COMPOSING IDENTITIES: APPALACHIAN STUDENTS,
LITERACY, AND IDENTITY IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor
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By

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ABSTRACT

Within the field of composition studies, significant critical attention has been paid to the literacies and school experiences of students from marginalized populations, such as African-American, Latino, working-class, and gay students. However, there is another marginalized group that, until recently, has had little published scholarship devoted to it: Appalachian students. There is now an emergent body of research that focuses on the literacy practices and beliefs of this group and how these practices and beliefs sometimes place Appalachians “at risk” in the academy. My dissertation research moves this scholarly conversation in a new direction through its unique focus on the performance of identity and the literacy practices and beliefs of Appalachian students in the context of the composition classroom—a course that almost all students encounter in their first year. Because some Appalachian students do not come from families that are familiar with academic conventions, and because the first-year composition classroom introduces all students to the academic literacy practices expected in college, I suggest that this is the best place to learn about this marginalized group’s literacy practices. Based on my research at two universities within the Central Appalachia region, I discuss the interplay of Appalachian students’ identity and literacy in the first-year composition classroom, using the lenses of critical ethnography and the New Literacy Studies, as well as Appalachian studies scholarship, to ground my findings. I focus on three key themes:
students’ performances of Appalachian and counter-Appalachian identities; the
metaphors of literacy used by universities and students; and the role of conflicting
sponsors of literacy in students’ lives.
For the women who have inspired me: my grandmother, my mother, and my daughter.
I must first thank the students and instructors who so generously welcomed me into their lives and classrooms. This project would not have been possible without them.

I have been fortunate enough to have several sponsors of literacy who have figured prominently in my education, and foremost of these sponsors is Beverly J. Moss, my dissertation director and advisor. Beverly has been an invaluable source of support throughout my entire time at Ohio State, particularly during the dissertation and job market process. I appreciate the detailed and careful way in which she has always responded to my writing and the considerable time and attention she consistently devoted to me. I am grateful for her mentorship and friendship, and I hope our relationship will continue to evolve.

Harvey J. Graff joined the committee at a critical juncture, a time when my belief in my project and, quite frankly, myself had nearly withered away. Harvey’s enthusiasm for my work and insistence on its importance helped me recover my belief that I could write this dissertation and that my research mattered. While his scholarly insights have been crucial to this project, his belief in my work and me has been his greatest contribution to the development of this dissertation and for my own evolution as a scholar. I owe him many thanks.
Because I was a student in his fieldwork course, Patrick B. Mullen has been part of this project since my first year at Ohio State. He has always been a source of unflagging support and enthusiasm. I thank him for his encouragement and for his ability to help me see more clearly the forest, and not just the trees, which has been this dissertation process. I owe special thanks to Pat for helping me bring together my interests in composition, literacy, and Appalachian Studies through the lens of folklore and for keeping me grounded in the reflexive ethnographic tradition. And I especially thank him for continuing to work with me through his retirement, a gracious giving of his time that has meant so much to me, both personally and professionally.

I must thank several faculty members in the rhetoric and composition program at Ohio State for their roles in this process as well. Wendy Hesford and Jacqueline Jones Royster served on my candidacy exam committee and helped me develop my thinking about this project. Kitty Locker taught my composition research methods course, a course that quickly proved its value as I began my fieldwork. Kitty also oversaw the pilot study I conducted for this dissertation and helped me learn how to negotiate the intricacies of seeking exemption from the Institutional Review Board. Kitty, I wish you were here to see the fruition of this work. I miss you terribly, and I am so grateful I had the opportunity to learn from you.

Morris Young of Miami University introduced me to the field of literacy studies and first put me in contact with another of my sponsors, Harvey Graff. In the time since I finished my master’s degree at Miami, Morris has been a mentor
and friend, sharing scholarly insights, writing letters of recommendation, and delighting me with flashes of his sly wit. I thank him for helping me discover what I was meant to do.

Professors have not been my only sponsors of literacy, however; my writing group has been incredibly important in seeing me through this process. Rebecca Dingo, Catherine (Katie) Braun, and Jason Palmeri have made me a much better scholar through the sharing of their own work and through their careful insights into my writing and research. I must also note Katie and Jason’s special role in my education at Ohio State; as members of the same cohort, the three of us did much of our coursework together, and Katie and Jason played a vital part in my scholarly development. Thank you for your insights and your friendship over the years.

I have had other sponsors of literacy who provided important material support during the dissertation process. During the final year of my work on my dissertation, I was awarded two fellowships from the Department of English: a Carnegie Teaching Development Fellowship and a Dissertation Fellowship. These fellowships were key to the completion of this dissertation, as they allowed me to focus my attention on writing. I offer much appreciation to Clare Simmons, Director of Graduate Studies, and Kathleen Gagel, Graduate Studies Assistant, for their encouragement and assistance over the years. I am also grateful for being awarded a Critical Difference for Women Grant by The Women’s Place and a Graduate Research Small Funds Grant by the College of Humanities, grants which supported the development of this project and facilitated my work.
I must acknowledge the critical contributions of Linda McNabb to my work. Linda has been my daughter Maria’s babysitter since Maria was three months old, and Linda’s importance in my family’s life cannot be overstated. Thanks to Linda, I have always been secure in the knowledge that my daughter would be well-cared for as I was in the field and as I wrote and taught—a peace of mind that enabled me to concentrate and to use my time productively. I am deeply thankful to Linda for the love and care she has given to Maria.

I gave birth to Maria about a month after I passed my candidacy exams, and I have joked that I had two babies during my time at Ohio State: my daughter and my dissertation. Maria has been incredibly understanding of the demands her mother’s other “baby” has placed on both of our lives, accepting with little complaint the many times that Mommy has had to go upstairs to her office and write. Maria, I hope that someday you will read these words and know how important you were to the completion of this dissertation. When I grew discouraged and wanted to quit, I thought of you. How could I ever explain to you the importance of perseverance if I gave up? My hope is to be a role model for you, and quitting is not behavior I want you to emulate. You kept me going and gave me hope. The feel of your small arms reaching up to hug me as I sat at the computer gave me sustenance. Thank you for being such a wonderful child.

A large part of Maria’s wonderfulness comes from her father and my husband, Gregory Sunderhaus. I don’t know how to even begin thanking him for all he has done. I thank Greg for always believing in me, for always supporting me, and for never questioning the importance of my education and career. He has
proven his devotion without complaint time and again: through the moves he has made (and will make) on my behalf; through his long commute to work; through his willingness to do not only his part, but also mine, around the house; and through his hands-on parenting of Maria. Greg, I love you, and I thank God every day that I have been blessed to have you as my partner in life.

Finally, I thank the three earliest sponsors of my literacy, the people who inspired this dissertation in very direct ways: my parents, John and Mary Webb, and my maternal grandmother, Flora Lykins. Mom and Dad, thank you for instilling in me early on a love of reading, writing, and learning. Thank you for the financial support you have given me when needed, as well as the important emotional support you have provided. While you haven’t always understood the importance of the work I did for school, particularly graduate school, you knew my work was important to me; therefore, it was important to you. That attitude has meant the world to me, and I love you for that and so much more. All I have ever wanted in life is to make you proud. I hope that I have done so.

Grandma, this moment is incredibly bittersweet. You have always had a guiding hand on me. When you were alive, you impressed upon me the value of education, especially for women, and you did your part to instill in me many of the values that have helped me throughout the dissertation process. It was your death that led me to enroll in graduate school, to reconnect with my Appalachian heritage, and to pursue this dissertation topic. I desperately wish you were here to
share this accomplishment with me, but at the same time I recognize it was your loss that put me on this path. I hope I have lived up to your example and have made you proud of me. I love you and miss you—always.
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In 1922, Flora McKee was a fourteen-year old girl growing up in Vanceburg, Kentucky. Life in this small tobacco farming community, part of the Central Appalachian region, was difficult, and opportunities for women were especially limited. After Flora finished the eighth grade, she never returned to school. Girls in Lewis County didn’t go to high school; instead, they learned how to take care of a house and live as a farmwife. In 1924, at sixteen, Flora married. Her husband abused her, beating her so violently that she lost two pregnancies during their marriage. At nineteen, Flora left, returning to her parents’ farm and eventually divorcing her abuser. At twenty-one, Flora remarried, and she went on to bear four children during the Depression. When times were especially difficult, she farmed with the men, tying a baby to her back as she cut and stripped tobacco—dirty, hot, and tiring work made all the more difficult by the added weight of a child. The only books kept in the home were some cookbooks and the family Bible; there was little money to buy books and little time to read them.

Her two oldest sons also left school after the eighth grade; the farm where the family lived was too remote to be reached by the high school’s bus, which was the only means of transportation the boys had. Eventually, two of her sons died, as did her husband of sixty years, George “Honey” Lykins. Six months after
Honey’s death, Flora was diagnosed with cancer. She then moved to a city outside of the Appalachian region to be cared for by her daughter and to live with her daughter’s family. This transition was very difficult for Flora, as she missed the hills of home, life on the farm, and, most of all, her independence, but she survived for eight more years. Finally, in 1998, at the age of 89, Flora McKee Lykins died, holding the hands of her daughter and her youngest granddaughter as she took her last breath.

***

The preceding narrative is the type of story often told in American culture about Appalachian people, more generally, and Appalachian women, more specifically. In these stories, Appalachians are usually long suffering victims of poverty, illiteracy, and violence who survive through a combination of pluck and down-home wisdom. They somehow endure these trials and tribulations to emerge stronger and all the more ready to face the next inevitable hardship they will endure. “Whatever doesn’t kill you makes you stronger,” the old cliché goes, and that seems to be the moral of these stories. Tough times are inevitable, the stories suggest, but those experiences are ultimately “good for” members of marginalized groups such as Appalachians, as they make the marginalized more able to cope with their lot in life.

These images are seen in such books as Gap Creek and Bastard out of Carolina and films like American Hollow and Coal Miner’s Daughter, cultural texts that, in the words of J.W. Williamson, position Appalachian women as “poverty goddesses” (247). In Hillybillyland, Williamson writes that this type of
popular depiction of Appalachian women “mak[es] \textit{hillbilly} synonymous with \textit{poor} when poor is meant to be noble” (247). The narrative I constructed about Flora would fit this pattern, as it creates for its audience a preternaturally “strong woman” whose suffering both toughened her, as it made her more able to cope with the difficulties and sadness that awaited her, and softened her, as the litany of losses made her a sympathetic—even pitiful—figure. It is not that there may not be some truth to those stories of woe; there undoubtedly is. But that’s not all there is in these stories. These stories conceal their role in perpetuating stereotypes of Appalachians—stereotypes that contribute, in part, to the marginalization of Appalachians and that allow this marginalization to continue, thus ensuring for some Appalachians that their “lot in life” will always remain one of hardship.

These stories also conceal the many other facets of Appalachians’ life experiences. In the preceding story, I emphasized certain experiences and stories from Flora’s life, subsuming other compelling narratives in order to fit the master narrative our society tells about Appalachians. Yet I know very well the other stories that can be told about Flora’s life, because Flora McKee Lykins was my beloved grandma. It was my parents’ house to which she moved after she was diagnosed with cancer. I was the granddaughter who held her hand as she died. Her stories—of abuse and of poverty, but also of survival and hope—were shared with me by her, as well as by her daughter, my mother. These stories, some of which you will read in the following pages, are all part of the master narrative of my grandma’s life, and all of them are important in order to understand her fully.
Her life was much more than the conventional narrative that began this preface, the narrative that can make her appear as yet another one of the poor, downtrodden, ignorant “hillbillies”—the Snuffy Smiths, the Jethro Clampetts, the locals in *Deliverance*—who are so often the targets of jokes, scorn, and fear in American life. Yes, Grandma was poor, and she had an eighth grade education. Those facts would have labeled her “illiterate” at the time of her death, as the 1990 census established as the “cutoff” for literacy a combination of poverty and a ninth grade education level. But this designation—part of the master narrative the government shapes about literacy—is just as absurdly narrow as the narrative with which I began.

In truth, Grandma was a voracious reader. She read the Bible daily, and when she came to live with my parents in the early 1990s, my mother gave her a subscription to the large-print version of *Reader’s Digest*. Grandma read those issues cover to cover, and she also read my mother’s copies of *Southern Living* and *Better Homes and Gardens*. She also on occasion enjoyed reading “the trashies” (her name for the tabloids) that one of my aunts would bring to her; they would sit in my parents’ TV room, reading *The National Enquirer* and whispering and cackling over some celebrity’s latest exploits. Grandma also kept a diary that she wrote in almost daily, until the arthritis in her hands became so troublesome that it was painful for her to hold a pen. Additionally, she had a voluminous collection of cookbooks, as well as recipes she had written by hand. In short, this was a woman who was very literate, although perhaps not in ways that count to entities like the Census Bureau or even to some compositionists such as James
Moffett, whose *Storm in the Mountains* focuses on a Central Appalachian county that banned several language arts textbooks, including *Interaction*, a textbook Moffett had written, from its schools.

Moffett writes that the books were banned because, in the eyes of community members, the books were “filthy, trashy, disgusting, one-sidedly in favor of blacks, and unpatriotic” (14). However, Moffett failed to recognize the literacy practices and beliefs that might have led this community to such a decision, and he failed to recognize the class implications of the conflict as well. It was, in the words of one resident, the county’s “country club set” who was in favor of the textbooks, while the “creekers”—those who resided in the hollows and other impoverished areas of the county—were the ones who opposed the books. Yet Moffett “diagnosed” the “problem” with the community as agnosis, derived from the Greek term *agnosias*, which means ignorance (187). Given their lack of literary “merit” and prestige and her poverty, Grandma’s literacy practices probably would have been dismissed in much the same way by a scholar such as Moffett.

Those like Moffett might also suppose that my grandma did not place much value on formal education since she had little herself, but the opposite was true: she highly valued education. She was so upset when my two uncles were unable to attend high school that she made sure the family moved further down the mountain so my mother and her other brother could ride the bus that would take them to the high school. This move was a financial hardship on the family.

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1 Kimberly Donehower makes a similar argument about Moffett in her dissertation, *Beliefs about Literacy in a Southern Appalachian Community*.
but Grandma was willing to sacrifice whatever it took to make sure her children continued their education. Her support for education did not end with her own children; she always stressed to me the need to go to college and “do something with” myself so I wouldn’t “have to rely on a man.” I was the first woman in my family to graduate from college, a fact that she was very quick to tell me made her enormously proud. While other family members sometimes scorned me for my pursuit of higher education, she never did; instead, she told me not to listen to them and to never let anyone keep me from getting an education. The attitude expressed in those words was a hallmark of Grandma’s character. She was an intelligent woman who was very shrewd and who had no qualms about asserting herself; unlike the dimwitted “hillbillies” who have appeared in films and television shows, no one ever played her for a fool or bullied her for long. Those who treated her patronizingly were quickly rebuked.

For example, I remember a conversation I observed between my oldest brother and Grandma in her later years, after she had moved in with my parents and me. They were talking about a local murder case that had been highly publicized, and my brother thought the convicted man should be sentenced to death. Grandma did not share his opinion, and my brother started trying to persuade her of the merits of the death penalty, its value for this particular case, etc. As I watched and listened to this encounter, I thought my brother was on dangerous ground, as he was speaking to Grandma as he would his young sons: “Now you see, Grandma, it’s like this.” Grandma would not tolerate being talked down to by anybody, let alone her grandchild. I watched her jaw clench and her
face harden as my brother prattled on and on, giving Grandma no opportunity to speak—or so he thought. Grandma would not tolerate being railroaded into silence. She held up a hand and shushed him, saying, “Barry, I know good and well how you feel about this. But if you know so much, then answer me this one question: how does it make any sense to tell somebody killing is wrong, then turn around and kill him for killing somebody else? I will never understand that. Do you?” My brother sat in stunned silence, unable to reason with that logic.

Grandma then smiled at him, said, “I didn’t think so,” and returned to the magazine she had been reading. My brother, after several more moments of embarrassed silence, left the room. Grandma then turned and gave me a quick wink before resuming her reading.

As the stories I have shared surely indicate, my grandma was a major influence in my life. Her frequent admonitions of the value of education and independence for women, in addition to my own knowledge of Grandma’s personal history, greatly contributed to my development as a feminist and as an academic. I’ve been told that her determination and assertiveness—some in my family might even say orneriness—have rubbed off on me, a judgment with which I would agree. While I am proud to write of Grandma’s influence in my life, that is not the main reason why I begin with these stories. I use these stories to make one central point: many times, the “stories” that composition and literacy scholars have told about Appalachians and other marginalized populations have
been, at best, incomplete—as incomplete as the first story I told about my grandmother’s life—or, at worst, all together missing from the field’s conversations.

It is my awareness that there are other “stories” of Appalachians, stories that are either absent or quite different from those that often circulate in my fields of study, as well as my awareness of the inadequacies of some conceptualizations of literacy, that inspired this dissertation, which examines the interplay of literacy and identity among Appalachians enrolled in college composition courses. Few scholars have researched the literacy practices and schooling of Appalachians, and some who have conducted this research focus their studies on illiteracy narratives, using a deficit-model of literacy that examines what is “wrong” with Appalachians as opposed to reviewing the full range of Appalachians’ literacy practices. Of those scholars whose work surveys Appalachians’ literacy, only one has focused on Appalachian college students. In short, very little has been written about Appalachians who have already acquired a certain degree of academic literacy, as recognized by their attainment of a high school diploma, and who are seeking to expand their academic literacy practices by entering college. Even less has been written about these students’ performance of identity in the composition classroom.

My dissertation, an ethnographic case study of students in two composition courses at two universities within the Central Appalachian region, sought to fill this void by posing the following four research questions:
1. What is the nature of the literacy practices and beliefs Central Appalachian students bring with them to the first-year composition classroom?

2. How do these practices and beliefs evidence themselves in the first-year composition classroom?

3. What is the role of these practices and beliefs in facilitating students’ entry into the academic community, and, in particular, first-year composition, a “gateway” course at most universities?

4. What can the field of composition studies learn about writing pedagogy from these students?

Out of these questions, three key themes emerged: the students’ performances of Appalachian and counter-Appalachian identities; the metaphors of literacy used by the universities and the students; and the role of conflicting sponsors of literacy in the students’ lives. It is my hope that the discussion of these issues in this dissertation will help the fields of composition, literacy, and Appalachian studies understand the literacies and needs of Appalachian students both inside and outside the college writing classroom, will expand our understanding of identity, and will enable us not only to address, but also to act upon the very real social forces that limit the opportunities available to all marginalized groups of students, including Appalachian students. Such an outcome can only benefit our students, our teaching, and our scholarship.
CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

Within the fields of composition and literacy studies, much critical attention has been paid to the literacies and school experiences of students who differ from the white, middle-class, heterosexual “norm” of the academy. Geneva Smitherman’s *Talkin and Testifyin*, Victor Villanueva’s *Bootstraps*, Lisa Delpit’s *Other People’s Children*, Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways with Words*, and Harriet Malinowitz’s *Textual Orientations* are just a few of the many works within these fields that explore the literacies and education of students of color, poor and working-class students, and gay and lesbian students. However, there is another marginalized group who, until recently, had little published scholarship devoted to it. This group is Appalachians. While there is a field known as “Appalachian Studies” and a large body of work in folklore studies that focuses on the cultural practices of Appalachians, scholars in composition studies, as well as literacy studies, for many years overlooked this group of students—probably because Appalachian identity was subsumed into broader categories of scholarship, such as working-class or whiteness studies. There is now an emergent body of research that focuses on this group, including work by such
compositionists as Peter Mortensen, Kimberly Donehower, and Katharine Kelleher Sohn and education scholars such as Victoria Purcell-Gates and Deborah Hicks. This dissertation seeks to add another voice to this scholarly conversation.

Mortensen’s essay, “Figuring Illiteracy: Rustic Bodies and Unlettered Minds in Rural America,” examines portrayals of Appalachian illiteracy in the larger American culture; Donehower’s dissertation analyzes a Southern Appalachian community’s literacy beliefs; and Sohn’s article “Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College,” focuses on eight Appalachian women who were once students in her first-year composition class. Both Purcell-Gates’ and Hicks’ books (Other People’s Words and Reading Lives, respectively) feature case studies of Appalachian children who are just beginning to learn not only how to read, but also how to “do” school. My research draws heavily on the work of these scholars. Like Mortensen, I came to my project with a desire to counter popular portrayals of Appalachians as overwhelmingly illiterate. Like Donehower, I, too, was interested in the literacy beliefs of the community I studied. Like Sohn, I wanted to study Appalachians who had demonstrated a certain level of success in using academic literacies. And like Purcell-Gates and Hicks, I sought to study Appalachians who were expanding their literacy practices in an educational setting. However, my research significantly differs from that of these scholars in that my project is a
classroom-based ethnography that focuses on the literacy practices and beliefs, as well as the performance of identity, of Appalachian college students enrolled in first-year composition courses.

Roots of the Study: The Personal and the Professional

My interest in this topic stems from multiple sources; to take off on an old feminist saying, “the personal is professional” in the case of this dissertation. I am an Urban Appalachian, a term that refers to a subgroup of Appalachians who migrated out of the Appalachian region and relocated to urban centers; the term also includes the children of these migrants who reside in urban areas.¹ My parents were part of the “Great Migration” out of the Appalachian region during the 1950’s, as they left their homes in northeastern Kentucky for Cincinnati, Ohio, a popular destination for Appalachian migrants. Frequent visits “down home” to the hills of Kentucky were a staple of my childhood, and my close relationship with my grandma further cemented my connection to Appalachia and Appalachians.

But that connection does not only have its roots in my positive and meaningful memories of life on the farm and with Grandma. That connection has also been forged in pain—a pain that for years prevented me from addressing my urban and Appalachian identities. I recall all too well what I endured during childhood: the incessant teasing about the “funny way” my family and I talked, the hillbilly jokes (“Why wasn’t Jesus born in Kentucky? Because God couldn’t

¹ See Borman and Obermiller’s From Mountain to Metropolis: Appalachian Migrants in the American City for further discussion.
find three wise men or a virgin”), and the constant insults and snide remarks—usually centered on themes of incest—about my family and me, based on our origins in northeastern Kentucky. I remember how I internalized that bigotry to some extent; after I went away to college, my mother lamented the (temporary) loss of the “twang” in my speech. I, on the other hand, was ecstatic to be rid of the accent I shared with her, the accent that earned me so much ridicule growing up: “Thank God I don’t sound like a stupid hick anymore,” I snapped at Mom. After quietly saying she liked my old voice better, she fell into a hurt silence.

I also remember the way I grieved after Grandma’s death, a grief rooted not only in the loss of her person, but also in what she represented to me: Appalachia, Appalachians, and my own Appalachianness. I remember how I began to come to terms with my own Appalachian identity, only to encounter yet again others’ bigotry towards Appalachians: the fellow M.A. students who referred to me as “Jethro” and who patronizingly told me how “cute” my speech was, asking me to repeat words and phrases for their amusement; the students and professors who, upon learning I survived a childhood sexual assault, relied on stereotypes about Appalachians and incest and automatically assumed that “one of the Kentucky relatives” was my abuser, when, in fact, my abuser was not a relative; the professor who I overhead warning a colleague to stay away from the “white trash” parts of Cincinnati, where “all the hillbillies from Kentucky and West Virginia live”; and the prospective Columbus landlord who proudly stated that he avoided renting to “rednecks” from southeastern Ohio and eastern Kentucky, since they destroy and steal property. I remember my feelings of
isolation and inadequacy and the way I questioned if I even belonged in the academy, feelings and questions with which I still—and probably will always—struggle. It is these memories and feelings that first prompted my interest in the literacies and education experiences of Appalachian students; quite simply, I wanted to know if others had similar experiences and if others felt as inferior and out of place as I often did.

As I developed professional experience as a tutor and teacher of writing, I began to realize that I was not alone, and it was these professional experiences that also led me to this project. For two years I worked as a professional tutor in basic writing courses at the University of Cincinnati, a university with a significant population of Urban Appalachians. I found as I worked with the students in class and in the writing center that almost all of them were white Appalachians or African-Americans, some of whom were Affrilachians (African-American Appalachians). This observation made me question how and why Appalachian students came to be placed in these courses and sparked my curiosity about Appalachian students’ literacy practices in the context of a composition classroom. Why was the writing of these students institutionally recognized as “lacking” in some way? Was the writing of Appalachian students somehow different from that of “mainstream” (i.e. white, middle-class, suburban) students?
And what was the relationship between their writing and their Appalachian identity? I was still pre-occupied with these questions when I left the program to begin work on my graduate degrees.

Later, as a Ph.D. student at Ohio State University, I became acquainted with Emily, an undergraduate student from Appalachian Ohio who endured such a miserable experience in an honors dorm and composition course that she was driven out of the honors program for a time due to her peers’ hostility and bigotry. Her peers ridiculed manifestations of her Appalachianness, such as her accent, and one even told her she would never succeed in college or in life because of where she was from. In a pilot study I conducted for this dissertation, Emily expressed how uncomfortable the competitive environment of her composition class made her and how she wished for a more communal classroom environment, the type of environment valued “back home.” Emily also described how she often grounded her discussion and analysis of texts in narratives of personal experience, a quality that made her unique from—and thus a target of—her peers. After hearing Emily’s story, I wondered if her discomfort with competition and her predilection for narrative analysis were rooted in her Appalachian identity and how her experience might, or might not, have been different if the majority of her peers had been Appalachian as well.

Thus, I began questioning how the literacy beliefs and practices Appalachian students brought with them to the composition classroom might affect their performance in it; those questions led to this project, an ethnographic

2 Like all names used in this dissertation, a pseudonym.
case study of the literacy practices and beliefs of Appalachian students enrolled in compositions courses at two universities within the Appalachian region. Given my family life, my personal experiences, and my work with Appalachian students at multiple universities, I knew the difficulties some Urban Appalachians faced in the worlds outside, and inside, the composition classroom. But I didn’t know why these difficulties occurred, I didn’t know if Appalachian students attending college within the region would have similar experiences, and there were few composition scholars to whom I could turn for guidance. The Mortensen essay mentioned at the beginning of this chapter is a rhetorical analysis of representations of illiteracy among Appalachians at the turn of the 20th century. Although this work is helpful in establishing the cultural context in which Appalachian students deploy their literacies, it does not address the literacy practices and educational experiences of Appalachians—issues I am most interested in exploring.

The title of Kimberly Donehower’s 1997 dissertation, *Beliefs about Literacy in a Southern Appalachian Community*, reveals its focus. Through interviews with ten residents of Luttrell, a community in Appalachian North Carolina, Donehower concludes that her participants are torn between what she calls the “academic literacy worldview,” which emphasizes the power of literacy to transform “one’s social, economic, intellectual, or moral status,” and community-based views of literacy, which realize how literacy “has historically been used to denigrate the culture” the participants share as Appalachians (193). Donehower explores this tension through discussing the participants’ views on
literacy as craft or art form; the power of literacy; the religious and moral implications of literacy; the practicality of literacy; and the cognitive roots of literacy.

Donehower’s dissertation is an important work, as it clearly establishes the validity and necessity of studying communities like Luttrell. However, the dichotomy that is made between the “academic literacy worldview” and the community view’s of literacy is unhelpful and troubling for two significant reasons. One, it presents a monolithic “academic literacy worldview” that oversimplifies the diversity in conceptualizations of literacy, not only among academics in general, but also among literacy scholars in particular—conceptualizations I will take up later in this introduction. Two, the sharp distinction that is made between the literacy views of the academics and mountaineers, as Donehower refers to the residents of Luttrell, can serve to reinscribe the very cultural denigration to which Donehower and her participants refer. By using such terms as “riot” and “conflict” (192-93) to discuss the differences between academics and Appalachians, Donehower positions her participants as cultural “Others” whose views estrange them from the academy. This characterization of her participants confirms the very sort of assumptions about Appalachians that she earlier criticizes the holders of the “academic literacy worldview” for making. While this topic will be addressed in much greater detail in chapter four, when I will discuss my participants’ views on literacy, suffice it to
say for now that I am not persuaded that the views academics and Appalachians hold about literacy are as monolithic or as distinct from one another as Donehower suggests.

For a more complex view of literacy among Appalachians, I looked to Katherine Kelleher Sohn’s “Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College.” In this article based on her dissertation research, Sohn traces the post-college experiences of eight of her former composition students—all Central Appalachians—and finds that the acquisition of academic literacy affected her students in ways that differed from her expectations. In fact, Sohn argues, “Literacy for the Appalachian women in this study served different purposes than it might in the larger population” (432), since, unlike the larger population, the women did not necessarily value literacy as a means of upward mobility. Instead, they feared that gaining “too much” literacy might result in the loss of their “common sense” (433). Yet the women still placed a high value on the academic literacy they had acquired in college and used this literacy for many purposes. These purposes included instilling and/or enhancing a love of lifelong reading and learning; empowering the women to find their voice, for their own benefit and for the good of their families and communities; providing an illustration of literacy’s intergenerational effects; and preserving relationships with family and community. While Sohn is careful to note that the attainment of academic literacy vis-à-vis a college degree was not some sort of “magic pill” for these women, this achievement was worthwhile and meaningful in their lives. Even though social forces such as a depressed economy
and traditional gender roles limited their opportunities to use their degrees in the field of their choice, the women still strongly believe that their college degrees were “worth it.” Mary, who works as a data entry clerk, explained: “If I hadn’t come to college, I wouldn’t be the person I am now. I wouldn’t trade that growth or the knowledge I’ve gained. Yeah, I’m glad I did that. I’m glad I did that. It made me a better person” (Sohn 442).

The women in Sohn’s study evidence complex beliefs about literacy, as seen in Mary’s statement. While the women are quick to note the social forces that have impeded them since graduation, they also recognize those factors were at work in their lives long before they enrolled in college. They do not expect their college degrees to somehow shield them from the realities of life in Central Appalachia and are cognizant of the limits—and dangers—of literacy’s power. At the same time, they are deeply appreciative of their college experience and treasure the academic literacy they gained there. Sohn concludes by writing, “It appears that academic literacy in the form of a college education enabled these strong and inherent survivors to build on the talents they brought to the classroom, taking it and fitting it to their practical purposes so that it caused only minor discomfort and allowed them to remain in the region they call home” (447).

Sohn’s work prompted me to think about the literacy and schooling of Appalachians in ways that challenge “our elitist attitudes which assume all working-class students aspire to middle-class values” (442). As Ellen Cushman forcefully argues in *The Struggle and The Tools*, the marginalized’s efforts to expand their literacy practices does not mean they are “naïve” participants in their
own disempowerment; the women profiled by Sohn were well aware of the power and limitations of literacy and were able to define and value literacy in personally meaningful and significant ways. I was moved, both emotionally and intellectually, by Sohn’s research with these women, and I decided to read the work of education scholars Deborah Hicks and Victoria Purcell-Gates to see how their approach to literacy meshed with the work of compositionists such as Mortensen, Donehower, and Sohn.

Deborah Hicks’s Reading Lives: Working-Class Children and Literacy Learning tells the story of Laurie and Jake, two young children who progressed from kindergarten through second grade during the course of Hicks’s three-year study, as well as the story of Hicks’s own literacy experiences as a young girl living in Southern Appalachia. One purpose of the study was to show how “these two young working-class children tried to figure out how they belonged in school. The stories I write of the literacy practices lived by Laurie and Jake are laced with pain as well as hope, as both children became readers and writers in a school setting that was sometimes distancing and sometimes embracing” (3). Hicks accomplished this purpose by comparing the literacy practices that were valued in Laurie and Jake’s homes to those that were valued in school and by illustrating how schools based on middle-class assumptions about literacy shortchange working-class children. But this was not the sole purpose of Reading Lives. Using Jane Miller’s concept of hybrid theoretical discourse, Hicks creates “hybrid practices of literacy research” (153) by skillfully weaving Laurie and Jake’s literacy narratives with her own and those of other writers, with analysis, and with
reflection in order “to articulat[e] a theory of literacy learning that has the particularity of social relations at its center” (1). What results from this hybridity is an artful and powerful work of scholarship, one that has inspired me to explore hybrid forms in my own work.

Similarly, Hicks’s description and analysis of the literacy practices and beliefs of white working-class children is thought provoking and cogent. As she accurately notes, discussions of the effects of class on education often conflate class with ethnicity, resulting in “a hidden message [. . .] that poor and working-class families are largely members of ethnic-minority families and neighborhoods” (4). Hicks is careful to collapse this conflation of class and ethnicity, resulting in a compelling discussion of the needs of white poor and working-class children who, in the words of Hicks, “often experience painful cultural dissonance in middle-class classrooms” (4). Her admonition to researchers and educators about the importance of addressing the many factors that may marginalize children in the classroom—ethnicity, race, gender, and class—is one that is needed in the field, and her words resonate strongly with me.

However, in her haste to separate class from other sociocultural markers, she disregards the role Appalachianness may play in Laurie and Jake’s schooling experiences and literacy practices. As Hicks once was, Laurie and Jake are children of Southern Appalachia, but they are not specifically identified as such in the book, other than a brief mention early in the text. Why is this facet of their identity left out of the discussion of their literacy practices? Why is regional culture omitted from the factors that may influence children’s performance in the
classroom? Since Hicks does not address the Appalachian setting of her research at all, I could not find answers within her text to the questions that lingered with me after finishing her book. I then turned to the work of Victoria Purcell-Gates to see if she addressed the questions that Hicks’s work did not anticipate.

Purcell-Gates’s *Other People’s Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy* was the first of the five works under discussion to be published, and at the time of its publication in 1995, the book garnered much critical praise for its study of Jenny and Donny, an Urban Appalachian mother and son. Upon meeting Jenny, Purcell-Gates describes her as “virtually nonliterate” and adds that Donny is a second-grader who “was unable to read anything beyond his name” (1). Over the course of two years, Purcell-Gates interviewed and observed Jenny and Donny in their home, in their neighborhood, and in a university-based literacy center; Purcell-Gates tutored them as well. The resulting study describes the problems Jenny and Donny face negotiating their daily lives, particularly their struggles at the hands of a school system that refuses to tailor its instruction to the needs of all of its students and that assumes its students come from print-rich home environments. Purcell-Gates argues that the education system is failing Urban Appalachians like Jenny and Donny because, due to their whiteness and Appalachianness, they are not included in many educators’ conceptualizations of diversity and difference.

Although I came to *Other People’s Words* with a great deal of interest and scholarly anticipation, I left it feeling quite disturbed and, in all honesty, offended by the treatment of Jenny and Donny’s literacy practices and their Urban
Appalachian identity. During her introduction to the book, Purcell-Gates decries deficit-models of literacy that “have held on to the notion that poor and minority peoples are supposedly deficient in important ways [. . .]: deficient cognitive abilities, deficient language, poor motivation, devaluation of education, poor parenting skills” (3). Yet her characterization of Jenny and Donny and their literacy practices indicates that she does, in fact, view them as deficient and define literacy as reading and writing in particular ways. For example, from the book’s introduction to its conclusion, Purcell-Gates consistently describes Jenny and Donny as “nonliterate” and makes repeated references to their “nonliteracy.” Jenny possesses some ability to decode and encode text, however: she could write a list of food items in her kitchen (52), she could decipher enough of the family’s utility bills to know the amount due (57), and she was able to decode a paragraph from a reading workbook; this paragraph was written on a fourth-grade reading level. Purcell-Gates writes that Jenny “read haltingly” (67), but Jenny did finish the paragraph. How, then, can Jenny be described as “nonliterate” when she does have an observable ability to decode and encode text?3 She can only be described in such a way if her literacy is being measured against some theoretical yardstick of “where it should be” and found to be lacking—i.e., a deficit model of literacy.

Furthermore, Purcell-Gates’s “nonliterate” evaluation of Jenny and Donny is based solely on their print literacy practices; even though Purcell-Gates states otherwise, her evaluation of Jenny and Donny’s literacy practices does not take

3 I focus my discussion on Jenny because, due to his young age (seven), Donny’s print literacy is understandably limited.
into account the other forms their literacy may take. Purcell-Gates notes, “Jenny used physical markers to locate stores, offices, and items on grocery shelves” (52), yet this practice is not considered to be part of Jenny’s literacy repertoire. Instead, it is another marker of illiteracy. Additionally, when Jenny uses the accompanying pictures to help her make sense of an article or a story, Purcell-Gates interprets this activity as yet another illiteracy indicator, as opposed to a visual marker of literacy (51). So while Gates indicates in her conclusion that “[l]ower-class, minority homes will thus be, overall, *differently literate*, as communities, from middle-class ones” (184, my emphasis), her work does not show Jenny and Donny as “differently literate” in the least. Instead, this research positions Jenny and Donny as *deficiently* literate.

In addition to the problematic nature of Purcell-Gates’s characterization of literacy, her description and conceptualization of Urban Appalachians are also limited. Although Purcell-Gates uses pseudonyms to conceal the identity of her site, as a community insider it immediately became clear to me upon reading the book that I shared with Jenny and Donny not only an Urban Appalachian identification, but also a hometown. When I began reading the book, I turned with interest to her description of Urban Appalachians, particularly in the context of this city and this neighborhood. However, I was troubled by what I read for several reasons, not the least of which was her highly problematic use of the term Urban Appalachian. She writes in an endnote that “many of the characteristics associated with the group referred to as ‘urban [sic] Appalachian’—and to which I direct attention—have been true primarily for only the first two generations”
(215), and she adds that she is using the term in specific reference to the first two generations of migrants. This distinction is an extremely important one to make, as it greatly differs from conventional use of the term, which is applied to all generations of migrants. However, nowhere in the text of the book does she discuss how her use of the term differs from other scholars.

Even the characterization of the limited group Purcell-Gates identifies is problematic. In the same endnote referenced above, Purcell-Gates writes that she uses Jenny and Donny’s stories “to highlight the experiences of their cultural group,” adding that she means first and second-generation Urban Appalachians (215). Purcell-Gates writes that this group “never succeeded in assimilating into urban and suburban society. They live a marginal existence” (18); she later adds that “[c]ultural alienation, poverty, and breakdowns in familial and societal networks have contributed to the ills of urban [sic] Appalachian families” (19) and that “harsh tragedy stalked Jenny’s family as it so often seems to afflict other urban [sic] Appalachians” (20).

I am a second-generation Urban Appalachian and thus am a member of Jenny and Donny’s cultural group, as defined by Purcell-Gates. Yet I do not think that my family and I (as well as the many other first and second-generation Urban Appalachians I have known) are “ill.” And while the earlier discussion reveals my feelings of cultural alienation as an Urban Appalachian, I certainly do not feel that I haven’t “succeeded.” According to Purcell-Gates’s analysis, however, this
is the case for all Urban Appalachians, and by basing generalizations on the experiences of a very small sample of Urban Appalachians, Purcell-Gates greatly distorts the lives of all Urban Appalachians.

Furthermore, for all her talk of how Urban Appalachians are discriminated against and stereotyped by “mainstream” culture, Purcell-Gates lacks awareness of the role social forces such as poverty and discrimination may play in some of their lives, as evidenced by her remark that Jenny’s family is “stalked” by tragedy. Specific tragedies Purcell-Gates mentions are a trailer fire, domestic abuse, alcoholism, child neglect, and teen pregnancy, but she never discusses what the roots of these tragedies are. In contrast to Purcell-Gates, I would argue that these events do not rain down on some Urban Appalachians—or members of any group that has been marginalized by the culture of power—as a series of random events, bad luck, or “tragedy.” Instead, this “stalking” is rooted in other social problems, such as inadequate child care; an education system that fails a large number of its children; a lack of safe, affordable housing; poor physical and mental health care; limited job opportunities; and a larger culture that sanctions violence against women and children. At the heart of these problems lay even bigger problems, namely sexism, classism, and bigotry. Yet Purcell-Gates neither discusses what may be at the root of the problems Jenny’s family faces, nor addresses how and why these problems disproportionately affect minority groups. Jenny and Donny’s story is simply positioned as one long tale of woe.

*Other People’s Words* is the first of few books that details the literacy practices and schooling experiences of Appalachians and is the only book that
focuses on a specific community of Appalachians, namely Urban Appalachians. For that reason alone, it is noteworthy. However, the ways in which Jenny and Donny are portrayed as cultural deficients set adrift in a confusing world of print are indeed disturbing. Interestingly, for all the focus on Jenny and Donny’s “shortcomings,” Purcell-Gates also valorizes other qualities she attributes to their Appalachian identity; these include a close family network, a love for the land, an emphasis on self-sufficiency and independence, and a “refreshing” habit of straight-talking (28). According to Purcell-Gates, all of these “natural,” admirable traits serve to further separate Appalachians from the urban mainstream. Thus, the portrait of Appalachians that emerges from this work is one of cultural Others who are both pathologized for the ways in which they fail to meet “mainstream norms” and who are romanticized for the ways in which they surpass those norms. And as we shall see in the following section, the push-pull between pathologizing and romanticizing characterizations is not limited to this work or to discussions of Appalachians, for that matter.

**Appalachian and Literacy Studies: An Overview**

As previously noted, issues of representation and bigotry have been widely addressed by scholars working in Appalachian Studies, but these scholars have written little about the literacy practices and beliefs of Appalachians and even less about the deployment of those practices and beliefs in school contexts. Conversely, literacy scholars have written a great deal about the social nature of literacy and the literacy beliefs and practices of various marginalized groups, but
aside from the previously discussed scholars, they have only rarely focused on the Appalachian population. What both fields of scholarship have in common is a noticeable tension between demonizing and romanticizing characterizations of their subjects of study. Pat Mullen writes in “Belief and the American Folk” that “the Anglo Appalachian is a complex construction containing both romantic and rational scientific elements; hidden beneath a romantic view is a pathological one” (129). Appalachian Scholars have certainly recognized part of this construction, writing much scholarship in response to popular portrayals of Appalachians that dehumanize and pathologize the group as a whole. Yet Appalachians Studies scholars seldom discuss the ways in which these popular portrayals of Appalachians romanticize the group—or how Appalachian Studies scholarship contributes to this dynamic. Similarly, literacy scholarship offers an extremely conflicted view of literacy, one that both demonizes and romanticizes literacy’s power and that offers conflicting interpretations of its scope. What follows, then, is my attempt to place these fields into conversation with each other by examining these tendencies and to provide some definitions and overviews of Appalachia, Appalachians, and literacy that will help establish the context for my fieldwork.

*Imagined Community, Invisible Minority: Appalachia and Appalachians*

According to the Appalachian Regional Commission, “Appalachia, as defined in the [federal] legislation from which the Appalachian Regional Commission derives its authority, is a 200,000-square-mile region that follows the
spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi.” 406 counties in 12 states (Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia) have been designated as Appalachian, and a significant portion of the population (42%) is rural, as opposed to the 20% of the national population that resides in rural areas (“The Appalachian Region”). Those who live in these counties are labeled as Appalachian by the federal government, and as previously noted, Appalachian scholars refer to the descendants of those who migrated from the region to urban centers as Urban Appalachians.

It is an open question, however, as to whether or not this region-based definition of Appalachia is sufficient, due in part to the fact that “Appalachianness” is tricky to define: what is it? What constitutes Appalachianness? What factors make one Appalachian? Furthermore, who are Appalachians? Various disciplines take differing approaches in the questions they ask about this issue. Sometimes Appalachians are viewed as a cultural group based on region or some other factors, such as a shared system of values, behavior, beliefs, and attitudes. This view is suggested by the work of many Appalachian Studies scholars, whose work spans the social sciences and the humanities. Folklorists such as Kathleen Stewart perceive people in the Appalachian region as a folk group—a perception that in turn may influence how some within the region see themselves. Still others argue that Appalachians are they strictly a regional group, as the Appalachian Regional Commission’s
definition suggests, and one is either “in” or “out” of the group, based on place of
birth and/or current residence. Finally, Appalachian scholars Michael Maloney
and Phillip Obermiller have argued that Appalachians are an ethnic group.
These issues are frequently debated within academic disciplines and the
Appalachian community and are important because they point to the rhetorical
spaces in which Appalachian identity is composed.

Perhaps, to borrow Benedict Anderson’s phrase and apply it to a new
context, Appalachia is an “imagined community,” one that has been created for
various political purposes. This point is the crux of Allen Batteau’s argument in
The Invention of Appalachia, as he writes “Appalachia is a creature of the urban
imagination” and later states that “the making of Appalachia was a literary and a
political invention rather than a geographical discovery” (1). Jane Becker
suggests that Appalachia was in a sense created for political purposes as well,
noting that during the first half of the 20th century, reformers looked to
“traditional” Appalachian practices as a way to “transform an increasingly
troubled American society” (4). This is not to say that Appalachians are not a
“real” group of people or that there are not material markers and consequences of
Appalachianess; this argument does suggest, however, that Appalachianess is a
social construction that has been used for good and ill purposes, such as
identifying Appalachianess as the source of both “pure,” Anglo-Saxon whiteness
and transgressive whiteness, a point to which I will soon return.

Adding to the problem of definition is the fact that not all of those who
might be thought of as Appalachian embrace that term, as I observed not only in
my fieldwork, but also throughout the course of my life. The term “Appalachian”
is not widely used among Appalachians themselves. Instead, some prefer terms
such as “hill people,” “mountain folk,” “mountaineers,” and “country people,”
while others do not identify with any term that is associated with Appalachians.
This tendency is in large part due to the fact that the term “Appalachian” has, in
some circles, a negative and inaccurate connotation of “white trash.” This term is
often applied to Appalachians by the dominant culture, which conflates
Appalachianess with whiteness and poverty. It is not only the dominant culture
that depicts Appalachia as exclusively white, as many Appalachian scholars
“whitewash” the region as well, giving little critical attention to African-
American Appalachians, or Affrilachians. Thus, there are many would-be
Appalachians who do not recognize themselves in these depictions and therefore,
they do not identify as “Appalachian.” Furthermore, the term “white trash”
typically implies not only whiteness and poverty, but also ignorance and
intolerance of others, particularly racial minorities. Among those would-be
Appalachians who are white and poor, it is unusual to find any who care to be
thought of as ignorant and intolerant. Is it any wonder, then, that there are those
who, while proud of their communities and their regional culture, avoid
identifying themselves as Appalachians, for fear of being thought of as white
trash?

Of course, the lack of self-identification does not mean that they will not
be identified as Appalachian (or white trash), since the term Appalachian is
usually applied by those outside the region to those inside the region. Even
though “insiders” may reject that term, they, like many outside the cultural
“mainstream,” still do not have the ultimate power to define themselves. Whether
they choose the label or not, it is still placed on them by the members of the larger
culture, including well-meaning scholars such as myself and others who work in
Appalachian Studies, an issue which arose during my field work and which will
be discussed in later chapters.

In addition to white trash, there are other derogatory terms for
Appalachians, such as “hillbillies” and “rednecks.” While these terms reference
Southerners outside of the Appalachian region as well, they pack an extra wallop
for Appalachians, as revealed by a study of the words’ origins. The *OED* states
that “hillbilly” came into use as an insult specific to those living in the
mountainous areas of the southeastern United States: in essence, a description of
Appalachia. The *OED* also states that the term “redneck” applies to those living
in rural areas, as many Appalachians do. Interestingly, I could not find in the
*OED* the use of the term “redneck” that my parents remember hearing as they
grew up in the 1930s and 40s in Lewis County, Kentucky; in that time and place,
a redneck was a complimentary term for a farmer who worked so hard that his
neck had been burned red by the sun. The far more well-known use of the term,
however, is the one found in the *OED*: “a member of the white rural laboring
class of the southern United States; one whose attitudes are considered characteristic of this class; freq. a reactionary. Originally, and still often, derogatory […]].”

This is the way in which most of the general population thinks of Appalachians—or hillbillies, or rednecks, or any other term you care to use. According to many of the images that circulate in American popular culture, Appalachians engage in incest and other deviant sexual practices; they are criminals, making moonshine and recklessly breaking the law; they are virulent racists; they are lazy “good for nuthins” who wile away their time telling meaningless stories and tall tales; and they are stupid. These images are conveyed through various pop culture media, including television shows such as The Beverly Hillbillies and The Dukes of Hazzard, not to mention the equal-opportunity offender known as The Jerry Springer Show; movies such as Deliverance and O Brother, Where Art Thou?; and novels such as Bastard Out of Carolina. Even the “funny pages” reproduce these questionably “funny” images of Appalachians; until 2001, The Columbus Dispatch carried John Rose’s Snuffy Smith comic strip, a strip which portrays its title character as a stereotypically lazy, stupid, dishonest “hillbilly” in Hootin’ Holler, Kentucky. This comic strip is still available in many newspapers, as it appears in papers spanning 21 countries and 11 languages (“King Features Syndicate Comics”). While some might assume that these images are solely Southern stereotypes, these fictional and, in some cases, real-life representations are of those who hail from the Appalachian
region of the South and trade in images historically associated with Appalachians as well as Southerners. And since many Appalachians are, in fact, Southerners as well, these identities are often conflated.

It is the pervasiveness of these stereotypes that, in a discussion of David Koresh and the government’s use of sexual abuse as a rationale for the events of Waco, allowed Mark Souder, an Indiana representative in the United States House, to ask, “Do you send tanks and government troops into . . . Kentucky and Tennessee and other places where such things occur?” (“Perspectives”). From these examples, then, it is clear how the dominant culture others Appalachians by projecting onto them its anxieties about race, class, and sexuality. By ascribing to Appalachians its sexual abuse and fear and hatred of blackness, the dominant culture can say that it’s a child-centered and color-blind society; it’s just the hillbillies/rednecks/white trash that act “that way.” And, by ascribing to Appalachians its racial anxiety and degrees of poverty, the dominant culture—especially the dominant culture’s whiteness—is redeemed of its “abnormalities” and thus purified.

There is another side to these negative images, however, one that romanticizes the very same traits that are scorned at other times. Along with the idea that Appalachians are white racists and/or “white trash” comes the idea that Appalachia is a place that embodies a certain kind of whiteness—namely, “pure,” Anglo-Saxon whiteness. Becker describes this tendency, writing that reformers and writers who worked in or with the region “situat[ed] Southern Appalachian culture in an idealized Anglo-American past” (7), a past free from all the “pesky”
problems of immigration and integration. Similarly, while incest jokes may poke fun at the “too close” Appalachian family, this image of the family-as-fortress, one that serves as a pillar of strength to its members and that is fairly closed to all “outsiders,” is venerated as well. We need look no further than the success of a television show such as *The Waltons*, with its iconic conclusion to every episode—“Good night, John-Boy; Good night, Mary Ellen”—to see evidence of popular acceptance of this romanticized view of the Appalachian family. And while previously I described the negative images associated with such television shows as *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *The Dukes of Hazzard*, as well as the *Snuffy Smith* comic strip, these images can also be romanticized, since the characters on these shows and in the comic strip beat the odds and triumph over their enemies. Jethro, Grannie, and the rest of the Clampett clan always foil the plans of the “city slickers” who are anxious to swindle them out of their newly-found riches; Bo and Luke Duke always evade the corrupt Boss Hogg and Sheriff Roscoe P. Coltrane; and Snuffy foils the plans of Sheriff Tait and Parson Tuttle for his legal and spiritual redemption. The “dumb hillbillies” are usually not so dumb after all.

The positive aspect of these images can also pave a path for reclamation of the hillbilly image by the Appalachian audience as well. I remember all too well my strict, police officer father howling with delight at the antics of the fun-lovin’, law-breakin’, good ole Duke boys as they proved, contrary to the words of Kenny Rogers, that they could indeed “outrun the long arm of the law.” I also have very fond memories of watching *The Waltons* with my family; all activity in our home stopped when the show began, and I recall my parents, who shared Depression-
era childhoods with the Walton children, reminiscing about “simpler times” and praising the values of the Walton family. Thus, I have seen in my own family how Appalachians can engage in romanticization and reclamation of the “hillbilly” image. My family is not alone in this practice; many in the Appalachian community attempt to reclaim and romanticize this image as well. One obvious example is the “Hillbilly Days” festival in Pikeville, Kentucky, which celebrates all things “hillbilly,” such as the Hatfield-McCoy feud, country music, and “down home” food, while raising money for charity. Similarly, the “Redneck Games” in East Dublin, Georgia venerate the image of the “redneck,” drawing over 12,000 participants some years in such activities as pigs’ feet bobbing, watermelon seed spitting, and hubcap hurling. While it can be said that the embrace of these images reinforces stereotypes, it can also be argued that engaging in what Gayatri Spivak calls strategic essentialism—a process by which group members deliberately invoke stereotypes (usually positive) of said group for larger political or cultural purposes—may be a way for those outside the culture of power to exercise power on a personal and political level.

It is not only in popular culture that we find pathologizing and romanticizing images of Appalachians, however. These representations of Appalachians exist in scholarship as well. As the discussion of Moffett and Purcell-Gates illustrates, some academic works focus on illiteracy narratives of Appalachians, narratives that perpetuate the “dumb hillbilly” stereotype, while other texts romanticize the region and its people. For example, the *Foxfire* magazine and book series, which were written by Appalachian students in an
attempt to negate the “dumb hillbilly” stereotype, glorify mountain life and culture through their discussion of such tasks as log cabin building, hog dressing, craft-making, and cooking. They also exoticize Appalachians via tales of snake handling, faith healing, and moonshining. Kathleen Stewart’s *A Space on the Side of the Road* also offers a romanticized and essentialized portrait of Appalachia and Appalachians. Stewart valorizes the oral storytelling tradition that undoubtedly is important to the people of Appalachia and to an understanding of Appalachians, but her work goes much further than simple observation and description of this tradition. She waxes poetically about “the space on the side of the road” that Appalachians occupy and how they center themselves through narratives: “Imagine how, in a cultural space that finds itself in a space on the side of the road, stories run rampant and become the cultural center, how they have the power to fashion an ‘Other’ world” (32). Through her descriptions of Appalachian storytellers as slow-talkin’ eccentrics and her portrayal of Appalachia as “wild,” “dangerous,” and “ decayed” (13)—in opposition to the tame, bland, and sterile suburb—Stewart, as so many others have done, essentializes and exoticizes Appalachia and its people.

It is not that many Appalachians do not share certain values or customs; they undoubtedly do. Those values and customs are certainly worthy of study and scholarship, as they have all too often been overlooked in discussions of diversity and difference. However, there is always a danger in discussing any group’s “norms,” as this sort of approach can lead to stereotyping or essentialism. Regarding this conundrum, Phillip Obermiller writes, “Bringing attention to
Appalachian social concerns while at the same time praising Appalachian values is like walking a log bridge—a misstep to one side or the other can be perilous” (261). While an argument certainly can be made that the Foxfire books are an example of strategic essentialism, book such as Stewart’s—written by an outsider in the culture—slip off the log bridge, to use Obermiller’s phrase, and into the murky waters of stereotypical representations.

Another danger of this romanticization can be found in portrayals of Appalachians that depend on idealized perceptions of “Americanness” and race. In Appalachian Values, Loyal Jones writes that Appalachians’ values are “similar to the value system of an earlier America” (37). This move positions Appalachia as the source of an “earlier America” that has historically been interpreted as a place that is more truly “authentic,” as seen in the work of David Whisnant, Allen Batteau, Henry Shapiro, and Jane Becker. Becker’s Selling Tradition is particularly interesting, as it discusses the history of literacy workers and social reformers who came to Appalachia at the turn of the 20th century with a contradictory mission to both venerate Appalachians’ “pure” Anglo-Saxon culture and to redeem that culture of its “primitive” ways. This redemption was important to insure that Appalachia could serve as the source of all that was authentically American, which included all that was authentically white. Becker writes of these workers:

Both African Americans and mountaineers, they felt, were unassimilated and premodern. The people of the Appalachian South, however, were white, and many were of Anglo-Saxon extraction. Moreover, the prevalent notion that one might find in the Southern Appalachian
mountains the “highest percentage of ‘pure’ American or Anglo-Saxon stock in any part of the United States” aroused a sense of duty towards the nation’s “superior” race. (55)

Literacy instruction was one part of that assimilation, as the founding of settlement schools gave these workers the opportunity to instruct children in basic encoding and decoding while engaging in what Becker calls “cultural education.”

On this topic Becker writes, “[C]ultural education entailed selective nurturing and, when necessary, the reintroduction of particular archaic customs” (58), which would position Appalachia as the source of an early, “authentic” America—one marked by the workers’ emphasis on literacy, temperance, whiteness, and other “middle-class” values, as well as the “primitiveness” of the region’s customs and traditional craftwork. Unsurprisingly, this education overlooked the cultural practices Appalachians already had, as it depended on narrow definitions of culture and pedagogical practices that engaged in cultural eradication as well as education. So, instead of collecting examples of folk songs sung within a community, for example, workers at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina taught the students Danish folk songs as a way to get them in touch with their “true” heritage (59). Becker’s work previews
the struggles that continue to preoccupy the field of literacy studies: the problem of defining literacy, the scope of literacy’s power, and the benefits and dangers of that power. It is to this subject that we shall now turn.

**What is Literacy?**

Literacy has, for at least the past 25 years, been one of the leading “buzzwords” in the popular press’s discussions of education. Nationally there has been a good deal of real as well as metaphorical hand-wringing over alleged low literacy levels among the general populace and certain minority populations in particular, including Appalachians, and articles that anxiously wonder “why Johnny can’t read” have appeared many times over. The way the term literacy is often used in these conversations is not the way most current literacy scholars use the term, however. These “popular” conceptualizations of literacy typically define literacy as the ability to decode or encode written text—i.e., the ability to read and write. In these conversations, literacy is an either/or possession: either one “has it” or one doesn’t. As James Gee writes in *Social Linguistics and Literacies*, by this reasoning, “Literacy becomes a commodity that can be measured, and thence bought and sold” (123). According to this view, literacy is a neatly packaged object that one can possess, and in turn, use as capital to gain even more capital—namely, employment and wealth (Gee 122-23). This is the view on which popular conceptualizations of literacy are based. Here we can see the roots of the anxiety that accompanies these discussions of literacy: unless they acquire literacy, or “enough” of it, our children will be unable to go to
college, secure professional employment, and take part in the American Dream of upward mobility. Of course, these conversations do not really address how much literacy is “enough” (other than to stipulate the passing of certain tests) and what counts as literacy, a fact that benefits the power brokers of literacy in that “the bar” of literacy can always be raised so as to exclude certain groups.

In contrast, literacy scholars such as Gee and Brian Street approach literacy as a multi-faceted collection of abilities, beliefs, and ways of knowing that are used by members of a community when encountering a variety of “texts,” including, but not only, print texts. This is a broad definition of literacy, one that takes into account different literacies (print literacy, visual literacy, etc.) and the range of abilities and beliefs in literacy brought to any given rhetorical situation. Street writes in *Literacy in Theory and Practice* that this approach, which is sometimes called the “New Literacy Studies,” attempts “to understand literacy in terms of concrete social practices and to theorise [sic] it in terms of the ideologies in which different literacies are embedded” (95). Using this definition, literacy is something that everyone “has,” in varying degrees and types, and it is inherently social. This conceptualization of literacy also seeks to address the types of questions ignored in popular discussions of literacy. On this point, Street argues that the New Literacy Studies “takes nothing for granted with respect to literacy and the social practices with which it becomes associated, problematizing what counts as literacy at any time and place and asking ‘whose literacies’ are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant” (“What’s ‘New’” 1). Thus,
the New Literacy Studies is preoccupied not only with understanding the literacy
and social practices of a group, but also with theorizing the power relations
imbedded in literacy.

Other literacy scholars go further in illustrating the flexible, social nature
of literacy. In her epilogue to Ways with Words, a classic study of literacy
practices among African-American and white working-class children in a
Piedmont Carolina town, Heath argues that “patterns of language use in any
community are in accord with and mutually reinforce other cultural patterns”
(344), and she later adds that these patterns “have prepared the children in
different ways for negotiating the meaning of the printed word and the production
of a written text” (348). Gee expands this argument, noting the following:

[A] way of reading a certain type of text is only acquired, when it is
acquired in a “fluent” or “native-like” way, by one’s being embedded
(apprenticed) as a member of a social practice wherein people not only
read texts of this type in this way, but also talk about such texts in certain
ways, hold certain attitudes and values about them, and socially interact
over them in certain ways. (41)

This approach to literacy goes far beyond the simple encode-decode model
described earlier; in this view, literacy is something that, in one context or
another, everyone “has” in varying degrees and types, and it is inherently social.
A study of literacy necessitates not only that literacy practices be studied, but also
that the context in which these practices occur be studied. In other words, the
social group, or social practice, to use Gee’s term, must be studied.

And yet, it is still not enough to study only the literacy practices of a social
group, for one simple reason: the literacy practices of a social group are not only
literacy practices. As Gee writes, “They also involve ways of talking, interacting, thinking, valuing and believing” (41). How, then, can a group’s literacy practices be separated from other dimensions of a group’s social practices? Since those social practices help to develop the group’s literacy practices, how can they be separated? While these questions may sound a bit like the old riddle of the chicken and the egg, that is, in fact, precisely the point. The various practices of a social group co-exist with and develop each other, so much so that it is impossible to separate them for analysis. A group’s social practices must be studied in context in order to understand any individual set of practices, including literacy practices.

The idea that a social group’s social and literacy practices intertwine and meld into each other is a concept that has over the years gained general acceptance among scholars from a variety of disciplines. The New Literacy Studies emerged in the late 1970s/early 1980s, roughly around the same time as the social-constructionist movement took hold in composition studies. Both schools of thought were embraced, and continue to be embraced, by scholars such as myself who appreciate the ways in which this conceptualization of literacy and language recognizes the qualities of a social group without holding said group to a “norm” against which it will always be judged deficient. This approach has been especially important to studies of marginalized groups such as African-Americans, Latinos, and women, who for years were compared to the white, male, middle-class “norm” and then deemed lacking. The work of the authors named in the opening paragraph of this chapter, as well as such scholars as
Beverly Moss, Juan Guerra, and Keith Gilyard, would not have been possible without the New Literacy Studies, and in all honesty, neither would this dissertation. Those of us who study the literacy practices of a social group in a way that seeks to empower that group are the inheritors of the New Literacy Studies’ legacy.

However, this is not to say that the New Literacy Studies is without critics. Some fear that the New Literacy Studies’ broadening of the definition of literacy and situating of literacy in the context of particular social groups has led the term “literacy” to become at once so generalized and so localized that it loses value in scholarly discussions. While Deborah Brandt touched on this point in her keynote address to the 2005 mid-winter convention of the National Council of Teachers of English’s Assembly on Research, her 2002 article with Katie Clinton outlines this argument in greater detail:

We wonder if the new paradigm sometimes veers too far in a reactive direction, exaggerating the power of local contexts to set or reveal the forms and meaning that literacy takes. Literacy practices are not typically invented by their practitioners. Nor are they independently chosen or sustained by them. Literacy in use more often than not serves multiple interests, incorporating individual agents and their locales into larger enterprises. (1)

Additionally, Kirk Branch notes that among his students at an adult education center, literacy was defined as encoding and decoding. This definition did not serve to marginalize Branch’s students; instead, the students’ conceptualization of literacy limited Branch’s authority as an instructor. Branch concludes, “By reconceiving the basis of my authority, students were able to direct the focus of literacy practices away from me, so that I did not determine their meaning or even
their structure” (225). In its conceptualizations of literacy, the New Literacy Studies does not always account for ways in which members of marginalized groups, such as Branch’s students, may use “popular” definitions of literacy to undercut its power.

There is also another dimension to this social construction of literacy—one that has not always found the same level of acceptance in the academy as the concept of interplay between social and literate group practices. Gee calls literacy one of many “socially contested terms,” meaning that these terms “describ[e] social relationships which one can choose to use in any of several different ways and where such choices carry significant social and moral consequences” (15). Thus, literacy is inextricably tied up with power. Many English instructors—self included—stress to our students and even ourselves a romanticized version of this power; for example, almost every time I have observed Frederick Douglass’s autobiography being used in a high school or undergraduate classroom, the instructor usually rhapsodically makes the point that Douglass’s life illustrates the power of literacy: because he could read, he was able to escape slavery and to work for the abolitionist cause. However, I have rarely seen these same teachers—and again, I include myself in this statement—discuss with similar passion how literacy has been used to oppress and disenfranchise African-Americans, as seen in the punishment meted out to literate slaves, the use of voting literacy tests in the segregated South, and in the educational system’s
treatment of African-American children. In short, there is “demonic” side to this power as well, one with negative ramifications that are all too often ignored by those of us who prefer to romanticize literacy.

What I am referring to here is, to use the title of J. Elspeth Stuckey’s book, the violence of literacy, or to use Harvey Graff’s term, the literacy myth. Both of these scholars, along with others such as Gee, Henry Giroux, and Donaldo Macedo argue that, far from being solely a force of positive social change, literacy can—and does—serve as a mechanism of social control. In this view, literacy is not only a means to escape such hardships as poverty and racial discrimination; literacy, is, in fact, a way to insure such hardships endure. Using the work of many literacy scholars, including Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways with Words*, Stuckey argues that these scholars over-estimate the benefits of literacy while denying the inadequacy of literacy attainment for changing an oppressive social order, adding that these studies “preserve the role of language and encourage speakers to adapt to the status quo” and asking, “Why […] do studies of language always result in solutions that are linguistic rather than social or economic?” (41). Stuckey’s answer is that literacy is a demonic force, one that preserves the social and economic norms that privilege some groups while marginalizing others.

While I share Stuckey’s view that literacy is a way to preserve the culture of power, her interpretation of these scholars’ work, particularly the work of Heath, is misleading and unfair. Stuckey summarizes Heath’s argument in *Ways with Words* by writing, “[I]f we teach students to communicate in mainstream
ways, then society will become more equal and just” (39). This statement is a gross over-exaggeration of Heath’s point, however. While it is true that Heath advocates “code-switching” for marginalized populations (i.e., alternating between the language systems of home and school as the situation dictates), she also advocates for an educational system that finds new ways of teaching all of its students. Furthermore, Stuckey spends so much time demonizing literacy and its power that she fails to recognize the complexity of the issues at hand. As I will discuss momentarily, in her continued characterizations of literacy as “exploitation” (37) and a “piece of weaponry” (54), Stuckey does not address the benefits this “weapon” can bring to those who wield it.

Unlike Stuckey, scholars such as Graff, Gee, and Street offer a more complex take on literacy and literacy scholarship, one that does not make such easy heroes and villains. It is Graff who coined the term the literacy myth, which is the idea that literacy automatically and independently improves one’s social and material conditions. Graff argues that it is factors other than literacy, factors including race, gender, and social class, that are far more influential in determining—and reinforcing—said conditions. Rather than theorizing literacy as only a means of empowerment, Graff identifies literacy as an instrument of domination and cultural eradication as well, writing, “Many persons, most prominently social and economic leaders and social reformers, grasped the uses of schooling and the vehicle of literacy for the promotion of the values, attitudes, and habits considered essential to the maintenance of social order and the persistence of integration and cohesion” (24). The “maintenance of social order”
includes insuring that those in the lower classes stayed in the lower classes; on this point Gee notes that “literacy served as a socializing tool for the poor, was seen as a threat if misused by the poor (for an analysis of their oppression and to make demands for power), and served as a technology for the continued selection of members of one class for the best positions in the society” (59). Similarly, in *Social Literacies* Street writes of “colonial” and “dominant” literacies that seek to encapsulate their values into the literacy they teach to Others, whether those Others be, in the words of Street, “indigenous ‘illiterates’ in another country or to lower-class members of their own societies” (30). Literacy, it seems, is neither as innocent nor as “empowering” as popular conceptualizations would have us believe.

The portrait of literacy that emerges from scholarly conceptualizations is one that is highly contested, composed of opposing forces and fraught with conflict. On the one hand, literacy’s power is limited. Contrary to popular views of literacy that position literacy as one of the necessary tools in achieving the American Dream of upward mobility, scholars such as Stuckey write that “literacy could not be found to produce much of anything useful” (27). Gee writes that while the quickly-changing technological aspects of our society are often used as an argument for the importance of literacy, “increased technology often leads to deskillling people, and, in fact, often makes lesser demands on literacy skills, especially of the sort traditionally valued by schools” (24). Far from being a guaranteed ticket to an individual’s “better life,” literacy becomes increasingly irrelevant in this view. And yet, these same scholars, as well as
many others, position literacy in ways that demonstrates its immense social power. As previous discussion illustrates, literacy is “violent” in the ways it limits the opportunities of those outside the culture of power, those outside the “mainstream” of society. Literacy is used to dominate and oppress others, insuring the maintenance of a particular social order. Literacy has, in fact, a tremendous amount of power.

This is the central contradiction of literacy: its power is simultaneously immense and limited. Contrary to the lessons we are often taught in school, literacy is not the solution to all social ills; literacy attainment does not guarantee the achievement of “a better life,” and literacy is used as a way to deny that life. As Graff’s work illustrates, rising literacy rates in 19th century Canada did not increase socioeconomic opportunities; poverty rates remained the same as literacy rose, and literacy instruction often re-inscribed the cultural norms that worked against minorities and the poor. And yet, we must take care to avoid demonizing literacy and its power, as Graff writes: “Any complete understanding and appreciation of literacy’s history must incorporate the large, if sometimes exaggerated and decontextualized, role of demand (in dialectical relationship to supply) and the very real benefits that literacy may bring” (23). In spite of the dangerous power of literacy to create and establish oppressive social norms, literacy also wields a tremendous ability to improve the lives of individuals, as the
classroom allusions to Frederick Douglass illustrate. In short, literacy does matter, particularly on the individual level where the benefits of literacy may be felt the strongest.

The contradictory nature of literacy also explains the seductive power of the literacy myth. As one who studies literacy, I know all too well of its dangerous and destructive tendencies, yet I can’t deny that I strongly believe in the value of literacy and its positive ramifications. It is these contradictions—the contradictions that I see all around me—that lead me to be seduced by the literacy myth as well. I see very clearly in my own family history how the attainment of literacy—particularly when officially sanctioned and recognized through such measures as a high school or college diploma—has very real consequences in an individual’s life. Unlike my mother’s older brothers, for example, my father was able to attend and to graduate from high school. It was this diploma’s credentialing power that secured him a place on Cincinnati’s police force, which would eventually bring a comfortable lifestyle to our family and enable me to become the first woman in my family to graduate from college. Thanks to the education I have received—an education that was dependent on the development of certain types of literacy—I have opportunities that Grandma and my mother could never have imagined for themselves.

And yet I also know that had my father been African-American, a place on the police force would not have been available to him when he joined the force in 1957. His literacy would have made no difference. I also know that while I have the most education and academic literacy of anyone in my family, I am paid the
least of any of them—a fact that will not change after I begin life as an assistant professor. Contrary to the stories often told in school about the importance of particular literacies, my brother who barely finished high school and who works in his county’s sewers was not doomed by his struggles with academic literacy. Neither was my sister, who worked for McDonald’s for over 20 years, beginning as a 16-year-old grill attendant and ending as a district manager responsible for multiple stores. This knowledge was not enough to dissuade me from pursuing graduate degrees, however, or from encouraging my students to finish their college education. This knowledge also does not mean that I am unconcerned about my daughter’s literacy development or her future education; I diligently read to her every day, and the love she has already developed for books brings a smile to my face even as I type these words. While I know the dangers and limitations of the literacy myth, it still wields its power in my life.

**Dissertation Overview**

Of course, the ways in which literacy and the literacy myth are evident in my life are not unique, a fact born out by the fieldwork I conducted in two composition courses at two universities in Central Appalachia. As I participated in and observed these two classes and interviewed the students and instructors, I learned much about the students’ and instructors’ literacy practices and beliefs
and the ways in which the literacy myth plays out in their lives. I will explore these findings and their implications in the following chapters, and I offer short overviews of them here.

Chapter Two details the methodology and sites chosen for this research. I discuss the value of an ethnographic case study methodology for this project and detail my methods. I also describe the sites in this study by offering demographic information about the towns and universities and by providing course information, such as their objectives, student populations, texts, and instructors. Finally, I introduce the case study participants and other interviewed students.

Chapter Three examines the performance of identity in the composition classroom. Beginning with my reading of a student’s autobiographical narrative, I illustrate how the students performed romanticized and counter-Appalachian identities. I argue that these performances are set against the scene of Appalachia, both in terms of the region itself and the students’ sense of that place. These students were also sensitive to their audience’s sense of place, at times crafting their performances to meet what they understood their audience’s expectations to be.

Chapter Four utilizes the framework set forth by Sylvia Scribner in “Literacy in Three Metaphors” to investigate the literacy beliefs at work in the classrooms and in the students’ lives. Scribner’s three metaphors—literacy as adaptation, literacy as power, and literacy as state of grace—are sometimes depicted as competing and clashing metaphors. Through observations gleaned in class sessions and interviews, I show how these metaphors are far more likely to
complement and bleed into each other. I argue that the ways in which these metaphors have often been discussed do not accurately describe the belief systems of my case study participants, and I offer a new metaphor based on my participants’ literacy beliefs and practices.

In Chapter Five, I revisit Deborah Brandt’s argument about the role of sponsors of literacy to demonstrate how, in the lives of the students I studied, sponsoring extends to support systems that include not only individual sponsors, but also groups, such as fraternities and churches, and support in the forms of financial and medical assistance. Additionally, I argue that inhibiting forces, or inhibitors, of literacy played a significant role for the students; inhibitors included family and friends’ disapproval, economic difficulties, traditional gender roles, and physical and mental health issues, including addiction.

I conclude in Chapter Six by addressing the importance of this study to the field. My findings challenge the way we conceptualize student “success” and the literacy beliefs and practices of marginalized groups. I ask how we might re-conceptualize our approaches to studying students and their literacy. Additionally, I note the importance of respecting groups who are major sponsors of students’ literacy, particularly groups such as contemporary evangelical churches and fraternities—groups that sometimes don’t receive much respect among academics. Finally, I note the critical importance of sponsors and inhibitors to literacy development and success in school and argue that
universities must engage not only in outreach efforts into the surrounding communities, but also in advocacy efforts for their students and communities in order to insure the success of all students.
CHAPTER 2
METHODOLOGY AND SITE OVERVIEWS

As my introduction to this dissertation indicates, I entered graduate school with strong personal and professional interests in the educational experiences of Appalachian college students. My end goal was always to write a dissertation that would in some way address the lives and needs of Appalachian students, and I shaped my graduate work to this end, taking courses in composition, literacy, and folklore. It was in two of these courses—Introduction to Research Methods in Rhetoric and Composition and Introduction to Folklore-Field Research—that I learned the methodology that would enable me to go into the field and conduct research. In this chapter, I will focus on my fieldwork, first building on Chapter One’s discussion of this project’s significance and then illustrating the value of my research methodology. I will also provide further context for the study, describing my research sites and participants in detail.

Posing the Problem

There are several colleges and universities in the Central Appalachian region that attract Appalachian students; given the vastness and scope of the Appalachian region, this dissertation will focus on students in Central Appalachia.
Some of these universities include Morehead State University and Pikeville College in Kentucky, the University of Rio Grande and Ohio University in Ohio, and Marshall University and West Virginia University in West Virginia. In addition, schools just outside the central area of the region, such as the University of Cincinnati and The Ohio State University, also enroll Appalachian students and, in fact, target this population for outreach programs designed for underrepresented groups, since Appalachians are under-represented in higher education and are deemed to be at risk of failure upon arriving at the university.

Those Appalachian students who do “make it” to college may meet with biases, such as being subjected to bigoted comments and rejection from their non-Appalachian peers. Some of these students may be tempted to “pass” as a non-Appalachian due to internal and external prejudice. A pilot study I conducted as a first-year PhD student illustrated this point. Emily, a student I studied at that time, suggested her peers’ hostility and bigotry drove her out of the honors program. She also described how one of her Appalachian peers “passed” as a suburban white student and participated in the cruel behavior directed at Emily.

As noted in Chapter One, composition and rhetoric scholars have conducted little research into the literacies and school experiences of Appalachian students. Data gathered from outreach programs to rural and Urban Appalachian students—as well as the stories told in this dissertation—suggest these students are in need of our critical attention. One example of these data can be found in the "Report of the Appalachian Access and Success Project to the Ohio Board of Regents,” commissioned by The Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education
(OACHE), a program based at a southeastern Ohio university that seeks to increase college enrollment and graduation rates among Appalachian Ohioans. This report found that the national rate for attendance at two or four-year colleges by current-year high school graduates is 62%. In Appalachian Ohio that rate falls to 30% (Crowther, Lykins, and Spohn). Similar rates have been found by OACHE’s sister programs in other states in the Appalachian region. The OACHE website also notes that retaining students once they begin their college careers is a significant problem at its partner institutions; one such school, Ohio’s Jeffersonville Community College, began a retention program specifically targeting Appalachian students. During the first year alone, completion rates in the one-year nursing program jumped from 33% to 81% (“About the OACHE”).

Retention is not only a problem for colleges, however. My hometown of Cincinnati has high failure and attrition rates of some Urban Appalachian high school students—estimated to be as high as 67% in some areas of Cincinnati (Timm 107). In a city where approximately 34% of the population is of Appalachian descent (“About Urban Appalachians in Cincinnati”), these numbers represent a large number of students. Given these data, it is clear these programs—and further research into the literacies and schooling of
Appalachians—are needed. I began this dissertation process with the desire to make a meaningful contribution to this limited area of composition and literacy scholarship.

Planning the Study

I had four questions in mind as I began to plan and research this dissertation. Those questions were as follows:

1. What is the nature of the literacy practices and beliefs Central Appalachian students bring with them to the first-year composition classroom?

2. How do these practices and beliefs exhibit themselves in the first-year composition classroom?

3. What is the role of these practices and beliefs in facilitating students’ entry into the academic community, and, in particular, first-year composition, a “gateway” course at most universities?

4. What can the field of composition studies learn about writing pedagogy from these students?

These questions determined the research methodology and the data collection methods I would use and the sites I would select for this study. As my study evolved, however, my research questions evolved as well. When I began my fieldwork, I was invested in the concept of “success” and documenting how the students’ literacy beliefs and practices had led them to enroll in, and successfully negotiate, their first year of college. But as my fieldwork continued, I became
more interested in other issues. Sponsors of literacy quickly emerged as a theme in classroom and interview conversations, and the interplay of the universities’ and the students’ metaphors of literacy fascinated me. The more that I observed these classes, the less useful success became as a concept; instead, performance and purpose were more valuable frames for analysis. This development is typical of ethnography, as questions narrow or shift their focus during the course of fieldwork. It is to this subject of ethnographic fieldwork to which we shall now turn.

Research Methodology

My research was qualitative in nature, as I conducted ethnographic case studies of two classrooms and identified participants for further interviews. Such an approach offered multiple benefits to my project. Beverly Moss writes that ethnography “allows a researcher to gain a comprehensive view of the social interactions, behaviors, and beliefs of a community or social group” (155). Given the type of research questions I posed, ethnographic case study was the method that allowed me to answer those questions most fully. It gave me the breadth that comes with studying and participating in a classroom community, yet also the depth of working closely with individual participants. Further individual case studies were important because I wanted to focus on the literacies and schooling experiences of several students in greater detail. I wanted to learn about the literacy beliefs and practices they brought with them to college, beliefs and practices that might not necessarily play out in the classroom, and I also was
curious about their earlier educational experiences. But because I was most concerned with learning how Appalachian students negotiated their literacy in the context of first-year composition, an ethnographic method allowed me to see their experiences in the classroom first-hand, to not only rely on their analysis during personal interviews, and to observe the role of their current classroom community in their lives.

Ethnography offered another significant advantage for the type of project I chose to pursue. It promotes a disclosure of the positionality of the researcher in ways that other methods do not. An ethnographic approach allowed me to call upon my personal history, my scholarly knowledge, and my field-based insights, while also promoting researcher reflexivity. Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater argues that “[f]or ethnographers, writing about how we are positioned is part of the data” (116). Given my status as an Urban Appalachian and an “insider-outsider”—one who is Appalachian, but who has never lived within the region; one whose culture falls outside the “norm” of the academy, but who nonetheless is firmly ensconced within it—this reflection is critical. Moss describes the precarious position of the insider-outsider, noting, “As insiders, we too must deal with our own ethnocentrism and the mental baggage we carry, precisely because of our memberships in the communities we study. And we must also be prepared to deal with the mental baggage and expectations of other members of the community” (168). While the students I studied and I are both Appalachian, we are not members of the same communities; they are rural Appalachians, while I am not. Our education levels and, in some cases, socio-economic status are very different.
I could not allow myself to assume I knew what my participants “meant” or that I could somehow recognize hidden subtexts based only on the fact that I identify as Appalachian; in many cases, I construed Appalachianness differently than my participants. As I will discuss in Chapter Three, some of my participants viewed Appalachian identity as a source of shame, in sharp contrast with the source of pride this identity had become for me.

Data Collection

The data I gathered came from multiple sources: participant-observations; transcripts of individual classes; a brief demographic survey; formal interviews; and in the case of one class, an extended survey based on my interview script. I attended each class twice a week, making audio recordings of each class session and taking notes so that I could paint a rich portrait full of “thick detail” for each course. I also made audio recordings of the five interviews I conducted with each of my case study participants, as well as the interviews with the instructors and other students. All data were coded by looking for emergent themes and recurring patterns related to my research questions. I coded the audio recordings with HyperResearch, a qualitative data analysis software program that quickly and automatically groups together all recordings tagged with the same code. My notes were coded by hand.

I asked each student to complete a brief demographic survey, and from those surveys I selected 2-3 students from each course to be my case study participants. My selections were based on student’s willingness and availability
to participate as well as their representativeness of their respective classes. For example, a case study participant at each university approached me after the first session of their respective courses to express their interest in participating; one of them was a mother, an identity she shared with many of her classmates. Thus, it seemed especially important to include her in the study since there were several other mothers in the class. Another case study participant was selected because he was the only male in his male-predominated class who was willing and able to be interviewed. He was also the only male from either course who could commit to weekly interviews. Since I wanted to learn about the literacies of both male and female students, it was important that he be included in the case study.

On the last day of the first class I studied, the professor allowed me to distribute a 4-page survey based on the script I used for my interviews with the case study participants and permitted me to speak with the students about their responses. This survey gave me a way to ask all of the students in attendance the same questions I was asking in interviews, and the students’ responses were invaluable to me as I tried to understand the culture of the class as a whole. Because the other class was running behind schedule on the syllabus, I was not able to conduct this survey with those students.

During my fieldwork, I reflected upon my own subjectivity and interrogated my methods every step of the way, checking my understanding with the participants and sharing my reflections with my participants and readers. I conducted “member checks” during interviews, frequently asking my participants such questions as, “What do you mean by that?” or “What does that term mean to
you?” I also would repeat my interpretations and observations to my participants, with statements such as, “So what I hear you saying is (xyz). Am I understanding you correctly?” That is why I offered my participants the opportunity to read chapter drafts and to have their interpretation and responses included. And that is why I have spent so much time to this point in the dissertation sharing my own stories and personal understanding of Appalachian identity: I believe it is critical for my own understanding of this project, as well as that of my readers.

**Choosing a Site**

I selected two schools for this study: State University-Sciotoville, a two-year regional campus of State University, and Riverton University, a four-year state school unaffiliated with State University. It was important to include a two-year college as well as a four-year college in my study so that I could better understand the experiences of Appalachian college students in schools with different missions and learning environments. A 1992 study of Appalachian high school students in southeastern Ohio found that, of those planning to go to college, 45.3% were going to attend a four-year institution, and 20.1% were going to attend a two-year school; the remaining students were unsure of what type of institution they would attend (Crowder, Lykins, and Spohn). Additionally, enrollment at two-year colleges has surged, particularly during the past two years (CNN). Thus, both types of institutions attract a significant percentage of college-bound Appalachians. In order to have a broader picture of the Appalachian college experience, I needed to study both two-year and four-year institutions.
I also selected these particular institutions because of their varying levels of outreach to the regional Appalachian population. State University-Sciotoville, much like its four-year partner, does not at this time have any special programs for Appalachian students or community outreach programs. However, a State University initiative is currently under way to explore issues involving teaching and learning in Appalachia; as the web page devoted to this initiative states, the goal is “to assist others in the broader university community to appreciate needs and resources distinct to the Appalachian region.”

In contrast, Riverton University is home to an advocacy group that focuses on increasing Appalachians’ college enrollment, and in its mission statement the university names “dedication to the region” as its utmost priority, stating, “The University’s primary focus is the higher education of the region’s first-generation college population.” The university offers five federally funded TRIO\(^1\) programs to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds succeed in college and also has multiple outreach programs for its surrounding community. In selecting these sites, I wondered what the two universities’ different commitments to Appalachian students and the region might suggest about the importance, or lack of importance, of such programs. I questioned what impact, if any, these factors may have on student success, or if other issues would emerge as more important.

\(^1\) TRIO is not an acronym but instead is a term that derives from the three original programs that were part of the federal government’s post-secondary education initiative. The federal government currently supports eight TRIO programs. See [http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/triohistory.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/triohistory.html) for further details.
State University—Sciotoville

State University—Sciotoville\(^2\) is a two-year, open admissions, regional campus of a four-year institution; both the two and four-year campuses are located in Central Appalachia. Sciotoville, with a population of nearly 22,000 according to the 2000 census, is the county seat of St. Clair County, which sits at one of the edges of the Appalachian region and whose 2000 population was just over 73,000. The county is predominantly white (92\%), and a college degree is an uncommon achievement: 11.3\% of county residents 25 and older hold bachelor’s degrees or greater, compared with a state average of 21.1\%. The most common educational attainment levels are high school graduate (42.2\%) and no high school diploma (23.9\%).

The Appalachian Regional Commission classifies St. Clair County as having a “transitional” economic status. This status means that the county’s three year unemployment average, its per-capita market income, and its poverty rate are worse than national averages, but better than those “at-risk” counties. (“County Economic”).\(^3\) 9.1\% of families in the county live in poverty, and of those families, 41.2\% are headed by a single mother. The county’s general poverty rate is 12\%, compared with the state average of 10.6\%. The major employers in the

\(^2\) All names of institutions, individuals, and locations are pseudonyms.

\(^3\) “At-risk” counties meet the following criteria: their three-year unemployment rate is 125\% or more of the U.S. average; their per-capita market income is 67\% or less of the U.S. average; and their poverty rate is 125\% or more of the U.S. average (“County Economic”).
county include a hospital, the Sciotoville school district, a utility company, and a paper manufacturer. The following table displays St. Clair County’s demographic information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County Seat</th>
<th>Sciotoville (approximate population 23,000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County Population</td>
<td>Approximately 73,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race of Residents</td>
<td>92% white, 5.7% African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level (residents 25 and older)</td>
<td>23.9% no high school diploma; 42.2% high school diploma; 11.3% bachelor’s degree or greater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Poverty Rate</td>
<td>9.1%; 41.2% of those families are headed by a single mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Poverty Rate</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: St. Clair County Demographics

Students at State University—Sciotoville can begin on this campus most of the majors offered at the four-year campus and finish the remainder of their course requirements at the main campus; the two-year campus also offers associate degrees in such fields as office technology, nursing, computer science technology, and law enforcement. In terms of student demographics, there are approximately 1,800 students enrolled at the branch campus. Over 60% of the students at this campus are women, and their average age is 33. According to the instructor whose class I observed, many students are first-generation college students, and 98-99% of the student body is white. Most students are from the
county that is home to the two-year campus; almost all of the other counties that are home to Sciotoville students are in Central Appalachian as well. All of these students commute to campus, since there is no campus housing.

During Summer Quarter 2004, I examined a course entitled English 110: Writing and Rhetoric I. 4 English 110 is the only first-year composition class at SUS. A second composition course is required during a student’s junior year. The course syllabus informs students that “[t]his course will help you develop skills in college writing, namely narrative, informative (analytical and comparative), and argumentative writing.” The reader for this class was Jane Aaron’s *The Compact Reader*, an anthology reader arranged by rhetorical modes (description, narration, example, etc). Within each chapter, similarly themed readings were grouped together. For example, in the narration chapter, all of the readings focused on some aspect of childhood. Diana Hacker’s *A Pocket Style Manual* served as the grammar handbook for the course. This course was known as a “Term One” course. The entire course was condensed from an eleven-week quarter to a five-week term, meeting twice a week for four hours per session. I attended every session of the term.

Perhaps due to the summer term and time of the course, the class demographics varied somewhat from the general student body demographics of State University—Sciotoville. Women made up 86% of this class (12 out of 14 students), significantly higher than the percentage of women in the general student body population. Another noteworthy difference between the two sets of

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4 All course numbers have been changed.
statistics was the English students’ average age: 23.8, almost 10 years younger than the campus average. All but two students in the class identified as white; one student identified as Asian-American, and one student identified as African-American. Finally, 9 of the 14 students (64%) were first-generation college students; two of these students were also first-generation high school graduates. Of those students whose parents attended college, degree attainment was mixed: one student had two parents with associate degrees; two students’ mothers earned college degrees, while their fathers completed some college; the parents of one student were both college graduates; and one student’s parents had both earned master’s degrees. On the next page is a table that summarizes this information:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>1,800 students</td>
<td>14 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male-Female Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>40% M, 60% F</td>
<td>14% M, 86% F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Age of Students</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race of Students</strong></td>
<td>93% (all S.U. campuses)</td>
<td>86% white, 7% African-American, 7% Asian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commuting Students</strong></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First-Generation College</strong></td>
<td>“Most”</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Born and Raised in Local Area</strong></td>
<td>“Most”</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identify as Appalachian (All Students)</strong></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identify as Appalachian (Students Raised in Region)</strong></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2: State University-Sciotoville Demographics

Shanti Durgakar was the professor of the course. She had taught at SUS for nearly 30 years. At this point in her career, she was beginning to teach “second-generation” students—the children of former students—in her classes. One day as we talked about her personal history, Shanti, a native of India, recalled how Homi Bhabha, the noted postcolonial theorist, was one of her classmates at university in India: “I earned higher marks than he did, but he was the teacher’s favorite because he was a boy,” she noted with a rueful smile. “I earned higher
marks than all the boys, but it was their careers that were encouraged by our
teachers.” After graduating from university, Shanti came to America and earned
her PhD in literature from a large state university within the same state as SSU;
she decided against returning to India because “there were far more opportunities
for me as a woman in America than there would have been back home.”

When I first met Shanti, she described herself to me as “an old school
English teacher,” explaining, “On the process-product continuum, I’m far more
interested in the product.” While well aware that “traditional grammar instruction
has fallen out of favor,” Shanti emphasized grammar and correctness to her
students, spending a large portion of almost every class lecturing her students on
grammar rules and their applications; her lectures typically consisted of textbook
review, handouts, and worksheets. Small group work, including peer review, was
not part of her pedagogy. Class discussion of the assigned readings played an
integral role in each class, however, as did a question and answer pedagogy—with
Shanti as the questioner. Many of the readings and ensuing discussions focused
on social issues such as homelessness, racism, and gender roles.

Shanti seemed at ease with my presence in her classroom, in spite of her
teasing remarks that she did everything “wrong” according to the composition
theory with which I was familiar. She called on me in almost every class (if not
every class), and if she was explaining something to her students and felt that her
explanation was unclear, she would ask me to join in and help. As the course
continued, I felt sufficiently comfortable to volunteer my opinions or add
explanations to hers. She welcomed my participation, asking me during breaks
for my suggestions. I viewed these activities as ways to provide reciprocity and gladly shared my ideas with her. For example, when Shanti asked me how I encouraged more meta-awareness of the writing process among my own students, I suggested writer’s memos as one way to encourage self-reflection. Shanti was quite pleased with my suggestion and adopted it immediately. Additionally, Shanti was unable to teach two class sessions during the term, and I filled in for her those days in a spirit of reciprocity. It was tough for me to establish the reciprocity I felt so strongly about offering to Shanti, however. She voluntarily acted as a mentor to me, giving me advice about the job market and coping with the demands of life as a professor. Shanti insisted she gained a good deal from my participation in her course, but I still feel that I learned far more from her than I will ever be able to repay.

Fourteen students were enrolled in and completed the course; a fifteenth student dropped the class after the first day. All of these students were in their first year of college or had just completed their first year. I selected two students from this class as case study participants. Katie May was a 19-year-old Sciotoville native and a rising sophomore at Big State University, the flagship university of the state. Because Katie May was a pre-med major, her schedule had been packed with the recommended science and math courses; thus, she had been unable to take first-year composition during her first year at Big State. Her advisor recommended that she take first-year composition over the summer, and she decided to return to her mother’s home in so that she could work for her aunt, a local dentist, and take her composition class at State University-Sciotoville.
Julie, my other case study participant, had just finished her first year at SUS. Julie was 24 years old and had a five-year-old son; they lived with Julie’s partner, Shelly. Julie was one of the few students in the class who was not a native of Sciotoville or one of the surrounding towns, as she was born and raised in another state in the Central Appalachian region. Julie’s enrollment at SUS was not her first attempt at college. As an 18-year-old newlywed, Julie had enrolled at a local college in her hometown, but shortly after enrolling, she became pregnant with her son. Troubled by morning sickness and feeling unsupported by her husband and parents, she dropped out of college. After divorcing her husband and sending her son to kindergarten, Julie decided to resurrect her goal of a college education and had been very pleased with her performance to that point: she had carried a 4.0 average her first year. She planned on taking courses year-round and hoped to graduate in less than four years.

In addition to my formal interviews of case study participants, I also interviewed Schueler, one of only two men in the class and one of the three remaining case study volunteers, once. Like Julie, Schueler had just finished his first year at SUS. He enrolled in this specific section of 110 because it was taught by Dr. Durgakar, who had taught the Asian literature class he had taken—and highly enjoyed—the previous fall. Schueler lived on his parents’ farm in an Appalachian county adjacent to St. Clair, and he worked part-time at a pizza shop
in addition to going to school. After completing his sophomore year at the
Sciotoville campus, he planned on finishing his degree at State University’s main
campus.

Of the 11 remaining students, 9 gave me permission to interview them
informally. These informal interviews consisted of conversations we had before,
during, and after class. These students also gave me permission to quote their
contributions to class discussions and conversations they had with other students.
These students include Dixie, a 30 year old single mom; Anna, a 30 year old
former Olympic swimmer from Bulgaria; and Beth, a 19 year old who had
enrolled at SUS a week after her 2003 graduation from her high school. Thanks
to their consent, you will hear these students’ voices, along with several others, in
the chapters that follow.

**Riverton University**

During the second five-week term of Summer Quarter 2004, I studied
English 103: Composition and Literature, a course offered at Riverton University,
a four-year, open admission, state university. Riverton is located in Sciotoville’s
home state, is similar in size to Sciotoville (nearly 21,000 according to the 2000
census) and, like Sciotoville, is a county seat. Massie County, the county in
which Riverton is located, has a population of just over 79,000—once again,
similar in size to Sciotoville’s home county of St. Clair. Like St. Clair County,
Massie County is also predominantly white: 94.7%. However, education levels
in Massie County differ slightly from those in St. Clair County. 10.1% of Massie
County residents 25 and older hold bachelor degrees or higher, in comparison with a state average of 21.1%. 39.9% of the county population graduated from high school, and 25.9% of county residents did not graduate from high school.

The Appalachian Regional Commission has designated Massie County to be “at-risk”: its three-year unemployment rate is 125% or more of the U.S. average; its per-capita market income is 67% or less of the U.S. average; and its poverty rate is 125% or more of the U.S. average (“County Economic”). Poverty rates were higher than those of St. Clair County: 15.2% of Massie County families live in poverty, and single mothers are the heads of 42% of those households. The general poverty rate for the county was 19.3%, again in comparison to a state average of 10.6%. Major employers in the county include a payroll service, a shoelace factory, and a bottling company. A table that summarizes Massie County’s demographics can be found below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>County Seat</strong></th>
<th>Riverton (approximate population 21,000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>County Population</strong></td>
<td>Approximately 79,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race of Residents</strong></td>
<td>94.7% white, 2.6 % African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education Level</strong></td>
<td>25.9% no high school diploma; 39.9% high school diploma; 10.1% bachelor’s degree or greater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Poverty Rate</strong></td>
<td>15.2%; 42% of those families are headed by a single mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Poverty Rate</strong></td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3: Massie County Demographics
Riverton University was founded as a two-year college and transitioned into a four-year institution almost twenty years ago; it does not offer any graduate programs. The university offers degrees in the humanities, fine arts, business, and the mathematical and natural sciences; most of these degrees include teacher licensure. The university also offers the Bachelor of Science in nursing and associate degrees and certificates in such applied fields as dental hygiene, respiratory therapy, and computer assisted drafting. According to the university’s Institutional Research Analyst, 60% of the student body is female, and the students’ average age is 25. 86% of the students at this university are white; 10% are classified as “unknown/other;” and four percent are divided among African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latino/as, and Native Americans. While there is limited on-campus housing, approximately 90% of the students commute to campus. Most students reside in the same county as the university, a county well inside the boundaries of the Appalachian region. The other four counties that are home to almost all of the remaining student population are within the Appalachian region as well.

The composition class that I observed at Riverton University was English 103, the final step in a required three-course, first-year composition sequence; eighteen students were enrolled in the course. In some ways the demographics of this class mirrored those of the university at large: the average age of the students in the class was 26.8, and 94% of the students were white (there was one African-American in the class). Perhaps due to the effects of summer school enrollment,
the student population of this class dramatically differed from the general student population, as well as the Sciotoville class: 60% of students enrolled in this class were male, and 38% of students in the class were not originally from Massie County or any of its surrounding counties. While two of these students currently lived in Massie County year-round, four of the students (25%) returned to a home at least 100 miles away from Massie County.

Thirty-two percent (5 of 16) of the Riverton students were first generation college students. Of these five Riverton students, three had at least one parent who did not finish high school; of those three students, two had at least one parent who did not complete elementary school. Thus, a wide range of parental educational attainment existed among these students, from parents with third grade education levels to parents with law degrees. Of the eleven Riverton students whose parents attended college, degree attainment varied: one student had two parents with some college coursework; one student had two parents with associate degrees; one student had two parents with bachelor degrees; and one student had two parents with master degrees. The remaining six students had two parents with different levels of education, ranging from one parent with some high school and one parent with an associate degree to one parent with a bachelor degree and one parent with a J.D. Of these six students, four students’ fathers had
greater educational attainment than that of the mothers. The table below summarizes demographic information for the university and this particular class:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>3,500 students</td>
<td>18 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male-Female Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>40% M, 60% F</td>
<td>60% M, 40% F (50-50 in regular attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Age of Students</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race of Students</strong></td>
<td>86% white, 10% unknown, 4% students of color</td>
<td>94% white, 6% African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commuting Students</strong></td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First-Generation College</strong></td>
<td>“Most”</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Born and Raised in Local Area</strong></td>
<td>“Most”</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identify as Appalachian (All Students)</strong></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identify as Appalachian (Students Raised in Region)</strong></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.4: Riverton University Demographics

Lynn Weatherby was the instructor of English 103; the course syllabus states, “The goals of English 103, to improve reading, writing, critical thinking, and speaking skills through a study of literature, help you to develop and enhance your intellectual growth.” The reader for the course was Literature and the Writing Process, a genre-organized literary anthology that also discusses the
challenges of writing about each genre; this text is by Elizabeth McMahan, Susan X. Day, and Robert W. Funk. Lynn Troyka’s *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers* was the grammar handbook. This class met four days a week for two hours at a time; due to travel constraints, I attended two classes each week.

Lynn had been teaching at Riverton University for nine years; five of those years had been as a full-time instructor. She was promoted to Assistant Professor the quarter after I observed her class. A native of California, Lynn earned a B.A. at a university in South Africa during the height of the anti-apartheid movement; in an interview, she recalled how one of her sociology professors was gunned down in front of his home due to his anti-apartheid activism. After graduating, Lynn stayed in South Africa for a few years but left owing to fears for her safety (her professor’s murder). She returned to the U.S. and earned a M.A.T. (Master of Arts in Teaching) at a mid-sized state university in a neighboring state in Central Appalachia. It was there that she met her husband, who was working on his PhD. At that time, her husband was an administrator at Riverton University; he is also a Riverton native. That is how Lynn came to live in Riverton.

Her husband also played a role in Lynn’s career at Riverton University. Here, Lynn explains how she came to teach at Riverton in statements that are also
revealing about the racial climate of the university and its effects on Lynn, a white woman married to an African-American man, as well as the status of particular programs and courses at the university:

Lynn: “After my second child was born, I was just staying home, but he [her husband] was talking to someone down here about my experiences in South Africa. And that professor asked me to come in and do a 15-minute guest thing for their senior seminar class; they were writing papers about Third World topics, and he asked me to come speak to his class. And after I spoke to his class, he said, ‘Wow, you really know what you’re talking about! We should get you in here as an adjunct.’ And so he and my husband talked to the powers-that-be, and I came down and taught the Black Authors class. They offered me a Black Authors literature class. And I taught that, which (pause) just because I was educated in South Africa doesn’t mean I know a lot about that [Black Authors]. But I just went with it.”

Sara: “But that was immediately…”

Lynn: (overlapping) “The assumption, right. That that’s what we studied in South Africa. Now we studied African literature, and the occasional black author, but not African-American authors.”

Sara: “Did these other administrators, did they know that you’re white, or did they assume you were also African-American because your husband is?”

Lynn: “I think, yeah. I think some of them assumed I was and thought, ‘Okay, it’s a black person, we’ll get them to teach African-American literature.’ [. . .] Then I came down and taught the class and they said, ‘We have this history of South Africa course on the books, but it’s never been taught.’ So I fired up a syllabus, because that’s my thing.”

Lynn taught the History of South Africa course for three years, after which time she sought more work teaching English classes. In contrast to Shanti, the
instructor of the Sciotoville class who was a tenured professor, Lynn was hired as a full-time instructor with funds the department had won through a special grant designed to improve writing instruction:

“They won this money to bring in three full-time English instructors to teach only composition, and they would allow the qualification to be only a master’s. Normally when we hire an English position, we look for a PhD. But they said, ‘We need composition instructors, so we’re going to hire them just to teach composition.’ And that’s the position I applied for and that’s the position I’m teaching. If I weren’t teaching my History of South Africa class, then they’d let me teach one literature class a year. But everything else, I have to teach composition.”

Lynn’s comments illustrate the privileging of literature instruction over composition instruction that is so prevalent in departments of English. In the case of Lynn’s composition-heavy line, a M.A.T. is “good enough,” but a Ph.D. is required for those professors hired with literature lines. Susan Miller addresses the historical privileging of instruction in literature over composition in Textual Carnivals, writing, “[A] cooperative brotherhood within English studies first necessarily separated and subordinated the teacher of composition in those departments that were well enough supported to establish a division of necessary labor. The division would by definition be inequitable” (126). Miller goes on to argue that while this literature-composition split was at one time used to justify the development of English departments, those historical conditions no longer exist to support this privileging. Instead, this privileging stems from the fact that “composition was work, and work of a particularly subordinate kind that by definition within English studies preceded the students’ later exposure to cultural
ideals in literature. It was literally ‘ground work.’” (128). And most of this groundwork is done by women, who according to Miller make up two-thirds of writing instructors (123)—women such as Lynn.

In contrast to Shanti, the Sciotoville professor who emphasized “product” over “process,” Lynn’s pedagogy and teaching philosophy fell more on the “process” end of the continuum; she described herself as a teacher interested in “student-centered pedagogy.” Lynn’s students participated in teacher-mandated peer review sessions of all of their papers; once drafts had been turned into Lynn, however, they were commented on and graded, with no opportunities for the students to make further revisions. Lynn made daily use of both large group discussion and small group work, including small group discussion and sharing of reader response journals. During large group discussions among the entire class, discussion typically focused on the day’s reading and upcoming writing assignments; for example, Lynn often engaged the students in such activities as group brainstorming, where the students would call out possible ideas and topics that Lynn would write on the board. Everyone would then discuss the feasibility of such topics. Lynn also assigned a collaborative project, a “poetry panel discussion.” For this assignment, students worked as a ‘panel’ (group of three) to analyze a poem and to present their interpretations to the rest of the class. Finally, direct instruction in grammar played a very limited role in Lynn’s course. While assignment sheets often cautioned students to proofread their work carefully, Lynn did not spend a good deal of time lecturing the students on grammar use. Instead, as she returned papers, Lynn would note particular grammatical issues
that were common for the class as a whole. She would then encourage students to consult their handbooks and to ask her any questions about grammar rules.

18 students were registered for the course, and 15 remained by midterm. However, on a typical day only 9 or 10 students attended class, with a core group of the same 8 students attending almost every class I observed. This core group included my two case study participants, Michelle and Mike, as well as Gladys, another student I interviewed during the course. Of the five students who identified as Appalachian, only one consented to the case study and was available for interviews. That student was Michelle, a 19 year old Riverton native who had just finished her first year at RU. A chemistry/pre-pharmacy major, she planned on becoming a pharmacist and hoped to transfer after her sophomore year to a combined BA/Pharm.D. program at a university a few hours away from home. In addition to going to school, Michelle worked in the pharmacy at the local hospital.

My other case study participant was a student who was unsure if he was Appalachian or not. Mike was a 26-year-old senior who had been in college off and on since he was 18 years old; multiple health problems, including two surgeries, had greatly slowed his progress towards degree. Thanks to the support of his parents, however, he persevered and was on track to graduate the following spring. After spending Mike’s early years in Colorado because of his military career, Mike’s father retired and the family returned to his hometown of Sciotoville when Mike was six years old. Mike went home to Sciotoville every
weekend to see his girlfriend and his parents. A business major and an active member of one of Riverton’s two fraternities, Mike lived in an apartment within walking distance of campus.

Other students participated in my research as well. I interviewed two students once: Gladys, a 54 year old junior double majoring in psychology and sociology, and Pamela, a 33 year old nursing major. While Gladys completed the course, Pamela stopped coming to class after the second week of the term. Comments from both women’s interviews will be included in the following chapters, as will the classroom contributions of their peers who consented to participate in this research and who finished the course. These students include Jodi, a 25 year old mother of two; Sharon, a 19 year old who had just finished her first year at Riverton; and Barbara, a 26 year old native of Montana who married a Riverton native. While some of these students—most notably Jodi—struggled with attendance, they stayed enrolled and finished the course.

The attendance problems in the class were unusual, according to Lynn, even for Riverton’s summer classes, which often struggle with lower attendance. In a follow-up interview after the course had ended, Lynn also shared with me how difficult the course had been for her, given the low attendance and the wildly varying abilities of the students:

“I had students like Michelle, very driven, very bright, very motivated. And then I had students like Jodi, who didn’t come to class regularly and who had barely gotten through her other classes with me—passed with D
minuses. And this time she failed. It was really hard to teach all of those students, to know how to help all of them when they needed such different things.”

My presence in the course may also have added to some of the difficulties, since Lynn confessed to me during the first week of class that she felt intimidated by me. I was shocked. Lynn seemed very self-confident and poised, and I so often felt unsure of myself that I couldn’t believe I intimidated anyone. Given Lynn’s confession, I decided to function as more of an observer than a participant in Lynn’s class. I usually did not speak in class and did not offer suggestions to Lynn in the way I did Shanti. I was afraid that if I did so, I might add to Lynn’s feeling of intimidation. I have also wondered what role, if any, my status as a PhD candidate may have played—my education level was higher than hers (again in contrast to Shanti, whose education level was higher than mine), which may have contributed to her feelings.

Finally, an important difference between the two classroom contexts was that I had contacted Shanti directly for permission to observe her class; in contrast, my contact with Lynn was at first mediated through the director of first-year composition at Riverton, who was my original contact at the university. While Lynn was the only person who could consent to my presence in her classroom, it is possible she felt a sense of obligation to consent, since it was her supervisor who first told her about my project. However, the director of first-year composition did not require Lynn to participate and, in fact, never gave me Lynn’s, or any other instructor’s, contact information—it was Lynn who first
emailed me after learning about my research. She frequently commented on how important she perceived my work to be and that she was pleased that she and her students could play a role in it. So, while Lynn may have been somewhat uncomfortable with my presence in her classroom, she clearly articulated an interest and desire to participate in the project as well.

I felt badly that I had intimidated Lynn, as I certainly did not intend to do so. I wasn’t sure what to do with this knowledge and I decided to keep a low profile in her class for fear of intimidating her further—a decision which prevented me from offering much in terms of reciprocity. In retrospect, I realize it may have, in fact, been more intimidating to have a silent observer furiously taking notes than a full participant who took on some of the responsibility for the class. It was not until after the course ended that I began to feel as if I established any reciprocity with Lynn. Knowing of Lynn’s interest in continuing her education, we have corresponded via email several times about PhD programs that may be a good fit for her, particularly programs that offer online or low-residency requirements that would more easily accommodate her position at Riverton and her family life. I have also offered to assist her when she applies to PhD programs by reviewing her application and writing a letter of recommendation. But again, as is the case with Shanti, I feel I owe Lynn far more than I can ever repay.

As I turn to the end of this chapter, I’m reminded of Beth Daniell’s words in *A Communion of Friendship: Literacy, Spiritual Practice, and Women in*
Daniell writes that she hoped to frame her participants’ stories “not as an example of one of the grand narratives of literacy, where they become smarter or freer, but rather as a little narrative, where a particular group of women use their literacy in specific ways” (36). When I first formulated my research questions two years ago, I was still invested in the “grand narrative” to which Daniell refers, a narrative that would explore the “successfulness” of these students’ literacy practices. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, my research questions shifted as I became immersed in my fieldwork. I began to see not only the folly of constructing a grand narrative of these students’ literacy, but also the need for investigating these so-called “little narratives” of literacy. My goal for the following chapters is to illustrate the importance of literacy’s smaller stories, demonstrating how these “little narratives” are, in fact, not so “little” in terms of their impact on students’ lives.
CHAPTER 3
A PLACE OF ONE’S OWN: PERFORMING IDENTITY IN
THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

Gladys: “I think they’re [Appalachians] hilljacks. I do, I think they’re backwoods maybe, they’re happy with their environment, they’re happy, not really expanding. They’re happy just to be here. I guess to me, that’s what it is. They just want to do what their mother did, even though it’s changing some now. They’re just happy in this small, little world. And narrow-minded.”

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Sara: “Why did you write this particular type of narrative?”
Julie: “Because I thought she [the professor] would like it.”

***

“What kind of self are we inviting students to become? What kinds of selves do we subtly dismiss?”—Thomas Newkirk, The Performance of Self in Student Writing

In Chapter One, I discussed the difficulties inherent in defining Appalachianness and pointed to the ways in which the Appalachian region and its
people have been defined by social reformers, popular culture, and others outside the region. In these constructions, Appalachians tend to be either pathologized (for their poverty, illiteracy, and/or lawlessness) or romanticized (for their close family ties, “down-home” nature, and “simple” ways). While I made passing reference to some of the ways in which members of my family and I constructed our own Appalachian identities, I did not explore in any detail how those living in the region may perform their Appalachianness. That issue will be the focus of this chapter.

In recent years, scholars have paid significant critical attention to the idea that identity is performative, i.e. that identity is not fixed but is constructed through acting upon, and being acted upon by, the social forces that surround us. This chapter will use that concept as a way to think about Appalachianness and how that particular identity plays out inside and outside the composition classroom. During the first week of my fieldwork, I read a short narrative by Julie, a case study participant in the Sciotoville class. Reading Julie’s narrative and talking about her motivation for writing it made me more conscious of, and curious about, the ways in which these students performed their identities in the classroom, in their writing, and in our interviews. Later experiences in the field reinforced my attention to how issues of identity play out. What “expressions” constitute Appalachian identity in the eyes of these students? What expressions do the students think constitute Appalachian identity for teachers and scholars such as myself? How do these students negotiate the performance of these
expressions alongside some very real material markers—and consequences—of Appalachianness? These are the questions that we will focus on in this chapter.

**Julie’s Story**

During the first class at Sciotoville, Shanti asked the students to do some in-class writing; the students were to write a personal narrative that illustrated a time when they had defied social conventions, a topic that was addressed in the first assigned readings. The students spent about thirty minutes composing their narratives, and Shanti collected them with a promise to return the assignment the next class session. Shanti stressed that while she would be reading the assignment, she would not be evaluating their work with a letter grade, telling the students she simply wanted to get a sense of who they were as writers.

When Shanti returned the papers during the next class, she singled out for praise the narrative written by Julie, one of my case study participants. Julie flushed with pleasure as Shanti gave her the paper and stated, “Now, this was an incredible narrative. Just incredible. Sara, you should really take a look at this, because it’s delightful. The imagery and pastoralism were amazing!” Julie, who had volunteered after the first class to be part of the case study, turned away from Shanti and towards me, rolling her eyes while also smiling at Shanti’s enthusiastic endorsement of her work. Julie then pushed her paper towards me, since she had
already agreed to my request to read and photocopy all of the writing she did for class, and told me I could hold onto the paper until I could copy it after class.

What follows below is Julie’s narrative, which I have included in its entirety and with Julie’s original language and formatting:

As a child, I was very imaginative and experimental. The town I lived in was in [a neighboring state] and some of societies views were a little different compared to others. There was many different things I enjoyed to do as a child; but only a few of these things were accepted by society. I was very big on nature and my favorite thing was to go in the woods and sing till darkness fell. My parents discouraged this activity for they felt I should participate in more girlish activities like my sister. I informed them that I was like a river for no matter how many dams are built I will keep flowing through the mountains and valley I loved. They felt that being in the woods for many hours was very dangerous and more suited to boys than girls. My friends were mostly boys and they felt that no matter your gender you should be able to experience what life has to offer. I believe that as a child I did not see any dangers in the activities I chose; but now I can see that I could have very easily been killed in the many trails I walked and the streams I crossed. The idea of taking those walks and experiencing the thrills of nature took me to a different world that I was not able to live if I had not accepted in a more boyish fashion, as my parents thought. I feel that I am a more rounded person and I don’t care as much about what society thinks of my actions.

Like Shanti, I, too, was pleased by Julie’s narrative. I was impressed by the amount of text she had generated in half an hour, and as a feminist, I
appreciated the spunk Julie exhibited in contesting gender norms. I was also seduced at first by the power of the pastoral images Shanti noted; as I read, I could visualize the child Julie walking through woods and singing. I felt as if I could see the hills and rivers she referenced. And since Julie had already volunteered to be a case study participant, my excitement about the piece was even greater—here was a student touching on her Appalachian identity in her writing, and she was going to be part of my study! A small, nagging voice in the back of my mind thought the narrative seemed a bit over-the-top, one that was a bit too “authentic” and romanticized, perhaps. But I quickly pushed that concern aside, as it was not my job to judge the “authenticity” of her writing.

That small voice in my head began speaking loudly when I interviewed Julie after class. After I asked Julie about her process of composing the narrative, she revealed that she had fabricated and enhanced parts of this piece: “Yeah, I played in the woods, but I wasn’t running around singing all the time or things like that. Where we lived wasn’t that pretty. We lived in a run-down house. It was near the woods, but things were all torn up from the mines. And my parents didn’t care if I played in the woods or not. So some of it was true, but some of it wasn’t.”

As Julie talked, she chuckled a bit, and I couldn’t help but join her. The little voice in my head had some valid questions. Though chagrined that my over-eagerness about my research project and my own conceptualizations of Appalachianness had led me to accept Julie’s piece with little questioning, I was also delighted by the awareness of audience Julie’s response indicated and by the
sense of play at work in her composing process. As we continued to talk, I asked her why she created this particular kind of story. Her answer was fascinating: “Because I thought she [the professor] would like it.” When I asked why she thought the professor would like it, Julie replied, “Well, I know what people think of [her home state]. They think we all live in the mountains, that we’re closer to the earth or whatever, and that we’re kind of backwards. So I kind of played that up by talking about the mountains and the streams and by acting like my parents thought girls couldn’t do certain things.”

Julie’s response indicated that her Appalachianness played a role in her literacy practices, but not in the way I originally thought when I first read Julie’s narrative. It wasn’t Julie’s Appalachian identity that was expressing itself in her writing; it was her audience’s understanding of Appalachian identity. Judith Butler, whose *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* details the theory behind “the performance of identity,” writes, “[G]ender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed” (25). Scholars working in many areas—including gender, race,
sexuality, and class studies—have used Butler’s conceptualization of identity to argue that there are no “essential” or “natural” identities. Instead, these identities are only performed in ways that are so marked by the culture of power.

This culture of power is felt within the composition classroom as well, since the expectations of teachers, researchers, and peers can play a role in the identities students perform. In “Writing Identities: The Essence of Difference in Multicultural Classrooms,” Wendy Hesford writes:

[D]iscourse communities define which voices are the most personal or real. If we do not recognize how students must negotiate their identities in response to perceived power relations and teacher expectations, we risk dismissing the complexities and struggles involved in writing autobiography within the academy. (134)

In Julie’s “autobiographical” narrative, we see an example of an identity—in this case, Appalachianness—being performed in ways recognized as “natural” by the discourse community of this classroom and, more specifically, the professor and the researcher. To return to a quote from Butler, it was her audience’s understanding of Appalachian identity that “constituted” Julie’s “expressions” as indicative of Appalachian identity. Shanti and I constructed Julie’s narrative in a way that meshed with our own perceptions of Appalachianness.

Yet our responses to Julie’s narrative were not solely a result of our own constructions of Appalachian identity, a construction that left Julie largely without agency. As Julie’s comments illustrate, she performed a particular type of Appalachian identity in her narrative and in the classroom, one she thought (quite

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1 Since Julie’s peers did not read this assignment, they were not directly part of the audience for this particular narrative, though as members of the classroom discourse community, they could be understood as an implied audience.
accurately, I might add) would appeal to her professor; while I do not know if she intended her narrative to appeal to me as well, she succeeded in doing so. Julie did not sit passively by while her professor and I received her performance and shaped it to fit our norms of Appalachian identity. Instead, Julie crafted her performance of identity to meet the expectations of her audience—or at the very least, to meet what she understood those expectations to be—by engaging in what Gayatri Spivak calls “strategic essentialism,” quite purposefully performing an Appalachian identity that she intuited would assist her in successfully negotiating this particular literacy event. In short, Julie was a very savvy rhetor who could read her audience quite well and perform Appalachian identity in the expected ways.

Julie was not the only student I observed for whom the composition course served as a stage for this sort of strategic performance of an essentialized Appalachian identity. Or, to use Kenneth Burke’s pentad from A Grammar of Motives, the class was the scene upon which agents (students) acted and were acted upon. Burke holds that life is a drama and that we may understand what motivates individuals by analyzing their discourse in terms of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. Scene is the setting or background of discourse, and the agent is the person(s) involved in the discourse (1298). The students of Sciotoville and Riverton were thus agents in the scene of the composition classroom.

Burke’s idea of scene can be extended beyond a physical space such as a classroom, however. Let us return for a moment to Julie’s narrative. In that piece
of discourse, Appalachia emerges as a scene; Julie’s understanding of the region—and her perception of others’ understanding—is the background upon which her performance is based. Julie’s narrative is not an isolated example of this occurrence. Students in both the Sciotoville and Riverton classrooms performed Appalachian identity in some rather distinct ways, and these distinctions can be traced to the students’ differing scenes, or sense of the place that is Appalachia. For the Sciotoville students, this sense of place primarily played out in a romanticized performance of Appalachian identity that emphasized seemingly positive values, such as neighborliness and personalism, which have often been associated with Appalachia. The Riverton students also had a strong sense of place that informed their performance of Appalachian identity, though in this case, that sense of place was negative. These students sought to distance themselves from Appalachianness through their performance of identity in the classroom.

In both classrooms, however, the students’ performative agency—or choice or roles, if you will—was limited to a binary of Appalachianness that operates in the larger culture, a construct that alternately romanticizes and pathologizes Appalachians. The tensions inherent within this romanticized-pathologized dichotomy of Appalachianness spilled over into the students’ performance of identity in the composition class as well. As Newkirk writes, “every act of self-presentation involves the withholding of information that might undermine the idealized impression the performer wants to convey” (3). In the case of some of these students, a lack of this type of withholding led to a
breakdown of the performative role they hoped to portray, as the students shared information and attitudes that did indeed undermine the identity they hoped to perform for their audience.

**Defining and Performing Appalachianness**

In *Appalachian Values*, Loyal Jones, a senior scholar of Appalachian Studies and founder of the field, outlines 10 values that he argues are especially important to Appalachians. These values are religion; independence, self-reliance, and pride; neighborliness; familism; personalism; humility and modesty; love of place; patriotism; sense of beauty; and sense of humor. While Jones does note that these values are not uniquely or uniformly Appalachian, the title of the book, through its juxtaposition of “Appalachian” and “values,” implies otherwise. Additionally, the book’s content is in line with the most common characterizations of Appalachians by Appalachian Studies scholars. Much has been written by these scholars concerning the value Appalachians give to place, community, family, and extended kinship networks; Phillip Obermiller, Kathleen Stewart, and Michael Maloney, among others, have written about the importance of community and personal relationships to Appalachians. In particular, Maloney says of Appalachians and education: “there’s a deep conflict between the values in school and the values at home. [. . .] Appalachians expect relationships to be
personal; they aren’t comfortable with functional relationships” (34). In other words, the values of home place a premium on personalism, while the values of academic institutions do not.

While I am uncomfortable with some of these romanticized views of Appalachianness, three values of which Jones writes—personalism, neighborliness, and sense of place—proved to be noteworthy for this study. In the Sciotoville class, all three values were integrated into the students’ performance of identity. For these students, their performance of a personable and neighborly Appalachian identity influenced the way in which they performed their student identity in class. This personalism and neighborliness could be seen in the ways in which these students helped each other learn academic literacy practices. The Sciotoville students’ sense of place was the foundational value of this performance; their romanticized sense of Appalachia informed their performance of these other values in the course. In contrast to these students, the Riverton students had a pathologized sense of place, one that led them away from performing in class the romanticized values associated with Appalachia by scholars such as Jones. In “Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore,” Richard Bauman writes that while some scholars conceptualize folklore as “a function of shared identity” (32), “difference of identity, not necessarily sharing, can be at basis of folklore performance” (35). For the students of Riverton, their
performance of identity in the course was rooted in differentiating themselves from typical constructions of Appalachianness. They performed a counter-Appalachian identity.

I will later address in more detail the performance of identity among individual students in the courses. But first, I will further define Jones’ values, giving brief examples of how they were performed in the courses. Then I will discuss how students from each course performed their identities in interviews and in the classroom.

“Appalachian Values”

The values of which Jones writes are certainly not unique to Appalachia; for example, personalism and neighborliness are values that are encouraged and rewarded in many small towns and rural areas outside of Appalachia. It is important to talk about these values in a discussion of Appalachia, however, because these values are so often associated with the region and its people—for good and for ill. Furthermore, while Appalachia may share these values with other places, the total weight of these values is not applied to other areas as it is to Appalachia and some of its people. It is, in the other words, “the sum of its parts” that distinguishes constructions of Appalachia from that of other regions and rural areas.

Personalism is the first of Jones’ values we will address. Jones notes of personalism, “One of the main aims in life for Appalachians is to relate well to other persons,” adding, “It is more important to get along with one another than to
push your own views” (81). This value was particularly evident among the Sciotoville students, who tended to bond over their similarities—such as the fact that many of them were mothers who were returning to school. Further bonding occurred among the single mothers in the group. Yet one of those single mothers was Julie, an out lesbian—definitely not a population that was embraced in the politically conservative area of Sciotoville. Julie’s declaration of her sexual orientation early in the term did not seem to noticeably impact her peers’ opinion of her, however, as she was one of the more popular students in the class. She was smart, funny, and outgoing, qualities which made her well-liked and respected among the other students, who frequently asked her questions about assignments and socialized with her both during and outside of class. While some of her peers may have held negative opinions of Julie’s sexuality, no one in the class ever criticized her, either directly (through attempts to witness to her or to “change” her) or indirectly (though homophobic comments not directed at Julie). They demonstrated in their interactions with Julie a “live and let live” attitude that prioritized getting along with Julie over alienating her—the very sort of attitude Jones identifies as personalism.

Neighborliness is another of the values Jones delineates that I observed during my fieldwork, primarily in the Sciotoville classroom. Jones writes that Appalachians’ “independence is tempered by our basic belief in neighborliness and hospitality” (69), and this neighborliness was performed by the Sciotoville students. These students were fairly quick to invite me into their conversations and to “help out” others, both inside and outside of class. For example, it was
Julie who showed me around the classroom building and who directed me to photocopiers and computers I could use while on campus. During a class that I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, several students attempted to help Dixie manage her confusion about transitions, and when the mid-class break began, Katie May and Julie stopped by Dixie’s desk to give her even more assistance. Both women offered to let Dixie read their drafts, and three women exchanged phone numbers so they “could call each other later” with questions they had while revising their drafts. Julie also volunteered to photocopy the handout she had received from the writing center. These seemingly small acts were quite meaningful and significant in the context in which they were performed, and they illustrate the neighborliness of which Jones writes.

But it was the sense of place that Jones identifies as characteristic of Appalachians that emerged as particularly important in both classrooms. Of sense of place, Jones writes, “Sense of place is one of the unifying values of mountain people, and it makes it hard for us to leave the mountains, and when we do, we long to return” (99). According to Jones, “place is close on our minds” (99) and informs the actions and other values of Appalachians. Place certainly informed the behavior I observed in the two classrooms I studied, as students in both classes had a strong sense of place that played a crucial role in how they construed Appalachianness (including the values of which Jones writes) and
academic literacy practices. In other words, the students’ construction, or composition, of Appalachian identity had implications for the way they performed that identity in the classroom and ultimately, in their writing.

**Place and the Performance of Appalachian Identity in the Composition Class**

At first, the students of Riverton and Sciotoville seemed to have similar views of Appalachianness: this view was shaped by place. When I asked my case study participants what being Appalachian meant to them, all of them initially focused on geography as a marker of Appalachian identity and insinuated that “Appalachianness” was a topic they hadn’t given much thought to. Appalachianness was not an identity that one performed in any recognizable way; they did not connect being Appalachian with the development of particular value systems, of folkways (such as music, art, food, crafts, etc.), of customs, or of language. One was Appalachian simply because one was from Appalachia. For example, Julie explained that she was Appalachian “because I’m from [a neighboring state].” Katie May stated that she was Appalachian because she was born and grew up in St. Clair County.

Schueler’s initial response to the question, “What does it mean to you to be Appalachian?” is typical in some ways of the other students’ responses:

“I think it’s being from this area, having family from this area. Being a part of it. My family, they’re from the hills, too. They came from [a
neighboring state] and stuff. My grandmother and grandpa, both my grandparents, were farmers. They grew up on farms. I always went to my grandparents’ [farm]. I was always on the farm.”

And since Schueler himself grew up on a farm in one of St. Clair’s neighboring Appalachian counties, his construction of “Appalachianness” as a geographical, and especially rural, identity was further reinforced. Interestingly, however, Schueler’s comments also reveal a distancing of himself from Appalachian identity, a point to which I will later return.

But as my fieldwork continued, sharp distinctions emerged between the two classes, and the sense of place was performed differently in the two classrooms. I will first discuss the students of Riverton University and how they performance of identity played upon the stage of a composition course.

*Place and the Performance of Identity in Riverton*

The students of Riverton did not perform their Appalachian identity in the conventional ways Jones describes, instead performing Bauman’s concept of a differential identity. The strong sense of place of which Jones writes was certainly in evidence at Riverton, yet for these students, this sense was negative. Most of the students in this class did not identify as Appalachian, though most of them had lived in the region their entire lives, and several students had antagonistic attitudes about Appalachia and Appalachians. For example, Mike
repeatedly referred to Riverton as “trashy” and talked extensively about his desire to “get the hell out of here.” Gladys constantly referred to Appalachians as “white trash” during my interview with her.

Both of these students initially articulated a definition of Appalachianness that was much like the previously described definition of the other students, a definition that relied on geography as a marker of identity. Both used this definition to distance themselves from an Appalachian identity. According to Mike, who was born in Colorado and moved to his parents’ hometown in the region when he was six years old, he was “not really” Appalachian because he was born somewhere else—even though he has lived in Appalachia for twenty of his twenty-six years. While Gladys initially defined Appalachianness in geographical terms, she stated that she wasn’t Appalachian because she had spent a significant portion of her life living outside of the region and had only recently returned to living in Riverton. Gladys was born in Riverton and lived there until she was twenty-nine years old, at which time she married a man who was frequently transferred by his job. During her marriage, Gladys lived in sixteen states and two other countries (Singapore and the Philippines). Gladys then returned to Riverton when she was fifty-one. So for Mike, one must be born in Appalachia to be Appalachian, and for Gladys, one must have lived primarily in Appalachia to be Appalachian—definitions which exclude themselves from Appalachian identity.

Michelle, a case study participant from the Riverton class, evidenced a fairly complex understanding of Appalachianness, as she veered between
romantic and pathologic images of Appalachians in my interviews with her, and she was usually quick to point out the problems with said images. A moment in our last interview illustrates this point quite well. I explained to Michelle the difficulties of defining Appalachia and Appalachianness and how scholars disagree if Appalachians should be defined as a regional culture, an ethnic identity, or a folk group. As I finished this statement, she shared her own thoughts:

Michelle: “I think that I would agree that I live in the Appalachian area—because, well, I do, you know, according to the government. But I don’t think I would consider myself Appalachian, or whatever. I don’t think I would consider myself that. I mean, we have that in the area. Have you ever heard of Swap Days or our fair?”

Sara: “I haven’t heard of Swap Days or been to your fair. So, what are Swap Days?”

Michelle: [laughing] “I went to Swap Days for the first time this year, because it was kind of like entertainment [laughing], instead of going there because you wanted to go. You see all these people running around, the stereotypical hilljack people, or whatever you want to call it, in their faded jeans and their cowboy boots and their cut-off shirts, big thing of chewing tobacco in their mouth, whatever the stereotype is [laughing]. There’s a lot of rough-looking people down there. [. . .] It’s an [pause] interesting thing to go to and see [laughing].”

After hearing Michelle’s description, I commented that it seemed as if the negative associations and stereotypes that accompany Appalachians make her reluctant to claim that identity for herself. She agreed, saying, “Yeah. And I don’t think I’m at all like that, so I wouldn’t agree with using that term as, putting that on a person. I think you can put it on an area, but not a person. I don’t know. I don’t know.” Yet moments later, when I asked Michelle if they were any positive traits she associated with Appalachians, she placed herself in the group,
saying, “I think we—it may be a stereotype—but we’re more down to earth kind of people, which is a good thing (laughter). I’d rather be down to earth than snooty or stuck-up or whatever. [. . .] So that would be a positive thing. But then again that’s a stereotype, so I don’t know.”

Michelle’s comments also reveal another of the complexities that characterize her conceptualization of Appalachianness: she had a keen understanding of how Appalachians can be both romanticized and pathologized by the larger culture, and she continually tried to emphasize in her comments that sweeping generalizations about Appalachians—even those that might seem “positive”—are based on stereotypical thinking. While at first she labeled Appalachians, including herself, as “down-to-earth,” she backpedaled from that statement, noting that it was a stereotype and saying, “So I don’t know.” After this remark, I told Michelle that it seemed to me as if she would be reluctant to directly identify herself as an Appalachian. She agreed with this assessment at first, but her follow-up comment again illustrates her complex relationship with Appalachianness: “I would say that I live in that area, but I wouldn’t say I was [Appalachian]. I guess maybe me living in the area makes me one, but I wouldn’t take the negative stereotypes, or even some of the positive ones. I’m probably not even some of the positive stereotypes of Appalachian people.”

Michelle’s remarks, particularly her final comments, reveal an awareness of the performative nature of identity. Michelle makes a distinction between labeling an area as Appalachian and labeling a person as Appalachian, and her problem with labeling a person with an identity marker, such as Appalachianness,
is rooted in performance: “I don’t think I’m at all like that, so I wouldn’t agree with using that terms as, putting that on a person.” While it is Michelle’s awareness of negative stereotypes of Appalachians that leads her to this conclusion, she has a valid point: given that identity is performative, it can be extremely problematic to assign a particular identity to others—in fact, this sort of rhetorical move can be used to marginalize Others. It is this tension that Michelle’s comments highlight. Her final sentences illustrate this tension even further: Michelle shares her realization that living in Massie County would, in the eyes of some, automatically imply Appalachianness. However, Michelle refuses to engage in performing an Appalachian identity in the way it is typically constructed in media representations and by scholars such as Jones: “I wouldn’t take the negative stereotypes, or even some of the positive ones.” If identity is constituted by its expected expressions, as Butler argues, then Michelle is performing her identity in a way that does not fit the expected expressions of Appalachianness.

Michelle was not the only student who performed an identity inconsistent with popular conceptualizations of Appalachian identity. Gladys also attempted to perform an identity that departed from stereotypes of Appalachians. Unlike Michelle, however, Gladys had internalized these stereotypes—in particular, negative stereotypes of Appalachians—to a large degree. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Gladys’ definition of Appalachianness began with geography. She initially did not identity as Appalachian during our interview because she had not lived in the area all of her life. But as the interview continued, Gladys
simultaneously began to invoke geography (she started to identify as Appalachian, citing her birth in Riverton) and evolve and expand beyond geography in her attempts to define Appalachianness. It was in this evolution and expansion that her desire to perform a counter-Appalachian identity became most apparent. I will quote at length from the transcript of this conversation:

Gladys: “I was born here. So I am [Appalachian]. But I lived here for 29 years, and I never felt like I belonged here. And then moving away, I realized that I’m not the same as people from Massie County. So yes I am, but I don’t know, even moving back here I feel like I’m still different.”

Sara: “Do you feel like an outsider?”

Gladys: “Yep, always. (pause) That’s why I say yes, I am [Appalachian], because I was born here. But no, I don’t [identify as Appalachian]. I am different from most of them.”

Sara: “How do you define that difference? What is it that makes you feel different? Because you say you felt that before you ever moved away, so it’s not even just the moving away. Because I could see where that would make you feel different.”

Gladys: “That’s really hard to describe. I don’t know. But I have different people make comments to me that they don’t feel like, I never felt like I belonged here. I don’t know, it’s just (short pause). I really can’t describe it. I always felt I was a little different. I have a sister here, and we are two different personalities. Of course everybody is, but (short pause) she’s home, she’s very happy being here, in this little small town. She makes it to [large city in the region] or [a neighboring state] once every year, and to her that’s the greatest thing in the world. To me, I’d like to go on the trip to Greece next year with the school. That’s for me, I want to explore the world. People here are just happy by just driving to Myrtle Beach.”

In the preceding section of the transcript, Gladys modified her first definition of Appalachianness and identified herself as Appalachian. Gladys then began to expand her notions of Appalachian identity beyond geography to
account for different attitudes and values. Her sister, who Gladys says is happy to spend a lot of time in her home and in Riverton and who does limited traveling, is positioned as Appalachian, while Gladys, who “want[s] to explore the world,” is not. While Gladys does briefly consider the idea that these differences may be linked to personality types, she primarily connects them to the development of an Appalachian identity (or not). In the next section of the transcript, Gladys continues in her attempts to perform a cosmopolitan identity as opposed to an Appalachian one.

Sara: “So it sounds like you’re saying that you have more of a curiosity about different places than you see a lot of people around here having. A lot of people are more focused on the world that’s here.”

Gladys: “Yeah. Just for example, my son was on the internet, and he said they have a need for all these people in Johannesburg, South Africa. And he said if you have your bachelor’s, they’ll hire you, you can get a job over there making $200,000 a year. And he said, ‘Mom, would you up and leave when you get your degree and move to South Africa with me?’ and I said, ‘Yes, I’m packing now.’ And I asked somebody else that, and they said, ‘Oh my God, no. There’s no way.’ And I said, ‘Well, you don’t know anything about the world.’ That’s why, I don’t know, I just feel different. I just don’t feel like I’m your typical Massie County girl.”

Here, Gladys once again uses her cosmopolitanism as a way to distance herself from Appalachianness. A “typical Massie County girl” would not go to South Africa, because she doesn’t “know anything about the world,” according to Gladys. But Gladys, who had lived in many states and two foreign countries, would be “packing now” to go to South Africa, since she is not “your typical Massie County girl.” While Gladys does not directly say so, there is a clear
implication on her part that a “typical Massie county girl” is happily ignorant of the world around her, while Gladys and other “cosmopolitan” types are more intelligent and sophisticated due to their knowledge of the world.

This implied dichotomy was made explicit when I asked Gladys what she meant by “typical Massie County girl” and told her that it seemed to me she used this phrase as a synonym for Appalachians. She verified the accuracy of my impression and then added:

“I think they’re hilljacks. I do, I think they’re backwoods maybe, they’re happy with their environment, they’re happy, not really expanding. They’re happy just to be here. I guess to me, that’s what it is. They just want to do what their mother did, even though it’s changing some now. They’re just happy in this small, little world. And narrow-minded.”

Sara: “Where do you think, how do you think you came to that? Just from growing up in this region and observing people? From cultural messages, so to speak?”

Gladys: “Yeah, because I see them. I work sometimes out there, out to the [local grocery store]. And I see all these young kids, a lot of kids from 16 up to 20. Every one of them has had a baby. You know? 14 years old. And I just don’t understand it.”

As Gladys spoke, I was taken aback by the venom of her remarks. It was not only her words that surprised me, but also her entire demeanor: her face hardened, her eyes narrowed, and the tone of her voice changed as she berated the “hilljacks.” I was floored that someone who had been born in Riverton and who had lived there most of her life—someone who could be identified as Appalachian due to those facts—could have such antipathy towards Appalachians.

Yet throughout the interview, I had felt an undercurrent to her remarks that I couldn’t quite figure out at the time. She seemed very eager to impress me,
something I at first struggled to understand in the context of this particular conversation. For example, at the beginning of the interview, she introduced herself to me as a fellow academic. She told me she had agreed to participate in my research because she, too, would be writing a dissertation someday—she intended to pursue a PhD in psychology or sociology, as she was a double-major—and she frequently reminded me that she intended on going to graduate school. She also spoke at length about the feminization of poverty, telling me how she had learned about that concept in one of her sociology classes and found it relevant to the economic realities of Riverton and the surrounding region. And, as previously noted, she repeatedly brought up the fact that she had lived in many states and two countries outside the U.S.

Her pathologized portrayals of those in the Riverton community, complete with references to “hilljacks” and “white trash,” certainly were not part of how I constructed my academic identity, however. Why did she engage in this seemingly contradictory behavior? Why did she seem to go out of her way to impress me with how intelligent and sophisticated (a word she used to describe herself) she was, only to undercut all of that with her stereotypes? As I reviewed and analyzed my notes and transcripts, I began to re-consider Gladys’ behavior in the context of her performance of a counter-Appalachian identity and her assumptions about my views of Appalachianness. Gladys appeared to be quite invested in distancing herself from Appalachianness and in performing a counter-Appalachian identity, one that was academic and cosmopolitan in nature. Hence her references to graduate school, her use of theoretical concepts she’d learned,
and her emphasis on travel. There was no room for Appalachianness in this identity, since she had constructed Appalachians as ignorant of the world around them. Not only were Appalachians ignorant, in Gladys’ construction of this identity (i.e., “You don’t know anything about the world”); they were willfully ignorant, as seen in her comments that Appalachians are happy “not really expanding” and in her characterization of Appalachians as “narrow-minded.” In Gladys’ performance of identity, the scene against which she performed—Appalachia—was inherently negative.

When reflecting on Gladys, I was reminded of James Moffett’s characterization of Appalachians. As I discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, Moffett depicts Appalachians as unwilling to learn, using the term agnosias to describe them. Gladys virtually echoed Moffett throughout our interview, and I questioned why that might be. I detailed in the introduction some of the negative portrayals of Appalachians that exist in the academy; while not all Appalachians may know the particulars of those portrayals, they know those images are out there, as Julie’s comments about her narrative illustrate (“I know what people think of [her home state]”). And like many of the scholars responsible for those images, I was an outsider coming into an Appalachian community to conduct a research study. While I did share my Appalachian background when I introduced myself to both classes during the first day of the term, my education, my experiences growing up outside the region, and my affiliation with a large research institution meant that I was still an outsider in the
community in some significant ways. Would it thus have been unreasonable for Gladys to assume that I, too, viewed Appalachians as ignorant and narrow-minded?

I have come to the conclusion that Gladys’ understanding of Appalachianness and my views of Appalachianness influenced her performance of identity. Newkirk writes that “in all public performances [. . .] we selectively reveal ourselves in order to match an idealized sense of who we should be” (4). Drawing on the work of sociologist Erving Goffman, Newkirk adds, “[T]he key element of a socially competent performance is the ability to maintain a situation definition consistent with that of the audience” (7). Gladys attempted to perform an identity that matched who she thought she should be, from her own constructions of Appalachians and academics. This identity was one that was highly academic—valuing continued education, theoretical concepts, and travel to/awareness of other regions and countries—and one that discounted Appalachianness.

Yet this performance was not “socially competent,” to use Newkirk’s phrase, because Gladys misread her audience. Her most notable misreading rested in the fact that Gladys was talking to an academic who valued Appalachianness. Gladys took great pains throughout our interview to construct a binary of “academic” and “Appalachian” identities, yet part of the larger purpose of this project is to deconstruct that very type of binary. Gladys was present on the first day of class when I told the class about my background and research objectives. Even so, her eyes widened and her mouth hung open when I reminded
her in interviews of my family’s history and my identification as an Urban Appalachian. I think her apparent shock was a result of the tension between academic and Appalachian identities at work during the interviews. It was inconceivable to Gladys that an academic might view an Appalachian identity as a source of pride, not a source of shame. Gladys could not process the fact that she was being interviewed for a research project that sought to destroy the construct present during our interview. That limited understanding may be one reason why gave this type of performance.

Gladys’ sharp contrast between Appalachian and academic identities gets at some of the dynamic I observed in this composition classroom. The Riverton students, who often did not identify as Appalachian, had a strong sense of place which led them away from integrating some of the other so-called Appalachian values, such as neighborliness and personalism, into their performance of an academic identity. Even when the performance of these “Appalachian values” was encouraged through literacy events such as required peer review sessions and group projects, the students did not engage.

It is an open question, however, as to what extent the students really were encouraged to integrate their performances of Appalachian and academic identities. While some of Lynn’s pedagogy encouraged a collaboration rooted in the so-called Appalachian values, other elements undermined it. The first peer review session of the class illustrates this contradiction. In Across Property Lines: Textual Ownership in Writing Groups, Candace Spigelman writes that while “collaborative learning activities attempt to rebalance and neutralize teacher
power, the instructor’s authority is inescapable,” adding that “many of the writing groups in their [the case study participants’] class used the instructor’s questions for each discussion, and in this way they continued to identify the instructor as their ‘group leader’ (80).” The formation and activities of the group during the first peer review session illustrate Spigelman’s point, as Lynn created the peer review group and decided where they would work and what questions they would ask. These facts are not evidence of Lynn’s “failings” as a teacher; she would have been remiss as a teacher if she did not guide her students in working through her expectations and goals for peer review. Instead, the following indicates how an instructor’s authority is ever-present in the classroom—even a “de-centered” classroom:

Lynn: “How many of you have a draft where we could do some writers’ groups and get some feedback? [pauses, counts the raised hands of Michelle, Jodi, and Sharon, Gladys, and Barbara] One, two, three, four, five. OK. I forgot to make a list of questions, so I need to go up to my office and print it out. It’s on my computer; I just forgot to print it out. So I will bring you all down the list of questions, but you can certainly start reading the essays. Those of you who don’t have a working essay, you know what you need to do. You need to work on your essays. [pauses, looks at the women] So, let’s see. We have five. Probably the best thing is just to put all five of you in a writers’ group and then work it out among yourselves how you can read two papers. Why don’t you all congregate around Michelle and Jodi. And I will get the questions.”

In this example, Lynn’s teacher-centered practices worked against her student-centered goals. By directing so much of the students’ work initially, Lynn unintentionally reinforced her position of authority in the classroom and undermined the student collaboration her philosophy sought to encourage.
The students’ behavior during peer review illustrated the coalescence of these forces, as many students resisted participating in peer review. Some students did not form groups at all through their refusal to bring drafts or participate; the latter was true of Gladys, who so memorably told me when I sought to observe her and another student, “Oh, we’re not going to do the group thing.” Even in the group that did work together—a group composed of Michelle, Jodi, and Sharon—resistance was evident. While the women read each other’s drafts and wrote comments, the students fell silent after returning the drafts to their respective owners after almost half an hour of reading and writing. They read the responses to their papers without asking any questions about those responses or offering follow-up comments. After several minutes of silence, they began to make small talk, not with each other, but with me. After a few minutes, this conversation waned as well, and the women began re-reading their drafts and their peers’ comments in silence.

The silence continued for over seven minutes, at which time Lynn came around to the group to check on their progress:

Lynn: “Are any of you ready to ask me some questions, or do you want to finish something and then ask me your questions?”

Michelle: “I never read what they wrote back yet, so I want to wait to ask you a question, I think.”

Lynn: “OK. What about you, do you want to wait? [pause, neither Sharon nor Jodi say anything] All right. Well, if we need to take it up to my office, I’m still here. If you run out of time.” [Lynn leaves the group]
I was confused by what I had heard and seen. Michelle told Lynn that she hadn’t read her peers’ comments, yet I had watched her read her draft and her peers’ comments for several minutes before Lynn approached the group. I wrote in my field notes: “Perhaps she wasn’t done reading. Perhaps she and the other women simply read more slowly than you expect.” I didn’t understand why Michelle and the other women would choose to not talk to Lynn at that time, unless they weren’t done reading their peers’ responses to their drafts. At the same time, I didn’t understand why it would take the students that long to read those responses. It had been at least 10 minutes since they had returned drafts back to their writers, and each response sheet was only a page in length. What was I missing?

After Lynn left the group, all three women silently re-read their drafts, jotted down notes, checked email, and surfed the Internet for the next eighteen minutes. The only exception was when Michelle and I made whispered plans for our next interview, immediately after this class. Then, at the end of class, Lynn came around once again to check on the group and to see if anyone wanted to meet with her after class. Suddenly, all three women were ready to ask Lynn questions—questions none of them asked during peer review. Instead, all three of them waited after class so that they could work individually with Lynn on their drafts. For some, the wait was substantial: Jodi waited for about 20 minutes, and Sharon waited for approximately 45 minutes.

In this classroom, a clear model of what it meant to be a “good student” emerged, and that model was not based on performing a romanticized Appalachian identity. Instead, this model focused on students’ individual
achievement. Being a “good student” in this class did not include assisting your peers during review days; instead, it meant working alone with the teacher after class. These students, reluctant to identify as part of the group that is Appalachian, were also reluctant to become part of a group in class. They were committed—and even inadvertently encouraged—to developing academic literacy practices on their own or with the instructor’s assistance, and they were committed to succeeding as individuals. In short, their identity was performed in ways not typically associated with—and even counter to the students’ conceptualizations of—Appalachianness.

*Place and the Performance of Identity in Sciotoville*

In contrast to the students of Riverton, the Sciotoville students, most of whom identified as Appalachian, had a sense of place that often manifested itself in positive, even romanticized identities, as seen in some interview and classroom comments and behavior. Katie May, who enrolled in the composition course at Sciotoville to make up for not taking the course at the large state university she attended outside of the region, had been awarded a generous scholarship to said university because she was from an Appalachian county. For her, being identified as an Appalachian was not a shameful experience, as Michelle’s comments about “not putting that label on a person” would indicate. Instead, for Katie May, this “labeling” was a positive act that assisted her in earning a college degree. Katie May carried these positive associations with Appalachianness into our interviews as well, frequently commenting on the importance of being “down to earth” and
of “helping out” and identifying these qualities as particularly Appalachian, with such statements as, “We’re all in this together,” “By helping each other we help ourselves and our communities, eventually,” “I feel a responsibility to help others in the class learn,” and “We [Appalachians] are just down-home people.” Like Katie May, Schueler offered a romantic view of Appalachianness, stating in an interview that what he calls the “mindset of an Appalachian” includes “Strong ties to the land and family. Very high morality—you look out for your family, you look out for your neighbors. You don’t really put up with crap or crime, because everybody is tied and close-knit.”

The traits Katie May and Schueler identify as “helping out” and “looking out” for each other—traits Jones refers to as personalism and neighborliness—were performed in the classroom as well, as almost all of the students in the course engaged in voluntary collaboration via self-selected, impromptu writing groups and repeated use of group work and peer assistance as they encountered unfamiliar texts. The students in this class exhibited strong ties to each other, “looking out” for their classmates and concerning themselves with each other’s success via literacy practices.

For example, during a lecture/question and answer session about transitions, Dixie expressed confusion about choosing an appropriate transition in her draft and had great difficulty when asked by Shanti to brainstorm some
possibilities for a transition statement between the second and third paragraphs of her essay. As Dixie struggled, Katie May and Julie jumped into the conversation and offered several suggestions:

Shanti: “What might you use? Because you’re definitely hearing the need for it [a transition].”

Dixie: “Although? No. [long pause] Even though the third paragraph doesn’t have anything do with the second paragraph?”

Shanti: “Yeah! But now you need to show, I finished this topic and now I’m going to discuss, use another criterion, to discuss it. All right?”

Katie May: [overlapping with Shanti’s last sentence] “Maybe you could say something about how society has changed and Perrin [one of the authors Dixie was writing about] changed also throughout his life.”

Dixie: “If I did that, though, it seems like, you know, I did it from his boyhood to his adulthood. It seems like that would go straight into adulthood.”

Julie: “I met with Bethany [the writing center tutor], and she gave me a copy of a paper that has transitions words and phrases on it, like ones you use for sequence, one you use for time, for comparison and contrast, ones with examples. It like really, really helped me.”

Shanti: [overlapping with Julie’s last sentence] “Which ones would work? Which ones do you think would work for Dixie?”

Julie: “Maybe you need something that has to do with, maybe something like for time of sequence, like later on you could say something like, later, or since, or I don’t know. Hmm. I can’t remember everything the paper said.” [laughing]

In this example, Katie May and Julie joined the exchange between Shanti and Dixie without any prompting. While Shanti did later encourage Julie with follow-up questions (“Which ones would work? Which ones do you think would work
for Dixie?”), I believe Julie would have given Dixie further suggestions without such encouragement, given the way in which Julie first entered the conversation without prompting.

Shanti then responded, attempting to pull together Katie May’s and Julie’s suggestions for Dixie, but Dixie’s confusion returned. Anna, who sat caddy-corner to Dixie, attempted to help:

Dixie: “Could the transition be at the end of the second paragraph?”

Shanti: “No, it has to be at the beginning of the third paragraph.”

Dixie: “I just, I just don’t understand that. Because the last sentence that is in my second paragraph doesn’t have anything to do with the first sentence in my third paragraph. So I don’t understand how…”

Shanti: [interrupting] “That’s why. That’s why you need a transition, right? I mean…”

Anna: [overlapping] “The book says that there is conjunctive adverbs”

Shanti: [overlapping] “Yeah?”

Anna: “Conjunctive adverbs. According to [unintelligible, pages ruffling as Anna opens book and shows it to Dixie]. See this part over here? [whispering to Dixie and leaning over] I thought we were supposed to use only transitional phrases.”

Chris: [leaning over] “What page is that on?”

Anna: “48.”

Long pause as Shanti waits for students to read the information.

Dixie: “Would consequently work? Because I’m talking about the difference in society.”

In this example, we see two more students join the exchange, one in search of information for herself (Chris), and the other offering information that she thought
might be helpful (Anna). Additionally, empathy is offered to the struggling student, as Anna tells Dixie that she, too, is confused by Shanti’s explanation of transitions, since Anna thought “we were supposed to use only transitional phrases.” But conjunctive adverbs are an option as well.

Shanti and Dixie continued to discuss her paper in front of the class, teasing out the comparisons Dixie was working on in the second and third paragraphs. Eventually, Dixie understood that her transition needs to be rooted in the comparison she was making between the authors’ credibility, though she was still unsure as to how to actually craft the transition and was visibly frustrated:

Dixie: “So just a sentence of, of?”

Shanti: “What your previous one [paragraph] is about is credibility, right? The credibility. And then you’re moving your reader on to the next topic. Would that help?”

Dixie: “Yeah.”

Shanti: [overlapping] “Because it’s true, isn’t it? They could have all the credentials in the world, but if they wrote a lousy essay or an article, you know, it wouldn’t mean anything.”

Katie May: “Can I share mine? ‘By making this admirable decision, each author grew more confident in themselves.’ Then the next paragraph: ‘We see this level of confidence through the authors’ details and humor.’”

Shanti: “Nice!”

Shanti continued praising Katie May’s transition for a few moments, then Dixie commented, “OK, now I get it! That was really good. I see how it works now.”

This final example illustrates how Katie May used her own writing to deflect attention from Dixie, who became more frustrated as the attention to her writing continued; from my seat beside Dixie, I could observe her cheeks redden.
as she continued to ask questions of, and answer questions from, Shanti. Katie
May seemed to sense that the class was not working well in that moment, as
illustrated by a remark she made during our post-class interview that same day:

“When we were talking about transitions, it seemed like everyone was just
trying to use one word for the transition, and I was thinking, they’re
derailing here. So I offered to give an example on an ending and a
beginning sentence in paragraphs. And I think that helped a little bit. And
just little things like that, other people have done, too. I think it just helps
with an overall understanding. And I don’t feel we’re in overall
competition with each other for grades or stuff like that.”

Katie May’s comments about her peers “derailing” and her description of her
attempt to get them back on track once again illustrate the neighborliness that was
so important in the performance of Appalachian identity in this classroom.

Though Katie May does not explicitly state that she was attempting to help Dixie
save face in an potentially embarrassing classroom encounter, her comments
about helping out and her emphasis on the lack of competition among the students
imply that concern; after all, if the students were in competition with each other
for grades, it would have been to Katie May’s advantage to allow Dixie to
become even more confused and flustered. However, such an act would not have
been compatible with the way Katie May and her peers had constructed
Appalachian identity and the identity of this particular classroom.

For these students, literacy functioned as a social act, and talk about
literacy played a crucial role in this process. The work of Heath and Farr, along
with scholars such as Beverly Moss, Juan Guerra, and Ellen Cushman,
demonstrates how in marginalized communities, literacy learning and uses are
strikingly social and can serve to intimately connect community members to one
another. That was certainly the case in this particular classroom, although this social nature of literacy was constructed for different purposes. Talk about literacy—such as when the students shared their struggles with school in general and with writing and revising papers in particular—was used as a way for members of this community to bond, as it was in the Trackton community of Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways with Words*. The social nature of literacy in this class was also rooted in the way literacy practices were learned. The students did not conceptualize Shanti as their sole source of literacy instruction. Instead, they relied on each other for assistance, such as when they demonstrated to each other how to find needed information in their textbooks and gave each other highly specific strategies for drafting and revising. In this way, the students’ classroom behavior resembled the out-of-school learning Marcia Farr describes in “En Los Dos Idiomas: Literacy Practices among Chicago Mexicanos.”

It is certainly tempting to ascribe the students’ behavior and their use of particular literacy practices to those “Appalachian values” of personalism and neighborliness. But the students didn’t engage in those behaviors “naturally” or unthinkingly, as Jones’ description implies in *Appalachian Values*. While the students did engage in behaviors that have often been romanticized and at times even romanticized these behaviors themselves, they quite deliberately negotiated their Appalachian identity and performed it in rhetorically savvy ways. The
students’ behavior wasn’t a natural outpouring of Appalachian identity—it was a performance of expected behavior, a performance that to some extent acknowledged its performativity.

This acknowledgement was seen in the remarks of a number of students, including Katie May, who noted the reciprocal nature of “helping out” and stated they helped other students in order to receive help in return. Katie May stressed in interviews how working with her peers on assignments enhanced her own learning: “It helps me to talk to other people. [. . .] I know I’m not the only one struggling,” a fact that encourages her. Many of her peers made similar comments during a class discussion on the final day of the course:

Amy: “Sometimes they can give you a better way to word something. You kind of get stuck on what you’re doing, and somebody else looks at it and can say, ‘Oh, just move that around a little bit’ or whatever.”

Sara: “So to get more help for yourself?”

Amy (overlapping): “Kind of like calling technical support.”

Sara: “OK”

Beth: “I know how it feels when you don’t understand something and someone can explain it to you on your level, rather than a non-student level. And so, if I understand something that somebody else doesn’t understand, why not?”

Later in the conversation, Chris raised her hand and added this comment about being helped by her peers:

Chris: “I was just thinking that at times I was checking to make sure I understood something, that I understood what was going on, that I
understood what she [Shanti] expected from me. To where to ask someone how they did it or what they did was something that was reassuring to me, it let me know…”

Sara: “That you were on the right track?”

Chris: “Mmm-hmm.”

So while students such as Katie May and Schueler—not to mention Appalachian Studies scholars like Jones—attributed the impulse to “help out” their peers to their own Appalachian identity, comments made in other interviews and classroom discussions point to a more pragmatic and deliberate motive for helping out: a desire to receive help for themselves. To return to Butler’s terms, the students’ performance of personalism and neighborliness was not solely a result of Appalachian identity. Instead, these acts constituted Appalachianness in the eyes of the students, and the performance of this identity was positively reinforced via reciprocated assistance. As Butler writes, a particular identity “requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already established” (140). Through their performance of romanticized Appalachian traits, such as personalism and neighborliness, these students were “reenacting and reexperiencing a set of meanings already established” by scholars such as Jones.

While many of the Sciotoville students strategically embraced an Appalachian identity, they did not do so all the time. Schueler, who as we have seen performed an Appalachian identity, also distanced himself from this identity,
depending on the circumstances. Let us return for a moment to the quotation at the beginning of the chapter, when I asked Schueler what the idea of Appalachianness meant to him:

“I think it’s being from this area, having family from this area. Being a part of it. My family, they’re from the hills, too. They came from [a neighboring state] and stuff. My grandmother and grandpa, both my grandparents, were farmers. They grew up on farms. I always went to my grandparents’ [farm]. I was always on the farm.”

In a sense, Schueler does claim an Appalachian identity for himself, as he points to being from the area and having family from the area as markers of Appalachianness—markers which he often noted applied to him. But note the emphasis of Schueler’s remarks: his Appalachianness comes not from his own experiences growing up on a farm in the region, but from his extended family’s experiences in another state. His Appalachianness was rooted outside of himself, many miles away at his grandparents’ farm.

Later on in an interview, Schueler again attributed his development of an “Appalachian mindset” to his relatives in the neighboring state:

Schueler: “Everything just stems from down deep in [the neighboring state]. I have a lot of [long pause] shiners, people who make moonshine, in my family. People who play the fiddle, bluegrass. So I kind of grew up with that whole… [pause]

Sara: “My grandpa ran moonshine, too. (Laughter from both Schueler and Sara) During Prohibition, well the Depression really, but that was still during Prohibition down there. So I know a little of what you’re talking about.”

Schueler: “Yeah, I grew up like that.”
During this part of our interview, Schueler’s idea of Appalachianness still begins in a sense of place, as indicated by his comment that “everything just stems from down deep” in the state where his parents grew up and his relatives live.

But as our conversation evolved, so, too, did Schueler’s performance of Appalachian identity. In the section below, Schueler began by once again distancing himself from Appalachian identity, attributing Appalachianness to the state where his relatives live and speaking of Appalachians in the third person. But, when I revealed my own family history of moonshining, Schueler then discussed “his” Appalachian identity in more detail, switching to the first person:

“I’ve always considered myself Appalachian, but not to the extent that I tell people or brag about it. I’m not really ashamed of it. It’s just never really played that big a role for me. I just never thought it would be something to start a conversation with. But I still consider myself Appalachian. [. . .] I think it depends more on the mindset. Like if someone moved away from a country to another place. If they gave up everything they had, their old ways, the old country, for the new, they’re trying to become part of the new. But if they moved away and kept their old traditions, they’d still be whatever they were before. So I think it would depend if I moved away. I’d still have the mindset of an Appalachian. I’d still have my views.”

Thus, during this interview Schueler’s idea of Appalachianness begins in a sense of place, as indicated by his comment that “everything just stems from down deep” in the state where his parents grew up and where he still has many relatives. But he expands his conception of Appalachian identity to include economic and cultural markers, such as trading in bootleg alcohol and performing music identified with the Appalachian region, and eventually concludes that part of Appalachianness involves the development of a particular mindset and traditions. For Schueler, being Appalachian is not simply a matter of where one is born, but
a matter of participating in certain behaviors that are associated with the region. In other words, Schueler recognized that Appalachian identity is performative—an identity he perhaps was more apt to perform in this interview after he picked up on the value I place on Appalachian identity and the lack of shame I evidenced about my bootlegger grandpa.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how the identities students perform on the stage (or, to use Burke’s term, against the scene) of the composition classroom are very much shaped by another scene: their sense of place, and sometimes, as Julie’s narrative and Gladys’ interview behavior demonstrate, their understanding of teachers’ and researchers’ sense of place. The sense of place these students had led them to simultaneously embrace and distance themselves from performing romanticized Appalachian identities, to perform an identity that differentiated itself from a pathologized Appalachian identity, and to perform an identity that sought to break out of the binary of these stereotypes.

These students illustrate the importance of the questions Thomas Newkirk asks in *The Performance of Self in Student Writing*: “What kind of self are we inviting students to become? What kinds of selves do we subtly dismiss?” (6). Newkirk’s questions are relevant not only for teachers, but also for scholars. I would modify these questions and ask, what selves are we inviting our research
participants to perform? What selves do we subtly—and perhaps not so subtly—dismiss or embrace? And finally, what selves are we performing as teacher-scholars?

In several of the examples presented in this chapter, the students’ performative identities arose in part from their understanding of their audience’s expectations. Julie crafted a narrative that would conform to the image of Appalachia she assumed her instructor held. Gladys performed an academic identity that differentiated itself from Appalachianness at every turn, a performance grounded in the assumption that I defined Appalachianness in the same pathologized way she did. Schueler’s commitment to performing a romanticized Appalachian identity seemed to increase after he learned more about my own Appalachian identity.

Newkirk’s questions raise questions in my mind as I reflect further on my fieldwork. During a class during the second week of the term, Shanti advised the students to be proud of being from a small town in Appalachia, drawing parallels between their experiences as Appalachians and her experiences as an Indian immigrant. Yet she also cautioned the students, telling them to be open to change and new experiences while adding, “Keep the Appalachian. Drop the redneck.” In this moment, how was Shanti constructing Appalachianness? What performances of self was she inviting from these students? What performances was she dismissing?

I would submit that Shanti articulated the romanticized and demonized images of Appalachians, encouraging her students towards the performances that
have typically been romanticized (neighborliness and personalism) while none-too-subtly steering them away from demonized performances (the happy-in-their-ignorance hillbillies). Yet at the same time, Shanti conceptualized these performances as part of the students’ identities already, since she told them to “keep” their Appalachianness and “drop” their redneck traits—a statement which clearly assumes the students have “redneck” qualities of which they should dispose. Yet the question remains, how did these comments affect the students’ performance of self in the classroom and in their writing?

The performance of identity is not limited to classroom and interview behavior, however. In the next chapter, I will examine another stage where identity is performed, namely belief systems about literacy. Utilizing Sylvia Scribner’s “Literacy in Three Metaphors” as a theoretical framework, I will explore institutional and individual beliefs about literacy, demonstrating how these beliefs become an important stage upon which students’ identities are performed.
CHAPTER 4

METAPHORS OF LITERACY: LITERACY IN THE CONTACT ZONES

“Textbooks: The Difference Between the Boardroom and the Waiting Room.” —
Poster in State University-Sciotoville bookstore

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“We all have to take this class, because it’s a freshman English class. These skills
that we’re learning are essential for our other courses that we’re taking.” —Katie
May

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“Definitions of literacy shape our perceptions of individuals who fall on either
side of the standard (what a “literate” or “nonliterate” is like) and thus in a deep
way affect both the substance and style of educational programs.” —Sylvia
Scribner, “Literacy in Three Metaphors”

The performance of identity has proven itself to be a useful concept for me
in thinking through ideas of Appalachianness and, more specifically, how students
grapple with this identity. In Chapter Three, I positioned the composition
classroom as a stage for the performance of student identity. I detailed the ways
in which students embraced and complicated romanticized Appalachian identities, as well as the ways in which they performed counter-Appalachian identities. This chapter will further explore students’ performance of identity, focusing on the role their literacy beliefs and practices played in their identity performance.

Drawing on Sylvia Scribner’s “Literacy in Three Metaphors,” I will illustrate how metaphors of literacy emerged from these students’ literacy beliefs and practices—metaphors that overlapped with and extended Scribner’s framework. I will argue that for these students, literacy became, to use Mary Louise Pratt’s term, a “contact zone”: a space “where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (34). While students certainly grappled with competing and contesting metaphors of literacy upon the classroom stage, I will illustrate in both this chapter and Chapter Five how this particular performance of identity influenced, and was influenced by, stages beyond the classroom. In this chapter, I will begin with an entry tale and a discussion of Scribner’s three metaphors of literacy. While this framework has its benefits in conceptualizing literacy, my analysis of Riverton University and State University-Sciotoville will show the ways in which this schema can be limiting. Both the institution and the students of Riverton University illustrated how the metaphors overlap and bleed into each other. State University-Sciotoville and its students performed literacy beliefs and practices that Scribner’s three metaphors of literacy could not fully explain.
Entry Tale

It was a gorgeous June morning as I drove to State University-Sciotoville for the first day of summer term. I left home quite early to make sure I arrived on campus in plenty of time before Shanti’s class started, and as I drove up the winding hill that separated the residential neighborhood of the university from the rest of Sciotoville, I checked my watch. I was 45 minutes early. I decided to walk around the campus in order to better acquaint myself with my surroundings. It was a small campus, made up of only a few buildings, but a pleasant one, with much green space and many trees; a large wooded area lay behind the campus.

Given the tiny size of the campus, my tour quickly concluded, and I entered the large, white, columned building where Shanti’s class would meet with much more time to spare. I walked through the building, wandering each floor rather aimlessly, until I descended to the basement, where I found the campus bookstore. Curious to see the English textbooks used on this campus, I went inside and walked over to the bookshelves that held the books for the composition courses being offered that term. Three posters hanging on the wall behind the shelving diverted my attention. The posters, which I will later describe in greater detail, left me dumbstruck: “Read This. Get This. Earn This,” read one, with pictures of a woman reading a textbook (read this), a man holding a diploma (get this), and a man waving a paycheck (earn this). Another poster noted, “If you don’t read your textbooks now, you’ll have plenty of time to read them later,” and below the text was a picture of people waiting in an unemployment office. Finally, another poster read, “Textbooks are the difference between the
boardroom and the waiting room,” and contained a juxtaposed image: one of people dressed professionally and gathered around a conference table, as if in a business meeting, and the other of people who were also professionally dressed sitting on benches—a scene reminiscent of the unemployment office pictured in the second poster.

I stared at the posters, surprised not only by the directness of their messages, but also by the way in which the messages embodied larger cultural messages about literacy. As I reached for my camera to photograph the posters, I thought of Sylvia Scribner’s three metaphors of literacy—literacy as adaptation, literacy as power, and literacy as state of grace—and how these posters related to Scribner’s schema. I wondered if the students noticed these posters and, if they did, what they thought of them. And I began to consider what the display of these posters, produced by the American Association of Publishers\(^1\) and purchased by the university, suggested about the university’s discourse and beliefs about literacy and how that discourse matched or conflicted with students’ literacy beliefs and practices. Scribner writes that definitions of literacy “affect both the substance and style of educational programs” (71); how, then, were the students

\(^1\) The AAP is the trade association of the book publishing industry. They are also responsible for the series of “Get Caught Reading” posters that feature celebrities reading; these posters can often be found in elementary school and public libraries.
of Sciotoville affected by the university’s conceptualizations of literacy? How are students of any university affected by the identity a university seeks to perform through its promotion of a set of beliefs about literacy?

These questions remained with me during my fieldwork in Sciotoville and Riverton. In this chapter, I will argue that both institutions and individual students perform certain kinds of academic identities by embracing particular beliefs or “metaphors” of literacy. At Riverton, the institution and students blurred Scribner’s analysis in a contact zone of metaphors, while at Sciotoville the institutions and students often invoked another metaphor of literacy, one that mixed literacy as adaptation and literacy as power into something different. This metaphor suggested that academic literacy practices were “empowering” because of their function and their potential to improve the lives of community members. What emerged in Sciotoville was a consuming metaphor of literacy that often, though not always, figured literacy’s power in terms of increased economic capital.

**Literacy in Three Metaphors**

But before I focus on how the students complicated and extended Scribner’s metaphors, an explanation of Scribner’s definitions is in order. In “Literacy in Three Metaphors,” Scribner writes that metaphor can help us understand “the many and varied utilities of literacy and [. . .] the complex social and psychological factors sustaining aspirations for and achievement of individual literacy” (73). As we saw in the previous chapter, the “complex social and
psychological factors” Scribner references played a role in the Sciotoville and Riverton students’ performance of identity in the composition classroom; the students’ performance of an Appalachian identity was shaped by their sense of place and by their understanding of the institution’s sense of place, as represented by their teachers and, in some cases, by this researcher. Similarly, these students’ literacy beliefs and practices—which contributed to their overall performance of identity—were again informed by their own sense of place and by their understanding of their institutions’ literacy beliefs and practices, as represented by their instructors and by the institutions writ large.

According to Scribner, there are three influential metaphors of literacy: literacy as adaptation, literacy as power, and literacy as state of grace. Literacy as adaptation is rooted in a functional view of literacy, one that “is conceived broadly as the level of proficiency necessary for effective performance in a range of settings and customary activities” (73). This metaphor of literacy most closely matches the popular notions of literacy described in Chapter One. It recognizes literacy’s assimilative value, portraying literacy as a set of skills one needs to survive and flourish in any given society. Scribner’s second metaphor, literacy as power, “emphasizes a relationship between literacy and group or community advancement” (75). This metaphor is evident in the work of such educators as Paulo Freire and Myles Horton, who sought to “empower” and “liberate” their students. In this view, literacy education can and should be used as a means of
social change and transformation, though the “power” of literacy is one of very
different kinds, including social mobility (a la the “American Dream”) and the
social transformation of which Freire and Horton write.

Scribner’s final metaphor of literacy, literacy as state of grace, derives
historically from religion and endows the literate person with special privilege
and worth. In this metaphor, literacy comes to define and refine the self. The
literate are those who are “cultured,” those who “know better” than their
contemporaries, whose literacy is deemed to be lacking: “the literate individual’s
life derives its meaning and significance from intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual
participation in the accumulated creations and knowledge of humankind, made
available through the written word” (Scribner 77).

Even though Scribner writes that her “purpose is not to marshal supporting
evidence for one or the other metaphor but to show the boundary problems of all”
(73), her article establishes three neatly divided metaphors that represent separate
purposes and belief systems of literacy. In her discussion of the metaphors,
Scribner does not illustrate how these metaphors are overlapping
conceptualizations that bleed into and feed off one another. Instead, she
separately defines and develops her discussion of each metaphor and its examples.
Thus, Scribner’s framework sets up for other scholars a trap that is difficult to
avoid: using these metaphors without positioning them as mutually exclusive. In
my analysis of the working of these metaphors at Riverton University, I have
struggled with how to use Scribner’s framework without falling into this trap. In
this part of the chapter, I will use Scribner’s structure, because it is nearly
impossible to analyze her schema without also using it. I will also point out the limits of each metaphor and the spaces in which other metaphors are at work, however. It is in these spaces—these "contact zones"—that we can see institutions and students wrestling with the meanings and implications of literacy.

**Riverton University**

In my discussion of Riverton University, I will focus my attention on university documents (such as mission statements and web pages) and student interviews. Aside from some attention to the course syllabus, I will spend very little time examining the workings of the metaphors in the classroom. While this move may seem strange, given the fact that this study is ethnographic in nature, it is because, quite simply, I felt that I never got a sense of this class’ literacy beliefs. As discussed in Chapter Two, there was a high level of student absenteeism, and I attended just over half of the class meetings, as opposed to all of them. These two facts meant that students were frequently shuffling in and out of the class without the opportunity for me to learn much about them—or for them to learn much about me, let alone each other. However, if I had attended every class, I suspect I would still feel that the class was, in a sense, unknowable. Even Lynn, the instructor of the course, later told me, “I never could get a handle
on this class.” Given that these students never seemed to come together and form a class identity, I have focused my attention on spaces where the interplay of literacy and identity is most recognizable.

**Literacy as Adaptation: Functional Literacy**

When I asked the Riverton students about the ways in which they used literacy in their lives, they first mentioned functional uses of literacy in their lives outside the classroom: making grocery lists, balancing the checkbook, and reading a work schedule. In response to my question about literacy’s role in her life, Michelle stated:

“It [literacy] is very valuable. Actually, we read a short story in English 101 here at Riverton about what it’s like to be illiterate, if you can’t read. You couldn’t really function in today’s society. You can’t drive because you can’t read signs. You can’t buy food. An example [in the story] was, on the Crisco can, there was fried chicken on the front of it. And the person thought they were buying a bucket of fried chicken, instead of Crisco cooking oil. So I think it [literacy] is very, very important.”

In this example, Michelle employs an element of the fantastic—imagining “what it’s like to be illiterate”—and identifies the university as a source for this particular narrative of literacy (and illiteracy): English 101 is the first course in the required three-course composition sequence at Riverton. While the metaphor of literacy as adaptation is both powerful and common in contemporary American society, it is worth noting that the very first example Michelle offered of the value of literacy was not from her own life, but from someone else’s life—an example given to her by her instructor Lynn and indirectly, the university. This suggests that at least some representatives of the university are invested in reinforcing the
importance of functional literacy in students’ beliefs systems about literacy. Such
an investment would appear ironic, given that universities are generally seen as
places that promote literacy as a state of grace.

But if we look at the university as a zone where different metaphors of
literacy come into contact with one another, then this investment is no longer
ironic. Consider that the criteria for being “functionally literate” continually rose
throughout the past century, to the point where “some authorities were suggesting
that the completion of high school should be the defining criterion of functional
literacy” (Rose 6). There is no doubt that the literacy practices needed to function
comfortably in 21st century society will continue to evolve and work to
marginalize some while rewarding others, as Deborah Brandt suggests in Literacy
in American Lives. In the remarks of students such as Michelle and Gladys, we
see their attempts to negotiate this reality with multiple metaphors of literacy. For
these students, the academic literacy practices they are learning in college have
become, in a sense, a new form of “functional literacy.” These students evidence
a belief that they must adapt to academic literacy—which typically has been
constructed as part of the state of grace metaphor—in order to participate fully in
today’s society. Later I will discuss Michelle, who primarily speaks about
literacy as power, but for whom all three literacy metaphors work in concert. For
now, I will focus our attention on Gladys, whose beliefs about literacy function as
a contact zone where multiple metaphors come into play. Gladys’ literacy beliefs
also opened a door to a particular performance of identity: a performance of what she hoped to become. This is a literacy of aspiration, a literacy that is shaped not by who students are, but who they hope to be.

The previous chapter discussed Gladys’ attempts to perform a counter-Appalachian identity and how her conceptualization of that identity was based on a binary of “academic” and “Appalachian” identities. I’d like to return to part of the same interview with Gladys in order to illustrate the interplay of Gladys’ performance of identity and her literacy beliefs and practices, as well as the contact zone of multiple metaphors of literacy.

At the beginning of the interview, I asked Gladys about the circumstances that brought her back to Riverton and that led her to enroll at the university. She responded:

“I came back here, thrown into the feminization of poverty after getting divorced, being married 21 years. And you either get an education or you work in McDonald’s. That’s about all there is here. And I came back here only because my family’s here. I don’t know if it was the right move, but it was the right move in certain ways. Because I forced myself to go to school.”

I was initially surprised by Gladys’ reference to the feminization of poverty, as I have rarely, if ever, heard a first-year student use such a term so handily and accurately in conversation; once I learned that Gladys was actually a junior double-majoring in psychology and sociology, my surprise subsided. But at the time of the comment, a follow-up seemed in order:

Sara: “I was surprised to hear you use the term feminization of poverty, because that’s not something I usually hear first-year writing students say [Gladys laughs and smiles broadly]. Where did you learn that term?”
Gladys: “In one of my sociology courses. I’m a double major in soci[ology] and psych[ology]. And I’m a junior, too. I started school in the winter of 2003 and became a junior last spring [2004].”

Sara: “Wow. You’ve made quick progress. [. . .] So I’m interested in hearing more about your comments about the feminization of poverty and how, if you’re here, your choice, if you can call it that, is to either live in poverty or work at McDonalds. That’s about it?”

Gladys: “Or welfare.”

Sara: “Is that something that you see here as a choice that women face? Do men have more economic opportunities without a college degree?”

Gladys: “Absolutely. Men can get out, they can get construction jobs, and it’s harder for a woman to get construction jobs. And then there are just very few jobs around here. There are very few for men, but there are even less for women.”

Echoing remarks made by Julie and Schueler later in this chapter, Gladys went on to discuss how the few jobs that were available to women without a college degree paid significantly less than jobs available to men without college degrees, also noting that sometimes even jobs in traditionally female fields that required college degrees—such as teaching—paid less than jobs in traditionally male fields that did not require college degrees—such as construction.

During this part of our interview, Gladys refers to the feminization of poverty, a concept she read about in a textbook for a college course, as a frame for analyzing everyday existence in her community. In this moment, Gladys does the sort of performative work David Bartholomae argues all students must take on if they are to become successful college students: “The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse
of our community” (589). Much like the students Bartholomae praises for successfully “inventing the university,” Gladys is able to take the commonplaces and taken-for-granteds in her life and the life of her community and frame them as part of a larger issue. Bartholomae writes that “to speak as a person of status or privilege, the writer can [. . .] speak to us in our terms—in the privileged language of university discourse” (593). That is exactly what Gladys did in this part of the interview: she used academic discourse not only to discuss an issue of significance to herself, but also to introduce herself to me as a “fellow academic,” as opposed to an Appalachian. As illustrated in Chapter Three, these were identities that she found mutually exclusive, given her construction of Appalachians as willfully ignorant.

This sort of performative work is not all Gladys does in this part of our interview, however. She also grapples with multiple metaphors of literacy belief systems. As seen in her comments that women can go to college, work at McDonald’s, or go on welfare, Gladys stresses the adaptive, functional nature of academic literacy. Furthermore, like the Sciotoville students I will describe later in the chapter, she positions this type of literacy as power—albeit a solely economic one. For Gladys, as is true for many of today’s students, academic literacy is, in part, a by-product of a much-needed credential (a college degree) that enhances one’s economic status. However, Gladys later undercuts the economic power of academic literacy by noting that in Riverton, women with college degrees often get paid less than men with high school degrees. She clearly recognizes that academic literacy, as recognized by the credential of a
college diploma, is not the end-all, be-all solution to the woes of women in the region. Yet her conceptualization of academic, “cosmopolitan” identity, discussed in Chapter Three, calls upon the metaphor of literacy as state of grace, as she certainly “endows the literate person with special virtues” (Scribner 76-77). In Gladys’ case, it is those with a particular kind of literacy—academic literacy—who have these special virtues.

As I have indicated, literacy as adaptation can work in complex ways, calling upon Scribner’s other metaphors. This complexity is also apparent in the idea of functional literacy itself, however. Scribner asks, “Which literacy tasks (e.g., reading a newspaper, writing a check) are ‘necessary,’ and which are ‘optional’?” (74), a question that students such as Gladys grapple with as they negotiate multiple metaphors of literacy, metaphors which bleed into each other. This question is also at the heart of our next discussion, as I will seek to further distinguish “necessary” and “optional” uses of literacy.

**Literacy as Adaptation: Everyday Literacy**

Students from both Sciotoville and Riverton mixed practices that were purely functional, such as reading and writing down their work schedules, with those that would seem to be optional, such as reading the newspaper and browsing an Internet site for articles on a favorite sports team. Yet this “optional” literacy was, in a sense, necessary for them to function fully in their social communities. For example, Katie May read the newspaper’s obituaries because grandparents of several of her high school friends had recently died. On a few occasions, she did
not find out about these deaths until a couple weeks later. She wanted to be more quickly informed, instead of relying on phone calls from her social network, so that she could send cards and attend funeral services—important gestures of sympathy among friends. Thus, she began reading the newspaper.

Everyday uses of literacy illustrate not only an overlap between functional and optional uses of literacy. These uses also indicate a blurring between the metaphors of literacy as adaptation and state of grace. The functional literacy practices associated with the literacy as adaptation metaphor are typically viewed as those that require lower-level literacy skills needed “to fulfill mundane situational demands” (73), as Scribner writes. The ability to read newspaper articles is often measured in assessments of functional literacy; see, for example, the Department of Education’s National Assessment of Adult Literacy, which used items from newspapers to measure adults’ “functional literacy” (“What is NAAL?”). Newspapers’ status as a measuring stick of “functional literacy” would seem to suggest that reading the newspaper requires lower-level literacy skills. This supposition is borne out by an assertion (bordering on urban legend) I frequently hear from family and friends: local newspapers are written at a fifth-
grade reading level.² It strikes me that most newspaper reading, fairly or unfairly, is commonly associated with “lesser” literacy, whether in terms of skill or—in a nod to a point I will later address—prestige.

Yet the purpose of reading a newspaper seems to mesh more closely with the literacy as state-of-grace metaphor. For students such as Katie May, Michelle, and Schueler—all of whom read at least part of the newspaper a few times a week—newspaper reading was a source of information and pleasure. In this way, the purpose of these students’ reading was, to borrow Sir Philip Sidney’s phrase, “to teach and delight.” Yet the spirit and literary form at the root of this phrase—a phrase that is part of Sidney’s defense of poetry—is more typically associated with the “bookish” tradition of literacy as a state of grace. This is how the metaphors of literacy as adaptation and state of grace become a contact zone for these students’ everyday uses of literacy. In some ways, the genre the students are reading and the literacy skills they are using would fall into the adaptive category. Yet the purposes for which they are reading are more similar to the literacy practices described with the state of grace metaphor. The clashing of these metaphors provides another moment in the contact zones of literacy, where literacy practices associated with “low culture” (reading newspapers) meet with those practices associated with “high culture” (reading poetry).

Mike, my only male participant at Riverton, provides an extended example of these contact zones. He stressed to me during the first few moments of our

² I am not at all convinced that this assertion is accurate, which is why I referred to it as a possible urban legend. I think this understanding of the literacy needed to read the newspaper speaks volumes about general perceptions and uses of newspapers as barometers of functional literacy, however.
first interview that he only engaged in reading and writing when he was required to do so for school, and he repeatedly told me that he “hated English.” Most of his dislike for the subject stemmed from his dyslexia, which made reading and writing difficult and frustrating tasks, and he asserted over and over again that the only time he read or wrote was when his classes required him to do so.

But as I probed deeper and asked Mike more questions, a more nuanced view of his literacy practices emerged. Though Mike did not keep a diary or write letters, as some of the female participants in the study did, he usually wrote one or two emails a week. And while he did not read the newspaper, he did catch up on current events and, in particular, sporting news via the Internet:

Mike: “I read short things. I go to ESPN dot com, the [name of Big State University sport site] dot com. That’s for [Big] State, it’s a sports site. I go to that every day.”

Sara: “Is that a fan site? Like a message board?”

Mike: “No, they have actual reporters, I do believe. It’s actual articles. I probably read that every day. I go to ESPN almost every day, too.”

Mike stated that he “rarely” read the newspaper; as a computer science major, he spent a lot of time at his computer, and he found the Internet to be a convenient source of information: “It [the Internet] is easier [than a newspaper]. It’s easier for me to find stuff. I look for stuff I want to read about, so the newspaper, it only has what here’s today. The Internet sites have a bunch of stuff under the topics I’m interested in.”

For Mike, engaging in literacy tasks that used print texts, such as books and magazines, had been a frustrating experience for as long as he could
remember. Electronically delivered texts, such as email and websites, were, to use the language of computers, far more user-friendly for him—even though Mike himself did not initially identify his engagement with these texts as literacy. Here is where we see the metaphors of literacy as adaptation and state of grace most clearly at play in the contact zone. Mike did not place much value on his literacy practices—in fact, he did not see them as important enough to discuss with me—most likely because they were associated with literacy as adaptation and not “high culture,” school literacy. He did not “count” his literacy practices as reading, even though the purposes for which he used his literacy (learning and entertainment) were most similar to those of literacy as state of grace.

Mike’s literacy practices highlight another important aspect of the literacy as adaptation metaphor and its limits. Towards the end of her discussion of this metaphor, Scribner speculates on the role technology might play in re-defining functional literacy:

Some of these technologies are, in effect, new systems of literacy. [. . .] One possible scenario is that in coming decades literacy may be increased for some and reduced for others, accentuating the present uneven, primarily class-based distribution of literacy functions. (75)

Mike, who did not self-identify as Appalachian, was the son of a lawyer who had retired from the Judge Advocate General’s corps. While Mike’s dyslexia made for unpleasant experiences with print texts, technologies such as the Internet became important sponsors that helped him to develop another kind of literacy, an electronic literacy that enabled him to engage in both “functional” and “everyday” readings despite his limited use of traditional print texts. And thanks to the socio-
economic class his father’s position as a military lawyer provided, Mike had access to those electronic literacies throughout his life—unlike some of his classmates, whose poverty placed them on the short end of the digital, not to mention traditional literacy, divide.

Literacy as Power

In regard to literacy as power, Scribner writes that the “expansion of literacy skills is often viewed as a means for poor and politically powerless groups to claim their place in their world” (75). According to this metaphor of literacy, literacy can serve as a means of social uplift for a community or individuals. This metaphor was on full display at Riverton, though once again mixed with literacy as adaptation. For example, the university catalog lists five goals and priorities, the first of which was “Dedication to the Region.” The description of this goal states, “The University’s primary focus is the higher education of the region’s first-generation college population.” Later in the paragraph, it is noted that the university focuses on the needs of the surrounding community in developing its offerings, stating that the university’s “programs focus on the interests and needs of the [local] region.”

In the same section of the catalog, a “strategic plan” is given for the university, and the very first point under this plan reads, “Promote the value of higher education to the community and region.” The third “strategic opportunity” states, “Improve student proficiency levels in basic knowledge and skills needed for success in the 21st century, such as oral and written communication,
mathematics, and computer skills.” Although they do not make any direct statements about literacy and its effect on the community per se, taken together these statements strongly suggest that the university seeks to “lift up” its surrounding community through the teaching of particular literacy practices—literacy practices that are recognized through the awarding of a college degree. Yet the literacy practices that are emphasized here are not those associated with state of grace literacy, but functional literacy, i.e. “basic knowledge and skills.” Clearly, multiple metaphors of literacy are circulating in this statement.

The university’s mission statement is further evidence of its use of multiple metaphors of literacy:

[Riverton] University-the regional state university for [its part of the state]-prepares students for the changing needs of business, industry, education, and society through its diversified degree programs. Recognizing the importance of knowledge, values, and cultural enrichment, [Riverton] University is committed to providing higher education that fosters competence in oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, and critical analysis/logical thinking. To enrich the lives of the community, the University provides opportunities for continuing personal and professional development, intellectual discovery, and appreciation for the creative and performing arts.

In this statement, Riverton University’s image of itself is framed in terms of service to the surrounding community, once again drawing on the metaphor of literacy as power. Not only students, but also residents and businesses are positioned as potential recipients of the “help” Riverton seeks to provide as it “enrich[es] the lives of the community.” Social uplift is not the only objective, however. The emphasis on career preparation echoes literacy as adaptation, right down to the university’s recognition of the “changing needs” students will face.
This statement asserts that students must develop the skills, including literacy skills (“written communication”), to adapt to any need they—or their prospective employers—may develop. And as I will discuss later, an undercurrent of literacy as state of grace runs throughout this mission statement as well.

The university is not the only source of this complicated literacy as power metaphor, as the metaphor also circulated in complex ways among the students and in the community as well. Michelle frequently talked about the importance of Riverton University to the town and its outlying areas. Her father had earned two associate degrees from the university, and her entire family seemed to have a great deal of respect for Riverton University that Michelle echoed in our interviews. The teachers at the Catholic high school Michelle attended discouraged her from attending Riverton because of its allegedly poor academics—a misconception that appeared to be rooted in the assumption that since Riverton is an open-admission university, it must be of poor quality. But Michelle thought quite differently of the university:

“Riverton is a very good school. I know some people, like my old teachers, don’t think so, and I don’t why. Because it is. And the school does so much good for people and the whole town, really. My dad is always talking about how important Riverton is to the town, and it is. The university has so many programs for people. Not just the students here, but the regular people, too. The university does so much in the community to try to make the town better. I don’t know what this town would be without the university. It’s so important.”

According to the 2000 census, Riverton University is a major employer in the region, suggesting that the university plays an important role in the local economy. Yet Michelle’s comments indicated that the university also functions
as an important part of the community’s performance of identity. The first time I
drove to Riverton, I was struck by the large sign that greeted me as I entered
town: “The students of Riverton University welcome you.” The small towns that
I passed through on my way to Riverton all displayed signs welcoming visitors to
the town, but the town of Riverton displayed no such sign. Instead, it was
university students who welcomed visitors into the town, suggesting that the
university plays a prominent role in the town’s performance of identity. The
university quite literally gives Riverton an academic face and a prestige
representative of the literacy as state of grace metaphor.

But it was not only the sign that tipped me off to the nature of the
relationship between the university and town of Riverton. One of the university’s
community activities was a weekly talk show on one of the few commercial radio
stations in Riverton. This radio station—which is locally owned and has no
officially recognized relationship with the university through its ownership,
participation on the university’s Board of Trustees, and the like—offered both
locally programmed talk shows as well as sports talk and programming from
ESPN. I listened to a local talk show on the station while driving into town, and
this show offered a different local topic each day of the week. Wednesdays were
the day that the station announcer (the only local announcer I ever heard on this
station) welcomed a different official from the university. While the topic of the
show varied from week to week, one thing was constant: references to the
importance of education in general, and the university in particular, to this
community. Any time the announcer stated the name of the university, he
followed it up with a phrase that referenced the relationship between town and
gown: “Riverton University, our hometown university.” “Riverton University,
our hometown jewel.” The announcer repeatedly exhorted his listeners to “go on
down” to the university and register for classes: “You’ll make some new friends,
and more importantly, you just might learn something.” While the announcer did
not directly allude to literacy, his comments represent the ways in which the
university succeeded in shaping the community’s discourse about education and,
indirectly, literacy as a means of social uplift.

_Literacy as State of Grace_

As we have already seen, the ways in which Riverton University and its
students used Scribner’s metaphors overlap. In this section, I will illustrate once
again how students grapple with multiple metaphors of literacy, with a particular
focus on literacy as a state of grace. The English course the Riverton students
were taking, English 103, was a literature-based composition course. While the
students wrote many papers and followed the process approach typically
associated with composition, they read literary works, as opposed to expository
texts. The university’s premise for the course seemed to rest on the idea that
reading literature makes one a better person—an idea that historically derives
from many religions’ emphasis on the reading of holy books. As Scribner writes,
“literateness has come to be considered synonymous with being ‘cultured’ [. . .]
the notion that participation in a literate—that is, bookish—tradition enlarges and
develops an essential self is pervasive and still undergirds the concept of a liberal education” (77). The course description that appeared on the syllabus for English 103 is indicative of this notion:

This course will help you meet a requirement of the University’s General Education Program (GEP). The GEP represents the essential purpose of higher education, which is to develop the mind to its fullest potential through the study of the most profound questions human beings face, through engagement with humankind’s most significant art and thought. The goals of English [103], to improve reading, writing, critical thinking, and speaking skills through a study of literature, help you to develop and enhance your intellectual growth. Good literature often examines human behavior and illuminates universal truths about the human condition.

This statement appeared to be a paraphrase of university publications’ descriptions of the GEP and its purpose, as well as the English department’s statement of goals for 103. However, the last sentence was created by the instructor of the course. The confluence of prose created by the university, department, and instructor in this paragraph suggests that this metaphor of literacy is prevalent at Riverton University in general as well as this classroom in particular, since all three levels of the institution—university, department, and classroom—use language to promote and reinforce it.

Literacy as a state of grace did not operate by itself, however. For example, the English department’s website states that the department “develops students who can think and read critically, write and speak clearly, and who understand the contributions literature, art, music, and philosophy can make to the quality of daily life.” This statement includes shades of literacy as adaptation, given the emphasis on critical thinking and writing, and literacy as power and state of grace are evident in the latter half of the sentence’s focus on “quality of
life.” The meaning of “quality of life” is ambiguous here. It could refer to material conditions and comfort, drawing on a belief that literacy provides economic power. At the same time, this phrase could refer to the pleasures of “book culture” and the life of the mind—pleasures rooted in the literacy as state of grace metaphor.

Students of Riverton provided further examples of how the three metaphors came together in their lives. Some students, such as Michelle, were quick to point out the prestige associated with academic literacy. During one of our interviews, I said to Michelle that in a sense, a college degree serves as a “credential” that certifies one’s academic literacy. She nodded her head in assent and said:

“In today’s society, if you don’t have a degree, you’re going to be doing manual labor. Or some people luck out and they’re models or superstars, but that’s not going to happen to me. [. . .] I think to me it’s important to earn a college degree, because it’s kind of like you’re expected to nowadays? If you don’t, it’s kind of like [putting on a disapproving voice], ‘Oh. She didn’t go to college.’ I don’t know, I get that a lot, I hear that a lot about people who dropped out. People talking about people who dropped out. And then they’ll say, oh, they’ll be doing hard work, or hard labor, not making enough money or having a good life.”

When I asked Michelle from whom she heard these types of statements, she replied, “Everyone. I think it’s just general society that feels this way.” I pressed deeper, asking her if she heard this type of remark from family members, schoolmates, and/or teachers, and she stated, laughing, “Well, I think everyone
thinks that way.” I added, “Or, at the very least, everyone that touches your life,” to which she responded, “Right. Okay, yes, everyone around here, I think, thinks that way. Because more people are going to college.”

It is important to note, however, that Michelle was a self-described “regular, middle-class kid” who lived in a “comfortable” home. She was a graduate of the local Catholic high school—a school that sends 99% of its graduates to college. However, the local public high school enrolled a different type of student: 36% of the student body of that school qualifies for free or reduced lunches, and of the 2002 graduating class, 45% of the seniors went on to college. During the 2003 year—the year Michelle graduated from high school—71.6% of students in the public high school’s senior class graduated. These figures call into question Michelle’s contention that “everyone around here” conceives of academic literacy skills—as certified by a college degree—as she does. Furthermore, these data point to the importance of considering the relationship between literacy and the performance of identity. For Riverton students like Michelle, beliefs about literacy were informed by their conceptualization of their identity—as seen in Michelle’s statement that she is a “regular, middle class kid.” One part of performing that identity is the development of particular literacy beliefs and practices, such as a valuing of “the book” and a college degree. Yet Michelle does not value “the book” for its own sake, but for what it can provide—a college degree and economic advancement—indicating multiple metaphors of literacy at work in her life. Michelle’s comments illustrate the necessity of the questions Scribner poses: “We need to
know how widely dispersed this admiration of book knowledge is in our society. To what extent are beliefs about the value of literateness shared across social classes and ethnic and religious groups?” (77). I suggest that we also need to examine how the three metaphors coalesce, blend, and blur together in the contact zones of students’ literacy lives.

**Literacy in New Metaphors: State University-Sciotoville**

Like Riverton University, State University-Sciotoville emerged as another contact zone of literacy metaphors. At Sciotoville, Scribner’s metaphors fed into each other as they circulated throughout the university. Literacy as adaptation, power, and state of grace were not the only metaphors in play at this university, however. A new metaphor emerged here, one that called upon elements of Scribner’s first two metaphors. This metaphor was literacy as consumption, a metaphor that figured literacy as a means of increased economic capital. While the emphasis of this literacy metaphor was often on individual advancement, this was not always the case. The students of Sciotoville also illustrated a concern for community advancement in class and in interviews—an important part of their performance of identity, a subject I will later address. But for now, let us return to the scene set at the beginning of this chapter: the bookstore at Sciotoville.
Literacy as Consumption

The bookstore’s posters were my first indicator of the metaphors of literacy in circulation at the Sciotoville campus. Before my arrival on campus, I had been unable to get a sense of the institution’s literacy beliefs since this regional campus did not have a separate website or its own documents, such as catalogues or brochures, separate from its four-year “home” campus. While the posters were not produced by the university, their presence in the bookstore and the messages they sent are still worthy to consider because they contribute to the implicit and explicit messages about literacy on this campus. In other words, these posters are part of the fabric that makes up the literacy lives of this university and its students. I am including photographs of each poster, but due to the poor quality of these pictures, I will also describe the contents of each poster.3

First Poster: “Read This. Get This. Earn This.”

This poster depicts a woman reading a textbook, a man holding a diploma, and a man holding a paycheck under the heading, “Read This. Get This. Earn This.” The implication of the image is clear; by reading a textbook, one will acquire a college diploma and subsequently earn a paycheck. The subtext of the poster—a metaphor of literacy as power—is also evident. This particular type of

3 The manager of the bookstore tried to stop me from taking any pictures of the bookstore and its posters. She only relented when I informed her that I had explicit permission from the Dean to conduct research on the campus and that, given its location at a state-owned university, the bookstore was public property that I had a right to photograph. Given the contentious nature of this encounter, I took my photographs as quickly as possible and did not attempt to move materials that obstructed the camera’s view of the posters.
literacy offers economic power, as the poster uses the language of the stock market ("Invest in your future") to drive home the importance of reading one’s textbooks.

Figure 4.1: Bookstore Poster, “Read This. Get This. Earn This.”

Second Poster: “If You Don’t Read. . .”

This poster notes, “If you don’t read your textbooks now, you’ll have plenty of time to read them later,” with the word “textbooks” highlighted in yellow. Underneath the text is an illustration. At the top of the illustration is a banner that states, “UNEMPLOYMENT. Please wait for your number to be called.” Beneath the banner, professionally dressed men and women (the men
wearing shirts and ties, the women wearing dresses or skirts and blouses) are sitting, presumably waiting for their numbers to be called. Several of the people depicted appear to be reading the newspaper or brochures of some sort. The man in the center of the illustration has a large book that appears to be a textbook resting on his lap—a visual emphasis of the poster’s message that the unemployment line offers plenty of time to read.

Figure 4.2: Bookstore Poster, “If You Don’t Read. . . .”
Textbooks: The Difference.

Finally, the last poster reads, “Textbooks: the difference between the boardroom and the waiting room,” and contains a juxtaposed image: one of people sitting on benches, and the other image showed a group of people dressed professionally and gathered around a conference table, as if in a business meeting. This table was resting on a large stack of textbooks, making this image literally tower over the image of people in the waiting room. The poster drove home its point—that reading textbooks will enable students to rise above others—quite literally.

Figure 4.3: Bookstore Poster, “Textbooks: The Difference . . .”
Together, these posters argue that students must develop a particular academic literacy practice—reading their textbooks—in order to function successfully in today’s society. It is not any type of reading, but the reading of college textbooks, that will ensure students’ ability to gain employment. Writing apparently plays no part in the students’ success. The message of these posters is that students can avoid being “left behind” in the waiting room or finding themselves lined up in the unemployment office, unable to procure the paycheck that the first poster implies is the byproduct of a college diploma, if they simply read their textbooks. Engaging in other reading and writing acts are not part of the equation for economic security.

In other words, this type of reading is power, according to the posters in the university bookstore, though in this conceptualization of literacy, its power is utilized not on behalf of a group, as Scribner suggests, but on the behalf of individuals. The transformative power Scribner describes, the power of literacy to affect social change, is nowhere to be seen. Instead, literacy functions as a commodity that offers the power to consume other commodities. As stated in Chapter One, in this view, literacy becomes a neatly packaged object that one can possess, and in turn, can use this possession as capital to gain even more capital—namely, employment and wealth (Gee 122-23). Stuckey writes, “Literacy is the language of profit,” adding, “A worker’s possibilities are contained by his ability to negotiate subjects of capital” (19). This is a conceptualization of literacy that
focuses not on group advancement, as does Scribner’s metaphor of literacy as power, but on individual advancement. The power that literacy offers for regional uplift, emphasized so heavily by Riverton, is not apparent in these posters.

The mindset behind these posters also overlooks other factors that impact literacy. It assumes equal access to the education and funds needed to enroll in college, let alone the money needed to buy textbooks. There is also an assumption that academic literacy ensures corporate success, as seen in the reference to the boardroom. This assumption is rooted in Graff’s concept of the literacy myth: the idea that literacy independently improves one’s social and material conditions. Graff argues that it is factors other than literacy, factors including race, gender, and social class, that are far more influential in determining—and reinforcing—said conditions. Rather than theorizing literacy as only a means of empowerment, Graff identifies literacy as an instrument of domination and cultural eradication as well. On this point, Gee notes, “[L]iteracy served as a socializing tool for the poor, was seen as a threat if misused by the poor (for an analysis of their oppression and to make demands for power), and served as a technology for the continued selection of members of one class for the best positions in the society” (59). Thus, rather than only seeing poverty and unemployment as resulting from low literacy and education, we should also see
the opposite: low literacy and education levels result from poverty and unemployment, since those factors limit one’s chances for pursuing and receiving a meaningful education.

This is not the view of literacy and education evidenced in the posters, however. State University-Sciotoville used “the vehicle of literacy for the promotion of the values, attitudes, and habits” (24), to use Graff’s phrase; the posters in the university bookstore may not explicitly say so, but the implicit meaning is clear: if you are unemployed and/or poor, it’s your fault. You should have gone to college and developed specific academic literacy practices—namely, reading textbooks—not so much for the purposes of learning, but for purposes of earning. After all, if you had gone to college and read those books, you would be gainfully employed and financially comfortable. These posters encourage students to “pull themselves up their bootstraps” by acquiring a college degree, but as Victor Villanueva writes of himself in *Bootstraps*, “[H]e knows that for most like him, the bootstraps break before the boots are on, that too many have no boots” (xiv).

What these posters, and by extension the university at which they were displayed, failed to recognize is the fact that there may not be jobs for these students, let alone members of the community without college degrees. Being in the unemployment line may not hinge at all on their status as a college graduate or non-graduate. What are some of the factors that may determine whether these students and their family members and neighbors stand in the unemployment line? The fact that unemployment and poverty rates in the region are far higher
than national averages. The fact that there is a lack of jobs, particularly high paying jobs, across the region. The fact that labor participation across the region is lower than national averages. The fact that so many of the jobs that had been available in the region have been outsourced. The fact that job opportunities for women are particularly limited. These factors play a role in determining—to paraphrase Villanueva—who has boots, who doesn’t, and whose bootstraps will break under the pressure of poverty, unemployment, and gender roles. It is the disconnect between the message of the posters and the regional and local context of the university which makes the placement of these posters in this university bookstore so ironic—and the metaphor of literacy as consumption in this context so troubling.

Consuming Literacies: Individual Contexts

To some extent, the students of Sciotoville shared a conceptualization of literacy as consumption, repeating over and over again in interviews that their composition course was important due to the literacy practices they learned in it, practices that would earn them a college degree and a ticket to a “better life.” For example, Katie May remarked in an interview, “We all have to take this class, because it’s a freshman English class. These skills that we’re learning are essential for our other courses that we’re taking.” In this quote, Katie May connects academic literacy practices (“the skills that we’re learning”) and success in other courses to success in this class. She must acquire a functional literacy (see her emphasis on skills) in order to succeed in other courses she takes.
When I asked Julie, another case study participant, why she enrolled in college, her response illustrates the idea that functional literacy is power, and its power is economic:

“Well, you had to, especially for girls in that area. The boys, there were good-paying jobs for them right out of high school. They could go work in the steel mill, the factories. Hardly any of them went to college, because they would be missing out on good money and would be living at home and paying a lot of money to go to college. It was almost like a waste of money to go to college. But for the girls, it was working at McDonald’s. That was it. That’s why I went back to school: I have to provide for my son, and there just aren’t good paying jobs around here for women, unless you have a college degree. Then you can be a schoolteacher, a nurse, that sort of thing.”

Julie’s goal was to become a lawyer, and she stated that her decision was influenced in part by a desire to “make a lot of money.” Julie had been poor all of her life, and she did not want the same for her son. Similarly, Katie May hoped to become a pediatrician, and one of the reasons why she wanted to be a doctor was because “doctors make a good living.” For these students, a college degree is a type of credential allowing them to pursue other credentials. In order to achieve that degree, they will need to engage in the literacy practices valued by the academy. Or, to return to an earlier point, these students view academic literacy practices and a college degree as forms of capital that will assist them in gaining even more capital.

But within Julie’s response is a recognition of social forces that the bookstore’s posters lacked: Julie points to the fact that, as a woman in the region, her employment opportunities are limited due to her gender. A college degree is more necessary for women than for men, according to Julie, because a college
degree opens the door to traditionally female occupations, such as teaching and nursing. These remarks hearken back to earlier in this chapter, when Gladys, using the language of the academy, explained the feminization of poverty.

Julie was not the only Sciotoville student with an awareness of how gender may impact educational and career opportunities. Schueler pointed to the fact that he was only one of two males in the class, and one of the only boys from his high school class to go to college, as evidence that there are more job opportunities in the area for men without college degrees—a fact which also illustrates the area’s gender norms. However, Schueler also noted that things were changing for young men:

“I have a lot of friends, in high school they always went to those tech prep programs, career centers, instead of college [. . .]. Most of them end up at [a local factory], the steel mill, the sawmills. Where I work, I have a friend who just graduated [from high school], and he quit his job at the pizza place [where Schueler works] to go work at the sawmill. [. . .] He was talking about how he was starting out at $13 an hour. And yeah, that’s good money for an eighteen, nineteen year old. But he’s going to be making that his entire life, trying to support a family on that.”

Schueler later added that while many of the factories and mills are closing, the mindset that young men don’t “need” college isn’t. He observed that this mindset could eventually leave his friends “between a rock and a hard place,” as he put it, since his friends would not have the college educations that would enable them to look for work outside of the local area at the very same time that jobs that do not require a college education are leaving the area.

In their own way, these gender roles are just as damaging for young men as they are for young women. The local and regional culture encourages these
young men to go to work after high school, since going to college “was almost like a waste of money,” to use Julie’s words. Yet as these jobs are outsourced from the region and men start to enroll in college, the men will be hit with a one-two punch: they will have lost their jobs, and the blame for that loss will be placed solely at their feet in institutional discourse such as Sciotoville’s. In this context, men are in a catch-22: they are encouraged to forsake college for the sake of employment so as not to “waste money,” but if they lose that employment it’s their fault because they didn’t go to college. If only they had read some textbooks, they wouldn’t be unemployed. What this discourse fails to recognize is the cultural context and the lack of jobs in the region for both men and women, college and high school graduates.

Students such as Julie and Schueler did recognize this cultural context, however. Although they echoed the university’s metaphor of literacy as consumption, they complicated it by their attention to place—a subject ignored by the university. They also complicated this metaphor through some of the literacy practices described in Chapter Three, practices that emphasized the social nature of literacy via peer collaboration and support: teaching each other how to use their textbooks, offering revision ideas, providing help to a student struggling to answer her professor’s questions. Their use of literacy practices illustrated another contact zone of metaphors, a space where differing beliefs systems about literacy came into play and blended both institutional and regional contexts.

Katie May provided some of the most powerful examples of this contact zone by linking the development of literacy practices and the attainment of a
college degree to the betterment of the local community. As discussed in the previous chapter, I repeatedly observed the Sciotoville students assisting each other in learning academic literacy practices, and Katie May was an active participant, if not a leader, in this chain of assistance. When I asked her why she helped other students learn how to use their grammar handbooks, why she offered them feedback on their papers, etc. she replied, “By helping one another we help ourselves and our communities, eventually.” In her response, Katie May linked together the development of literacy practices with the betterment of the community, echoing the work of such scholars as Paulo Freire. While Katie May might not be an example of Freire’s conceptualization of literacy as power—conscientizacao, or critical consciousness—she does make a connection between assisting others in learning literacy practices and lifting up the surrounding community.

Or, to return to Scribner’s description of literacy as power, Katie May conceptualizes literacy as a way to improve the conditions in her community; for her, literacy attainment, as recognized by a college degree, can serve to “lift up” other members of the community. Katie May frequently talked about her aunt, a dentist for whom Katie May worked, as a role model in her life; as a way to illustrate her respect for her aunt, Katie May chose to use her aunt’s name as part of her pseudonym for this project. When I asked Katie May to explain her aunt’s influence in her life, she responded:

“She’s a role model to me, because she came from poverty and got her education, which she had to do. She didn’t have much money going through college, so she made a lot of sacrifices. [. . .] She has a lot of
money now, and she gives back to the community, in various ways. [...] She has a lot of compassion for others. It makes me want to be like that.”

When I followed up by asking Katie May what she meant by “be like that,” she explained that her aunt made donations of time and money to local charities, including her church, and worked with individuals in the area as well. She mentored local high school students, and she helped her family members financially when needed. She mentored Katie May as well, offering Katie May a summer job in her practice, some financial assistance with school, and substantial guidance and advice about her college education. As Katie May put it, “She teaches me how to do school,” and Katie May planned to follow her aunt’s example and provide that type of support to others. She viewed helping her composition classmates in this light, but she also hoped to work in the community as her aunt did. She felt becoming a pediatrician would enable her to give back to the community in that way. Thus, the view of literacy expressed by Katie May in some segments of our interviews was one that viewed literacy as a means of social uplift as well as a means of individual economic gain.

Literacy and the Performance of Identity

It is in Katie May’s comments that the link between literacy and the performance of identity becomes clearer. In her descriptions of why it is important to her to develop academic literacy practices—as “credentialized” by a college degree—and to help her classmates in developing those practices, Katie May consistently returned to the idea of “helping out” or neighborliness—as
discussed in Chapter Three, one of the values Loyal Jones ascribes to Appalachian identity. For Katie May, the social nature of literacy that I described in Chapter Three was inextricably tied to her performance of Appalachian identity. But, unlike Riverton students such as Gladys, her Appalachian identity was not performed in opposition to an academic identity. Instead, through her practice of literacy as a social act, Katie May integrated her performance of Appalachian and academic identities, using her Appalachian identity as a way to help herself—and others in the class—develop an academic identity.

But Katie May was not the only student who engaged in this type of performance. Many students in the class referenced issues of neighborliness and reciprocity—which they termed “helping out” and “giving back”—when asked why they engaged in collaborative behavior:

Dixie: “I would hope to be treated this way if I needed help.”

Ruth: “If you understand something and can explain it, that helps, because sometimes they [other students] just need it worded differently to understand it.”

Amy: “It’s a two-way street. The students who come to class want to learn and so do I. There is nothing to be gained by not helping if you can.”

Katie May: “We’re all in this together. [. . .] I feel a responsibility to help others learn.”

Beth: “I know it’s great to have something explained to me on my level. If I understand something, why not help someone who doesn’t? Everyone’s trying to better themselves.”

In a separate interview, Julie also discussed why she felt it was important to engage in literacy instruction with her peers—an instruction based in reciprocity:
“I don’t think it’s a competition. [. . .] I don’t think that me doing better than everyone else in the class is significant. I’m always the type of person, and always have been, I want you to do as good as I do. [. . .] And I think maybe I need someone else to say, ‘Well, that paper’s pretty good.’ Or ‘maybe you should try this.’ I think I need that confirmation of someone else, and sometimes too I like to know that I have something that someone else would need, that I can give and take. I don’t like to just say, ‘Hey, can you do this [for me]’, ‘Hey, can you do that’ [for me].”

Julie’s comments here are similar to those of her peers due to the way in which she emphasizes the valuable support and validation peers can provide to one another. Julie also notes the importance of reciprocity, as seen in her statement that “I like to know that I have something someone else would need, that I can give and take.” For these students, literacy practices were an important method not only for performing a romanticized Appalachian identity, but also for teaching and learning from others the performances of identity expected in the university.

Conclusion

In her unpublished dissertation entitled Beliefs about Literacy in a Southern Appalachian Community, Kimberly Donehower describes a conflict between the beliefs of the community she studied and the beliefs of “professional literacy workers,” which she describes as the academic worldview. Donehower writes that academic beliefs about literacy “package literacy as a means to elevate one’s moral, economic, or intellectual status” and as a way to isolate and disparage “Others,” including Appalachians, for their alleged literacy failures (7)—a characterization that hearkens back to Scribner’s “state of grace” metaphor. In contrast, Donehower writes that her informants in the community
“were careful to suggest a view that high attainment of literacy skills does not, ultimately, make one a better person—be it in the sense of being smarter, more moral, or more refined” (207).

Reading Donehower’s work made me question how Appalachian students could negotiate an identity for themselves where use of academic literacy practices would not, as Donehower puts it, “mean a choice between their cultural identity and their social, economic, intellectual, and moral future” (207). This was the choice Gladys made, as described in Chapter Three and alluded to in this chapter. But as I found during my fieldwork, many students were in the contact zones of literacy. They were living with literacy’s contradictions, illustrating how the boundaries of Scribner’s metaphors break down and how new metaphors are created as literacy practices and beliefs circulate.

What emerges from the Sciotoville students in particular is a belief system about literacy that is profoundly shaped by their performance of Appalachian identity—a performance that in turn shapes their performance of an academic identity. For these students, their performance of an Appalachian identity, one which is neighborly and “helps out” others, played a significant role in their development of their metaphors of literacy. It was their attention to issues of neighborliness that lead them to form impromptu writing groups and to teach each other how to use their textbooks—important sites for the learning of academic literacy practices. And it was through these acts of teaching each other academic literacy practices that they began to perform an academic identity as well. In
short, these women moved from being solely learners and students of academic literacy to producers and sponsors of academic literacy—an important shift in their performative identities.

It is to the subject of sponsoring that this discussion will now turn, as in Chapter Five I will examine the sponsors of literacy at work in these students’ lives. In Chapter Four, institutional discourses of literacy and fellow students emerged as important sponsors of belief systems about literacy. The following chapter will build on that work, examining the roles of community and school groups, as well as immediate and extended family members, in sponsoring sometimes-conflicting metaphors of literacy.
CHAPTER 5
COMPETING SPONSORS OF LITERACY

“. . . Witnessing] is kind of like good writing, like Dr. Durgakar was talking about. You have to know what to put in and what to leave out.”—

Katie May

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“He wants to blame me going back to school for his problems, which it is not.”

—Pamela, discussing her husband’s drug addiction

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“Sponsors nevertheless set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty.”—Deborah Brandt, Literacy in American Lives

Deborah Brandt’s Literacy in American Lives has, in a few short years, made a substantial impact on the fields of composition and literacy studies. Literacy in American Lives posits that literacy is not only an individual development, but also an economic one, since “literacy looms as one of the great engines of profit and competitive advantage in the twentieth century” (18). The
individual and the economic are intertwined, Brandt argues, and she frames her analysis by examining what she calls “sponsors of literacy.” According to Brandt, sponsors are “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (19). These sponsors are conduits for the larger economic forces of literacy, as Brandt writes that they are “the means by which these forces present themselves to—and through—individual learners” (19). While interviewing the participants in the case studies that make up her book, Brandt found that sponsors were often individuals: “older relatives, teachers, religious leaders, supervisors, military officers, librarians, friends, editors, influential authors” (19). However, as Brandt notes, sponsors can include commercial entities, such as companies who award prizes in a jingle-writing contest and restaurants who offer gift certificates to children who read a designated number of books, as well as institutions, such as the African-American church.

In the preceding chapter, I described the literacy beliefs of the students of Sciotoville and Riverton, focusing in part on the role the institutions played in shaping these beliefs and the students’ performance of identity, particularly their Appalachian identity. As illustrated in Chapters Three and Four, literacy beliefs and practices are part and parcel of the students’ performance of identity, representing an important stage on which their Appalachianness—or non-Appalachianness, in some cases—was portrayed. Institutional beliefs about, and rewards for, certain types of literacy help foster or sponsor certain beliefs and
performances from the students. Yet schools are not the only, or the most influential, sponsors of literacy in American lives. Brandt writes that “sponsors of literacy are more prolific, diffused, and heterogeneous” (197) than in the past, when schools played a prominent role in literacy education; she later adds, “Schools are no longer the major disseminators of literacy” (198). Thus, the question that surfaced during my research was, if educational institutions are a key sponsor of these students’ literacies, how do other sponsors impact the students’ performance of identity, and more specifically, Appalachianness? Who are the “prolific, diffused, and heterogeneous” sponsors in these students’ lives?

This chapter will focus on these other sponsors, discussing them in terms of two categories that emerged as important in student interviews: school and community groups, such as fraternities and evangelical churches, and immediate and extended family members—not only parents, but also grandparents, aunts and uncles, and siblings. Some of these family members also worked to inhibit the students’ emerging literacy beliefs and practices, in a sense becoming sponsors of competing meanings of literacy. And it was through—and upon—these inhibitors of literacy that the larger social forces that Brandt describes surround literacy were often enacted in the students’ lives.

**School Groups and Community Groups as Sponsors**

Some literacy researchers have recognized the importance of certain kinds of school and community groups in the development and deployment of literacy beliefs and practices. Julie Cheville’s *Minding the Body: What Student Athletes*
*Know about Learning* explores the ways student-athletes learn on and off the court, arguing that writing instructors should develop a theory of body cognition which would draw on these students’ strengths. Haivan Hoang’s unpublished dissertation “‘To Come Together and Create a Movement’: Solidarity Rhetoric in the Vietnamese American Coalition” focuses on a college student organization as a sponsor of group members’ literacy. In *Literacy in American Lives*, Brandt recognizes the pivotal role of the church in sponsoring African-American literacy, following in the tradition of scholarship by Beverly Moss and J.W. Fraser. In this section, I will build upon this scholarship as I discuss fraternities and evangelical Protestant churches—important sponsors in the literacy lives of some of the students.

**School Groups: Fraternities**

In my interviews with Mike, a 26-year-old senior at Riverton University, his fraternity emerged as a sponsor of his literacy and education, more broadly. Mike joined the fraternity—one of only two fraternities on campus—during his first year at Riverton, taking on multiple leadership roles during his college career. Mike planned to step away from leadership roles in the fraternity during his final year of college, as he wanted to focus on finishing his degree and finding a job. However, he intended to actively participate in fraternity functions.

Early in our interviews, Mike pointed to the sponsorship role his fraternity had played in his education, an identification that would seem to fly in the face of conventional wisdom. College fraternities have not often been thought of as
sponsors of students’ literacy. In fact, among some, fraternities are viewed as an inhibitor of students’ literacy and academic performance; additionally, they are even faulted for students’ dangerous and morally heinous behavior. While researching the interplay between fraternities and schooling, I found that most of the scholarship focused on one of three themes: fraternities’ roles in encouraging a culture of violence against women, in facilitating substance abuse, and in contributing to poor academic performance.

Regarding academic performance, several studies have concluded that Greek life has a detrimental impact on students’ learning (Grove and Wasserman; Pike; Pascarella et al). For example, Grove and Wasserman, in a study of college GPAs, conclude that “Greek system membership accounted for over half of the ‘freshman fall’ [the second semester drop in GPA of some freshmen . . .]. Thereafter only fraternity members, not those in sororities, registered sharply below average grade improvements” (170). The authors also note that schools without Greek life did not suffer such noticeable declines in first-year students’ GPAs.

However, when Pascarella et al revisited their 1996 study of first-year students active in Greek life and included second and third-year students in the study, they noted a significant difference:

Any major negative learning consequences of Greek affiliation occur primarily when students pledge a fraternity or sorority in the first year of
After the initial year of college, however, any negative consequences of fraternity or sorority membership may tend to diminish, if not totally disappear. (297)

The image of fraternity life that Mike constructed in our interviews is in line with these findings, as Mike’s remarks suggest that the fraternity had not only a neutral effect, but also a positive impact on his academic performance and literacy development.

As previously noted, Mike pledged his fraternity during his first year at Riverton, and over the years he had held several leadership positions within his fraternity, including recording secretary, historian, and president—posts that required him to negotiate a text-rich environment and multiple audiences. As recording secretary, he was responsible for taking notes at all fraternity meetings and filing these notes, as well as any supplementary materials, such as meeting agendas. As historian, he taught new members the history and tradition of the fraternity and was responsible for recording and preserving the activities, codes of conduct, fliers that promoted events, etc. of the organization. As president, he was in charge of leading all meetings of the chapter and was also primarily responsible for the fraternity’s effort to apply for an alumni charter, a time-consuming effort that required the filing of multiple forms with the fraternity’s national office.

Another part of his duties involved regular meetings with various individuals and groups on campus; as fraternity president, Mike was the face of the fraternity to the public, including university faculty and administration:
“It’s a pretty hectic job. It’s a stressful job. You have to make sure that no one messes up. I was literally here at school, in meetings with one of the faculty or administration, three or four times a week, at least. [. . .] We have the faculty advisor, the advisor to the chapter, that we have to meet with, as well as the student activities advisor that we have to meet with at least once a week.”

During these meetings, Mike worked with various faculty and administrators to check in on the academic progress of fraternity members and to plan and coordinate the fraternity’s philanthropic efforts and social activities. Mike recognized the “Animal House” image many have of the Greek system, noting, “When people hear ‘fraternity,’ the first thing they think of is people partying. But there’s a lot more to it than that. A lot.” And in his description of fraternity life, Mike tried to illustrate what “a lot” was through sharing the demands of leadership roles. In fact, Mike portrayed the social aspect of Greek life as yet another burden:

“Of course there is the social part, the parties. The risk management, if you want to call it that. Those can be so stressful, too. I personally hated having parties. I hated it! Our executive board, everybody on there is stressed out the whole time, trying to make sure everything runs right. Because if something does happen, our executive board, the way our chapter is set up, we’re all accountable.”

Mike went on to discuss the details of party planning and the liabilities involved, such as obtaining security and hiring a professional bartender to ensure there would be no “free-flowing” alcohol during the event—responsibilities that required him to negotiate contracts. Mike also had to sign university documents that stipulated he and other members of the executive board would be accountable for any underage drinking or other lawlessness. Granted, Mike was twenty-six years old at the time of our interview, an age at which “keggers” have lost their
appeal for many individuals. Mike may have also been tempted to paint an overly
innocent image of fraternity life in order to counter the hedonistic portrayals
utilized by the previously cited scholars. His responses are still compelling,
however, as they illustrate the multiple ways in which his literacy practices were
used in the service of the fraternity: taking notes, keeping records, completing
forms, and negotiating contracts.

When I asked Mike if his participation in the fraternity had affected his
education, he vigorously nodded “yes,” stating, “Being in the fraternity has helped
me so much.” Some elements of his response directly touched on elements of
literacy sponsorship, noting how his responsibility for taking notes at meetings
helped him learn how to take better notes in his classes. Study tables, required for
all members unless they had a 4.0 GPA, offered members the opportunity to give
and receive impromptu peer tutoring. The chaplain of the fraternity was
responsible for scheduling study tables and for developing and maintaining a list
of all the courses each member was currently taking or had taken in the past. The
chaplain then scheduled members for study tables in such a way that more
experienced and successful students would be available to assist those who might
be new to college or struggling in a particular course. In this way, the fraternity
became an important sponsor of its members’ academic lives and their literacy.
Other elements of Mike’s response focused on a broader conceptualization of sponsorship, one that emphasized the fraternity’s role in developing particular attitudes and behaviors among its members:

“The fraternity definitely helps you through a lot of stuff, without a doubt. You see freshmen come in, every year, especially in a fraternity, you see them come in, and two years down the road, they’re more of a responsible person. I am a firm believer that our fraternity, our chapter here, deals out a lot of responsibility to people. It helps that person evolve into a more responsible person. Our chapter does a very good job of that. It’s a better process and helps the person come into college and grow up a little bit.”

The fraternity fostered this responsibility by making each new first-year member chair of a committee, such as the alumni reunion or rush committees. While a member of the fraternity’s executive board sits in on all committee meetings and can serve as a mentor to the new chair, it is ultimately the chair’s duty to run all committee meetings, delegate the work that needs to be done, compose reports, and account for the committee’s progress at chapter meetings.

Thus, the fraternity tried to encourage in its members a sense of responsibility to self and others—the same sense of service that permeated the university’s characterization of its relationship to the Appalachian community, as addressed in Chapter Four. This responsibility was enforced by the assignment of particular duties in service to the fraternity and extended to academic life, as seen in the use of study tables and the emphasis on fraternity brothers helping brothers with their academic work. The neighborliness that is often part of a performance of Appalachian identity—a neighborliness that did not emerge in the Riverton classroom—became part of the performance of identity among the members of this fraternity, given the group’s emphasis on sponsoring other members. And
while Mike did not identify as Appalachian, neighborliness became integral to his performance of identity as a leader in this fraternity. The fraternity also helped shaped Mike’s performance of identity as a student, as it lead him to develop certain values (responsibility) and literacy practices (note-taking, studying) that informed his academic life.

**Community Groups: The Church**

Scholars have written extensively about the role of religion and the church in Appalachians’ lives. While some scholarship conducted has focused on the “exotic” elements of some Appalachians’ religious beliefs and customs, such as Thomas Burton’s work on serpent handling, many other Appalachian Studies scholars have focused their attention on the role of religion and the church in Appalachians’ everyday lives. Jones represents this approach to Appalachians’ religious lives, writing, “Mountain people are religious. This does not mean that we always go to church regularly, but we are religious in the sense that most of our values and the meanings we find in life spring from the Bible. To understand mountaineers, one must understand our religion” (39).

Evangelical Christianity is particularly important for consideration in the context of Central Appalachia, according to Howard Dorgan, due to shared characteristics between the region’s people and this religious tradition. These qualities are as follows: “a strong sense of spiritual independence [. . .] a distrust of religious hierarchies [. . .] a lean toward congregational polity [. . .] a God-called and God-trained clergy [. . .] a demand for a personal experience of
redemption [. . . and] a modified Calvinism that accepts God as the controlling force in life” (1283). Thus, my understanding of much Appalachian Studies scholarship led me to develop interview questions about religion and the church, as I speculated that the church might have been an important sponsor of literacy in my case study participants’ lives. Jones notes that “religion and culture are always intertwined” (46), and I felt it was important to inquire as to how that intertwining may have affected the students’ literacy beliefs and practices. These expectations were further shaped by my experiences in Sciotoville, where I first conducted fieldwork, since my case study participants themselves identified religion and the evangelical Christian church as important forces in their lives and discussed their religious upbringing, to varying degrees, in class and in their writing.

My personal history also played a role in developing my assumptions. I grew up in an Appalachian family whose value system was shaped in large part by religion, specifically—though not exclusively—evangelical Christianity. A few months into first grade, my parents enrolled me in a Baptist school, a school from which I would graduate twelve years later. While part of their incentive was to remove me from the Cincinnati Public Schools, another significant motivation for the change was the religious instruction the school would provide. My father never attended church, and my mother only occasionally did so, but both felt it was important that I receive a religious upbringing. Thus, to them, the Baptist
school was a 2-for-1 deal: my attendance there would alleviate their concerns about the public schools in our city and would instill in me a Christian value system without requiring them to take me to church.

My family’s religious heritage shaped my impressions of the role of religion in Appalachians’ lives as well. Grandpa Lykins had been raised as a Mormon; though he was excommunicated from the church when he married Grandma (who was always described by his family as “the divorced Methodist”), he followed many of the church’s edicts until he died. He never consumed any kind of caffeinated beverage, he did not smoke or drink alcohol, and he never cursed. Similarly, Grandma was a religious woman. Though she did not attend church, she identified as a Methodist and said she was “saved;” she based her belief system on the Bible; and she invoked God and the Bible into conversations regularly. And, as noted in the prologue, Grandma read her Bible every day.

Given the religious context of my life, I came to my fieldwork with the assumption that religion and the church may have played a role in the literate development of my case study participants. These assumptions were reinforced in Sciotoville, where religion and evangelical churches were important in my conversations with Julie and Katie May, my two case study participants. However, I discovered as I talked with other students that religion did not always work in their lives in the ways I presumed it might. Mike, for example, did not have any sort of church upbringing and never referred to religion. As discussed in the previous chapter, Michelle was raised Catholic and attended Catholic school; given this educational background, the Catholic Church clearly was a sponsor of
Michelle’s literacy. However, the Catholic Church’s sponsorship role in
Michelle’s life was on an institutional level. For Michelle, the school and church
were so woven together that it was impossible—for her and for me—and perhaps
even unnecessary to differentiate between the roles these institutions played in her
literacy beliefs and practices.

Religion’s sponsorship role was more easily identifiable in the lives of
some Sciotoville students. Julie attended a Pentecostal church as a child, and her
family members still attended this church. Julie’s religious upbringing had
become a source of pain for her over the years, especially as she came to terms
with her sexual orientation. Thus, Julie was uncomfortable talking about the role
of religion and the church in her life and literacy, and I tried to respect Julie’s
feelings by not pushing the issue in interviews. Later in this chapter, however, we
will see how religion and the church played a role in her family’s disapproval of
Julie’s life, including her education, and how their beliefs led them to sponsor
competing meanings of literacy.

Katie May was the clearest example of how the church can play an
important sponsorship role. Katie May identified as a born-again Christian and
attended a non-denominational church with an evangelical Christian philosophy.
As a child, she attended a Baptist church and participated in the church’s Awana
program, which is an international Christian organization that seeks to promote
Bible reading and memorization among children. As an Awana veteran myself, I
knew exactly what Katie May was talking about when she mentioned her
participation in the program; children are divided into groups based on age and

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meet weekly, often during a church’s Wednesday evening prayer service. While these weekly meetings are predominantly social in nature, including a snack and games, almost all of these social activities are connected to reading and memorizing the Bible in ways that promote traditional academic literacy practices. For example, during my time in Awana as a Spark (the group designed for children in kindergarten-second grade), I vividly remember races to find particular Bible verses and playing other games, such as competing to see who could most quickly fill in the missing words of an incomplete Bible verse written on the chalkboard. During story time, the story that was shared was from the Bible.

There were also workbooks, sections of which were to be completed during the meeting and sections of which were to be completed as homework before the next meeting. Among the assignments in these workbooks was the memorization of particular Bible verses. Once these verses could be recited from memory at a meeting, the child would be rewarded with a small prize, such as a sticker or a pencil. Once children memorized a particular number of verses or completed a workbook, they would receive a patch they could display on their Awana vest (which was similar in design to the uniform of the Girl Scouts). Other
incentives were also given to the children in an attempt to promote their interest in reading and memorizing the Bible, as Katie May further described in interviews:

Katie May: “In sixth grade and fifth grade I did Awanas at a Baptist church, and I loved that (laughing).”

Sara: “What did you like about it?”

Katie May: “I liked the memorizing, because they give you so many incentives to do it.”

Sara: “Do you remember some of the things that you wanted?”

Katie May: “Yeah, there was, the group that memorized the most Scriptures got to go ice skating and that type of thing. And in school I always tried really hard, so at Awanas I did the same thing. I would do a lot. And I ended up getting “Clubber of the Year.” I just really enjoyed it. We played games and that sort of thing, too.”

Sara: “So it sounds like there was a social element to it that you liked a lot.”

Katie May: “Yeah.”

As we saw in Chapter Three, the social nature of Katie May’s literacy reveals itself here. Through her participation in fun activities with groups of children her own age, Katie May was encouraged to develop particular beliefs and literacy practices, such as reading and memorizing the Bible and valuing those activities. She also learned how to use literacy tools, such as dictionaries and encyclopedias, through her knowledge of looking up Bible verses via reference words at the top of the page. Yet these activities were not merely fun and games. Brandt writes that “sponsors deliver the ideological freight that must be borne for access to what they have” (20). In this case, the ideological freight that Kate May bore for
access to those treats and rewards was an evangelical Christian worldview, one that would shape the materials she read and when, how, and why she read them.

Katie May ended her involvement with the Awana program at this church after sixth grade, but eighth grade became a pivotal point in her spiritual and literate development. Katie May stated that during eighth grade, “I recommitted myself to Christ,” and this reinforced commitment was evidenced, and enhanced, by specific literacy practices. At the urging of her youth pastor, she began taking notes during sermons “so I could pay more attention to everything.” It was also around this time that she began making a habit of looking up unfamiliar words she found in the Bible:

“When reading the Bible sometimes I’ll find older words. For instance, one that got my attention was the verse, I can’t remember the exact sentence, something like, ‘All of the sheep except for one.’ But instead of saying ‘except for one,’ it said ‘save one.’ So then I looked that up to find out what it meant. So little things like that, I’ve noticed how language has changed greatly.”

By learning not only how to take notes, but also the value of taking notes—and looking up unfamiliar words—Katie May began to develop literacy practices that would benefit her academic life as well. While Katie May remarked that taking notes in church helped her learn how to listen in class and figure out what was most important to remember, she also said that taking notes and looking up words “got me in the habit” of engaging in those literacy practices in her academic life as well. As a composition instructor who frequently finds herself reminding students to write down important points during class and to look up unknown
words in their readings, Katie May’s development of this habit seems to me to be important in understanding the relationship between her spiritual and academic literacy practices.

The daily devotionals that Katie May began during eighth grade further illustrate how her spiritual and literate development were mutually reinforcing. Devotionals are short books designed to reinforce daily prayer and reading of the Bible. Most devotionals I saw and used as a youth consisted of short daily readings based on a Bible passage; the devotional directs readers to read the Bible passage, then read the devotional as supplementary material that encourage further reflection. Finally, the readers are to conclude the reading with prayer; some devotionals even include suggested prayers for the day, though not all do, thus blending silent reading of the devotional with the reading aloud of prayers.

Many Christians refer to both the books and the act of working through the books as “devotionals,” though in the excerpt below, Katie May refers to her reading and praying as “quiet time”:

Katie May: “I would do quiet time every morning. . .”

Sara [overlapping]: “Did that include a devotional-type thing? Because I know there are those little books where you read stuff and then you write stuff in the book every day. . .”

Katie May [overlapping]: “Yeah, I’ve done a lot of those. That’s what I use the quiet time for. [. . .] In eighth grade was when I really started to, I’ve always been a Christian. I grew up in a Christian home, and I got saved when I was seven. But I never really did any Christian stuff. Then
in eighth grade was when I recommitted myself. My brother encouraged me a lot with books that he had read, he’d say, ‘Hey, try this one, it’s good.’”

In this section of the interview, Katie May connects performing particular literacy acts with the development of her faith, identifying her use of “quiet time”—reading the Bible, reading the devotional text, and praying—as part of her “recommitment” to Christianity. Later in the interview, Katie May made this connection even more explicit, stating, “I used the devotionals as a way to become a better Christian, to become closer to God.”

With these statements, Katie May echoes the literacy as state of grace metaphor referenced in the previous chapter, though in this case, literacy became a way to attain a state of grace not with society, but with God. Scribner writes that while she had also termed this metaphor “literacy as salvation,” she found the label “unsatisfactory” (76). Yet for this aspect of Katie May’s literacy beliefs and practices, it is an apt description. For Katie May, literacy was a way of reinforcing her salvation and deepening her spirituality, making her an example of Scribner’s observation:

A concern with preserving and understanding scripture is at the core of many religious traditions [. . .] the literacy-as-salvation metaphor had an almost literal interpretation in the practice of post-Luther Protestant groups to require of the faithful the ability to read and remember the Bible and other religious material. (77)

This metaphor has a long history of use, as Graff notes, “[A] reforming Protestantism was the dynamic force in those few societies that achieved near-
universal adult literacy before the nineteenth century. [. . .] Reading the Bible was the vehicle for this impulse, for religious indoctrination derived from the moral message of this print” (24).

Katie May’s involvement with Awana, her note taking, and her use of devotionals all exemplify this near-literal view of literacy as salvation. In this sense, Katie May personifies Brandt’s argument about members of an African-American church she studied. Brandt acknowledges that while “faith in God and faith in learning, once integrated incentives for the spread of literacy in the mass American society in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, increasingly grew apart as secular literacy and education eclipsed religious literacy,” for members of the African-American church, “the original connection between faith and learning were still alive” (121). For Katie May, a white evangelical Christian, the connection between faith and literacy was still very much alive as well.

Church services also connected Katie May’s literacy and spiritual development. In interviews, Katie May extensively discussed the use of testimonials—or “praise reports,” as her church referred to them—during both youth group and regular Sunday services, as well as the practice of witnessing. Testimonials typically consist of church members voluntarily rising from their seats and extemporaneously speaking about the role of God in their lives, how he has helped them overcome challenges and/or particular sins, and the like; generally, testimonials serve as an opportunity for members to engage in a bit of public confession and/or thank God for blessing them—often referred to as “giving praise to God” (hence the use of the term “praise report” by Katie May’s
church). Witnessing is the act of sharing one’s Christian faith with non-believers and is considered by evangelical Christians to be an important part of their responsibility as Christians.

While testifying and witnessing are usually unrehearsed speech events that involve minimal, if any, use of text, Katie May made important connections between them and her literacy development. When I asked her what she thought of the relationship between her literacy and her spiritual activities, she replied:

“It [church] helped me be more comfortable. I’ve learned how to talk to a variety of people; it helped me be more comfortable talking to people, relating certain things. How to talk to certain people.”

Sara: “What do you mean by that?”

Katie May: “Well, as an eighth grader you learn how to talk to your friends, how to talk casual, but with the pastor, it’s more formal. Then with other people, older people in the church, it’s a lot different, too.”

Sara: “So really what you’re talking about here is audience.”

Katie May: “Yeah. To be the most effective with them. To know the different personalities you’re talking to, so you can kind of meet them at their level. [. . . Witnessing] is kind of like good writing, like Dr. Durgakar was talking about. You have to know what to put in and what to leave out. So I might be able to relate to someone on a certain level. Since as a person I have lots of different aspects and different religious experiences, I could pick the ones that were more, the experiences that would more relate to this person.”

Here we see interplay between the “oral” and the “literate.” Contrary to the “Great Divide” theory of orality and literacy posed by scholars such as Walter Ong, Jack Goody, and Ian Watt, Heath argues in *Ways with Words* that in the communities she studied, “[T]here are multiple uses of written and oral language, and members have access to and use both” (230). By relating the oral traditions
of her church to the written traditions of the academy, Katie May illustrates illustrate the dynamic relationship between “oral” and “literate” traditions.

Katie May’s participation in church-sanctioned activities such as testifying and witnessing proved to be important as she learned about academic literacy practices, because these were the sites in which she first learned about rhetorical concepts such as audience. Bartholomae writes that “expert writers [. . .] can better imagine how a reader will respond to a text and can transform or restructure what they have to say around a goal shared with a teacher” (593). Thanks to the practices the church had honed, Katie May had already learned about “reader-based prose” and had experience in negotiating the demands of an audience, experiences that would help her in understanding the rhetorical concepts presented to her as a first-year composition student.

Katie May not only learned about audience, but also about genre through her participation in the church. When I asked Katie May to describe the use of testimonials in her church, she noted that there was a format to them: “They’d get up and testify—we’d call it praise reports—about different things. They’d prayed about something, and God answered their prayers. [. . .] They’d say the problem, say how they prayed about it, and then say how God answered it.” Later in this segment of the interview, Katie May noted that, while this expectation was
never directly stated, there was an implicit assumption that all testimonials would conform to this pattern, and one learned the genre of the testimonial by watching and listening to others—“kind of like school,” she added.

The genre of the testimonial also shared commonalities with genres Katie May would produce in first-year composition, namely the genre of the argument. Both a testimonial and an argument ask a rhetor to identify a problem, explore possible solutions, and discuss their findings. Thus, Katie May entered college with an implicit awareness of how to construct an argument—a highly valued skill in academic writing and one that would serve her well in many courses, including (but not only) first-year writing. In *Other People’s Children*, Lisa Delpit argues, “There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a ‘culture of power’” in the classroom (24); she later adds, “The codes or rules I’m speaking of relate to linguistic forms, communicative strategies, and presentation of self” and notes that these codes are transmitted implicitly (25). Although Katie May did not acknowledge the similarities between the genre of the testimonial and the academic argument, she did relate her awareness of this genre, its conventions, and the transmission of those conventions to the literacy practices of school—which also have their own generic conventions that are transmitted indirectly. This awareness gave her an important advantage in understanding the workings of the “culture of power” that Delpit describes.
Family Members as Sponsors

Katie May’s stories of literacy and spirituality indicate that multiple literacy sponsors were at work in her life. Some of these sponsors included the church as an institution and individuals, such as the youth pastor who encouraged her to take notes, who were directly connected to the church and representative of the church’s role in her literacy beliefs and practices. But her brother, an important sponsor of Katie May’s literacy, indicates the role not only of religion, but also of family, in the development of her literacy. While some work by literacy scholars such as Shirley Brice Heath and Denny Taylor points to parents as significant forces in the development of literacy, my research pointed to multiple family members, including but not limited to parents, as sponsors of literacy.

siblings

As alluded to in the previous section, Katie May’s brother played an important role in the intertwining of literacy and spirituality in her life, since he first recommended that she begin daily devotionals; he also offered specific suggestions of texts for her to read. Her brother was four years older and, at the time that he began to take on this sponsorship role in her life, preparing to attend
Bible college. Given their age difference, Katie May’s brother was more mature and knowledgeable about both spirituality and literacy, making him an appropriate sponsor in her life.

Katie May’s brother demonstrated his sponsorship in other ways as well. Her brother offered her a ride to church until Katie May was old enough to drive herself, and as Katie May stated, he “encouraged” her spiritual development through various uses of literacy: “Through notes. I’d find a note in my school notebooks. I’d turn the pages and there would be something he’d written me a couple nights before. Also with the books [the devotionals]. He recommended a lot of things to me.” The notes usually had a theme of encouragement, drawing on stories from the Bible to make a point: “I think he was trying to encourage me. He’d write things like, ‘I’ve been praying for you.’ He’d mention things from the Bible, about people who had gone through the same thing. He’d talk about characters from the Bible that I could relate with.” After Katie May’s brother moved across the country to become a youth pastor, they began exchanging emails once or twice a week as a way to stay in touch and to continue this spiritual sponsorship. The spiritual sponsorship Katie May’s brother offered was inextricably tied to literacy, as almost all instances of sponsorship that Katie May shared with me involved print: recommending specific readings, writing notes, making Biblical analogies, and emailing.

Katie May was not the only participant with a sibling who played a sponsorship role in her life. Mike’s older brother was an indirect sponsor in his life, since it was his brother who recommended that he join a fraternity: “He
really encouraged me to join. He’d been in one in college, too, and he said it really helped him do better in school. He said it teaches responsibility, helps you grow as a person, especially coming out of high school.” Mike was a quiet participant at times, one who was reluctant to elaborate on his answers to interview questions and who was quick to underestimate the value of his experiences with literacy. This made it difficult for me to learn specifics about his brother’s role in his life. But while Mike did not mention learning any particular “lessons of literacy” from his brother, as Katie May did, it was apparent that his brother’s guidance led Mike to one of the influential sponsors of literacy in his life.

Extended Family Members

While for some students it was immediate family members who exerted the most influence in their literacy lives, extended family members, such as Michelle’s grandparents and cousins and Katie May’s aunt, were significant sponsors as well. Michelle lived in rural Massie County, a 30-minute drive from the downtown campus of Riverton University—making it difficult for her to return home for lunch or studying during the day. Her grandparents lived in town, however, and they invited their grandchildren to come to their house during the school day. Several of Michelle’s cousins also attended Riverton University, and
all of those cousins would gather at their grandparents’ house for lunch and study breaks. In an interview, Michelle described these visits to her grandparents’ home:

“Grandma will cook lunch for whoever’s there, but we’re all in and out at different times due to our class schedules, so we’ll bring our own food to eat, too. But the main thing is that it’s a quiet place to study. Grandma and Grandpa will ask how things are going and that sort of thing, but then they’ll leave you alone so you can get your work done. And if they’re not going to be home, they’ll leave the door open so we can come in and do our work.”

As we have seen before, Michelle’s grandparents did not sponsor her literacy through teaching her particular literacy practices, modeling textual interaction, and the like. Instead, Michelle’s grandparents’ sponsorship arose from their offer of material goods—namely food and study space—that would assist in the development of her academic literacy and education. Michelle’s grandparents did not have the necessary academic literacy themselves to assist Michelle and her cousins with their homework and the like; however, they could, and did, offer their approval of academic literacy by offering a warm meal and a quiet place to study. These acts, which on the surface may seem unconnected to literacy, were a powerful, unstated show of support for the education of their grandchildren.

Michelle also commented on the role the cousins played in each other’s education, noting that since the cousins were at varying stages in their college careers and had different academic strengths:

“There is always somebody around who can help you with your homework. Or you can help them. It’s really nice to be able to talk with
them, if I’m stuck on something or have a question. Or sometimes we just give each other advice about what classes to register for, which professors are good, that sort of thing.”

Through this support, Michelle and her cousins became sponsors of each other’s academic literacy practices and education, broadly speaking. Like Mike and his fraternity brothers, and like the Sciotoville students discussed in Chapter Three, Michelle’s extended family evidenced a “We’re all in this together” mentality, one that valued “helping out” and teaching others specific ways in which to “do school.”

Other students also discussed the importance of family members who helped them learn how to “do school.” For Katie May, one of her aunts was a pivotal sponsor of literacy. As quoted in the previous chapter, Katie May stated in an interview that her aunt “teaches me how to do school,” and we later talked further of the specific suggestions her aunt gave her for “doing school.” Katie May had a difficult time during her first two quarters at Big State University; always an A student in high school, she found herself struggling to make Cs in the chemistry and calculus courses required for pre-med majors—grades that put her in danger of losing her scholarships, which required a B average. Her aunt, a dentist who earned her undergraduate and professional degrees at Big State, sat Katie May down over a break and gave her a “talking-to,” as Katie May put it.

Katie May: “She definitely, I brought my grades up a lot last spring quarter, and she definitely influenced me in that area. I felt like I had what it took [to do well in school], but I didn’t know how to channel that. And
so she really guided me and showed me, this is the way you do it. It really was. At first I didn’t believe her, because I’d never done study groups. But it really helped.

Sara: “How did she, how did she show you, ‘this is how you do it’? Was is just the study groups, or do she give you other kinds of advice?”

Katie May: “She would talk to me, she talked to me at the end of fall quarter [Katie May’s first term of college], and said, ‘This is what you need to do and went down the list. And then…”

Sara [interrupting]: “What was the list?”

Katie May: “Do study groups. Talk to the professors. Do all the homework. She asked me how I studied, and I said I read the chapters but then I’m usually too tired to do the homework, so I just read the chapters. She was like, well maybe you should do the homework first and then go back and read the chapter. So she really helped me with that.”

Katie May’s responses indicate the pivotal acts of literacy sponsorship her aunt took on. Her aunt directed her as to which academic literacy practices were most important—doing the written homework as opposed to the reading homework—and directed her towards other, more local sponsors of literacy: her peers and professors. So once again, we see a sponsor whose importance came in part from her recommendation of other sponsors of literacy.

Katie May’s aunt told her not only to seek out these other sponsors of literacy, but also how to approach them, and the aunt stayed in regular contact with Katie May so she could continue her sponsorship of Katie May:

Sara: “Did she give you strategies about how to talk to professors?”

Katie May: “Yeah. She said, ‘Go up to your Chemistry 122 professor and say, I got a C- in Chemistry 121, and I struggled for that, and I don’t want to get another C- in this class. How can I improve?’ [. . .] And then she’d talk to me once a week and ask me, so are you doing the things we talked about? Are you doing the study groups and talking to the professors? That sort of thing. [. . .] We have AIM instant messenger, so
we talk at least once a week through that. At first it was probably two times a week, but then, as she saw I was doing what I needed to do, we went down to once a week.”

Sara: “How did she come to sit you down and give you the talking-to? Did you kind of come home and cry on her shoulder, or did your parents tell her something was up? Or did she just ask you about how you were doing in school?”

Katie May: “My mom would call her and say, ‘Katie May’s crying! What should I do?!’ That type of thing. And then I came home for break and we talked.”

Here we see another sponsor of Katie May’s literacy emerge: her mother, who first informed the aunt of Katie May’s struggles in school. It is to the subject of parents as sponsors as literacy that we shall now turn.

Parents

In studies of family literacy, it is often parents who receive the most attention, and our culture’s conventional wisdom places heavy emphasis on the role parents play in the development of their children’s literacy practices. While part of my intent in this section of this chapter has been to illustrate that many family members can become sponsors of a young person’s literacy, I also recognize that for many individuals, their parents are among the earliest and most primary sponsors of literacy.

Parents’ sponsorship can take different forms, however, as illustrated by the experiences of my case study participants. For some parents, such as Katie May’s mother, sponsorship meant connecting their children with more knowledgeable sponsors. In the last transcribed section of the Katie May
interview, Katie May stated that her mother had informed Katie May’s aunt—her sister—of Katie May’s problems with school and had asked for assistance: “Katie May’s crying! What should I do?!” Katie May’s mother did not attend college, whereas Katie May’s aunt held undergraduate and professional degrees. Katie May’s mother may not have had the knowledge of academic literacy practices to advise Katie May about her difficulties in school, but she knew someone who did—her sister—and she asked her sister to work with Katie May. While this may have been an indirect form of sponsorship, it was incredibly important in helping Katie May acquire the literacy practices she needed during her first year of college.

Other parents engaged in other indirect, as well as more direct, forms of sponsorship as well. Michelle’s father had two associate degrees from Riverton University and worked at the local hospital as the supervisor of bio-medical engineering. He loomed large in Michelle’s discussions of literacy. One of her earliest memories of books involved looking at her father’s college textbooks; he was enrolled at Riverton while Michelle was a small child. After Michelle’s father earned his last degree, he did not put away his books. Instead, he kept them displayed on the family bookshelf, and as she grew up, Michelle continued to read them:

“I loved looking at his books when I was little. Still do. I look at them now sometimes to see if they might explain something a little better, something I’m confused about. I know he’s got a physics book up there that I should look at. [. . .] He never showed them to me. They were
just always there. [. . .] As a kid I looked at them, not knowing what they were. But as I got older and thinking about college, it hit me, what they were, and I looked at them to see what college would be like.”

In addition to the textbooks Michelle’s father kept on-hand, he also subscribed to several science magazines that he read, partly to stay aware of new developments in his line of work, and partly for the pleasure of reading about science.

While her father did not directly encourage her to read these magazines, his modeling of a certain type of behavior—an interest in continued learning and a love of science—combined with the easy availability of texts led Michelle to develop an interest in science and read these books and magazines as well. Michelle directly credited her skill and interest in math and science to her father, an unsurprising development given the types of print materials her father brought into the house via his work and education. As Brandt notes:

Though not always the focus of explicit instruction and not often school oriented, work-related reading and writing provided children real-world information about how literacy functions [. . . and] brought at least some children into contact with the material assets and social power of major literacy sponsors—corporations, industries, merchants, governments, and universities. (199)

While Michelle’s mother worked at the hospital as well, she worked in the data entry department; she attended a business college for two years and did not earn a degree. Though Michelle did note in interviews that her mother always encouraged her to go to college, she made it clear her father played a more active sponsorship role in her life through his sharing of texts and, as I will soon discuss, his specific guidance about her education. In Michelle’s family, there was an
unstated understanding that her father would be the one to develop Michelle’s interest in science and to advise her about education, since he had two associate degrees and work experience in scientific fields.

Thus, it was Michelle’s father who had the career path with more economic and cultural capital—one that a college-bound daughter would be more likely to emulate. Brandt writes that fathers are often overlooked in studies of family literacy, due to an emphasis on “the nurture of preschool children,” a presumably “motherly” domain (200). But Michelle’s case is representative of Brandt’s notion that “[t]he historically privileged position that men have occupied in education and employment made fathers in many households the conduits of specialized skills and materials that could be of interest and use to other family members” (200). It was Michelle’s repeated exposure to the world of scientific reading materials, via her father, that set her on the path of a chemistry/pre-pharmacy major. Her father also played a direct role in her educational goals, advising her to take particular courses in high school:

“My sophomore year, I doubled up on math classes so I could go farther [take more advanced courses in high school]. I knew that I really wanted to go towards the medical field, and I knew, because my dad told me, that you had to have a lot of science, since obviously it’s the big thing in the medical field. So you gotta get that in. So I doubled up in that.”

The “doubling-up” in math and science courses paid off, as Michelle was quickly moving through her courses at Riverton and was looking into transferring to a joint B.S./PharmD program at a large state university a few hours from home.

Given her father’s educational background and work experience, he had the knowledge to tell Michelle what types of courses she needed to be taking and
when—a critical factor in determining what careers would later be open to her and in enabling her success at Riverton. When I think back to my own high school experiences, I know that, while I was a bright student, I was thoroughly unaware of the demands particular college majors would pose. I simply met the general demands of most colleges (four English classes, three math and science courses, two foreign language classes, etc.), thinking that meant I was taking “college prep” courses. My parents, who knew less about the ways of school than I did, thought the same. I realize now that if I had decided to pursue a major that required advanced science or math, my lack of even the most basic knowledge of chemistry or calculus would have all but closed those fields to me. Thus, Michelle’s father’s ability to steer her towards particular courses—towards developing particular kinds of academic literacies, if you will—strikes me as a very important moment of sponsorship in her life, one that determined which educational and career paths would be available to her in the future.

Inhibitors of Literacy

While the students I interviewed told many stories of literacy sponsorship, as our interviews continued, other stories about literacy emerged as well. In these stories, a darker side of literacy sponsorship emerged. Literacy, particularly academic literacy, became a dangerous force, one that could distance students from family members and loved ones. For a few students, their pursuit of academic literacy vis-à-vis a college degree put them at odds, in ways big and small, with some of the most important people in their lives. Some of these
people sought to inhibit the students’ development of this literacy through their sponsorship of competing meanings of literacy. These individuals did not inhibit the development of the students’ literacy practices alone, however; social forces, such as poor health care and stereotypical gender roles, played a significant part as well. Brandt writes, “Literacy spread last and always less well to remote rural areas and newer, poorer industrial areas—a geographic and political legacy that, even today, in the United States, helps to exacerbate inequalities by race, region, and occupation” (88). The forces at work in these students’ lives, sometimes presented themselves in the form of individual inhibitors, reveal some of the inequalities still at work in parts of Appalachia.

Mike’s Story

For Mike, attaining a college degree had been a long, drawn-out process. While he began college at the age of eighteen, at the time of our interview he was twenty-six and just entering his senior year. One reason why his college education had taken seven years to that point was his repeated transfers between institutions. While he started his education at Riverton, after his first year there he transferred to Big State University to major in architecture, a major Riverton did not offer. However, he was unhappy at an institution that large, and as he progressed in the major, he found that “I didn’t want to do that for the rest of my life. I wanted to study computers instead.” After two years at Big State, he
returned to Riverton, but only two of his classes at Big State transferred, due to the change of major and the different general education requirements at the two universities.

But his health was the factor that most slowed his progress to degree. Mike developed a problem with his kidneys while he was enrolled in Riverton, a problem that required a minor surgery at the local hospital. The surgery involved inserting a stint into one of his kidneys to help improve its function and to reduce the pain he felt every day. While this was not life-threatening surgery, Mike had to withdraw from school for a quarter as he healed. As it turned out, however, Mike’s surgery wasn’t so simple: “I got an infection. It was pretty bad. They put me in the hospital for four or five days. I don’t even remember being in the hospital, I was so sick. It was a staph infection. It was pretty bad.”

After his hospital stay, Mike returned to his parents’ home in Sciotoville and continued to recover from the infection, which left him weakened. During the course of his recovery, it was determined that the surgery had not corrected the problem with his kidneys; in fact, the condition had worsened. At this point, frustrated by the care their son was receiving and worried about his health, Mike’s parents took him to the campus of Big State University so that he could be treated at the university’s medical center:

“I was still in so much pain every day, which is what the first surgery was supposed to fix. And then I developed that staph infection, which you get from the [surgical] instruments not being sterile. So when that happened,
we decided that I should change doctors, and I went up to Big State. They
couldn’t get me in for the surgery for a while, so I missed even more
school. But at least they fixed my kidney.”

All told, Mike lost a year of school as he went through the first surgery and
recovery; the staph infection and recovery; and the second surgery and recovery.
When I asked Mike if he ever wanted to give up during this time and quit school
all together, he responded, “Yes. But what kept me going was my parents. My
parents were dead set on me getting through college.”

Mike’s story illustrates multiple forces at work in his literacy life. His
first surgery, at a small country hospital, turned into a disaster, with the failure of
the stint to treat the problem and the development of a staph infection. Mike
attributed both of these problems to the health care he received, and given the
state of health care in Central Appalachia and Massie County, Riverton’s home
county, it is quite likely Mike received inadequate care. Massie County has been
identified by the Appalachian Regional Commission as economically distressed,
and according to Richard P. Mulcahy, the “supply of doctors in the distressed
counties is one primary-care physician for every 2,128 person and one specialist
for every 2,857 individuals” (1635). This is in comparison to one primary-care
doctor for every 1,099 persons and specialist for every 588 in economically
competitive Appalachian counties (Mulcahy 1635). The lack of quality health
care in the region caused serious hardship for Mike and very nearly derailed his
college career.

But Mike’s story also reveals the larger social forces that worked to help
him return to college. His parents had the economic means to support him
throughout his illness, to care for him in their home, to seek out second opinions, and to take him to Big State for further medical treatment. His parents also had the means to support him financially following the second surgery. Prior to these health problems, Mike had worked full time and gone to school. But Mike stated that after he recovered from his second surgery, “my parents told me they wanted me to focus on finishing school and staying healthy. They were afraid working would get me run-down and sick again. So they’re paying for my school now and helping me with money to live on.” The importance of this type of economic sponsorship, as well as his parents’ insistence that he finish his degree, cannot be overrated; simply put, without the sponsorship of his parents throughout this challenging time, it is highly debatable whether Mike would have returned to school—or if his health would have permitted him to return.

Women’s Stories

While Mike’s story reveals some of the economic forces that sponsor or inhibit academic literacy, the stories of Pamela and Julie reveal how traditional gender roles can inhibit academic literacy—or, at the very least, sponsor competing notions of that literacy. I will first discuss Pamela, a thirty-three year old student at Riverton University.

Pamela

When I met Pamela during the first week of class, she was eager to participate in the case study, but she explained to me that she might have to drop
the class due to problems at home. While she had just been accepted into the nursing program—a rigorous and competitive program at Riverton—she was considering withdrawing from it as well. Pamela was going through a divorce and was worried about its impact on her sons, who were nine and thirteen years old: “The kids, especially the little one, really need my support right now, and I’m worried he’s not going to have that if I have my nose stuck in a book.” There were also financial considerations; in order to accommodate the class schedule and homework the nursing major demanded, Pamela, who worked as a licensed practical nurse at the local hospital, would have to limit herself to 16 hours of work a week. Given the pending divorce, she literally could not afford to make that change.

As we began our first—and only—interview, Pamela explained why her plans for school were in a state of transition:

“I started here two years ago, full-time, but then last year I took a couple quarters off to deal with stuff at home. And now my status fluctuates. I can’t predict what it will be. So much depends on my husband. Soon to be ex-husband. At first he was very supportive. And then his insecurities. . . (trailing off). That’s why we’re getting a divorce. I’ll just tell you: he’s got a prescription drug abuse problem. He’s buying them from the street.”

Pamela’s estranged husband suffered a back injury at work and, in the course of his treatment, was put on prescription painkillers, including OxyContin (or Oxy). During his disability leave from work and recovery, he eventually grew addicted to Oxy. His addiction is sadly representative of the problems facing many Central Appalachians; Oxy has become the drug of choice in the region, to such an extent that it is commonly referred to as “hillbilly heroin.” And like heroin, Oxy can
have a devastating effect. To give one example of the severity of the problem, the Appalachian Regional Commission states in “Substance Abuse in Appalachia”: “Appalachian Kentucky is experiencing drug related deaths at about four times the rate of the rest of the state”—deaths that, for the most part, are attributable to OxyContin. Though Pamela’s estranged husband was alive, his addiction caused serious emotional and financial hardship for the family: he had difficulty keeping a job, and he had emptied the joint bank accounts he had with Pamela in order to buy more Oxy. The consequences of his actions were mortgage and car payments so far behind that Pamela feared she might lose both her home and her car.

Pamela continued to discuss her estranged husband and his addiction, directly relating his addiction to her pursuit of a college degree:

“And at first he was really supportive. In fact, before I went back to school, I actually wrote a paper about this for my first English class. It was something like, ‘Why are you here?’ And I had said, to my kids and my husband, I had said, ‘Okay, here it is. I’m gonna go back to my school, you’re going to have to help me pick up the slack with the house,’ and everybody was in agreement. If one of them had said, ‘No, I’m not willing to do that,’ I probably wouldn’t have come. But it was a family decision. And now his insecurities . . . (trailing off). He thinks, he wants to blame me going to school for his problems, which it is not. It has nothing to do with me going back to school.”

Indeed, even before we sat down for this interview after class, Pamela had related her estranged husband’s attempts to attribute the cause of his addiction to her schooling; when she approached me after class, she told me that her husband had “problems” and stated, “He says it’s my fault for going back to school. Because as the man, he should be the one to provide for the family, not me.” Apparently, he was despondent over the loss of his income (due to his work injury) and
threatened by Pamela’s emergence as the breadwinner and most highly educated member of the family. In arguments with Pamela, her estranged husband connected these losses—both of money and of status—and perceived them as the cause of his subsequent addiction.

As we have seen time and again in previous chapters, gender roles play a large part in circumscribing the opportunities available to men and women within the Central Appalachian region. More women go to college because they are deemed to “need” it, since it is hard for them to find a job that offers sustainable pay without a college degree. Men traditionally have not gone to college, because jobs that could support a family were available to them without said degree. Yet given the exodus of jobs from this region, as well as changing life circumstances, gender roles are in flux. Whether it is due to a job being outsourced or being out of work due to workplace injury and subsequent addiction—as was the case in Pamela’s marriage—many men are no longer the primary breadwinner for their families.

For couples steeped in the region’s traditional gender roles (Bush and Lash 170), this break from tradition could have significant consequences. In her book *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices Since College*, Kathy Sohn introduces us to Sarah, a former student of Sohn’s and a woman whose marriage had been affected by her education, much like Pamela’s. Sarah said of her husband, “He was a traditional man who wanted me to be more passive. He felt that he should be the breadwinner and felt that my being in college was a threat to his manhood in providing for his family” (131). Drawing
on the old Appalachian maxim that “whistlin’ and crowin’ hens always come to no good ends,” Sohn writes that in parts of Central Appalachia, “Women are not supposed to whistle or crow; those who objected [to women’s changing roles] were threatened by these women’s growth and change” (77). As we see from Sohn’s study of Sarah and the example of Pamela in this study, husbands are highly vulnerable to feeling threatened by their wives’ educations, given the confluence in the region of traditional gender roles, limited economic opportunities, and medical issues such as disability and addiction.

**Julie**

Like Pamela, Julie was also under a tremendous amount of pressure to live up to traditional gender roles and to abandon her pursuit of a college degree, though unlike Pamela, Julie’s pressure came from multiple sources. Julie, a twenty-four year old mother of a kindergartner, first attended college as an eighteen-year-old fresh out of high school. Julie had been a good student throughout high school, and her mother and stepfather were generally supportive of her college plans. So Julie enrolled at the local community college (Julie, while from Central Appalachia, is not a native of Sciotoville or its home state).

Soon after the fall semester started, however, Julie discovered she was pregnant, and her life quickly changed:

“I was under so much pressure. My mom and step-dad told me that I had to drop out of school, now that I was going to become a mother. I had to focus on my child and what was best for it. And he [the father of her child] and his mother said this, too. They all just wanted us to hurry up and get married. I really wanted to stay in school, but there was just no
support for it all. My ex-husband always went along with whatever his mother said, so there was no support there. And then I had terrible morning sickness and was constantly getting sick; I was so afraid of throwing up in class. Eventually, it seemed easier to stop fighting everybody and to quit, so I did.”

For the first year of her son’s life, Julie was a stay-at-home-mother, and while she enjoyed being home with her son, school was always in the back of her mind: “I knew I never should have dropped out.” Then economic demands began taking a toll on the family; Julie described her ex-husband as young and irresponsible, and he lost several jobs. Julie found a job at a call center and went to work, eventually out-earning her husband—a fact that added stress to an already shaky marriage. When her son was four, Julie and her husband divorced. Shortly thereafter, Julie moved to Sciotoville and enrolled at the university.

Julie’s family was aghast at these developments. Julie stated in interviews that numerous relatives told her she was “abandoning her child” by returning to school. Julie saw her return to school as a way to provide a better life for her son, but her relatives, especially her mother, did not agree:

Julie: “Mom is always telling me that my place is in the home, that I should be taking care of him, that school is robbing him of me.”

Sara: “But you worked before you went back to school. So how is being away from him for work different from being away from him for school?”

Julie: “That’s just it. It’s not. Well, I am working now, part-time, while I go to school, and they say it’s too much, that I shouldn’t be working and going to school. But I try to arrange my schedule so that I’m not away from him any more than I would be then if I worked full-time. Mom and my step-dad are always telling me that it’s selfish for me to be in school, that I should just be working full-time and supporting my son. ‘You made
your bed, now you have to lie in it.’ That’s what they’re always saying to me. It was one thing for me to go to school before I had him, but now it’s something else.”

Julie attributed her family’s response to their strong religious beliefs, since “their church teaches a woman’s place is in the home.” But traditional gender roles were at work in complex and contradictory ways here. On one level, Julie’s family recognized that her place was not in the home, since they felt she should be working full-time to support her son. Yet they also faulted her for not being home with him and told her she was “selfish”—an accusation typically hurled at working mothers. There was no way for Julie to win her family’s approval, short of re-marrying and becoming a stay at home mother again.

Adding to her family’s disapproval was the fact that the possibility of remarriage had been eliminated by the fact that Julie had come out as a lesbian. Shortly after moving to Sciotoville, Julie met Shelly, with whom she began a romantic relationship; they moved in together about a month after Julie moved to town. Her family’s disapproval of homosexuality added to their already strained relationship and increased the tension in Julie’s life. When I asked Julie in our first interview if Shelly had been a source of support for her during these trying times, she replied:

Julie: “Oh, God, no. She’s just as bad as they are about school. She tells me I have no business being in school. She says she was attracted to me because I was very femme, and she says school has changed that.”

Sara: “How?”

Julie: “Well, she thinks it’s my job to do all the stuff around the house, the cooking, the cleaning, and of course there’s my son, who is my
responsibility. She gets so mad when things aren’t clean the way they should be and says that if I wasn’t so busy with school I would take better care of the house.”

While Julie was in a same-sex relationship, she was still subject to traditional gender roles in the relationship.

Julie continued, explaining the other reasons why Shelly does not support her schooling:

“She says I don’t have any time for her or our friends, that I’m always busy with homework. She says it can’t be that hard, that it doesn’t take that much time to do school work, that I just don’t want to be with her. But how would she know? She came here a quarter when she was 18 and flunked out because all she did was party. So she never tried. (Sigh, then a short pause) She also says I think I’m better than everybody else now. She says I use big words and act all superior. And it’s true, I do have a really good vocabulary, I’ve always been really verbal. But that’s just the way I talk! It’s not because I think I’m better than other people. I’m tired of fighting about it, though. So now I just don’t talk about certain things, or saying things in a certain way, just so I won’t have to hear that.”

Thus, Shelly emerged as an inhibitor of Julie’s attempts to gain academic literacy, one who attributed academic literacy with other meanings. For Julie, her development of academic literacy was a way to gain a “better life” for her son. For Shelly, Julie’s development of academic literacy was seen as an infringement on Julie’s role in the home and their time together, as well as a force that distanced Julie from her, making her “uppity,” to use another label Julie said had been applied to her by Shelly.

Shelly’s disapproval of Julie’s education had a noticeable impact on her schooling. As the summer term went on, Julie attended class less and less; she missed two classes to go on a camping trip that Shelly spontaneously announced, telling me, “I couldn’t deal with telling her I couldn’t go because of school.”
also began a new job, one that required her to work more hours, because of pressure from Shelly that she wasn’t contributing enough money to the relationship. The training for her new job overlapped with a couple classes, and Julie missed class so she could attend those sessions. Before these absences, Julie was earning an A in the course; between the penalty she earned due to the strict attendance policy and the self-admitted lack of time she put into doing assignments after she began her new job, Julie earned a B- for the course—a grade the professor privately told me was generous.

At the end of the summer, I met Julie for a follow-up visit, at which time she told me that she was taking fall quarter off: “I’m hoping it will make things better with Shelly,” she said, sharing the details of their most recent argument about school. Throughout the summer, Julie had told me that she would not “give up” school for Shelly, noting, “If I have to choose between school or her, I’m choosing school.” Yet as fall approached, Julie’s position had shifted: “I don’t think it’s worth it anymore. All the stress. All the fighting. I can’t do it. Things are better now that I’m just working, and I want to keep it that way.”

I haven’t been successful in contacting Julie since that day, and as of the spring following that final conversation, her university email account had been closed.

**The Interplay of Literacy, Education, and Identity**

The stories of literacy sponsorship and inhibition presented in this chapter illustrate the complexities inherent in a discussion of literacy, education, and
identity. The sponsors profiled in this chapter vary a great deal and at times have contradicting or conflicting influences. In some cases, examples of literacy sponsorship or inhibition are fairly direct: Katie May’s brother suggesting devotionals for her to read. Julie’s partner telling Julie that her use of words she learned in college made her “uppity.” But some may ask exactly what roles Michelle’s grandparents or Pamela’s husband played in their respective literacy lives. While these students articulated a connection between their education and these individuals, the links between them and specific literacy beliefs and practices were not always so clear. Why, then, do I write about these issues in a dissertation focused on the literacy practices and beliefs at play in composition classrooms?

I have written about Michelle’s grandparents, Pamela’s husband, Mike’s fraternity brothers, and all of the other individuals discussed in this chapter due to the interplay between education and literacy practices and beliefs. What is a college education, if it does not involve the development of particular ways of reading, writing, and valuing texts? This is, in fact, precisely what many academics refer to when they use the term “academic literacy”—it is shorthand for the beliefs and practices held in esteem by the academy. Furthermore, as we saw in Chapter Four, educational institutions play a sponsorship role of their own as they shape—and re-shape—students’ literacy beliefs and practices. Thus, it is difficult to sort out “literacy” from “education,” since to sponsor or inhibit one leads to sponsorship or inhibition of the other. But, whenever possible, I have
tried to distinguish between examples of sponsorship and inhibition that invoke text in direct ways—such as Katie May’s aunt—and those examples that do not invoke text directly, such as Julie’s parents.

Similarly messy examples of the performance of identity can be found in this chapter. As discussed in Chapter Three, neighborliness is a value often constructed as part of a performance of Appalachian identity, as is familism, of which Jones writes, “Mountain people usually feel an obligation to family members and are more truly themselves when within the family circle” (75). Yet some of the most striking examples of those values in this chapter—Mike’s involvement in his fraternity and his relationship with his parents, as well as Michelle’s relationship with her grandparents—come from students who often sought to distance themselves from Appalachian identity in our interviews. What do the lives of these students suggest about Jones’ construction of Appalachians?

Those students who most readily embraced a performance of Appalachian identity—Katie May and Julie—evidenced ambivalence about their relationships with family members. While Katie May’s mother was a sponsor of her literacy in important ways, Katie May also expressed a worry about being perceived by her mother as “rising above my raising”—similar to Julie’s designation as “uppity” by her partner—when she talked about concepts she learned in school. Similarly, Julie appeared to embrace a romanticized performance of Appalachian identity more consciously and skillfully than any of the other students, yet in relation to her family and academic life, she stated, “All my life I’ve tried to do the absolute best I can do, and I never got the gratification from the people who love me. Most
of the gratification I’ve got is from people who don’t love me, my teachers and
the students around me.” This statement stands in stark contrast to Jones’
description of Appalachians as “more truly themselves” when among family, a
conceptualization that essentializes Appalachianness and assumes there is some
sort of stable, authentic identity. Julie’s comment undercuts this notion and
reveals that the metaphor of the Appalachian family as a fortress is also a
performance, much like the facets of Julie’s romanticized Appalachian identity.
But what might this “undercutting” reveal about overlapping and contesting
performances of identity? How much of Julie’s conflict, for example, is rooted in
her performance of gender—a performance that clashes with the expectations for
gender performance by Appalachian women? These are the questions that remain
with me as I conclude this chapter.
This spring, I attended the annual meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. During one day of the convention, I stood in line waiting to buy a book I have cited in this dissertation, Katharine Kelleher Sohn’s *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia*. Two women behind me in line struck up a conversation with me. As the conversation progressed, they noticed the book in my hands, asking, “Is that book any good?”

“Yes,” I replied, and I told them that the book focused on Appalachian women’s literacy practices after college.

The women exchanged a confused look. “College?” one asked. “But they don’t go to college.”

“Yes, they do,” I said. “My own research focuses on Appalachian students in college composition courses. There are many Appalachians in college.”

“But that can’t be so,” stated the other woman. “I mean, they don’t have electricity or running water. So how can they go to college? How can there be colleges in Appalachia?” They stared at me. I stared back at them in disbelief.
At the time of this encounter, I didn’t know how to respond to the women. Part of me wanted to laugh at the ignorance they displayed in their remarks. How could two apparently well-educated adults—the women were attending the conference as presenters, so they were clearly graduate students, if not instructors or professors—believe that an entire region of people were without electricity or running water? How could they think no colleges existed in a 12-state region? How could anyone be so ignorant, let alone someone presenting at a conference such as the Cs?

But another part of me—a larger part—was angry. I was angry that people who clearly were well educated enough to teach composition and to present at a major conference were so ignorant of an entire group of people. I was angry that they believed the stereotype of the hillbilly so wholeheartedly that they held on to it in the face of all reason. And I grew even angrier as the women continued to insist that I was wrong. I explained to them that I had done fieldwork at universities in Appalachia, and while there is certainly poverty in Appalachia, all but the very most remote areas of the region have basic utilities. Yet I was met with resistance from the women. I’ve come to think of this encounter as a hegemonic moment, one in which those who associate themselves with the “mainstream” culture view themselves as the determiner of the
experiences of the “minority.” I also now think of the experience as one that points to the importance of this project’s findings and that also highlights their implications for research, for institutions, and for pedagogy.

The Study’s Findings

In the preceding chapters, I explored three themes that emerged during my fieldwork in Sciotoville and Riverton. These themes were the students’ performances of Appalachian and counter-Appalachian identities; the metaphors of literacy used by universities and students; and the role of conflicting sponsors of literacy in the students’ lives. Specific findings related to these themes were as follows:

- *There is no stable or fixed Appalachian identity.* The students of Sciotoville and Riverton illustrate the limitations of some existing concepts of Appalachian identity. While some scholars, such as Jones, limit Appalachianness to a laundry list of romanticized values, these students performed a range of Appalachian identities. These range from Julie’s strategic adoption of an essentialized and romantic Appalachian identity, to Schueler’s and Michelle’s simultaneous embracing and distancing themselves from multiple Appalachian identities, to Gladys’ performance of an identity that countered the pathologized Appalachianness in which she was most invested. This fluidity of identity hinges
in part on the audience for its performance; as my interactions with these students illustrate, the students were continually negotiating their performance based on their understanding of their audience’s expectations.

- **The literacy myth is still a powerful and complex force in these students’ lives.**

My student participants viewed literacy—especially literacy practices that are “certified” by a college degree—as important but not all-determining in life, complicating this myth through their attention to their regional context and their focus on gender, for example. The students’ focus on academic literacy also reveals the ratcheting up of literacy standards that Brandt discusses in *Literacy in American Lives*. The literacy myth is, for these students, no longer a myth about functional literacy, as it was in the 19th century Canada of Graff’s study. It is a myth about a particular *kind* of literacy and draws on academic literacies as well as others, such as digital or electronic literacies.

- **Literacy metaphors were blurred and circulated between the universities and the students—it was not necessarily an “us versus them” dynamic.** The overlap between the universities’ and students’ belief systems about literacy points to the ideological nature of literacy and illustrates its power. Furthermore, as I will soon discuss, this finding has implications for the ways in which composition and literacy studies scholars position the literacies of the academy against the literacies of marginalized groups.

- **These students confirmed that sponsorship is an important framework for understanding their literacy beliefs and practices.** It is not only that sponsors mattered in these students’ lives, but also the *kind* of sponsors who mattered.
These students extend sponsorship to groups not often conceptualized as sponsors, such as contemporary evangelical churches and fraternities, and also pointed to the importance of extended family members. This study also illustrates the power of competing sponsors of literacy and how contradictory messages about literacy can co-exist within one particular individual or group.

**Implications for Research: Composition and Literacy Studies**

In Chapter One, I discussed some of the reasons why I was drawn to this project, including my desire to re-examine and revise painful stereotypes of Appalachians that I have been subjected to throughout my life. When I began my fieldwork, I conceptualized this study as one that would focus on “successful” students and their literacy practices—a study that would counterbalance the many illiteracy narratives of Appalachians, stories of failure and shame, that circulate in American culture and that contribute to those aforementioned stereotypes. Yet as I became immersed in the field, many compelling stories emerged, several of which did not fit neatly into the “success-failure” binary I allowed myself to fall into.

In first seeking to disrupt the stereotypical narratives of Appalachians that the women at the Cs knew—narratives that include extreme poverty, failure, and/or illiteracy—I allowed myself to become locked into the other side of that binary, one focused on “success,” whatever that meant. As I continued with this project, I discovered the limitations of this conceptualization that reified the
pathologized-romanticized construct of Appalachians discussed in Chapter One. By focusing my energies on “success,” I was defining these students in terms of whether they failed or not.

Here is one of this project’s implications for research. Some composition and literacy research has focused on student populations outside the culture of power and how our teaching leads these students to fail or succeed. Much of this research, like mine, comes from a well-intentioned place: a desire to help students. Yet in our attempts to help these students, I fear we’re perpetuating the same tired binary that works to marginalize them in the first place. Rather than undertaking research that will position some students as “successes” and some “failures” according to the academic yardstick we bring with us as scholars, we should conduct research that explores the literacy beliefs and practices that operate in students’ lives. This perspective would build, rather than destroy or replace, the literacy beliefs and practices that students bring with them to our composition classrooms. Such an approach would recognize the multi-faceted nature of students’ literacy beliefs and practices and would complicate what we mean when we talk about student success. How might it benefit students and instructors to define success only by studying literacy practices that correlate with high grade point averages or graduation rates? How might it benefit students and instructors to move beyond a narrow concept of “success” and focus on purpose? What if we studied the multiple and varied literacy practices and beliefs that operate in our students’ lives—lives lived inside and outside classrooms, lives in which “success” can be defined according to the different rhetorical situations,
purposes, and audiences our students encounter? I suggest that our field should follow in the tradition of work by scholars such as Mike Rose and Ellen Cushman by focusing attention on answering the latter questions.

This re-consideration of the conceptualization of literacy practices and beliefs is rooted in another implication drawn from this work: an awareness of an “us versus them” mentality between the academia and members of under-represented groups, including (though certainly not limited to) Appalachians, that appears in some of our scholarship. As shown in Chapter One, literacy scholars whose work I respect and have relied upon heavily—scholars such as Heath and Donehower, along with others—have sometimes positioned the literacy beliefs and practices of marginalized groups such as Appalachians in stark contrast to the beliefs and practices of the academy. While the intent of much of this work is to illustrate how educators can improve their efforts to teach students of all backgrounds, I fear that its result can be the reinforcement of the very marginalization these scholars seek to disrupt.

This opposition of the literacy lives of the academy with those of Appalachia is particularly problematic in light of Chapter Four, where I used Scribner’s metaphors to frame a discussion of institutional and individual beliefs about literacy. Far from the conflict-filled riot of difference Donehower’s work suggests, I found many similarities between the literacy beliefs of the institutions and the students. Even if the students could not necessarily perform these literacy practices or articulate these beliefs in detail, they were acutely aware of the general literacy practices and beliefs the academy expected of them and valued.
Composition and literacy researchers must ask not only if the literacy beliefs and practices of underrepresented students are different from or similar to those of the academy, but also how they differ, how they overlap, and—most of all—why this might be so and what difference it might make. For example, why does ideology about literacy operate in such a way in Sciotoville so that both the institution and the students “buy in” to a literacy of consumption? What does this shared conceptualization suggest not only about the local context for literacy beliefs and practices, but also about the larger societal framework and how these frames circulate? These are the types of questions with which composition and literacy studies must grapple as we continue our research into the literacy lives of underrepresented groups.

Finally, this work demonstrates not only the complexity of student identities, but also that of researcher’s identities. As I noted in my previous statement of findings, these students shaped their performances of identity according to their understanding of their audience—an audience of which I was always part and was sometimes the only member. My performance of identity, and my students’ understanding of it, invited certain performances from them as well. We need look no further than the examples I give in Chapter Three—Julie’s narrative, my interview with Schueler—for evidence of that reciprocal relationship.

In essence, multiple tensions were at work during my time in the field, and some of these tensions were rooted in my own performance of identity. In Chapter Two, I discussed my status as an “insider-outsider” in these classroom
and local communities, one who identified as Appalachian and who, in some cases, had times to the area. Yet my status as a PhD candidate and researcher from a flagship university clearly marked me as an outsider. Like many of the women in the Sciotoville classroom, I was a mother, an identity that led these women to invite me into their conversations and to treat me as a classroom member. At the same time, however, I was never just a participant in these conversations; the recorder was always running, and the pen was always in my hand. As a field, we must continue to question the impact of research identity, not only on the ways in which we write about ourselves and our work but also on the ways in which we conduct our research.

**Implications for Research: Appalachian Studies**

The complexity inherent in literacy beliefs and practices’ circulation is also apparent in the performance of Appalachian identity, another area that cries out for further research. What became apparent to me throughout this study was the messiness of the students’ multiple identity categories (such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and social class) and how the students’ performances of these other identities could not be separated from their performance of Appalachian identity. The students’ performance of a class-based identity, for example, was filtered through their performance of Appalachian identity; their performance of Appalachian identity informed their performance of gender; and so on.

The concept of intersectionality holds that identity markers—including but not limited to race, gender, and class—do not act independently of each other but
instead inform and complicate performance of all of them. While intersectionality is not a new theory, having been used by feminist scholars for over a decade, it is one that has not been well addressed on the whole in Appalachian Studies and that cries out for further research by that field. The performance of Appalachian identity is about so much more than region; it includes gender, class, sexuality, and race, a topic which did not receive much attention in this dissertation. The interplay among these identities illustrates why these students differently constituted their Appalachian performances: because the performances of gender, class, and sexuality that infused their Appalachianness were different. For example, in their performances of identity, Katie May and Michelle did not construct an Appalachianness that limited opportunities for women; in contrast, for Julie and Gladys—both divorced mothers—sexism played a critical role in what Appalachia, and Appalachianness, meant to them. And since all of the students in this study identified as white, a similar racial identity informed their performance of Appalachian identity.

Thus, an obvious question that remains to be answered is how Appalachians of all races perform Appalachianness and how the performance of race informs the performance—and reception—of Appalachianness. To answer these questions, Appalachian Studies scholars should turn to work in whiteness studies, an emerging field in recent years. Some scholars are already working in this area; for example, John Hartigan Jr. examines the experiences of Appalachians who migrated from the region—Appalachians such as my parents—in terms of transgressive whiteness. While they do not directly engage whiteness
studies in the manner of Hartigan, scholars such as David Whisnant and Jane Becker, whose work I called upon in Chapter One, also point to the intersections of race, class, and Appalachianness. We must continue this work as we seek to further explore the performance of Appalachian identity.

Implications for Universities

Chapter Five discussed the groups, individuals, and social forces that work to sponsor students’ literacy beliefs and practices. In that chapter, I focused on sponsors outside of a traditional classroom or school setting in an attempt to demonstrate the diffuse nature of sponsorship suggested by Brandt’s work. At the same time, however, I recognize that educational institutions can be among the most powerful sponsors of literacy in an individual’s life; for example, in the process of writing the acknowledgments for this dissertation and reflecting on the literacy sponsors in my own life, I was struck by just how many of the most influential sponsors in my life have been faculty members and my fellow students. Thus, in this section of the conclusion, I want to address the sponsorship role that universities should play in the lives of their students.

Universities could make the most difference in their students’ lives by helping them “do school.” In other words, universities should assist students in navigating the multiple social forces that limit their development of academic literacy practices and their college educations in general. As we saw in Chapter Five, the ability to enroll or stay in school depended on important material realities: physical and mental health care, childcare, and financial aid. These
issues impacted, in multiple ways, the students who appear in this dissertation: Mike’s illness and surgeries. The addiction of Pamela’s estranged husband, an addiction that led to divorce, issues with child care, and reduced opportunities for schooling. Julie’s pressures to spend more time with her child and partner and to reduce the financial hardship of her education.

These students’ experiences suggest multiple ways in which universities can improve their sponsorship of students via attention to the material conditions of students’ lives:

- **High quality, affordable, flexible, and available child care services on campus for students.** While childcare is often offered in theory on college campuses, including both Sciotoville and Riverton, the reality is that it is not often available. For example, when I inquired about childcare for my daughter at my institution’s childcare center, I was informed that it would be at least 18 months before there were any openings; in fact, it was two years. And when childcare is available, it is often poor quality; high quality but unaffordable to those on student budgets; and/or restricted to children who are not yet of school age (as was the case at the universities in this study). If high quality child care included after-school care for older children and was affordable, available on campus, and flexible enough to accommodate students’ ever-changing schedules, perhaps students such as Julie and Pamela would not feel that their pursuit of higher education came at the cost of their children—a cost many parents are understandably unwilling to pay.

- **Increasing awards of financial aid and student awareness of this aid.** In addition to the issues they faced as parents, Pamela and Julie provided examples
of the pressures they faced as they provided financial support for their families through working and attending school simultaneously. But these women—and many students like them—would not be under such pressure if adequate financial aid was available, aid that would assist them in supporting their families as they studied. This aid must be not only available, but also more easily accessible to students. In interviews, Julie spoke of the many hours she spent hunting down monetary assistance, whether in the financial aid office, on the phone, or online—an often time-consuming and frustrating task that came at the expense of her classes and her family. Pamela was unaware that there were funds available that could provide some assistance to her and her family. It does no good to students to have monies available if those funds are nearly impossible to claim due to bureaucracy or a lack of student awareness. Thus, institutions must do a better job of helping students learn about the aid that is available to them and streamlining the procedures to receive that aid.

- Providing and promoting mental health care, including issues of addiction.

State University-Sciotoville had no on-campus resources for students’ mental health care needs; while Riverton University did have a counseling center, it was not well promoted, and its offerings were limited. How might Pamela have been helped by a support group for students struggling with the impact of a loved one’s addiction? How might Julie—who often had to be gently reminded that I was not a therapist and that our interviews were not counseling sessions—have benefited from therapy that helped her explore how to balance school, parenting, and a
relationship? Could support groups and workshops for first-generation students such as Katie May have been helpful in teaching them how to “do” school? These are questions I ask as I reflect on these students’ lives.

While the above points reflect pressing areas of need for students, they are also among the most difficult areas in which universities can improve and advocate for change. Public institutions such as Sciotoville and Riverton continue to have their state funding slashed to the point where they almost function as private universities. Child care, if done well, is extremely expensive to provide—which is why its costs are so often passed on to the parents. The same is true of mental health care. Streams of financial aid continue to be cut by the federal government. Given these very real constraints, it is certainly valid to ask how universities can provide new programs when it is extremely difficult for them to maintain the same level of student services they’ve always had.

Yet, if universities truly want to educate their students, this is what they must do. Universities must become better stewards of their communities, taking more care to address the concerns and needs of their local areas and students. They must advocate for their students and local citizens at all levels of government. They must take a role in local economies through engagement in such activities as service-learning, P-12 educational initiatives, and partnerships with local employers. While on the surface these efforts may seem unconnected to literacy, they are not; as Chapter Four illustrated, material conditions have a substantial impact on students’ literacy and education. Through these types of endeavors, however, universities could improve the material conditions of their
students’ lives and become sponsors of literacy who fulfill the role of public intellectualism that Ellen Cushman advocates, one which enacts “the kind of civic-minded knowledge-making that engages broad audiences in pressing social issues” (“Public” 335). Given the very real pressures of poverty, unemployment, addiction, and sexism in parts of Appalachia, this role becomes particularly important for the region’s universities.

Implications for Pedagogy

As I begin this section, I am reminded of another conversation I had at a conference. This conversation occurred at last fall’s Women of Appalachia conference, where I had presented part of the research described in this dissertation; my presentation specifically focused on Gladys’ and Michelle’s performances of identity described in Chapter Three.

After the panel at which my presentation was part concluded, a PhD student at a university in Appalachian Pennsylvania approached me. She was a native of eastern Kentucky, had taught at colleges near her hometown, and was currently teaching at her PhD institution. The woman complimented me on the quality of my work, and I asked about her research as well. As our conversation ended, she unleashed a zinger of a question. Visibly distressed, she cried, “But what do we DO about these students? What do we DO with students who seem to have so much hatred for where they’re from?”

At the time, I had no answer for her, a fact that greatly disturbed me. I have always prided myself on the interplay between my scholarship and my
teaching, yet I was dumbfounded by her question. What exactly did my scholarship have to say to composition teachers? How could this work inform my pedagogy, let alone anyone else’s?

I began to find answers to these questions this spring, when I taught English 367.01, an intermediate writing course that explored the construction of Appalachia and its people via examinations of texts that ranged from Allen Batteau’s *The Invention of Appalachia* to cartoon characters such as Snuffy Smith and Lil’ Abner and films such as *Coal Miner’s Daughter*. The students wrote papers that discussed the usefulness of metaphors such as the “imagined community” or “the space on the side of the road”—metaphors conceived in theoretical texts by Anderson and Stewart, respectively—in composing Appalachia; that examined how Appalachia was constructed by the mass media during one historical moment; and that analyzed representations of Appalachians in popular culture (see Appendix F for course syllabus, which includes descriptions of the major assignments). In the students’ daily response papers, I pushed them to think critically about not only the words and images of Appalachia we encountered in our course texts, but also the constructions of Appalachia they brought with them to the course—how were they composing Appalachianness? In the course of class discussions, we also interrogated the
question of Appalachian identity and the purpose that a given identity can serve for those who do, and do not, claim it—or at the very least, those who do not claim the identity in the traditional or expected ways.

In short, in this course students began to consider a sense of place and how that sense factors into the construction of identity (and vice versa). While this course had a limited focus on one particular place (Appalachia), as the class evolved, the focus expanded to broader discussions of identities rooted in place. These included, among others, rural, urban, and suburban performances of identity. In one particularly memorable class, we discussed the ways in which Ohio State is or is not an “imagined community” and how community members are expected to perform an appropriately authentic “Buckeye” identity. From there, we returned to the subject of Appalachia as an imagined community.

Taken together, the intellectual work of this course sought to encourage students to engage critically with the ideas of Appalachianness and performance of identity and to interrogate their own understandings of those subjects—work whose importance was brought home to me during my fieldwork, when I observed firsthand the Sciotoville and Riverton students’ performances of identity. For some of these students, this process included re-connecting with their own Appalachian identities. For example, one student “came out” to me at midterm, telling me that he was from Appalachian Ohio and that he was a recipient of Ohio State’s scholarship program for Appalachian students. “I’ve never thought in this way about where I’m from,” he stated, adding, “I’ve learned a lot from this class.” At the beginning of the course, no students identified as Appalachian or as having
family in the region; by the end, one-third of the students did so. Regardless of their Appalachian identification, my students seemed to take away from this course a sense of the ways in which Appalachian identities are constructed by the larger culture and performed by those who claim Appalachianness.

Given my fieldwork and experiences with this course, this is what I will tell that PhD student if I have the opportunity to speak with her at next year’s Women of Appalachia conference: what we can “do” with all of our students—not just those from Appalachia—is to encourage reflection on how place informs the performance of their own identities and their construction of the identities of others. Here are some concrete ways we can accomplish these goals:

• Provide students with the rhetorical tools to analyze and deconstruct these identities and their representations. For example, in the course previously discussed, my students and I focused on the news media’s and pop culture’s constructions of Appalachia and its people. Using pathos, logos, and ethos, we analyzed how these representations positioned those depicted and the audience consuming these images. We also pinpointed what type of cultural work these images engaged in.

• Teach writing courses that explore themes based on the place of the university and its surrounding community—as well as the place of the university in its surrounding community. This type of course would lend itself quite well to a
service-learning approach. This way, students could learn about the role of the university in its community from multiple perspectives while also working to strengthen the university’s contributions to that community.

- *Respect how a sense of place might manifest itself in our students’ writing via language choices, organization, use of storytelling, and more.* This respect can be shown through the ways in which we talk about language use with our students, as well as the assignments we create. I’m reminded of a conversation I had a few years ago with Min-Zhan Lu, who suggested that we talk with students about Standardized English, as opposed to Standard English—a lexical choice that calls attention to the process by which a language variation becomes “Standard.” If we study language choices with our students, we can provoke discussion about how these features become standardized and the forces that are behind this process. Similarly, if we make issues such as organization and genre part of a broader discussion of standards for academic writing, the issues of power that are at the root of standards are brought to the surface.

- *Assist our students to craft writing that recognizes their performances of multiple identities.* As with the previous point, the ways in which we design assignments have a large impact here. If we ask students to write a traditional personal narrative, for example—such as Julie’s assignment, discussed in Chapter Three—we invite students to perform their identities in traditional ways. If, however, we craft assignments that push students to explore the intersectionality of identities or to engage in meta-analysis of performances, we have invited a
very different type of performance. And if we encourage students to utilize different forms of composing as well, we are opening the door to yet another kind of performance.

By taking these steps, we can enact a pedagogy that will move students to question their own performances of identity as well as the performances of others, a critical awareness that might prevent the hegemony that was at the heart of the conference experience I described at the beginning of this chapter. Since completing my fieldwork, these are practices I have tried, and continue to try, to adopt in my own teaching. As already discussed, the course I taught this spring focused on place, and my students and I focused on the construction of Appalachian identity. I have also taught service-learning courses that contributed to the surrounding community. I continue to devise assignments that ask students to question their own performances of identity, as well as the performances of others, and to articulate the power issues involved in discussions of language. Through these steps, I hope to develop a pedagogy that is, in a sense, dialectical—though not in the Socratic sense, with questions and answers leading to a truth. Instead, this pedagogy would be dialectical in that it would explore and be attentive to the contradictions inherent in the performance of identity, particularly Appalachian identity. Appalachianness is an identity that is romanticized and pathologized, valorized and demonized. Appalachia is the America some say we once were and the America others fear we are. In short, Appalachianness is dialectical. It deserves a pedagogy that is dialectical as well.
APPENDIX A

SCRIPT FOR SOLICITING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
Hi. My name is Sara Webb-Sunderhaus, and I am a Ph.D. student in English at Ohio State University. I will be observing your class this term as part of the research for my dissertation. I am interested in learning more about the literacy practices of Appalachian college students. My interest in this topic comes from the fact that I am an Urban Appalachian; my parents were from eastern Kentucky and moved to Cincinnati, where I was born and raised. As I’m sure you all are well aware, it seems that lots of times in our society, Appalachians are represented as “dumb hillbillies.” And as you and I both know, that stereotype is simply not true. All of you are in the classroom because you have had some success in school and because you have advanced literacy skills. I am studying your class in order to learn what factors have enabled you to be successful students and to enter college. I am also interested in learning how you will manage the demands of a college writing course and in finding out more about the ways you participate in class and complete your reading and writing assignments. Finally, I’m also interested in learning about your general thoughts on reading and writing.

I’ll be doing a couple things in order to learn this information. I’ll be observing this class for the entire term; I would like to make audio-recordings of each session, if that is acceptable to everyone in the class. Your grade will not be penalized if you are not comfortable with having the class recorded. I will give you some time to think about that, and we’ll discuss it as a class in a few moments. Additionally, I would like to do what’s called a case study of 2-3 of you who consider yourself to be Appalachian in an attempt to learn more about this topic. Being part of a case study would mean being interviewed by me and sharing your written work with me. In these interviews, I will ask you questions about this class and your assignments, about college, and about reading and writing in general. I would like to interview you once a week, for a total of five interviews, for 30 minutes at a time. These interviews would take place before or after class; I would also like to do one follow-up interview with you after the class is over, but before fall quarter begins. Anything you say to me will not be shared with your teacher during the term, and your participation is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not participate in a case study will have no effect on your grade for the course. I may also seek to interview a few of you once, just so that I can paint a broader picture of the course. Again, consenting to an interview is completely voluntary and will have no effect on your grade. All interviews will be audio-recorded.

I will use the information I collect as the basis of my dissertation; I plan to finish my dissertation by June 2005. When I write about this class and individual students in my dissertation, I will not use the real name of this university, this town, or anyone in the class. Additionally, you will not be identified by your physical appearance, hometown, etc.; your age, race, and gender will be identified, as well as the fact that you are an Appalachian. While I will not divulge to your instructor any comments you may make about him/her or the class.
while I am collecting your information, I will share chapters of my dissertation with your instructor once I have written them; since your instructor will know everyone in the class, he/she may be able to figure out your identity from what I have written. However, my dissertation will not be completed until long after you have finished the class and received your grade. Furthermore, a minimum of 4-6 students from two universities will take part in this research, which will make it more difficult for any one student to be identified.

As I have just stated, if you choose to be part of a case study or to be interviewed, I will take every precaution to make sure that your identity is concealed, as it is extremely important to me that you are protected during this process and only divulge written or verbal information with which you are comfortable sharing; you do not have to answer questions or share graded/ungraded drafts that make you uncomfortable. Furthermore, in order to protect you, I will conduct what are called “member checks.” That means not only that while I am interviewing you, I will verify my impressions with you, but this also means that I will share drafts of the parts of my dissertation that focus on you. If there is information that you feel would be too personal or sensitive to include, I will remove that information upon your written request. Upon your written request, I will also clarify information that you feel is misleading or inaccurate. If we disagree about my interpretation or analysis, I will include your opinions in my findings. While your opinion may not necessarily change my opinion, I will include your concerns in my dissertation.

If you have questions or concerns about this study at any time, please contact my advisor, Dr. Beverly Moss, who is an Associate Professor of English at Ohio State, or myself. Dr. Moss’ e-mail address is moss.1@osu.edu, and my e-mail address is webbsusa@hotmail.com. I will write those addresses on the board so you can copy them more easily. At this time, I’d like to hear your thoughts about the class being recorded and answer any questions you have.

(I will answer questions and address concerns they have about the class being recorded, about the case studies, etc. I will then seek their verbal consent to record the class).
APPENDIX B

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT LETTERS
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent to participate in research entitled “Negotiating Difference: Literacy Practices of Appalachian College Students.”

Beverly J. Moss, Principal Investigator, or her authorized representative, Sara Webb-Sunderhaus, has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternate procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available. I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction.

In particular, I understand that Sara Webb-Sunderhaus may do any or all of the following:

- ☐ Interview me;
- ☐ Observe my composition class;
- ☐ Interview my consenting professor;
- ☐ Read and analyze my written academic work, including drafts with grades and teacher comments;
- ☐ Record these grades;
- ☐ Make audio recordings of all interviews and observed classes (pending permission from all students).

I understand that pseudonyms will be used to protect my privacy. I understand that, while participating in the study, I can refuse to answer questions or to provide written information without penalty. Furthermore, I understand that I may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation in the study without penalty to me. If I decide I do not want some or all of the data previously collected from me used for this project, I will give Sara Webb-Sunderhaus written notice.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date:__________________________  Signed:_______________________

(Signed:________________________ Witness:_______________________
(Sara Webb-Sunderhaus, authorized representative)
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent to participate in research entitled “Negotiating Difference: Literacy Practices of Appalachian College Students.”

Beverly J. Moss, Principal Investigator, or her authorized representative, Sara Webb-Sunderhaus, has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternate procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available. I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction.

In particular, I understand that Sara Webb-Sunderhaus:

☐ Will interview me;
☐ Will observe my classes;
☐ Will make audio recordings of all interviews and observed classes (pending student permission).

I understand that pseudonyms will be used to protect my identity. Furthermore, I understand that I may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me. If I decide I do not want my interviews used for this project, I will give Sara Webb-Sunderhaus written notice.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date:__________________________  Signed:_______________________

(Participant)

Signed:________________________ Witness:_______________________

(Sara Webb-Sunderhaus, authorized representative)
APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY
Completion of this survey is absolutely voluntary. You may answer as many or as few questions as you choose, with absolutely no penalty to you. Completion or non-completion of this survey will not affect your grade in any way.

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your race?
4. What is your mother’s highest level of education (i.e., some high school, high school graduate, some college, college graduate, etc.)?
5. What is your father’s highest level of education (i.e., some high school, high school graduate, some college, college graduate, etc.)?
6. If you have siblings, what is their highest level of education (i.e., some high school, high school graduate, some college, college graduate, etc.)?
7. Do you consider yourself to be Appalachian?
8. What county/state…
   - Were you born in?
   - Were you raised in?
   - Are you currently residing in?
9. What county/state…
   - Were your parent(s) born in?
   - Were your parent(s) raised in?
   - Are your parent(s) currently residing in?
10. When did you graduate from high school?
11. Are you a commuter?
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW SCRIPT
Possible Interview Questions:

- How do you define the term literacy?
- How would you evaluate your own literacy?
- Do you think literacy is valuable? Why or why not?
- When did you first start reading? Writing?
- Do you write for pleasure in addition to writing in response to class assignments? If so, what do you write?
- Do you read for pleasure in addition to reading for class assignments? If so, what do you read?
- How did you learn how to read? Write?
- Describe a favorite memory of reading or writing.
- Describe a least-favorite memory of reading or writing.
- Do you recall seeing your parent(s) read for pleasure while you were growing up?
- Do your family members read the newspaper regularly? Magazines? Books? Do you?
- (If the student is a parent) Do you read to your child/children? Why or why not?
- Do you think reading and writing are important? Why or why not?
- Do you think earning a college degree is important? Why or why not?
- What types of writing do you engage in for pleasure? For school?
- What is your favorite type of writing?
- Describe your high school educational experiences, particularly your English classes.
- Why did you decide to attend college? Why did you decide to attend this college in particular?
- Describe your college educational experiences, particularly your composition course.
- Have you chosen a major?
- If so, what major did you choose? Why did you choose this major?
- Are you happy with your grades? Why or why not?
- Do you identify yourself to others as an Appalachian? How do people respond to that identification?
- Have you encountered bias due to your cultural background? If so, please describe those experiences.
- How do you define narrative?
- Do you like to write narratives?
- Do you like to tell oral narratives or stories?
- What difficulties, if any, have you encountered in your college education?
- What has gone especially well in your college education?
Discourse-based questions (based on class assignments):

- How would you describe your composing process as you wrote this draft?
- What decisions did you make in approaching this assignment? In other words, what types of choices did you make when thinking about the assignment and when writing the assignment?
- How concerned were you with the conventions of academic writing as you wrote this draft?
- Did you decide to take a certain approach to this assignment in an attempt to earn a higher grade? If so, how would you characterize that approach?
- Did you enjoy writing this draft? Why or why not?
- Was this assignment easy or hard to complete? What factors made it easy/hard?
APPENDIX E

LITERACY SURVEY
End-of-Quarter Literacy Survey

Completion of this survey is absolutely voluntary. You may answer as many or as few questions as you choose, with absolutely no penalty to you. Completion or non-completion of this survey will not affect your grade in any way.

Please write your name on this survey. If you would be willing to answer any follow-up questions via e-mail, please include your e-mail address.

Definitions and Beliefs

How do you define the term literacy?

How would you evaluate your own literacy?

What do you think the term “academic literacy” means?

How do you define the term narrative?

How do you define “good writing?”

Do you think literacy is valuable? Why or why not?

Do you think earning a college degree is important? Why or why not?

Past and Present Activities

When did you first start reading?
When did you first start writing?

How did you learn to read?

How did you learn to write?

Do you write for pleasure in addition to writing in response to class assignments? If so, what do you write?

Do you read for pleasure in addition to reading for class assignments? If so, what do you read?

Describe a favorite memory of reading or writing.

Describe a least-favorite memory of reading or writing.

What were your high school English classes like?

Do you recall seeing your parent(s) read for pleasure while you were growing up?

Do your family members read the newspaper regularly? Magazines? Books? Do you?

If you are a parent, do you read to your child/children? Why or why not?
What types of writing do you engage in for pleasure? For school?

What is your favorite type of writing to produce (if any)?

Do you like to write narratives? Why or why not?

Do you like to tell oral narratives? Why or why not?

Do your family members tell oral narratives? What types of narratives do they tell?

Aside from teachers and your parent(s), are there any other people or places they have been influential in developing your abilities to read, speak, and write? If so, please describe these people or places.

*College and Composition Class*

Why did you decide to attend college?

Why did you decide to attend this college in particular?

Have you chosen a major?

If so, what major did you choose? Why did you choose this major?

Are you happy with your grades (in this class)? Why or why not?

What difficulties, if any, have you encountered in your college education?
What has gone especially well in your college education?

What are your goals for the future?

What do you feel you learned in this class?

Do you plan to apply what you learned in this class to your other classes? If so, how? If not, why not?

What was the most helpful element of this class?

What was the least helpful element of this class?

Do you feel a responsibility to help other students learn? If so, why?
APPENDIX F

ENGLISH 367.01 SYLLABUS
English 367.01: The US Experience

Composing Appalachia

Spring 2006

Instructor: Sara Webb-Sunderhaus
Office: 216C, Ohio Stadium East (enter between gates 18 and 20; my office is on the second floor)
Mailbox: 218 Ohio Stadium East (Writing Workshop office)
Phone: 688-8572; if there is no answer, call 292-8134 (Writing Workshop office) and ask to leave a message
E-mail: webbsusa@gmail.com (the best way to reach me)
Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:30-3:00

Texts:

• Readings available via electronic reserve (ER) and Carmen (CA); see attached bibliography.
• A handbook of your choice (recommended: Hacker’s A Pocket Style Manual)
• Films/TV episodes:
  o Coal Miner’s Daughter
  o Stranger with a Camera
  o The Beverly Hillbillies
  o The Dukes of Hazzard
  o The Waltons

Course Description:

English 367.01 is an intermediate composition course that extends and refines skills in expository writing, critical reading, and critical thinking by asking students to analyze, discuss, and write about the diverse US experience. This course will focus in particular on one particular American experience by examining the rhetorical construction of Appalachia and its people. Dominant American culture has “Othered” this community by projecting onto it the larger culture’s anxieties about race, class, and sexuality. This tendency has resulted in today’s popular images of Appalachia as the backwoods of America, a place populated by racist, incestuous “white trash.” These images are seen everywhere from television, film, and books to Abercrombie and Fitch T-shirts which proclaim, “It’s all relative in West Virginia.” This course will historically and rhetorically situate these representations, however, noting how at the turn of the 20th century, Appalachia was lauded as a source of “pure” Anglo-Saxon whiteness and a refuge from the immigrant and African-American populations who were quite literally changing the face of America. Thus, this community has been constructed as a place where America works out its anxieties by romanticizing and/or demonizing Appalachia and Appalachians. This course will examine the rhetoric of this process.

While we will be reading some challenging texts, this course is, above all else, an intensive writing course. As a student in this section of 367.01, you can expect to utilize a process-oriented approach which involves drafting, revising, and editing your own
work, as well as responding to the work of your peers in workshop settings. This course continues the work of 110 by emphasizing revision and disrupting the belief that good writers “get it right the first time” and don’t need to revise. Writing is a continuous process, and this course will emphasize that process.

Some of our goals for the quarter are as follows:

- to analyze language and visual images rhetorically
- to understand the significance of language and images
- to read texts (including but not limited to articles, films, and TV shows) that will challenge us in a variety of ways
- to recognize pop culture is not “just” entertainment
- to organize thoughts more effectively
- to use supporting detail effectively
- to gain greater fluency in writing
- to revise thoroughly and effectively
- to reflect on our writing
- to respond in meaningful and helpful ways to others’ writing
- to plan and draft writing

As you may have surmised by this point, this course will be challenging and ambitious, and you should be prepared to work hard and to the best of your ability throughout the quarter. In addition to being intellectually challenging, this course may challenge some of your beliefs. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and others (including me); within this class community you are expected to value the ideas of those around you and to voice your reactions in a constructive way. I encourage you to accept the challenge of exploring new ways of approaching writing. Although our work together this quarter will be challenging, it will also be thought provoking and (gasp!) even enjoyable. 😊

Welcome to English 367.01. I’m glad you’re here!

Assignments/Grades:

This course will utilize a variety of assignments, including in-class writing, summaries, reader responses, major papers, and leading of discussion. You will have the opportunity to workshop your three major papers with your peers on peer review days and will also receive ungraded feedback from me before revising your papers and re-submitting them for grading. Keep EVERYTHING you do for the major papers—brainstorming, drafts, notes, scribbles—EVERYTHING. You must turn in all of this material with each draft.

The grading distribution is as follows:

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<th>Paper 1</th>
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Papers:

You will write three papers this quarter that will in some ways parallel the structure of our readings. Your first paper is an analytic essay (3-4 pp) in which you will grapple with Anderson’s idea of an “imagined community” or Stewart’s concept of nostalgia as
useful metaphors in understanding the construction of Appalachia. You will need to analyze your chosen metaphor and discuss its benefits and limitations in conceptions of Appalachia. Remember to be specific; to quote, paraphrase, and summarize our course readings as necessary; and to define key terms. However, do not over-rely on the course readings, as this paper asks for your analysis of concepts from the readings.

Your second paper (4-5 pp.) asks you to examine the historical constructions of Appalachia in further detail. Your paper should explore one historical moment in which Appalachia was “composed,” questioning how and why Appalachia was composed at this moment. This historical moment should have occurred before 1970. This paper will require you to conduct some research and cite sources, but remember: this is a short paper, not an intensive research paper!

Your final paper (5-6 pp.) will require you to engage in analysis of pop culture representations of Appalachia and how those representations have shaped, and been shaped by Appalachian identity. You may decide to craft an argument based on a few examples (i.e., two movies, three television shows, etc), or you may wish to do an in-depth exploration of one particular film, show, comic strip, web site, etc.

Revising Papers:

As previously mentioned, you will be required to revise your three major papers this quarter. You will turn in a draft of each paper on the date listed on the daily schedule; I will return this draft to you with my comments, but no letter grade. Within one week of the return of that draft, you must write a memo stating how you intend to revise your paper, and you must also state the due date for your revision in this memo. You may select any due date you wish, as long as all revisions are turned in to me by the end of the quarter, and your revisions may be turned in the same day. I WILL FIRMLY HOLD YOU TO THE DUE DATE YOU STATE IN YOUR MEMO. If your revision is not turned in to me by the date you select, the revision will be considered late and will be graded accordingly.

Homework:

You will be required to do some type of writing for each class. I may ask you to write a summary of the day’s reading, or I may ask you to respond to the author’s argument. We will also be doing some in-class writing. These assignments serve as a place to practice writing, a place where you can work with ideas and consider new concepts. Homework should be posted to our Carmen site before the class it is due; I will not accept assignments posted during class, unless we are doing some designated in-class writing.

Participation:

The nature of this course is very different from that of a large, lecture-based course. This is a small class that will heavily rely on small and large group discussion to facilitate learning. Your active participation is crucial for both your individual success in the course as well as the success of the course as a whole. Simply showing up for class isn’t participating and will not yield a passing participation grade.
Leading of Discussion:

During one class this quarter, you and a partner will be required to lead the discussion of the reading. This requires more than simply doing the assigned reading for that day; you will need to decide which issues from the reading are important for the class to consider and to design an activity that will help us address these points in the discussion you lead (you MUST have an activity aside from large group discussion). I strongly encourage you to integrate technology into your activities. You and your partner must take an equally actively role during class (in other words, one person can’t do the preparation while the other does the in-class work—you must be equally involved in the speaking component). You should let me know by the end of next class which day you’d like to lead discussion; any day for which reading is required is open.

Attendance/Tardiness:

Due to the structure of the class and its activities, your attendance is vital. Much of the work we do together in class simply cannot be “made up.” In accordance with university policy, I do excuse absences related to illness, a death in the family, jury duty, official college competitions, and religious holidays. In the case of illness, a physician’s note will excuse the absence and allow you to complete the work for a grade. For other excused absences, written notification before the absence is expected.

You are allowed TWO unexcused absences this quarter. If you have three such absences (which is equal to 15% of the course), your final grade will be dropped a full letter. If you have four such absences (20% of the course), your final grade will be dropped 2 full letter grades. Per English department policy, if you have 5 or more unexcused absences (25% or more of the course), you will fail the course.

Tardiness is disruptive to the classroom community. Anyone coming to class after we’ve started will be considered tardy. You have one “free” tardy—everybody has a bad morning now and then. After the “freebie,” every third tardy will equal one absence. So, make it a habit to be on time.

Late/Missed Assignments:

Unless your absence is excused, your assignments are due even if you are not in class (if your absence is excused, you will be permitted to submit assignments on the day you return to class). All projects/assignments are due on the announced date at the BEGINNING of class time, so be in class and on time when assignments are due; assignments will be considered late if they are not ready to be turned in at the beginning of class. I do not tolerate late work and will reduce an assignment’s grade by a full letter (B to C) for every day it is late. If you are late to, or absent from, class, you will not be able to make-up any in-class writing assignments you missed (unless your absence was excused). “Computer problems” do not excuse late work.

***If you do not turn in drafts of each major paper, you will fail the assignment. There will be NO exceptions.***
Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is against the rules of this university and my own personal ethics. To put it bluntly, DON’T DO IT! The English Department defines plagiarism as the representation of another's works or ideas as one's own; it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.

Support Services:

Office for Disability Services: If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, please arrange a conference with me as soon as possible. During our conference, we will discuss the course in an attempt to anticipate your needs and explore potential accommodations. I rely on the Office for Disability Service for assistance in verifying the need for accommodations and developing accommodation strategies. If you have not previously contacted the Office for Disability Services, I encourage you to do so. ODS is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, and the phone number is 292-3307.

Writing Center: The Writing Center, located at 475 Mendenhall Lab, offers free tutoring appointments and is an excellent way to get additional feedback on your writing. Call 688-4291 for an appointment.

Ombud: The Writing Programs Ombud, Matt Cariello, mediates conflicts between teachers and students in 110 and 367. You can contact him at 292-5778 or cariello.1@osu.edu. Office hours for Spring 2006 in Denney 533 are Tuesday-Thursday, 1:30-3:00, but other times are available by appointment. All conversations with the Ombud are strictly confidential.

Conferences:

There will be two mandatory conference sessions this semester. The first conference will be a short, informal, getting-to-know-you chat. I’ll be passing around a sign-up sheet; select the time that works best for you (or see me if none of the times work).

The second conference will occur around the mid-term. We’ll review your writing and other course work, as well as other concerns you may have. More information will follow, but plan on these conferences being held the 5th week of the quarter.

These are not the only times you may conference with me, however. Take advantage of my office hours and come to me with concerns about assignments, revisions, etc., as well as general concerns about the course. I especially encourage you to conference with me about the drafts of your three major papers. I will be more than happy to go over your revisions with you in conference and to offer my response and suggestions. If you cannot meet with me during my office hours, I am willing to schedule another time that is convenient for the both of us, and I will also conference via e-mail or chat. Don’t be afraid to ask—I am here to help!
DAILY SCHEDULE
***Assignments and due dates are subject to change***

WEEK ONE

3/27 (M)  Introductions; review syllabus

3/29 (W)  What is good writing? Peer review training; discussion of handouts and the rhetorical triangle

WEEK TWO


4/5 (W)  Peer review of Paper One—bring draft to class.

WEEK THREE

4/10 (M)  Shapiro, “Solving the Problem” (ER); one page summary and response due.

4/12 (W)  Viewing of Stranger with a Camera; Paper One draft due to Sara

WEEK FOUR


4/19 (W)  Batteau, “A Poetic for Appalachia” (ER); summary/response due.

WEEK FIVE

4/24 (M)  NO CLASS—MID-TERM CONFERENCES. Please bring to your conference a one-page statement that reflects on your progress in the course so far.


WEEK SIX

5/1 (M)  Peer review of Paper Two—bring draft to class; Shelby, “The ‘R’ Word” (ER).
WEEK SEVEN


WEEK EIGHT

5/15 (M) Viewing of The Waltons; Roiphe, “Ma and Pa and John Boy in Mythic America.”


WEEK NINE

5/22 (M) peer review of Paper Three—bring draft to class; begin viewing Coal Miner’s Daughter

5/24 (W) Finish viewing Coal Miner’s Daughter; Paper Three draft due to Sara

WEEK TEN

5/29 (M) MEMORIAL DAY—NO CLASS

5/31 (W) Course wrap-up; evaluations

***ALL REVISIONS ARE DUE IN MY MAILBOX BY 4 P.M. ON MONDAY, JUNE 5TH. HAVE A GREAT SUMMER!!!***

Course Readings


---. “Ed and Lewis and Bobby and Drew: The Monster in the Mirror” and “Deliverance on Location.”

---. “Heidi and the Poverty Mamas: Fooling with Economics.”
“About the OACHE.”  *Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education—A College Access Program.*  Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education. 14 April  http://www.oache.org/about.htm


Hoang, Haivan V. “‘To Come Together and Create a Movement’: Solidarity Rhetoric in the Vietnamese American Coalition.” Diss. The Ohio State University, 2004.


