income parents did not see value in taking out debt in order to obtain a degree. Arnold et al. offered several suggestions for how to support these students during the summer to help them continue on their path to post-secondary success, including access to a counselor or advisor, social and emotional support for when occasions arise which cause them to doubt their choice, and consistent financial guidance (p. 29). All of these constitute services that Upward Bound provides. Yet, sometimes this still does not prevent summer melt. The authors acknowledge that programs that provide this support are rare among high risk populations because they can be very costly.

Castleman et al. (2012) researched “at high risk” populations to determine whether counseling during the summer after graduation has an effect on college enrollment. Their concern was that “without active intervention to help low-income students carry through with their postsecondary plans, the summer following high school graduation may represent an important and hitherto unnoticed leak in the high school to college pipeline” (p. 4). They found that the urban, low-income population they studied encountered many barriers to obtaining information on their own that would have helped in their college goals such as lacking the confidence to call their intended college and ask questions. This may also be found among rural, Appalachian, low-income students who have been raised with a mistrust of education and authority. The researchers also made
recommendations that this time period should be studied for other “at high risk” populations to determine best practices to curb “summer melt.”

In a subsequent study of what happens between high school and college, Castleman and Page (2013) looked at barriers that may delay enrollment immediately after high school. They found that “even after controlling for cognitive scores and other demographic factors, low-income students are more susceptible to summer melt than high-income peers” (p. 214). They found that lower income students’ plans for post-secondary enrollment are much more susceptible to change than those of their higher income counterparts. This study specifically found that students who are low-income can especially benefit from support when registering for classes and completing loan applications. As is, Upward Bound programs often assist students in applying for college admission but do not do so as much in the transition from gaining admission to actually attending.

Research on rural, Appalachian, Upward Bound graduates should acknowledge that “summer melt” exists, particularly among a category of students who have already been shown to be susceptible to changing plans. Although their participation in Upward Bound has indicated their desire to attend college, research has shown that even once accepted to college barriers may arise that can derail these plans.

**Summary**

Rural Appalachian Upward Bound students possess a complex set of factors that make up their identity. Their identity has the potential to shape their experience in the formative high school years as well as their transition into adulthood regardless of
whether they choose to pursue higher education. Being rural is a circumstance that does not a priori inhibit a student’s ability to succeed academically after high school, but as research indicates can lead to students not returning to contribute to their communities. Appalachia has culture that, while it is known for its poverty, also has many asset-based features, such as social capital and strong kinship ties, that can contribute to success. The federal government has made it possible for programs such as Upward Bound to work with students during their high school years and guide them towards a college degree. It is up to the individual student as he or she moves into the transitional years into adulthood to make decisions about what he or she wants the future to look like.

Although the literature presents findings regarding the various characteristics of this population, it is by no means a narrative of the actual experiences of these students’ lives. In order to assess the essence of what it means to be a rural, Appalachian, Upward Bound graduate, it is essential to investigate the stories of these students’ lives in their own words. In order to do so, further research is needed to explore the phenomenon of being a Rural, Appalachian, Upward Bound Graduate.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction to the Methodology

A qualitative approach to research can shed light on events or phenomena that cannot be explored in other methods of research. Patton (2015) argues that “[i]n-depth qualitative inquiry can illuminate a system and systemic issues and potential solutions” (p. 8). In order to describe the experience of Rural Appalachian Upward Bound graduates, qualitative methods are the most informative way to discover the meaning of lived experiences. Since I am not a Rural Appalachian Upward Bound graduate and have not lived this experience first-hand it was most beneficial to use a qualitative approach without any a priori assumptions. “The strategy of induction allows meaningful dimensions to emerge from the patterns found in the cases under study, without presupposing in advance what those important dimensions might be” (Patton, 2015, p. 64).

There are many critical research questions that emerge when considering this particular population. The central one is: What is the lived experience of being a rural, Appalachian, Upward Bound graduate? Each of the elements of this experience combines to create a phenomenon that can inform future research on similar populations. Other research questions to be explored from this data include: How does this knowledge inform our understanding of rural brain drain? How does reflecting on this experience inform Upward Bound programs? How does this experience shape what choices this population makes about its future?
Phenomenology

It has been determined that the best qualitative approach to conduct this research is phenomenology. Van Manen (2014) argues that “phenomenologies may enrich and guide our professional and everyday actions and experiences” (p. 31). Phenomenology is a way for the researcher to interpret a lived experience of a sample in order to make meaning. It is the act of uncovering the essence of an experience. Patton (2015) states that “phenomenologists focus on how we put together the phenomena we experience in such a way as to make sense of the world, and in so doing, develop a worldview” (p. 116). It is the interpretation of this worldview that can inform scholars on how to best work with students who may experience these phenomena. Studying lived experience can provide insights by examining details and experiences that the one living through the experience may not have deemed as meaningful at the time. “Lived experience names the ordinary and the extraordinary, the quotidian and the exotic, the routine and the surprising, the dull and the ecstatic moments and aspects of experience as we live through them in our human existence” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 39).

The challenge in using this approach to the researcher is being able to understand his or her own biases and experiences in regards to the phenomenon being studied. It is important that the researcher have self-awareness about his or her own feelings regarding the participants and their experiences. Patton (2015) argues that “self-awareness, even a certain degree of self-analysis, has become a requirement of qualitative inquiry” (p. 605). Phenomenology, being a deeply personal method of research, requires a certain amount of investment in the process on the part of the researcher. Moustakas (1994) remarks that
“at all points on an investigation, intersubjective reality is part of the process, yet every perception begins with the researcher’s own sense of what an issue or object or experience is and means” (p. 59). This challenge is addressed in this approach through the época or bracketing on the part of the researcher (Dahlberg, 2006; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014).

**Epocché, Bracketing, or Bridling**

Moustakas (1994) describes the época as an act the researcher must take on in order to approach the phenomenon in an open way. “In the Epocché the everyday understandings, judgements, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide-open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). Husserl used the ideas of época and bracketing to only assess, similar to mathematical functions, that what is done within the brackets and kept apart from that what is done outside of them (as cited in Van Manen, 2014, p. 215). This means that the researcher should put into brackets what presuppositions might stand in the way of the essence of a phenomenon. Patton (2015) describes época as the act of the researcher looking inside to become aware of personal bias and eliminating personal involvement with the subject material. He argues that phenomenological reduction involves bracketing out the world. It allows the researcher to identify data in pure form and “hold the phenomenon up for serious inspection” (p. 525). Husserl, as cited in Van Manen (2014), describes the época as means to gain access to the phenomenon with a reduction as leading back to the researcher’s own experience of the phenomenon as a
means of understanding. In discussing the reduction, referring to Heidegger’s definition of reduction, Van Manen (2014) argues that

as part of the methodological reduction, we need to suspend the inclination to rely on a set of rules, a schema of steps, or a series of steps. Rather each phenomenon requires its own unique approach and unique application of the epoché and reduction (p. 220).

The researcher needs to step back from his or her own experience to take in and make meaning of the phenomenon, it is then that they can draw from it the essence of the phenomenon. Dahlberg (2006) referred to this same process as “bridling.” She argues that bridling covers the same things as epoché and reduction yet also covers an understanding that not only takes care of the particular pre-understanding, but the understanding as a whole. We bridle the understanding so that we do not understand too quick, too careless, or slovenly, or in other words, that we do not make definite what is indefinite (p.16).

In this case study, as the researcher, I have bracketed prior experiences with both the environment from which the participants come as well as the relationship that spawned the interest in studying this particular population. Prior to this study, I grew up and lived in one of the small Southeastern Ohio towns that some of the participants in this study came from. During my adolescence, I did not see the region as specifically Appalachia, but rather as a very rural area that has a coal mining history and now had little industry, yet has a supportive community in which people want to raise their children. Although my immediate family was of a higher socioeconomic status than that
of many of my classmates, friends and extended family, the rural nature of the region meant that everyone lived similar lifestyles. Although my father completed college and it was an expectation in my family, my older sister’s post-secondary experience was that of many of the participants being studied. She attended college where she found herself in an environment that did not feel comfortable. She ultimately decided to return home where she worked in several minimum wage jobs, started a family and finished her Associate’s degree more than a decade later.

During my time in college I began to notice differences between myself and my college peers from other areas, such as the number of times I went home for the weekend to visit with my family, the opportunities they had had in high school compared to me, and what their goals were after college. During this time, I began to wonder why my sister and many of my high school classmates had the experience in high school and college that they did. Later in my graduate program I began to learn more about Appalachia and what makes it different from other regions in the country. After college, I substitute taught in the region and began working for federal TRIO programs at my alma mater and later at Waylon State Community College, where the participants in this study were in the Upward Bound program that I directed. It was through this program that I met and formed relationships with the participants and had a possible impact on the outcomes in their lives. It is important to acknowledge this relationship here to state that I have been able to separate my experience with the participants while recording their stories. It is here that I seek to shed light on possible biases that I may have had during the interview and analysis process and affirm that I used our relationship to make the
participants comfortable and did not use it to define my understanding of their lived experience. It is through this bracketing of my own experience that I hope to show my connection to the phenomena under study which according to Moustakas (1994) is appropriate for this type of study. “In a phenomenological investigation, the researcher has a personal interest in whatever she or he seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected to the phenomenon” (p. 59). Moustakas (1994) points out that “in phenomenological studies the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for further research and reflection” (p. 47). It has been my intention to focus on the topic of these former students’ lived experience in an open-minded way.

Participants

The ten participants in the study included Upward Bound graduates from programs located in the Appalachian Regional Commission’s designated Appalachian counties of Ohio, notably from Waylon State Community College. Eligibility for the sample populations included both those graduates who went on to seek post-secondary education as well as those who did not. It included those who have since graduated from college, those who were currently still attending college, as well as those who had attended for a short time and did not finish. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 24. They represented a range of ages as well as an even split of five females to five males.
Sampling Strategies

This study involved purposeful sampling of students who met the criteria specified above and experienced the phenomenon being studied. Patton (2015) confirms the legitimacy of purposeful sampling by suggesting that,

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling (p. 264).

There are various perspectives on the appropriate sample size for qualitative research. Patton (2015) argues that there are no sample size rules, and Creswell (2014) maintains that phenomenology typically ranges from three to ten. This research study’s sample included ten participants. They were identified using my own relationship with former Upward Bound participants from an Upward Bound program from which I previously served as director.

Procedures

All prospective participants were sent a social media message to request participation. Once a participant agreed to be part of the study I arranged for a date and time to conduct a face-to-face interview at a convenient location (e.g. a public library, a campus location, or a local restaurant). Patton (2015) states that, for qualitative research, the interview is used to “provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understandings in their own terms” (p. 442). It is essential in a phenomenological
study to get a grasp on the participants’ individual experiences and to discover the essence of the group experience.

To ensure participant confidentiality each participant selected a pseudonym prior to the start of the interview. All participants signed a statement of informed consent acknowledging they were not forced to participate and did so of their own volition. Each face-to-face semi-structured interview lasted approximately one hour and was digitally recorded and transcribed by a transcription service to ensure accuracy. Participants were asked whether I might contact them for a possible follow-up interview, to which all agreed.

**Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data was guided by *Hollowing Out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What it Means for America* by Carr & Kefalas (2009). This is a qualitative study that examined the experience of youth in rural Iowa and presents framework for categorizing rural youth which provides a useful tool for understanding the experience of the ten participants in this study.

According to Patton (2015) “[q]ualitative methods permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance [and] that data collection need not be constrained by predetermined analytical categories [which] contributes to the potential breadth of qualitative inquiry” (p.257). Thick narrative description throughout allows the data to be organized into emergent thematic categories. These patterns and themes will serve as a starting point to analyze and assess the central research questions presented above.
Once I organized the data into initial thematic categories, I “lumped” data into areas for coding. According to Saldana (2016), “lumping gets to the essence of categorizing a phenomenon” (p. 24). This helped me make meaning out of the narrative of each individual as well as assisted in a cross-case analysis to determine shared themes and experiences. Patton (2015) argues that in a phenomenological approach “all elements and perspectives have equal weight and that the data are then organized into meaningful categories” (p. 575).

I used emergent data and categorical themes as the primary vehicle for presentation and analysis. Data were read and coded initially line by line in order to create a code list, then it was re-coded according to the established code list and sorted into code families after themes emerged. Code families were categorized by theme and sub-themes.

I used AtlasTI, qualitative data analysis software, to assist with the analytical process. “Computer aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) [such as AtlasTI] efficiently stores, organizes, manages, and reconfigures …. data to enable human analytic reflection” (Saldana, 2016, p. 30). Creswell (2013) states that using computer programs for data analysis mirrors hand coding the data and can be useful for compiling data in a meaningful way.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is that all participants’ Upward Bound experiences were influenced by my involvement in their life. This could have impacted their responses in the interview and were influenced by our prior relationship. Responses to the same
questions asked by a person not associated with the program might have been framed differently. In contrast, it is possible that their responses were more in-depth.

Summary

This chapter provided introduction and rationale for the use of phenomenological inquiry. It presented an explanation of bracketing including an auto-ethnography, as well as a description of participants, procedures, and the data analysis process. Chapter Four will present a case by case analysis of all participants and their individual experiences.
Chapter 4: Participant Narratives

This chapter provides a narrative about each participant in this study and a brief overview of their interview. All participants’ names as well as the names of their high schools have been changed in the interest of participant confidentiality to pseudonyms that the participants themselves selected. In many of the hometowns of the participants there are not a variety of public locations appropriate for an interview, therefore most interviews took place at local McDonald’s restaurants. I felt that each participant in the study had an interesting and unique story to tell that might not come through in the analysis of the interviews, to that end I have provided a case by case narrative of each participant’s individual experience to provide the reader with a sense of each story involved in this study. Table 4.1 provides a breakdown of defining characteristics for each participant for organizational purposes.
Table 4.1

Defining characteristics of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age at Time</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>College Graduation Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brutus</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>In progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Workman</td>
<td>In progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerry</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>Stopped out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Bloom</td>
<td>In progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Bloom &amp; Workman</td>
<td>In progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Castle</td>
<td>In progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twig</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>Stopped out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following narratives are arranged by various components of the study including; the Rural Appalachian experience, Social and psychological capital, Upward Bound, and Post-Secondary success.
Brutus was interviewed in the library of Waylon State Community college where he was taking one class each semester. We met on November 14th, 2016 immediately following his class. I had not seen Brutus since shortly after his high school graduation and we were both happy to talk about what had been going on since high school. Although Brutus had all the makings of an Achiever or a High-Flyer, he has become what Carr and Kefalas (2009) would describe as a Stayer or Boomerang. Brutus describes his life as pretty average for the region that he grew up in. He is from a rural region and went to school at rural Forest High School, where he considered himself a good student, civically minded, and was involved in diverse extracurricular activities. His parents are still married, and he is the middle of an older brother (22) and a much younger sister (10). Brutus is currently 20 years old and is working his way through community college.

Rural Appalachian experience. A recurring theme throughout his interview was the economic struggle his family has had for as long as he can remember. Brutus recognizes that this is a problem for most of his community and describes the region as “economically diverse,” saying “The majority of the jobs around here are usually for steel mill plants, coal production facilities. Well, you go into the cities, you got high-rise office buildings, multi-million-dollar, six-figure businesses. We're lucky if we break $100,000.00 a year around here.” He is a first-generation college student whose father drives a concrete truck and whose mother is a driver’s education instructor for AAA. Both of their adult children live at home and work to help support the family. “So all four of us are working – Shane, me, mom, and dad are making ends meet. But some weeks are
better than others.” He talks about family finances when referring to every area of his life and how it has impacted where he is today. In talking about why he still lives at home he said that it was because his mother does not want her kids to live on their own “until she knows that we can provide for ourselves with a college degree. She wants us to be sure that we can do it.” He is careful to frame it as though his parents want to make sure they can make it on their own rather than that his family needs his and his brother’s income to survive. Brutus speaks favorably about his current job as a cashier at a local gas station and how he contributes to the family’s well-being.

He is aware of the common stereotypes about the region, but does not let it phase him in regards to his feelings about where he is from. He talks about how “everybody knows everybody” but is alright with that and states, “I would say as a close-knit community. Everybody tries to help one another. We don't judge based on race or religion. And we try our best to get along with one another.” He says that he is proud to consider himself an “Appalachian American” and that although he knows he may have to leave for employment reasons that he hopes he can stay or at least return to retire in the region.

**Social and psychological capital.** During high school, Brutus worked hard to help others in his community. He describes his role or place in his community as a “helper.” He and his brother mowed lawns for elderly neighbors for no pay even though he often talks about the financial struggles his family has always endured. He volunteered to help other students who were struggling in school. He and his brother also helped care
for the grounds of his church and volunteered every first Saturday of the month at the local food pantry to help pack boxes of supplies for families in need.

He describes his high school as small but supportive of its students. “They tried their best to encourage everybody to go to college. They knew that some people might not go down that path, but they at least wanted everybody to have an equal opportunity to further their education.” He has no ill will towards his high school despite the fact that while in high school he was in the top ten percent of his graduating class, but when he went to the large state university he selected, he struggled in all of his math and science courses. While explaining what happened he took responsibility for his struggles by saying that he did not prepare himself adequately for college.

**Upward Bound.** During high school Brutus was involved in Future Farmers of America (FFA), track, and was a member of the local community college’s Educational Talent Search Program (ETS). ETS is a TRIO grant for sixth through twelfth graders similar to Upward Bound. He had to quit the ETS program when he joined Upward Bound because of federal regulations that do not allow participants to benefit from more than one TRIO program at a time due to the duplication of services with federal money. His senior year of high school he began taking classes at the community college as a full time Post-Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) student. He attributes his high school success to Upward Bound and says that “if it wasn't for them, I probably would have ended up being a mess.”

Brutus stated that Upward Bound’s purpose is to help first-generation students prepare for the real world and college, and describes how it becomes a second family. He
said, referring to what he got out of Upward Bound that, “They taught us that it's your decision and the decision you should make should be one that makes you feel the happiness.” He attributed what success he has had to Upward Bound. “If it wasn't for Upward Bound, I wouldn't be where I am today. They helped me attain great useful skills and time management, prepping for classes, taking notes. If it wasn't for the note taking, I would not have graduated with the grades I had.” He also talked about the help Upward Bound provided with non-cognitive skills such as being comfortable socializing with new people and the support system he had saying that, “I would say Tiffany really set me straight” and “And I want to actually say if it wasn't for her and her encouragement, I probably would not have had the courage to apply and eventually be accepted to college. And I thank her for that.”

**Post-secondary success.** Brutus said his parents were supportive of him attending college, and joked that they were especially supportive of the university he selected because his dad wanted free sports tickets. He said that they did what they could as far as helping him apply for college and get financial aid but that Upward Bound got him where he needed to be. Once in college Brutus struggled both academically and culturally. He was accepted into an honors engineering program with hopes of becoming an aeronautical engineer. The main academic struggle and shock was in going to the university with many advanced math credits due to PSEO but still not being able to keep up in his calculus class. He described living in the state capital as overwhelming and scary at first but that he ran into many kind people that helped him acclimate. He made friends in his residence hall and sought out tutoring to try to keep up.
Brutus talked about what happened when he came home for his winter break during his first year of college in 2014 with sorrow but no regret. During break his mother had a massive stroke that required a stay in a more advanced hospital in the state capital, resulting in an accumulation of bills that the family couldn’t pay. Although much of Brutus’s college was paid for with scholarships and grants, he felt that he needed to be at home working and helping his parents pay for the hospital bills. It was at that time that he began working at a gas station and re-enrolled in the community college taking one class at a time towards a computer services technician Associate’s degree. The plans he once had following high school have dramatically changed and he hoped to finish his degree and obtain employment around his hometown, but has accepted the fact that he may need to go elsewhere, and that Pittsburgh might be an option for him.

Tracie

Tracie and I met for her interview on December 6, 2016 in my office in the university’s Academic Advancement Center. While at the university, Tracie was in the program that I worked for, so she and I have seen each other on a regular basis and remained close in the years since she graduated from high school.

Rural Appalachian experience. Some would say Tracie defied the odds. She is rural, Appalachian, first-generation, low-income, disabled, and soon to be a graduate with honors of the university. She is also about to become a High Flyer (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Tracie attended one of the larger high schools served by the community college’s Upward Bound program. She graduated in 2013 with approximately 150 people in her graduating class and was open in talking about her life and struggles during high school.
Although Tracie’s parents did not attend college she has an older sister who had graduated from a large four-year university with a nursing degree by the time Tracie entered high school, and so she felt a lot of pressure from her parents to do the same. Her mother worked in the office of a local dairy and her father had had several different jobs throughout the years ranging from school bus driver to city pool manager to working in a grocery store. Tracie describes her home economic situation as that, “we weren’t the richest people, but I know we weren’t the poorest either.” She talked about giving up getting things that other teenagers often wanted, like a bedroom makeover, because she knew that her parents really needed the money for other things.

When discussing the idea of Appalachia and what that means to her, Tracie described it as country, close-knit, and relaxed. She sees the people as helpful and friendly but does not describe herself as Appalachian. She says that she does not see her area as Appalachian because she knows there are areas that are “way more Appalachian.” She describes her area as valuing education more than what she views as Appalachia does, even though she is from the Appalachian region of Southeast Ohio. She describes her own community in much more positive ways than she does Appalachia.

**Social and psychological capital.** In high school Tracie was a very involved student. She participated in band, choir, softball, basketball, multiple 4-H clubs, and Upward Bound. Because of her disability, she could tell that something about her was not the same as other students in her school but she did not know what it was. She joined Upward Bound because, as she says, “I always struggled in school, so going into high school I knew that I would probably need a little extra help.” Although Tracie and her
parents knew that she was struggling she did not pursue testing in high school because she “just didn’t want to be different.” However, what Tracie found out later was that she has an auditory processing disorder that leaves her feeling distracted, not able to focus or stay on task, and unable to listen to her teachers and understand them while there are other students in the room. Because of these struggles she had to switch out of more rigorous college prep classes into easier ones such as basic chemistry. Despite all of that she feels that her high school teachers were supportive and that she received the best education she could at the time even though the physical environment of the school was not ideal. Workman High School had indoor gutters where water flowed down the halls during a rainstorm, poor ventilation, and no air conditioning, making it hard for students to concentrate.

Tracie describes her community as small, which she likes, because she had the opportunity to know everyone so well. She has a very large extended family that is also active in the community and she felt supported by them. She said that if she needed something that someone she knew could not directly help her with it was ok “’Cause I could talk to somebody who knew somebody who knew somebody.” As far as her role in her community, she says that she was known for being actively involved in 4-H and community service which helped her self-confidence in working with others. It was through 4-H that she began to learn to train dogs and discovered that dog training, boarding and grooming is what she would like to do for her career. She labels her community as welcoming and friendly but does acknowledge that the reception she gets when she goes home since she left for college has changed a bit over time.
**Upward Bound.** She attributes her consideration of college early on to being in Upward Bound. After feeling behind all the time, she felt that Upward Bound helped her at least be even with other students in her class. She said that being away from home in the summer and learning to manage herself was the most valuable part of her time in Upward Bound. This is in addition to the many trips and experiences she was able to have outside of her community. She talks about the support system that Upward Bound, and specifically I, provided for her in high school and her transition to college.

**Post-secondary success.** After struggling in high school, Tracie decided that she should attend the local community college and work towards an Associate’s degree in business technology instead of going to a four-year school. Although she did desire to move out and meet new people in a four-year school environment, Tracie wanted to make sure she was academically strong enough to do it and learn to work with her. At the community college, she was successful and gained the confidence she needed to transfer to a university. She said that she felt very supported by the community college in her plans to transfer and chose a large public university because it was an hour away from home yet not too far.

At the university, Tracie was more successful than she even expected. She made friends and joined organizations. She did well in her classes and graduated in April of 2017 with a Bachelor’s of Specialized Studies and an Entrepreneurship certificate, with honors. Her plans at the time of graduation were to get a position with an organization that advocates for animal welfare and do marketing until she can save enough money to open her own dog kennel and training business. She plans to stay in the region and thinks
she will never live more than an hour away from her family, if that far. When asked why she wants to stay she said

Because I'm very close to my community and my family, so I think – Would I think it'd be cool to move away and live in a different area? Yes. But I like my area, and the community that I have. And if I ever have children, I would want them to be raised in a good community. It has its issues, but definitely just raised with the people that I have been raised with.

Penelope

The interview with Penelope took place on November 14th, 2016. We met in a restaurant in a West Virginia town close to the Ohio border. Although I had occasionally talked with her after her high school graduation through social media, we had not met in person to talk about what had happened since high school and her time in Upward Bound.

Rural Appalachian experience. Penelope tried her hardest to be an Achiever, and she may yet get there, but for now she is a High-Flyer. She is someone who “set aside [her] chance at the essential American wish for self-reinvention when [she] return[s] home in search of stability” (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, p.108). Penelope attended Forest High School, one of the smallest schools Upward Bound served, until her junior year of high school when she became a Post-Secondary Enrollment Option student going full time to the community college. She had a 4.0 GPA at her high school and a 3.7 at the community college. She wanted nothing more when she graduated in 2010 than to get her Bachelor’s degree and move far away from the mid-Ohio Valley and Appalachia.
Penelope was involved in competitive dance, cheerleading, student government, and Upward Bound in high school. She lived with her mom and step-dad, neither of whom had a four-year college degree. She describes her school as one of the poorest in the state of Ohio with a very low graduation rate and small class sizes (she graduated with a class of 45), where most students grew up in poverty, did not go on to college, and many she graduated with still live with their parents today. She commented on how both her history book and her cheerleading uniform were used by her cousin who graduated fifteen years before she did.

Penelope has many strong opinions on her community and Appalachia in general. She describes her hometown as small minded in that its inhabitants do not like “anybody that’s different” and “if it's not guns, if it's not religion, it's not important.” However, she also talks about how her community will rally around people “when it’s important”, such as when a wounded veteran from their town returned home and the town raised funds to help him make his house handicapped accessible, or when they had multiple fund raisers for her own sister who has Cystic Fibrosis.

Penelope considers herself Appalachian in so far as that she is from the region but does not identify with many of what she considers “Appalachian values.” She talks about how her family and the people she grew up with desire to know the same people their whole lives and live in the same place, but those are not her hopes for herself.

**Social and psychological capital.** Although her family supported her in her post-secondary goals she felt like in leaving for college that she was betraying her friends who decided to stay in the area. She said,
The really, really close friends that knew what I wanted, they were cool with it, but the others that weren't actually planning on going to college or going away and living in that area their entire life, they were like, "You're leaving and you're never going to see me again and you want nothing to do with me." It's just kind of, "You're shunning me."

She was also frustrated with what she calls her family and friends “small town mentality.” Particularly regarding asking her when she is going to get married and have kids. Penelope expressed that this is a very small-town way to look at life. In comparison she says, “I don't want to just get married and pop out a bunch of babies and be a stay-at-home mom. That's great for some people, but not for me.”

**Upward Bound.** Penelope attributes her feeling that she could live elsewhere to her time in Upward Bound. She described Upward Bound as a way for her to see new things and what life could be like in other places like Chicago or Pittsburgh. Upward Bound gave her the confidence to apply to the colleges that she did. She talked about how she was ultimately waitlisted for her top two college choices and how her one-on-one meetings with me while she was taking PSEO classes really helped her decide the direction she wanted to go in when she was devastated about being waitlisted.

**Post-secondary success.** Penelope ultimately decided to attend a medium-sized public university in the capital of West Virginia, where she spent only two and a half years because she transferred many credits from doing PSEO at the community college (CC) where she attended Upward Bound. She spoke favorably of her time at the community college, primarily because it saved her so much money on her bachelor’s
degree. She also said that she was able to get the academic shock out of the way in high school because the level of rigor at Forest High School was so low that the CC helped her understand what to expect in college classes. In talking about how some believe the rigor at CC is not that great, she said

But compared to what I was learning at Forest, it was awesome. It was awesome.

I mean, I'm sure for someone that went to Morton or someone that was getting Algebra 2 in 8th grade, it was nothing. But someone that wouldn't be able to get Algebra 2 until senior year, that was – they really prepared me, that's for sure.

She overall had a very positive experience at her four-year institution and graduated with a communications degree and a 3.8 G.P.A.

Penelope’s real challenge was following college graduation. She had hoped to get a job with the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation or another non-profit but at the time of the interview it had not worked out. She went to Georgia to live for a year because she was told there were jobs there but was unable to find anything. She returned to the local area for an Americorps position that ended last year and since has been unable to find anything else using her degree. She does not live at home, is determined not to move back in with her parents, and is extremely frustrated with her financial situation. Although she still wants to move out of the region she does not feel like she can do so right now. She attributes this to a combination of finances and her family situation. Last year her younger step-brother was killed in an ATV accident which made her realize that unless she has a job making a good salary she cannot move away from her family. She worries that if she does not have a decent paying position that she will not be able to
come home if something catastrophic like her brother’s accident were to happen again because she could not afford to fly. She feels trapped in the region around her hometown since she is very close to her aging grandparents and is worried should she leave, she will not be able to get to them if needed.

Frustration with the amount of credit card debt she has acquired since college and her inability to secure a well-paying job in her field has caused Penelope to consider going back to graduate school, but she is still concerned about not being able to work full time, even if the work is at a retail job which is what she does currently. She said that people have been encouraging her to go back but said, “But I’m like, I got to work. I have to work. I mean, that's the thing. Like I have to work. I've lived on a living stipend, and those are hard. Those are really hard.” She was interested in getting a public administration job but fears that when she finishes graduate school she will be in the same position she is now. Penelope was adamant about her feelings that she does not want to stay in the area. When asked whether if she found the perfect job five miles from her home town would she stay, she said

No, I don't think I could. I want new experiences. Like I said, I don't want to walk down to the gas station 50 years from now and see the person that I went to kindergarten with and know every single thing about their life. I just don't. I am not that person.
Gerry

The interview with Gerry took place on November 25th, 2016. He was home for Thanksgiving with his partner to visit his grandparents. We met in the McDonald’s in his hometown. We had communicated very little since his high school graduation.

**Rural Appalachian experience.** Gerry is an Achiever with complex reasons for leaving his rural hometown. He graduated from Western High School in 2011, in a class of 66 students 33 of whom spent the last two years at the county vocational school, which is indicative of the intimate high school experience that students from Western often received. Gerry spoke positively about this experience saying that there were many good things about his high school such as the close relationship he had with high school staff and his peers. However, he was also open about the less positive aspects of such a small rural school. He talked about the lack of options that he had in classes in high school and feels that if he had had access to more advanced math and science courses he might have chosen a different path for his career.

Gerry grew up with divorced parents who shared custody. This meant that he spent a lot of time getting used to new step parents and step siblings. He commented that although there were some personal issues that had to be worked through with those relationships that he always had food and shelter, and always felt loved. He also acknowledges that at times his family dealt with its own economic struggles,

I mean, there were times that – I mean, I never felt like I was scared. I never felt like I was never going to eat. But there were times, I mean, in between employment, there were scary times. I remember growing up where they had to
work multiple jobs or do something that they didn’t really want to do because they had to make it.

He describes his community as very small and very “close-knit” where “everyone knows what’s going on and there are very few secrets.” He also describes it as very slow to progress in many ways.

It doesn’t progress with the times very quickly, which as any small town is going to do that. But you go to other places and they’re so much more advanced. Their views on life are so much more advanced than here. They’re not as advanced as other places in the United States and the world.

Which for Gerry is a problem as a gay man from a rural area. He talked about how the culture is much slower to progress than in other areas of the country which leaves him feeling like he cannot and does not want to live in the area for the long term. He said he would not mind staying in the Appalachian region but feels oppressed and unable to be himself when he is at home. He said that although he felt like people knew he was gay in high school that no one really acknowledged it, and even though he brings his partner to family functions now, they still do not really acknowledge it. He also said that his relationship with his father has become strained to the point of non-existence because his dad will not let his partner come when Gerry visits him. At the time of the interview Gerry had chosen to sever ties with his father.

Gerry considers himself to be Appalachian because he is from the region but does not consider himself to fit into the Appalachian stereotypes. The stereotypes he specifically did relate to were in regard to being a hunter or going “muddin.” Because of
that he has struggled to feel fit in in this area. However, he does not hold it against his former peers, “I don’t blame people for that, because any time I see something that’s different, you’re always like leery of something different. And I was different growing up. I never was the same as the other boys and, like, I just wasn’t.”

**Social and psychological capital.** During high school Gerry felt connected to his school and community, he participated in many sports and community activities. His main extracurricular activity in high school was band. The band program at Western was small but that is where he felt most at home. He was also involved with the FFA and Upward Bound. In his community, Gerry was involved musically, often playing the piano or other instruments at weddings, funerals, and church services. He commented that in middle school he did not feel the connection to school and community that he did later because he did not have extracurricular opportunities. He said he had a hard time fitting in and getting along with people.

**Upward Bound.** Gerry valued his time in Upward Bound primarily because of the new experiences he had in the program. He said that he appreciated being taken to cities and being shown that you can live another way, and he valued the friends he was able to make from other schools. He sees Upward Bound as something that taught him how to live with not being part of the stereotype. At one point, he even questioned if he could pretend to fit into the stereotypical Appalachian teenager mold to make life easier on himself because,

Acceptance. Sometimes it was the acceptance, ‘cause sometimes I thought, ‘Oh should I give up what I care about so that I can just fit in, or should I really stick
through who I am?’ And Upward Bound kind of taught me a little bit about you need to be who you are. You’re going to be the happiest if you are who you are. I remember doing things like that with Upward Bound that helped me with that.

Post-secondary success. After high school, Gerry attended a very small liberal arts college in a nearby state that is also in the Appalachian region, where he majored in music education. He chose this school, two hours from his hometown, because of the quality of the music program and because of its small size. “Coming from a little high school, I was afraid it would be too much to go to a great big university. That was my thought, and so that’s why I went to a smaller school. And they offered me a good amount of money.” He also mentioned that it was necessary for him to go two hours away from home, “So that I could explore myself and be myself, and not have to deal with the, sometimes the judgmental myths of people that you’ve been around, and things like that.” He strongly encourages students who can leave for college to go far away. He said that leaving enabled him to discover himself and that he would not have made it through college if he had not been two hours from home. He thought that, “… the struggles of being kept in your home will keep you from finishing it, or doing what you want to do.”

He feels high school prepared him for college in the best way that the teachers knew how to and did the best with what they had. He said that he felt supported to go to college because after the large population of vocational students left his junior year the only ones left at the school were a small group of college bound students, so they could focus on what that meant. Gerry graduated from college and has since begun a position as
a music teacher and band director at a middle school in a small town in the same nearby state, which is located in the Appalachian region. He talked about the financial crises that public schools in the state are in right now and that it impacts the way he teaches and his desire to stay. Gerry is planning to continue working at the same school and establishing himself as a band director but he is open to moving on to another position if one should become available that he wants. He hopes to eventually return for a Master’s degree in educational leadership. His desire is to live in a more urban environment where he feels comfortable living with his partner without fear of judgement. He commented that he is always concerned that where he teaches now that the “wrong parent” will find out that he is gay and that it will no longer feel good to work at that school. His goal is to live and work where he can be who he is.

**Tina**

Tina’s interview took place on October 16\textsuperscript{th}, 2016 in her father’s mobile home in her home town. It was the first time I met Tina since high school as well as the first interview for this study. Although Tina felt awkward and said that she did not have anything of value to say she was able to provide a perspective on students who decided not to complete a degree and who began at the local community college.

**Rural Appalachian experience.** Tina is the textbook definition of a Stayer. She comes from a low-income and first-generation family, values work more than school, loves her hometown, and never planned to get more than an Associate’s degree (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). She wanted to be in a helping profession and believed that community college was best for her if she could decide what direction she wanted to go in.
Tina likes her community and she likes living in rural Appalachia. She said “I like it here because you have your distance from people. But at the same time, if you need somebody, there's always somebody close that is willing to help.” She describes Appalachia the same way that she describes her hometown, as a Country setting, farmland, everybody just working to get by and get what they need 'cause they don't – some people go out and better themselves. But a lot of people just get settled in the small town and just wanna be here with family. She said she feels like even those that leave the region to go to college often come back and end up getting blue collar jobs so that they can stay in the area. She said it is because people “get stuck in their ways and don’t want new experiences.”

**Social and psychological capital.** Tina was raised primarily by her grandparents. Her parents divorced when she was very young with her father getting primary custody. However, due to his work schedule she ended up living with her grandparents in a house that also housed extended family living there for short or long periods of time. Tina talked about how the busy environment of her home made it hard to really concentrate on what was going on with her schoolwork. She participated in softball and band but felt like they were the “outcast sports”, and so did not really feel like she fit in with the others at her high school. She also talked about not feeling supported at her high school in terms of post-secondary education. She felt people in her class were just trying to get through high school and her guidance counselor was typically negative regarding her future career goals.
At home, Tina always felt supported in her desire to go to college. She talked about how her entire family had in blue-collar jobs and “They wanted me to do something better myself than what the rest of the family had done. They wanted me to be able to pursue a career in something I like to do.” Tina had the desire to go to college, she said that “I wanted to be one of the first people in my family to go and complete it.” She just struggled with what she wanted to pursue and what career path would allow her to stay in the region.

**Upward Bound.** Tina applied to participate in Upward Bound because she knew she wanted to go to college but did not know how to get there. She describes the impact the program had on her as more of a social benefit than anything. She said she enjoyed the experience of traveling to new places and seeing things she had never had the opportunity to see before. Socially, she said, “It was nice to have a family outside of family because everybody in Upward Bound got along.” Upward Bound gave her the confidence to meet new people after having been shy most of her life. She said at this point that,

I can talk to people a lot easier. Like when somebody asks me with help for something, I may go to talk to them about my situation and kind of let them know that they can do better things if they try to, that there's better things out there. But at the same time, I'm not very good at taking my own advice.

**Post-secondary success.** Tina stated that felt like she “did okay in school, but struggled with a lot of stuff.” She said that she never minded going to school and graduated from Western High School in 2011. She enjoyed reading and writing but in
later years struggled in science and math. She liked the fact that her school was small. She graduated with 66 students and felt like teachers could give more individual attention a larger school would be able to. The last two years of high school Tina attended the county vocational school in a patient healthcare program. The vocational school was an option that 33 out of 66 people in her high school class chose to exercise. She enjoyed this experience because she got to know people with backgrounds different than hers. At the time she thought she might want to go into nursing and was able to earn her State Teachers Nursing Assistant (STNA) certificate. She had the opportunity to work in a nursing home with that certification, which she enjoyed, however after her grandfather passed away she ultimately decided that nursing was not for her.

At graduation Tina’s plan was to attend the local community college to major in Early Childhood Development. She only considered the local community college, “Cause I didn't wanna go too far from home, and it was a place where I could still be home and still go to school.” At the community college, she struggled primarily in math. She said that she could not pass the class and one of the other classes she was advised to take was not appropriate for the major she had chosen. Ultimately, she lost her financial aid. She ended up having to pay back about $800.00 because she did not complete the math course. After a year at community college she decided that she did not want to continue until she was completely sure of the direction she wanted to go in. She had been working at a local daycare and realized that she could do that without having a college degree and investing money that she did not have.
Tina said that she regrets not finishing her degree and is sad that she did not have the motivation to stick with college, yet she also feels like it was a waste of her time to go to college without being certain of what she wanted to do with her degree. She said that if she could change anything it would be that she wished she had had more career education or exploration to discover what she really wanted to do.

Tina has been working at Walmart for the past three years and enjoys her job. She said that she is not helping people in the way she always thought she would but that she likes being part of a big company. She and her boyfriend still live with her grandmother and she is trying to decide what is going to come next. She wants to stay in a rural setting but thinks they may move two hours north because she feels like there are more job opportunities for her boyfriend. She said that if she had to tell anything to students at Western today who are in the same position that she once was, she would advise them to find something they love and stick with it. Tina also feels that the region lacks career opportunities for people with a college education.

**Greg**

The interview with Greg took place on November 25\(^{th}\), 2016 at a McDonald’s in Bloom where he grew up and his parents still live. He was home from school on Thanksgiving break and was accompanied by his sister Sally who also participated in a separate interview in the same location.

**Rural Appalachian experience.** If Greg’s plans come to fruition, he will be an Achiever. He played multiple sports, was popular among staff and students at his small Appalachian school, and has every intention of never living in Southeast Ohio again. In
college, he has fared the same way, making friends easily, getting good grades, and enjoying his time until he can graduate and move far away.

Greg graduated from Bloom High School in 2014. He was very involved in his community but expressed frustration about the fact that it is getting “old.” He describes it as a “good place to retire” and said that most of the residents of the area are over 65 years of age. He calls Appalachia “secluded” and says that when he thinks about it he “pictures country roads and banjos.” He said the people like to keep to themselves, and although he grew up in the region he does not consider himself to be Appalachian. He said that he likes the city, dresses differently than the people he grew up with, and listens to different music than the people from his school.

**Social and psychological capital.** Greg’s parents are still married and were very involved in Greg and his sister Sally’s life. His dad was the reason that Greg participated in four sports in high school. His dad was an athlete in high school and Greg wanted to make him proud. He talked about how his parents were very connected to the community which could be frustrating because he knew they would find out if he did anything he was not supposed to be doing. Through his church Greg was involved through community service and his church youth group. Church was an important part of his family’s life but he felt like that was not the case for everyone in his town.

Although Greg’s parents did not go to college he never felt like they struggled financially. It was not until he began applying to colleges and thinking about finances that he realized they might have to cut back to afford school.
I don’t know when I was growing up, but towards my senior year, up into college, I knew more, and I knew that we weren’t rich and we weren’t going to pay off all my college debt right there, but I don’t think my parents struggled. I think they’re not well off, but I don’t think they’re sleeping in dirt, you know. His parents were supportive of his and his sister’s attending college. He would even say that they made him go to college. He said, “My dad told me that I had to go to school and get a degree, and make a lot of money so I could have a better life than what he did.”

**Upward Bound.** Greg joined Upward Bound because his sister Sally had been in it for a year and he thought that it was something that would be fun and would look good on college applications. He said that the summer classes helped him improve his writing skills and although he was a good student before, that Upward Bound helped him become a “great student.” The biggest impact the program had on him was socially, “The trips at the end were pretty cool, but I think meeting all the kids and creating those friendships and bonds between everyone was probably the best part, ‘cause I still talk to people, still friends with everyone I was in Upward Bound with. I think I have closer bonds with them than I do friends I graduated with.”

**Post-secondary success.** In high school Greg knew everyone and everyone knew Greg. Although it was sometimes a burden to him, he speaks positively about being from a small school because he was able to form a personal connection with his teachers. He spent two years at Bloom and then decided to go to the county vocational school because they had just started a new sports medicine and exercise science program. Although Greg felt like there was a stigma on the career center he was happy with the level of education
he received there. He said that this is because, “most people that are from other high schools that are around the career center, they think that you’re stupid or not as smart as them because you went to the career center, ‘cause you are in a trade program.” However, to be in the program Greg was in you had to meet some high standards. He says that it prepared him for college and that he still uses notes from high school as a junior in college. He also credits some of his success in college to being in Upward Bound.

When Greg graduated from high school his plan was to attend a four-year university for athletic training, followed by graduate school and chiropractic school. He wanted to participate in athletics in college but struggled to find a school that would allow him to be an athlete and in the athletic training program. That is ultimately why he chose to attend a small private school about two and a half hours from his hometown. Greg said that he was sad when he graduated because he was going the furthest away of all of his friends who were going to college, but that he needed to go that far so that even if he hated it, it would be harder for him to come back home. Originally, he wanted to wrestle in college, but after he was injured in high school the colleges that were scouting him for wrestling scholarships were no longer interested. If Greg did not get a scholarship he could not have afforded to go to college, so he had to change his plans to play football instead of wrestle. He went to his college to play football, which he did for one season. He had gotten hurt a couple of times and just did not enjoy the experience so he made the switch to cheerleading.

Going to college from a small town, even to a small college, was a culture shock for Greg. He suddenly found himself on a football team with more players than he had
classmates in high school. Although he acknowledges that his college is not as diverse as it could be, he likes that he gets to know students from all over the country and sometimes from other countries. Especially because his hometown lacks diversity. He does not feel that Bloom high school gave him a good foundation to go to college but is thankful that the vocational program did. He often felt like his high school just wanted to get students through and graduated without really caring about whether they learned what they needed to.

Greg wants to graduate next spring with his Bachelor’s of Science in athletic training and has plans to attend chiropractic school. He wants to go to school in either Florida or California. He said that his mother is worried and sad about him leaving but that his dad is encouraging it. Greg said that he will be back to visit but not to live. He said, “I mean I like it here, but I don’t think I’d want to live here, ‘cause it’s such a small place, and I don’t feel like I fit in in small places. I feel like in bigger cities I’d feel better.” He also has no desire to remain or return to the Appalachian region.

Greg says the keys to his success and the success of other students from his high school is persistence and having a goal.

I think it’s all about persistence. I really wanted to do what I’m doing, and I think if you find something that you want to do, that you’ll push harder to do it. And I don’t know if the people that didn’t go to college or aren’t doing what they wanted to do in school, if they really knew what they wanted to do, and if they have found it yet, or if they’re ever going to find it.
In terms of how he figured this out for himself he said, “So if you find something that you really like, find people that will help you figure that out and make sure that’s what you want to do. And I think Upward Bound helped me a lot with that. So, I would push people to go to Upward Bound or to find something or someone to help.”

Sally

Accompanied by her brother, Greg, Sally and I met on November 25th, 2016 in a McDonald’s restaurant in her hometown of Bloom. Both she and Greg were home from school for the Thanksgiving holiday, and while they came to the interview together they were interviewed separately. She seemed to enjoy being interviewed even though she became emotional by the end.

**Rural Appalachian experience.** Sally does not have many positive things to say about the Appalachian region she grew up in. She describes it as “backwards” and lacking diversity. She said that she feels like it is still a patriarchal society. She describes the people from Appalachia in that,

They don't accept people who stand out. You're supposed to fit this mold. And it's very, like, country, I guess. Like, almost like hick. Like there's a lot of that stereotype here, but the stereotype really is based on a lot of truth. Because we are a huge farming community, so that does hold true as well.

She does consider herself to be Appalachian because she is from the region but feels like she has “grown a lot more from what is here.” She feels trapped in a stigma about the region,
I personally think like it has made me who I am so that's like – that's good for me, but at the same time, like if you say, ‘Oh, I'm from Appalachia, Ohio,’ like people are like, ‘Oh, so you're a dumb redneck.’ Like, that's – and that's a negative because going to college and stuff, like even if you make something better of yourself, people still go, ‘Oh, you're from there.’ That means you're always gonna have a little bit of the backwards backwoods, you know, hick in you, so…

She said that Upward Bound gave her the confidence to live somewhere else.

**Social and psychological capital.** Sally feels like she took the opportunities she had because of who her parents were and how they tried to better the community through service. She said that her parents instilled in her the understanding that when people need help, you help them, “no matter who gets the credit for it.” She did service through her church, through Upward Bound, and she worked with the local Chamber of Commerce to organize a community Easter Egg hunt that still occurs every year.

At first Sally attended Bloom High School with her brother Greg. She stayed there for her freshman and sophomore years until she felt like her school just was not providing her with what she needed to become an Achiever. She said she was in “a class of 71 students and the teachers really didn't want to teach you. They were just there to get a paycheck. And they didn't really care if you succeeded or you failed.”

She decided to transfer to nearby Workman high school, although she felt she was at a disadvantage because of how much she had “missed out [on] in my previous school.” She had experienced some social problems at Bloom and attributes that to what she calls “small town drama” because the students all had known each other their entire lives.
Sally was very connected to her community but spoke of it in terms of the attitudes of its residents. She feels like it is ruled by what she refers to as “small town politics” in that how people view you is based on your family’s wealth and name. This frustrates Sally who is aware that there are talented individuals in the community who never have an opportunity because of their socioeconomic status.

At both schools, she attended Sally was fairly involved. She was the statistician for the wrestling team, on student council, in Upward Bound, and heavily involved in the music department. She felt that although her parents strongly supported her going to college because they do not have degrees, that she might never get there because her parents didn’t have the money to send her and because she felt that her school didn’t give her the tools to succeed in college.

**Upward Bound.** Sally said that she feels that her classmates who were not in Upward Bound “got stuck” in their home town. She felt that Upward Bound prepared her for college in a way that her high school never did. Socially, UB prepared her for interacting with peers from other regions and backgrounds. Although the other students in her UB program were from the same area of Ohio she was from they had different experiences growing up and in high school than she did. She said that she greatly valued the staff of Upward Bound and the support they offered. She said in talking to students from UB in other places that this was a unique aspect of this Upward Bound. “Like, I go to school with a bunch of people who were in Upward Bound at other places and they are like, ‘I would never have talked to them about anything, like –.’ And I’m like – I feel like it would have been very isolating if we would have that kind of staff.” Sally became
emotional when talking about her time in Upward Bound. She stated that the reason she was crying was, “Because I know I wouldn't be here. I know I wouldn't be in college and I would be stuck here.”

**Post-secondary success.** Sally thought that she might end up in a community college, like a lot of her high school peers, rather than at a four-year school. Originally, she thought she would probably attend a nearby large university in Southeast Ohio, but when she toured the small Northern Ohio university she chose, she felt like that was the place for her. It is a very small four-year school with a population of about 3,000 where she could get the personal experience that she wanted.

Sally’s university is over four hours away from her hometown. She did not select it because of that reason, nor did that deter her from going there either. She said she wanted to stay in Ohio because she knew it would be less expensive and that she was okay with the distance away from home. She said that one of the best things about the school is the diversity that it offers. She was not intimidated by it and felt prepared by Upward Bound to interact with people from different backgrounds. Originally, she had planned to major in criminal justice, but after sitting in on a class when visiting the college, she decided to pursue homeland security and terrorism. Although her mom was concerned about the distance from home, Sally’s dad felt like it was a good fit. Sally rarely comes home on the weekends because of the distance. She will graduate this spring with a Bachelor’s degree. Currently, Sally has no plans to return to the area to live after college. She is hoping to obtain a position working with the drug task force area in the Department of Homeland Security and is willing to go wherever she needs to go.
Ryan

The interview with Ryan took place on December 11th, 2016. We met in a McDonald’s about twenty minutes from the town Ryan grew up in. We had not seen each other since he graduated from high school and I was eager to hear what had happened to him. I had messaged him on social media to catch up with him before but he had said he would have to tell me the story in person.

**Rural Appalachian experience.** It was clear from an early age that although Ryan was loved in his hometown, he probably would not want to stay there for the long term. Although he did not feel out of place, for a variety of reasons, he wanted more than his small town of Castle could offer him.

He describes the inhabitants of his town as “set in their ways” and reluctant to being open to new viewpoints. He said they are “backwards-minded” on important topics like the environment and social issues. When he talks to people from outside the region about where he grew up he says, “I tell them to think of West Virginia, and I live in the West Virginia part of Ohio, and they normally know exactly what I mean.” He describes the Appalachian region as “racist, sexist, assholes.” He does enjoy the outdoors and appreciates that there are lots of opportunities to experience nature, but does not see value in it other than that. Although he does not consider himself to be Appalachian he says that he does fit in because he likes hunting and fishing and all that “outdoorsy stuff.” He says that

I kind of fit in. I think a lot of it is… or not fit in. I think I fit a lot of the Appalachian things, but I think it's more because it's been my life growing up. I
do like doing all the outdoorsy stuff, having bonfires. All the country things, I guess.

He describes the Appalachian mentality as, “being from a small town and being proud that you're from a small town and wanting to do everything you can to make sure everybody else knows that you're from a small town.” Ryan says that being Appalachian means you want to stay in your small town and that is not for him. Although he began by describing people from the region in a negative way, he acknowledges that there are positive characteristics about the people as well. He said that it is “homey” and it is nice knowing you have a support system when you need it because “everyone knows everyone else.” He said that, “People are pretty friendly as long as you're not someone that gives them a reason to not be friendly, whether it be an actual reason or in their eyes a reason to not be friendly.”

**Social and psychological capital.** Ryan lived primarily with his mom and step-dad, with whom he had a good relationship. Ryan got along with his father but barely saw him, especially when he was in high school, because Ryan was heavily involved in extracurricular activities. Marching band, choir, national honor society, Relay for Life, Upward Bound, and a few other activities kept him busy. During his junior year in high school he decided to enroll in the Post-Secondary Enrollment Option Program (PSEO) at the local community college.

In his community, Ryan saw himself as “the entertainer.” He describes himself as “very well liked” even though he came out as gay at a young age. He stated that the town
was okay with him because they knew him before he “came out.” If someone new came in and said he or she were gay he feels that the town would respond much differently.

Part of the reason why I think I didn't have any problems is because everybody knew me well enough to know me better than that. It wasn't so much that they were okay with it. It was more that they just ignored the fact because they knew me.

He said that his mom was ok with him once she realized that he would be safe in their community; his dad, however, was not. His dad found out about his tenth-grade son after he saw a notebook in which Ryan had been journaling. His dad immediately texted him at school and took him to see his preacher later that same day. Ryan said the preacher gave him a book that “explained why it was wrong.” He says that his dad is more accepting now because he had to come to terms with the fact that if he did not accept him he might lose his son. Ryan said that the town saw him as “an upbeat, happy kid who can’t walk sometimes,” due to his hypokalemic periodic paralysis condition.

Ryan felt supported in his plans to attend college, both by his family and by his school and community. He is the first person in his mothers’s entire extended family to pursue a college education. He said that his parents never forced him to want to do it, it was just something that everyone knew he wanted to do. Ryan hopes to become a teacher and most people he has encountered have supported him in his endeavor.

**Upward Bound.** To help him in his pursuits Ryan joined Upward Bound, which he said
…made me not as afraid to go to college. Honestly, I might have not have went to college. I might have just been like, “Well, I don't know how to do any of this stuff. I don't know what I'm doing.” I might have just given up and then like, “Well, I'm just not going to college.” That very well could have happened. It didn't, but it could have.

He says that Upward Bound helped him through the college admissions process, from understanding the FAFSA to applications, to learning how to go on a college tour. He attributes finding his college choice to Upward Bound.

**Post-secondary success.** Castle High School is a small school that, according to Ryan, does not offer many choices in classes. He graduated with 53 other students in 2013. He believes that the reason the course options are limited is due to funding and a lack of teachers. He said that Castle had two teachers for each subject and that was all they could offer. He had access to “college prep” classes but nothing more upper level than that. Ryan liked that he knew everyone in his class and for that matter in the whole high school, but he didn’t like how limited he felt in terms of academics and extracurriculars. He chose PSEO at a local community college to widen his opportunities to meet people and be challenged academically but it was a bit of a shock to his system at first. He said,

that's kind of honestly, funny enough, that's kind of whenever my grades started going downhill. A lot of that I think was just the option of going to class is kind of what threw me off a lot. [Laughs] But yeah, it was – I mean, I enjoyed community college. It was nice. It was kind of nice to get away from my high school,
especially with my high school not having many options in classes. I went from having a strict schedule of what I was going to be taking every year to actually having options of what I could take to fill those credits.

In the end Ryan actually regrets making the choice to take the PSEO option. He said that he was lulled into a false sense of security by believing that this experience was the same as college and he learned he could skip class at the community college and still do okay.

He first fell in love with his original selection of a large public university in western Ohio on a tour with Upward Bound. He decided after being on campus that he would become a high school science teacher. However, his plans did not work out as he had hoped. When he got to college he found that he had a difficult time making friends, which was unusual for him given his high school experience. He had been successful in his science classes in high school and in PSEO and felt like he could handle the work load without necessarily going to class all the time. “I was taking chemistry and biology and trigonometry and all these really hard classes that didn't have attendance policies. So I'm just like, "Eh, it's okay. I can catch up. I'm good at this stuff." That was my mindset the whole time. It's just like, "Oh, I'm really good at these subjects. I don't need to go to class."

Ryan described college as a “culture shock” for him. He met people from different countries and cultures. He said that he had never met an Indian person before, and he had never had black friends before. He said that

There's just so much different culture that I just didn't know about. Even gay culture. I didn't know anything about that stuff. Then I learned how much there
was to that too, which really was a shock because I'm just like, ‘This is supposed to be my culture.’

He said that the shock he experienced contributed to his inability to make friends. He said that he had never had to approach people before to make friends because people had always gravitated towards him, but this was not the case in college. He became depressed and stopped attending classes all together. He ended up on academic probation after his first semester. He said after that experience that he straightened up and began attending classes again the next semester. However, he also began making friends.

Instead of going to class, Ryan then decided to spend time with his new friends. Next, the university academically dismissed him. Ryan returned home to Castle but did not tell his mom that he was dismissed. Instead he told her that he had “lost his financial aid.” Because she did not attend college herself she did not understand what that meant. Ryan worked jobs waiting tables and at McDonald’s, his high school job, and again became depressed. He said that people in town were surprised but not disappointed in him. He said that

I think so few people around here go to college or make it through college, that I think that they kind of almost – it's like same story that they've heard a million and one times, that they were just like, "Okay, this happened to other people that I know, so this must be a common thing.

After a summer and fall at home, Ryan got back together with his high school boyfriend and decided to move to several hours away out of the region with his boyfriend’s family and attend a small university there. He still pursued a science
education degree but added an art minor as well. He had always enjoyed art but his family dissuaded him from majoring in art because they did not believe it was practical. He finds the smaller environment of his school now to be a better fit for him than the larger university he attended.

His plan is to graduate from college and live in a suburb of the state capital. He said that although he does not want to live in Castle he actually does not like living directly in a city, but that living near the capital is ideal because he can still see his family whenever he wants. He has no desire or plans to return to his hometown for economic and social reasons. He said that there is “nothing for me there” and that he worries that with the local economy that he would not have job security. Ryan believes people in his region and town do not value education the way they should, and that they see people in a skilled trade as more successful than someone who is in college. He no longer feels comfortable in his hometown and notices a difference when he goes home now compared to when he lived there. He said that he feels like people look at him now as if he is a stranger.

Ryan said that if he could talk to young people from his home town that his words of wisdom would be to tell them to see what else is out there. He says,

It's good to get out of your hometown, not permanently necessarily, but you need to see other parts. Even if it's just within your state like I did. You just need to see other parts of the country to get a full scope of what your life could be, I guess, to understand where you're going or where you should be going, whether you go
elsewhere and you're just like, "Oh, I like this better," or you just go elsewhere and you're just like, ‘Oh, well, I wanna go back.’

He said that the difference between himself and others from his high school or Upward Bound that are not going to finish school is that he has a big ego and he sees it as an investment in himself.

Louise

I met Louise for her interview on October 21st, 2016. We were able to meet in my office because she was a graduate assistant during the previous two years at the university while obtaining her Master’s degree in education. Louise and I had maintained a relationship since her high school graduation, meeting a few times each year to talk about her progress and then later to help her secure an assistantship for graduate school.

Rural Appalachian experience. The oldest of four Louise felt a lot of pressure to do what her parents had not done: go to a four-year college and graduate. She attended Western High school where she was what she called “over involved.” She participated in Upward Bound, Spanish Club, Leo Club, Chess club, and other various activities. She always felt very supported by her parents and had a drive to succeed where others in her small community did not.

Louise’s parents also had a drive for their children to succeed. If one of the kids came home with less than a B on a report card, they would be grounded the entire next grading period. This often meant they could not engage in social activities they were interested in and had limited Internet access. This was not a big deal according to Louise because in her town Internet was limited to dial up while she was in high school.
She describes her town as small-minded, in that people there seem to view the world in black and white terms. She said that people are not often willing to discuss issues with those who have different viewpoints. She described her home town as very close knit where everyone knows what is going on in everyone’s lives all the time. Louise did not feel that close knit is necessarily bad but that if something happens in someone’s family people will jump to conclusions about it without knowing the whole story. She also describes her home town as isolated in terms of activities. “So I would say if you're part of the community, it's very tightknit, very family oriented, specifically around high school and sports. When you live in rural space, there's not really a whole lot of other activities to go to except sporting events.”

Louise felt very connected to her community when she was growing up, but after she left things changed. “So when I went to college, I went to college, and I kind of dropped off the face of the Earth at home. When I came home, I only hung out with my parents, my family.” Louise also feels connected to the Appalachian region where she says the people have specific values such as close family ties and independence. Louise primarily defines herself as Appalachian because of the kinship ties.

Louise realized in college that she was not as financially well off as her classmates. Growing up in a rural place meant that although there were people who had more than others, everyone had access to the same things. Everyone shopped at the same grocery stores and she said you did not notice the socio-economic differences between people. Louise describes the economics in her hometown in terms of everyone being close to the same, and always helping one another out when needed. “When you come
from a community where everybody cares about everybody, I can't think of a single time I ever went without not having something that I needed – or any of my friends. If somebody didn't have something, we brought it.”

**Social and psychological capital.** During high school Louise placed great importance on giving back to her community. She participated in several activities like Leo’s (a young adult civic organization) and Upward Bound that had service components. She talked about the support that students need from their parents to succeed academically but also talks about the support that the family gets from the children as an issue that can sometimes be a barrier to student success.

They wanna stay close to their families. And then, part of the reason why they don't persist is they've got all this family drama going on that that they have to deal with, where, if you go away, there's not really a whole lot you can do about it.

**Upward Bound.** Louise had family support to go to college, but she did not have the knowledge needed to navigate the process or the understanding of what living on a college campus would entail. Upward Bound provided that to her. She found it to be a social group that had the same goals as she did. She discussed not really fitting in in high school because her goals were different than those of the other students she went to school with. “Everybody else wanted to graduate, get married, and start working, and I knew that that wasn't my path.” Upward Bound gave her the social support she needed to work towards her goals.
**Post-secondary success.** Although she was actively engaged in her hometown she still felt as though things changed after she left to go to college. She feels that many people she previously associated with are intimidated by her because of her college degree. “Because I think a lot of it is they're intimidated, like, ‘Oh, you have a degree, and you think you're smarter than us, and we don't wanna talk to you 'cause we don't want you to think that we're dumb.”

Although she is extremely close to her parents, Louise knew that she needed to get far away from her family to succeed in college. She decided to attend a small Jesuit University, two hours away from home because she wanted a small school environment where she “wasn’t just a number.” She says she chose it because “I wanted to be a face, and I wanted to be a member of the community that made a difference. And going to a larger school, that wasn't gonna be something that I was able to do.” She decided to major in psychology and faced some challenges along the way. After doing Post-Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO), Louise felt prepared for college. However, when she received a D grade on her first psychology test she realized that she had not been faced with this level of rigor before.

The bar was set so low that I didn't have to work for it. I didn't do homework at home. I got everything I needed to do done in study hall. I didn't feel like I was learning anything valuable or anything I was interested in. And they didn't offer AP courses, which I'm glad they didn't because AP is a lot harder to get to transfer, but no, it was not rigorous or challenging.
Despite academic challenges, Louise felt connected to her university and supported by its staff. She used her time in college to solidify her desire to help people better themselves.

Now that Louise has graduated from college and has had different experiences she sees her community in a new light. Immediately following graduation, she began working for an Upward Bound program in the state capital city. Working with urban students who were experiencing some of the same challenges that she had experienced herself, inspired Louise to pursue a Master’s degree from a university an hour from her hometown in College Student Personnel. She selected this program so she could help people the same way that staff from her school and Upward Bound helped her to reach her goals. She currently lives with her fiancé in her hometown, which she is okay with because of some family issues that have come up recently. She graduated in April of 2017 with her Master’s degree and hoped to give back to high school students struggling to succeed. Although she has a backup plan of moving back to the city if she cannot find a job, she would be happy to stay in the area for the long term. She eventually wants to pursue a doctoral degree but knows that the investment in her education to that level is not common in the area. She said that the few people she knows from the region who went that far never came back. In considering her high school class, she says she doesn’t know of anyone else who has earned a four-year degree and returned to their hometown.

She believes it is her initial decision to go hours away to college that contributed to her success. She does not believe she would have finished had she been closer to her family and the issues they were having. She recommends that anyone from this area who
wants a four-year degree should go as far away from home as they can to get it. In terms
of what else students from this area need to succeed she said, “If you're not studying
something that you're interested in, you're not gonna do well. And surrounding yourself
with people who are genuinely invested in your success is essential.”

**Twig**

Twig and I met on December 27th, 2016 in a McDonald’s restaurant on the
outskirts of the nearest small city to his hometown. It was the first time we talked since
he had graduated from high school and he said afterward that he was nervous to come
because he thought I would be upset with him because of how things had transpired in
college after high school.

**Rural Appalachian experience.** Twig wanted to be an Achiever. The story he
tells of his life is filled with sentiments of regret and self-doubt about his abilities. He
describes his home life as “pretty typical” which for him means that he has two parents
who are still married, two brothers and has felt supported in whatever he wanted to do.
His father attended a community college for a certificate program, and his mom went to
cosmetology school. Twig is quick to say that “… she could've gone to college if she
wanted, but she didn't get around to it.”

Although at first, he was reluctant to describe himself as Appalachian because he
does not feel like he fits the stereotypes, he eventually agreed that he possesses some of
the cultural traits. He describes the area as not “economically sound,” and as a place
where people are very close to their families, as is he. He says that,
In some places family doesn't mean as much. But around here people will give the shirt off their back if it means helping their mom out or helping a brother out. And it's just – people are very close out here. You have to rely on each other.

In his experience, he sees older generations of local people who at one point left the region only to return and talk about how they would rather be close to their family, and he agrees with this sentiment. When he was younger he also felt like he would like to “get out” of the region, but says that as he grew older he realized how much his family meant to him.

In his description of Appalachia Twig pointed out that he does not really believe that his hometown is Appalachia since it is not in the actual Appalachian Mountains. He does not describe himself as Appalachian. He mentions Confederate flags, trucks, big tires, and “hicks” as the markers of being Appalachian.

**Social and psychological capital.** Twig talked about being the oldest of three boys in an affectionate way towards his brothers. He is proud of his younger brother who is now in art school but is not proud of him being gay. He describes the upheaval that it caused in his religious family as somewhat traumatic to their overall relationship to each other. His dad’s “nerves” took a blow at the realization that he had a gay son and the family dynamics began to shift. Because of this Twig feels that he has a closer relationship now to his youngest brother who he believes is going to be the one to be successful in the family. He talks about his youngest brother in a way that indicates his frustration with his own struggles,
14 and already knows what he's gonna be doing… me, I have an issue with right now I still am not for sure what I want to do. Jacob knows he wants to go into physical therapy for sports. He knows that, all the terms for it, knows everything the job entails, knows he wants to go into it because he's had experience with it.

In high school, Twig was involved in extracurricular activities like Upward Bound, drama, choir, and track. He felt most proud of his involvement with track because at Forest High School, track had been cut many years before due to budgetary issues. Twig started a petition, spoke at a board meeting and had it reinstated. In talking about high school, he describes his experience as feeling “out of place.” Because of this feeling he decided to participate in PSEO in order to stay close to his best friend, Brutus, who he describes as one of the only two friends he had.

Twig’s desire is to stay in his hometown. Community service has always played a role in his life, particularly through Upward Bound, but he feels that his connection to his hometown has evolved over time. At 21 years old he still lives at home and has become involved with a local lodge and the community fire department which has made him feel accepted and a bigger part of the community.

**Upward Bound.** When Twig thinks about high school, memories and feelings about Upward Bound permeate all areas of the conversation. He talked about it being “a very good program if you take advantage of it. I probably didn't take advantage of it as well as I should have.” He does not ascribe any of his missteps to the program, rather simply that he needed to learn his lessons in his own way. He enjoyed the summer programs and staying in residence halls but says, “Staying in dorms and things like that,
that was – that helped me out a lot in raising my maturity level in some ways. Some other ways I just needed to get out there and realize I can't do this.” Twig understands that many of his co-participants in Upward Bound went on to finish what he did not and attributes it to them having more drive than he did. In terms of programmatic support, Twig acknowledged that he had a lot of it, particularly in terms of always being pushed to do his best. He says that he needed the tough love that I provided and still feels as though I am pushing him on, he says, there was one night when I was sitting there, and I was like, I really need to get that application done, but I have this to do. And I thought, “Tiff would be screaming at me right now to get that filled out.”

He said the support provided to him through Upward Bound keeps him on his path even now, “You are my conscience. You're my conscience. And it's terrifying.” He also says that Upward Bound gave him a social group, that if he had not been in the program he would have only had two friends and no support system. UB taught him how to interact with people with different lives and different viewpoints, which has helped him in dealing with his brother “coming out.” He says that his biggest regret is not using all that Upward Bound offered him, “And if you don't use it, it – you get what you put into it. And I didn't put as much into it as what I probably should've.”

Post-secondary success. During his junior year, Twig chose to participate in the Post-Secondary enrollment program at the local community college. In high school, his grades were decent. He says that he was an A or B student with an occasional C, “but that's mostly because I didn't try, which is a theme that kind of stuck with me.”
He felt that his high school was supportive until he decided to go with PSEO and then he felt they tried to make things harder on those students who chose that option. At the community college Twig began to struggle. He, and Brutus, began taking different classes and were not able to study together as they had before. Twig says that he made some new friends that were not academically minded and his grades began to suffer. He failed his required English class and things began to deteriorate from there. He struggled in several PSEO classes and his last semester of high school he failed a sociology class at the college that he needed to graduate from high school. He was told three days prior to his high school graduation that he was not going to graduate with the rest of his Forest classmates. He said that because his family knew his principal at the time it was arranged that he would have the opportunity to complete a semester long sociology class online in three days’ time. Because his family lived far out in the country, their Internet service was unreliable, so he decided to complete the course at his grandparents’ house. His parents provided him with caffeine pills and Twig worked day and night for the next three days to graduate. He described the next few months as a sort of “nervous breakdown” during which he could not sleep in his room alone and suffered from terrible anxiety.

Before graduation Twig had applied to several colleges, including four-year schools, but decided that he would stay at the community college and get an Associate’s degree in engineering. That fall, although his confidence was shattered, he attended the community college full time. He found himself enjoying and doing well in his engineering courses but struggling again in his general education classes. He struggled
through two semesters as a full-time student and one semester as a part time student, then he decided to stop. He had begun questioning his major and felt like it was a waste of time to attend school without knowing what he wanted to do. In describing his decision, he said,

So I didn't want to pay the money to take classes for something that I'm not sure of. So I took some time off thinking that, okay, I will – I'm gonna get my mind right. I'm gonna figure out what I want to do. And I'm gonna go back.

However, after two semesters Twig found himself working full time at minimum wage at a local golf course rather than back in school. He was taking steps at the time of the interview towards obtaining vocational credentials to gain employment at a local plant.
Chapter 5: Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a cross-case analysis of the data from interviews done of ten rural, Appalachian, Upward Bound graduates from Southeast Ohio. The data can be broken down into five overarching themes that provide insight into the factors that go into making the choice to pursue and complete post-secondary education. Within each theme there are sub-themes that show the trends in each participant’s story as well as makes note of participants who may be outliers or have a different take on their experience than the others. The five themes to be explored are: the rural Appalachian Experience, Social and Psychological Capital, Impacts of Upward Bound, Post-secondary success and struggle, and Participant retrospective: words of wisdom and plans for the future.

The Rural Appalachian Experience

There are various components that can comprise the definition of Appalachia and its people.

Definition of Appalachia

Characteristics. In discussing what Appalachia meant to each of the ten participants, there were many characteristics that some or all of the participants talked about when describing and defining the region. Although most of them acknowledged that there are many negative stereotypes about the region, most of the conversation on the definition of Appalachia centered around examples of traits that they experienced in their everyday lives growing up in the area. Even those who had no interest in staying in the
region found positive characteristics about their home town. Two words that all the
participants seemed to use in their descriptions of the region were caring and close-knit.

While some of their statements were critical of the region, an overwhelming
majority of the participants found their communities to be caring and supportive. Louise
stated “But when you come from a community where everybody cares about everybody, I
can’t think of a single time I ever went without having something that I needed…
or any of my friends. If somebody didn’t have something, we brought it.” Penelope
stated that although she found many negatives about her community that “they’re
supportive when it’s important” and “they’ve got big hearts.” She gave the example of
how her town rallied around a local veteran who came home injured from Afghanistan.
Tracie loved how in the region “we are here for each other” which she believes is
different than in a more urban environment. Although Ryan acknowledged that there are
reasons that people may not be as caring that “People are pretty friendly as long as you’re
not someone that gives them a reason not to be friendly, whether it be an actual reason or
in their eyes a reason not to be friendly.” Even though it was a bit in contrast to the others
in regards to the idea of not judging people, Brutus defined the area as “a close-knit
community. Everybody tries to help one another. We don’t judge based on race or
religion. And we try our best to get along with one another.”

Much of this sentiment of the region being caring translated into having close
family or kinship ties to the participants. Greg illustrated his by talking about being in
multiple sports in high school to please his dad. He said “my dad was a really good
athlete and so I wanted to aspire to impress him sort of. Make him feel good that his son
was a good athlete.” For some the kin-ship ties mean that they stay in the region when they did not or do not necessarily want or plan to. As was the case for Louise and Penelope. Throughout his interview, Twig referred to how much more his family has come to mean to him as he has gotten older and feels that it is this way for many of the people who grow up in the region.

But there is one thing I would say about Appalachia. The families. Families are really- it means a lot. In some places family doesn’t mean as much. But around here people will give the shirt off their back if it means helping their mom out or helping a brother out. And it’s just-people are very close out here. You have to rely on each other.

Although Penelope would rather be somewhere else she talks about how important it is right now for her to be near her family. She said that although being in the area is not in her long-term plans that she can understand why people need to be near their family. Which echoes what Tina says about why she still lives with her grandmother and did not want to go further than a local community college. She said “cause I didn’t wanna go too far from home, and it was a place where I could still be home and still go to school.” She also says that she likes it because although geographically she has distance from people they are still there when you need them. Tina held her family in very high regard and looks to the grandmother who raised her as an example of how to live a life helping people. Both Twig and Brutus also still live with their families even though they are both in their early twenties’ at this point.
Most participants felt that a downside of everyone being so close knit and caring about each other is the idea that perhaps the community is too interested in everyone else’s business. Brutus acknowledged that this is the case multiple times throughout his interview. Gerry stated that it is impossible to have a secret in his community because of this. He said “Everyone knows about everyone else. Everyone knows what is going on. There’s no, very few secrets. It’s very small town like.” However, Tina did not agree that it is necessarily a bad thing, “Everybody tries to help each other out for the most part, it seems. At the same time, everybody knows everybody else’s business, I guess. But everybody normally came together when we needed each other.”

This particularly can be a problem for students when they know that should they chose to do something that is not what their parents would want them to do. Brother and sister participants, Greg and Sally, each had similar feelings on this matter. Greg described everyone knowing each other and each other’s business as “crappy,” “Like if you say something to someone in a small school, that something goes to the entire school, and then everyone’s parents, and then their parents. So, your parents, everyone just knows everything, and that sucks.” Sally said that this has been both good and bad for her and still affects the way she behaves today.

Like my Dad works in the city, so everybody knows who he is. And he was a coach too, so like our – we were always in the spotlight of the city. And I think it made a real impact on like the way that I behaved in high school and the way I behave now too, because I'm still so, like, used to everybody's eyes – you know,
you can't do anything wrong because everybody will know it. And I think that that has, like, an impact on the way like you behave once you leave as well.

According to most of the participants, the idea that people know each other’s business is indicative of a small-town mentality. For some this meant a lack of interest in progressing. Tina, who was one of the participants who held a more positive view in general of the area shared this feeling. She said about her community, “Maybe they’re scared of not being able to do what they wanna do. They just are used to what they have. And they’re kinda stuck in their ways, and they don’t want to go out and see different things.” For Gerry and Ryan who are both gay, what they see as a resistance to progress made life hard for them in some ways. Gerry talked a lot about this issue and said that the cultural norms of the town often dictated what was acceptable for what to wear, and what to do. He defined Appalachia as “a unique area that is very rural and non-progressive compared to other areas around it.” For Gerry, this has gone so far as to sever his relationship with his father. Although Ryan did not have personal problems with most people in his community because he was openly gay, he acknowledges that the mentality towards being gay is a problem.

Well, I mean, part of the reason why I think I didn't have any problems is because everybody knew me well enough to know me better than that. It wasn't so much that they were okay with it. It was more that they just ignored the fact because they knew me, but if I would have been some stranger walking in there and being like, "Hey, I'm gay," I would have probably been lynched or something. Not really, but you know. But my parents, my mom, she told me she'd accept it, but
she wasn't gonna support at first. But she kind of grew to realize I could take care
of myself.

Like Gerry, Ryan also had issues when his father found out about his sexuality. He
described a scene where his dad found a notebook that he had been journaling in and
immediately called his pastor for help trying to talk him out of being gay. Ryan said that
although he still sees his dad that this has had a lasting impact on their relationship.

Louise, who went to a small liberal arts college in Columbus, and Sally who went
four hours north for college both stated that they believed that her community and the
region is close-minded compared to other places that they have been. Penelope, a college
graduate who currently lives in the region, described the small-town mentality as,

Well, anybody that’s different, we don’t like that. Do not like that. Anybody
that’s different, different race, different religion, different anything…we’re very
involved with our guns, which is fine, but we’re very… if it’s not guns, if it’s not
religion, it’s not important. It doesn’t matter. If you’re not a white Christian that
likes guns, it don’t matter.

This mentality may stem from what a few participants described as growing up in
a region where most of the inhabitants are aging. Twig discussed how he did not grow up
near many kids his own age, and his nearest neighbor was in his eighties. Greg described
his community as small and old, he said “it is a very good place to retire, and there’s not
a lot of children.” His sister Sally said that it seems as though the community keeps
getting older and older with less young kids entering the schools.
Fewer young people means fewer social options for them. Sally said, “I enjoyed growing up here, but it kind of sucked. Like, there was nothing ever to do, or you know, if there was stuff to do, like you didn’t have the money to do it.” Louise attributes the lack of things to do for entertainment to the distance of her community from bigger towns, she says the best social activity they have access to is high school sporting events. “So like tonight, I'm going to high school football game for my brothers. Both of 'em play, and there's just not really a whole lot of other things to do unless you wanna drive 45 minutes to an hour away.” Many of the participants talked about social life being centered around the school or their church when they were young.

Another notable characteristic that factored into the participants description of the Appalachian region was that of religion and the importance of religion in day to day life. That was evident in the story that Ryan told of his father contacting the pastor when he found out Ryan was gay, and it is mentioned many times by several of the other participants. Penelope talks about how she feels that her family brings God into conversations regularly when she never felt like they were particularly religious growing up. She said that her dad will often talk about “God’s plan” for her and tell her that he is praying for her. “I can't stand that. I can't stand that. Like I get it. I get it, but that's like what my family does. My dad's like, "I'm praying _____." My dad has never been a religious person ever. My entire life, it's been like he was afraid, like he'd step foot into a church and go up in flames.” The way that she describes religion in the region is as though Christianity is a default and that people do not consider what it means. They simply define themselves this way because that is what everyone from this area does. She
says, “And then the past three years, he's become like praying every time we sit down for dinner. Like every five seconds, it's like, ‘Oh, I'm praying for you.’ I'm like, ‘Why?’ I don't get it. I'm a Christian, but I'm not throwing it out there every two seconds.” Greg and Sally talked about religion being a major part of their home growing up and a way for them to stay connected to the community. They were so involved in their church that they often led community service projects through their youth group and Greg’s preacher told him about the college that he eventually chose. Brutus and Tracie also talked about the church being a social option for them through community service.

Stereotypes. When talking about how the participants would define Appalachia, inevitably stereotypes came up. Most often they argued the other students at their high school fit those stereotypes but that they themselves did not. Several of them were reluctant to identify themselves as Appalachian because they felt like they were not like other students in their schools. Tracie said that she felt in general that her area did not fit the common stereotypes because they value educating their youth. She said that from what she has seen that Appalachia is “more of the hillbilly-lifestyle that isn’t so valued on education and being able to speak proper and dress appropriately.” For Greg, the image of Appalachia conjured up visions of “country roads and banjos.” Many of them equated Appalachia with the outdoors. Ryan said that he feels like he is Appalachian because he does like outdoor activities but that he does not fit what he sees as the stereotypes of the region. He stated when talking about whether he fit in,
If you don’t like big trucks, and hunting, and fishing, which I mean, don’t get me wrong, I like to do a lot of that outdoorsy stuff. But if you don’t drink Bud Light on weekends and… I don’t know. I mean I kind of fit in.

Twig also specifically mentioned trucks when talking about what he believed to be Appalachian. He felt at first that he could not consider himself to be Appalachian because he did not fit the stereotypes of those who drove a “beat up pick up, which for some odd reason decided to take the perfectly good bed off and put a wooden bed on and then fly two Confederate flags off the back.” He also seemed frustrated that he knows that people believe those from Appalachia are less intelligent. In regard to this he said,

If you say, “Oh, I’m from Appalachia, Ohio,” like people are like “oh, so you’re a dumb redneck.” Like that’s…and that’s a negative because going to college and stuff, like even if you make something better of yourself, people still go, “oh, you’re from there.” That means you’re always gonna have a little bit of the backwards back woods, you know, hick in you.

Brutus is one participant who seemed to acknowledge and be amused that his family does fit the stereotypes in some ways. He said that, “I know Appalachia’s sort of stereotyped as rednecks, inbred, moonshine drinkers. But my uncle has been known to put back a pint or two.”

The other common way that participants talked about stereotypes was by referring to the lack of diversity, or lack of appreciation for diversity that they see as a negative about the region and a reason that sets them apart from being Appalachian. Many of them talked about going to school and finding it to be a culture shock when they encountered
so many people from other countries or regions. Ryan said that he had a hard time at first learning about other cultures because in college he met his first Indian person and first African American person. He even said that he had to learn about gay culture, which amused him because he is gay. But had not been around many other gay people. Ryan also referred to people from the region as being “racist, sexist, assholes who voted for Trump.” Louise and Sally both echoed Ryan’s experience about learning about other cultures when they went away to college. Louise said, “A lot of the people that… I mean everybody in my class was white, and race wasn’t really a thing that I even thought about until I went to a predominantly African American College, which was a culture shock for real.” Sally’s frustrations stemmed from what she believed was a culture characterized by “male dominated families who expect you as a woman to want to stay home and not have a career.” She also felt that people still think in a “backwards” way, particularly in regard to the LGBT community.

**Self-identification.** Participants in this study had diverse opinions on whether they considered themselves Appalachian or not. These opinions can be broken down three ways. There were those who are proud to be from the region and not ashamed of identifying as Appalachian, there are those who can see that they are Appalachian but do not see themselves as being “as Appalachian” as others they have seen, and then there are those who are cognitive outsiders, or understand that they are from the region but do not identify with what they think of as “Appalachian.”

Those who would be categorized as being proud to be Appalachian are not necessarily the text book definition of “proud,” but they are those who readily agreed to
being referred to as Appalachian and often had a reason attached to why it was acceptable for them. For example, Louise said that she considers herself as Appalachian “because I really do value my family”, and Gerry, Sally, and Ryan accept it because they were raised in the region and feel that that makes them Appalachian even if they do not identify with the stereotypes. Tina identified herself as Appalachian in an exclusive way, in that she is part of a group that not everyone gets to be a part of. With a sense of pride, she said, “I don’t think a lot of people know about us. They’re all busy with their…a lot of people are busy in the social lives. And lots of people over here, I feel like we just kinda stick together, and we don’t stray too far from what we’re used to.”

Another way participants talked about their own identification with the region was in comparing themselves to others that in their minds were “really Appalachian.” Like the ideas that Anne Shelby discusses in her 1999 essay “The ‘R’ Word: What’s so funny (and not so funny) about Redneck Jokes.” In her essay Shelby talks about her experience growing up in the region and seeing the stereotypes that did not represent her life. She says that although she identified with being Appalachian, the images that were presented as Appalachian in the mainstream media did not look like those she saw on a day to day basis. She said that “the ‘real hillbillies’ whoever they are, are hard to find. They’re always over the hill somewhere, or on up the holler, one county over and one class down” (p.154). Similarly, participants in this study also understood they are also Appalachian but were reluctant to put themselves in that category because they did not feel like they were Appalachian enough. Tracie said “I probably wouldn’t really consider myself Appalachian, as far as…maybe in between Appalachian. Cause I know there’s
other areas that are way more Appalachian than what my area is. So that’s the only reason I would say that.” She said that Appalachia was more country than her area, she said that she considers Appalachia to be more “hillybilly-ish” than the area she grew up in. That “people think of hillbilly in like kind of white trash in a way, and I don’t feel like my area is really like that.” Twig also was reluctant at first to identify as Appalachian because at first glance he considered Appalachians to be a stereotype, however when further discussing the values of the region he agreed that he is Appalachian “by that definition.” Gerry used the stereotype to say what he was not, even though he agrees that he is Appalachian.

Well, I’m like a boy. A typical Appalachian boy is going to be, I want a big truck, and I’m going to go muddin’, or I’m going to go huntin’, or I’m going to go… things like that. And it just never was my, that wasn’t my type of thing I guess. It still isn’t my thing. It never will be. That’s the stereotype when you think about this area.

The third way of discussing identity was to reject the idea that they are Appalachian, which is essentially what Richard Ulack (1982) calls a “cognitive outsider.” That means that they do not perceive themselves as Appalachian when they are from the region. Penelope and Greg are examples of this mentality. Greg distanced himself from the region by distinguishing that he even dresses differently, likes different music and likes the city. Penelope said “I don’t really identify with a lot of their ideals. I mean, it is my culture, I grew up in it, but I don’t feel like I have a lot of the same mentality.”

Among all the participants they discussed the ways in which they do not fit into what
most people see as “Appalachian” even if they felt themselves that they embody a lot of the same value system.

**Economics.** A substantial part of what the participants talked about in defining the region focused on its economics. They were all identified as low-income students at the time they were accepted into Upward Bound. Because of this it may be that the economy and their family’s financial status was something that they were used to thinking about, or it could be due to the region as a whole struggling financially for many years. Although the participants knew they were considered low-income by federal low-income guidelines, many of them were quick to explain that they never felt worried about funds as young people. They knew that they may have needed to give up things that they wanted sometimes to help the family but that this was just part of being a family and that it was not that different from the rest of the students in their school.

In the Appalachian region, money is never far from residents’ minds. In the case of the participants in this study that may have been because although they were not scared of going hungry or without shelter, it never seemed like their families had enough. Many of the participants talked about the personal struggles that their families had at home when it came to paying the bills and especially paying for college. While they also talked about the economy in terms of unemployment, over education, blue collar jobs, vocational education, and school funding.

Overall, although they understood that their families were low-income, they also understood that most families in the area were low-income as well. Louise talked about how they had to shop at Walmart because they could not afford to shop at other stores,
but she also said that everyone had to shop there regardless of income because that was what was close by. Tina mentioned that during her childhood that she slept on the couch because there were so many people living in her grandparents’ house but that, although it was not the best circumstances, she knew that it was like that because her grandmother helped so many people who were in need. She said this again when she talked about her grandmother getting money from signing a fracking lease on their land, she said that she had had money but that it was gone because she kept giving it to family members to help them. Rather than reflecting on this and feeling sorry for herself, Tina used this as a way to illustrate how much her family cared for each other.

It was an overall theme among many of the participants that although there were things that they did not get, and times that they knew were tough, that their parents and caregivers took pains to keep it from them and not make it a big deal. Both Greg and Gerry talked about knowing that financial times were tough but also knowing that it could be worse. Gerry said,

I mean, there were times that…I mean, I never felt like I was scared. I never felt like I was never going to eat. But there were times, I mean, in between employment, there were scary times. I remember growing up where they had to work multiple jobs or do something that they didn’t really want to do because they had to make it.

Sally also felt that although she knew she was sacrificing material things that she felt like she had more quality time with her parents than other students did. Twig said that sometimes as a small child he felt like he was deprived when he had to give up buying
certain items they were used to but as he became a teenager that he understood that
giving up things and modifying your behavior is what you did as a family when times
were hard. Many of the participants said that they believed they were middle class for the
area that they grew up in. They repeatedly demonstrated that they did not hold it against
their parents that they were low-income and that they were grateful for what they had and
their time together as a family.

An economic issue that affected or concerned many of the participants was
unemployment. Some of them talked about the unemployment of their parents while
others talked about their own employment prospects in the region. Both Penelope and
Louise were currently struggling with their own unemployment issues since they both
had college degrees and were uncertain of where to go next. Tina talked about how many
of her classmates who also have college degrees have come back to work blue collar jobs
since they were unable to find anything for themselves using their education. Penelope
states her frustration with this when she said,

Even my last couple of jobs that required a degree, it didn’t require the degree that
I had. So I wasn’t really using it, it just kind of hangs up on the wall, like ‘look
congratulations, you went to college’ That’s about it.

More commonly talked about than unemployment, were blue collar or service
industry employment. They discussed this in terms of what they felt the region values,
what is available, and what the great majority of people in the area must do in order to
stay. Nearly all of them had parents or caregivers who worked in blue collar employment
or service industry positions. Most of them had also worked in one of these types of
positions in the past or currently, and all of them understood that this was how people made a living in the area. Brutus came home from college to help his family’s finances by working in a gas station, and with both of his parent’s and his brother working in blue collar jobs as well they were able to make ends meet “most weeks.” Louise picked beans at a local farm to earn enough to buy her first car. Penelope has worked retail at the same time as other non-profit type positions to pay her bills, and the retail is the job that is a constant for her. Penelope added that she knows she would have gotten more financial aid to pay for college if her dad had claimed her on his taxes because “where he didn’t have the college degree and he didn’t really… he just kind of worked labor.” Tina’s greatest barrier to finishing college was her belief that paying for a degree is a waste of money when she will not be able to find employment in the region for that degree. She said that most of her family work in local plants and she works nights at Walmart.

Not only do people have to work in blue collar positions in the region, Ryan feels it is valued more than having a college education. He stated,

I think people will value more skill here than they do education. So if you're able to do something, and I mean skills are important. We need people that can do construction and can do all stuff like that, but I feel like around here people value those skills more than they do an education. I see that from – particularly from people who have stayed around here, who went to the vocational school, who learned those trades and stuff. People kind of look at them like they're successful, and I'm in school, and I'm actually trying to make something of myself and people
just kind of just like, "Eh, you're in school. You're not an adult yet because you're not in school.

This was in agreement with Penelope’s feelings that people from the area respected young people more if they advanced into adulthood early by learning a trade and securing employment, and by getting married and having children shortly after high school.

One way that the participants talked about learning a skilled trade that would earn resident’s gainful employment, was by gaining technical education through attending the county vocational school or the local community college, which many of their classmates as well as several participants did. Although Brutus began at a four-year school, he ended up at a community college where, after talking to faculty in the information technology systems program, he felt that it would be the best route to a job in the area. He said that the faculty member spoke to him of many opportunities and internships that she could help him get when he came to the end of his program. Twig, Tracie, and Tina all went directly after high school to the local community college where their Upward Bound program was housed because they felt comfortable there and felt like it was attainable for them to earn an associate’s degree. However, at the time of the interview Twig expressed regret at not attending the vocational school instead while he was in high school. He commented that he decided not to go there because of the stigma often attached to students who chose that option. He said,

There’s a stigma that if you go to the vocational school here…well, back when I was in high school. If you go there, you’re just going there to get off school and not try as hard. And then I realized later on I know some people who went to the
career center. And right now they are making big bucks on the oil pipelines, welding, different things like that. It’s not what you think it is.

Tina felt like the vocational school was the right choice for her because it allowed her to obtain her State Tested Nurse’s Assistant certification and begin working while she was in school. Greg attended the vocational school because of their athletic training program and the rigor that it provided him, contrary to the belief that the vocational school was not as challenging. None of the participants who attended vocational school seemed to regret their decision to go there, however both Twig and Tina regretted their decision to attend the community college, both at different points expressing that it was a waste of money since they were unsure of what they wanted to do. The participants were well aware of the economics of the region and what it would take to make a living.

**Appalachian Education**

During the interviews, the participants spent a lot of time talking about their high school experience and how it shaped their time after graduation. They discussed the experience of going to a small school, including school finances and funding. They also talked about the priorities of the teachers and administration in their schools, the academic rigor of their schools, and what other students did in comparison to them in high school.

**Small schools.** Most of the participants noted both positives and negatives about attending a small school. Tina, Greg, and Tracie felt it was a good experience because they were able to get one on one attention that they thought they might not have gotten in a larger school, and they liked that the teachers knew their families in a personal way.
Gerry, who attended the same school as Tina, agreed that he liked getting to know his teachers but felt like he did not have the opportunities students at bigger schools have. This was echoed by Ryan who talked about the lack of AP credit courses, extracurricular opportunities and the fact that his school only had two teachers for every subject for every grade which he felt limited his options.

For Tracie, the issues she had with her school were in the actual school building itself. She discussed the continued inability to pass a levy to improve the schools because they had indoor gutters and no air conditioning. She said,

That also played a big role, I think, in my achievement through school, because it’s so very hard to focus over the hot days, because you’re just sitting there sweating. And most teachers just have a couple of fans going, and that’s about it. We had one teacher that had an air conditioner, and I felt I did so much better in her class, because I could sit there and pay attention, and not be as distracted.

School funding was an issue with several other students as well, who felt like their small school experience was not always positive. Penelope talked about her history book being the same one her cousin used fifteen years earlier. Gerry, as a teacher now in the region, understands that the region’s education is often under-funded in comparison to other areas in the state. Twig felt the lack of funding contributed to not having quality teachers who cared about the future of their students.

**High school priorities.** The priorities of the schools the participants attended were in question throughout many of the interviews. Several of them spoke about the priority being placed on sports and on “getting them graduated, getting them out of there,
and never having to deal with them again,” rather on providing a quality education. Louise said that she felt like the focus on sports was due to not having many options for socializing in the area. She commented, “Like tonight, I’m going to a high school football game for my brothers. Both of ‘em play, and there’s just not really a whole lot of other things to do unless you wanna drive forty-five minutes to an hour away.”

**Academic preparation/rigor.** Many of the participants wished that their schools had offered more rigor in the form of advanced classes so that they could have been more prepared for college and felt more confident in what they decided to do in college. Gerry said, I didn’t have as many opportunities as what kids had at other schools, like those advanced math classes. If I could have got into some of those, would that have changed my decision in what I went into when I was older? Advanced science classes, things like that.

Sally said that she notices that she goes to more tutoring sessions and meets with the professors more than her friends do, and she feels like that is because the rigor of her high school was not as strong as in other places. She states, “When, like, I don’t know some of the lingo or, you know, I don’t know some of the vocabulary even after, you know, reading it.”

**Other students.** Penelope spoke of other students from her school in terms of where they came from and what they decided to do after high school. She stated, “I graduated with 45 kids, a very, very low graduation rate. Most kids came from poverty. And a large majority did not go to school. They stayed at home and lived with their
families. Many still do live with their families.” Brutus commented on his class size dwindling down over the years, which he says is due to having a lot of drop outs, “mostly due to bad grades or then becoming parents by the last day.” Greg seemed amused by the way his view of his classmates had changed over the years since high school. He said, “I know a lot of kids that I graduated with that didn’t go to college and they are still here, and they are still the cool kids even though they aren’t so cool anymore.”

Rural Brain Drain

All participants in this study discussed brain drain in one form or another. Some focused on their own wish to leave, why they wanted to go, and the process by which they were separating themselves from their home towns. Most of them discussed why their peers left or wanted to leave, and some of them talked about why they had a desire to stay.

The act of separation. The participants spoke of the process of separating themselves from their communities as a way of preparing to leave the region. Although Sally was connected to her town and spent much time devoted to serving the community she saw that she was slowly separating herself from being involved. She said that she still helps with whatever she can when she is at home “but at the same time I feel like I’m trying to slowly separate myself from here. Because, yes, this will always be my home, but I don’t want to make my life here.” As she does so she is also feeling like her community is declining, as though it is a way to justify her wish to leave. She said, As I’ve separated myself from here, like I see that there was like-there was nothing here. And every time I come back, like you know, more things are
leaving. And, you know, there’s less and less industry here and I don’t… it’s kind of like a dying community.

Although Tracie plans to move back to her community, she also felt the act of leaving had separated her from her social network at home, but understood that this is part of pursuing new opportunities. She said in regards to coming home to visit, “I still feel welcome, but as far as moving away and not being able to see as many people, and being focused on school, it’s hard to keep those connections with the people I knew back from home.”

Desire to stay. There was a desire to stay among participants in this study. They had specific reasons they felt like they needed or wanted to be in the region that included their family, and a feeling of having a safety net. There was also discussion of epiphanic moments that changed the trajectory of a couple of participant’s lives, where they are now planning on staying near their hometowns after thinking at one time that they might not.

The main reason they cited for staying is the need to be close to family. Even the participants who plan to leave discussed how it affects their family and how important their family is to them. Tina said of her decision to attend community college after high school, “cause I didn’t wanna go too far from home, and it was a place where I could still be home and still go to school.” At the time of the interview, Tracie said that she could not imagine living more than an hour away from her family as she currently did. Twig said that as he has gotten older he realizes that his family means more to him than he thought. Although Ryan had no desire to stay in the region, he did say that he hopes to
stay close enough to be able to visit his family often. Although Louise has a Master’s degree and said that she “can do her job anywhere” she is choosing to stay for now and that she ultimately chose the school where she did her Master’s degree was because it was close to her family. She said, “I wouldn’t say that I’m disappointed in my decision to go here because there are outside factors, like all hell breaking loose at home, where I really needed to be closer to my parents to help.” For the most part, the participants in this study all discussed family as a motivation to stay.

In addition to just family, the feeling of having a safety net at home when things are not going as well as they hoped was another reason that participants talked about wanting to stay. They also cited this as a reason that their high school peers chose to stay in the region. Penelope said that, “I think a lot of people stay to be around their family and their friends, and because it’s comfortable and that’s what they need.” Tina said that she feels more comfortable in a country setting where she has privacy but also has people close by if she needs them. Twig discussed that he feels like people who leave are sometimes running away from their problems and that although he has been tempted to leave just for that reason that he has learned it won’t help. He said, “So I know going anywhere else isn’t gonna solve my issues. My family’s here, and they’re my safety net. They’re my support. And I don’t really want to leave them.”

Some participants did not feel as though they had a choice to leave because of factors beyond their control. Anderson and Larson (2009) cite Denzin in discussing what they call “epiphanic moments.” “Epiphanic moments are times of awakening that no longer allow people to proceed in quite the same way” (p. 81). Participants in this study
experienced epiphanic moments that changed the course of their lives and caused them to stay in the region when they might otherwise have chosen to leave. Both Brutus and Penelope had family issues that altered their decision making. Brutus left for a large city to attend college and ultimately returned when his mother had a blood clot and ended up in the hospital for two weeks. The family then had almost $5,000 worth of unpaid hospital bills and Brutus felt like he could not return to school. He said about his decision to return to help his family financially and emotionally, “I based my decision not to go back based on my mother and my family’s needs at the moment. My mom needed me at home more than college needed me.” Penelope’s course was changed when her younger step-brother was killed in an ATV accident. She said,

> My thing is we lost my brother, my younger stepbrother, last year. So now I want to find a job and I want to move away, but now I’m like, ugh, I kind of want to stick close to home just in case. So I’m like, I don’t know. I don’t know.

Although Brutus said in his interview that he had plans to stay in the region, it is unknown what would have happened to him had he finished his time at his large university. Penelope expressed that she does not want to be in the region and is staying grudgingly because she is afraid that her aging grandparents will die and she will not be able to afford to come home if she leaves before having an adequate paying position. Both participants experienced epiphanic moments that changed the way they view their opportunities to leave.

**Reasons for brain drain.** The participants offered many reasons why they were not going to stay in the region long term. One obvious reason was that they felt they
needed to leave because of economic reasons, including their inability to find a job paying what they feel they need to live. Other reasons have to do with wanting a diversity of experiences, feeling alienated from their hometowns after leaving, and feeling like they cannot be themselves in their home towns because of the oppression that they describe as a characteristic of the region.

The participants who spent many years and a large amount of money on post-secondary education felt that they will not have the economic opportunity to use their education in the region. Sally said that she is willing to go wherever she needs to, to get a job using her Homeland Security degree but is going to start in the state capital in hopes of getting an internship with the state attorney general’s office. Ryan commented that with his future degree in education he is concerned that the schools just do not hire that many teachers since they are so small, and that is one reason among others that he will leave. Many of the participants commented on their classmates who also went to college and noted that most of them have left for job opportunities elsewhere after school. When asked if it was a bad idea for residents who left for college to come back, Louise summed up the economic reasons for leaving by saying,

I think it depends on what their purpose for coming back is. Part of the problem with living in a rural space is that there’s not a whole lot of job opportunity. And so finding something that you’re passionate about in rural area is not necessarily something that you can do and make money at.

Mentioned more often than economic reasons for leaving, was the desire for a diversity of experiences including interacting with people from other cultures, as well as
social and cultural opportunities that are not readily available in small towns, and the experience of living in a city. Although Penelope expressed frustration with not being able to find a job using her degree, she also talked a lot about wanting new experiences, which differs from the rest of her family. She said,

And I want bigger experiences. I like meeting new people. I don’t want to go down to the gas station fifty years from now and see the person I went to kindergarten with and know every single thing about their life, and vice versa. That terrifies me.

Other participants expressed sentiments similar to Penelope. Greg stated that he would just “feel better” in a bigger city.

After leaving home for a period, several of the participants in this study describe feeling alienated from the community they used to be connected to. Louise described feeling like an outsider after she left home for college, and although she currently lives back in her hometown, she still does not feel like she belongs like she once did. In her opinion, those who did not leave for college developed deeper friendships with each other, whereas she was now left out. She stated,

There are very few people that I hang out with from high school just because I think that going away for so long, those relationships with the people who stayed changed and became closer, and those people who left were kind of…they’re no longer part of the community.

Ryan’s sentiments agreed with Louise. He said that he feels very out of place in the region because he has had the diverse experiences that people who stayed have not had.
He acknowledges that this may be a feeling that he has conjured in his head and is not substantiated in real life, but he said,

I feel like people that don’t know that I’m not from out of town, that I grew up here, just kind of look at me like I don’t belong here. I mean, it might not be that way, that’s kind of a feeling you get whenever you’re here. It might have been some kind of mental something that I’ve created myself, but it’s still there’s something around here that’s making me feel that way.

This was a sentiment that the participants who went away to college shared and was not expressed by those who stayed and attended the local community college. In fact, the two participants who went to the community college and did not finish spoke about how strong their connection to community still currently is.

Although freedom from oppression is not a reason that most of the participants in the study used for wanting to leave, it is an important one that two of them did use. At the time of the interview Gerry lived with his partner and expressed that he felt that they had to live in a secretive way. He expressed frustration at feeling as though he had to hide his lifestyle from his students because he lives and teaches in Appalachia and fears that if the “wrong parent” found out that he is gay he would no longer be comfortable living in the community. He said that although he is okay with staying in the Appalachian region, he feels that living around the more urban area of the state capital would be a better place for him to be able to live freely. He said that the reason he left his hometown to begin with was, “so that I could explore myself and be myself, and not have to deal with the sometimes the judgmental myths of people you’ve been around, and things like that.”
Although Ryan did not mention leaving specifically because he is gay, he did talk extensively about how frustrated he is because of how he felt the region viewed gay people and people different from what they were used to, he used the term “racist, homophobic, assholes” to describe most of the people living in the region.

**Social and Psychological Capital**

Social capital can be used to examine how social ties can promote well-being or constrain an individual’s goals, while psychological capital can be used to describe a person’s own sense of self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience (Bandura, 1997; Dufur, Parcel & McKune, 2008; Dyk & Wilson, 1999; Luthans et al., 2007; Vorhaus, 2013). The participants in this study displayed multiple ways in which both social and psychological capital played a role in their high school and post-secondary experience. Socially speaking, most of the participants had some form of positive social capital, while at the same time they also dealt with forms of social capital that worked to undermine decisions that they needed to make regarding their educational and career goals. There were times the participants discussed how outside factors, like their high school experience influenced components of their psychological capital such as their self-efficacy and optimism regarding their own abilities to succeed. This section will begin by examining the various forms in which social capital presented itself, followed by a discussion of the ways that psychological capital affected the participants’ behavior during and after high school.
Social Capital

**Family support.** By and large, the greatest source of the participants’ social capital was their families. Although many of the participants had non-nuclear family structures in which they may have been raised by grandparents, had step-parents and step-siblings, or did not have relationships with one or more parents, they all described having a positive family environment growing up. Ryan said that he rarely saw his dad in high school, but spoke of his step-dad, “I feel, like I guess, typical. We did stuff together. Nothing bad was ever happening. My step-dad taught me a lot of things about cars and music and all that stuff.” Tina talked about her grandparent’s raising her since she was fifteen months old because her parents were divorced and her dad worked a lot of hours. She said that she admired her grandmother because she always wanted to help others but that Tina saw that help as something that hurt her grandmother’s finances in the long-term, and that she wants to be near her family and be able to support herself which seems impossible to her. She said “They wanted me to do something to better myself than what the rest of the family had done. They wanted me to be able to pursue a career in something I like to do.”

All participants discussed how their family supported them in some form or another. For Tracie, this came early on when her parents helped her try to find out what her disability was and helped her try to learn to work with that while first attending community college despite their wish for her to be more like her sister who attended a four-year school for nursing. While she talked about always feeling pressured to live up to her older sister’s example, she knew it was because her parents wanted the best for her.
Penelope discussed feeling supported by her immediate and extended family when deciding to go to college as well as since then as she has struggled to find a job. Yet she joked that she feels like they talk about her inability to get a job when she leaves the room,

Oh, God. They're all really supportive and they're like, "Oh, you'll get there, you'll get there." But I'm like, honestly, like my mind when I leave, I'm like, "I think that they're like, "Oh, God, she is such a bum. She is such a bum." I know they're not, but like it's in my mind. And I've become like the disappointment of the family, the secret disappointment.

All participants’ families encouraged them to go to college and supported their academics in high school, even the participants who have not yet completed a degree. Greg said that although his mother was uncomfortable with him going four hours away to school that his dad encouraged him to get new experiences. Sally, Greg’s sister, echoed that sentiment about their mother, “I think she liked the university and she liked the fact that it was small, but she was really worried about me being, you know, four and a half hours away.” Both Greg and Sally talked about the expectation that they both attend college always being a part of their relationship with their parents.

Although their family support may not have always led to the best outcome, the participants always knew it was out of the family’s best intentions. This was evident in Twig’s story about finding out three days before his high school graduation that he had failed a sociology class at the community college that he needed to graduate. Twig described his parents as being understandably distraught at the news and immediately
speaking with his high school principal to see if there was anything that could be done.
The principal informed his family that he would agree to open an online course for Twig, and if he could complete a semester’s worth of work in that three-day period, he would be able to graduate. Twig said that his parents, as well intentioned as they were, agreed to help him complete the course but did so at a cost to their son. He said about the situation,

My parents probably didn't handle it as well as they should've. But they did get my butt in gear, but that also meant they got me caffeine pills. Actual caffeine pills. And literally I didn't sleep for three days.

He also stated,

And I had to go through, read the lessons, and then redo everything. I finished it, but that also came with a price to my sanity a little bit. I kind of had nervous breakdowns for the next couple of months. A year after… for about a month I had to actually… this is gonna sound weird, I actually had to sleep beside my parents' bed because of the fact that in the night I would get up. And I wouldn't know I was up. I would sleep walk and actually go into the corner, and I'd be sitting there pulling hair out.

This was one example of a family’s well-intentioned help that turned out to have a negative impact on the participant. Another example is that of Brutus, who returned home from college after his mother had a health issue and now works part time to help with family expenses. Brutus was fine with the fact that he still lives at home with his parents, older brother and sister, and maintains that the reason he still lives at home is because “mom won’t allow us to go out and get our own apartments until she knows that we can
provide for ourselves with a college degree. She wants us to be sure we can do it.” After returning to her hometown to attend graduate school, Louise says that being close to her family makes concentrating on school a challenge for her. She says that the only reason she was able to succeed as an undergraduate is because she was two hours away from her family. She stated, “even though my family supports me immensely, I think that if I would’ve stayed and dealt with all of the bullshit that happened at home while I was in undergraduate, I would’ve quit school.” The feeling Louise had about being unable to concentrate in her undergraduate time if she had lived at home, was reality for Tina. She said that she ultimately failed because “so much going on at home that I just didn’t put myself into the work I should have, I guess.”

**Community support.** In addition to a lot of family support, the participants spoke at length about the social capital they gained from the community in which they lived. This included their friend group, their church involvement, community service activities, and overall connection to the community.

Although both Louise and Penelope spoke about their classmates and friends in a frustrated or disappointed way at times, they also spoke about how caring and supportive they were in high school and that they did not see the “cliques” you would associate with high school in other places. Louise talked about how she felt they took care of each other in a better way than in other places and used the examples of giving someone clothing if they needed it or inviting them over for dinner if they needed somewhere to eat. Sally and Greg also felt like they belonged to lots of different groups in high school and had a large social network. However, Twig spoke positively of his two best friends but
acknowledged that when he went to the community college that he became part of a group of friends who did not make studying a priority. As a result, he also did not make studying a priority. This may have happened because Twig felt he only had two real friends in school and wanted more of a social life when he began the post-secondary enrollment program and so fell in with a group of friends who were not a good influence. Tina, who along with Twig, also did not complete college, said that she had friends but felt “slightly outcast” in school, not really fitting in with any particular group. Whereas, Ryan felt that his social life may have been a cause of the struggles he faced his first year in college. He had been in a relationship with a man from his high school that carried on when he went to school. He stated, “I was trying to maintain a relationship and I don’t know if that kind of screwed things over. I’m sure it did. I’m sure it didn’t make anything easy.”

Community service seemed to play an important role in many of the participants lives. It was the main way that they described growing connected to the places they lived. For some this happened during their high school years up until the time of the interviews, for others this emerged in the period following high school or college. For all of them it was an important source of social capital. Brutus considered his role in the community as “helper” because he would help other students who were struggling in school, mowed his elderly neighbor’s lawns, and helped out at his church’s food pantry once a month. He said that now that he is in his hometown again after leaving college that he has considered volunteering to tutor at the high school. Gerry felt that his community service in high school was bringing music to people in the form of playing the piano at local
weddings and funerals. Louise also participated in community service during high school and now is still civically involved as an adult in her home community in the local Lions club. She said that the reason she is still involved is because after leaving for a period of time she returned to feel like an outsider. Service is how she is re-connecting to her community. Most of Sally and Greg’s service work was through their church, but Sally also spearheaded the formation of a community Easter egg hunt that still happens each year. Sally stated that she believes it helped her grow as a person and as a community member. She said that if she had the chance she would tell other young people to get involved in the community as much as they can. She said,

You don’t have to have money to do community service. Go down and pick up trash at the park. Go, you know, help a local church with a food drive. You don’t have to give them… you know, if you don’t have the money you don’t have to give them food. Just be there. Help collect cans, you know? Help people plant gardens. Do anything because those are the people that, you know, if you need a recommendation letter, those are the people you’re gonna go to.

Both Louise and Sally said that one of the reasons they were so involved in their communities was so that they had an identity outside of who they were related to. They were not known as so and so’s kid or the oldest in their family, they were thought of as a contributing part of the community. Tracie also saw the value in service, she felt that her time working with others in service helped her confidence and her public speaking abilities.
Although he did service through 4-H and Upward Bound, Twig spoke of being more connected to his community now than he ever was because of the community service in which he now participates. Since he stayed in his hometown he is now part of the volunteer fire department and he is one of the youngest members of the local Free Mason Lodge. He said this is different than when he was in high school where he “bided his time until college.” Doing community service gave all participants a place in their community. When asked about their role outside of school but in their towns, they held service as most important aspect of being connected to where they live.

One outlier in this area was Tina. She did not describe service, other than what Upward Bound required, as a part of her life. She also stated that she “never really felt like I fit.” She did not blame this feeling on anyone else. She attributed it to not feeling like she ever had direction about what she wanted to do.

A vital part of the participants’ experience in high school and college was that of a significant support network outside of their families. For some, like Greg and Sally, some of the support people were involved with their church. Greg said that his preacher at church pushed him to go to the college that he ultimately selected. For others, they were positive influences from their school. Gerry talked about how his band directors in high school helped him know what to do to be successful in a music education career. He said, “They helped me, and I believe because they worked with me so individually that they are the reason why I got such a good scholarship to go to a school that’s not cheap.”

Many of the participants mentioned coaches or advisors from extracurricular activities like sports or Upward Bound. Tracie mentioned that she felt some of the best support
from those that she knew in her family or community who did not finish college. She felt that they were cheering her to do what they could not. Louise felt pushed to succeed by the older people that she worked with in doing her community service.

*Extracurricular activities.* In addition to community service, all participants were involved in several extracurricular activities in their school and community. This may be a personality trait, and may explain why they were also involved in Upward Bound. It also could be a function of growing up in a small community where there are not many other students competing for space in these activities. Extracurricular activities also provided them with social opportunities in a hometown that often did not have many things to do for its young people. Even Tina, who described her activities as the “outcast sports,” was involved in several activities in high school, including band and softball. Gerry was very involved in all of the bands his high school offered but mentioned that when he got to college to major in music education he could tell he was at somewhat of a disadvantage because his band program was so small. He said, “I had lost some of those experiences ‘cause I was just in a little band with 20 people that could only do so much.”

Gerry was also heavily involved in FFA, where he won multiple state awards. Greg discussed being in four sports for most of his time in high school and one of the main reasons for doing that was to make his dad proud. It seemed like the participants used these activities to supplement an education that some of them found lacking and provide a social network of coaches, advisors, and classmates that could provide support throughout their time in school.
By forming these connections through extracurricular activities in their schools, participants were also able to form close relationships with the coaches and advisors for their sports and clubs. This was meaningful to the participants who often felt that the teachers in their school were not supportive of their post-secondary goals. Many of the participants commented that they felt like their teachers and counselors wanted to see their students graduate but did not care what happened to them afterwards. Greg said, “I think they’re just worried about getting you to graduation. And then past that, I don’t think they really had any goals for you after that. I know that they don’t, some of the people at the high school didn’t really care if you went to college or not.” Twig discussed feeling the lack of high school support the most when he left his high school to attend the community college for the Post-Secondary Enrollment Option Program. He said he felt the attitude of the high school toward the students who chose that option changed after they left. When students chose that option, the state funding the schools received per student would go with the students to the community college and he felt like that made the teachers no longer care what happened to the students. The exception to this feeling was Tracie who said that she felt her teachers were supportive outside of class. However, she did also say that although she felt like they wanted her to go to college that she did not have a personal connection to them. She said, “I feel like they did want me to go to college. Not as a one-on-one as far as… They wanted… Well, they pretty much wanted everybody to go to college, so they… It wasn’t a… a personal one-on one.” While students seemed to obtain positive social capital through the sports and extracurricular activities they chose to participate in, they may have done so because they did not feel
support from their teachers and other school administrators. It seemed that the positive
feelings that the participants had at the time of leaving high school were due to the
activities that they chose to participate in, rather than the time they spent in the academic
part of high school.

**Psychological Capital**

**Self-efficacy.** Bandura’s Theory of Self-Efficacy states that individuals must possess self-efficacy to feel like they can create positive change and outcomes in their lives. “Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Participants in this study exhibited through talking about their own successes and challenges prior to going to college, that they had both times when they felt like they possessed self-efficacy, yet also times when they felt less confident in their own ability to carry out their goals. This section will discuss various components of psychological capital and what the participants exhibited in terms of their own self-efficacy, self-confidence, effort, and determination, as well as their academic strengths and struggles going to college.

The participants often talked about their self-confidence, in terms of feeling positive about their own abilities as well as less effective after finding themselves in a situation with a false sense of security. Penelope’s first experience with waning self-confidence was in the college application process. She applied to three different schools expecting to be admitted to all three, however when she was waitlisted for two of them, she said, “I was a wreck.” She later found out, after she had decided to go to her third
choice, that she was not admitted to either of her first two choices. Immediately following graduation Greg had to come to terms with leaving. He said that he was unprepared for feeling scared about this realization. He stated, “I was scared, nervous. Right after I graduated that relief kind of let go and the worries of leaving, and not being home and seeing all my friends or family, being so far away I couldn’t come home. It was like, oh no, I’m finally going away.”

Some participants, like Gerry had their self-confidence shaken when they went from high school to college. He described coming from a small school, with a small music program and feeling like he was a solid musician, but then realizing that he was now competing with students who had a far better preparation than he did. He stated, “I had to learn to cope with being from I’m one of the top music students. Now I’m not. Now I have to, I’m with other kids who are better or equal to me.” Ryan had a similar experience where he went to college not understanding the level of rigor he would be dealing with compared to what he was used to. He described not having to put forth a lot of effort in high school and just always getting good grades. He said that this false sense of security was a major factor in his struggles in college. He said, “Whenever you overestimate yourself… that’s whenever you screw up.” Twig also described himself as “overly confident” about his academic ability, which quickly faded after his experience of nearly not graduating because of failing a class. He described this episode as taking a toll on his mental health and confidence when he went on after high school to try to finish his associate’s degree. He asserted that this is one of the reasons he is no longer attending college. Louise discussed having a false sense of security which dissipated when she
received a D grade on her first psychology test in college. This was a major reality check for her in terms of her own ability and work ethic.

Tracie was one of the only participants who discussed being less confident about her ability in school due to her disability and understanding that she needed to go to community college first because she was not prepared for a four-year school. She indicated that she struggled in high school to keep up with classmates despite wanting to do well. She said, “I didn’t wanna be that person that needed extra help all the time, because I didn’t wanna be different.” However, unlike some of her peers, who were less confident after beginning classes, Tracie’s confidence grew because of her success at the community college. This inspired her to transfer to a four-year school where she has been arguably happier and more successful than several of the other participants in the study.

Many participants had come to the realization that the amount of effort needed to succeed in college was drastically different than the effort they put forth in high school. This had a major effect on what happened after high school, especially for Twig, who said, “I can’t say I was a straight A student. I got A’s, B’s, and an occasional C But that’s mostly because I didn’t try, which is a theme that kind of stuck with me.” He went on to describe two of his fellow Upward Bound peers who he felt exhibited the necessary effort and determination to succeed in college that he did not. He said that they were willing to throw themselves into things and stick with it but that he would be more likely not to follow through. He stated that his friends always put forth a lot more effort than he did.

Several participants felt that the difference between themselves attending college and classmates who did not was their own determination to do so. Brutus said that he
was determined to attend college because, “I wanted to better myself. I wanted to know that I could do it. It’s all the challenge for me… first generation college student, none in your family before you has gone to college.” Gerry said that his determination is what got him to college because he did not feel that his high school supported him in that. He said, “I think if I wouldn’t have tried myself, I probably wouldn’t have got any help. I think a lot of it was my own determination and the determination that Upward Bound gave me, I think.”

**High school strengths and struggles.** High school can be a formative time in a student’s effort to determine what he or she may want to do in terms of his or her future and career. It is a time when they see what they excel at or what they find challenging. This can either help build psychological capital or deter them from certain pursuits. Participants in this study discussed their strengths and struggles in high school and how it influenced their post-secondary goals, including the self-efficacy they may have had or lacked from their high school experience.

Many participants had good grades in high school which gave them the confidence to pursue college, even though they often did not have to work for them. Brutus said that most his grades were A’s. He stated,

I wasn't worried about academics. I felt confident about my abilities in certain subjects, although I learned quickly that those skills didn't prepare me a lot when I started getting my tests and my papers back. I knew that there's just some things that high school level in small towns can't hardly prepare you for when it comes to major campuses and university.
Penelope had academic success in high school but does not attribute her success at her four-year college to what she learned at her high school. Instead she attributed her ability in college to what she learned from her participation in the Post-Secondary Enrollment Option program at the local community college during her junior and senior years. She said that the PSEO program required her to acquire study skills and academic self-efficacy that her high school did not. She said of her high school, “They don’t have the resources that they need at all. They don’t have the resources. I was a straight A student at high school, never had to study a day in my life. And I automatically was successful.”

Greg had a similar experience with academic success in high school. He said that the capital he gained academically primarily came from joining the sports medicine and exercise science program at the vocational school.

Louise knew that when she went to college her good high school grades were not necessarily reflective of her effort or ability. She said,

So no, I don't feel that I was being challenged, and I think that that's to the detriment because students will work for the level that you set for them. And the level was just – the bar was set so low that I didn't have to work for it. I didn't do homework at home. I got everything I needed to do done in study hall. I didn't feel like I was learning anything valuable or anything I was interested in. And they didn't offer AP courses, which I'm glad they didn't because AP is a lot harder to get to transfer, but no, it was not rigorous or challenging.

However, it seems that even though the participants knew they were not being challenged in high school that nevertheless it gave them the confidence so they could be
successful in college. Contrarily, those participants who struggled more in high school were quicker to decide that they were not going to be successful in college.

Although Tina knew that she struggled in some areas of high school, she graduated with a good grade point average from the local vocational school. When she began course work at the local community college after graduation she realized that she struggled more than she anticipated. Her placement scores put her in developmental math where she struggled with understanding the concepts and after which determined that she was not going to continue college. After Twig’s confidence was shattered in high school due to his academic failure with his PSEO course, he struggled to be successful again and ultimately also determined that he would not finish his associate’s degree. The only participant who struggled during high school but went on to be successful in college was Tracie. She used her resources and her time going to community college after high school to develop the academic resiliency and confidence necessary to be successful in college.

By and large, with the exception of Tracie, the participants in this study who gained psychological capital during high school such as Louise, Penelope, and Greg, went on to be successful in college, whereas the participants who struggled in high school like Tina and Twig, were more likely to give up on college early on.

The Impact of Upward Bound

One of the key purposes of this study was to examine the participant’s experiences in the Upward Bound program. Upward Bound served as one consistent factor in all participants’ lives. The discussion by the participants regarding their time in Upward Bound has been broken down into four parts; what they perceive as its purpose,
the social impact of the program, the level college preparation that they felt it provided, and how the program impacted their choice to attend college.

The purpose of Upward Bound. One purpose of the program that all participants agreed upon, was that it sought to prepare students for college. The methods through which the program achieved that purpose differed somewhat among the participants, but all of them understood that the different components that they experienced were all in hopes of preparing them for college. Since Louise has been involved as an employee in three different Upward Bound programs after her initial experience in high school, she was the most well versed on the actual governmental description of the program. She described it as,

Upward Bound is a government funded program that… a federally funded program that is a college-preparatory program for first generation, low-income students. And their job is to expose students to things that they will experience in college so that they’re more prepared when they get there and also provide additional support to maybe some financial aspects, helping with understanding the language of applying for school, and giving additional support through different experiences, leading up to college.

Gerry stated that he feels that the program serves to help students who might otherwise not go to college get to college. He stated, “Upward Bound is meant to take those students who statistically do not attend or make it through and help them find a pathway to stick through college and get a college degree, and try to make it in the world today.”
Other participants focused more on how the program prepares students, rather than who it is for. Brutus, and Tracie commented on the college visits and the Saturday sessions that focused on different topics. Tina, who said that part of the reason she did not succeed in college was because of lack of direction, said the program serves, “To help you find a career and go to college in what you’re interested in, to be able to find a school that you’ll be able to excel in programs that you’re interested in.” Twig commented that he felt like the program was intended to be a resource and help students learn to use their resources. He said, “It’s a very good program if you take advantage of it. I probably didn’t take advantage of it as well as I should have.” Ryan also described the program in terms of what he got out of it.

Upward Bound is a good way to prepare yourself for college whenever you have no other way of knowing how to prepare. It’s like… and that in itself is its own big family really. I felt like I encountered so many people while I was there and everything. It just made me know what I needed to do to be able to do what I wanted to is basically how I would describe it.

This notion of the program being one big family and the social support that they gained from it is one that carried on throughout the participants descriptions of how Upward Bound impacted their lives.

**Social impact.** One of the biggest benefits that participants saw to being in the program is the social impact it had on them. This was in the form of the support they gained from the staff of the program, including me as the assistant director and later director, as well as in the form of the friends they made who may or may not have been
from their high schools. The way that this Upward Bound program was structured meant that full time permanent staff who interacted with the participants were limited to primarily the assistant director, the administrative assistant, and the Americorps College guide.

Upward Bound became a social network for the participants that lasted four or more years at a time in their lives when they seemed to need it the most. They spoke of how important it was for them to know that the staff was on their side and looking out for their best interests, even if it came in the form of tough love. Twig in particular focused on my role in his life during high school and beyond. Since he had not yet finished a degree he commented that he felt embarrassed to see me for the interview, even though we had not seen each other since he graduated from high school. He was afraid that I would be disappointed in him. He said about the staff of the program, “I feel like having those people that are there trying to help you, even if it is tough love, I feel like that leaves an impression.” He went on to say that a few weeks before the interview he was procrastinating filling out an application for a technical program and thought to himself, “Tiff would be screaming at me right now to get that filled out.” He continued, laughingly, “You are my conscience. You’re my conscience. And it’s terrifying.”

Illustrating the impact that significant support people from the program have had on participants lives, Brutus said that without the program staff’s encouragement that he would not have had the courage to apply and be accepted to the university he attended for one semester. He commented, “Person-wise, I would say Tiffany really set me straight.” For some participants, it was times of uncertainty that came to mind when discussing the
impact that staff support had on them. Penelope commented on the one-on-one meetings she had with me because she was a PSEO student at the community college where Upward Bound was housed. She said that she felt like she had no idea what she wanted to do, but that the meetings we had “constantly kind of narrowed my way, helped me figure out what it was I wanted, ‘cause I had no clue whatsoever.” For Gerry, it was memories of going on trips with me and the person who had my position before me. He said “You guys were influences in my life. I feel 100 percent about that.”

Greg echoed a lot of the sentiment that the other participants discussed in terms of staff support, but he added how much he also appreciated the other staff members that worked with the program in the summer. He said that he felt like everyone involved with the program, even the summer instructors that did not know him as well, wanted everyone to go to college and be successful. He also said that the resident assistants, who were hired to live with students during the summer program, became lifelong friends who encouraged him to go to college. Greg’s sister Sally said that she has friends from college that were in other Upward Bound programs and she feels that the staff support she had was unique to this Upward Bound program. She said that her friends said that they would never have been close to their Upward Bound staff the way that she was. Sally said “I feel like it would have been very isolating if we would have that kind of staff.”

The participants who felt as though the program was “one big family,” they expressed that they felt this way not only because of the staff but also because of the friends they made through the program. Tina, Twig, and Brutus all mentioned that they felt like they were not good at meeting new people until they were in Upward Bound, and
that the program helped them develop social skills that have stuck with them for life. They said that by making friends from other schools that they were able to come out of their shell and that they are still friends with many of those people today. Greg said that he feels that he is better friends with people today from Upward Bound than he is with people from his high school. Tina stated about her time in the program,

It was nice to have a family outside of family because everybody in Upward Bound got along, and we all kinda got to know a little bit about different school districts and how they went through their lives. I don’t know. It kinda made me open up to other people to be able to talk to ‘em ‘cause I was always kinda quiet in school.

Meeting other students helped the participants to learn more about themselves. Sally said, “we got to know a lot of people that, like, we never would have gotten to know when… like if I would have just stayed at my high school. And I got to learn about myself too.” Louise felt that the bonds between the students in Upward Bound had to do with their common goal of going on to college which is something that was not common among their classmates at school.

And the kids that were in Upward Bound wanted to do the same things I wanted to do. They wanted to continue their education, so I was able to make friends from other schools that supported me in the things that I wanted to do and also had similar values.

**College preparation.** An equally important aspect to the social impact of Upward Bound was that of the college preparation that the program provided. Preparing students
for college is was the participants saw as the main goal of the program and they had much to say in regards to how that was accomplished. They spoke of preparation in terms of academic help, the travel and college visits that the program allowed them to do, and the life skills or non-cognitive preparation for college that they learned from participating.

Although many of the participants in the study felt like they were fairly strong academically, they were able to see the value of the academic work they did in the program. During the six week Upward Bound summer program, students took academic classes in a college setting to prepare them for their next year in high school as well as for college like expectations. Louise said that this was valuable because it helped her understand her limits. Gerry said that although it was hard to motivate himself to do school work during the summer that it gave him a sense of what college classes would be like. Greg said that he appreciates now that the instructors in the summer program were strict about rules and doing your work. He said,

They really stick you when you write papers because they really want you to do well. They’re not trying to be mean but they’re trying to make you realize that college isn’t easy and you have to work hard to do well.

Greg also said that the math and science classes really helped, “’cause I was a good student, but I wasn’t a great student, and I think Upward Bound helped me to get to be a great student.” Tracie, who struggled in high school appreciated the academic help that the program provided. She said that because she struggled she felt behind and that the academic work, “helped me get to the level that my other friends were.”
College visits and the end of the summer reward trips were another way that Upward Bound helped the participants prepare for college. During the academic year and summer program, Upward Bound took them to many colleges around the state and sometimes outside of the state so they could explore their post-secondary options. The end of the summer program reward trip, gave students who succeeded academically during the summer the opportunity to participate in a three or four-day trip, typically out of state, where they toured more colleges and had cultural opportunities to see things they might not have been exposed to. The opportunity to travel and conduct college visits was important to the participants in terms of seeing new places and expanding their horizons.

Many of the participants in this study selected the colleges they chose to attend because of visits through Upward Bound. Penelope commented that she was able to see more colleges than she would have if she had not been in the program. Louise said of the college visits, “I definitely knew within the first year that I was looking for a small school and probably a liberal arts school because of our tours.” She also said that she liked how after every college tour I would ask what the grouped liked or did not like about each school because “we could bounce ideas off of you and each other and we would talk about it on the ride home sometimes too.” Brutus appreciated that the program could take students to specific colleges as they requested them because their parents were often not able to do this. Greg also mentioned that the information that the program provided to students about upcoming college fairs in the area helped him find the college that he attended.
The end of the summer program reward trips allowed participants to see new parts of the country and experience culture that they might not have otherwise had the opportunity to see. Most of the participants in this study talked about these trips impacting them because they had experiences they may have been afraid of on their own. Tina said that because she had never really traveled outside of Ohio that it was nice seeing new places. She said “We went to New Orleans and Chicago and kinda saw some bigger places and what they were about. It was a nice experience to be able to see how different people live and the different colleges.” In terms of new experiences, Brutus said that his two favorite travel experiences were seeing Niagara Falls at night and going to the Outer Banks, North Carolina because “I had never been to the ocean before in my life. It was my first time at the ocean.” Penelope loved the travel and said it was one of the biggest benefits of the program.

Upward Bound, I felt like, at least for me, a lot of it was getting me out there. It gave me a couple new experiences, where some of it was still in Appalachia, but it was a bit bigger for me, I guess. I got to go to Chicago, different places like that. I got to experience new cultures and different areas. Even just Pittsburgh, just two hours away, completely different world. Just being able to see different schools, different places, and get to have those experiences, where I probably wouldn’t otherwise. I got to see a lot more schools than what I expected, I just got to do more than what I would have had it just been me and my mom looking and going on, like a tour, and little stuff like that.
Gerry valued this exposure to new places because he feels like students are often afraid to live in different areas and this opened them up to that. He said, “It shows them, look, not everywhere is like that. There’s other places you can live and you’re fine, and you can breathe air in a big city and you’re not going to die. And I think that’s good.”

The participants understood that not all college preparation has to do with academics and selecting a college. Most of them talked about aspects of college preparation that were more in the area of life skills they acquired or benefits that were not cognitively based. One example of life skills that Ryan said he learned was learning how to fill out the FAFSA and other paperwork necessary for college. In the same vein, Louise and many others said that they were more prepared for college because of the summer program experience, particularly because they had to live with a roommate. They said that it prepared them to “deal with roommate conflicts,” and how to live with people in general. Louise also said that she felt like the program helped her learn “valuable coping skills and valuable interpersonal skills that I probably wouldn’t have otherwise.”

Although her college plans did not work out as she had hoped, Tina credited the program with giving her the confidence to speak out in social situations and make friends even though she described herself as “quiet.” She said that for her the benefit was learning how to better herself.

Multiple participants brought up how the program taught them how to focus on being happy and on being themselves. Brutus talked about Upward Bound staff teaching him that whatever he decided to do after high school was his decision. He stated that, “They taught us that it’s your decision and the decision you should make should be one
that makes you feel happiness.” Similarly, Gerry commented that “Upward Bound kind of taught me a little bit about you need to be who you are. You’re going to be happiest if you are who you are.” Sally stated that the biggest non-cognitive benefit that she gained was that of a strong work ethic which has helped her succeed in college. Twig had an interesting spin on life skills that the program taught him for the long term. He believes that at the time of graduation Upward Bound had given him confidence but that he did not take advantage of the program in the way that he should have. Knowing now that his life did not work out the way he had planned that he confessed, “that’s shown me you can’t run away from your problems They’re just gonna follow you around. You’ve got to actually confront them.” All participants felt that Upward Bound played an important role in preparing them for post-secondary success, regardless of how that worked out in the long run. Many of them stated that they do not believe they would have known what was needed to get to college without Upward Bound. Sally was very emotional as she stated, “Because I know I wouldn’t be here. I know I wouldn’t be in college and I would be stuck here.” Ryan said that he would have given up if he had had to complete the process of selecting and applying to college by himself. “I feel like if anything, Upward Bound is what prepared me the most for college. I’m glad that I did Upward Bound because, if I hadn’t done that, I probably wouldn’t have gone to college to begin with.”

**Post-Secondary Success**

Although all the participants in this study intended to go on to pursue post-secondary education in some form, not all the participants had the same levels of success. This section discusses the various levels of success of the participants and what went into
helping them or deterring them from their goal along the way. It begins with examining
the participants’ experience at the time that they were leaving high school and making
decisions about their future. Then the discussion focuses on barriers that they faced when
making the choice to attend college, the areas where they faced success and struggles
when they got there, followed by the support and engagement that they had in college.

**Leaving high school.** At the time of high school graduation the participants were
faced with carrying out plans they had made during their last year or two of high school.
For some these plans had been on their minds for much longer than that, others were not
quite solid even at the time of graduation. This section will explore some of the
participants experience with the PSEO program, their feelings at the time of graduating
high school, and the plans they had at that time.

A factor that played into five of the participants plans and success in college after
high school was that of what was known at the time as the Post-Secondary Enrollment
(PSEO) program, but now is known in the state of Ohio as the College Credit Plus
program. Through this program students had the option to take college classes while in
high school, and even earn an associate’ degree at the same time they finished their high
school education as was the case with Brutus, Ryan, and Penelope. Although not all
participants in this study participated in the PSEO program, half did and spoke
extensively of that experience. Three participants spoke highly of this time in their lives
and believe that it helped them succeed at their four-year universities, while two
participants felt differently and believed that it contributed to the struggles they faced in
college. Because of this, discussion of this program and their experience is warranted.
Students had the option to be a full time PSEO student beginning during their junior year in high school. Some of them did, others chose to only take some classes at the community college while taking others at their high schools. Students also had the option of only doing their senior year, which is what Louise did. Although Louise did well at her high school academically, she said that when she took PSEO classes at the community college, her grades actually went up and continued going up through her Bachelor’s program. An advantage of doing PSEO for most students was that it could get them credit for courses for free during high school that count towards their degree after high school. For Penelope this program and the associate’s degree she earned from it was a great benefit and a choice that she says she will never regret. She stated that anytime she meets a high school student she asks them if they are going to do the PSEO program and tells them they need to. Penelope said that it saved her time and money at her four year school. After going to a private school having PSEO credit, she said that her student loan debt was a fraction of what her cousin’s was at a public school. She said that during her first week at the community college for PSEO she cried every night because, “I had no idea what was going on. I knew I was going to fail everything.” Yet it ultimately prepared her for college. She stated, “PSEO definitely prepared me, especially being from Forest. They don’t have the resources that they need at all.” She said that if she had gone from her high school to college she would have struggled. Ryan, however, also did the full time PSEO program and he feels the opposite of Penelope.

Ryan said that the start of the PSEO program was the start of a slippery slope in his work ethic towards college. He said that having the option to not attend class when he
was that young gave him some bad habits that hurt him later on. He said that he enjoyed “getting away” from high school and having more options in courses that he could take, but that the rigor of the community college gave him a false sense of security when he went to college, and that he thinks he would have done better if he had stayed at his high school. He also said that only a few of his college credits actually counted towards his science education major.

Twig decided to do PSEO because his best friend Brutus had gone full time PSEO and it made him nervous to not have friends at his high school. Twig now feels that this may have not been the best decision because he feels that the high school administration did not support the PSEO students like they should have. He said that this is part of the reason that he struggled with passing and retaking classes that ultimately led him to almost not graduate from high school. Now Twig believes that if he had stayed at his high school he would have graduated without issue and would have had the confidence to complete an associate’s degree instead of dropping out and being unsure at this point about what he wants to do.

At the time of high school graduation, the participants in this study experienced mixed feelings about their future. Some were apprehensive about college and had conflicting feelings about their high school experience. Others were excited and comfortable with the idea of leaving. Brutus said that he had begun thinking about attending college in the sixth grade so that by the time he graduated he was comfortable with the idea of going to college. Tracie said that in high school she never thought about whether she wanted to go to college or not, as it was a given in her family that she would
attend some sort of post-secondary program. She said that as she got older she realized that she needed to work harder than she was if she were going to go but never considered not going. She said, “I think the more I got older and throughout high school and saw the different things, and why I needed to go to college, that made me realize that I do wanna go to college.”

Greg said he felt feelings of relief at graduating from high school but realized that all of his friends would be going in different directions soon. He said,

I was scared, nervous. Right after I graduated, that relief kind of let go and the worries of leaving, and not being home, and seeing all my friends or my family, being so far away I couldn’t come home. It was like, ‘oh no. I’m finally going away.’

Tina felt frustrated at the time of graduation because she felt her high school experience was not what it could have been in terms of support. She felt that her guidance counselor did not support the students at her school and because of that she felt unprepared for college. She said her counselor did not seem to have an interest in knowing the students and helping them with what was best for them.

The participants in this study who were the most successful in college, in terms of having few obstacles they could not overcome, were those who had a plan and for the most part carried it out. For example, Louise planned to go to the college she chose, get her Bachelor’s in psychology and then find a Master’s program in psychology for counseling. The only change in her plan was that she chose a Master’s program in College Student Personnel instead of psychology. Although Penelope matriculated at her
university as an undecided major she thought she might major in communications which she did three years later. Gerry said, “my plans were to go to college and study music education, and that’s what I ended up doing. So I guess I stuck with my plan all the way through.” Although Ryan had some obstacles during his first year, he has continued with his plan to become a science teacher. Those with less solid ideas of what they wanted to do were less successful after high school. Tina started out in her patient healthcare program at the vocational school, switched to early childhood education before she enrolled at the community college, and ultimately dropped out of school. Similarly, Twig said that he always planned to go to college, but he had never known what he wanted to study. After several attempts to discover what he wanted to do, Twig ultimately dropped out of college as well. The only exception to this trajectory was that of Tracie. She had a plan to go to community college and then after succeeding there went on to finish her four-year degree. It seemed that the key for many of the participants was formulating a detailed plan prior to high school graduation and not wavering from it even in times of struggle.

**Barriers to post-secondary success.** The participants in this study realized that they faced some specific barriers in going to college that would impact the way they would approach their post-secondary goals. They discussed the challenges of being a first-generation college student, as well as financial issues they faced. Many participants also discussed the need to leave their hometowns to attend college.

All participants in this study were first-generation college students. Being first generation impacted their understanding of and functioning in the post-secondary world.
Brutus said the reason he wanted to go to college was that, “I wanted to better myself. I wanted to know that I could do it. It’s all the challenge for me…first generation college student, none in your family before you has gone to college.” He talked about an experience he had when applying for the university he where spent a semester immediately following high school. He talked about not understanding that the application requested his physical address rather than his post office box and this caused a delay in the processing of his application and a missed opportunity for a scholarship.

Penelope said that she got assistance with the financial aid process through an event that Upward Bound assisted with at the local community college because her mom did not know how to help. Louise made a similar comment about her mother who encouraged her to join Upward Bound for help with the process,

I had an idea of what I wanted to do, but that she may not be able to help me as much as she should just because she had never gone. She didn’t know the process. She didn’t know how any of that worked.

Being a first-generation student meant that many of the participants discussed their parents supporting them and pushing them to do what they themselves did not. This was a reason that many of them early on considered attending college. This support is something that Louise said is vital to a first-gen student’s success. Although Tina did not finish her Associate’s degree she stated, “I wanted to be one of the first people in my family to go and complete it.” Greg said that his dad pushed him to go to school because he wanted him to “make a lot of money so I could have a better life than what he did.” Greg’s sister Sally said that she felt her parents struggled financially because they did not
have college degrees and she knew that they did not want the same for her and Greg. Ryan said that he is the first person in his mother’s entire family to attend college. Although he felt supported he did not feel like he had the help from his parents to get through the process. He said, “my parents had no clue what to do to go to college because they’d never done it before.” He said this was in comparison to other students who “were lucky enough to kind of have parents that knew what was going on and what to do. They knew how to prepare their kids because they’ve already been through it.” In many cases, being first generation pushed the participants to want to try to go to college; however for some of the participants like Brutus, Twig, and Tina, it also made it easier for them to change their plans when it did not work out. When Ryan was academically dismissed from his first school and came home for a semester, he felt that it was acceptable in his town to be back home because it had happened to so many others before him.

A major barrier when pursuing college education is finances. While this can be a barrier for all types of students, it is especially hard to overcome for low-income, first-generation, Appalachian students. “Finances was my biggest barrier,” stated Brutus. “Money has always been tight growing up. We tried to make ends meet when we could. We gave up one thing every now and then to try and make things do.” Once the participants were past the barrier of applying for financial aid, they still needed to find a way to cover the remaining balance that their aid did not. For some, that was a deciding factor in their choice of where to attend. Gerry said that one of the reasons he chose the college he did was that, “They offered me a good amount of money.” Sally chose an in-state school because she knew that it would be less expensive than out-of-state tuition.
The participants discussed feeling pressure to do very well academically so that they would be awarded extra scholarships to help bridge the gap. Greg said that getting a good ACT score helped him in this regard. On the flip side of this, Tina lost her financial aid when she did not perform as well as she should have academically. She said that this caused her to leave school and having to pay back over eight-hundred dollars because she did not finish the semester. In her case, she left school worse off than when she entered. For low-income students, there is no room to fail or they risk losing their funding. This was an issue for Ryan, who feels that he would do better academically as a part time student but knows that if he drops down in his course load he will lose the funding he is relying on to attend. He said, regarding his decision to continue attending school,

I am gonna be honest. If I hadn’t went to school, I might not have just went to school. I might have went to the vocational, to a career center or something and learned something else that wouldn’t cost me as much money, but I’m so invested moneywise, financially, that I feel like I have to. I feel like I don’t have another option because if I don’t, I’m still paying these student loans either way…So I need to at least get a…. I need to keep going because I’ve already invested in myself so much already.

Of the participants who chose to leave their hometowns to go to school, one thing was clear. They all felt that it was necessary for them to leave so they could succeed in college. For Gerry, it was necessary to leave so that he could have freedom from the oppression that he often felt in his hometown for being gay. He said that he left, “So that I could explore myself and be myself, and not have to deal with, sometimes judgmental
myths of people that you’ve been around, and things like that.” Gerry also said that it is a good thing for anyone to leave home to attend college because, as he stated, “I just think the struggles of being kept in your home will keep you from finishing it, or doing what you want to do.” Louise said that if she had not gone far away she would have been easily drawn back into family issues at home, which is indeed what happened when she moved home for graduate school. Greg said he felt that it was necessary to leave so that if he hated it at school that it would be harder to pick up and come home. The only participant who went to a four-year school and intentionally stayed close to home was Tracie, who liked that her family was only an hour away and thinks that she will never live further away than that. This may be because she attended a community college at home first and feels comfortable being an adult in her home town.

**College success and struggles.** Once the participants started college, regardless of whether it was a community college or a university far away, they all had areas of success and struggle. An issue that many of them noted was that of choosing a major and career exploration to learn about majors. They also discussed their choice of which college they wanted to attend, the culture shock of going to college, and their academic struggles and successes.

All of the participants felt that choosing the right major/career for them was essential to success in college. As Louise stated, “If you’re not studying something that you’re interested in, you’re not gonna do well.” Penelope spoke about the importance of studying something you are interested in but also knowing what career that you might pursue with a degree in that major. She received a communications degree but said that
she still does not know what she wants to do when she grows up, which is a challenge because she has been out of college for two years at the point of the interview and had not yet found a professional position with her degree.

Brutus, Tracie, Tina, and Twig all said that when considering a major they focused on what they could do in the Appalachian region. After transferring home from his four-year college following his mother’s illness, Brutus decided to switch from mechanical engineering to IT support at the local community college, which he says he did because he knows the director of that program can help him get a job in the area. Tracie has known since middle school that she wants to open her own boarding kennel and dog grooming facility, so for her it was best to complete a program in which she could create her own major based on her needs. However, for Twig and Tina it has not been as easy. They both struggled to decide on what they wanted to do, and at the time of the interviews, neither felt they had any direction. These are also the only two participants who dropped out of school entirely.

Greg said that when talking to young people he suggests having a goal bigger than just going to college. He stated, “Find people that want you to succeed and be with them, and then find something you want to do.” He said the key is to “find something that you really like, find people that will help you figure that out, and make sure that’s what you want to do. And I think Upward Bound helped me a lot with that.” Ryan said that he selected his major to get the job he wants but that he picked his art minor because it is something he enjoys. He stressed the importance of being able to get a job with your
major while also enjoying it. Gerry thought that if you find a major or career that you really want to do it will inspire you to persist. He said,

I think it’s all about persistence. I really wanted to do what I’m doing, and I think if you find something that you want to do, that you’ll push harder to do it. And I don’t know if the people that didn’t go to college or aren’t doing what they wanted to do in school, if they really knew what they wanted to do, and if they have found it yet, or if they’re ever going to find it.

The participants in this study discussed their choice of college as a factor in their success as well. Some of them felt strongly about selecting a small school that was relatively far away from their families. Others wanted to stay close to home or felt that an Associate’s degree was the best option for them. In one case, the participant’s college was not necessarily her first choice. Penelope discussed how she originally had chosen two larger schools out of state, and when she found out that she was put on the wait list for both she was devastated. Although she felt certain of her decision to apply to those schools, her confidence was shattered when she had to re-evaluate her plan. Her third-choice school, and the one that she actually attended, was much smaller and also out of state but was within two hours drive from her home, significantly closer than her first two choices. Louise, Gerry, Greg, and Sally also chose small schools that were far away. Louise said that she did not want to feel like “a number” because she was used to being part of a community. Gerry said that he wanted the individual attention he was accustomed to at his high school. He stated, “Coming from a little high school, I was afraid it would be too much to go to a great big university.” All of these participants felt
more comfortable at small schools that were similar to the environment of their high school. This also became the case for Ryan after he tried a larger school, was academically dismissed, and then transferred to a smaller school where he has had success. He said that he was surprised at this because he started at one of the largest schools in the state and transferred to one of the smallest state schools. Ryan said, “So I kind of like it. I like that I can actually get one-on-one time with my professors and stuff.”

Of the three participants who chose to attend a community college after high school, Tracie was the only one who originally chose a community college and then transferred to a four-year school. She said that she did not have good grades in high school and did not have the confidence to try a four-year school. She said that she originally thought an Associate’s degree would be enough for her. Later, after she did well at the community college she chose to continue to a Bachelor’s degree and subsequently graduated with honors. Tina and Twig both chose to attend the local community college where their Upward Bound program was housed. They each said they wanted to stay close to home and that what they thought they wanted to do only required a two-year degree.

Going to college can be a culture shock for any student, but the participants discussed they felt it the most in terms of diversity. Although many of the participants attended small, liberal arts schools, they often experienced diversity they were not used to. Greg said that he liked being around students from other cultures and countries. Sally agreed and stated, “It wasn’t a shock, but it was, you know, it was something pleasant for
me, ‘cause you get to meet other people from, you know, different backgrounds.” Ryan openly admitted that it was a culture shock for him. He said about his experience at his first college,

There’s just so much different culture that I didn’t know about. Even gay culture. I didn’t know anything about that stuff then I learned how much there was to that too, which was really a shock because I’m just like, “This is supposed to be my culture.”

Louise had a similar experience and compared the diversity at college to her own hometown’s lack of diversity. “Race wasn’t really a thing that I even thought about until I went to a predominantly African American College, which was a culture shock for real,” she went on to say, “I just didn’t even know how to conduct myself.” Gerry compared the experience that he had at a four-year school with other students’ experience who stayed at the local community college. “I think any college you go to- not that I’m saying community college is bad, but unless you go to somewhere like that, you’re going to have a culture shock when you go in.” Brutus described his feelings when he arrived at the university he attended for a semester as, “I felt out of place, like being in a foreign country.” Although many of the participants who went away to school described the culture shock they felt at being in a more diverse place, they all thought it was a good experience that helped them broaden their world view. It was an aspect of college life that the participants were not prepared for after living in a small hometown, yet they enjoyed the time spent with people from other backgrounds and largely felt it was a positive aspect of going away to college.
While not all the participants in this study finished college, all experienced both successes while in school as well as struggles. Many of them believe that the experiences they had struggling were as important as the success they had. In his first post-secondary attempt, Ryan learned his lesson about the importance of going to class too late to remain at his first university. Even at his second university he failed chemistry three times. He said that he struggled in classes in which he did not expect to, and he had developed bad habits, such as skipping class often from the community college. From this struggle, he learned the self-discipline that he needed to have more success after he was academically dismissed. His dismissal was painful for him, “Made me feel stupid. Made me feel really stupid.” This description of bad habits and surprisingly low grades encompassed for many of the participants what was the freedom to fail that they did not have in high school. Louise said that coming to the realization “that I was gonna have to say that I failed and going to have to withdraw from the class,” was an experience she had not had before. She stated that college “was very challenging for probably the first semester or two, to like be a free-thinking individual “cause that’s not necessarily something that happens at home.” Louise, like many of the other participants had come from schools where they did well with little effort, and if they did not do well they were allowed to do the work over or get bonus points. College was for many their first experience of failing in school. Gerry discussed coming from an environment where he was the best music student to a place where he was not. Although he did not fail, he learned a hard lesson about his abilities, “You have to accept you’re not. I’m not the best now. I make mistakes every day, and that’s okay. I just try, as long as I try my best and work the best I can,
that’s all that matters.” Sally felt underprepared compared to her classmates. She said she felt like they came from bigger places and had a better education. She commented that she knows that her friends did not have to do the extra tutoring sessions or talk to the professors for help like she did. Twig felt that his over-confidence in his abilities combined with his first experience with failure stayed with him for the long term. He said that although he tested well, “It was large papers and things like that would always just stress me out beyond belief.” He went on to say, “I mean some things you just gotta learn through failure.” Tina, who said that she struggled with math and science in high school, saw the trend continue in community college.

I struggled a lot with the online classes, especially math, because we had to do the work in the classroom setting, but it was all on the computer. And our advisor for that class wasn’t very helpful in instructing us how to do things. Rather, she would just show us what the answer was, and we were supposed to learn from that.

Despite many participants saying they felt unprepared for college, they also experienced academic success in school. When Brutus was accepted at the large public university, he was also accepted into their Humanities Engineers Honors program. Penelope maintained a 4.0 grade point average during her first two years in college. After contracting mono during her senior year and missing some class meetings she graduated with a 3.8 G.P.A. Greg, an athletic training major in his junior year said that he carries a 3.0 G.P.A. Tracie, who struggled in high school, graduated from a four-year university shortly after the interview, with honors. She attributes this success to studying what she
liked, business and communications, which she put together to create her own degree
program. Even Ryan felt that he has finally gotten his feet under him, especially since he
added an art minor which has given him something to enjoy.

Six of the participants in this study believe they would not have been as
successful or enjoyed their college experience as much if they had not been engaged and
found a social network or support system. They found this network through getting to
know their professors, advisors, other college personnel, and the friendships they made.
Greg found this through the sports he participated in during college. He originally went to
the small school he chose to play football, but after a season of playing on a losing team
and not feeling the support he wanted he decided to make the switch to cheerleading. He
said that a friend of his asked him to come to practice with her multiple times, when he
finally agreed he found the practice to be fun. He said of his first practice, “everyone
seemed pretty cool. The coach was pretty excited that I was there, and I was good at it,
which was surprising.” Louise said that success came from “surrounding yourself with
people who are genuinely invested in your success.” She did this by becoming a tutor and
working in The Student Success Office at her college. She said that the staff in the office
was supportive and encouraging. “Every question I ever had, they answered and were
excited about answering it and excited about me learning more about advising and
retention and just students in general.” These interactions inspired Louise to pursue a
College Student Personnel Master’s degree. She stated, “I didn’t really realize higher
education was a career path until I started working and I was a tutor at my
undergraduate.” Penelope relied on her social nature to help her create a group of friends
that lasted throughout her undergraduate career. She said that she met the student who became her best friend at orientation before she started school and it lasted through her whole time there. Tracie’s experience was like Penelope’s. Tracie was a transfer student and worried that she would not meet people. She said that she met her first friend during her transfer orientation and eventually lived with her during her senior year in college. Although she met her friend Tracie had already agreed to live with another student who was not as social and she had known from high school. Because of that, her first year she felt isolated in her apartment and sought out a way to find a social group. She decided to join a student organization to help her meet people. Through this she bonded with her orientation friend and found her social support.

For other students, it was not so easy. Gerry felt that going somewhere new, while liberating, also was hard socially after coming from a small high school. He said that he could see, after experiencing it, how not having a social network in college can make people like his former high school classmates want to quit.

Sometimes they’re looking for acceptance in some situations, so they get into that, and then the focus goes away from their academics, and then they’re spiraling downhill into something that ends where they drop out and leave. I saw that happen a couple of times.

Ryan was surprised at how hard it was to make friends after coming from an environment where he grew up with the same people throughout high school and always had friends. Of his time in high school he said, “Just people kind of gravitated toward me, I guess. People wanted to be my friend.” When he got to college and was constantly
around 20,000 students, he said, “I always thought I was very extroverted, but then going to college made me realize I wasn’t.” He said that he spent the semester depressed, and was “considering transferring to a school where I had friends.” He recommended that future students should always seek out friends. He stated,

You need support, and you need support that is there really and I didn’t necessarily lack that, but I thought I lacked that I guess you need to realize where your support is. If I had the knowledge of what I do now, then things would have went completely different.

Although Louise found her place of support eventually, she also struggled socially when she first got to college. She said that it was not that she was homesick, “Upward Bound did a really good job of like getting over that homesick bump.” It was more that she did not know how to be alone when all her roommates went home every weekend. She said she worried about things like sitting alone in the dining hall. Several participants expressed similar concerns when they reflected on their college careers.

**Retrospective and Participant Words of Wisdom**

In their understanding of their own experiences, many reflected on what helped them along the way and what struggles might have been avoided if they had known better.

**Looking back.** As do most adults, some of the participants in this study had some regrets or thoughts about their lives in looking back at their high school and post-secondary experience. Both Ryan and Twig commented on what they learned from the failure they experienced. Ryan wished that he had been able to stay at his first university
and had not been academically dismissed. He said that he wishes that he had been able to graduate from there but,

At the same time I feel like my experience since then has kind of… I didn’t miss out on… I kind of learned in a different way I guess. I got an education in a different way from those years of not being there, a year of not being in school. Being on my own, I’ve kind of- I feel like I’ve grown up more because I wasn’t being coddled the whole time.

Twig said that when he first quit attending community college that he was okay with it because he had a full time job making money and felt content. He said that taking the time to work and discover himself helped him find out what he wants now. At the time of the interview he said that he had been dating a woman for six months and decided that he needs more than just work at a golf course.

As the participants reflected on their experience, they wished that they had been given more education on how to be an adult in the world on their own. Penelope said that when she went to college she had to learn how to budget, do laundry, and cook for herself. She stated, “I wish high school would have prepared me a little bit for that. It’s like adulthood sucks.” This was also the only component of going to college that intimidated Tracie when she transferred to a four-year school. “The aspect of being on my own scared me,” she said, “because I wasn’t fully aware of myself, and how well I would do with just basic time management, and even just doing my own laundry.”

Additionally, in the course of their time in college and maturing into young adulthood, many of the participants saw change in themselves, either in comparison to
what they once were or in comparison to others they grew up with. Sally saw herself as more open minded than she used to be and more so than the town she grew up in. She said, “I am a lot more open minded than a lot of people are here. I’m accepting of a lot of different, you know, cultures and stuff that I definitely don’t see in the community around me.” For Ryan, the change was more about how he views his community and how they view him after being gone. He said that he feels like he could go home and no one would remember who he is.

**Currently.** When asked about how they felt about how their lives have turned out, many participants were optimistic, despite things not turning out the way they planned. Louise said that her college motto was “Passion with a purpose”, which helped inspire her to obtain a Master’s degree in education. Despite not finishing her Associate’s degree, Tina feels that she is on the path to bettering herself. She talked about how she is happy that she has had a job for the previous three years and that she is “just kinda making ends meet, trying to better myself slowly.” Gerry said that he is happy with how things turned out for him even though it is hard financially. “I mean, I’m a young adult,” he said, “so it’s hard to make it sometimes. You have your loans you have to pay for and all that stuff, but I’m satisfied with what happened.” Sally, who had not graduated at the time of the interview, said that she has days when she feels stressed, but that overall she was very happy that she went to college. She stated, “I feel like college is where I’m supposed to be right now.”

Although Penelope graduated from college, she struggles to find satisfaction with her life. After graduation, she worked in retail for a period of time, moved to a different
city where she did the work she wanted to in a non-profit, but it was only a temporary position. She then moved to Georgia for a year, moved home to become an Americorps Vista volunteer for a year, and has been working retail ever since. She questions the value of her degree. Otherwise, most of the participants felt content with the way things worked out for them.

The participants spoke of their plans moving forward from the time of the interview. Several hoped to eventually finish the degrees they previously started. Brutus is working towards his Associate’s degree one class at a time but said that if he had the opportunity he would like to finish his Bachelor’s degree. Tina spoke of a desire to return and finish a college degree but was concerned about the money that it would cost. She said that she was unsure about her future in her community but that she wants to be in the country “where you have your own privacy and distance from people, but there’s still people close by if you need them.” She that her immediate hopes were to move into management at the store where she was employed. Twig also hoped to continue his education but had decided that the best method at this point in his life would be through adult technical education. He said that he wishes that he had taken the vocational track in high school because he is much more comfortable and interested in hands on work. He is hoping to build a house on land near his grandparent’s and stay in his town for the long term.

Two of the college graduates were looking towards graduate school for the future. Penelope and Gerry both want to pursue a Master’s degree at some point, but for now Penelope would just be happy with a full-time job using her degree. Gerry said that he
did not know where he will go but wants to get his Master’s degree in educational leadership. He also spoke of the freedom of having his degree and a stable career. He said, “I can be a little pickier now. It’s not just that I need something.” While Louise was finishing a Master’s degree at the time of the interview, she still has hopes of returning to eventually work on a Ph.D. In the meantime, she is getting married in the summer following graduation and would begin working in her field, ideally around her hometown. She said, “What I wanna do I can do anywhere…if I can find the right job, and I really…I think I have a connection with the students from the Appalachian area because we share similar history, so I’m comfortable with that.” Although he had not yet graduated with his bachelor’s degree at the time of the interview, Greg said that he was already planning for chiropractic school.

Tracie was happy with her Bachelor’s degree and was formulating a plan to begin her career grooming, training, and boarding dogs. She said that following graduation, “I’ll move back home and find a job from around my home town, and then while doing that, kinda do more of training and grooming, and boarding dogs through my home.” After graduation, Ryan said that he would like to teach for some time and hopefully move up in the public-school system. He stated, “I’ve actually thought if the money ever isn’t enough for me, I’ll go into administration because I have an education degree and I have that personality that I could take charge.”

**Words of wisdom.** The reflection on past experiences has made participants feel like they want to share their experiences with other people. Brutus said “I try to share my viewpoints of what I learned about people who keep asking questions about what I’ve
seen, what I’ve learned.” Additionally, the participants had some advice they would like to pass on to students who are in the same position they were in when growing up in the region. Many of them, like Brutus, urge young people to take advantage of their opportunities.

I would tell them to make the most of their high school experience, that if they have the opportunity to do Upward Bound and/or PSEO, take the opportunity. They both help you plot your course for the rest of your high school career and even past that, to your college career and beyond that.

Louise said that she would tell students that they have a responsibility to get an education if they can so that they can help those less fortunate than they are. Penelope and Tina both said that young people need to find what they want to do and are passionate about before they go to college. Tina said, “Find something that you like, and try to keep as much feeling into it as you can, trying to do what you enjoy doing without backing out of it.” Gerry focused on telling young people to do what he struggled with doing in terms of being himself.

Do not be afraid to be who you are, and don’t let this community keep you down and keep you from doing what you want to do really. ‘Cause I remember growing up, there’s a lot of, you can get a lot of flack for being who you are here. You just can. And there’s a lot of push to be this way. You need to be this way. This is the normal way. This is the way you need to be, and don’t let that happen to you.

Sally and Greg both suggested that young people should get involved in their communities and their schools. Sally wants everyone to do some community service
while in high school. Greg encouraged everyone to get involved with Upward Bound. Tracie said that students need to keep going even when they want to give up. She said to find people that will provide support. “I had that support group with me, and now I’m where I’m at today because of them, and because of Upward Bound.” After all of his struggles, Twig had some words of wisdom for young people who are also struggling.

Don’t get down on yourself. And also make the most of what you’re given. You only get out what you put into it. So take high school seriously. Because when you don’t… any program you’re in take it seriously. Because if you don’t you’ll end up screwing it up somehow. And then you’re gonna be stuck not being able to do what you want in life.

**Conclusion of Analysis**

The findings presented in this chapter represent a synthesis of the participant interviews. They illustrate the experiences and participant reflection on the various aspects of their time during high school, the post-secondary education application process, as well as during their time pursuing a college degree. Examining their own thoughts on this process, the participants gain an understanding of their own experiences and provided a deconstruction of those experiences. The final chapter of this study will examine the data in reference to the research questions to suggest lessons learned as well as further questions to be addressed.
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

Some of the issues the participants in this study faced are universal, such as being prepared to live independently and worrying about how to pay for college. However, many of the issues they faced are unique to this population, such as struggling to pay for a college experience that replicates the experience in a small rural high school, deciding to leave college to take care of home finances after parental illness, lacking experience with diverse populations, and struggling to overcome cultural stereotypes. This study serves to show both the similarities of this population to high school students from across the country as well as the differences and additional challenges they may face when pursuing post-secondary education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of a sample of rural, Appalachian, Upward Bound graduates. This was completed by deconstructing the components of this identity with existing literature on the topic and collecting qualitative data from a sample of ten participants who have lived this experience. This study sought to address a gap in the literature concerning the identity and experience of this population and to provide a resource for rural Upward Bound programs and educators who work with these students in an educational setting seeking to prepare them for decisions about their future.

Scope of the study and data gathering. Data for this study was collected from ten rural, Appalachian, Upward Bound graduates. All participants were 20 years of age or older, with the oldest being 24 at the time of the interview. Five of the participants were
still attending college at the time of the interview, one was attending part-time, and one had returned after being academically dismissed for the duration of one year. Three of the participants had completed a Bachelor’s degree, while one of these three was enrolled in graduate school at the time of the interview. Two of the ten participants had dropped out of college and had neither completed an Associate’s nor a Bachelor’s degree. Although I attempted to include at least one participant in the study who did not attend any college after high school, I was unable to make contact or get responses after several attempts. I believe this occurred because the former students may have been embarrassed to talk about not attempting their post-secondary goals. The participants were contacted primarily using social media and text messages.

All participants in this study were previously part of the Upward Bound program in which I served as either the Assistant Director or Director at the time of their participation. As a result, I had a personal relationship with each participant prior to the study. All participants completed an informed consent form. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were recorded using a handheld recording device. After the interview, I sent each recording to a transcription service. I uploaded the transcripts in ATLAS- TI, a qualitative data analysis software for coding. Coding was done using emergent codes and then recoded at the end to provide continuity across the interviews for cross-case analysis purposes. Codes were condensed, in accordance with Saldana’s (2016) recommendations, into code families creating themes across all cases and were used subsequently to provide structure. This structure constitutes a method for presenting findings in what Patton (2015) describes as a “creative synthesis,” which is the “bringing
together of the pieces that have emerged into a total experience, showing patterns in relationships” (p. 577).

**Phenomenology**

My interest in this topic emerged from my own experience growing up in rural Appalachia and attending college in a region where college is not always the expectation. Additionally, my 12-year career in working with this population of students, and having mixed success in terms of degree attainment, led me to consider what could be done to increase college completion rates among Appalachian students. As is the case in this study, many students from this population indicate an interest in college at some point, however there are factors that often obstruct success. I was curious to research what some of those factors might be and how to mitigate them to promote success while also understanding what contributes to students’ choices to stay in or leave the region. Particularly because many, if not most, Appalachian students are low-income and/or first-generation, and while this is a population that has been studied in urban settings, little research has been conducted focused on rural students. Because this population has many factors that contribute to their decision to pursue post-secondary education, I determined the best way to explore these factors would be through a more personal methodology allowing me to equally focus on all areas of their experience. Moustakas (1994) stated that the goal of phenomenology is to determine what experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual
descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences or structures of the experience (p. 13).

Phenomenology allows each voice to be heard individually, while also enabling a compilation of experiences to create a more general meaning.

According to Moustakas (1994), “In phenomenological science a relationship always exists between the external perception of natural objects and internal perceptions, memories, and judgments.” For the purpose of this study, my own experience of working with these participants and observing their actions during the period in their lives in which they would have participated in Upward Bound, typically between ninth grade and high school graduation, provides the external perception of the phenomenon whereas interviewing the participants after the fact provides the internal perceptions, memories, and judgements of their experience. My own outside observations guided the creation of the interview protocol and the conversations that emerged during the interviews. This study attempts to marry the two into one essence of a phenomenon.

**Research Questions**

From the beginning, five research questions guided this study. To best explore the data beyond the emergent themes described in the previous chapter, it is essential to address the findings pertaining to each research question. This section will sequentially address each research question as well as implications for practice.
Question One: What Can Rural Appalachian Upward Bound Programs Learn from the Experience of Graduates of the Program to Increase Matriculation into and Reduce Attrition in College?

Because Upward Bound programs are charged with assisting program participants with matriculating into a college and finishing a degree, all programs can benefit from knowing what their graduates think would have helped them most in completing their post-secondary goals. Given the lack of research, rural Appalachian programs can especially benefit from learning from the experience of their graduates. The following details what conclusions were drawn and can be used in response to this question.

The participants in this study focused on social aspects of the program. They argued that being among a group of peers who were all trying to accomplish the same goal was a motivating factor that increased their own drive for success. An additional motivating factor was the Upward Bound program staff. Although I was the person conducting the interview and was the staff member who interacted most with these participants, they also acknowledged the importance of the summer staff members they interacted with, including the residential staff and the summer program instructors. They referenced their close relationship with the staff members as well as the importance of the “tough love” they experienced. Referring to the low expectations of other educators in their lives, the participants appreciated the staff’s high expectations and the role this played in preparing them for college.

Finding 1. Although all participants in this study attended relatively small high schools, they enjoyed the individual attention the program provided. They valued the
one-on-one meetings they had with staff members regarding their progress towards college. Ultimately the students who succeeded in obtaining a college degree primarily chose a small liberal arts college because it allowed for individual attention.

**Implication.** Large colleges and universities could benefit from creating programs for Appalachian students that provide individual attention and address their unique needs. Although TRIO programs (such as Student Support Services) exist to help students in college, they are highly focused on students who have academic needs which is often defined by a low ACT score or low high school Grade Point Average. Most of the former Upward Bound students in this study would not have qualified by those definitions of academic need.

**Finding 2.** Programmatically, the participants identified the summer program as having the deepest impact. They enjoyed the rigor of the summer classes as well as the travel they were able to experience as part of the program. They argued that the independence they gained from participating in Upward Bound, particularly the summer component, empowered them to make decisions for themselves.

**Implication.** Upward Bound programs should embrace the opportunity they have in the summer to provide students with additional rigor in program classes. Although students may shy away from academic work in the summer, this finding in this study demonstrates that they appreciate and find it useful for preparation for college, particularly when their high school courses have failed to challenge them. It is an opportunity to make up for the lack of rigor often prevalent in rural, Appalachian high schools (Duncan, 1999; Irvin et al., 2011; Shaw, DeYoung, & Rademacher, 2005).
Finding 3. The participants expressed mixed feelings about Ohio’s Post-Secondary Enrollment Program, now known as College Credit Plus. Five participants enrolled in that program. Three expressed they benefited from the program while two argued it actually inhibited their success by giving them a false sense of security about what college level work was like.

Implication. Programs could benefit from taking action to assist students in the PSEO program differently than regular high school students. Although I met with the PSEO students individually on a monthly basis to check in on their progress, I now believe they would have benefitted from more frequent meetings and conversations between program staff and the college PSEO advisor to provide more direct assistance.

Question Two: What Cultural Factors Play into Student’s Decision to Stay or Leave the Region?

All participants were familiar with the term “Appalachia” and generally knew what I referred to but most did not appear to have knowledge about the region beyond stereotypes they noted in their classmates and in the media. Although all participants in this study acknowledged some truth in common negative stereotypes about the region, particularly being present among other students who attended their high schools, they also found there to be positive characteristics of the region. They believed the region to be above all a caring place to live and a close-knit community for better or for worse. They appreciated that if someone was in need the community would band together. However, they also often expressed frustration with the fact that “everybody knows everybody’s business.” This meant they often felt like they had no privacy and were
exposed to ridicule if they were to do something the community did not feel aligned with its values. Additionally, they argued community values often reflected an unwillingness to accept new ideas. Several participants expressed frustration about being from a community they perceived as close-minded. This frustration only grew more after they had left for college and experienced a diversity of culture, thought and ideas they felt were non-existent in their region.

**Finding 1.** Many participants indicated social life in their community revolved around their high school and church. For those who expressed an interest in leaving the region to live elsewhere, this was not a positive aspect of their hometown. They expressed a desire for new experiences and new social opportunities such as those they had when in college. Those who wished to stay expressed similar frustrations yet were willing to ignore these feelings in order to be able to live in a place they felt safe.

**Implication.** While programs and schools should expose students to new opportunities to develop an appreciation of new experiences, they should do so in a way that also increases appreciation of their own culture. Developing one without the other will result in students who lack connection to their region and culture.

**Finding 2.** Not all the participants in this study identified as Appalachian because they defied the stereotypes they believed to be evident among their classmates. Those who were willing to self-identify as Appalachian did so because of the positive traits they saw represented in themselves, such as strong kinship ties and valuing serving the community. Many acknowledged that they are from the Appalachian region but often viewed Appalachia as a place that exists elsewhere, not an uncommon sentiment among
people from the region who often associate Appalachia with stereotypes. One of those stereotypes views the entire region as poor and that its residents value vocational skills more than a college education. This is likely a reason why they did not feel they belong. Additionally, three participants in this study discussed the impact of being gay in a small community on their lives. Two participants in this study were gay, while one participant had a gay brother. Their remarks on the oppression that they have experienced reinforced the feeling that many in the region have a “small town mentality.” This provides further reason why they may not want to make a life in the area they were raised.

**Finding 3.** Not uncommon in the region, family was the most significant source of support and social capital. Despite the stereotypical belief that the region does not value post-secondary education, all participants’ families encouraged them to enter college. This finding contradicts Tang and Russ (2007) who argued that families in Appalachia do not encourage a college education because it will lead to an exodus. The participants in this study had families that encouraged matriculating into college despite knowing that their children might not return to live in the region. The participants received this message regarding the lack of value of education from other sources such as their high school and the belief they held that teachers and administrators in their high school just wanted to “get them graduated and get them out.” Consequently, the participants in this study often felt like they did not belong in their hometowns and were better suited to live somewhere outside of the region.

**Implication.** The only education that was provided for families consisted of an orientation at the beginning of the academic year and summer program. Programs should
incorporate more opportunities for parents to learn how to encourage their children as well as learn more about Appalachian culture and struggles their children may face in college. Since family constitutes the largest source of social capital in Appalachia there should be more intentional efforts to use families as a resource.

**Finding 4.** Except for one, all participants in this study who were most successful in college left the area they grew up in, although a couple of their colleges were technically located in the Appalachian region, all of them were more than two hours from home. Although they gained positive social capital from their family, they expressed frustration with the cultural value system in which they grew up. The participants who finished college made a deliberate choice to stay or leave while the participants who did not finish college stayed by default instead of making a choice. According to Carr and Kefalas (2009), “[l]eaving is something that young people must be pushed, prodded, and cultivated to do, whereas staying just sort of happens” (p. 9).

**Implication.** Given the lack of pride in or knowledge of their own culture, high schools in the region and Upward Bound programs should both incorporate curriculum that teaches Appalachian students about the complex history and dynamics of their culture. Heinemann and Hadler (2015) found that “the decision to stay also coincides with strong family ties and social identities, characteristics that are less common among … respondents who plan to leave” (p. 102). Likewise, the findings in this study suggest that although the participants had strong family ties, they did not strongly identify as Appalachian and therefore were not committed to stay in the region for other reasons than being close to their families. Upward Bound and local schools should help students
develop positive regional identities, so they are more committed to staying in the region, and see it as a viable option, in order not to expend resources on students who are not likely to return. This can be done by focusing on assets and providing experiences for students to recognize the positive benefits of living in the region.

**Question Three: How Does this Knowledge Inform Understanding of Rural Brain Drain?**

At the time of the interview, six out of ten of the participants in this study were still living in their hometown even if they did not intend to do so for the long term. The reasons for this varied. Although many chose to stay in the region all acknowledged the previously referenced frustrations with their community and high school. High schools in the region will be better served by providing more academic support and developing a college-bound culture.

**Finding 1.** Many students in this study did not believe their high schools cared about what they did after graduation.

**Implication.** While high schools often pay lip service to wanting their students to be college bound, they should increase efforts to support students in ways that value all of their post-graduation choices. This will help those who leave accept they can return after getting an education as well as help those who chose to stay feel valued. Carr and Kefalas (2009) state that “small towns invest far too heavily in the young people who are most likely to leave and who are unlikely to return” (p. 52). They argue that those who stay constitute an untapped resource that can greatly benefit the communities they came from.
The findings in this study suggest that neither those who left nor those who stayed felt particularly valued or legitimized in their decision.

The findings in this study suggest that family values and a sense of belonging significantly affect a young person’s choice to stay or leave. The participants indicated that family is often enough to keep them in the region, even when they do not necessarily wish to do so. Three of the participants who decided to stay in the region long term believed there are only blue-collar or service type jobs available which has kept them from finishing a college degree or pursuing a field they believe would take them away from home. Likewise, Lichter and Campbell (2005) found that residents in the region do not feel the investment in education is worth the money when there are no jobs for people with college degrees. Those who choose to leave perceive their community to be in decline and use that as a justification to go elsewhere.

Yet, even the participants who decided to stay desired experiences outside their communities. They desired diversity and social opportunities. Towns that are open to new ideas and ways of doing things may be able to entice young educated people to stay in the area. However, several participants discussed feeling alienated after having left to attend college for a period of time and returned to their town. “For small town kids, particularly from the countryside, going off to college is a momentous, and for some, alienating experience” (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, p.43). The participants also lamented the “slow to progress” mentality of their home community stifled their ability to be who they are. The feeling of not belonging or being unwelcome because they had a college education or did
not fit into the “typical small town” mold of their community led some of the participants want to live and work outside of the region and have the freedom to live as they choose.

Although the participants expressed frustration with their community, they were still civically engaged through service. With the exception of Tina, all participants participated and still participate in community service. It is not likely that the participants left or will leave because they were or are not engaged in their community. It is more likely that such is because they were or are motivated to seek out even more engagement in a community that they feel offers more opportunities for diverse experiences. Several participants also argued the travel experiences with Upward Bound helped them feel comfortable so they could live in new places.

**Finding 2.** Seven of the ten participants in this study attended a college two hours drive or more away from home, a fact they considered essential to their success. Partially, due to family issues at home as well as the pull of their hometowns, participants felt that they would be more successful if it would not be easy to travel home and be involved in what they called “drama” with family and friends. After living independently, a long distance from home for a period of three to five years, the participants had gained enough psychological capital to feel comfortable living in a different city. As Carr and Kefalas (2009) stated,

The Leavers who adjust more easily to college life use higher education as a stepping-stone or dress rehearsal for their new lives; after more time away from home, they see their hometown through outsiders’ eyes, and with time the rules of life in the countryside start to chafe (p. 44).
**Implication.** Upward Bound programs should not hesitate to organize college visits to small schools that are a significant distance from participants’ home communities. Although research suggests that Appalachian students are more likely to select schools closer to home because of ties to family and place (Howley, 2006; Shaw, DeYoung, & Rademacher, 2005; Wilson, Peterson, & Wilson, 1993), the independence they gain from living on campus through the Upward Bound summer program and from campus visits, has given them the courage to live farther away from their families and been integral to their post-secondary success.

**Question Four: What Deficits Prevent Engaged, Rural, Appalachian Upward Bound Students from Succeeding in College?**

Those participants who dropped out of college or who had major struggles along the way, such as transferring part-time to the local community college or being academically dismissed, all expressed frustration with the lack of academic options in their high school and lack of preparation for college. The two participants who completely dropped out of college both struggled in high school and did not appear to have built the psychological capital and self-efficacy the other eight participants did. They neither had a large group of friends in high school nor did they have the social capital the other participants had. Although all participants encountered some adversity in college, those who had confidence in their own abilities were much better prepared to overcome struggles and persist, whereas the two participants who dropped out of college were much quicker to decide that college was not for them.
Finding 1. The participants who had more social capital in terms of friends in high school as well as higher levels of psychological capital and self-efficacy were more successful in college.

Implication. Upward Bound programs should challenge students with rigorous coursework to build self-efficacy. In addition to academic coursework, Upward Bound should build curriculum into its summer program that teaches students how to think critically to overcome problems.

Finding 2. Those participants who struggled the most in college ascribed it to lacking a plan before and after college. Although Ryan also struggled in his first year, he had a plan to become a science teacher and eventually re-enrolled and at the time of the interview was pursuing that plan. Tina and Twig both were still uncertain about what they would do in the future and were struggling to decide on a major and career path. Their lack of direction contributed to losing motivation to continue with college.

Implication. Rural high schools and Upward Bound both should spend more time working with students to develop a more concrete plan than simply “going to college.” In experiencing what Erickson terms a “psychosocial moratorium,” Arnett (2000) states that young people should use this as a time to explore their future without concern about the responsibilities of adulthood. Upward Bound can assist in this process by providing more education in terms of career choice. Although career exploration is a goal of Upward Bound it is an implicit part of the curriculum rather than its main focus. The findings in this study suggest that Upward Bound students need more support to determine what major they would be likely to pursue in college. This would be congruent with
Guiffrida’s (2009) statement that in order for youth’s identity issues to be resolved, they need make a decision about their future vocation. The findings in this study suggest that students who have made a career choice have resolved part of their identity and will be more successful in the future.

**Finding 3.** Despite Upward Bound’s assistance in searching for scholarships, most participants discussed finances as a major stressor while in college. For Twig and Tina financial struggles were a contributing factor in the decision to not return to college after attending for a period of time, whereas for Ryan his student loan debt was something that spurred him to return and continue so that he had something to show for the debt he had incurred. Financial issues also contributed to Brutus returning home from his university, however it was not as much a lack of finances for him to go to college as much as it was unexpected medical bills for his mother.

**Implication.** Upward Bound and high schools should both include more information and activities centered around financial literacy. This should include more hands-on skills and discussions about the long-term impact of student loans and the importance of finishing college in due time. Although the federal government has encouraged financial literacy curriculum in TRIO programs in the past, programs should consider finding new and interesting ways to make financial literacy relevant to students.

**Finding 4.** Another area of struggle participants referenced was not having what they labeled “adult skills” when they left for college such as budgeting, knowing how to prepare and cook a meal, and knowing how to do laundry.
Implication. Programs and educators could consider focusing on practical knowledge for students to increase their self-efficacy and lower the non-cognitive stress they may feel when going to college.

Finding 5. From a small school background, many participants in this study felt unprepared to make friends and develop a social network once they got to college. Although all talked about the social benefit that Upward Bound provided, the struggle to fit in consumed much of their time and was a major factor in Ryan’s first academic dismissal. While they attended different local high schools, most other Upward Bound students the participants encountered were from similar racial and ethnic backgrounds and shared similar experiences growing up. The participants did not often make new friends from different backgrounds.

Implication. Programs should make increased efforts to help students learn to make friends with students from different backgrounds. This could take the form of partnering with other Upward Bound programs from other regions to help students learn to interact with diverse populations.

Question Five: How Does this Experience Shape What Choices this Population Makes for its Future?

The choice to attend college was not a difficult one for the participants in this study. When they made the decision to participate in Upward Bound they essentially made an early choice to attend college. However, other factors besides simply making the choice to go impacted their success. The majority of participants chose to attend small liberal arts colleges rather than large state institutions despite the higher tuition at small
schools. They enjoyed the attention experienced in high school and hoped for the same experience in college. They did not want to “just be a number.” As the director of the Upward Bound program in which these students participated, I attempted to expose them to a diversity of college environment but typically focused on less expensive, and often larger, state schools because I anticipated that finances would be an issue. However, they decided that they would rather pay a bigger tuition bill and continue the experience of a smaller setting.

Although all discussed coming from a background that lacked diversity, they appreciated the diversity they experienced in college. Some attributed their appreciation of diversity to their exposure to new experiences through Upward Bound. The appreciation of diversity they gained was a contributing factor in their decision to leave the region for more urban experiences.

Those participants who finished college or were near completion reported they were more satisfied with their life after high school than those who returned home or dropped out of college. However, all participants had something in their lives they felt positive about.

The experience of being rural, Appalachian, and a former participant in Upward Bound shaped these participants’ choices based both on what they wanted more out of life as well as what they wanted to stay away from. The participants who left for college and were exposed to more diversity and new experiences wanted the same exposure in the place where they ultimately would choose to live. While Upward Bound exposed students to a world outside of their own and gave them the courage to explore, they were
not given the message that creating a life in their hometowns with a college education was possible.

**Contributions to the Field**

There is a gap in the research literature on rural Upward Bound programs, particularly on rural Appalachian programs. Since the identity of this participant population is complex, this study sought to address five major themes that emerged as contributing factors to their experience. Rural Appalachian students who participate in Upward Bound have unique high school experiences as well as special needs in preparing for post-secondary education. Upward Bound contributes to their overall success in college. Contrary to research suggesting that parents in Appalachia are not supportive of their children attending college, the findings suggest that parents of the participants in this study felt and acted otherwise.

The findings in this study support Barcus and Brunn’s (2009) conclusion that social ties are more important than socioeconomic status. The participants in this study stated repeatedly that while they wanted to move for economic reasons as well, they were more interested in the diversity of experiences they can get outside their hometowns, and cited this as a reason for brain drain. Barcus and Brunn (2009) also argued that a culture that has a lot to offer socially and makes regional identity an important part of its residents’ character will suffer less from out-migration than cultures that do not. The participants in this study often expressed negative views of their community and subscribed to many of the negative stereotypes about the region. Barcus and Brunn (2009) and Heinemann and Hadler (2015) stressed the significant impact of a strong
regional identity. Although many participants in this study identified as Appalachian, they did not have a positive association with this identity.

Despite financial struggles, the participants in this study tended to choose smaller, private colleges and universities that were more expensive to attend than their larger, public counterparts. This means that their sense of belonging and their need for individual attention were worth the heftier price tag.

**Implications**

Several implications for future research have emerged from this study which would improve understanding of the experience of students in a rural Appalachian, Upward Bound program.

Originally this sample was intended to include students who did not ever enroll in college after graduating from Upward Bound, but unfortunately it became increasingly difficult to enlist participants who met this requisite. Conducting research on participants who never attended college would offer additional understanding of how Upward Bound programs can help participants not only gain admission into college, but also enroll and begin attending courses.

In addition, this study did not address “summer melt.” Since all participants in this study attended college for some period of time, the issue of summer melt did not present itself. Research on students who gained admission to college but decided not to attend prior to the start of the academic year would offer insight into what college access programs, rural Appalachian high schools, and colleges can do to assist students into actually attending college.
Although there were questions in the interview protocol about Upward Bound and what participants valued about it, it would be useful to also focus research on what aspects of the Upward Bound curriculum students find most helpful. The participants in this study stated the rigor of the courses they took helped them in the long term, yet they did not reference the specific courses. Such research would help provide more information about how to better structure the program.

It would also be beneficial to conduct a similar study with participants who are currently in the program to assess whether they feel as positively about the various components of the program as the graduates in this study did years later after they completed Upward Bound.

Lastly, it will be valuable to examine the participants in this study again at a later period in time to determine whether the process of discussing their experience in the interview spurred any changes in their trajectory. For example, did this study in anyway motivate any of the participants to return to college to finish their undergraduate degree or pursue a Master’s degree when they might not have originally planned to do so? This will provide data that will help influence the way educators approach students after they have completed high school or during and after college.

**Conclusion**

Upward Bound programs are valuable to rural, Appalachian students. They provide them with a “second family” that has the same post-secondary goals. Upward Bound provides a way for students to see new places and learn to be independent enough to choose colleges that are a significant distance from home. It also helps them develop
greater self-efficacy and the psychological and social capital necessary to be successful in
college. However, Upward Bound does not provide a solid foundation for feeling positive
about one’s own culture and realizing why it is important to return. The participants in
this study lacked an understanding of Appalachia’s complex history and place in
contemporary society. By not providing this knowledge, Upward Bound is a contributing
factor in their choice to leave the region. Students can and should leave for college to
experience new things. However, before they leave there should be a process of helping
them understand that they have the option to return to region to live. Young Appalachian
students should be provided with an education on the complex history of the region in
order to increase their cultural competency about their own culture. Educators should
incorporate readings that show students examples of people from the region who feel
positively about their culture and have made a life in the region after obtaining a college
degree. In college students will get exposure to new ideas and diverse people they seek,
while gaining an understanding of how their own culture fits into the diversity around
them. This will help them understand that their definition of success does not always
have to include leaving the region to make a life elsewhere. Success for them can also
include having pride in their Appalachian heritage whereby they seek to make a life in
the region and help it prosper economically and culturally.
References


Black, B. (2011). A legacy of extraction; ethics in the energy landscape of Appalachia. In M. Morrone & G.L. Buckley (Eds.), *Mountains of injustice: social and environmental justice in Appalachia*. Athens, Ohio; Ohio University Press.


Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

RQ1: “What is the lived experience of Rural Appalachian Upward Bound Graduates?”

1. Describe your high school experience in regards to home life, school life, extracurricular.

2. Do you feel that your high school experience was different than for Individuals from a different region? Why or Why not?

3. How would you describe your home town or community?

4. Can you describe your role growing up in your community or school? Did you feel like you were part of something? Did you feel excluded? Were you involved in your community?

5. Do you still live there? If so, how do you feel about your role now?

6. How have your feelings or role in your town changed since high school?

7. How do you define Appalachia? Are you part of this region?

8. What does it mean to you to be Appalachian?

9. Are you Appalachian? If so, how are you? If not, why are you not?

10. Can you talk about what Upward Bound is? What is it’s purpose?

11. Did Upward Bound have an impact on you? If so, how? If not, why not?

12. What value, if any, did Upward Bound have for you??

13. What were your plans when you graduated from high school?
14. Were there any individuals that have had a significant impact on your plans after graduation from high school?

15. What was it like to graduate from high school after being in Upward Bound? What feelings did you have?

16. What do you wish that High school and Upward Bound had done differently or focused on more?

17. Did you feel supported? By whom? Why or why not?

18. Did you feel comfortable with the idea of attending college? Why/why not?

19. What happened after high school?

20. Are you satisfied with what your plans were and how events unfolded? What, if anything, do you wish had transpired differently?

21. What do you value most about what happened after high school?

22. What are you doing now? College? Working? Family?

23. What are your plans for the future?

24. Will you stay in your hometown or community? How does that make you feel?

25. Will you stay in the Appalachian region?

26. If you aren’t in your hometown now, do you like where you are? Do you plan on staying there long term?

27. What would you want young high school students from your community to know about your experience?
Appendix B: Informed Consent

Ohio University Adult Consent Form With Signature

Title of Research: The Lived Experience of Rural Appalachian Upward Bound Graduates

Researchers: Tiffany Arnold

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

This study is being done because I am interested in your story and perceptions of your experience as a Rural Appalachian Upward Bound Graduate. If you participate the interview will last approximately one hour. The interviews will be audio recorded. I may ask you to participate in a second interview that could last about 45 minutes.
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to talk about your experience during high school, directly after graduation, and the years since.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no major risks to participation in this study. If you chose to discuss this topic or your participation in the study with others, it may result in you or others feeling uncomfortable. You may end your participation in this study at any time.

Benefits

Having the opportunity to share your experience could be a positive experience for you. Your insights will contribute to a better understanding of rural Appalachian students’ experience and contribute to future research and practice.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by using a pseudonym. All files with information that could potentially identify you will be stored on a flash drive in my office in a locked file cabinet. Only I will have access to the data. Upon completion of the study, I will destroy all files that could identify you by approximately December 1st, 2017.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:
* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;

* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the investigator Tiffany Arnold, Doctoral Student,

arnoldt2@ohio.edu,
740-629-1604

or the advisor

Dr. Frans Doppen
doppen@ohio.edu
740-593-0254

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

• you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered;

• you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction;
• you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study;
• you are 18 years of age or older;
• your participation in this research is completely voluntary;
• you may leave the study at any time; if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature       Date

Printed Name

Version Date: [07/07/2016]