This study examines how the Appalachian region has been portrayed as a contaminating threat to the symbolic order, a place that undoes cultural taboos and destabilizes borders between normal and abnormal, insider and outsider, marginal and center. It explores how Appalachia has been performed as an abject body—a hillbilly caricature, a defiled, drunk, filthy, deviant, repulsive, marginalized Other. As well, it looks at the model of Appalachia as an internal colony and how that position constructed particular Appalachian identities. It then moves beyond the colonization model and examines where Appalachia is situated in a postmodern, post-colonial world and how boundaries of Appalachia are fluid and slippery. Further, this research explores storytelling in Appalachia and probes reollections, blurred memories and stories of microresistances. It uses an interpretive lens to explore the way natives of the Flatwoods in Kentucky, in particular, tell stories of resistance that are often overlooked when resistance is more narrowly viewed as that which is a collective political struggle. To analyze the reasons behind such microresistances, it examines how resistance theory has been constructed, studied, overstated, criticized and utilized to determine the complex ways people make sense of their lives and resist or conform to forces such as surveillance, punishment and power networks.
Dedicated to Ethard, my father, my inspiration for this work, and the most powerful storyteller I’ve ever known.

And to my husband Jim: For backing me all the way.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my advisor, Dr. Patti Lather, whose leadership, thought-provoking questions and constant support inspired me to think in ways I had not known to think and helped bring me to this place. I also deeply appreciate the keen insight I received from members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Amy Shuman and Dr. Christine Ballengee-Morris, as well as from Dr. Peter Demerath, who served as co-advisor during my exam. A special thanks to my husband, Jim, for his encouragement, love and willingness to talk late into the night of all things Foucault and Flatwoods. I am also indebted to: Sharon Green, for proofing countless drafts and offering invaluable advice and friendship; my long-time friend and mentor, Dr. Art Ranney, for his detailed, astute critiques; Denise Piersante and Robert E. Rich for their perceptive observations; Betsy Hubbard, for her willingness to help in immeasurable ways; my sister Tamra Jasper, for always believing in me; my mother Doris South, for supporting me each and every day; my stepfather, Carl South, for the great meals and quiet place to study for weeks on end; and my dissertation group; for the lively exchanges and counsel. And finally, thank you to Ethard Jasper and the rest of the Flatwoods storytellers for sharing the powerful narratives that made this work possible. To all of you, I am grateful always.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................... ii  
DEDICATION ...................................................................................................................................... iii  
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................................................................................. v  
VITA ............................................................................................................................................. vi  
LIST OF TABLES .............................................................................................................................. xi  
LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................................ xii  

CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY: THE FLATWOODS AND APPALACHIA ................................................. 1  
  Stating the Problem .................................................................................................................. 1  
  Small v Resistances ................................................................................................................. 4  
  Study Focus and Approach .................................................................................................. 5  
  An Interpretive Lens ............................................................................................................. 7  
  Overview of Chapter Contents ............................................................................................ 9  

CHAPTER 2  APPALACHIAN LITERATURE, RESISTANCE THEORIES AND POSTMODERNITY: EXPLORING OTHERNESS, HISTORIES AND MULTIPLICITIES ......................................................... 14  
  Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 14  
  Color Writers ......................................................................................................................... 18  
  Inadequate Schooling, Accessibility, and Resources .......................................................... 29  
  War on Poverty ....................................................................................................................... 31  
  Reworkings ............................................................................................................................. 33  
  vi
LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PHASES...............................................................105

TABLE 2: CODING CHART .....................................................................................220
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: IMAGES FROM THE FLATWOODS ..........................................................217
FIGURE 2: NEWSPAPER ARTICLE ...........................................................................218
FIGURE 3: SYNOPTIC CHART/AUTHORITY CHALLENGES .................................219
FIGURE 4: IMAGES FROM THE FLATWOODS ......................................................216
FIGURE 4: PULASKI/CASEY COUNTIES ..............................................................222
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY: THE FLATWOODS AND APPALACHIA

Stating the Problem

In *Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal*, Sherry Ortner argues that some of the most influential studies of resistance “are severely limited by the lack of an ethnographic perspective,” which she minimally defines as the attempt to understand another life world by using the self as the instrument of knowing (1996, p. 281). By keeping a commitment to produce richness, texture and detail—as well as the complexity, desires, conflicts and internal politics of dominated groups—Ortner says resistance studies can overcome “ethnographic thinness” and reveal what James Scott calls the “hidden transcripts” of resistance and “those nonobvious acts and moments of resistance that do take place” (Scott, 1985, 1990). To be sure, Ortner acknowledges James Clifford’s argument that in some sense, all ethnographies are fictions (1996). But she says, “*Despite all that*” it is still worth seeking to “understand other peoples in other times and places, especially people not in dominant positions” (Ortner, 1996, p. 297, italics in original).

In my own effort to better understand other peoples in other times and places and attempt to produce what Clifford Geertz has called ethnographic “thickness” (1973), I conducted this dissertation research in an area in rural Appalachia near Windsor, Kentucky, known as the Flatwoods—a place where my father and his siblings grew up.
during the Great Depression, WWII and the 1950s. As Elizabeth St. Pierre points out, the postmodern turn and the crisis of representation insist that researchers acknowledge their agendas and “come clean about their desires, which often include the desire to study themselves and their culture through their research” (St. Pierre, 1995). Indeed, I have long been immersed in the culture and life history narratives of natives of the Flatwoods, an area informally named by locals because of its dramatic difference from the rest of Casey County’s hilly terrain. In some ways the seeds for this research were sown when I was five and six years old, sitting at daylight each morning at what was called the Liar’s Table in Jerry’s Restaurant, listening to my father, Ethard Jasper, and other men weave edge-of-your-seat stories about politics, moonshine runnin’, cheatin’ and all manner of wild times. In *A Space by the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an “Other” America*, Kathleen Stewart says that listeners can be “sucked in by the pull of storied claims on people and the power of fabulation itself to draw them into eccentricity so there’s what they might do” (1996, p. 31, boldface in original). Stewart points out that in elaborate “local ways of talkin’” and “local ways of doin’” the term *lying* refers to highly stylized, performative competitions, usually between older men, “as each one claims to be able to do the other one better; an appreciation for poetic performance is indexed in the recognition that so-and-so has a nice *turn of phrase* or is *good to talk to*…” (1996, p. 8, italics in original). She contends that people tell stories because they need to bear witness and leave a trace, and their stories of trauma, in particular, grow detailed to promote a strange intimacy of subject and object. She says, “And I remember that his stories grew progressively more graphic and imaginary until they had wrenched us into a narrative
space that is at once more situated and contingent and yet opens an interpretive, 
expressive space—a space, in short, in which there is more room to maneuver” (1996 p. 
27).

Ethard and the other storytellers who gathered at Jerry’s Restaurant in the late 
1960s were keenly aware they were competing to win over an audience, to create 
laughter, high tension or grief. In this space, stories became progressively more explicit 
and unsettling, such as the story Ethard repeatedly told about the time when he was just 
11 years old and a dynamite cap blew up in his hand. He would explain:

Well, I reached down and got the dynamite with my right hand…and of course it 
went off, and of course when it went off it blowed my fingers all off and blowed 
my eyes and my face, and my left shoulder and all the meat off my left hand. It 
just blew me all to pieces. Well, it blinded me so bad, the blood did, the biggest 
thing they found in that bedroom was my thumbnail. But, the rest of it was just 
giblets of meat. But I tried to get out, and I couldn’t, I tried to open the door with 
my right hand and I couldn’t, cause I didn’t have anything to open it with. All my 
fingers was gone (Interview, October 21, 1994).

When Ethard finished talking, others would pick up the thread and tell of their 
own tragedies, traumas and troubles. And though I was very young at the time, I still 
vividly recall the reluctance of folks—lost in imagined and remembered places—to shake 
off these stories and break up. Such recollections spurred me to consider four years ago 
how I might spend time in my doctoral program more deeply exploring the highly-
stylized, performative aspects of story telling among older men from the Flatwoods. As I
moved through the program and became more familiar with postmodern theory and theorists, I saw that much could be learned about what counts as significant in kinship/knowledge networks in this region and began to study the ways stories from Flatwoods natives kept in play a thousand tiny resistances to power structures—through such often overlooked, less visible maneuvers as making and drinking homebrew, cursing, running moonshine, smoking in church, stealing cars for joyrides, swiping tomatoes, talking back, and dropping out of school, as well as through micro events, locations, everyday practices, humor, and speech patterns.

Small v Resistances

Just as narrative has been theorized as a critical way to make sense of experiences, I found that these Flatwoods stories provided insight into practices of resistances and microresistances. Throughout this field research, I sought to understand how people methodically constructed their experiences and their everyday lives, and “in the configurations of meaning and institutional life that inform and shape their reality-constituting activities” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 215). In particular, I was interested in their life histories, their personal views of their own experiences as they understood them. These histories can reveal the ways people who explicitly or implicitly understand their “otherness” displace dominant social relations (Munro, 1996, p. 24). Petra Munro notes that traditionally power was thought to be located in macrostructures “in a binary world in which the oppressed (powerless) struggle against the oppressor (powerful)” (1996, p.18). French philosopher Michel Foucault disrupts this metanarrative, saying too many people view power only as that which represses. Power is more than a force that
says no. It is a productive network of possibilities that produces discourse, induces pleasure and forms knowledge. It circulates up, down, around, over and under in institutional settings and formal structures, as well as and among family members and kinship networks. As Foucault points out, “It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands…” (1972/1977a, p. 98). An ethnographic examination of less visible resistances provided an opportunity to highlight power/knowledge circulation in the kind of everyday practices usually hidden, overlooked or “obscured when resistance is understood as reactive acts of opposition that operate outside the forces of power” (Munro, 1996, p. 17). Thus, I explored acts of resistances as fluid, unstable moves against erasure. At the same time, I tried to navigate what Patti Lather (2006) describes as the “double move of respecting the voice and troubling the voice, of interpreting resistance stories in a way that does justice to what people tell us about living in a complex and ambiguous world.”

*Study Focus and Approach*

When I began to collect stories for this research, I already had a strong base. In 1993 and 1994, I conducted a series of interviews over a 10-month period with Ethard, who talked of the poverty, trauma and troubles of his youth in the Flatwoods as well as his love affairs, fistfights, late-night parties, drinking binges, seven children, four divorces, countless high-dollar business deals and two bankruptcies. In essence, he shared the life stories he believed constructed who he was. In 2005 I transcribed and coded more than a dozen hours of this archived material, most of it focused on Ethard’s early years in the Flatwoods, as part of an attempt to get a deeper feel for his stylized storytelling and
focus. I also tracked down another archived interview originally conducted in August 2002 with one of Ethard’s best friends, Roy Delk, about what it was like growing up with Ethard.\textsuperscript{1} In addition, between 2005 and 2007, I transcribed another dozen or so hours of interviews with Ethard and conducted additional interviews about the Flatwoods with two of Ethard’s brothers, Leon and Levi Jasper, who out of 11 children born to Charlie and Mary Jasper are the only two sons still living. Once I was in the field, I saw the need to interview another relative, Alma Jasper Hopper, Ethard’s only sister who survived infancy.\textsuperscript{2} My research also included observations of the Flatwoods made during my own exploration of the area as well as guided tours provided separately by Leon and Levi. I also spent significant time in the past three years attempting to again familiarize myself with the local sights and sounds of the Flatwoods as well the neighboring town of Somerset, Kentucky. Beyond immersion in the local area, I spent considerable time in the past three years situating the Flatwoods in its larger context of Appalachia: familiarizing myself with Appalachian scholarship; studying the history of the region; looking at how Appalachians have been recuperated as an abject subject; exploring how the region has been theorized and stereotyped and who benefited from such stereotypes; and examining

\textsuperscript{1} This interview was conducted by telephone after I was notified that Roy Delk was ill and did not have long to live.

\textsuperscript{2} Alma Jasper Hopper, Leon Jasper and Levi Jasper are the only three children of Charlie and Mary Jasper still alive today.
Appalachia’s imagery and existence through a postmodern lens. This information will be detailed further in Chapter II.

*An Interpretive Lens*

In studying the Flatwoods of Kentucky, I opted to take an interpretive approach and analyze stories told by four Flatwoods natives who shared powerful, graphic narratives of exploitation, trauma, tragedy and triumphs. By an interpretive approach, I mean I tried to produce a reflexive work that demonstrates my awareness of the necessity of interpretation, of layering information and focusing perspective within moving networks of storytellers and stories told. For example, I compared stories told by my father to stories told by his brothers and sister, reading texts for how they constructed and communicated resistance and how they grappled with blurred memories, multiple truths and fabulations. I tried to continually acknowledge there are many truths and multiple knowers (Sipe & Constable, 1999, p. 158). In essence, I acted as an interpretive bricoleur—one who understands that research is interactive, shaped by personal history, class, race and ethnicity, and that research findings have political implications. “The product of the interpretive bricoleur’s labor is a complex, quilt-like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage—a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations. This interpretive structure is like a quilt, a performance text, a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 9). With that in mind, I sought to understand situations from the points of view of those who experienced them while conveying that we are all informing and influencing each other. As detailed in Chapter III, I also attempted to describe the data in a way that conveys the complex
dynamics of the research, including how I identified research questions, constructed the
design, selected a sample, determined how to collect and interpret the data and what
decisions were made about data to include and exclude. I articulate the theoretical
contributions the research made and what motivated the research. Ideally, the result is a
study that both wrote and was written by the “life stories and experiences that the
research was designed to document and understand” (Jones, 2002, p. 461).

Further, an interpretive approach allowed me to resist positioning these stories as
either true or false and instead focus on assessing how these stories shape and open up
broader discussions of social power, values, behaviors, as well as how the stories mesh
trauma, humor, and other emotions. There was much room here for presenting the
multiplicities, fluidities, and layers of complexities. Like Natalie Guice Adams and
Pamela J. Bettis, I hope I succeeded in writing about Appalachian storytelling in a way
that did not “suck the joy out of it” (2003, p. 142). Storytelling is a complex and
contradictory activity that is at once serious and playful, entertaining and troubling. I
tried to present all of these thick layers in their complicated and ever-changing forms.

It is important to note that my research was also heavily influenced by a
postmodern perspective, which has helped me see how Flatwoods’ narratives challenge
humanism’s notions of one valid truth that can be found through a positivistic model of
rationality (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 486). This perspective provided insight into how both
micro and macro dimensions of human activity exist in the Flatwoods, as do tensions
between structure and agency. This research involved stylized memories, blurred
identities, complicated disputes, irreconcilable differences, ambiguities, gaps, and lived
experiences. Certainly, highlighting only agency and resistance in storytellers from the Flatwoods might have helped illustrate how some Appalachians are not passive bystanders needing to be rescued from powerful oppressors but are instead capable of resisting hegemonic forces. Yet such an interpretation also would have reified and romanticized resistance and the idea of a unified, coherent agency. Flatwoods natives both exhibit and do not exhibit agency. They resist, conform to, and wield power structures at various times and in multiple ways.

*Overview of Chapter Contents*

In recognition that this study could not be complete without also situating the Flatwoods in context of the invention, history and culture of Appalachia, I spent significant time examining the fields of Appalachian studies, Folklore, and colonial discourse/postcolonial theory as inflected by postmodern and feminist thought. In those fields, I utilized the work of such researchers as: Alan Batteau, Dwight Billings, Alan Banks, Kathleen Blee, Henry D. Shapiro, John Alexander Williams, J.W. Williamson, David Whisnant, John Campbell, John Gaventa, Nelly P. Stromquist, Edward W. Said, Stephen J. Ball, Douglas E. Foley, Annette Lareau, Amy Shuman, Kathleen Stewart, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and V.Y. Mudimbe, among others. Much of this research on Appalachia and how the region has been theorized will be discussed in Chapter II to help provide a frame and sense of place for the Flatwoods and those who grew up there.

As part of this second chapter, I review Appalachian literature, examine the Appalachian region itself and consider how it has been constructed and reworked as “the underside of a stable subject identity, an abyss at the borders of the subject’s existence”
(Sandovai-Sanchez, 1995, p. 548). I look at how has it been portrayed as a contaminating threat to the symbolic order, a place that undoes cultural taboos and destabilizes borders between normal and abnormal, insider and outsider, marginal and center. Further, I explore how Appalachia has been performed as an abject body—a hillbilly caricature, a defiled, drunk, filthy, deviant, repulsive, marginalized Other. I examine the model of Appalachia as an internal colony and how that position constructed particular Appalachian identities. As Tuhiwai Smith notes in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (1999) it is difficult to discuss research methodologies and indigenous peoples without including an analysis of imperialism and colonialism—in this case, internal colonialism. In reading Tuhiwai Smith, Mudimbe, Said and others, I have found numerous similarities between the construction of the colonized in other countries and the construction of the Appalachian as childlike, primitive, savage, backward, ignorant and in need of civilizing. Tuhiwai Smith notes that such labels apply to indigenous communities in First World nations as it does to indigenous communities in developing countries. Chapter II explores the ways Appalachians have been articulated in all of their performativity, and how this idea of a deviant, primitive people who were *in but not of* America developed tremendous staying power. It then looks beyond the colonization model and examines where Appalachia is situated in a postmodern, post-colonial world, how boundaries of Appalachians and Appalachia are fluid and slippery and how production and the material grounds in which it takes place are illustrated through “the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of every day life…” (Katz, 2004, preface).
In Chapter II, I also explore the historical and philosophical roots of qualitative/postpostivist inquiry and—in order to analyze stories about Flatwoods natives’ resistance and microresistance to power structures—familiarized myself with theoretical frameworks of Foucault, Munro, Ortner, Lather, St. Pierre, Alice J. Pitt, Deborah Britzman, David Couzens Hoy, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Henry Giroux, Pierre Bourdieu, Stephen L. Fisher, and others. In this chapter, I move into resistance theory and examine how it has been constructed, studied, overstated, criticized and utilized to examine the complex ways people make sense of their lives and resist or conform to forces such as surveillance, punishment and power networks. I ask: What are the mechanisms that produce resistance? What cultural expressive practices and speech performances are in use in these life history narratives? How are resistors in the Flatwoods constituted through their resistance? What shapes the patterns of resistance, nonresistance and “resistance dramas?” (Ortner, 1996, p. 294).

Beyond these questions, as detailed in Chapter III, three overarching questions guided this research: 1) How did Flatwoods natives methodically construct their experiences and what formed and shaped their reality-constituting activities? 2) What counted as significant in kinship/knowledge networks in this region in theorizing 1,000 tiny resistances to power structures? And 3) What can these “acts of narrative mean for learning to live?” (Britzman, 2006, p. 26). In Chapter III I also explain how I chose the Flatwoods as a place to conduct my research and expound on my research design, including: How I used analytic tools from ethnography, narrative analysis, and oral history and life history research; how I chose my interview subjects; how I gathered data
and constructed my analysis; and how I performed validity checks. In addition, this chapter provides reflexivity on my role in the overall study as part of a process of “coming clean at the hyphen,” which means that I examined “the hyphen at which Self-Other join the politics of everyday life, that is, the hyphen that both separates and merges personal identities with our inventions of Others” (Fine, 1994, p. 70). Further, I discuss how I used an interpretive lens for this work and provide an overview of my pilot study, which includes thick description of the Flatwoods. Chapter IV introduces the voices of the Flatwoods through the stories of Ethard, Leon, Levi, and their sister, Alma. It explores their narratives about growing up in the Flatwoods and probes more deeply into their microresistances, disputes, re-collections and blurred memories. It also analyzes the myriad reasons behind resistance dramas and the way the microresistances described in these rich stories are the kinds often overlooked when resistance is only understood as that which “contains the possibility of galvanizing collective political struggle around the issues of power and determination” (Giroux, 2001, p. 111). Chapter V details an incident in Ethard’s childhood—the day a dynamite cap blew three fingers and the thumb off of his right hand—and his account of resisting authority figures who subsequently tried to move him to the margins. This story was so frequently told and discussed among members of the Jasper kinship network that member checks and crystallization were employed to develop “a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic” (Richardson, 1994, p. 518). The section includes an analysis of a newspaper account of the same event, for example, and compares other siblings’ stories about the event to Ethard’s story. Finally, Chapter VI highlights what this study accomplished and
discusses its ramifications and implications, what was learned and unlearned, as well as its limitations, future goals and directions. To begin, I turn first to my review of Appalachian literature.
CHAPTER 2
APPALACHIAN LITERATURE, RESISTANCE THEORIES AND POSTMODERNITY: EXPLORING OTHERNESS, HISTORIES AND MULTIPICITIES

Introduction

The name Appalachia evokes a vast and conflicting range of images and emotions. For some, it brings to mind a strong, proud and pioneering people—the kind described in the Hank Williams Jr. song, “A Country Boy Can Survive” (Williams, 1990, track 9). In the song, Williams brags that—unlike city people too caught up in the Broadway lights and likely to be victims of muggers—hillbillies, West Virginia coal miners and other mountain people know how to live in the woods, skin a buck, run a trout line and protect their own. This view depicts mountaineers as independent, hardworking, self-sufficient folks who are primitive in a natural, salt-of-the-earth way that is to be desired and envied. Others, however, conjure up a far different picture. They view Appalachians and other mountain folks as synonymous with ignorant social deviants—the kind of toothless, lazy, poor, dirty and fatalistic characters who tote rifles and live in backwoods shacks framed by sagging porches and rusty cars. Mountaineers are seen as primitive, not in a natural, earthy way but in a crude, savage way that is to be avoided and feared. David Whisnant notes that Americans have long held such contradictory views about mountain people, particularly about Appalachians. Conflicting themes of differentiation, ambiguity, celebration, and repulsion have flowed through myriad representations of Appalachia since before the Civil War. While for some, mountain
people were “backward, unhealthy, unchurched, ignorant, violent, morally degenerate social misfits who were a national liability,” for others they were “pure, uncorrupted 100 percent American, picturesque and photogenic pre-moderns who were a great untapped national treasure” (Whisnant, 1983, p. 110). Appalachian scholar Ronald D. Eller in the foreword to the book, *Backtalk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes*, further explores such tensions:

As Americans have sought to redefine themselves as a people, Appalachia has become a Janus-faced ‘other.’ Throughout much of the 19th century Appalachia represented a geographic barrier on the frontier, a ‘strange land inhabited by a peculiar people’—a people who were at once quaint and romantic yet a burden to American success. By 1900 a popular image of Appalachia had crystallized that defined the region as ‘in America but not of America.’ Since then… the static and savage image of Appalachia has grown and continues to predominate in media, film and other popular views. (Eller, 1999)

Indeed, such images are still inscribed today by countless artifacts and media forms, including: hillbilly souvenirs of lanky, grizzle-bearded men carrying jugs of moonshine; Internet jokes and late-night comedy routines about rednecks and trailer trash; and movies and television shows ranging from *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994) and frequent cable TV reruns of *Deliverance* (Boorman, 1977), *The Beverly Hillbillies* (Henning, 1962) and *Green Acres* (Albert & Gabor, 1963) to the more recent *Blue Collar TV* (Foxworthy, 2004). So how does one sort through the quagmire of controversies over, and contradictory depictions of, Appalachian identity? Who and what are the
Appalachian Folk? Traditionally, there has been a perceived ontological and epistemological distinction between ‘folk’ and ‘nonfolk.’ The ‘folk’ was once defined “as a homogeneous category of cultural producers” (Roberts, 1993, p. 158) who were “peasant, working class, rural, poor, self-trained, or marginal” (Shuman & Briggs, 1993, p. 123). However, folkloristics in more recent times has contested the idea of culture as homogenous and created an expanded definition of the folk that means “any practice of ‘traditionalizing’ or, even more broadly, using artistic communication in everyday life” (Shuman & Briggs, 1993, p. 112).

Thus, while it might be tempting (as many have) to try to construct an all-encompassing, homogeneous “Appalachian Folk,” to do so would be to ignore the wide range of interests, backgrounds and ethnic diversity of the 23 million people who live in an area that stretches through 406 counties in 13 mostly central and southern states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. Appalachians are as diverse as the 200,000 square miles of land they occupy. On the other hand, to acknowledge that diversity is not to deny the existence of the idea of an Appalachian Folk conveyed in countless depictions by color writers, academics, politicians, missionaries, social workers, muckrakers and others. Nor is it to deny a Folk exists under the expanded definition of any practice of traditionalizing or using artistic communication. To be sure, many Appalachians share a number of commonalities including: familiarity with particular music, crafts and foods; a mountain dialect; and strong ties to the Appalachian mountain terrain. As Allen Batteau notes in his book, *The
Invention of Appalachia, people who live in the region don’t take kindly to outsiders questioning its existence.

Statements such as these, that Appalachia is nothing but a cultural construction, leave many, particularly those knowing the born-and-bred Appalachian, uneasy. They…make reference to a thickly structured array of experiences—growing up on Troublesome Creek, learning how to hunt, eating soup beans and cornbread—that demonstrate that ‘being Appalachian’ is something real. (Batteau, 1990, p. 200)

In light of the immense breadth and endurance of Appalachian cultural representations, it seems wise to rethink the question of who are the Appalachian Folk and instead ask who are they thought to be, and why the idea of an Appalachian other captured the American imagination so vividly more than 100 years ago and remains lodged firmly there today. How has Appalachia been recuperated as an abject subject? How has the region been constructed and reworked as “the underside of a stable subject identity, an abyss at the borders of the subject’s existence?” (Sandovai-Sanchez, 1995, p. 548). How has it been portrayed as a contaminating threat to the symbolic order, a place that undoes cultural taboos and destabilizes borders between normal and abnormal, insider and outsider, marginal and center? Further, how has it been performed as an abject body—a defiled, drunk, filthy, deviant, repulsive, marginalized Other? It is in the “condition of abjection—the struggle between the subject and the abject—that subjectivity in process is articulated in all of its performativity” (Sandovai-Sanchez, 1995, p. 548). This chapter explores the ways Appalachia has been articulated in all of its
performativity, and how this idea of a deviant, primitive people who were in but not of America developed tremendous staying power.

A reading of Appalachian history, artifacts, stereotypes and scholarship suggests a key reason for this endurance is connected to Appalachia’s role as a placeholder. Many depictions of the region have had little to do with what Appalachia was—or is today—and more to do with what various people have wanted, or still need, it to be. In other words, whether Appalachians are seen as primitive in an enviable way or primitive in a repulsive, deviant and frightening way depends on who is doing the looking, and the era in which they look. The Garden-of-Eden version of Appalachia acts a placeholder for those who long for a simpler time and place. The dangerous, backwater version acts as a placeholder for what people define themselves against—ignorance, pre-modernity, a lack of sophistication. In looking at how Appalachia has worked as various kinds of placeholders at particular times during the last century, this work examines how Appalachia served (and still serves) the needs of writers, academics, industrialists, missionaries, and a general American public who either benefited from framing the region in derogatory or conflicting terms, or who bought wholeheartedly into such labels.

Color Writers

To begin to understand how the highly visible idea of an Appalachian Folk operates, it is useful to analyze the texts and contrivances that created a homogeneous regional identity and “trace the forms of implantation, delimitation and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organization of domains…” (Foucault, 1972/1977a, p. 70). Appalachia owes its name to rumors that the Apalachee people living in
northwest Florida might possess gold. They had none, but pointed representatives of the Spanish empire in search of riches to the distant southern Appalachian mountains (Williams, 2000, p. 20). Appalachia became fixed as the name of the mountains after the American Revolution. At that point, “history in the form of the Protestant Reformation launched the waves of migrants who after 1720 surged through the natural gateway” (Williams, 2000, p. 31). Eventually during this period, people in Appalachia began to be conflated with the land. “Significantly… projected images of a wild and untamed state of nature were transferred from the mountains to their earliest inhabitants once upper-class, propertied explorers began to appreciate the value of the region’s rich natural resources” (Billings, Norman & Ledford, 1999, p. 13).

Put another way, derogatory depictions of Appalachia helped land developers and industrialists discourage people from settling in the mountains, giving them time to lay claim to large tracts of expensive timber. When explorer William Byrd discovered the value of mountain land, for example, his descriptions of the settlers who were beginning to inhabit it became increasingly negative. “As a member of the privileged, landholding elite, Byrd had every reason to be concerned about the acquisition of potentially valuable lands by settlers of a different class” (Billings, Norman & Ledford, 1999, p. 55). Another colonist, John Lederer, who explored the Appalachian mountains in the late 1600s and early 1700s, also emphasized the danger and uncertainty in the region. But Lederer, too, notes the presence of mineral bearing rock and speculated that “many other rich commodities and minerals there are undoubtedly in these parts, which if possessed by an
ingenious and industrious people, would be improved to vast advantages by trade” (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999, p. 55).

Disparaging portrayals of Appalachia expanded greatly after the Civil War, when “color writers”—travel writers, short-story authors and novelists—put forth a genre of dialect tales and travel sketches describing the mountains as a place inhabited by brooding, isolated and melancholy people. The local color movement in American fiction included conventions that required color writers to highlight the strange and exotic ways indigenous populations differed from the norms or urban America. Colorists sought out unusual settings, “such as the shores of the Great Lakes, the picturesque parts of Europe, and the byways of America just out of reach of the railroad” (Batteau, 1990, p. 39). They focused on “images of the ‘cannibal’ chief, the ‘red’ Indian, the ‘witch doctor,’ or that ‘tattooed and shrunken’ head, and stories which told of savagery and primitivism” and generated “further opportunities to represent the Other again” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2004, p. 8). Definitions of Appalachia centered on representations of a distant past that expressed either the primitiveness, backwardness and savagery of Appalachia or a “homogenous vision of ideal community, in vivid contrast to the actual growing diversity of American society” and where “folk became synonymous with colonial” (Becker, 1998, p. 4).

One of the more important writers of the era was Will Wallace Harney. Henry D. Shapiro says Harney and his editors at Lippincott’s Magazine in essence “discovered” Appalachia in 1869 by asserting regional Otherness in his article, “A Strange Land and Peculiar People.” The story made “the mountainous portions of eight southern states a discrete region, in but not of America, and which, after 1890, would seem to place
Appalachia and America in radical opposition” (1978/1986, p. 4, italics added). Harney’s article exoticized the region by emphasizing its degradation, degeneracy and difference from a homogeneous and unified America. Subsequently, other writers told similar tales of difference, describing their surprise at finding white, native-born, Anglo-Saxon Protestants in America who still appeared to live on a frontier that had not given way to the “more sophisticated and civilized” conditions of modern life (Shapiro, 1978/1986, p. 17). In many accounts, Appalachians were not only viewed as backward and illiterate, but also unaware of the progress taking place around them. Consider John Easton Cooke’s story in Harper’s Magazine, which described his encounter with people living in a hut in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. He wrote:

> Twenty miles from them, railway trains were speeding along freighted with well-dressed passengers reading the latest telegraphic news in the day’s paper and here were two beings who, as I soon found out, could neither read nor write, and were destitute of all ideas beyond the wants of the human animal in the state of nature.  

(Shapiro, 1978/1986, p. 17, citing Cooke, 1878)

Such dramatic depictions also influenced scholarly accounts of the mountains during and after this period. Katie Algeo notes that several academic works mirrored descriptions from travelers’ tales in popular magazines, giving similarly inaccurate accounts of Appalachia’s isolation and reinforcing the exaggerated characteristics of its inhabitants (2003, p. 29). She argues that by further disseminating erroneous ideas in an academic milieu they gave weight to a new epistemology of Appalachia. “The use of local-color imagery in what would be taken as objective, scientific narratives reified
imaginative fictional renderings of place, situating in real places a highly selective and distorted version of culture” (Algeo, 2003, p. 36, italics in original). Harold W. Foght, for example, in a 1913 essay about Madison County, North Carolina, borrowed liberally from fictionalized renderings when depicting the region’s educational systems. He wrote that in the mountains “only teachers in the mission schools ever bathe,” and claimed that whole counties had no schools and generations of people were entirely illiterate—ignoring literacy rates in the area in 1910 of 80 percent or documents showing that 850 people in the county subscribed to the local newspaper (Algeo, 2003, p. 41). The essay was designed to make the rest of the country “snort with indignation” over educational conditions in the mountains and galvanize support for reforms (Algeo, 2003, p. 46). Such an exaggerated and “deliberately provocative piece” helped Foght’s aim of introducing a Danish folk school model as part of a broader plan to systematize and standardize education.

Foght’s Appalachian imagery is a prime example of how a fictional discourse can “induce effects of truth” (Foucault, 1972/1977a, p. 193). The region is a literary and political invention that took shape after color writers, academics and others succeeded in conveying such powerful imagery that they induced the effects of a truth about Appalachians as a homogeneous people set apart. This “truth” reveals much about the power of hegemonic discourse and conditions at the time that made America need to measure its progress against an Other. Appalachia in this era acted as a forceful symbol of America’s confrontation with the industrial civilization it was becoming and the old ways it was leaving behind. The backward mountaineer in the late 1800s and early 1900s
reflected the nation’s struggle over class, currency, inequality, land and industrialization.

“It is far from coincidental that Appalachia was ‘discovered’ as a frontier at about the time the real frontier disappeared, when the last Indian resistance was eliminated at Wounded Knee in 1890,” notes Finlay Donesky (1999, p. 295). “The Appalachian replaced the savage needed to justify and define the imperatives of civilization.”

Constructing the Appalachian savage/civilized binary created an important function—putting the region at the periphery of culture, power and civilization. In essence, terms like “primitive, savage…undeveloped, developing, archaic, traditional, exotic and Other…all take the West as norm and define the rest as inferior, different, deviant, subordinate, and subordinateable” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Thomas, 1998, p. 209).

Thus, through the works of color writers, as well as academics and others who took what they said as truth, Appalachia became, in the popular view, a “retarded frontier” (Whisnant, 1983, citing Vincent, 1901).

**Selling Civilizing Efforts**

Of course, color writers were not the only ones during this period who reaped rewards from depicting Appalachians as backward and in urgent need of civilizing. Missionaries participated in a hegemonic movement to secure capitalist investment in the mountains by raising money to enlighten the needy mountaineers. “When the missionaries campaigned for funds—and you must understand how relentless this was, thousands of missionaries speaking in churches and other public forums—they described Appalachians as child-like and backward. …this meant focusing exclusively on sensational aspects of poverty at the expense of everything that might have been
normal…” (O’Brien, 2002). Shortly after the Civil War, the president of Berea College in Kentucky asserted to the Congressional American Missionary Association that mountaineers had sympathized with the north and therefore were worthy of moral and political evangelism (Shapiro, 1978/1986, p. 87). He suffered a setback when the feuds broke out at the turn of the century and “images of mountaineers as pathetic and romantic gave way before a new set of images of mountaineers as feuders, desperadoes, criminals, social deviants” and illegal moonshine whisky makers (Shapiro, 1978/1986, p. 102). Between 1904 and 1927, at least 476 silent films depicted life in the Southern Appalachians: 145 featured moonshining and 92 featured feuds “along with countless assaults and homicides” (Billings & Blee, 2000).

But by the turn of the century a new leader of Berea College, William Goodell Frost, was savvy enough to use the feuds to his advantage, citing them as further evidence of a great need for more funding so the college could lead Appalachians through the stages of progress already experienced elsewhere. College president from 1892 to 1920, Frost developed the public image of Appalachians with such lines as they are, “Not a degraded people, but a people not yet graded up” (Batteau, 1990, p. 77). In various speeches designed to win over northern benefactors, he defended the mountaineers as part of our “contemporary ancestors” and compared them to the people of Scotland in that they were “intelligent but not sophisticated.” Frost explained:

It gives us hope for their future that the frequent homicides are not committed wantonly nor for the purposes of robbery, but in the spirit of an Homeric chieftain on some ‘point of honor.’ Their exaggerated individuality is only offset by a spirit
of clannishness with which they gather around a leader in the old feudal way.

(Batteau, 1990, p. 111)

It was Frost who coined the term, Appalachian American, during an 1895 address at the annual banquet of the Cincinnati Teachers’ Club. In a speech dubbed, “The Last Log Cabin,” he told the teachers, “We are familiar with North America and South America. But have you ever heard of Appalachia America?” He went on to describe Appalachia as inhabited by a hardy race of pioneer ancestors still living in such isolation the region deserved a name of its own (Batteau, 1990, p. 130). His rhetoric was no accident. Here, Appalachia acted as a placeholder for America’s longing for its pioneering past. Frost’s use of log cabin imagery, and the promotion of the idea that Appalachians had “pure Anglo-Saxon blood” came at the close of the 19th century, when concerns were rising about the large numbers of immigrants pouring in from Eastern Europe and Mediterranean countries (Donesky, 1999, p. 296). Concerns also were increasing about the disappearance of the Western frontier and the moral corruption believed to accompany modern times. In Frost’s terms, Appalachians presented both a morality problem to be solved and enough strong pioneer stock to be worth saving.

Ambiguous Messages

Frost’s views quickly took hold outside Appalachia and by the turn of the century, a growing, more systematic interest in the region began to develop. In 1908, the National Conference of Charities scheduled a conference in Virginia to discuss the need for mountain missionary work. In 1911, Congress created the Appalachian National Forest and defined the region economically and geographically, though officials have since
added to and debated such geographic definitions and created new boundaries numerous times. And in 1917, new outside interest focused on Appalachian speech, crafts and folksongs. That year the renowned British folk-song collector Cecil Sharp traveled to Knoxville, where he asserted the essential Englishness of the Appalachian culture, argued for its legitimacy and spoke of the “supreme cultural value of an inherited tradition, even when unenforced by any formal school education” (Whisnant, 1983, p. 199). By the 1920s, scouts for commercial recording companies had realized that traditional mountain musicians “fit a surprisingly salable ‘hillbilly image’ ” (Whisnant, p. 183, p. 199) and “sales of hillbilly records multiplied dramatically by 1929.” Though it should be noted that musicians often were expected to give up their least popular songs in favor of new repertoires that were more appealing to mainstream society.

Churches during this period began to open settlement or sponsored schools, mission schools, and industrial and agricultural schools, institutes, academies and halls. Copying the settlement house movement in Europe that provided services to immigrant populations, settlement and mission schools in Appalachia generally located in remote, rural areas of the region where no public schools existed or where public schools were only open a few months a year. The first two missionary schools specifically dedicated to “mountain whites” opened in North Carolina in 1886 and 1887 (Williams, 2000, p. 200). One was an industrial school for girls in Asheville; the other a farm school for boys. Eventually such schools spread out across the mountains under the auspices of denominational “mountain mission boards” (Campbell, 1969, 1921, p. 271). Most of these schools, which charged tuition or allowed students to study under work programs or
with scholarships from beneficiaries, were ostensibly designed to help preserve moral
values and material culture in a world increasingly corrupted by urban industrialism.

The schools set out to teach literacy and other basic educational skills as well as
preserve local culture and crafts. Yet in Appalachia they often became more about
replacing local customs with a sanitized, napkins-on-the-left-please culture more
acceptable to the dominant class. Many of the schools’ instructors were from outside the
region and taught Appalachians to turn out products from other locales. Appalachian
craftsmen built furniture from New York designs. Copying Swedish patterns, women
weaved “new products rarely if ever seen in mountain homes, such as cloth napkins, table
runners and place mats” (Whisnant, 1983, p. 67). Advertisements for such crafts depicted
the work as handmade by skilled artisans in romantic mountain hollows and cabins.
Traditional ways were viewed with nostalgia for a pre-industrial past before America’s
“fall from innocence” (Becker, 1998, p. 21). The bleak working conditions often endured
by craft producers who were paid nominally for piecework were rendered invisible in
order to appeal to middle class consumers. “One of the most important factors in
maintaining that invisibility is the transformation of the real people of the Appalachian
South into mythological keepers of America’s heritage” (Becker, 1998, p. 168). As with
the music, messages about Appalachian heritage were at best ambiguous. “Cherish your
traditions, but mind your new manners; affirm what you are, but groom yourself for
social mobility; life in the mountains is wonderful, but its wonders must be shaped
according to the vision of the great stereoscopic world beyond” (Whisnant, 1983, p. 21,
italics in original). That conflict also surfaced in diaries and letters home from women who worked in various settlement schools. Their writings depicted their struggles with:

…on the one hand, their *conviction* that their new neighbors are descended from ‘hardy pioneers…of strong intellect and great force of character…willpower, good hard sense in abundance…’ and, on the other hand, their *observation* that many of them eat little but bacon, coffee, and cornbread; go barefoot; sleep (in their clothes) all together in one room; drink moonshine; swear; and fight; and indulge (one hears) in shocking immorality. (Whisnant, 1983, p. 21, italics in original)

Social workers used such research and the continued lack of educational options in parts of Appalachia to justify their position as helpers and strengthen their faith in the need for a benevolent society. “Many well-meaning Americans…set out to minister unto (mountaineers), to change them, to uplift them, to reconnect them even more firmly to the dominant economics, just so that, ironically, middle-class Americans could feel good again about the evolution of our political system” (Williamson, 1995, p. 251). Worth noting is that while schools were focused on teaching morality as well as preserving culture, many settlement teachers said little about the exploitative tactics used by coal mining companies and other outside interests that helped create the dire conditions of poverty they were trying to address. In *All that is Native and Fine*, Whisnant points out that even when teachers recognized exploitative practices, they were reluctant to speak out or help their students understand the impact of the industrialization occurring around them. He suggests the reasons behind such reluctance included a naiveté about the
devastation industrialization would eventually cause, as well as the funding some schools received from mining interests. In 1913, for example, 76 percent of the endowment used to operate the well-known Hindman Settlement School was donated by the Elkhorn Fuel Company (Whisnant, 1983, p. 73). So at the same time companies were exploiting workers and buying valuable minerals for as little as $1 an acre, teachers at Hindman and other coal-company supported schools were touting the sympathetic nature of coal operators who “fully appreciate the problems to be met” in educating backward Appalachians (Whisnant, 1983, p. 76).

_Inadequate Schooling, Accessibility, and Resources_

While researching the southern mountains as a regional director for the Russell Sage Foundation in the early 1900s, John C. Campbell realized that many church-backed schools did not know about each other. So he brought them together in 1913 to form the Conference of Southern Mountain Workers, where they shared ideas, created common goals and later put forward the definition of mountain people as a distinct “folk” and of southern mountain culture as a “folk culture” (Becker, 1998, p. 60). Campbell’s book, written in 1921 based on his notes and observations as a teacher and missionary in the region, found that young girls during this period sometimes opted not to go school because they saw it as a means of providing skills they could never actually use. “Too often still, if one of the household is ill, if ‘mammy’ is busy or the baby needs tending, ‘sis’ must stay at home. She is not an unwilling sufferer always… and not infrequently she runs away and leaves education to the menfolk” (Campbell, 1921/1969, p. 127). Nor did boys go to school all that long or often, since school terms were dictated by the
weather and crops. Other problems also persisted. Salaries were so low that some schools went for months without teachers. At the same time, jobs were so scarce that some teachers shared salaries, making continued instruction spotty. Worsening the situation, superintendents who showed favoritism often hired the least-qualified teachers, or churches refused to allow outsiders to teach their children. Parental support, too, was lackluster, with many parents questioning whether school just contributed to children getting “above their raisin’” and moving away (DeYoung, Glover, & Herzog, 2006, p. 1518).

Inadequate schools and accessibility issues might have posed barriers for white mountaineers, but African Americans faced even greater hurdles. Much that was written about Appalachia in the 1800s and 1900s focused on whites only. In fact, David Newhall says that the education of Appalachian blacks has drawn such little scholarly attention that the subject must be detangled from studies of blacks or Appalachians generally (2006, p. 1522). But he concurs with data showing that the vast majority of slaves and free African Americans in Appalachia were illiterate even long after the Civil War. “Appalachian blacks in particular suffered further neglect when, in the 1890s, missionaries—frustrated by Jim Crow laws and the magnitude of the problem in educating blacks—turned to working among poor whites.”

In *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia*, Dwight Billings and Kathleen Blee offer a lengthy account of slave holdings and the harsh life experienced by many African Americans in Clay County, Kentucky—both before and after the Civil War. Few had access to property or mortgages and worked
instead in salt mines, or as landless tenant farmers or house servants (Billings & Blee, 2000, p. 223). Educational opportunities were either absent or highly restricted. In 1910, just 18 African Americans were listed in Clay Count as literate, and they included farmers, servants, laborers and cooks. Most African Americans eventually left Clay County, in part due to a Kentucky state law that “allowed for the arbitrary seizure and forced apprenticeship of free African American children, especially those from poor families” (Billings & Blee, 2000, p. 237). By 1934, only 18 percent of eligible black children in Appalachia attended high school, compared to 54 percent of whites (Newhall, 2006, p. 1523).

By 1950, 20 Tennessee counties had enough blacks to justify building high schools for them—but none did. Even as late as 1985, adult Appalachian blacks over age 25 in rural areas were twice as likely as whites to have had less than five years of schooling. As well, Native Americans have been an important but too little talked about presence in the region. During the 1700s and 1800s, missionaries operated schools for Cherokee tribes in North Carolina (Coulter, 2006, p. 1529). Today, three Cherokee schools continue to operate on the Qualla Boundary in Appalachia, with the goal of promoting an awareness of tribal cultural identity, language and history.

War on Poverty

National interest in Appalachia did not resurface strongly until the 1960s when several books, television shows and politicians highlighted its dire poverty and illiteracy rates and unemployment. In 1960, newspaper and television reporters widely publicized compelling images of the poor in West Virginia as part of their coverage of that state’s
primary election between John F. Kennedy and Hubert H. Humphrey. In 1964, CBS created a public uproar when it featured the deep poverty in Letcher County, Kentucky in its television special, “Christmas in Appalachia,” narrated by Charles Kuralt. The show prompted donors to send 50 tons of food and toys to needy children in Whitesburg, Kentucky (Brosi, 2006, p. 204) and scores of activists and missionaries soon descended into the region. That same year, Lyndon B. Johnson declared war on poverty from a front porch in Martinsville, Kentucky. The early 1970s continued to reinforce the region’s mythology, particularly in media portrayals. In its Tuesday night lineup in 1970, CBS featured *The Beverly Hillbillies* (Henning, 1962) *Green Acres* (Albert & Gabor, 1963) and *Hee Haw* (Peppiatt & Aylesworth, 1969). While not explicitly Appalachian, the shows were viewed as depictions of the region and/or the Ozarks, and emphasized poverty, unemployment and a lack of education, housing and public services. In 1972, the movie *Deliverance* (Boorman, 1977) was released, “with its severely handicapped little banjo player and sexually deviant mountaineers… inspiring fear and loathing for hillbillies in the public imagination.” Even the movie *Harlan County, USA*, (Kopple) which won an Oscar in 1976, “emphasized violent images of the mountaineers, although it portrayed them as victims of a system of exploitation” (Brosi, 2006, p. 204).

Yet again, during this period, Appalachia acted a placeholder. Depicting the region as a problem to be solved once more transformed it into a liberal cause—giving Americans a way to feel good about their own progress and also their benevolence in helping the pathetic mountaineers. Much has been written about the industrialization of Appalachia, the control of land and resources by large, absentee companies, high levels
of poverty, political corruption and the exploitation, intimidation and physical force used to intimidate workers. But while missionaries, muckrakers, politicians, social workers, and a variety of well-meaning folks fretted over the region’s problems during the 1960s and 1970s, J.W. Williamson notes that “the free enterprise system for which countless patriots have expended much energy and heavy breathing—was hauling Appalachia away.” He added, “Mountain people have learned the hard way to beware of the doer of good deeds bearing pity” (Williamson, 1995, p. 252).

Reworkings

Foucault argues that it does not make sense to look for the origin of things because that presupposes that there was a time of emergence, that there was some primordial truth that “necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity” (1977b, p. 142). He says history is born of chance, of accident, of scholars who bicker with each other and who compete and disagree, adding:

What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. A genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their ‘origins.’ As it is wrong to search for descent in an uninterrupted continuity, we should avoid thinking of emergence as the final term of an historical development… (1977b, p. 144).

Thus, it is important to note that Appalachia has been discovered repeatedly in the last century and its imagery reinforced in multiple ways. There was no exact moment in time when Appalachian stereotypes lodged in American consciousness. There were many
moments, many color writers, missionaries, social workers, bickering academics, media forms and jokes. There was no one beginning but many discontinuous beginnings, passing events, norms, deviations, fissures, accidents, and discursive practices. Excavating them requires a recognition of these repeated beginnings and discoveries. “The creators of the Appalachian myth were not of the people they described, and what the inventers saw was refracted through their particular set of cultural and class lenses” (Lewis & Billings, 1997, p. 16).

As well, there was (and is) no one response to or reworking of depictions of Appalachia. Appalachians have resisted, redefined, recreated, recovered, recouped and at times embraced the labeling of their culture. In the book, *Growing Up Global: Economic Restructuring and Children’s Everyday Lives*, Cindi Katz defines recuperative acts as those where people succeed in engaging in opposition without a space of their own, “that is they encroach upon—in a temporary often stealthy way—the space of the dominating power in order to recuperate something” (2004, p. 253). Representations of Appalachian culture and responses to such representations are fluid, changing and fragmentary. Some Appalachians “encroach upon the opposition” by adapting to, or adopting, the labels that have defined them to the rest of America. As noted later in this chapter, they participate in Hillbilly Days celebrations, for example, and dress up in hillbilly garb, buy hillbilly souvenirs, listen to hillbilly music, and tell hillbilly jokes. “For every briar hopper joke they tell, you tell them two” says Anne Shelby, an eastern Kentucky native (1999, p. 154).
Others simply ignore Appalachian representations. And still others fight back. The Abercrombie & Fitch clothing company spurred widespread outrage in 2004, for example, when it decided to sell T-shirts reading, “It’s All Relative in West Virginia”—a play on the stereotype that the state fosters incest (Withers, 2004). The shirts prompted grassroots protests as well as vocal opposition by the West Virginia governor and Congressional members. CBS prompted similar protests in 2002 with its plan to bring back *The Beverly Hillbillies* as a reality show by moving a poverty-stricken family from the hills into a Hollywood mansion, where critics argued the family would be held up for national ridicule. The television network backed down only after an organized national effort that included ads in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, which read, “CBS CEO Les Moonves may fly over rural America in his corporate jet but that does not give him the right to look down on the hardworking people who live here” (The Center for Rural Strategies, 2002). As Kentuckian Shelby explains, such resistance can come across “as mere testiness or oversensitivity” but is “the product of a thousand insults, small and large” (1999, p. 154). In the end, she says, “Appalachians have been objecting to the stereotypes for well over a century now, seemingly to no avail. The images keep coming…”

*Theorizing Appalachia*

When examining Appalachian stereotypes such as those promoted by Abercrombie and Fitch, it is useful to begin with an exploration of how such stereotypes have been used over the decades in Appalachian scholarship. In the 1960s, for example, during the nation’s War on Poverty, writers and scholars sought to explain Appalachian
“Otherness” and its high rates of unemployment, illiteracy and concentrated poverty by looking to Appalachians themselves. They put forth a culture of poverty theory that depicted mountaineers as childlike and so isolated from the rest of America’s progress that they developed deep, sometimes perverse, attachments to family and tradition (Caudill, 1963, Weller, 1965, Fetterman, 1967, Ball, 1968, Goshen, 1970, Looff, 1971, Toynbee, 1975). Originally developed by anthropologist Oscar Lewis in 1966, the culture of poverty theory was intended to highlight “the profound difficulties that living in poverty for generations posed to the poor” (Lewis & Billings, 1997, p. 10, citing Lewis, 1966). But critics quickly realized it actually focused attention on the attitudes and values of the poor themselves, rather than their living conditions. When applied to Appalachia, culture of poverty theorists held that backwoods folks stubbornly refused to adapt to mainstream culture, even when such change would greatly benefit them and their communities. Appalachians were depicted as “cultural primitives,” whose independence and narrow-mindedness left over from subsistence farming days created deficiencies and fatalistic attitudes difficult to overcome (Goshen, 1970).

One of the most influential writers in the culturalist vein was minister Jack Weller, whose book, Yesterday’s People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia, claimed Appalachians were poor mostly because they were suspicious, fatalistic, clannish, and backward. Unlike upper middle class American professionals, Weller said, mountaineers feared education, resisted change of any kind, lived in isolation and were “traditionalist in the extreme” (1965, p. 89). David Looff echoed these themes in Appalachia’s Children: The Challenge of Mental Health, (1971) saying Appalachians were unable to overcome
the challenges of the frontier, and ended up feeling the world was beyond their control. He argued that religious beliefs further hampered the mountaineers’ motivation to seek change or set goals, and kept them locked in slow and backward lifestyles (Looff, 1971, p. 160). Others, such as Arnold Toynbee, suggested Appalachians inherited backward traits from the lower classes, criminals or indentured servants who migrated from Europe and settled in the mountains to avoid civilization (1975, pp. 383-389). He also described mountain people as little better than barbarians, adding: “‘They have relapsed into witchcraft and illiteracy,’” and “present the melancholy spectacle of a people who have acquired civilization and then lost it’” (Lewis, Johnson & Askins, 1978, p. 37, citing Toynbee, 1975).

Yet other scholars during this period, and into the 1970s and early 1980s, dismissed culture of poverty theorists as too willing to blame the victims. Influenced by Latin American dependency theory as well as representations of racial ghettos as internal colonies, they instead argued that Appalachia was affected by colonization in ways similar to other parts of the world dominated by first world countries (Caudill, 1963, Lewis, Johnson, & Askins, 1978, Shapiro, 1978/1986, Gaventa, 1980, Billings, 2006). Advocates of the internal colonization theory presented “highly romanticized pictures of traditional Appalachian culture and then lamented its destruction by outside forces” or described the many ways in which the region has been economically exploited (Fisher, 1993, introduction). In his bestselling book, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: Biography of a Depressed Area* (1963), Harry Caudill both continued to inscribe cultural stereotypes
of the backward Appalachian and also forcefully document the external exploitation of the region by absentee coal companies.

Caudill set the stage for scholars such as Helen Lewis, a major proponent of the internal colonization theory, who combined a condition of cultural, political and economic imperialism in her colonialist model, suggesting “the condition of Appalachia to be the end product of colonial like relations between Appalachia and outside society” (Gaventa, 1990, p. 13). She put forth four criteria to make her case that Appalachia was a U.S. colony. First, outsiders in the form of absentee coal companies forcibly acquired control over much of the land, resources and political structure. Second, they rapidly changed the values, orientation and the way of life of the colonized, transforming or destroying their indigenous values and orientations. Third, they administered much of the social and economic life. And fourth—although Appalachians were not of an ethnic or racial origin that had been subject to historical legal, political or civil discrimination—Lewis says racism still affected the dominant group’s actions toward the colonized (Lewis, Johnson, & Askins, 1978, p. 16). In essence, Lewis argues, Appalachia was exploited by ruling interests who justified their takeover of the region and their brutal extraction of its raw materials by depicting its inhabitants as uncivilized and unworthy of concern. She notes that outside interests and some Appalachian natives went to great lengths to politically disarm and culturally discredit those who opposed them, explaining: “It is a subtle and deadly process by which a people were convinced of their own worthlessness and thus, in many cases, gave up efforts to defend themselves and their ways of life” (Lewis, Johnson, & Askins, 1978, p. 23).
Convincing others of the low worth of Appalachians was made easier by historical stereotypes of mountain people as dumb, lazy, no-good hillbillies. “As a white ‘other,’ the hillbilly has a particular racial status. Since modernity and ‘civilization’ are racialized as Western and white, the dual function of the hillbilly is as much a matter of race as it is a marker of primitivism and poverty…” (Mason, 2005, p. 43). Lewis says the racialized refrain of mountain worthlessness was picked up by “native colonizers” who cashed in on their share of the wealth and then justified their payment of below-welfare wages by denigrating their own. “The native exploiter… speaks of the laziness and ‘sorriness’ of a ‘certain class’ of people, especially those on welfare or those who are unemployed” (Lewis, Johnson, & Askins, 1978, p. 23). John Gaventa agrees that such degradation of mountain people usually had racial overtones, particularly in tightly controlled mining towns such as Middlesboro, near the Cumberland Gap. Appalachians were depicted as different from other white people. They were a people set apart:

While the mountaineer was not exactly of another race, he could be portrayed as a breed whose lifestyle presented a deficient way of existence. For instance, while the new Middlesboro was said to represent ‘true social enjoyments, health, a fine climate, natural beauty and good things,’ the older culture was said to consist of ‘wilder mountaineers,’ who were ‘usually not attractive,’ but were ‘rather yellow and cadaverous looking, owing to their idle and shiftless ways, and the bad food upon which they subsist, and perhaps also to their considerable consumption of moonshine whisky.’ (Gaventa, 1980, p. 65)
Such descriptions of the shiftless, “yellow and cadaverous looking” Appalachian bring to mind the stereotypes cited by Edward Said in his book, *Orientalism*. He notes, for example, that the “American is ‘red, choleric, erect,’ the Asiatic, is ‘yellow, melancholy, rigid,’ the African is ‘black, phlegmatic, lax,’ ” and, of course, in many accounts, the Other is described as wild, lazy, primitive, barbaric, childish and/or dangerous (Said, 1995/1978, p. 119).

Lewis and other internal colonization theorists viewed structural forces as the major reason for the harsh working conditions, environmental devastation and high poverty rates prevalent in parts of Appalachia. They said mountaineers were less fatalistic than realistic about their powerlessness over major absentee landowners and other political forces beyond their control (Gaventa, 1980). Other structural theories regarding Appalachia included a modernization model, which grew out of an Appalachia Regional Commission study that attributed the region’s problems to “infrastructural backwardness” in road and highway networks, economic institutions, housing and educational facilities (Matvey, 1990). Those who argued for this theory said the mountainous topography, rugged terrain, lack of infrastructure and untrained workforce in Appalachia made it difficult for developers to open industrial parks and new businesses in the area. This model became a foundation for funding in Appalachia, as the Johnson administration created the Appalachian Regional Commission in 1965 to administer programs and fund infrastructures throughout the region (Matvey, 1990, p. 6).

By the 1990s, however, scholars began to find major flaws in all of these perspectives (Batteau, 1990, Matvey, 1990, Fisher, 1993, Billings, Norman, & Ledford,
1999, Williams, 2002, Billings, 2006). Joseph Matvey challenged the modernization model, pointing out that topography was clearly not a barrier for mining interests, though their investments never spilled over into other industries. “If geography is seen theoretically as a principal barrier to economic development, then how would one explain other cases where development and growth occurred despite the obstacles imposed by rugged terrain?” (Matvey, 1990, p. 7). He said the crucial question theorists should have posed was not why there was a lack of capitalist work ethic in Appalachia but rather why the work ethic only found its expression in the coal industry and never deviated from mining into the formation of other industrial sectors. Scholar Stephen L. Fisher found that far too often both the culture of poverty and internal colonization views “unwittingly reinforced the notion of Appalachians as victims, as non-actors determining their fate” (Fisher, 1993, introduction). And Eastern Kentucky University sociologist Alan Banks contested the internal colonization theory’s tenant that entry into Appalachia was forced. While there were examples of companies stealing or swindling land, he found that many state and local elites welcomed outside investment and people were eager to sell large tracts of property (Banks, 1980).

Along those lines, University of Kentucky Professor Dwight Billings and University of Pittsburgh Professor Kathleen Blee challenged theories that asserted Appalachia is poor because of the people themselves or because absentee corporations exploited its timber, coal and other wealth. As a way of examining various theories about regional poverty, they examined conditions before industrialization in a thorough longitudinal case-study (1990) of the Beech Creek area (a pseudonym) in Clay County,
Kentucky. This helped them make the case that the continued emphasis on either structural oppression or lack of agency in Appalachia diverted attention away from a more comprehensive conception how places grow poor. They asked why corporations were allowed to engage in such widespread exploitation in the first place, and provided a detailed account of how power structures formed and how corrupt local politicians aided outside corporations, hurting the region economically.

Billings and Blee also challenged other long-held beliefs, noting that parts of Appalachia as early as 1820 developed strong connections to capitalized markets through salt manufacturing and livestock and timber sales—thus disputing historical accounts of the entire region’s virtual isolation during that period (2000). As well, they challenged the popular idea that there are “two Kentuckies”—the Bluegrass and mountain sections. This idea wrongly encouraged those outside the region to see the area as “two entirely distinct elements of population” and that a “separate and inferior” people had settled in the mountains. In fact, both areas were “settled by people of the same racial stock, many of whom were members of the same families and migrated to Kentucky at the same time…” (Billings & Blee, 2000, p. 29).

On other fronts, researchers found that, contrary to stereotypes, feuding often started with elite and powerful families—not ignorant people who lived outside the law. In Clay County, feuds were centered on two powerful families made up of a number of attorneys, lawmakers and other elites, many of whom were well-educated and familiar with the court system. “It is ironic, only in the light of much later discursive tradition that portrayed the Kentucky mountain ‘feuds’ as the consequence of ignorance, isolation, and
backwoods primitivism, that the social origins of long-term conflict would take root in unresolved disputes of that area’s leading capitalist entrepreneurs and its best-educated, most-sophisticated political leaders” (Lewis & Billings, 1997, p. 117). Researchers also dismissed Weller’s work, saying he was untrained in social research and simply took impressionistic beliefs about the culture and presented a bleak, derogatory picture of mountaineers. “Nowhere in his entire book did Weller provide evidence for his characterizations. The authority of his text, and others like it, came not from the power of research but from the potency of stereotypes recycled again and again by writers claiming to understand Appalachia” (Lewis & Billings, 1997, p. 10).

Today, Appalachian scholars and activists continue to work against essentialized notions of Appalachians as a backward, homogeneous group cut off from civilization. They have written extensive histories of coal and textile union rebellions and challenged Marxist theories of class exploitation that they said emptied the region of its content and reduced it to an abstraction. And they have created new discourses that reject “the attempt of historical winners to justify the losers’ fate as the inevitable result of personality flaws or geography or impersonal market conditions” (Banks, Billings & Tice, 1993, p. 285). In addition to preserving the history of dissent and resistance in the area, Appalachian scholars also have formed alliances and task forces to investigate mineral rights, land ownership and taxation on more than 20 million acres of land in 80 counties spanning six Appalachian states. They have pushed for tax reforms, measures to hold absentee companies more accountable for environmental degradation, and new mining and land ownership policies. As well, postmodern, poststructural, postcolonial,
and feminist analysis of knowledge have brought to the forefront a recognition among Appalachian scholars of the existence of many diverse Appalachians and the play of identities in the region. Further, they have worked to “overcome the often romantic and contrived characterizations of Appalachian culture” (Banks, Billings & Tice, 1993, p. 286).

Hillbilly-ness

One way to explore moving regional boundaries and complex and fluid Appalachian identities is to look at how Appalachia has been represented and the varied reactions to such representations. Appalachian stereotypes and representations take myriad forms, but perhaps no other image is more identifiable with Appalachian identity than the hillbilly. In his article, “Old Men and New Schools,” David Whisnant argues that the hillbilly is the central figure of a “complex myth” created by outsiders (1989, p. 74). One might argue, as Said has argued, that it should not be assumed that certain myths or lies are such that, “were the truth about them to be told, (they) would simply blow away” (Said, 1995/1978, p. 6). Yet perhaps deciding on the myth or truth about the hillbilly is far less worthwhile or possible than identifying the various archetypes by which scholars, natives, activists and others use the image to understand Appalachia. As Batteau notes in The Invention of Appalachia, “the interesting question is not a contrast between myth and reality, but rather the hierarchies and intersections and naming of multiple realities” (Batteau, 1990, p. 6). He abandons the idea that the problem with representation in Appalachia is misrepresentation and instead discusses the social construction of Appalachia, within the texts, performances and consciousness of our own urban
imagination. In other words, it is not that such “myths” are misrepresentations of the real Appalachian, but that there are no true representations of anything at all. “All representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the presenter” (Said, 1995/1978, p. 6).

Still, as noted earlier, representations have purposes and the hillbilly representation can be used to effectively create an “us” and a “them” that constructs the superiority of America over the inferiority of Appalachian backwardness. “The construction of identity…involves establishing opposites and ‘others,’ whose actuality is always subject to the continuous reinterpretation of their differences from “us.” Each age and society re-creates its ‘others.’ Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of ‘other’ is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies” (Said, 1995/1978, p. 332). Thus, instead of searching for the hillbilly identity or its meaning, this section will examine discourse about how the hillbilly functions and is represented by various people and groups. Where is the hillbilly to be found? How has hillbilly as a cultural representation constructed the Appalachian? How does insider/outsider status, socialization and class—education, gender, age, status, lifestyles, consumption patterns, property, community membership and socioeconomic mobility—affect negotiations with the hillbilly identity? How does hillbilly construct the male and female body in different ways? Where did the hillbilly come from, anyway? And finally, how do responses to hillbilly differ and what do such responses say about those who are responding?
The idea of the hillbilly southern mountaineer has a history of tradition, thought and imagery. It is a durable apparatus that has constructed the Appalachian as a particular kind of body—a drunk body, dangerous body, filthy body, shiftless body, diseased body, disfigured body or deviant body. Further, responses to the hillbilly representation—whether they are oppositional, celebratory or even exist—depends in part on where one lives and one’s cultural and economic status in and out of the region. As Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of symbolic power asserts, “all cultural symbols and practices, from artistic tastes, styles in dress, and eating habits to religion, science and philosophy—even language itself—embody interests and function to enhance social distinctions” (Swartz, 1997, p. 6). In Appalachia, social distinctions and identities are routinely displayed in hillbilly festivals, modes of dress, souvenirs, movies, t-shirts, Internet jokes and other cultural artifacts. Social position, mobility and socialization affects whether one identifies with or rejects these artifacts, as well as one’s knowledge about how they operate.

To be sure, this work is far from a complete history of the way images of the shiftless, lazy, moonshine-guzzling hillbilly started to operate as a cultural icon and continue to have tremendous staying power today. Still, it does analyze some of the texts and contrivances that connect the hillbilly image to a homogeneous regional identity. Researchers have traced the modern “hillbilly caricature” so strongly associated with Appalachians back to America’s first folk song, published in 1643, which poked fun at colonists (Lewis R., & Billings, D., 1997). Professor J.A. Leo Lemay, who studied the song, found that it regarded the colonists as “rustic hicks” who “lived disheveled lives of
grinding poverty in shacks under which hogs and dogs took refuge, who distilled and then dissipated themselves on homemade liquor, lazily tilled the corn crop with a hoe, if the animals did not get to it first, and wore ragged, patched clothing” (Lemay, 1985). In 1900, the New York Journal first linked the term to uncivilized mountaineers. A “hill billie,” the journal explained, was “a free and untrammeled white citizen of Alabama, who lives in the hills, has no means to speak of, dresses as he can, talks as he pleases, drinks whisky when he gets it, and fires off his revolver as the fancy takes him” (Williamson, 1995, p. 37). In 1915, the term was used in a movie, Billie— the Hill Billy, about a city man who goes to the hills and rescues a daughter from her father’s tyranny. Hundreds of similar movies about dangerous desperados, moonshine and feuding soon followed (Williamson, 1995, p. 37).

Contributing to such images was H.H. Goddard, who published several books and articles just before the Depression claiming that intelligence and feeble-mindedness were inherited traits, and depicting “lurid (and falsified) pictures” of hillbillies that later helped deepen beliefs about hillbillies as a defective race (Batteau, 1990, p. 98, parenthesis in original). In the 1930s, a book called Hollow Folk echoed such themes, though ostensibly it was more scientific and based on two years of field work in five mountain communities. The book continued the emphasis on Appalachian educational backwardness, describing the region as “a pocket of animality: filth, illiteracy, incest, superstition, and sloth” (Batteau, 1990, p. 97). More recent depictions—movies such as Deliverance (Boorman, 1977) and Pulp Fiction (Tarantino, 1994) — depict the male hillbilly as a “repulsively savage, a monster of nature” with a “rank disregard for all
propriety.” From this view, the hillbilly male body is seen as stagnant, indolent, inbred and often filled with rot-gut alcohol. Further:

He reminds us symbolically of filth, of disgusting bodily functions. Why else is he so frequently pictured with outhouses? The hillbilly’s outhouse is a pig’s bladder at the American garden party, an abstracted and ironically glorified memorial in plain sight of the utter democracy of human hygiene, a symbol of the plain fleshly equality of all people. And when the hillbilly is depicted as sexually loose—another category of symbolic filth—isn’t his easily available Moonbeam McSwine a fantasy of that same democracy? (Williamson, 1995, p. 3).

When the hillbilly is not drunk he is mean, or, shotgun at the ready, poised for violence or worse—violent sexual deviance. Deliverance embedded one of the best known hillbilly images in American culture, the “squeal-like-a-pig” inbred rapist who strikes fear into other male hearts. Twenty-two years later, Pulp Fiction picked up its main themes, showing how two sadistic hillbilly brothers, Zed and Maynard, victimize the movie’s main characters, Marcellus and Butch. After Zed sodomizes Marcellus, he recovers the upper hand and retaliates against Zed, warning: “Hear me talkin’ hillbilly boy? I ain’t through with you by a damn sight. I’m going to get Medieval on your ass.” Thus, the movie indicts Zed, the hillbilly rapist, as “a thing from the Middle Ages, a creature not evolved to modern ways and, therefore, deserving of barbaric retribution” (Dinshaw, 1999). As the filmmakers who produced Deliverance and Pulp Fiction know, “Appalachia is one of the ‘backward’ places to invoke if you want to depict sadism and coerced sex as inevitable and inherent. Sexual deviance is portrayed as endemic to the
region and its people” (Mason, 2005, p. 52). Such movies can have a lasting impact. In a 1999 survey of undergraduate students, men asked to describe their most memorable horror film responded with words such as “teenager, disturbing, rural, dark, country and hillbilly.” Clearly, researchers said, “men had a fear of rural people and places” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 270).

Hillbillies, of course, are not just men, though female hillbillies are frequently depicted as either transgressing gender roles and being too male, too aggressive, and too physical or as voluptuous but dim-witted “hillbilly gals” who need strong, male protectors. The mannish portrayals began in the 1800s, when Appalachian women were thought to have adopted rough-and-tough men’s work to compensate for their lazy, incompetent husbands. Erikson, the sociologist who studied the Buffalo Creek flood, found numerous such depictions in his research of female mountaineers. He said that by most accounts:

The average mountain woman married in her early teens and gave birth to as many as a dozen offspring in a childbearing career that might last 30 years. She did most of the work in and around the log home, spinning and weaving and knitting, making the family’s clothes, feeding what livestock there was and slaughtering it when the time came, planting and weeding and harvesting the garden, milling the corn when it was picked, bringing water from the spring or creek, sawing the firewood, laying fences, dressing and salting the game her husband brought home, and, of course, nursing everyone through frequent bouts of illness. Mountain women often grew gaunt and leathery while still young,
tough as rawhide but mistaken for aging grandparents at the age of 25. (Erikson, 1976, p. 76)

In the 1960s, some of the best known hillbilly women were Elly May Clampett and Granny, two main characters in the television show, *The Beverly Hillbillies* (Henning, 1962). Granny liked to make moonshine or “roomtiz medicine” and frequently sneaked off and got liquored up. Elly May climbed trees, took care of her “critters” and often won fights against her brother Jethro, though much like the cartoon Li’l Abner’s Daisy Mae, she was “voluptuous, vacuous, barefoot” (Maggard, 1999, p. 229). Both women were not likely to direct the events in their lives. “Granny is wizened, wiry, and wrinkled, an older Appalachian woman with enough rural smarts to outwit city slicker bankers. But she… is uninterested in achieving some upper-middle-class lifestyle. In both kinds of images mountain women seem to be standing outside or apart from the rest of America” (Maggard, 1999, p. 229).

More recent mannish portrayals include Private First Class Lynndie England, a West Virginia soldier who became famous after a photo surfaced of her smirking for the camera while holding a naked Iraqi prisoner on a leash. The media were quick to report England’s Appalachian heritage and show images of her residence in a mobile home in Fort Ashby, West Virginia. She was the “trailer trash torturer,” and “ignoble savage” (Jennings, 2005) or a “gender-bending hillbilly.” Journalist Seymour Hersh reported that a former intelligence officer said many of the problems in the 372nd Military Police Company were caused by “recycled hillbillies” who did not know the boundaries between humane and inhumane treatment (Mason, 2005, p. 49). Bloggers and chat room
participants echoed that opinion, with one saying the photographs simply reflected the “mating rituals of wild hillbillies,” and holding up England’s out-of-wedlock pregnancy as an example of West Virginia womanhood at its worst. It was the opposite for West Virginia soldier Jessica Lynch, who was viewed as both a tough soldier and frail girl from a forgotten corner of the world, as both a “Rambo-esque underdog fighting to the teeth and the noble savage who waits for salvation from the West” (Mason, 1995, p. 47). Either way, “female Appalachians… are idealized or demonized not only in terms of racial purity or inbreeding, but also as all natural ‘hillbilly gals’ or unnatural ‘mannish misfits’ ” (Williamson, 1995, p. 225).

The way people respond to such stereotypes—whether they eschew, embrace or are even aware of them—depends in large part on their socialization, class, education levels, and whether they still live in the region or have moved away. Phillip Obermiller, (1999) who has studied urban Appalachians, say migrants who live in densely populated neighborhoods in cities and suburbs are the least likely to embrace hillbilly imagery because they experience stereotyping and its effects more pervasively than their rural counterparts. In rural areas, negative portrayals of hillbillies come from outsiders. In urban settings, migrants must deal with them from coworkers, neighbors and the public institutions in their own community. In fact, despite 1960s studies claiming urban Appalachians were not joiners, Cincinnati Appalachians were so motivated to fight prejudice they form a number of groups in the 1970s and 1980s, including: the Appalachian Community Development Association, dedicated to promoting Appalachian culture; the Urban Appalachian Council, an advocacy group; and Appal-PAC, a political
action group. The groups have been effective on a number of fronts. Cincinnati is the only metropolis in the country with a human rights ordinance explicitly protecting the rights of Appalachian people (Billings, Norman & Blee, 1999, p. 256). In addition, Cincinnati Appalachians so strenuously objected in 1982 to a Shriners convention planned around Hillbilly Days—saying it “implicitly and explicitly ridiculed and humiliated new arrivals to the big city from the mountains of Kentucky”—that the event was canceled. Williamson said that the irony behind such objections is clear:

Members of the offending group, thoroughly middle class and influential in their own hometown settings, adopt the hillbilly as a cheeky affirmation of regional identity in the larger American context, their own assertion of equality. Yet they end up endangering the self-esteem of their coregionists who are relatively powerless in the city setting and thus vulnerable to policymakers who act on stereotype. For the first group, the mirror flatters and energizes; for the second, the mirror mocks and diminishes (1995, p. 13).

Class culture and mobility are also reflected in the ways people respond to the image of the hillbilly by painstakingly working to avoid being viewed as one. Often, such reactions involve trying to shed dialects and learn more mainstream ways of speaking. Crystal E. Wilkinson, an Affrilachian from Casey County, Kentucky, said she always dreaded the question, “Where are you from?” and worried during her travels that someone would detect her accent. Before she went away to college she repeatedly stood in front of the mirror and tried to mimic the way people talked on television—in an attempt to repel the “country” from her voice (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 185). Eventually, she
succeeded in becoming a “black, professional woman with a trained, homogenized tongue.” But later discovered the joy of returning home, where her “jaw would loosen” and her tongue would “rest in its normal state.” Linguist Kirk Hazen has traveled to various Appalachian schools trying to teach students not to be ashamed of their speech. He tells them the only real problem with the Appalachian dialect is the prejudice of outsiders who rate it as inferior. Yet Hazen acknowledges that critics have demanded his resignation from West Virginia University because they say he is a threat to a proper education. They “seem to feel there is a certain set form to language and you can’t think right if you’re not using that language, which is ridiculous” (Clines, 2000). Herbert Reid, who realized in the 1950s that he was viewed by his new northern classmates as a hillbilly, spent a great deal of time trying to distance himself from his upbringing and find a new identity that fit into the dominant class. “More of us were ready to aver that the label ‘hillbilly,’ under certain circumstances, was a ‘fighting word’ ” (Reid, 1999, p. 315).

Certainly, not all natives want to avoid or fight over hillbilly depictions. Indeed, some Appalachians do not even connect such stereotyping to their own heritage. As a child, Kentuckian Anne Shelby didn’t realize that derogatory depictions of hillbillies, or the myriad media images of dirty children sitting listlessly on porches of old shacks, had anything to do with her background. She explains, “I figured Appalachia must be in West Virginia. Much later I had a student from West Virginia who said he’d always thought they must be talking about East Tennessee.” It wasn’t until she moved away and became a teacher that she realized the labels conjured up by the term hillbilly were typically
applied to Appalachians as a whole, or in some cases, to mountaineers from the Ozarks. For many natives, she said, “The ‘real hillbillies, whoever they are, are hard to find. They’re always over the hill somewhere, or on up the holler, one county over and one class down” (Shelby, 1999, p. 154). Appalachian Darlene Wilson agrees, saying hillbilly stereotypes give middle-class white Americans a way to confirm their idealized status and breathe a sigh of relief. “See,” they can say, “that’s the bottom for white folks and we’re not like that at all” (Wilson, 1999, p. 100. On the other hand, as Williamson points out, for some natives hillbilly is less a joke on them than on the middle class folks who look down on them. “After all, who buys the tourist items, the wall hangings and the yard art? Hillbilly souvenirs do not find a home in condos but in countryside abodes…Stuck-working people buy them, the purely salaried buy them, and they get the joke. The hillbilly takes his durn ease right in the middle of all these working people. He gives the horse laugh to middle-class respectability” (1995, p. 4).

Those who do embrace some part of the hillbilly identity usually embrace “the dirt without the danger” (Williamson, 1995, p. 9). They defend shows like *The Beverly Hillbillies* and characters such as Granny and Minnie Pearl as harmless or even endearing. Some also profit from hillbilly portrayals, such as those who run the annual musical reenactment of The Hatfields and McCoys feud in a West Virginia state park or performances in Virginia of John Fox Jr.’s *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999, p. 5). The Shriners group, in particular, has adopted the hillbilly image. The organization gave out its first Hillbilly Degrees in 1969 and has since hosted hundreds of parades across the country featuring Shriners decked out in “their hillbilly
garb and driving their moonshine-still jalopies” (Williamson, 1995, p. 11). In 1976, Shriners in Pikeville, Kentucky got in on the act with their Hillbilly Days festival, which now attracts more than 100,000 people each spring and has spurred a host of hillbilly merchandise, vendors and spin-off celebrations (Hillbilly Days 2006, 2007). Other hillbilly events and depictions are also growing in popularity. In 1993, a Beverly Hillbillies movie (Spheeris) based on the same naive cast of characters featured in the television series grossed $9,525,375 in its first weekend at the box-office.

Country musicians, too, have recognized the popularity of hillbilly images and are using the term in songs and more often calling themselves hillbilly bands. Hank Williams Jr. has revived the song, “A Country Boy Can Survive” (1990) and it is once again topping the charts. Country music duo Brooks and Dunn’s latest release, called “Hillbilly Deluxe,” also is topping the charts and the Country Music Television video countdown (Brown, Dunn, & Brooks, 2006). In fact, the term hillbilly is so popular that are now more than two million links to the word on the Google search engine, with many sites depicting derogatory jokes, cartoons, photos and videos. “By probing the cultural function of the innocent fool as truth-saying Other and social critic from its medieval habitus to current Hollywood… the potentially subversive appeal of Dogpatch characterizations…and hillbilly icons—not to mention the ritualized celebration of Hillbilly Days—often amuse as well as offend mountain people themselves…” (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999, p. 14). Whether mountain people are offended or amused, Appalachian native Katherine Ledford says they not have to look hard to find a hillbilly today. “Turn on the television, open a newspaper, watch a movie, listen to a political
debate, or attend a performance of a Pulitzer-Prize winning play and there he is—drinking, feuding and fornicating” (Billings, Norman & Ledford, 1999, p. 47).

A Common Ground of Class and Rural-ness

Researchers have theorized Appalachia from a wide variety of perspectives, including culture of poverty, internal colonization, modernization models and others. A postmodern framework argues that there is no essentialized Appalachian or Appalachia and no one theory that could possibly sum up the entire region or its inhabitants or culture. Yet as Tuhiwai Smith notes in Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples, (2004) it is difficult to discuss research and indigenous peoples without including an analysis of imperialism and colonialism—or in this case, internal colonialism. Like the colonized in other countries, Appalachians have been depicted as childlike, primitive, savage, backward, ignorant and in need of civilizing. Such discourse concealed the exploitation of people and resources in “statements about the inferiority of the colonized, the primitive nature of other races, the barbaric depravity of colonized societies and therefore the duty of the imperial power to reproduce itself in the colony society….‖ (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1998, p. 43).

Further, examining the contexts that shape the way in which Appalachian representations—in particular the image of the hillbilly—are enacted serve to illustrate class, socialization, mobility, and insider/outsider positioning as locations for identity formation. Whether people cringe over the term hillbilly or dress up in hillbilly garb, buy hillbilly souvenirs, listen to hillbilly music, and tell hillbilly jokes, the image creates a common ground of class and rural-ness. It epitomizes a working-class identity and
culture, way of life and experience. “Clearly one’s social position—defined by gender, race, class and any other division that is structurally significant—potentially affects one’s perspective on cultural institutions and the ardor of one’s subscription to the values and interpretations that are promoted in rituals and other socially produced cultural forms” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). In other words, those who “get the joke” are those who understand groups of people are “differently situated within the structures of inequality within capitalistic societies” (Hall, 1999, p. 123). Advances in media technology, illustrated by the two million hits of the word “hillbilly” on Google, contribute to the circulation of imagery, information and ideas that are distinctly class- and culture related. At the same time, this era of globalization has increased opportunities for both the assertion of local cultures and the production of new hybrid cultural forms. “Popular culture (or any other site) is not a solid, fixed object, but instead an ever-changing network of movement, which is structured by and through apparatuses of power, which is itself a result of a struggle” (Dolby, 2001). Thus, Appalachian representations are not bounded, stable or impermeable identities or places but fragmented and contradictory. As Daniel Yon (2000, introduction) points out, far from the traditional “culture of origin” that provides an anchor and point of reference in this fluid world, “identities are constantly reworked with meaning and images drawn from the rapidly changing circuits of popular culture.”

Structure, class, identities, and everyday cultural practices in particular areas of Appalachia and how production and the material grounds in which it takes place are, as noted in Chapter I, illustrated through “the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of
every day life…” (Katz, 2004, preface). People are both shaped by structures and shape them, and construct their every day lives in response to and in spite of structural configurations and amidst huge, systemic inequalities. In examining multiple and fluid Appalachian identities, I recognize that “cultures and the identities they foster constitute social constructions—and not passively inherited legacies” (Stromquist, 2002, p. 65).

The Appalachian Body

To further examine cultures, conditions, tensions and dilemmas regarding identities, community membership, and socioeconomic mobility in Appalachia, it is also useful to explore a particular subject and historical period that has long been associated with, and indeed at times has been seen as synonymous with, Appalachia. That subject is coal and how multinational coal company purchases and actions in the late 1800s and early 1900s produced new knowledges, skills and practices that valued certain kinds of intelligence, speech and consumption patterns in areas of Appalachia. By many accounts, pre-industrial Appalachian culture was predicated on strong relationships to the land. Most of the earlier settlers in the Southern Highlands were Scotsmen, Englishmen, and Welshmen, and many in the 1700s lived in relative isolation, scarcely influenced by rapid industrialization in other parts of America. Kinship in these rural communities was a key to social organization. “Labour was often co-operatively shared at ‘corn-huskins’, log rollings, or house-raisings” (Gaventa, 1980, p. 49). There was little formal government. Roads were difficult to travel on and often impassable. But timber, animals to hunt, and, in some cases, land to farm, was plentiful. During this period, Appalachia was mostly a “farm-and-forest economy” (Williams, 2002, p. 236).
But by the late 1800s, major industrial changes were occurring, and two of the biggest centered on railroads and coal. “It is difficult to think of anything in Appalachian life that the coming of railroads did not change. A catalog of such changes could elicit many thousands of similar anecdotes, illustrations of how the railroad changed the way people lived—how they lived and where they lived” (Williams, 2002, p. 235, italics in original). People began to move to towns and construct their identities in new ways, acquiring new everyday practices. Between 1880 and 1920, many Appalachian towns were transformed by “electric lights, movie theaters, department stores, daily newspapers, paved streets, high schools, country clubs, and a dozen other features that introduced newcomers to the pleasures and debts of a consumer society” (Williams, 2002, p. 228). In other words, capitalism culturally reproduced widely different human and economic circumstances. “What had been in 1860 only the quiet backcountry of the Old South became by the turn of the century a new frontier for expanding industrial capitalism” (Lewis, Johnson, & Askins, 1978, p. 38). “…the general expansion of industrial employment greatly altered the traditional patterns of mountain life… By the end of the 1920s, few residents of the region were left untouched by the industrial age.”

Railroads paved the way for absentee coal corporations to forever change cultural practices in rural areas as well as in cities. With the Appalachian region’s lower wage scales, coal could be mined and taken further distances at still great profits. Companies from England and other parts of Europe and America bought the majority of surface land and minerals in much of coal-rich Appalachia—while investing very little in the region. Gaventa in his book, Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an
Appalachian Valley, (1980) notes that Appalachia was not poor. In fact, it held tremendous wealth. By 1974, it supplied 65 percent of the coal produced in the United States, and in Central Appalachia alone there were 1,460 mineral industry establishments, 43 percent of the country’s total (Gaventa, 1980, p. 35). The region during this period contained enough coal to supply energy to the nation for 200 years. But multinational coal corporations owned so much of the area’s resources that even during the nation’s War on Poverty in the 1960s, twice as much capital flowed out of Appalachia as into it. “In a word,” Gaventa found, “Central Appalachia is a region of poverty amidst riches, a place of glaring inequalities.”

Social scientists at the time seemed baffled by Appalachians’ acceptance of such inequalities with what seemed to be little protest. Studies in the 1960s found that residents had few community groups and were disinclined to form them. This held true even after Appalachians moved to northern areas like Cincinnati, where migrants during this period participated less often in voluntary organizations, such as lodges or clubs (Gaventa, 1980, p. 37). Missionaries, too, decried what they called Appalachian fatalism. Minister Jack Weller, author of Yesterday’s People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia, said Appalachians were stubborn and “virtually impossible to organize into groups” (1965, p. 89). Other studies (Dorner, 1969) found that “when compared to their urban counterparts, the Appalachian poor, as the rural poor more generally in America, are unorganized, dispersed, and less visible: though numerically there are almost as many rural poor as there are in urban areas.” Even miners in areas of widespread labor militancy did not develop the class organization or class consciousness found in other
parts of the world. “Historically, in fact, miners of the region in comparison with other American miners have had the image of the ‘docile digger’” (Gaventa, 1980, p. 38).

Yet a number of researchers have since found images of the docile Appalachian body to be a myth. Consider Gaventa’s case study of the town of Middlesboro, near the Cumberland Gap. The town, located in the Middlesboro Basin of Bell County, Kentucky, contained just 60 families in the mid-19th century. As in other rural areas, families were close-knit and relied heavily on subsistence farming. In 1890, however, the American Association Ltd., of London, boosted by $20 million in British capital, bought 80,000 acres in the coal-rich valleys. Many of the mountaineers sold their land for as little as 50 cents or $1 an acre, though usually for $3. At the time, they had no idea that their activities would move from the household to new specialized sites in the ground, and no way of knowing the dramatic impact that new capitalist modes of production and labor arrangements would make on their working-class bodies and their land. This held true in Middlesboro as well as communities across Appalachia, as farmer after farmer turned over land to coal companies for little or no profit, and even less understanding of what such deed transfers meant.

It was years before they discovered the deeds they had signed gave coal operators the right not only to bore holes deep into the ground but to use the surrounding territory as suited their purposes. They could take whatever timber they needed…pollute the streams or dam them up. They could dump slate and other forms of refuse wherever gravity dictated, not excluding occupied lands, and then when the operations were complete and the coal was extracted… they could leave
a ravaged mountain behind, filled with black water and so hollowed out that the land itself was in danger of collapse (Erikson, 1976, p. 70).

Not everyone sold land willingly. Some who balked were “burned out,” jailed or stolen from (Erikson, 1976, p. 54). Other kinds of resistance also met with force. Absentee coal companies often sought widespread surveillance and tight controls over workers, creating company stores, company police, company money (scrip), company schools and even company churches—and firing, and evicting people, or their relatives, for challenging company rules. In Middlesboro, the new spokesmen of the coal industry assured elite families that coal mines would bring great wealth and commodities (Gaventa, 1980, p. 43). They promised the new industrial order meant luxuries and consumption unheard of in earlier times. Many elite, in particular merchants and politicians, responded by adopting the values of the power holders and giving “up their culture in favor of the ‘homogenized all-American model’” (Gaventa, 1980, p. 43). As mentioned earlier, their adaptation often increased their social rank and earned them “palatial structures on the hillside overlooking the town” (Eller, 1978, p. 41). Workers, meanwhile, did not reap similar rewards. Despite the wealth being produced, taxes remained low. Schools, hospitals, roads and other town priorities were ignored. Those who were forced to use scrip to pay for overpriced goods and rents started to fall behind. In a 1923 federal study, fully 60 percent of mining families in Appalachia surveyed were working at a deficit averaging more than $300 a year and the Depression was still five years away (Erikson, 1976, p. 108). “Socially, if not physically, the working class mountaineer was more isolated in his new situation than he had been on the family farm,
for industrialization introduced rigid class distinctions into the highland culture” (Lewis, Johnson, & Askins, 1978, p. 41).

Despite harsh conditions, many miners realized they could not return to farming their land. It was now owned by corporations. They found themselves disenfranchised, landless, and without the skills, or means, to move to the cities. So they remained in the coal camps and learned to reconfigure themselves, and retained certain collective values and everyday practices. Katz notes that as capital investments grow more complex on the transnational scale, investments locally can grow more limited and thus narrow production activities for locals. The struggle for viability in these narrowed landscapes of production and reproduction takes a serious toll on bodies and their fortunes “riddled with, as much as riddles of, global, national and local effects and processes.”

Globalization, then, is about the way capital has serious and often “deleterious local and embodied effects” (Katz, 2004, p. 157).

In Appalachia, global restructuring replaced the “farm-and-forest” economy with a new coal economy, and everything—money, houses, jobs, landscapes, music, religious worship, and Appalachian bodies—changed. During boom cycles, families grappled with confusing new practices in areas such as consumption and leisure. Mountaineers had been accustomed to growing or hunting much of their own food and bartering with neighbors and others for the things they couldn’t make themselves—but they were far less comfortable with cash. Yet mining towns reoriented the local economy from the production of food or commodities for exchange to a monetary system. “They were the shrewdest traders in the world, but they did not have enough experience with money to
measure its worth or count its uses” (Gaventa, 1980, p. 104). In boom times, miners and their wives engaged in “waves of spending” for cars, appliances, Bibles and all manner of purchases. People had little understanding of surplus funds, and besides, “Appalachian miners have so many reasons to wonder whether there will be a tomorrow to save for.”

During frequent bust times, families lived in homes that “were monotonous in appearance and always begrimed by the gritty black mud that seemed a special curse of coalfield communities” (Williams, 2002, p. 261). Not even school children escaped from deteriorating local landscapes. Harry Caudill’s best-selling, powerful book, Night Comes to the Cumberlands, depicts a scene from a coal camp schoolyard, where he had been a speaker in the 1960s at an eighth-grade graduation. The seven graduates, he wrote, received their diplomas in a dilapidated two-room building, with unpainted walls and torrents of water pouring through its leaking roof. The grassless playground lay in the shadow of a slate dump and “one of the graduates had been orphaned by a mining accident, the father of another wheezed and gasped with silicosis. The fathers of three others were jobless” (Caudill, 1963, introduction). Nor could miners and their families form bonds or discuss resistance in churches, a seemingly likely place for expressions of community solidarity. “If a minister should become imbued with a passion for social justice, it is doubtful he could have remained in a company-owned parish” (Gaventa, 1980, p. 92).

Sociologist Kai T. Erikson describes even harsher coal town conditions in his book about the 1972 Buffalo Creek flood in West Virginia, caused when two million gallons of debris-filled mud from a makeshift mining company dam burst. He said life in
the mountains had always been difficult, but in pre-mining days at least there had been clean air to breathe and space to move around in. Coal towns were an entirely different matter. In industrial Appalachia, smoke, soot, and sulfuric fumes hung over narrow settlements. Miners worked long hours in dirty, life-threatening conditions. Roofs caved in. Dangerous gases killed workers. Electric wires came alive suddenly, and machinery ground not just coal but body parts. “One can get some idea of the scale by noting that mine deaths must be calculated in the thousands and incapacitating injuries in the millions since the 1900s…” (Erikson, 1976, p. 98). Death figures did not include the men who died at home of black lung or silicosis or other injuries. Clearly, mining conditions played out on bodies in numerous ways:

Old miners who spend their time hanging around the stoops of Appalachia look out at the world through eyes blurred by years spent in darkness and singed red by decades of exposure to coal dust and other irritants. Their hearts are enlarged by the strain of working in the thin air of underground passages. Their hands are thick and callused, their shoulders sloped, their knees and thighs and lower backs stiff with years of bending… And many of them live out their remaining years with amputated limbs, sightless eyes, and torsos that have gone limp as the result of spinal injuries. (Erikson, 1976, p. 100)

Of course, not every moment in a coal community was a dismal one. People found ways to invent cultural practices that helped them cope amid difficult or even life-threatening circumstances. Children or young adults learned the occupation of coal mining informally while working alongside older family members. This informal folk
system inspired “an extraordinary volume of occupational lore and music…” (Williams, 2002, p. 259). From union fight songs to Coal Miner’s Daughter, (Lynn, 1970) cultural expressions through the form of music, storytelling or other activities played a major role in the coal communities. As Foley notes, the working class has what anthropologists would call expressive cultural practices, for example, talking, eating, joking, playing, storytelling, singing, dancing and dressing. “They have a distinct lifestyle and way of living and expressing themselves that is not bourgeois” (Foley, 1994, p. 165).

Loretta Lynn illustrates this distinct expressive ability in her rich autobiographical song about growing up the daughter of a coal miner in the Van Lear mine in Butcher Hollow, Kentucky. The song demonstrates the impact of coal on the bodies of women, as they fought off dirt, disease and hunger and struggled to raise large numbers of children. She sang, “Mommy scrubbed our clothes on a washboard ever’ day. Why I’ve seen her fingers bleed.” Yet Lynn said expectations of a different life were low. “To complain there was no need… I never thought of ever leaving Butcher Holler” (Lynn, 1970). Bourdieu argues that instead of a culture-of-poverty, blame-the-victim model, people actually accept their circumstances because they can’t think outside their “habitus” or socialization. Habitus is a set of cultural forms and practices that works to reinforce and naturalize the dominant social relations of production and reproduction, resulting from socialization experiences in which external structures are internalized and ideas are formed about what is possible and natural for certain groups in a stratified world (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In other words, women like Lynn did not complain
because they could not see where else they would go, or what they would do when they
got there.

Still, as Bourdieu points out, resistance can sometimes overcome habitus when
alternative existing social arrangements are exposed. In mining communities, union
leaders promised that success would mean a measure of freedom from the constraints of
domination. Miners and their families who could visualize this new social order often
worked to form unions or support strikes. Sometimes their resistance involved individual
acts and behaviors, such as “gossip, back talk” or “refusal to cooperate with outside
authority figures” (Fisher, 1999, p. 204). Yet other mountaineers, including women,
became increasingly militant and willing to question dominant ideologies and invent
counter-hegemonic strategies. Perhaps the most famous woman to fight mining
companies was Mother Jones, who worked among coal mine strikers in West Virginia,
Pennsylvania, and Maryland during her long career. In 1905, Jones was the only woman
among the founders of the Industrial Workers of the World (Steel, 2006). Three years
earlier, after her arrest for ignoring an injunction banning meetings by striking miners,
she was dubbed "the most dangerous woman in America," by West Virginia District
Attorney Reese Blizzard.

*Coal, Class, and Consciousness*

Even in Middlesboro, where control of miners was more far-reaching than
controls put in place in the more militant mining communities of Ohio and Pennsylvania,
the “docile diggers” eventually became more militant. In northern states, communities
were well-established before companies arrived. They had strong civic organizations and
just one-fourth to half of them lived in company towns, compared to two-thirds or four-fifths of miners in southern Appalachia (Gaventa, 1980, p. 94). But by the 1920s and 1930s, Appalachian miners were more frequently challenging companies and their loyal backers, who responded with relentless surveillance and increased punishment tactics to try to create a workforce of subservient, quiescent bodies. During the 1931 Middlesboro strike, judges beholden to mining interests jailed organizers and the union attorney sent to represent them. A 19-year-old organizer was shot to death. Student activists coming in to help were beaten and evicted from the county. Miners went back to work with few concessions from owners. “The control inside local government was matched by the reign of terror outside the formal decision-making structures. Hired thugs, machine guns, dynamiting, beatings and killings of organizers and sympathizers, raids, evictions, burnings, harassment, and arrests seemed everyday occurrences” (Gaventa, 1980, p. 105).

Nor did many outside the region understand the level of violence. Sympathetic newspapers were banned from the county and the few reporters allowed in wrote that the conflict was spurred by Harlan County workers still “in a mood to settle any issue with a rifle” (Gaventa, 1980, p. 105).

Middlesboro was not alone. In Night Comes to the Cumberlands, (1963) Caudill blamed stubborn, backward Appalachians themselves for some of the poverty and bleak conditions in the mountains. He said mountaineers were “born of embittered rejects and outcasts from the shores of Europe—as cynical, hardened and bitter a lot as can be imagined without prison walls” (Caudill, 1963, p. 13). However, he also was one of the first to highlight the ways that coal corporations used coercion to exploit communities
across the entire region and prevent workers from challenging their own oppression.

“Miners suspected of joining the union, harboring its agents or spreading its propaganda were summarily ordered out of company houses and off company property” (Caudill, 1963, p. 195). Eventually, many were arrested or “secretly slain and their bodies cast out, gangster-fashion, on creek banks or in alleys,” but “company-controlled sheriffs and state patrolmen… found no clues as to the identity of the perpetrators.”

This idea of laying people out “gangster-fashion” fits in well with Foucault’s assertion that the laws and penal system are designed to insure challengers to the status quo are viewed by others as “marginal, dangerous, immoral, a menace to society as a whole, the dregs of the population, trash, the mob” (Foucault, 1995/1975, p. 15, italics added). It also reemphasizes the idea of Appalachia as a place of violent, lawless hillbillies. In fact, a number of studies since the 1920s have described Appalachian coal miners as comprising the most militant and class-conscious workforces in the country (Fisher, 1993, introduction). Such depictions stand in direct opposition to other notions of the region:

Appalachians are generally viewed as backward, unintelligent, fatalistic, and quiescent people who are complicit in their own oppression. But at the same time, these ‘submissive’ mountaineers are seen as among the most vicious and violent people in the United States. As contradictory as these stereotypes may appear at first glance, they are related. For most of the nation, the coal miners are uninformed workers blindly following corrupt and manipulative union leaders. In the end the verdict is the same—they are gun-happy, illiterate bumpkins who are
culturally incapable of rational resistance to unjust conditions (Fisher, 1993, introduction).

Bourdieu says that socialization or habitus “orients action according to anticipated consequences” (Swartz, 1997, p. 106). Habitus creates in people an unconscious calculation of what is possible, impossible and probable. “Not all courses of action are equally possible for everyone; only some are plausible, whereas others are unthinkable.”

Gaventa, after closely studying the happenings in Middlesboro, concluded that America’s lower- and working-classes are not silent or quiescent, but have learned to hide their discontent or express it only among small social circles. “In the Appalachian Valley, the anticipation of defeat by the relatively powerless, often thought to reflect the fatalism of the traditional culture, is not an irrational phenomenon” (Gaventa, 1980, p. 254). He explained that those who dared buck the system understood they would face either violence or serious economic sanctions, “whether over pension benefits, health cards, food stamps, or the home or job tenure of an individual or an individual’s kin or neighbor.”

In addition, symbolic labeling, such as communist, outsider, or troublemaker, offered a more subtle means of discrediting discontent. Thus, speaking out or taking action had become implausible or even unthinkable. By the late 1970s, land ownership patterns continued to create significant inequalities in distribution of wealth. But Gaventa said people accepted it as “a natural, ineradicable fact” and an example, not of exploitation, but of their forefathers’ ignorance. “The powerlessness reflected in the first key encounter of their society has often been reflected as their fault” (Gaventa, 1980, p.
Miners’ reactions to inequalities in Appalachia were firmly shaped by their dispositions and habitus. In all likelihood, miners were not trying to reproduce social inequalities but rather their actions—or non-actions—demonstrated survival strategies for themselves and their families. As Ball puts it, “In philosophical terms there are actions we are entitled to take even though they may not lead to the best of all possible outcomes. It would be difficult to lead a normal life otherwise” (1996, p. 201).

As demonstrated, stratified systems of hierarchy, domination and structural socialization in coal mining communities in the early 1900s affected how people both accepted and resisted coal companies and other power-wielding forces. Some absentee coal companies controlled nearly every aspect of workers’ lives. They owned workers’ homes, churches, stores, schools and even the form of currency. This allowed companies to reinforce and naturalize the dominant social relations of production. Serious discipline and surveillance techniques insured adherence to the status quo. Yet such hierarchies and intense socialization did not succeed in creating completely docile bodies. Expressive practices by miners and their families—union membership, eventual migration to northern cities, and the less visible resistances of gossip, backtalk, and music—were influenced by other more intermediary factors and by people defending their class interests. While coal companies were a powerful economic and political interest in Appalachia in the late 1800s and early 1900s, miners did actively intervene, struggle, contest and partially penetrate mining structures—though many such interventions succeeded only in reproducing their working-class culture and conditions. Still, globalization through the form of multinational coal company purchases and actions...
during this period produced new skills and practices in Appalachia, valued certain kinds of knowledge, reinforced class and difference—and formed a new kind of working-class Appalachian body.

As practices in Appalachia demonstrate, the conflicts between structure and agency are complex in a rural world dominated by global forces. Coal mining communities asserted great influence over cultural traditions and everyday expressive practices. One area of agreement among social scientists, writers, and others is that modes of practice changed in mining communities as families adapted to new rules and learned make do on every front, from home life to work life to school life. As mentioned earlier, working class ways of life remained largely organized around the ‘practical order’ of simply getting by” (Ball, 2006, p. 162). These “getting by” adaptations were not unlike those taken in other communities around the world impacted by industrialization. In Howa, Africa, for example, as in Appalachia, contradictions were apparent everywhere. “People adjusted to new patterns of work and social relations as they mourned the loss of their more autonomous farming practices and the landscapes with which they were associated. At the same time, and not necessarily contradictorily, they scrambled to get a leg up in the new social formations…” (Katz, 2004, preface, page 11).

*Appalachia, Postmodernity, and Slippery Boundaries*

What happened when absentee coal companies entered Appalachia was in many ways a precursor of what was to come. Today, globalization is intensifying and the world is rapidly being integrated into one economic space via increased international trade and the internationalization of a “‘commodity culture promoted by an increasingly
networked global telecommunications system. This economic space is increasingly connected to cultural influences and to political relations that are also global in nature’” (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000, p. 4, citing Gibson-Graham, 1996, p. 121). Worldwide social relations are linking distant places in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring thousands of miles away in other nations. In essence, how one separates the local from the global is difficult to decide when each thoroughly influences the other. Cultural theorists and political and social scientists worry that the “gigantic corporate machineries that celebrate globalization” ignore the increased inequality that comes with market deregulation (Appadurai, 2000, p. 2). The poor and their advocates are concerned that global transactions have left ordinary people outside and behind. In a “grassroots globalization” movement, they are working to contest, interrogate and reverse developments that create social exclusion and instead strive for democratic and autonomous standing for the “poorer 80 percent of the population of the world (now totaling 6 billion) who are socially and fiscally at risk” (Appadurai, 2000, p. 3, parenthesis in original). In a postcolonial world, new forms of colonialism have emerged that put economic control in fewer hands and create permanent second-class status for much of the world’s poor (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000, p. 104). A postmodern research agenda calls for deconstructing modernist assumptions that “equate no sustainable development with ‘progress’ and replacing these with…new practices based on ecological and people-centered thinking” (p. 220).

Of course, not only are worldwide social relations changing, but there is a growing recognition of the arbitrariness of national boundaries as well as designations of
the large regions, such as Appalachia, that once dominated maps, discussions and studies. Areas such as Appalachia were once seen as “relatively immobile aggregates of traits, with more or less durable historical boundaries and with a unity composed of more or less enduring properties” (Appadurai, 2000, p. 7). The region, like other colonized areas, was depicted as a land separate from the rest of the nation, a place more wild, barbaric and backward. Yet, as Said points out:

This universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is “ours” and an unfamiliar space beyond “ours” which is “theirs” is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. I use the word arbitrary here because imaginative geography of the “our land-barbarian land” variety does not require that barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for “us” to set up these boundaries in our own minds; “they” become “they” accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from ours. (1995/1978, p. 54)

The recognition that such areas are impermanent geographical facts provides initial contexts for themes that generate variable, rather than fixed, geographies. Boundaries, like populations, cultures and identities, are fluid and constantly moving. In Appalachia, technological innovations in the coal, timber and mill industry during and after WWII killed thousands of jobs and spurred a mass exodus from the region. For several decades, at least three to four million Appalachians headed north and west in search of jobs in industrial cities such as Cincinnati, Dayton, Akron and Detroit (Banks, 1981, p. 443). Those migrants today flow back and forth into the region. Between 1985
and 1990, for example, in- and out-migration accounted for 25 percent of the region’s population. The 2000 Census shows that at 23 million people, the number of people living in Appalachia had increased nine percent over the previous decade, with the southern region growing rapidly and the northern and central regions losing people (Pippert, 2006, p. 343). Studies of Appalachia today must take into account the Appalachian Diaspora involving the dispersal of people from their homeland and the multiple journeys that form collective memories. “Contemporary understanding of Diaspora means being at home in the place where one lives while still living with the memories and shared histories of the place from which one or one’s ancestors have come” (Yon, 2000, p. 17). Capacities must be expanded to address the types of cultural complexity generated by shifting populations, media, capital, information flows, globalization and global dynamics of power (Hall, 1999, p. 123).

Just as such boundaries are expanding, so is Appalachian literature, theory and scholarship, which is encompassing a broadening spectrum and including conflicting themes of differentiation, multiplicities, and ambiguities. Clearly, the postmodern turn has brought about added layers of complexity to the study of Appalachia, as scholars debate its impact and wrestle with how to best negotiate the tensions that it brings to the fore. Yet as Banks points out, engaging in such negotiations and maneuvering can have a new impact in the field.

From the recognition that “truths” are always truths for some particular person or group, it follows that our common sense notions of what “Appalachia” is, or who “Appalachians” are, can always be opened up to include more diversity, or, as
postmodernists like to say, more difference. Yet, as many feminists have been forced to admit, the recognition of difference and diversity is a political challenge. Still, if the Appalachian Studies movement is to fulfill its promise of helping to reconstruct a public sphere through which people can participate in democratizing the structures of political economy and every day life, difference and diversity must be further embraced and accommodated. Mythical images of a homogeneous Appalachia must not be allowed to suppress the important class, race, ethnic and gender differences that figure into the life of the region. (Banks, Billings & Tice, 1993, p. 297)

As this study seeks to bring postmodernism to bear in the Appalachian studies field, I turn in the next section to exploring postmodern views and their impact on theorizing resistance. I then attempt to illustrate in subsequent sections that while various resistance theories have at different times been embraced, touted, debated, dismissed, and disdained, they provided for this study a useful and compelling lens in which to examine narratives from the Flatwoods in Appalachia.

Examining Resistance Theories through a Postmodern Lens

Understanding the differences among humanist, psychoanalytical and postmodern views provides critical insights into the myriad approaches to theorizing resistance and microresistance. This section looks at key theories provided by researchers in the area of class, culture, and resistance—including Marx, Giroux, Foucault, Frankfurt school scholars, Britzman, Pitt, Bourdieu, and Katz—and delves into the way resistance theories have been studied, used, misused, in vogue, out of vogue and how resistance is a
modernist concept, part of the idea that the truth can set us free. The status of the human individual was one of the key features of the Enlightenment. Descarte’s declaration that “I think, therefore I am” confirmed the “centrality of the autonomous human individual, a founding precept of humanism, a precept that effectively separated the subject from the object, a thought from reality, or the self from the other” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1998, p. 219). This individual self was separate from the world, and possessed an autonomous human consciousness that was seen to be the source—as opposed to the product—of action. Thus, the individual of humanism is generally understood to be a “conscious, stable, unified, rational, coherent, knowing, autonomous, and ahistoric individual…” He is someone who expresses an inherent agency, and “through careful exercise of his rational intellect and will, can free mankind from confusion and error…” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 500). Marxism, psychoanalysis and poststructuralism have challenged the notion of this reasoned, truth-finding individual. Marxist ideology, which is centered on a totalizing metanarrative of class and therefore considered a humanist project, decenters the subject of humanism through “‘the historical analysis of the relations of production, economic determination and the class struggle’” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 500, citing Foucault, 1972/1969, p. 14). The subject of Marxist ideology is not abstract or apart from social activity, but a product of society, who is embedded in controlled, tightly woven constraints of power. As Katz notes:

Historical consciousness for Marx and others stems from a recognition that what is is the result of a process of historical development, and this is not immutable. Coming to consciousness at once denaturalizes that which appears given and
exposes the enormous work involved in making the world of appearances seem permanent and natural. (2004, p. 257).

Marx claimed that it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but their social being that determines their consciousness (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1998, p. 221). Freud also decentered the coherent, stable, rational humanist subject by theorizing the unconscious and blurring the distinction between the subject and object. “A subject with an unconscious that is almost always simply unavailable, not present, and uncontrollable, can hardly maintain the kind of coherence, centeredness, rationality, and agency required by humanism” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 501). As well, Lacan’s (1977/1966) re-reading of Freud further decentered the subject, arguing that the coherent self is constituted in language, and “is simply a trope for the bewildering complexity of subjectivities that constitute the subject” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 501). Lacan said the subject is produced through language in the same way that language produces meaning (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1998, p. 222). In this way, psychoanalysis radically disturbs the notion of the rational, unified individual of humanism.

Much of the work of humanism has been to define the essence of things, to produce order by figuring out how to identify a thing and group it with others in various structures. Humanism involves structures that make order out of chaos and randomness. It creates classifications and binaries, such as culture/nature, mind/body, rational/irrational, subject/object (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 481) As Britzman points out, in poststructuralism all categories are unstable and “all experiences are constructed, all reality is imagined, all identities are produced, and all knowledge provokes uncertainties,
misrecognition, ignorances, and silences” (1993, p. 22). To be sure, poststructuralism, in responding to humanism, is a part of the humanism it is critiquing. Yet in a poststructural framework, boundaries, ideas of normalcy and limits can be interrupted and subjects continually constructed, reconstructed and reconfigured. Indeed, the agency of the subject lies in this ongoing constitution. Subjectivity in poststructuralism is “‘the conscious and unconscious thoughts of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world’” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 502, citing Weedon, 1987, p. 32). Poststructuralists are said to be more or less self-consciously postmodernists, although some who have been labeled postmodernists have disputed the label or term. Some consider postmodernism and poststructuralism to be synonymous, but “one obvious difference between them (is that)... postmodernism is a reaction against the rationalism, scientism and objectivity of modernism. Poststructuralism, on the other hand, is a reaction against structuralism which claims that there are universal structures of language, and that these structures are ultimately the determining factors in life and thought” (Chagani, 2007).

Lyotard (1979/1984) argued for the abandonment of structuralism, as well as Marxism and other masternarratives, including the argument for a scientific objectivity that is said to allow researchers to arrive at basic laws of nature and theories free of cultural influence. Positivistic science holds that there is a reality out there to be studied, captured and understood, and that objective accounts of the real world can be given. For positivists, truth is the same for everyone at every time and in every place and takes the form of logical propositions that can be proved or disproved (Sipe & Constable, 1999, p.
158). Positivists embrace quantitative research that collects and analyzes numerical data. Federal definitions support this view, privileging experimental research, such as the testing and establishment of replicable causal effects, and prioritizing it for federal funding. Postmodernists favor smaller, local discourses that shift the emphasis from “totalizing cross-cultural explanations (modernism) to the study of smaller, localized units of discourse (postmodernism)” (Ritchie, 1993, p. 365). From a postmodern perspective, grand theories, or metanarratives, such as theories of institutionalized racism or Marxist theories of class exploitation, are not desirable or possible. Thus, postmodernism often takes the form of “triumphant and hoary dismissal of Marxism and grand theory as being hopelessly embroiled in a futile project of world-historical magnitude” (McLaren, 1994, p. 199).

Instead of grand theory, postmodern theory explores socially constructed realities, often examining texts or discourses as repositories for social construction. The postmodern turn troubles the language of subject and subjectivity altogether as being the trappings of modernity. Postmodern theorists seek to do away with the idea of a rational, unified subject as knower, arguing that there are multiple and contradictory subjectivities that are produced by discursive practices. Or, as Yon explains, postmodern subjects “are no longer perceived as fastened to cultures and external social structures” (2000, p. 14). That doesn’t mean identity can’t produce feelings of rootedness or coherence, but that such feelings are recognized as arising from the practice of situating the self within narratives. Postmodern techniques also move away from such binaries of men/women, white/black, capitalist/socialist, rational/irrational, global/local (Stromquist, 2002, p. 32).
Instead, many postmodern theorists have used the work of Foucault to pay increasing attention to a politics that is more plural, multiple and fragmented (Collins, 2000, p. 51). Foucault argues that new tools of analysis are needed to discern that “slippery interface between modern forms of power and knowledge and new forms of domination” (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000, p. 115). One of these major tools is the technique of deconstructing discourse, searching for what arguments say and do not say and recognizing that identities are constantly negotiated. Anything can be a text and can be deconstructed. Deconstruction methodologies generate skepticism about taken-for-granted beliefs, including objective, reliable and universal foundations of knowledge, truth claims, and science as a model of legitimate use of reason.

Postmodern theorists also seek to understand how people come to their views of social reality and how they justify their positions in the face of seemingly contradictory opinions and evidence (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000, p. 115). Not everyone, of course, embraces postmodern theory and deconstruction approaches. Critics say postmodern theorists’ intense focus on discourse reduces the value of experience, and the continued questioning of the possibility of human progress dissuades political action. Stromquist, for example, acknowledges that, “Postmodernity has introduced greater complexity in our thoughts.” Yet, she said, “at the same time, it avoids dealing with the concrete problems brought about by globalization and neoliberalism, preferring instead to assume limitless, individual agency and choice” (2002, p. 35).

In moving into resistance theory, it is worth noting that researchers in the Frankfurt School rejected standard Marxist models of resistance, saying they
overemphasized the labor process and reduced culture to “a mere reflex of the human realm” (Giroux, 2001, p. 11). Instead, the Frankfurt School deemphasized the area of political economy and instead focused on culture and everyday life. Echoing Nietzsche’s earlier warning about humanity’s unbounded faith in reason, Frankfurt School Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno “voiced a trenchant critique of modernity’s unswerving faith in the promise of Enlightenment rationality to rescue the world from the chains of superstition, ignorance, and suffering…” (Giroux, 2001, p. 22). Along with Herbert Marcuse, Frankfurt School researchers looked to Freud and psychoanalysis to explain why people were complicit in their own domination (Giroux, 2001, p. 31). Like Antonio Gramsci, they argued that domination was exercised not just through the physical force of armies or police, but through ideological hegemony—attempts to win people’s consent to domination through cultural institutions such as schools, churches, families and media. “Rather than being pregiven, subjects are seen to be the result of social practice, products of history…” (Kenway, 2001, p. 50). Following that line of investigation, Foley argued that there is no ruling class socializing a working class, but only a “vast unspoken, unrecognized, ideological process that makes the commodity logic of capitalism seem normal and natural” (1994, p.169). He recognized that it is important to keep in mind Marxism’s distinct views of classes—capitalists, who own the means of production, and the proletariat, wage laborers who produce profit for the capitalists, and other intermediary class positions with little or no control over the means of production, such as “petty bourgeoisie, intelligentsia, peasantry, and lumpen proletariat” (1994, p.169). But Foley said that it is equally important to take into account
the shift away from an economic production model to focus on those with different lifestyles, status and displays of consumption. When Marxists study reproduction, they are studying how capital is accumulated, how it flows, rates of profit and struggles over wages. But everyday cultural practices also reproduce class society. Culture works not through domination but what Gramsci calls consent. “In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others: the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as hegemony, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West” (Said, 1995, 1978, p. 7). Gramsci’s notion of hegemony and counter-hegemony stresses the creating of an “ideological realm in which people are socialized to have different levels of consciousness” (Foley, 1994, p. 189).

Bourdieu, too, argued that the ruling class does not just impose class-control through overt force but also by more subtle means. As discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, Bourdieu used the concepts of cultural capital and habitus to explain how power and class are legitimated and reproduced. For Bourdieu, these levels of consciousness are developed through bourgeois class cultural practices, which then reproduce class inequalities. He said the habitus, a set of cultural practices that reinforces and naturalizes the dominant social relations of production and reproduction, results from socialization experiences in which external structures are internalized and ideas are formed about what is possible and natural for certain groups in a stratified world (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Put another way, people’s background experiences “shape the amount and forms of resources (capital) individuals inherit and draw upon as they confront various
institutional arrangements (*fields*)” (Lareau, 2003, p. 275). Beyond early socialization, the habitus sees the continued interplay between material and symbolic forms of culture as productive. Cultural capital is intertwined with economic capital, and occurs when one develops the kind of tastes, intelligence, dress, speech, and consumption patterns valued by the dominant class, and then enacts these signs of social standing.

Habitus can be viewed in a variety of institutions and places. Bourdieu was particularly interested in the way French schools distributed, validated and reinforced the symbolic capital which allowed dominant groups to maintain their economic advantages (Levinson, Foley & Holland, 1996, p. 5). In Europe as well as the United States, the knowledge and experience of wealthy youth is more valued in school and gives them an upper hand when it comes to managing appearances in a variety of places, such as “football, youth status groups, and classroom ‘making out games,’ in a way that low status groups cannot hope to match” (Willis, 1994, foreword). As a result, those who already possess social prominence are more likely to experience school success, and ultimately economic power because they know how to gain and use their credentials to get elite jobs, homes and business partners. Meanwhile, the non-elite are subjected to a kind of “symbolic violence” in which arbitrary knowledge is made to appear universal and objective (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 115).

Yet critics say Bourdieu failed to take into account notions of resistance, diversity and human agency. “By failing to develop a theory of ideology that speaks to the way human beings dialectically create, resist and accommodate themselves to dominant ideologies, Bourdieu excludes both the active nature of domination as well as the active
nature of resistance” (Giroux, 2001, p. 31). Nor did Bourdieu consider material conditions in explaining how power and resistance works. As a result, according to Giroux, we are left with “a theory of reproduction that displays no faith in subordinate classes and groups, no hope for their ability or willingness to reinvent and reconstruct the conditions under which they live, work and learn” (2001, p. 95). In other words, Bourdieu failed to recognize that people are not merely pawns of their schools, employers, churches or even their families. They are not only constructed but also construct, are not only pushed but also push back. Even the subordinated wield power. Paul Willis, in particular, has demonstrated the way people construct their own subjectivities. In his well-known ethnographic account of British lads, for example, Willis showed how the school alone did not socialize the lads to accept their working-class futures. Instead, the lads reproduced their own working-class positions through their strong identification with physical labor, masculine identities, bawdy humor and manners, and rejection of middle-class ideologies (Levinson, Foley & Holland, 1996, p. 5). Though the lads’ construction of their own positions did not work in their favor, as Willis explained, “Social agents are not passive bearers of ideology, but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation, and a partial penetration of those structures” (Willis, 1981, p. 175). Thus, he illustrates how marginalized groups “actively struggle against the dominant ideology and invent new, counter-hegemonic cultural forms. In other words, everyday group cultural practices are what people invent to find dignity in an oppressive class society” (Foley, 1994, p. 166).
Resistance was also a central theme of political and social theory in a group of French philosophers in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly Foucault. He disrupted the notion that power exists “in a binary world in which the oppressed (powerless) struggle against the oppressor (powerful)” (Munro, 1996, p. 18). Foucault described power as “a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised” (1972/1977a, p. 156). He said power is not only a force that says no. It is a productive network of possibilities that produces discourse, induces pleasure and forms knowledge. It circulates up, down, around, over and under. “It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or price of wealth” (Foucault, 1972/1977a, p. 98). In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*, Foucault said it is time to do away with a narrow view of power. “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes,’ it ‘represses,’ it ‘censors,’ it abstracts,’ it ‘masks,’ it ‘conceals.’ In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (Foucault, 1995/1975, p. 194).

In *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-Critique* (2004/2005), Hoy said that for Foucault, all domination is power but not all power is domination. This helps explain why Foucault could see power as something that produces as well as oppresses. Governmentality is formed by the institutions, procedures, analysis, and tactics used by the State to wield power. It “subjugates” people by deciding what counts as a person, as proper actions, as a citizen right (Hoy, 2004/2005, p. 88). Yet, while
governmentality socially constructs subjects, critique still provides an escape. It gives people a way to resist their attachment to their social identities and ideals, and allows them to challenge their understanding of who they are (Hoy, 2004/2005, p. 14).

The “Polymorphous” Nature of Resistance

The resistance theories of Foucault and others provide insight into the critical notion of human agency and challenge the idea that dominant ideologies are all-empowering, all-encompassing. They help foster an understanding of dominant ideologies that are as contradictory as the “different factions of the ruling classes” and the institutions that serve them. Indeed, debate is still ongoing about how domination works and what resistance is, must less what it does. As demonstrated, delving into resistance theory is a complicated process that involves multifaceted definitions, visions and critiques. Hoy said resistance that comes not from power but from a lack of power is the most ethical kind. “The resistance of the completely powerless Other is perhaps paradoxically the most powerful form that resistance can take” (2004/2005, p. 16).

Foucault envisioned a multiplicity of resistances, in the same way there is a multiplicity of power. From his view, resistance to asymmetrical relations of power is “distributed in irregular fashion: the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups of individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behavior” (1978/1976, p. 96). Poststructural theories embrace this idea that resistance is not formed in a single point but it is instead local, unpredictable and multiple. Elizabeth St. Pierre said such a view makes the notion of a totalizing revolutionary liberation from the
relations of power impossible (2000, p. 492). That means, then, that freedom is no longer an idea that manifests itself in a concrete, revolutionary freedom but in rebelling against who we have been defined and categorized to be. Or, as St. Pierre said, it is a resistance to “how we are being constituted and are constituting ourselves as subjects” (2000, p. 492). She explained, “Relations of power are complex and shifting. Resistance and freedom are daily, ongoing practices. Humanism’s totalizing understanding of power, resistance, and freedom seems to allow less room to maneuver, fewer possibilities for social justice, than that of the poststructural critique” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 493).

If resistance takes multiple forms, however, the question arises of how one recognizes which forms are resistance and which are survival strategies, religious acts, or other forms—and equally important who decides? Resistance as Frederich Nietzsche understood it is not all emancipatory. Instead, it goes in two directions. There is resistance to domination, in the name of emancipation. And there is domination’s resistance to emancipator efforts (Hoy, 2005, p. 2, citing Nietzsche, 1968). Giroux argued that not all resistance is rooted in opposition to domination and not everyone who questions authority is reacting to oppressive practices. Like agency, resistance is constantly shifting, never complete. Resistance is dialectical and rooted in a variety of forms. To forget this—to portray working-class resistance or other resistance forms as homogeneous acts—is to romance the nature of resistance and the culture of subordinate groups. Resistance is no “magic bullet” that can be invoked in order to assert a researcher’s political credentials (Giroux, 2001, introduction). Instead, some acts called resistance might actually be creative expressions, or religiously motivated, or a host of
other moves. According to Giroux, resistance must at least demonstrate the possibility of intervening in transformative ways, as well as serve the interests of developing new democratic identities, relations, institutional forms, and modes of struggle. “Resistance must have a revealing function, one that contains a critique of domination and provides theoretical opportunities for self-reflection and for struggle in the interest of self-emancipation and social emancipation” (Giroux, 2001, p. 110).

Giroux urged researchers not to hang the label of resistance indiscriminately “over every expression of oppositional behavior” (Giroux, 2001, p. 110). While oppositional behavior is worth analysis to see if it is resistance—meaning to see if it serves any emancipatory interest—Giroux is suspicious of researchers who see such behaviors everywhere. “It must be strongly emphasized that the ultimate value of the notion of resistance has to be measured against the degree to which it not only prompts critical thinking and reflective action, but more importantly, against the degree to which it contains the possibility of galvanizing collective political struggle around the issues of power and determination” (Giroux, 2001, p. 111). Finally, Giroux advocated seeing elements of resistance as a focal point for the construction of lived experiences in which people can find a voice and extend the positive dimensions of their own cultures. He says researchers should be asking how the modes of cultural production displayed by subordinate groups can be analyzed to reveal both their limits and possibilities “for enabling critical thinking, analytical discourse, and new modes of intellectual appropriation” (Giroux, 2001, p. 111). Giroux presents thought-provoking arguments for what resistance is, what it does and how it should be used, though there is room for
opening up his more narrow definitions, as discussed in more detail in an analysis of Flatwoods resistances in Chapter IV.

Sofia Villenas also provides compelling arguments for using resistance theories more thoughtfully, saying that too often, feminist anthropologists have relied on resistance theory in an attempt to highlight women’s agency and reverse the arrogance of Western-based feminisms. She says anthropologists “exoticize Third World women by defining their culture and lives in terms of resistance” but this problematically bestows on women a Western version of agency. According to Villenas, such moves play into the Western colonial desire to find the exotic story, to privilege life histories that show resistance. Yet what gets left behind is theory rooted in the mundane of everyday practices—the less glamorous, less colorful, or more mainstream performances of the other. “Certainly, resistance as interpretation may be a new wave of exoticism as it becomes chic and in vogue to frame people’s actions as empowered ‘resistance’” (Villenas, 2000, p. 80). Instead of reifying the exotic, Villenas calls for anthropologists to develop a better understanding of how people both form relations and are constituted within relations and discourses of power embedded in kinship, religion and other forms.

In her book, *Growing Up Global, Economic Restructuring and Children’s Everyday Lives*, Katz offers another useful model for thinking through the way resistance works. Katz produced a longitudinal ethnographic study of children growing up in a Sudanese village, as well as significant research with working-class families in New York City in the 1980s and 1990s. Katz argues that it is too easy to call all oppositional practices resistance, when some would be more accurately described as survival
practices, resilience, recuperation, reactive acts of consumption or reworking. Villagers in Howa, Africa who acquire a VCR, for example, are not evidence of globalism triumph or “heady reinscription or recuperative self-construction” (Katz, 2004, p. 24). “Celebrating such acts as resistance is a cheap thrill, usually voyeuristic, a balm to critics in the global north that may be no less exoticizing that earlier renditions of Orientalism and constructions of the self-possessed ‘other’” (Katz, 2004, p. 24). As a Marxist, feminist, poststructuralist, Katz says she began her project in Howa, in part, because she was seeking examples of resistance to capitalism and other sources of exploitation and oppression. But she discovers that finding resistance in every discursive or cultural practice had become a sort of an industry, particularly since Foucault. And at that point, she began to resist resistance and instead ask how, or whether, the practices she saw in her research produced massive disruptions or pierced people’s everyday lives in the course of capitalistic development. She concludes:

When it comes down to it, feeling good, even when it is called something as fancy as “reconstituting one’s subjectivity in the face of power,” through all manner of discursive practices and independent readings is simply not enough to transform the social relations of oppression and exploration that are the cornerstone of so many people’s daily lives. Autonomous, even “counterhegemonic” agency is just the beginning. Yet it is so often presented as the end. (Katz, 2004, p. 242)

To try “to diffuse, if not burst, the romance with ‘resistance’ ” (2004, p. 241), Katz proposes using three fluid and overlapping categories she calls the 3 Rs: resilience, reworking and resistance. Her goal is to distinguish among material social practices
loosely considered resistance whose primary effect is something else, such as autonomous initiative, recuperation, resilience, or attempts to rework oppressive and unequal frameworks without changing the frameworks themselves. Like Giroux, she views practices of actual resistance as those that are intended to resist, subvert, or disrupt conditions of exploitation or oppression. Resilience, however, is more of a survival strategy. As an example, she cites the capitalistic development and urban migration in Howa that has required rural residents to resurrect their dormant agricultural knowledge and cultivate rain-fed sorghum or create riverbank gardens. “Small acts of resilience” could also be found in the ways neighborhood activists provide each other with a web of care, such as watching out for each other’s children or providing AIDS education.

Reworking, on the other hand, involved projects that offer pragmatic solutions to conditions but do not try to undo the hegemonic social relations that created them in the first place. Such projects included reconstructing children’s playgrounds or working to build a community centers in East Harlem. Reworking undermined structures that affect everyday life in order to make life more livable. Acts of resistance are rarer, because they involve consciousness building and are explicitly oppositional in character. An obvious act of resistance includes a war protest or labor strike. “Practices of resistance draw on and produce a critical consciousness to confront and redress historically and geographically specific conditions of oppression and exploitation at various scales” (Katz, 2004, p. 251).

While Katz does an excellent job teasing out strands of difference in loose acts of resistance, she, too, struggles at times to decide how to categorize certain practices. In
Howa, for example, people allowed their goats to eat cotton grown as part of a government project that was supposed to provide local wealth but was actually just using up land. Allowing goats access to cotton fields not only destroyed the crop but also helped people hang on to some of their animal wealth. Katz at different times called the act of fattening the goats a “maverick form of resistance,” a recuperative act of “getting one over on a superior,” and a survival strategy because animals are so critical to livelihoods (2004, p. 253). In the end, she decides the illicit grazing was resistance “because people understood it as a means to redirect the flow of resources to them in a way that deliberately undermined the success of the agricultural project.” Yet she concedes that definition might not fit her resistance model because the grazing did not build something larger on the “subversive consciousness that invoked it. Certainly, the consciousness that inspired the illicit crop consumption might have been more resentful and angry—or even just more pragmatic—than ‘oppositional’” (Katz, 2004, p. 253).

Further, one could also argue that the grazing could be considered a reworking, under Katz’ definition that reworking reorders or undermines structures that affect everyday life in order to make life more livable.

As this section demonstrates, resistance is “polymorphous in nature” (Pitt, 1998, p. 535) and delving into resistance theory is a messy process that involves multifaceted definitions, visions and critiques. To be sure, the postmodern turn’s creation of additional room to maneuver in the realm of resistance theory brings with it additional complexities. Pitt notes that theories of resistance must be able to engage not only the ways in which acts of resistance are attached to the social “but also the ways in which individuals – as
teachers, learners, and researchers – are attached to resistance” (Pitt, 1998, p. 539).

Further, Pitt says that taking into consideration the researchers’ viewpoints can offer a transformed view of the way resistance works and blur boundaries between varied definitions of resistance. She agrees with Giroux that resistance theories can function as an “antidote to the pessimism of reproduction theories” that were once dominant but still cautions of the dangers of researcher interpretations. While qualitative studies of resistance acknowledge that they go beyond the interpretation that actors themselves make of their own experiences, Pitt says “there is still something quite troubling about positing the researchers’ interpretations as having the capacity to tell the truth about the meaning of an action of another” (1998, p. 538). Pitt points out that in Willis’ study, for example, the working class lads he researched not only resisted middle class ideologies but also Willis’ own idea of emancipatory thought and his own “dreams for the emancipatory potential of research” (1998, p. 537). Britzman, too, points out the dangers of unquestioning acceptance of researcher interpretation, saying that since researchers have the power to reinterpret they may end up authorizing the experiences and voices of others in ways that clash or fail to resonate with the lived experiences they seek to explore (2003, p. 38).

In the following chapters, I continue to examine how resistance can operate in in-between spaces, in gray areas or in more than one space. I also highlight the complexities of not only defining resistances but in differentiating among the wide-ranging motivations behind Flatwoods natives’ acceptance or rejection of actions that might be viewed as microresistances. At the same time, while recognizing that actions and
motivations are open to multiple and muddied interpretations and that not all maneuvers can be easily be defined as resistance, I found in my own study that resistance theories still provided valuable perspectives. To shed light on those perspectives, I turn in Chapter III to detailing the strategies I used to conduct this study, as well as situating my own dilemmas as a researcher trying to apply resistance theories and define microresistances in narratives from the Flatwoods.
CHAPTER 3

THE RESEARCHER AS INTERPRETIVE BRICOLEUR: ETHNOGRAPHY, ORAL
AND LIFE HISTORY RESEARCH AND NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Introduction

Good ethnographic texts were once thought to take the reader into “an actual world to reveal the cultural knowledge working in a particular place and time as it is lived through the subjectivities of its inhabitants” (Britzman, 2000, p. 27). That idea has since been recognized as a “fictive geography” and today ethnography is expected to provide a larger critique into “the impossible difference within what is said, what is intended, what is signified, what is repressed, what is taken and what remains” (Britzman, 2000, p. 27). This study—constructed from the life histories of Flatwoods natives who grew up in the region during the Great Depression, WWII and the 1950s—recognizes that the retelling of another’s story is always a partial telling, involving selections, tensions, gaps, silences, and the pressures of what can and cannot be told. These are tales of unknowing and knowing, of unconscious and conscious resistance, of contradictory realities, conflicting and multiple truths, and acts of translation. They offer intimate and, at alternating times, graphic, unsettling, humorous, exaggerated, ambiguous, disputed and disturbing insights into struggles involving the authoritative gaze, punishment and authority figures.

This work is an attempt to do justice to these stories of lived experiences while at the same time recognizing such experiences cannot be recreated, but are instead re-
collected and re-presented. As outlined in Chapter I, as this also is a process of attributing “meaning to what happens to us” (Britzman, 2003, p. 32), three overarching questions guided this research: 1) How did Flatwoods natives methodically construct their experiences and what formed and shaped their reality-constituting activities? 2) What counted as significant in kinship/knowledge networks in this region in theorizing 1,000 tiny resistances to power structures? And 3) What can these “acts of narrative mean for learning to live?” (Britzman, 2006, p. 26). Exploring these questions required a combination of tools from ethnography, oral and life history research, and narrative analysis and inquiry.

As a qualitative researcher, I used the ethnographic tools of prolonged engagement in the field, thick description, participant-observation, interviewing and reflexivity to help me learn about and interpret how Flatwoods natives made sense of the world around them. Further, I engaged in oral and life history research, conducting, sorting, coding, and interpreting a series of “biographic interviews over time” (Glesne, 2006, p. 12). While collecting these oral histories, I focused on the “historical events, skills and ways of life” of Flatwoods natives (Glesne, 2006, p. 80). Further, I used narrative analysis and inquiry to examine stories of life experiences and how they developed, as well as to articulate the aim of the research in the form of personal narrative (Schwandt, 2001, p. 171). My analysis included identifying, categorizing and interpreting themes and patterns (Janesick, 2003, p. 63) involving resistances and microresistances and a deep focus on “people’s storytelling, reasoning that storying is an important means for representing and explaining personal and social experience” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 98).
In this chapter, I detail how I used these methods in this project and expound on how I wrote the data in ways that conveyed its complex dynamics and translated and represented others’ accounts. I explain how this research is “interpretive, constructivist, and critical, moving back and forth between the story, its telling, and the contingencies of perspectival borders” (Britzman, 2003, p. 36). Further, I describe my approach to: constructing the design; selecting the Flatwoods as a study site; choosing Flatwoods natives as subjects; identifying research questions; determining how to collect, interpret and use the data; and handling such issues as engagement in the field, crystallization, transferability, and validity.

In essence, I devised and gathered the essential elements of my qualitative research project in six phases. First, as detailed in Chapter II, in order to help me situate the Flatwoods and better understand the historical background and culture of the area, I familiarized myself with dominant theories in and outside of the fields of Appalachian studies, Folklore, colonial discourse/postcolonial theory, and scholarship on the invention, history and culture of Appalachia and its people. As further explained in Chapter II, in order to apply theoretical perspectives to my work, I also delved heavily into the historical and philosophical roots of resistance theory. This process helped me engage in theory building that probed the “meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action” of Flatwoods natives (Denzin, 1989, p. 39) and develop a greater understanding of their intentions, perceptions and motivations. It also helped me settle on using a interpretive lens for my research and recognize there are many truths and multiple knowers (Sipe & Constable, 1999, p. 158). As mentioned earlier, I tried to act as an interpretive bricoleur, who understands that this research is interactive, shaped by
personal history, class, race and ethnicity, and that my findings have political implications (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 9). In the second phase, I conducted field research by immersing myself in the local culture as well as identifying my initial research sample. As discussed in my introduction, I spent significant time in 2005 listening to and transcribing archival data in the form of recorded narratives collected over 10 months in 1993 and 1994 with one of the study’s key participants, Ethard Jasper. During these interviews, Ethard detailed his life history, highlighting particular events and actions and explaining their impact. These transcriptions marked the first time I had listened to these earlier interviews and—in this listening—found myself once again immersed in the stories Ethard shared that intense summer and fall just before he died. Hearing his voice on these tapes brought back vivid recollections of Ethard in his tiny living room, propped up in a hospital bed delivered that spring by Medicaid, answering my questions and pouring out the history of his life. In re-listening to and transcribing these interviews, I recognized in new ways how I had earlier acted as audience, as a witness to Ethard’s emotionally wrenching accounts. Also from 2005 through 2007, I began to once again spend considerable time in Somerset, Kentucky, the place where I grew up but left more than two decades ago. I reconnected with relatives, revisited places I had known as a youth and readjusted to the pace of life in southern Kentucky. During this prolonged engagement in the field, I shopped, played and studied in the area. I

3 I was able to spend significant time in the region, in part, because my husband in 2006 took a job for nearly a year in Somerset, Kentucky, about a half an hour drive from the Flatwoods. In addition, many family members still live in the area.
frequented Cracker Barrel and Sonny’s Barbeque in Somerset and ate country ham, pinto beans and fried cornbread at the diner just down the road from the Alligator Boat Dock near the Flatwoods. I purchased clothes at Goody’s and Peebles. I bought gallons of the locally famous cole slaw at Max Village Pantry in Nancy. I also: read local newspapers; strolled the muddy fairway at the Pulaski County Fair; danced in the Wal-Mart parking lot during a crowded Somernights Cruise car show; and wandered the halls of Burnside’s indoor/outdoor flea market on Saturday mornings while my mother worked the tables. In addition, I consulted Web sites and census data to get a stronger picture of the region ethnically, geographically, economically and culturally (U.S. Census Data, City Data, Somerset/Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce, Somerset Images, Casey County Chamber of Commerce, The Commonwealth of Kentucky, Tour Casey County, Casey County Economic Development Authority). As mentioned earlier, I tracked down archived data consisting of a brief interview I had done in 2002 with Roy, one of Ethard’s cousins and closest friends. As well, I unearthed old photographs and consulted with relatives about names, dates and places—later using the photos as talking points during interviews, and to prompt recollections. I analyzed a newspaper account of one of Ethard’s most frequently told stories about a dynamite cap blowing off in his hand. I also spent several weekends sorting through and rereading numerous diaries I have kept since 1970 about growing up in the region—a practice that brought to the surface emotions, memories and details of the area and its people that I had long ago locked away.

4 See Appendix A.

5 See Chapter V.
As noted, in this second phase I identified my initial research sample and devised early research questions. I originally chose Ethard and two of his brothers, Leon and Levi, specifically because they are information-rich cases. As Michael Patton notes, qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, “even single cases (n=1) selected purposefully” (Patton, 1990, p. 169, italics in original). “The logic and power of purposeful sampling…leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Once I chose this original sample, I conducted a pilot study, detailed later in this chapter, which consisted of an initial interview in January 2006 with Levi, as well as a guided tour that he provided of the Flatwoods that allowed me to begin to familiarize myself with the area and engage in thick description.

In the third phase, I transcribed more interviews with Ethard as well as my 2006 pilot study with Levi. I also conducted and transcribed more than a dozen hours of additional interviews with both Leon and Levi in the summer and fall of 2007. One particularly lengthy interview with Leon was completed on Labor Day, September 3, 2007 at his home off Slate Branch Road in Somerset. After talking for a couple of hours that morning, Leon then took me on an extensive tour of the Flatwoods in neighboring Casey County and pointed out places of significance. Afterward, he drove me around Pulaski County and showed me other spots of interest, including: a cave where he said one of our Indian ancestors, Chief Doublehead, was born; the fire station parking lot where our local county sheriff was murdered by a sniper in 2002; and a quiet, tree-covered stream between two caves that Leon touted as the shortest creek in the world.
That evening, we went to dinner at Ruby Tuesday’s on Highway 27 and he told more stories about the Flatwoods. I showed him old photographs6 that I had inherited from my father, and they prompted additional reminiscing about aunts, uncles, brothers and other relatives. I conducted additional interviews with Leon and his brother Levi two days later. These interviews again took place at Leon’s home. By interviewing the two men together, I was able to capture how they both challenged and reinforced each other’s recollections and prompted each other to remember specific events and details, such as family lore, rebellions, punishments, schools, neighbors, houses, trailer sales, and car makes, models, prices and deals. Based on these in-depth, in-person interviews, I also decided to add to my research sample their only female sibling, Alma Hopper, another Flatwoods native, identified through snowball or chain sampling, a common approach for “locating information-rich key informants” (Patton, 1990, p. 176). I interviewed Alma, who lives in Corinth, Mississippi, by telephone several times in September and November 2007.

Throughout interviews with all of these respondents, I sought to understand Flatwoods experiences from the points of view of those who lived them, and convey that we are all informing and influencing each other. Moreover, I looked for the ways Flatwoods natives methodically constructed their experiences and their everyday lives, and “in the configurations of meaning and institutional life that inform and shape their reality-constituting activities” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 215). In particular, I was interested in their life histories, their personal views of their own experiences as they

6 See Appendix A.
understood them. I explored what was constructed beyond a fluid story and how each storyteller resisted, conformed to and wielded power and in what ways. As I conducted this research, I kept a detailed field journal about the experiences of returning to the region, conducting interviews, and immersing myself in local culture. I also strived to maintain that “delicate balance between probing the motivations, intents, investments, and practices of persons, and respecting their boundaries of privacy and vulnerability” (Britzman, 2003, p. 37).

In the fourth phase, I continued transcribing and coding my interviews and began writing about my analytical hunches, deciding what data to include and exclude, and reviewing my Flatwoods tours and observations. Over time, my coding strategies dramatically changed from low-inference, descriptive coding to more high-inference, theme coding. For example, I started out in the summer of 2005 trying to code for what Ethard talked about most frequently. That led me to code for his mentions of southern food, involvement with cars, and descriptions of poverty. But after I had more deeply delved into poststructural theory, I moved to more high-inference coding around stories relating to resisting or conforming to power structures, double consciousness, talk of truth, and instances of physical or mental trauma. I also compared instances where each of the siblings told similar stories as well as where their accounts differed, which helped me better understand how these stories are situated and perspectival.

7 A more complete picture of the number of times Ethard talked of resistance and other topics is offered in Appendix D.
As well, I began to wrestle with the difficult issues of what kind of data to include. One particularly thorny issue centered on speech patterns and whether I should—and how I could—accurately as possible reflect the ways Flatwoods storytellers actually talk. I debated, for example, whether in certain cases to “clean up” grammatical errors or delete quotes with more graphic expletives. I discarded both notions—ultimately deciding to try and record as accurately as possible speech patterns and accents. For example, when a storyteller called something a “thang,” I recorded it my notes as a “thang” and not as a “thing.” Or if they said something was over “air” I transcribed it as “air” and not “there.” In the end, I chose to try and accurately as possible reflect accents, speech patterns, and actual ways of talking and cursing because to do otherwise seemed unfaithful to the data and a misrepresentation of Flatwoods speech. Presenting these Flatwoods natives as people who speak proper English seemed incongruous. The way they speak is a part of who they are. There is a cadence, a rhythm, to their language that I did not frankly think I could improve upon. I recognized this was a critical decision, in part, because attentiveness to language and participants’ voices shape meanings. After all, word selections, accents and grammar are not neutral. They carry the intentions and contexts of historical subjects. As Freud puts it, “Words were originally magic and to this day words have retained much of their ancient magical power. By words one person can make another blissfully happy or drive him to despair… Words provoke affects and are in general the means of mutual influence among men” (1989, introduction). At the same time, I recognize that “tone, accent, and style qualify meaning, meaning is never realized by the individual alone” (Britzman, 2003, p. 44). As a researcher, I interpreted accents, decided which words to emphasize and reconstructed meaning. As I was reminded during
this process, and as Britzman points out, the dilemma for the researcher is how to critically re-present the voices of others while also caring for their integrity, humanity and struggles.

In addition to wrestling with matters of language and voice, I briefly considered whether to identify respondents by their real names, although I found this question easier to resolve. All of these interview subjects agreed to speak to me because they wanted to share their oral histories and be remembered. I explained to them that I planned to share stories in my dissertation research and present them at conferences, and I also hoped to expand this research into a book. Identifying them only as anonymous research subjects would have defeated their goals of being remembered and of having their stories told. Furthermore, my work is about my father and his family so it would have been impossible not to identify them unless I chose to hide the fact that we are related—which would have raised different ethical questions. In the end, a much more complicated question was which of their stories to include in this research and how much of those stories to tell. There are stories, of course, that did not make this body of work for a wide variety of reasons. Some seemed irrelevant. Others were simply too long or meandering. Still others seemed too private or graphic or unsettling. Of course, there was no way to escape my own influence in these matters. As Lather points out, “No matter how much we think we are reading voice, we are reading a text. Acts of transcription have taken

8 Though no one expressed any interest in my dissertation they did ask to see copies of the book after it is published.
place. Editorial decisions have been made. The text is never free of the contamination of language” (2000, p. 155).

Throughout this research, I kept reflexive notes on the ethnographic process and in the fifth phase began to write up that data. As part of my reflexivity, detailed later in this section, I navigated insider/outsider dilemmas faced during this research and tried to walk a reflexive line between vanity and the disembodied knower. I also wrote about the methods I used to establish the trustworthiness of this data without simply conforming to a validity policing function. I sought to achieve internal validity through prolonged engagement in the field and thick description. As well, I identified and acknowledged the disconfirming evidence uncovered during this research, such as stories which focused on a lack of agency or conformity to power structures in the Flatwoods. To add rigor and richness to my inquiry, I employed crystallization\(^9\) and member checks by: consulting with Web sites, newspaper accounts, photographs and other public records and archival material; asking respondents about each others’ stories; and comparing stories about the

\(^9\) I use the term crystallization instead of triangulation here because I recognize there are more than three sides from which to approach this research. Crystallization provides an “infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach.” Crystals cast off in different directions. “What we see depends upon our angle of repose” (Richardson, 1994, p. 518).
same events told by different family members. While I used multiple data sources to help establish the validity of this work, that does not mean I sought to arrive at “the truth” in these stories. Instead, comparing stories told by Ethard to stories told by his brothers and sister allowed me to analyze how family members constructed and communicated resistance and conformity, how they grappled with blurred memories, multiple truths, exaggerations, fabulations and how recollections were shared, disputed, encouraged, reinforced or reinscribed. Indeed, I sought to establish external validity in this research by creating transferability through illustrations of how certain events are remembered differently among family members who experienced them—while others are recalled in exactly the same way. There seems to be widespread understanding among those of us with siblings that childhood memories are often disputed accounts. With that in mind, one of my goals for this research became not to find “the truth” but to find meaning and offer a pragmatic validity to others in that it could be useful in helping people understand Flatwoods natives and in some ways the Appalachian region itself differently than they did prior to reading the work (Green & Stinson, 1999, p. 98). Stories, after all, can invite mesmerizing involvement, “inciting readers to return to their own lives with comparability and with difference” (Britzman, 2006, p. 21).

In the final phase, I continued my thematic analysis by segregating data and further sharpening the focus of the study. I responded to the analytical questions about my research, such as: What ways did people both exhibit and not exhibit agency—how

10 Comparisons of stories about events in the Flatwoods are presented in Chapter IV and Chapter V.
did they resist, conform to, and wield power structures at various times and in multiple ways? What was being illuminated? I reviewed my work repeatedly and made definitive decisions about what data to include and exclude and what constituted confirming and disconfirming evidence. This helped me see how quality criteria was fluent and emergent (Lather, 2001, p. 245). My goal was to present the data in a way that conveyed the complex dynamics of this research. I also tried to ensure these life histories illustrated the uniqueness and complexities of these particular Flatwoods natives in such a way that they might cause “readers to reflect upon themselves and to bring their own situations and questions to the story” (Glesne, 2006, p. 11).

To be sure, this section would not be complete without acknowledging the messiness of this process. While the phases overall are accurate, there were overlapping moments—sometimes I found myself coding again in the final phase or driving back out to the Flatwoods just to look around one more time. Nor have I detailed all of the uncertainties, anxieties and questions this process created. I constantly worried: Am I telling too many stories? Are the quotes too long? Will readers get bored in this or that section? (Undoubtedly, yes). And the big question I asked repeatedly: What’s missing? There was all of the self berating, too. Why in the world did I interrupt Levi just as he was about to say how he replied to the Cincinnatians who made fun of the way he talked? What would he have said? What could Leon, Levi and Alma not say because of who I am? And why did I not ask Ethard at least a thousand other questions when I had the chance? There also were the seemingly endless weeks spent lost in the data—days upon days upon days of a painful slogging through. Sometimes I felt I was writing in circles and getting nowhere. Other days I found I headed down a path, but arrived at what felt
like the wrong place. There was the difficult knowledge I encountered about my father from his siblings—who had great deal to say about him, much of it less than complementary. Then there was that internal battle I waged between the stories I was telling and the stories I wanted to tell. I experimented with writing some of the stories the way I have envisioned them before finally accepting that those stories—that way of writing, conveying and translating, is meant for another time. Despite such concerns and the inevitable blurring of the process, I tried to create distinct goals and outcomes for each phase. The following chart describes how such goals and outcomes correlated with the work in each phase, as well as insights I gleaned as my research progressed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Phase</th>
<th>Description of Methods Used in Conducting Research</th>
<th>Goal of Research During this Phase</th>
<th>Outcomes and/or Insights</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A) Throughout this study, but particularly in 2005 and 2006, researched dominant theories in and outside of the fields of Appalachian studies, Folklore, colonial discourse/postcolonial theory, and explored scholarship on the invention, history and culture of Appalachia.</td>
<td>A) To situate the Flatwoods and better understand the historical background and culture of the Appalachian region.</td>
<td>A) Developed familiarity with important literature and theoretical frameworks, and settled on using a interpretive lens for my research.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B) Throughout this study, but particularly in the winter of 2005 and in 2006, researched the historical and philosophical roots of resistance theory.</td>
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TABLE 1: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PHASES (CONTINUED)

11 See Chapter VI for more details.
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<td>B) To engage in theory building that would lead to a greater understanding of the intentions, perceptions and motivations of Flatwoods natives.</td>
<td>A) To use prolonged engagement in the field and familiarize myself with the region today.</td>
<td>A) Helped develop a better understanding of the culture in southern Kentucky, in particular the Flatwoods.</td>
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<td>B) Improved ability to put theory to work, as well as recognized how I acted in this research as an interpretive bricoleur.</td>
<td>B) To better understand Ethard’s views of his experiences.</td>
<td>B) Brought back vivid recollections of the interviews, and created a new recognition of the ways I had acted as audience, as a witness to Ethard’s accounts.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>A) Immersed myself in the local culture and conducted field research between 2005 and 2007.</td>
<td>C) To get a stronger picture of the region ethnically, geographically, economically and culturally. To gather archived data for analysis.</td>
<td>C) Brought to the surface significant emotions, memories and details of the area and its people.</td>
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<td>B) Listened to and transcribed archival data in the summer of 2005 in the form of recorded narratives collected over 10 months in 1993 and 1994 with a key participant.</td>
<td>D) To begin to set the parameters of the research.</td>
<td>D) Developed a feel for who and what this study would revolve around.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>C) Throughout this study tracked down archival data, including photographs, diaries, interviews and census data. Again consulted Web sites and updated census data in the winter of 2007.</td>
<td>E) To begin to familiarize myself with the Flatwoods and engage in thick description.</td>
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TABLE 1: CONTINUED

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<th>Outcomes and/or Insights</th>
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<tr>
<td>D) In the fall of 2005 identified initial research sample and devised early research questions for pilot study.</td>
<td>E) Conducted a pilot study consisting of an initial interview in January 2006 with Levi, as well as a guided tour that he provided of the Flatwoods.</td>
<td>A) To familiarize myself with my data. B) To gather more data from additional respondents. C) To learn more about Leon’s experiences in the Flatwoods and the region. D) To capture how both men prompted each other to remember specific events and details, such as family lore and rebellions.</td>
<td>A-B) Created a database of interviews that revealed patterns and outliers. C) Moved toward a better understanding of respondent’s views of the region. D) Illustrated the ways two Flatwoods natives challenged and reinforced each other’s recollections.</td>
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<td>E) Provided an opportunity to see the area from the perspective of a Flatwoods native.</td>
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<td>3. A) Transcribed more interviews with Ethard, as well as pilot study with Levi, in the spring and summer of 2006.</td>
<td>B) Conducted and transcribed more than a dozen hours of additional interviews with both Leon and Levi in the fall of 2007. C) Took an extensive tour in September 2007 of Casey and Pulaski counties guided by Leon, who pointed out places of significance.</td>
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<td>Research Phase</td>
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<td>D) Interviewed Leon and Levi together in September 2007. E) Added to research sample their only female sibling, Alma Hopper, another Flatwoods native, in September 2007. Interviewed her in September and November 2007. F) Kept a detailed field journal from the fall of 2005 through late 2007 about the experiences of returning to the region, conducting interviews, and immersing myself in local culture.</td>
<td>E) To create a useful and rich research sample. F) To reflect on perspectives of returning to the region, and on Flatwoods experiences from the points of view of those who lived them.</td>
<td>E) Provided perspectives on the Flatwoods during this time period. F) Explored what was constructed beyond a fluid story and how each storyteller resisted, conformed to and wielded power and in what ways.</td>
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<td>A) Continued in the fall and winter of 2007 transcribing and coding interviews and writing about analytical hunches. B) Made decisions in the summer, fall and winter of 2007 about what data to include and exclude.</td>
<td>A) To begin to see patterns and themes in the data. B) To sort through and choose the most relevant data. C) To sharpen familiarity with the Flatwoods. D) To develop a more sophisticated analysis.</td>
<td>A) Patterns and themes around resistance emerged. B-D) Irrelevant information peeled away and key data brought into focus for analysis. E) Comparisons revealed layers of complications in narratives.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>C) Reviewed in the fall of 2007 Flatwoods tours and observations.</td>
<td>E) To better understand how stories are situated and perspectival.</td>
<td>F) Decisions made to reflect as accurately as possible accents, speech patterns, and actual ways of talking, and identify and describe respondents.</td>
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<td>D) Between 2005 and 2007 moved coding strategies from low-inference, descriptive coding to more high-inference, theme coding.</td>
<td>F) To identify and make appropriate decisions about representations.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>E) In the fall and winter of 2007 compared and analyzed instances where siblings told similar stories, as well as where accounts differed.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>F) Throughout this research period, wrestled with matters of language and, voice.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>A) In the summer and fall of 2007 began to write up data on reflections in the field.</td>
<td>A-B) To compile and reflect on data, and develop an awareness of the impact of insider/outside Perspectives.</td>
<td>A-B) Helped to heighten awareness of and acknowledge the impact of the researcher on the research.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B) Throughout this research, navigated insider/outsider dilemmas.</td>
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| 6.             | C) Throughout this research, selected and refined methods to establish the trustworthiness of the data. Employed crystallization and member checks. Sought to establish external validity by creating transferability.  

D) Sought to achieve internal validity through prolonged engagement in the field in 2005 through 2007, as well as through use of thick description.  

E) In the summer, fall and winter of 2007 identified and wrote up disconfirming evidence uncovered during this research. | C) To carefully choose a variety of methods to establish data trustworthiness and offer a pragmatic validity to others.  

D) To develop a strong knowledge of the region and describe it in detail.  

E) To analyze disconfirming evidence. | C-D) Able to apply various methods to address data trustworthiness and validity issues.  

E Developed familiarity with Flatwoods natives and renewed appreciation for the Appalachian region itself. |
| A) Continued thematic analysis in the fall and winter of 2007 by segregating data and responding to analytical questions about my research.  

C) Throughout the study reviewed work repeatedly and made decisions on data inclusions/exclusions and disconfirming evidence. | A-C) To present the data in a way that conveyed the complex dynamics of this research, and to create deeper understanding of Flatwoods natives and the region. | A-C) Helped illustrate how quality criteria is fluent and emergent and develop a sharper focus. |
A Reflexive Account

I turn now from an explanation of the six phases I moved through as I conducted this research to a reflexive account of how I came to focus on Appalachian storytelling—in particular how I became determined to research and analyze the stories of the Jasper siblings from the Flatwoods. I also explore my own subjectivity and biases as a researcher and describe how returning to southern Kentucky immersed me in both a new and yet familiar world of lifelong relationships. In his early years, Marx wrote of the importance of placing a work in its historical context. In The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, he discusses how historical forces shape and limit our capacity, noting that people “‘make their own history, but they do not make it under circumstances directly chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past’” (Britzman, 2003, p. 40, citing Marx, 1981, p. 15). He added: “The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.” In explaining why I chose to write about my deceased father and the experiences of a previous generation, and to provide an “inherited context” for my work (Britzman, 2003, p. 41) I employ in this section the methods of autobiography, re-presenting a brief glimpse of my own history and explaining how I believe this past motivated and shaped this present study.

I will start with the summer of 1979—the year after my parents divorced, my father suffered his first heart attack, and we auctioned off our junkyard just as interest rates hit double digits. We lost, I was told, hundreds of thousands of dollars in that transaction and my father filed for bankruptcy. We fired our maid, sold our hilltop home
with its double party decks and heart-shaped hot tub, and began moving from place to place—finally settling into a beat-up trailer in the middle of my uncle’s gravel mobile home lot in Burnside, Kentucky. The convertible red Corvette my father had given me as a birthday present morphed into a tired Dodge Colt with a leaky radiator. The local politicians and their cronies who ate our steaks and drank our booze during the good times disappeared. I quit the cheerleading squad at Eubank High School and started commuting to the larger county school, all the while scrambling for cash to help us get by until my father recovered. On weekends, I pin-striped cars for $50 or delivered vehicles from Cincinnati to used car lots for $10 a trip. Without telling my Dad, I also signed us up for Food Stamps. In the evenings, I sat at our kitchen table while Ethard drank whisky and alternated between telling stories about his childhood and railing against the bankers, politicians and anyone and everyone he imagined contributed to our dismal state of affairs. Late at night, I wrote in my journal, where I found escape, solace and the beginning of a deep love affair with writing. Someday, I wrote, I would make it out of southern Kentucky, though I had no idea how. My Dad had only made it to eighth grade, and most of my seven siblings dropped out of school by the 9th or 10th. By my junior year, my friends were dropping out, too. Some eventually dropped dead. My best friend, Wayna, was strangled to death by a guy in a coke-induced haze. My boyfriend, Larry, died too stoned to pull his Jeep out of the path of a coal truck. They say Bubby hung himself—but I always wondered. Looking back, I doubt if I even believed myself when I said I would someday become a writer in a big, far-off city. But the alternative seemed too grim.
Yet, despite grades near the bottom of my high school class, I eventually got into Eastern Kentucky University and majored in journalism. After graduation, I landed my first job in Casey County—where my father grew up—and began covering school boards, editing church news and reporting the DUI arrests on Saturday nights. A hundred city council meetings and police blotters later, I desperately wanted to produce a deeper kind of reporting that exposed injustices and helped people with no money and no voice. I decided my best bet was to leave Kentucky and get a master’s degree in journalism at Ohio State. A few years after getting my degree, while I was covering politics for the Dayton Daily News, my father’s heart disease worsened and we realized he probably would not have much longer to live. So, years before Tuesdays with Morrie I returned home to spend Sundays with Ethard, interviewing this brilliant, violent, used car and mobile home dealer, junkyard owner, developer, huckster and jack-of-all-traders.

I spent those Sundays immersed in his stories because he so much wanted me to write a book about his life and because, as I was growing up, his stories had such an impact on me and nearly everyone I knew. Even in my teens, my friends used to ask to come over on weekends and listen to Ethard tell stories about the Flatwoods and his rowdy and remarkable life. “Ethard always did have charisma. He could talk you out of or talk you into anything,” his sister, Alma, recalled. “People loved him so much he just had this following” (Interview, November 29, 2007). One of his best friends growing up, Roy, described Ethard as having “the gift of gab” (Interview, August, 2002). Roy said Ethard did not know any strangers. “He could talk to anybody, and he knew how to talk
to people. They’d be doubting their lives and a few minutes of talking to him and they’d be feeling good about themselves” (Interview, August, 2002)

Folks in Casey County always expressed a little bit of awe over Ethard’s gift of powerful storytelling. Leon said back when Ethard thought he might be a Baptist preacher he relied on his abilities not only to tell stories about his own life but also to share the Gospel.

Ethard would come down from Cincinnati, and there’d be 25 or 30 people waiting at our gas station for him to come in. They’d get Cokes and stuff like this, and he’d start tellin’ ’em about the Lord. And they would wait for him to come, literally, to tell them about the Bible. And of course he would read the Bible all week while he was up there managin’ the used car lot, there, Hock Muth Sales and Service. So he knew more about the Bible than anybody around our country knew. And people’d just wait on him. They’d wait on him to come and tell ’em stories.” (Interview, September 3, 2007, italics added)

Eventually, and admittedly not always in an admirable way, Ethard became larger than life to many people in our family and in our town. He was both loved and hated—the kind of man who once chased a motorcycle gang off his farm with a Sub Thompson machine gun, who got meaner than a snake when he drank whisky, and who didn’t think twice about smacking someone with a crowbar or using a two-by-four in a Saturday night fight. Yet Ethard was also the kind of man who delivered free bags of groceries to neighbors if they fell on hard times, who loved to dance on tables, tell funny stories, and snub the rich folks in town who thought they were better than everybody else. “He was
always taking care of people who couldn’t take care of themselves” (Roy, Interview, August 2002). Even after his second bankruptcy, third heart attack and fourth wife, Ethard continued to live hard, party hard and enthrall an audience with his stories. When he died, the local newspaper ran an announcement on the top of the front page. On his tombstone, our family inscribed: “Ethard Jasper, 1928-1994. A visionary, a pioneer, a man who lived on the edge.”

For months after his death, I obsessed over what to do with the hundreds of stories I had just spent months recording. But they seemed too raw, too complicated, to even begin to sort through. So instead I turned my attention to telling other people’s stories. I spent two years investigating the national foster care system and writing about the abuse and neglect of foster kids. As Statehouse Bureau Chief of The Cincinnati Enquirer, I spent another year writing about families with medically fragile children, and 18 months producing a series—called “Ohio’s Secret Shame”—which illustrated how a state system supposed to protect people with mental retardation instead allowed them to be so abused and neglected that in some cases they died (Jasper, 2001). I also covered state agencies, the Ohio legislature, governor’s office, and presidential campaigns. Some of my work spurred new laws, reforms and on the best days seemed to make a difference in people’s lives. Along the way, I learned a great deal about how to get the most out of interviews, recognize emerging patterns and themes, synthesize hundreds of pages of notes and translate massive amounts of information into a form and vocabulary that could easily be understood by people not familiar with the research.
Yet during that decade, I was keenly aware that Ethard’s stories still sat in a shoebox in the top of my closet. I tried to ignore them. I tried to tell myself I would get to them “someday.” But each time one of my series appeared in the newspaper, I was reminded that I seemed to be telling everyone’s stories but Ethard’s—and, in some ways, everyone’s stories but my own. By the time I started the doctoral program in January 2005, I felt compelled to dig out the shoebox of cassette tapes I had so carefully packed away. Still, it was a wary undertaking. I imagined that it would be an emotional experience to listen to my father’s voice again, to re-immersing myself in the stories I had heard countless times growing up. It turned out to be even more difficult than I anticipated. In re-listening to these stories for hours, I realized that Ethard’s voice grew noticeably weaker over time and, in the last weeks before he died, frequent coughing began to interrupt his flow and rhythm. At that point, the stories seemed to take on an urgency for Ethard. Indeed, they took on an urgency for me as well. I recognized that I wanted to collect additional stories from the Flatwoods. I wanted to talk to Ethard’s remaining siblings and learn more about their ways of life. I wanted to document and illustrate the uniqueness, complexities and personalities in this particular family, place and time period while I still had the opportunity. And I wanted to do so in a way that “causes readers to reflect upon themselves and to bring their own situations and questions to the story” (Glesne, 2006, p. 11). I began to realize that:

Story telling, oral histories, the perspectives of elders and of women have become an integral part of all indigenous research. Each individual story is powerful. But the point about the stories is not that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply.
These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place… The story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people, and the people with the story. (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 145)

*An Insider/ Outsider Perspective*

Certainly, I am not the first person to want to return to my roots, to try to share with others a glimpse of (an)Other world—of (an)Other way of seeing and doing and living. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Tuhiwai Smith notes that it is critical for Othered people to tell stories that reinforce their own values, customs and identities. “Telling our stories from the past, reclaiming the past, giving testimony to the injustices of the past are all strategies that are commonly employed by indigenous peoples struggling for justice” (1999, p. 35). My own early insider-ness—my seat in the late 1960s at the Liar’s Table in Jerry’s Restaurant, for example, and my recognition of the power of these stories and familiarity with the men who produced them—led me to this research path. In some ways, conveying stories from the Flatwoods is my way of connecting the land with the people, the people with the stories, and a previous generation with my own. It is my way of retelling stories I have heard so often and for so long in my own childhood that they surely became a part of who I am.

At the same time, I recognize that although I am Appalachian and writing about my own relatives, I am also an outsider to this research. I left southern Kentucky in my early 20s and have lived in Ohio for the past 18 years. Beyond the change in geography,
my status as a privileged, white female academic and former journalist no doubt influenced my understanding and translation of these life histories, as did the need to examine data through various theoretical lenses and use theory to make meaning. Tuhiwai Smith discusses at great length the problems that researchers who define themselves as indigenous face as they deal with the “demands of research, on one side, and the realities they encounter amongst their own and other indigenous communities, with whom they share lifelong relationships, on the other side” (1999, p. 5). I found these demands, at times, to be exhausting. I did not approach this research assuming that because respondents are relatives I would somehow have a greater understanding of the context of their stories. Though I was born in neighboring Somerset, I did not grow up in the Flatwoods, which is even more rural and less populated than my own hometown. Nor do I remember the Great Depression, WWII or the 1950s. In fact, I was too young to have ever known most of the characters depicted in these stories—Ethard’s homebrew-loving Uncle Killis, mean ol’ Uncle Tom, the fiery preacher I.K. Cross, and all the pretty girls who lived down the road. Even the ones I did know, I did not know well. I had not spoken with my aunt or uncles for years and discovered it was a challenge to locate them and reestablish what at best had been tenuous relationships. Once I did make contact, I found I was more at ease interviewing strangers than these people I had known in my youth, in part because I could not escape my own awareness of old family grudges and loyalties. There was no need to tease out these tensions to see if they still existed. They hung thick during interviews and at times created an uncomfortable space in which to maneuver.
These strains, pressures and ambiguities spurred me during this research to try to adapt a stance of “methodological humility” and “methodological caution” (Narayan, 1988, p. 38). In other words, I tried to stay aware that I may have missed something or failed to glean the larger picture available to insiders of the Flatwoods, especially to insiders in this particular kinship network. The stories these siblings told were not uncontaminated portrayals. They were influenced by their own memories, resentments, burdens, connections, disconnections and present-day loyalties. “Whenever someone gives an account of a past event, even if he is a historian, we must take into account what he unintentionally puts back into the past from the present or from some intermediate time, thus falsifying his picture of it” (Freud, 1989, p. 417). Further, these stories were influenced by my own present-day and past biases and methods of collection. I was the one asking the questions. By necessity that means I guided the interviews, sought out particular stories, and chose when to follow up on accounts and when to move on. I also transcribed the interviews, decided which stories to include in this work and which stories to leave out. I made decisions about what to emphasize and which quotes might be paraphrased. None of this is surprising, of course. As Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Boschner, (2000, p. 734) point out: “Why should we take for granted that an author’s personal feelings and thoughts should be omitted in a handbook chapter? After all, who is the person collecting the evidence, drawing the inferences, and reaching the conclusions?”

Recognizing my critical role in this process, I paid close attention to what I chose to report, how I framed my data and why I chose my line of inquiry and kept a reflexive
awareness of what shaped my own interpretations and what made my interpretations of the texts seeable. I also troubled my initial romanticized views of resistance and my temptation to view acts of resistance as universal or coherent attempts to take on power. As well, I tried to produce a critical reflexivity of my obviously deep connections to this research and its conflicts and multiplicities. It was not an easy process. This research was not about truth telling in the absolute sense. It was about complications and performances of self and representations. In the end, my goal is to have presented my insider/outsider status straightforwardly, yet without wallowing in too much self-absorption.

Indeed, too much reflexivity can lead to a kind of intellectual paralysis, in which the researcher is so absorbed in the problems associated with his own position in the power/knowledge nexus that he fails to see any way in which a substantive contribution to the debate can be made, without it somehow being fatally flawed by contaminating influences deriving either from his own compromised professional role or from external political forces. (Humes & Bryce, 2003, p. 38)

No doubt I could write endlessly of my own history, perspectives, worries, frustrations, exhaustions, fears and decisions during this research. Using my theoretical research to analyze my families’ stories and my own return to my roots challenged my ideas about knowing and moved me into a world of conflicting realities, double consciousness, and angst. But I am mindful of the caution by Lather not to drown the “poem of the other with the sound of our own voices” (1997). So now I will try to get out of the way and move the next section, in which I begin to present the thick layers of rich remembering and ragged ruminations of Flatwoods natives. I start here with the pilot
study, conducted on the fourth weekend of January 2006, when I drove to Somerset, Kentucky to interview for the first time Ethard’s brother, Levi, about his experiences growing up in the Flatwoods. As mentioned earlier, this pilot was designed to help me familiarize myself with the Flatwoods itself and collect an initial interview, which later helped me formulate research questions and a research design. I include information about this pilot study as part of my “thick description” of the Flatwoods as well as to introduce Levi, one of my key research informants.

Touring the Flatwoods

I called Levi a week before our meeting and we decided to get together at noon the following Monday, January 25, 2006, at Frisch’s restaurant. I was nervous about seeing my uncle again after so many years, and when he first walked into the restaurant, I felt an immediate jolt. Short, with wiry brown hair and that famous Jasper hook nose, he is the spitting image of Ethard. And when he said hello and started talking in that familiar Kentucky twang, I felt like I had stepped back in time, and found it to be an uncomfortable, disconcerting space. We found a booth near the back of the restaurant, and began to look over the menus. I noticed Levi looked a bit tired, but as we settled in, his stories started to flow freely. He talked about his family, and what it was like growing up dirt poor. He told stories I had heard when I was younger and some I had not. No one had ever mentioned that as a little boy Levi was the one who accidentally burned his

12 I had not seen Levi since my brother’s funeral six years earlier, and had not talked with him in any depth in at least two decades.
family’s house down, for example, or that the entire family had subsequently moved into their old smokehouse until they could get enough money together to build a new place. Nor had I ever heard the story about my Dad being forced to move in with a crotchety old woman named Eula, who was one of the main reasons that for the rest of his life he deeply despised women with ugly feet. These were the kinds of stories that Levi shared over lunch.\footnote{Levi gave multiple performances of identity here, describing himself as the kind of boy who accidentally burned his family’s house down – and as a man forever haunted by guilt over that day. Or explaining that he was the sort of child people made fun of for his hand-me-down clothes and accent—and how that later caused him to deeply resent people who judge him for the way he talks.}

At this point, I was uncertain about asking Levi to take me on a tour of the Flatwoods so I could see for myself some of the places that until now I had mostly envisioned in my mind. Which house did they all grow up in? Where did they go to school? Where exactly is the Flatwoods anyway? What were his impressions of growing up there so many years ago? I had been to the Flatwoods, of course. Ethard had given me a tour a long time ago, and he is buried there now. But I didn’t know the boundaries of the Flatwoods well enough to recognize them on my own. I really wanted answers to these questions I had been curious about for so many years. But at the same time I worried that Levi might be too busy for a country drive or simply reluctant to dig up old
memories. But after polishing off my fish sandwich, I worked up the nerve to ask him to give me a tour of his old stomping grounds—promising that it would not take long. Outside, it started to snow, and Levi pulled a cigarette out of his shirt pocket, lit it, looked at me for a moment, and then asked if we could take my car. Breathing a sigh of relief, I brokered no objections. At about 1:30 p.m., Levi and I set off for the Flatwoods and he showed me important places from his childhood and talked about growing up there. He drove my car, and pointed out landmarks that from time to time I got out of the car and photographed. We took the Cumberland Parkway and hit Old Highway 80, a curvy two lane road lined with barbed-wire fences, a patchwork of trees, and field after field of cows and bales of rolled hay. A light snow covered the ground as we turned right at the old Gossett grocery, heading to Carter Ridge. We passed the now deserted Tarter’s Wrecking Yard – with its decaying empty metal buildings. A dilapidated red barn sat just past the lot, with a handful of Angus cattle and two fat bulls. We passed broken-down fences and fields of crushed corn stalks. Finally, Levi announced that we were in the Flatwoods, which I realized cannot be found on a map.\footnote{There is an official Flatwoods in Kentucky, but the one described here is informally named. See Chapter IV for details.} The place is just what the name suggests: a few hundred acres of flat, swampy ground that Levi explained used to be covered in woods.

14
We crossed over the Pulaski County line, which prompted Levi to explain how folks used to sell liquor from something called a blindjack.\textsuperscript{15} Other places prompted new stories, which he obviously relished telling. We passed Bradley’s Pleasure Baptist Church – one of the nicest and oldest brick churches in the Flatwoods. And then we crossed into Casey County, with its little white homes with white picket fences and occasional sprawling brick homes owned by a school principal or truck driver or other wealthier Casey Countian. Of course, there were plenty of run-down trailers, too, with bare patches of red clay dirt in the yards. We found one of the houses that Levi grew up in, and pulled into the drive. The house was small, but had new siding and black shutters, a shiny metal roof and a giant stump in the back yard, with a half-inflated basketball in the drive. A faded red barn sagged in the back yard. Snow fell lightly off and on under a flat gray sky. Further down the road we stopped at another family home. It was so tiny I thought, “Nine kids lived here? Amazing.” It was in much worse condition than the first home, with rusty metal siding and a half-erect front porch. I peered in the kitchen window at the peeling wallpaper and imagined what it must have been like when my father and all his brothers slept in the loft. We backed out of the gravel drive and turned around next door at the little Windsor Post Office, a white, one-room building that resembled a shed more than a post office. Next, we stopped in front of the house that Levi said his parents once rented for $10 a month.\textsuperscript{16} At first we thought it must be

\textsuperscript{15} See Chapter IV for a more detailed description of a blindjack.

\textsuperscript{16} This was after they moved out of the smokehouse.
abandoned. The windows were covered in yellowing plastic, and the porch was wrapped in chicken wire. A ripped poster of a monkey hung on the back porch, and a brown Naugahyde office chair lay upside down in the yard, next to a colorful baby quilt flapping in the wind. The side yard was packed with rusty wheel barrels, old tires, dead plants, window air conditioners, busted buckets, clay pots, a banged-up school locker and the shell of a ’55 Chevy squatting on blocks. We did not get out of the car.

On the way home, we took Old 80 all the way back to Nancy. I thought about the way so many trailers sit next to luxury brick homes with three- and four-car garages and appreciated the lack of rigid class distinctions and zoning in the country. We passed a pretty horse farm, with a giant sign announcing, “Flatwoods Quarter Horses” just above the white barn doors. Horses stood behind the bar in a field, munching on a broken-apart hay bale. We passed another brick house on the left, with a brand new, white Chevy pickup out front. Then we drove by assorted barns, the Chesterville Baptist Church, a cattle breeding farm, Foster’s Wrecking Yard and another tar-paper shack just before the Piney Grove Baptist Church. In Nancy, I waved to an old man standing outside of the This & That Store, a two-story white plank building advertising “Greeting Cards, Pottery, Baskets, Candles and Collectibles.” Three big wooden spools sat on the front porch along side a red and yellow plastic kitchen chair – the kind often found in hip kitchens these days with black and while tile floors. A little stone house sat next door, with neatly trimmed hedges and new blacktop on the drive, just down from Mandy’s Super Market. A sign out front read Pzza without the i. Other shacks lined the road home, with outhouses that look just like the ones in Google images under the heading “Appalachia.”
A broken-down mustard Mercedes sat in one of the yards. The nicest, most modern building in Nancy, it seemed, was the brick and stone, tanning salon in the heart of downtown. We passed the Mill Springs cemetery—where my uncles Hassel and Don are buried—then Pulaski Park and Cheney’s Apple Farm, where my brother used to steal apples.

It ended up being a good tour. Levi stayed engaged and pointed out the places he played as a child, telling story after story. As we pulled back into the Frisch’s parking lot, I noticed the diamond horseshoe ring on his left hand. He has worn that ring as long as I have known him, and it spurred recollections of the way he once loved horse racing so much that he built a huge dirt track behind his trailer in Science Hill—a track we later used for motorcycle and dune buggy racing. I thought about how it is funny that you can know someone for a little while and then never see them again—except at funerals, or in hospital visiting areas, or you happen to have a research project that you need their help to finish. I got out of the car and we said goodbye, then both drove away. 17

Eight months later, in the fall of 2007, I interviewed Levi again, along with his brother, Leon, and their sister, Alma. In the next chapter, I explore several of the stories Levi expounded on in these subsequent interviews, as well as stories told by Ethard, Leon, and Alma.

17 After this tour, I retraced our drive so I could write down more details about the area. Some of those are included in this description as well.
CHAPTER 4
ESCAPING THE GAZE: NARRATIVES FROM THE FLATWOODS

1,000 Tiny Resistances

Ethard, Levi, Leon and Alma, all siblings and natives of the Flatwoods of Kentucky, could be described as the kind of engaging Appalachian storytellers able to keep listeners on the edge of their seats, wondering what would happen next. As described in previous chapters, their stories frequently centered on what I call 1,000 tiny resistances, such as making and drinking homebrew, cursing, selling moonshine, smoking in church, stealing cars for joyrides, swiping tomatoes, talking back or dropping out of school. Thus, microresistances to power structures in the Flatwoods are a major theme emerging from these data, which illustrate how these siblings methodically constructed and were constructed by their experiences during the Great Depression, WWII and the 1950s. This chapter begins by positioning the Flatwoods in Appalachia, introducing participants in this study and then situating them in their kinship/knowledge network. Subsequent sections highlight their stories of resistance and then analyze what kinds of small v maneuvers were used to subvert authority and thwart attempts to create docile bodies. This analysis includes both confirming and disconfirming evidence as well as an evaluation of the various ways Flatwoods natives exhibited and did not exhibit agency.

18 See synoptic chart, Appendix C.
Further, it looks at how they challenged, embraced, conformed to and wielded power.
The final section scrutinizes storytellers’ strategies of invisibility, deniability and culpability and applies resistance theory to such strategies.\textsuperscript{19} It also draws conclusions about what can be learned from these life histories.

\textit{Situating the Flatwoods}

The Flatwoods of Kentucky should not be confused with Flatwoods, Kentucky, which is just across the Ohio River from Ironton, Ohio. The Flatwoods of Kentucky is an informally named, flat, formerly wooded area in Casey County near the border of Pulaski County in the southern part of the state.\textsuperscript{20} Both counties are among the 406 counties that make up the Appalachian region. The Flatwoods has no borders or counted population, as it was given its name unofficially by local residents who noticed its unusually flat and swampy geography. Casey County’s largest city, Liberty, has a population of 1,800 but the Flatwoods encompasses part of nearby Windsor and another smaller town called Yosemite, (pronounced Yo – seh—mite), which today have fewer than 200 people each. In some key ways, Casey County has not changed much since the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, when Ethard, Leon, Levi and Alma were growing up in the area. The countywide population, for example, was at 16,747 in 1930 and reached its peak of 19,962 in 1940, before dropping slightly each of the past six decades back down to the 15,447 residents who live there today (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). The area remains one of the more

\textsuperscript{19} Additional analysis of resistances can be found in Chapter VI.

\textsuperscript{20} See Appendix E for a map of Casey County and Pulaski County.
impoverished in Kentucky, with more than a fourth of its residents living below the poverty line (City Data, 2007). In 2003, the per capita income was $18,000 (Casey County Economic Development Authority, 2007) and the average house was valued at $64,000. No violent crimes were reported at all in 2005 and 2006, and just a few dozen thefts (City Data, 2007). Only slightly more than half of the population over 25 has a high school degree, and just 7 percent graduated from college. Agriculture is still an important part of the economy, though many people commute significant distances to work in Lexington or other larger cities outside the county. Last year unemployment stood at nearly 7 percent, about 2 percentage points higher than the state average (Kentucky Interactive LLC, 2007). The biggest difference in geography between the Flatwoods 50 years ago and the Flatwoods today, natives say, is that most of the woods are gone and the roads have significantly improved. Many homes built in the 1920s and 1930s are still standing and the one- and two-room schools that the Jasper siblings once attended remain in surprisingly good condition, though they are no longer used. Formed in 1807, the county, located in the Knobs Region of Kentucky, continues today to be a prohibition or “dry county,” meaning it is illegal to sell or transport liquor for sale into the county. According to U.S. Census data, the county is 98 percent white, 1.28 percent Hispanic or Latino, and less than 1 percent African American, Native American, or other race.
Casey County’s neighbor, Pulaski County,\textsuperscript{21} has changed more significantly in the past few decades—in large part because of its proximity to the 66,000-acre Lake Cumberland, which attracts more than 1.7 million tourists each year (Somerset/Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce, 2007, Images of Somerset, 2006). The county population of 35,640 in 1930 had jumped to 59,200 by 2005, and in the next few years the county is projected to become the 14th most populous in Kentucky. It, too, is mostly a dry county, though recently voters allowed two wineries to sell alcohol to the public. In addition, one of the county’s smaller cities, Burnside, allows restaurants that seat over 100 patrons to serve alcoholic beverages by the drink. Like Casey County, the racial makeup of Pulaski has long been overwhelmingly white. Census data shows that more than 97 percent of the county is Caucasian, with African Americans and Latinos making up most of the other 3 percent. Sixty-five percent of residents over 25 have a high school degree, though less than 10 percent graduated from college. In part due to tourist activity connected to Lake Cumberland, Pulaski County is somewhat wealthier than its neighbors. The average house in the area is valued at $95,000 (City Data, 2007) and the median income for a household in the county in 2000 was $27,370. About 19 percent of the population lived below the poverty line.\textsuperscript{22} Though agriculture still plays a large role in the economy, generating more than $35 million each year, the area has significantly more industry than

\textsuperscript{21} I was born in Pulaski County and lived there most of the first 18 years of my life.

\textsuperscript{22} See Appendix E for a map of Pulaski County.
Casey County, with so many houseboat builders it is known as the “houseboat capital of the world” (Somerset Images, 2006). The county also has two industrial parks, with companies that produce automotive parts, porcelain fixtures, pressed glassware, lumber, clothing and food products (Somerset/Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce, 2007).

Flatwoods Natives

Interviews to collect the life histories from the Casey Countians participating in this study were conducted more than a decade apart with four children of Charles and Mary Delk Jasper, who were also Flatwoods natives. All told, Charlie and Mary had 11 children between 1922 and 1941. They are, in order of birth: Arvis Vertrees; Earsel Edward; Mavis Franklin; Hassel; Cecil; Ethard; Helen Rose; Donald; Alma Janet; Leon; and Levi. The first child, Arvis Vertrees, was born in 1922 and died nine months later of pneumonia. Another child, Helen Rose, died during childbirth. Ethard was born in 1928 and died in 1994 at age 67. He and the remaining three children living today make up the respondents in this study. They are: Alma Janet, who was born in 1933; Leon, who was born in 1936; and Levi, the youngest, who was born in 1941. Ethard was born just before the Great Depression in a log cabin in Casey County, though his family moved into a larger, white clapboard house shortly after his birth. They were poor, but not as poor as many in this rural Appalachian area. Still, when their house burned down in the early 1930s, they were forced to huddle into a one-room smokehouse for a year until Charlie and his sons could cut down enough trees to build a new place. While they did not have indoor plumbing or get electricity until 1946, Charlie was one of the first in the county to
own a Model T Ford, which he used for his hucksterin business. 23 And he was the first to get a wet cell radio, which attracted people from miles around to hear talent like Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys sing at the Grand Ol’ Opry on Saturday nights.

Ethard grew up wearing hand-me down bibbed overalls, going barefoot in the summers and getting just one new pair of shoes—and some apples, bananas and oranges—each Christmas. He dropped out of school in the eighth grade—saying all he really needed to know was how to turn a quarter into 50 cents and he wasn’t going to learn that from a teacher. At 14, he bought his first car, a 1934 Plymouth, towed it home with a team of mules, repaired its brakes and sold it for $180 in profit—beginning his career in the car business. At 20, he married 13-year-old Priscilla Spaw and over the next 10 years they had six children: Beverly Gay, Larry Michael, Jeffery Charles, Timothy Hollis, and twins, Thomas Ray and Tamra Renee. In 1964 he had a daughter24 with his

23 A huckster is a jack of all trades. According to Ethard, his father Charlie went from house to house and store to store and bought items that people traded for groceries. “And on Saturday he’d haul it all to Somerset and sell it to a dealer and sometimes he could make $4 a week, $5 a week, $10 a week, whatever he could make. But he bought chickens and eggs, walnut kernels, and all kinds of hides. Mink. Possum hides and so on. Cause that’s the way people made a livin.’ Cause there wudn’t no money” (Ethard, Interview, October 21, 1994).

24 That would be me.
second wife, Doris Fitzgerald. By then, by all accounts, Ethard had become a very wealthy man. He owned Jasper’s Pontiac and Buick Dealership in Somerset, as well as a thriving mobile home business, several large houses, a luxury motorhome, and even his own plane and a private landing strip on one of his Charolais cattle farms. He favored brand new Cadillacs and flashy diamonds—and Doris, a striking blonde who wore go-go boots and carried around a poodle named Gidget, drove only the latest model Lincoln Continentals, preferably in baby blue. The two traveled extensively, threw lavish parties and embraced the high life. For Ethard, it was all part of a carefully laid plan. “I wanted to outdo every brother I had, and I wanted to outdo my Daddy. All of ’em,” he once said. “And I did. I truly did.”

Little by little though, the dream began to unravel. By the 1990s, two bankruptcies, four divorces and serious heart disease had left Ethard broke, depressed and living alone in a shabby, four-room house that he bought dirt cheap because it sat so close to Old Highway 80. The expensive dark suits he sported in his heyday had given way to old jeans, pullover shirts, and K-Mart tennis shoes—when he could find a pair with Velcro straps so he could fasten them. 25 It was in this place that my interviews with Ethard were conducted over a 10-month period in 1993 and 1994. Though he gave more than a dozen interviews overall, the stories highlighted in this study were collected on October 21, 1994 during an all-day interview that focused on his childhood and teenage years. A photo of Ethard taken that day shows him sitting on the front porch in a kitchen

25 Without three fingers and a thumb on his right hand, Ethard could not tie shoes.
chair, a half-burned cigarette hanging from his left hand. A short, stocky man, with light brown hair and a distinctive nose, he wore a blue-striped shirt, gray sweat pants and tan moccasin slippers. He looked worn out and worried; having survived over the previous 15 years three heart attacks, open heart surgery, two angioplasties, a surgery to install a defibrillator and another one to fix it after it malfunctioned. Still, he had stories to tell and an audience to tell them to so that was something. He relished these Sundays of storytelling and often continued to talk late into the evening, chain-smoking cigarettes while he sat on the side of his hospital bed in the cramped living room. At one point, as his voice grew weaker and his coughing fits grew longer, he wondered if he would “get it all out before (his) heart quit.” He died one month later, on November 22, 1994.

Subsequent interviews with Ethard’s youngest brother, Levi, were conducted during a 2006 pilot study and in the fall of 2007. As detailed in a section of Chapter III, the first interview began at Frisch’s Restaurant in Somerset, continued during a drive through the nearby town of Nancy, and then during a tour of the Flatwoods. Levi, who at 67 very much resembles Ethard, is also a short, stocky man with light brown hair, though curly. He, too, likes to tell stories, is a chain smoker, and wears mostly jeans and tennis shoes. Levi was the last born into the Jasper family, and got his start in the sales business as an adolescent when he began trading watches, pocketknives and bicycles at his Dad’s gas station in the Flatwoods. Levi also spent several years going to school in Cincinnati after his father briefly took a job making furniture at the Globe Wernicke factory. In the ’50s, Levi and his brother, Leon, started selling the trailers that Ethard hauled down from Ohio and Michigan. At that point, all three brothers recognized there was big money to
be made in mobile homes. Levi, who married and had two children, eventually opened his own mobile home sales in Burnside, Kentucky, and a few years ago moved it down to the McCreary County line, where he and his second wife, Susie, continue to work today.

Leon, meanwhile, went into business with Ethard and in 1959 sold 37 mobile homes in one year—a record number in those days. The two men eventually became partners in Jasper & Jasper Mobile Homes but later had a major fallout over the business, which Leon still operates on Highway 27 in Somerset.

My first interview with Leon, who is now 72, took place on Labor Day 2007 at his 4,000-square foot, brick home in Somerset. Leon, whose wife Joyce, died unexpectedly last year, invited me in and directed me to sit in her La-Z-Boy recliner next to his. He seemed pleased that I wanted to hear stories about his childhood in the Flatwoods, and eager to bring me up to date on his various travels and accomplishments over the years, as well as the whereabouts of his two children and granddaughter. Leon, who also closely resembles his brothers, is the only one of his siblings to earn a college degree—graduating at 40 from a Bible college in Florida. He dresses and speaks a bit more formally than his brothers and does not smoke. In addition to still owning Jasper & Jasper Mobile Homes, Leon is a Baptist minister and co-founder and president of a large missionary organization. He later showed me around his well-appointed house, with its indoor swimming pool and massive rooms jam-packed with antiques, delicate china, musical instruments, paintings and other items collected during his missionary trips around the world. He also drove me around the Flatwoods, Nancy and Somerset, pointing
out important places from childhood and talking about his experiences growing up in Casey County.

A few days later, I interviewed both Levi and Leon together at Leon’s home. This provided an opportunity to listen to them share recollections as well as dispute and reinforce each other’s accounts. I also interviewed the only female sibling in the family, Alma Hopper, 75, several times by telephone at her home in Corinth, Mississippi, in September and November, 2007. Alma, who is the oldest living sibling, lives with her husband, “Hop,” 20 miles from the Alabama state line. She too, is very active in the Baptist Church, though she is quick to note that she is American Baptist while Leon is Southern Baptist. She said repeatedly how glad she was to hear from me after all these years, and spent considerable time updating me on her family’s health, her new grandbaby, her son Ernie’s missionary work in Africa, and the 1,000 hours she recently spent making a special commemorative quilt for 4-H, an organization she has been active in for 52 years. Alma also delights in telling a good story, and particularly likes to talk about her childhood experiences.

In listening to stories from these Flatwoods natives, and later re-listening to and transcribing the interviews, I found that Ethard and Levi, in particular, give numerous accounts that could be described as resisting surveillance and escaping the authoritative gaze and subsequent punishment from authority figures. Leon and Alma also share narratives that center on resistances to various power structures, though more often their stories focus on what I would call Ethard’s performances of resistance. The following examination shares stories from all four respondents, beginning with stories of what I call
small v resistances told by Ethard and Levi. It then explores as outliers instances where actions conform to authority figures or where punishment is actually embraced. Finally, it compares challenges to authority expressed by Ethard and Levi to those expressed by Leon and Alma and looks at how such views are situated and perspectival, as well as how some acts themselves are less visible, conscious or straightforward than others.

**FLATWOODS NARRATIVES**

*Ethard*

Ethard’s stories frequently involved resistance to authority in kinship networks, in particular resistance to parental direction and punishment. To develop a better understanding of such resistance, it is useful to first understand how Ethard viewed the severity of the physical punishment doled out by his mother, and also by his father:

> Aw, my mother would slap me in the face right here, open handed, and simply knock you through the door. Or she’d go out and cut a green limb, a big long limb, and she’d cut the blood out of you from your butt plum to your ankles, you know, when she whipped you. But she didn’t whip you very often. See, we knowed that, and we wouldn’t do nothing to get a whippin’ but if we did do anything to get a whippin’ that’s the kind of whippin’ we got. See the Bible says *you spare the rod and you spoil a child*. Well, all them old people went for that. *And they didn’t spare no rod and they didn’t spoil no child.* (Interview, October 21, 1994, italics added)
Ethard said his father, Charlie Jasper, appeared to outsiders to be “meek and mild mannered” but inside the family expected his children to do what he instructed them to do—or face severe consequences. He explained:

Dad ud say, “I don’t chew my tobacco but one time.” In other words, I’ll just tell you one time. If you don’t do it, you’re in trouble. If he told you to do something and you didn’t do it, he’d just look around at you and say, “You’ve got a whippin’ comin’.” But he wouldn’t whip you right then. He’d make you worry about it for two or three days, or four or five days, or maybe even a week. And of course you’d just be scared to death all the time, day and night. Then maybe you’d walk in the barn… you know, you’d do everything just as perfect as you could, and you might walk in the barn some evenin’ at milkin’ time and Dad might walk in behind you and say, “I promised you a whippin’ about a week ago, didn’t I?” So he’d pick up an oak tobacco stick, a seasoned oak tobacco stick, and he’d knock you five foot or 10 foot or whatever, and he’d beat you til you’s black from here plum to your butt. I mean, I’m talkin’ about a whippin’. I’m talkin’ about a beatin’. He whipped me with a handsaw oncet, and cut my legs from my bottom plum to my ankles, and them teeth went in my body til the blood was just gushin’ over the top of my shoes, and me a runnin’ just as fast as I could run,’ and I run and caught my brother and went home with him... And I stayed two weeks and my brother’s wife doctored me and I slept on my stomach. And after two weeks, I was well enough to go home but you know I wudn’t wantin’ to go home. But Dad sent word… that he had work for me to do.” (Interview, October 21, 1994, italics added)
The severity of such whippings, however, did not stop Ethard from challenging his parents’ instructions. Consider the following story he told about disobeying his father’s orders not to drive the family car:

So I asked Dad to borry his (car). He had an old ’36 Chevrolet. And he told me right quick to go straight to (pause). Well, I hot wired it and went over the hillside, and come down the driveway, it was a steep hill, and I come over that hill just wide open and I hit the mailbox and the post and all come out of the ground. Dad a hollerin’ and a screamin’ and a squallin’ and a tryin’ to stop me. Well I just went on.” (Interview, October 21, 1994, italics added)

Ethard continued the story by saying that the girls in the Flatwoods during this period also resisted their parents’ instructions.

And I tore down ever mailbox and I tore up everythang there was in the country down there. And I had a crowd of girls, I had a whole load of girls. Ever girl in that country would crawl in. And all their Daddys and mothers just threatened to kill me. All their Daddys and mothers would threaten to kill them. They’d say, “You get in the car with Ethard Jasper, and we find out about it, we’ll beat you to death.” Well that just made it worse. They’d all do it.  (Interview, October 21, 1994, italics added)

These stories indicate that Ethard highly valued the skills necessary to resist punishment and escape surveillance. He described the elaborate measures his parents took to ensure their instructions were followed and then he depicted the myriad ways he resisted such efforts. Further, he discussed how local girls disobeyed their parents, too. Certainly, many of Ethard’s stories about disobeying his parents involved challenging
their views of his relationships with girls. He noted that on Sundays in the summertime, for example, that he routinely defied his mother when the neighborhood girls got together and walked by his house. He said:

And that’s when shorts come in style. And they’d put ’em on the shortest shorts that they could wear. And my mother would throw the awfulest fit there ever was in the world. And call them whores and ever thang else, and she’d say, “There comes that bunch, that gang, and your not a goin’.” Well, we’d go or die. And we’d all walk to Goose Creek. It was five mile. And we’d walk five mile to a swimmin’ hole down there. And we’d go in swimmin’ and swim all day, til three or four o’ clock. And then we’d walk five mile back. And we’s starved plum to death. Just literally to death. Well, we’d raid ever ol’ woman’s garden that we could find. We’d steal cabbage heads. We’d steal tomatas. They’d throw rocks at us, they’d cuss us. They’d do everything in the wide world and we’d just do it anyway. (Interview, October 21, 1994, italics added)

In another story, Ethard described making his own illegal “homebrew,” which he created by filling a five-gallon stone crock with water, stirring in cakes of yeast, five pounds of sugar and one jar of malt, and placing it in the hot summer sun. After sitting in the sun for a while, Ethard said the mixture would start just bubblin’ on top: “Bubble, bubble, bubble, bubble, bubble. And the third day, if you had it in the right place, on the third day, you could bottle it and it’d get you drunker than Cooter Brown” (Interview, October 21, 1994). He added, “We’d lay it in the creek, see, so it’d get cold and we’d go down there get as drunk as we could get drunk. Of course, we’d sober up before we’d go to the house, you know.” Ethard said he usually only made homebrew in the summer but
one winter day his uncle drove in from Cincinnatti, and that visit inspired him to devise a cooking method that did not require sunshine. He explained:

I went down to the barn and dug me a hole out in the manure in the mule stable and took the mule out and dug me a hole down in that hot manure, and put that kettle down in there, that crock down in there and put water in it, and put my yeast and my malt and my sugar and everything in there. *Stole the eggs out of Mom’s henhouse to buy the sugar and stuff with, the malt and yeast.* Then I took a real clean warsh sack and put over the top of that and tied a string around it real tight, and then I put four grass sacks, you know, over the top of that. Then I put boards over it. Then I put the manure right back over top of it and put the mule back in the stable. Well that hot manure just worked that homebrew off. And boy, I told Killis about it, my uncle, and he said, “You didn’t do it,” and I said, “Yes I did. I’ve got it down there right now,” and he said, “Let’s go.” So we went down there and in 30 minutes I had him so drunk he couldn’t walk. I mean he was drunk. Out-of-his-mind drunk. *I kept him drunk for about three days, you know, and Dad couldn’t figure out where we’s gettin’ anything to drank, or what...He couldn’t figure out nothin’. Of course, I couldn’t tell him. Lord, he’d beat us to death. I couldn’t tell him. He never did figure it out.* (Interview, October 21, 1994, italics added)

Ethard also successfully kept many other acts of disobedience hidden from his father. On Halloween, he and his friends frequently stole shocks of fodders and placed them in the road and set them on fire, saying, “We’d set 15 of ’em on far and have the awfulest fars there ever was in the world” (Interview, October 21, 1994). One of his
favorite incidents involved a man that Ethard described as mean, cranky and hateful. To get even, Ethard said, he and his buddies devised this plan:

So we just slipped in his barn lot and took his wagon apart, and put four boys up on the top of the barn and handed ’em one piece at a time… We put the wagon that he carried corn and everything on, went to the mill with and everthang, on the comb of the barn, and put it all back together. Put the wheels back up… Tongue and all. The next mornin’ he got up and his wagon was up on top of the barn. There wudn’t no way he could get it off. I mean he had to take it apart to get it off. He wanted to kill ever one of us. In fact, my Dad did, too. Cause he knewed we’s in on it. But ever one of us denied it. Everbody stuck together and everbody denied it. (Interview, October 21, 1994, italics added)

Over and over again, Ethard told stories of bending and breaking rules, outrunning, hiding from, and outsmarting authority figures—and “getting away with it.” Of course, not all stories involved resistance to parental authority. Some involved challenges to county law enforcement officials, teachers, or other power-wielding agents in the county. Ethard’s description of his involvement in moonshine running offers a good case in point:

…and we took the seats out of ’em, plum to the trunk, and put sprangs on the back, and put 10 quarts of oil, goin’ through the motor instead of five, where I could hold it wide open, you know. So I’d drive the Chrysler one night and the Plymouth the next night in order to dodge the law. I’d go through Liberty one night, and then I’d go through Campbellsville the next night. Oh Lord. Bill Wilson was the sheriff. He run me all the way from Liberty plum to my Dad’s.
And I outrun him and went around behind the house and unloaded the whisky and beer in the basement, and him runnin’ up and down the road tryin’ to find me, with sirens and everything else. (Interview, October 21, 1994, italics added)

Ethard also discussed how he resisted his teacher’s orders to do his schoolwork or other school-related tasks. After he had the thumb and three fingers blown off his right hand by a dynamite cap, for instance, he refused to learn how to write, despite his teacher’s insistence. He said:

And I didn’t try either. I really didn’t. I really didn’t work at it. I really didn’t try. I didn’t want to learn. See the only thing I wanted to know, I told the teacher this and we got into it in Algebra class because I’d always turn in a blank piece of paper with my name on the bottom of it. But I wouldn’t put a thang on it. It’d make her so mad she’d just blow up. And she said, “You’re never going to amount to nary thang, nothin’ in the world. You ain’t worth nothin’. And you just might as well quit school and go on home cause you ain’t worth killin’. Cause you ain’t goin’ to do nothing.” And I said, “Lady, the only thang I want to learn to do, I’m not interested in no books, I ain’t wantin’ none of that two plus two equals Z. I said I’m not going to be an engineer or surveyor.” I said, “The only thang I want to learn how to do is take a quarter to 50 cents.” (Interview, October 21, 1994, italics added)

Levi

Ethard’s brother, Levi, also emphasized the importance of challenging authority figures and escaping observation in the Flatwoods. Consider how Levi described what he
refers to as a “blindjack,” which was a shed with four wheels on it that could be rolled back and forth across the Pulaski/Casey county line. He said:

Alcohol sales were illegal. So they’d go to a county line and they’d build a little old shack called a blindjack and somebody from this county would come in and hand the money through a slot and you’d hand ’em the whisky out. They didn’t see who you was or nothin’. So when the Pulaski County law come they’d be over on the Casey side. The Casey County law come they’d be over on the other side so they couldn’t be arrested, see. And they couldn’t swear out a warrant for nobody cause it was a blindjack. Nobody knew who bought it and nobody knew who sold it. (Interview, September 5, 2007, italics added)

Levi laughed several times when telling this story, and openly admired the blindjack operators for successfully escaping the surveillance of the local sheriffs and subsequent punishment. Like Ethard, Levi also had plenty of stories related to resisting parental authority. He echoed the story about making homebrew in the wintertime and explained how Ethard would go to the barn and dig a big hole and fill it full of manure:

He made some of the strongest shit I ever saw. Well, me and Leon found his trail one day. We followed that trail down there and found that homebrew. So we decided we’d partake a little bit of that. And by the time Dad got to the barn, we’s higher than a Georgia Pine. Dad give us a good thrashing. Busted up the still and ran Ethard off again. Which was about a weekly occurrence. (Interview, September 5, 2007, italics added).

Levi stressed that it was very common at the time for people to challenge authority and not just parental authority or law enforcement. He pointed out that one
congregation in the Flatwoods often bucked church authority by smoking during Sunday
morning services. He recalled his surprise at seeing church members flip their cigarettes
out the church windows. But he said a member of the congregation explained the action
by telling him: “Let me tell you somethin’ young man. Ninety five percent of the people
who come to church raises tobacco as their main crop, that’s what we do. To say we don’t
do this would be a hypocrite. To say we don’t smoke would be a hypocrite. God knows.
You can’t hide from God. So if we didn’t do this we’d be a hypocrite.” Levi approved of
that view, saying, “I thought, ‘Makes a lot of good sense to me.’ At least he was down to
earth about it. Cause you know in most churches you have to hide and do it. Well they
didn’t hide a damn thing. They all smoked. They all made a livin’ raisin’ tobacco
anyway.’” (Interview, September 5, 2007, italics added)

Leon

Leon also shared numerous stories about challenging authority, most of them
connected in some way to Ethard. He related his own story about imbibing Ethard’s
homebrew, for example, but in his version he was too young at the time to understand
that the concoction would get him drunk. Further, unlike Levi’s dramatic account of both
of them getting a “good thrashing,” Leon does not remember being punished. He said:

What he (Ethard) would do was go out and dig a big hole in the ground down next
to the sprangs and then they would haul horse manure and put in that hole and put
a big jar down in air and put the horse manure in and heat it. The horse manure
would. And then they’d cover it over and he’d make home brew. One Sunday, he
told me if I’d milk the cow for him that night, he wanted to go church or
somewhere, you know, we’d go to church not to go to church but to see the girls
and walk ‘em home. So he wanted to go so I’s supposed to milk his cow for ‘em
so he gave me a bottle of homebrew for milkin’ his cow for ‘em and I drank the
homebrew and I couldn’t milk the cow. I was probably 7 or 8 years old, somethin’
like that. I didn’t… it just tasted, it was kindly sweet and tasted pretty good. I had
no idea it had alcohol in it. It didn’t take but just a little bit, see. Homebrew was
about 18 percent. He would put potatoes in it. Dad finally figured out I’d got
some homebrew. They found the bottle or something, I don’t remember exactly
how it was. And that’s when they figured out the only one it could’ve been makin’
it was Ethard. (Interview, September 3, 2007, italics added)

Leon said Ethard was the main one to instigate such actions, and also was the one
most likely to pay the consequences. He recalled:

One time Ethard was with us and we’s pickin’ up hay or somethin’ and one of his
buddies came along with an old car and uh, we just left the team standin’ in the
road and all of us got in the car and went swimmin’ and left the team standin’ out
there in the hot sun for two or three hours with no water, you know. When Dad
come in and found out, he came back and they’s standin’ down there, he busted
Ethard’s butt that time. (Interview, September 3, 2007, italics added)

Alma

In Alma’s story about homebrew, she said she never drank any or got into trouble
over it but she knew that Ethard made it and recalled it was hidden between the garden
and the barn:
I smelled it one day and said, “Whoohoo, that stinks.” I don’t know why Ethard thought Dad was not going to find it. But I don’t think he cared. He just put it where he could get to it. But Dad was not about to let them drink in the house. He used to smoke, and Mom used snuff. But he wasn’t going to put up with no habit of drink. (Interview, November 29, 2007)

Alma’s own stories centered more on backtalk, temper tantrums and other types of parental disobedience. She told, for example, of the time she challenged her mother in front of company:

Some of the neighbors come in and she started tellin’ something, and I said, “No Mom, it wudn’t like that,” and I started tellin’ it. She told me to hush or whatever and I didn’t hush, so she backhanded me, smacked me right in the face. I was never so embarrassed in my life. (Interview, November 30, 2007)

In another instance, Alma went against her mother’s wishes that she wear only dresses:

One thang I hated is they made me wear dresses cause I was a girl, and long cotton stockins, and think about that cold air goin’ up your dress, freezin’ you to death. One time my dad took me to a big yard sale, and I don’t know why he did that cause he never took us anywhere, but anyway he bought me a pair of overalls. I never was so happy in my life cause then I could run and play with the boys and climb fences. My mom threw a fit but I still wore ’em. She said, “I’ve washed overalls all my life. I want to wash dresses.” (Interview, November 30, 2007)
Alma explained that she had quite a temper when she was younger and was known for being stubborn. One tantrum erupted when her brothers refused to weigh her in the back of her father’s pickup truck on a scale they were using to weigh chickens. “I wanted to see how much I weighed and see how big I was. Well, I was big enough to throw rocks,” she said with a laugh. “I threw that rock and it went through the bedroom window, Dad’s window. There was an old rag stuck in that window the rest of that year. I did get a whippin’ for that” (Interview, November 30, 2007, italics added). Another time Alma said she got into troubling for sneaking out of the house to play with two girls who lived down the road and had store-bought dolls. Alma had never had anything but stick or corncob dolls, so the temptation to play with real ones was too great.

And one time I slipped off… They had their dolls set up in the back and I went up and played and it was gettin’ dark and I’s scared to go home. And my Mom sent Ethard up air to get me and I wouldn’t go home with him. They sent Cecil and I went home with him. Man, they gave me a rakin’ the awfulest rakin’ 26 I ever got in my life. I went to bed that night so frightened, thinkin’ ‘Oh man, what are they goin’ to do me?’ ” (Interview, November 30, 2007)

These stories illustrate some of the ways Ethard, Levi, Leon, Alma and others in the Flatwoods engaged in strategies to resist surveillance, escape the authoritative gaze and punishment, and create more personal freedoms. As the following 19 warrants

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26 “A “rakin,” such as a “rakin over the coals” is a lecture.
reiterate, these life histories provide an opportunity to highlight the kinds of small v
resistances that can be overlooked when resistance is narrowly defined.

**Warrants**

**Warrant #1/ Ethard:** “He whipped me with a handsaw oncet, and cut my legs
from my bottom plum to my ankles, and them teeth went in my body til the *blood was*
*just gushin’ over the top of my shoes, and me a runnin’ just as fast as I could run,’ and I
run and caught my brother and went home with him, blood was comin’ out over the top
of my shoes.”

**Warrant #2/ Ethard:** “So I asked Dad to borry his (car). He had an old ’36
Chevrolet. And he told me right quick to go straight to (pause). Well, I *hot wired it and
went over the hillside*, and come down the driveway, it was a steep hill, and I come over
that hill just wide open and I hit the mailbox and the post and all come out of the ground.
*Dad a hollerin’ and a screamin’ and a squalin’ and a tryin’ to stop me. Well I just went
on.*

**Warrant #3/ Ethard:** “And I tore down ever mailbox and I tore up everythang
there was in the country down there. And I had a crowd of girls, I had a whole load of
girls. Ever girl in that country would crawl in. And all their Daddys and mothers just
threatened to kill me. All their Daddys and mothers would threaten to kill ‘em. They’d
say, ‘You get in the car with Ethard Jasper, and we find out about it, we’ll beat you to
death.’ *Well that just made it worse. They’d all do it.*”
Warrant #4/Ethard: “And my mother would throw the awfulest fit there ever was in the world. And call them whores and ever thang else, and she’d say, ‘There comes that bunch, that gang, and your not a goin’. ‘Well, we’d go or die.”

Warrant #5/Ethard: “Well, we’d raid ever ol’ woman’s garden that we could find. We’d steal cabbage heads. We’d steal tomatas. They’d throw rocks at us, they’d cuss us, they’d do everything in the wide world and we’d just do it anyway. We’d go over there and cut us a big cabbage head and all the tomatas we could get, or anything else we could get ahold of that you could eat, and we’d eat it comin’ up the road.”

Warrant #6/Ethard: “I mean he was drunk. Out-of-his-mind drunk. I kept him drunk for about three days, you know, and Dad couldn’t figure out where we’s gettin’ anything to drank, or what…He couldn’t figure out nothin’. Of course, I couldn’t tell him. Lord, he’d beat us to death. I couldn’t tell him. He never did figure it out.”

Warrant #7/Ethard: “The next mornin’ he got up and his wagon was up on top of the barn. There wudn’t no way he could get it off. I mean he had to take it apart to get it off. He wanted to kill ever one of us. In fact, my Dad did, too. Cause he knewed we’s in on it. But ever one of us denied it. Everbody stuck together and everbody denied it.”

Warrant #8/Ethard: “So I’d drive the Chrysler one night and the Plymouth the next night in order to dodge the law. I’d go through Liberty one night, and then I’d go through Campbellsville the next night. Oh Lord. Bill Wilson was the sheriff. He run me all the way from Liberty plum to my Dad’s. And I outrun him and went around behind the house and unloaded the whisky and beer in the basement, and him runnin’ up and down the road tryin’ to find me, with sirens and everything else.”
**Warrant #9/Ethard:** “And I didn’t try either. I really didn’t. I really didn’t work at it. I really didn’t try. I didn’t want to learn. See the only thing I wanted to know, I told the teacher this and we got into it, in Algebra class, *I’d always turn in a blank piece of paper with my name on the bottom of it. But I wouldn’t put a thang on it. It’d make her so mad she’d just, blow up.*”

**Warrant #10/Levi:** “Alcohol sales were illegal. So they’d go to a county line and they’d build a little old shack called a blindjack and somebody from this county would come in and hand the money through a slot and you’d hand ‘em the whisky out. *They didn’t see who you was or nothin’*. So when the Pulaski County law come they’d be over on the Casey side. The Casey County law come they’d be over on the other side *so they couldn’t be arrested, see*. And they couldn’t swear out a warrant for nobody cause it was a blindjack. *Nobody knew who bought it and nobody knew who sold it.*”

**Warrant #11/Levi:** “We followed that trail down there and found that homebrew. So we decided we’d partake a little bit of that. *And by the time Dad got to the barn, we’s higher than a Georgia Pine. Dad give us a good thrashing. Busted up the still and ran Ethard off again. Which was about a weekly occurrence.*”

**Warrant #12/Levi:** “Cause you know in most churches you have to hide and do it. *Well they didn’t hide a damn thing. They all smoked. They all made a livin’ raisin’ tobacca anyway.*”

**Warrant #13/Leon:** “So I’s supposed to milk his cow for ‘em so he gave me a bottle of homebrew for milkin’ his cow for ‘em and I drank the homebrew and I couldn’t milk the cow.”
Warrant #14/Leon: “When Dad come in and found out, he came back and they’s standin’ down there, he busted Ethard’s butt that time.

Warrant #15/Alma: “I smelled it one day and said, ‘Whoohoo, that stinks.’ I don’t know why Ethard thought Dad was not going to find it. I don’t think he cared.”

Warrant #16/Alma: “She told me to hush or whatever and I didn’t hush, so she backhanded me, smacked me right in the face.”

Warrant #17/Alma: “I threw that rock and it went through the bedroom window, Dad’s window. There was an old rag stuck in that window the rest of that year. I did get a whippin’ for that.”

Warrant #18/Alma: “And one time I slipped off... I went to bed that night so frightened, thinkin’ ‘Oh man, what are they goin’ to do me?’”

Warrant #19/Alma: “My mom threw a fit but I still wore ’em. She said, ‘I’ve washed overalls all my life. I want to wash dresses.’”

Outliers

While all four Flatwoods natives told multiple stories about the times they escaped authority, there were still several instances that illustrated their failures to escape whippings, beatings, or other reprimands. In some cases, they expressed the notion of deserving to get whipped, beaten or otherwise punished. Alma, for example, said her father once slapped her for sassing her Mom and “he probably should have” (Interview, November 29, 2007). In another story, Levi explained that he deserved to be punished after he and his brother, Leon, took their Dad’s corn to the Hammer Mill and sold it—and
then kept some of the cash back from their father, Charlie, so they could buy a bicycle. When Charlie found out they had disobeyed him, he was furious. Levi told it this way:

Well, he (Charlie) said, “You can’t take the bicycle back cause you gave him the money fair and square.” But he said, “You’re going to have to work to pay the $3 and a half back.” Plus he beat the livin’ fuckin’ shit outa both of us, which we deserved. No doubt about that.” (Interview, September 5, 2007, italics added).

Levi said he learned over time that there were good reasons his father kept a close eye on him and the other children. When Charlie failed to watch over them, he said, they took unnecessary risks and faced unintended consequences. Levi explained, for example, that one afternoon he ignored his father’s warnings and agreed to race ponies at the Russell County Fair. A jockey had fallen ill and the pony’s owner chose Levi to take his place. He told the story this way:

He said, “Son, here’s what I want you to do. He said this other pony is faster than yours but I own both of ‘em. I don’t want you to try to beat him. I just want you to run second…” So we got squared off and headed for home and I had a bunch of pony left. A lot of pony left. And this guy’s in front of me and didn’t have much pony left. I seen I’s gonna catch him so I got down on it pretty hard and switched a little bit I won by, oh, I won by two or three lengths. When I got back I had big grin on my face. I forgot he told me to run second. Of course, this guy had made some bets I didn’t know about it. So when I got back I was all smiles and he just backhanded me and smacked me off that pony. Dad throwed the awfulest fit in the world. He was gonna go after that guy, but first he jumped on me for ridin. I
wasn’t supposed to ride for that dang guy noway. But I learned a valuable lesson.” (Interview, September 5, 2007, italics added).

As these outliers illustrate, punishment is not always successfully resisted in the Flatwoods. In fact, sometimes it is embraced. Note that Levi acknowledged in the Hammer Mill case that the punishment was severe but also says it was no doubt “deserved” and for good measure added, “no doubt about that.” Alma said her father once slapped her for sassing her Mom and “he probably should have” (Interview, November 29, 2007). Leon, too, also spoke of times he deserved his father’s punishment. Yet unlike Ethard or Levi, Leon downplayed the frequency or severity of parental punishment and said he rarely did anything to prompt a whipping:

Dad didn’t whip us much but when he whipped us we knew that we had gotten a spankin,” he said. “But he never beat us, OK? He would whip us. I remember one time seems like he hit me with a leather strap, you know, and I tell you what that just burned the blisters. But I never did get but two or three whippin’ in my life from Dad. (Interview, September 3, 2007)

In describing the same Hammer Mill incident described by Levi, Leon agreed that they deserved to get punished for lying to their parents about the incident. But unlike Levi—who had vivid memories of both of them getting “the livin’, fuckin’ shit” beat out of them—Leon was not sure he was disciplined. When asked if got whipped, he said, “Probably, but I don’t remember whether we did” (Interview, September 3, 2007).
Creating Disturbances

While Alma, Leon and Levi all agreed that everyone in the family got into trouble from time to time, they repeatedly said no one resisted authority as often or as creatively as Ethard. For him, they said, resistance was a way of life. Consider these accounts:

Levi: Dad (Charlie) was a good person. He really was. The only problem he ever had was Ethard. I mean Ethard was absolutely just… He wouldn’t do a damn thing Dad told him to do. He wouldn’t work. He wouldn’t do the crops with us. He was always out doin’ his own thing. Whatever that was. (Interview, September 5, 2007)

Leon: Dad (Charlie) would try to get him to do right and Ethard, sometimes Ethard just wouldn’t do it, you know? He’d just go run off from home, and be gone for days. Ethard growing up was very rebellious. He was very rebellious. (Interview, September 3, 2007)

Alma: He (Ethard) was always in trouble. He created disturbances. He didn’t ever want to do what Dad wanted him to do. Ethard didn’t do anything anyone wanted him to. He drove reckless. He ran moonshine. He did things the rest of us wouldn’t have done because we didn’t want to be picked up by the police. (Interview, November 29, 2007, italics added)

Alma added that Ethard’s acts of rebellion were at times justified. She tells the story of one of Ethard’s best friends as a boy, Garner, whose family had next to

27 Garner is a pseudonym.
nothing. “I don’t know how they ever lived. They ate beans and potatoes every single day. Cornbread and buttermilk for supper every single night” (Interview, November 30, 2007). The boy’s father had a board, about one-inch thick and four inches wide, with nails pounded in it and poking through to the other side. “He would whip Garner with that board until his back, his little hiney and his arms would just be bleedin’ and he wouldn’t be able to go to school or do anything. He’d whip him four or five times in a year,” Alma recalled. Then one day, Ethard got his siblings together and decided, “no more whippings’ for Garner. He’d got his last one.” Ethard, who “was the main rang leader cause he could think up more good things to do,” instructed Leon, Alma and the other kids to go to Garner’s front yard and get into an argument with each other. “He said, ‘racket, fuss, do anything you can to make them pay attention. If you have to fight with each other just go ahead and have a fight.’ ” Meanwhile:

“Ethard sneaked through the fence, down by the barn, past the chicken house, down into the cellar and stole the paddle. My Dad seen that paddle, man, and he was madder than anything. We never did know if Dad spoke to (Garner’s dad) or not but he never did make another one, maybe he was too tard, but he never did whip him again. But anyway, Ethard was always doing thangs like that for people. He’d give you the shirt off his back. He was always doin’ good thangs for people. (Interview, November 30, 2007)

Clearly, these challenges to authority, or what could be called small v resistances, are one critical way Ethard constituted himself while living in the Flatwoods during the Great Depression, WWII and 1950s. As the multiple warrants and these accounts from
his brothers and sister illustrate, he used a wide variety of strategies to escape surveillance and stand up to authority in his kinship/knowledge network—including authority wielded by parents, teachers, neighbors, and law enforcement. In one day of interviews alone, Ethard described 67 different acts of resistance to various kinds of power structures in the Flatwoods—ranging from challenging parental authority to disobeying local laws (Interview, October 21, 1994). Ethard touted both blatant resistance to authority and more clandestine strategies. For example, he described openly resisting his father’s efforts to make him docile by “hotwiring” his Dad’s car and patently ignoring his mother’s admonitions not to go swimming. In other instances, Ethard used stealthier maneuvers to escape detection, such as hiding liquor, building a special kind of car engine that allowed him to drive faster and “dodge the law,” and furtively dissembling and reassembling a wagon on top of a barn in the middle of the night.

Like Ethard, Levi and Alma indicated admiration for those, including themselves, who successfully defeated punishment attempts. Yet while Levi told several stories of his own challenges to authority, more of his stories involved Ethard or other resistors—such as blindshack operators or church congregations. Alma, too, spoke more of Ethard’s resistances than her own. Moreover, each time she described her own moves to challenge power structures—backtalking her mother, throwing rocks at her brother, or sneaking out of the house to visit friends—she always included accounts of getting caught and being punished. However, regardless of whether they used blatant or more covert methods, got

28 See Appendix D.
away with resistances or got caught, such data suggest that in rural areas such as the Flatwoods during this period\textsuperscript{29} it was difficult for parents, teachers, law enforcement and other officials to maintain an authoritative gaze and eliminate what Foucault called “the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals” (1995, p. 143). Put another way, Ethard and his siblings repeatedly demonstrated the relative ease in which one could escape the gaze and disappear in the Flatwoods.

“Symbolic Violence”

The narratives in this section provide insight into what kind of knowledges, skills, practices and intelligence were valued in this particular kinship/knowledge network and how those values affected whether domination was resisted, accepted or reinforced. In particular, stories from Flatwoods natives provide examples of how Bourdieu’s notions of habitus and cultural capital, outlined in Chapter II, worked in this rural Kentucky region. Consider Levi’s experience of moving to Cincinnati in 1949 and recognizing that his habitus—his cultural background, speech patterns, and mode of dress—cued his classmates in to his lack of cultural capital. On his first day of school, they immediately viewed him as a hillbilly—as someone who was backward, dimwitted, and unable to talk properly. Levi said when he walked into class and saw everyone staring at him, he realized that he did not look or sound like the other kids, who wore pants and belts and had a different accents. He also realized he would quickly need to conform or continually be ostracized.

\begin{footnotes}
\item 29 And still today…
\end{footnotes}
The only thing I’d ever had on was bibbed overalls and kids up air had never seen anything like that. And I’d seen all them kids wearing a belt, you know. So Pop told mom she’d have to buy me a belt and a pair of pants, and she said “Oh Lord, he’s too skinny to ever hold ‘em up.” But he went with her and they bought me pants and a belt and come back and cinched that belt up and I remember I was the most uncomfortable little feller in the world. I thought that was the most uncomfortableist thing I ever wore. Now if that ain’t country I’ll kiss your butt. (Interview, September 5, 2007).

Valuing the cultural capital of the dominant group, Levi said he made a concerted effort to adapt to status quo, not just by adapting his clothing but also by changing how he spoke and the vocabulary he used. Though it was not until the family moved back to the Flatwoods that Levi realized just how much he had changed and how people viewed him differently back home.

I didn’t know I’s talkin’ proper but you knowed it when you heard the other kids cause they’s still talkin’ like them old country boys talk, you know. And then I noticed, the big thang I noticed, is I’s about seven times smarter than anyone else in the class. (Interview, September 5, 2007)

As Levi and Leon talked over these memories together, Leon, too, said he made changes in his speech in order to fit in better with his classmates. But he said his heavy accent still made him a target, at which point Levi chimed in:

30 Pop is Levi’s brother, Earsal.
I never will forget I went into class one day and they had a picture of Leon
drewed up on the board air, and I forgot what it said, something like, “Oh Fly
Away Kentucky Babe.” They’s always makin’ fun of me, so then I knew they’s
makin’ fun of Leon, too, see. I didn’t know they’s makin fun of him cause he
never would say anything, see, he wudn’t much about talkin’ about things like
that.” (Interview, September 5, 2007)

While it is easy to envision how habitus works in such situations, as noted in
Chapter II critics of Bourdieu say his vision is too deterministic. They say his work with
schooling, in particular, portrays students as “dummies, marching off to their respective
fates” (Borman, Fox & Levinson, 2000, p. 241). They point out that attempts to
administer the cultural sphere and reproduce homogeneous cultural norms create
rebellions. Just as Willis demonstrated the way people construct their own subjectivities
in his study of the way school alone did not socialize lads to accept their working-class
futures, this work attempts to show how no one force alone socialized Flatwoods natives.
Though the lads’ construction of their own positions did not work in their favor, as Willis
explained, “Social agents are not passive bearers of ideology, but active appropriators
who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation, and a partial
penetration of those structures” (1981, p. 175).

Certainly, members of the Jasper family in the Flatwoods during the Great
Depression, WWII and the 1950s, both resisted and conformed to the middle-class
ideologies and socialization expectations of dominant groups, particularly people who
lived “in town” or in the bigger cities such as Dayton and Cincinnati. As discussed in Chapter II, Flatwoods residents and others living in Appalachia’s rural areas led different lifestyles from their urban counterparts. They had unequal purchasing power, and varying degrees of education. Thus, they felt differently about what was natural, comfortable or worth defending. “Since there is an unequal distribution of resources for reality construction, not all actors are equally situated to understand and act upon the world in similar terms” (Swartz, 1997, p. 57). Wealthy business owners, factory workers and others in larger cities mostly had higher-income brackets and fancier homes while many rural residents continued during this period to struggle for low wages and live in homes without plumbing or electricity—and often without the cultural capital they needed to change their conditions. Yet many clung to traditional ways of life, despite perceiving that action at times as a hardship. Leon, for example, said there were numerous reasons why he and several of his eight siblings decided not to move north, although its factory jobs at least appeared to promise better wages and a higher standard of living. He said:

When I was young all the young boys were all going to Cincinnata and Indianapolis and Detroit to get ’em a job. So I decided that’s what I wanted to do. So dad told me, he said “Now I’m not goin’ to tell you not to go.” But he said, “if you notice, ever one of ’em wants to come back home ever weekend, and if you’ll

31 At least three to four million Appalachians headed north and west in search of jobs in industrial cities such as Cincinnati, Dayton, Akron and Detroit as part of a Diaspora that spanned several decades (Banks, 1981, p. 443).
stay here and help develop the country, in the long run you’ll wind up with more than they do.” Cause he said, “They spend ever thing they can get their hands on, livin’ in an old boardin’ house somewhere, and comin’ home on the weekends. They might get ‘em enough money to buy ‘em an old car sometime. But you could live here all week.” So I never did go to Cincinnata to live. (Interview, September 5, 2007).

Levi acknowledged that when Charlie moved the family to Cincinnati in 1949 to take a job in a furniture factory they lived in a nicer home and experienced better economic conditions. But Levi said he wanted to go back to the Flatwoods anyway. “I didn’t want to live in the city all my life. All the kids wanted to go to the country. You know, what was there to do in the city? In the country you had all this stuff to do” (September 5, 2007). Ethard, too, tried his hand at moving to Cincinnati and getting a job so he could better support his growing family. But like Charlie, he loathed factory work and decided to return to southern Kentucky.

I’s on an assembly line where you pulled fruit jar lids out with that rubber gum around the top, and they was red hot, you had to wear big long gloves. You had to reach into that oven and pull them out, and then you had to package ’em and put a band around ’em and stack ’em and they was on a conveyer belt and if you messed up, they’d just over run you. You couldn’t mess up. You had to do it.

Well, I got tard of it. I got so tard of it, I just couldn’t stand it and I quit. (Interview, October 21, 1994)
In summary, parents, churches, schools, law enforcement, or others tried to exert widespread control over Flatwoods bodies in a variety of ways, including monitoring where people worked, what they learned, where they lived, whether they consumed alcohol, when and how they talked, and what kind of clothes they wore. Still, as stories by Levi, Alma, Leon, and particularly Ethard, illustrate, even serious discipline and surveillance techniques, hierarchies, intense socialization and promises of increased cultural capital did not succeed in creating completely docile or socialized bodies. Clearly, small v resistances such as backtalk, making homebrew, quitting school, quitting factory jobs, and remaining in or returning to the region, were influenced by other more intermediary factors as well as by people defending their class interests and challenging constraints on their personal freedoms. In the next section, I move from a larger look at multiple stories of microresistances to an analysis of one particular story of trauma repeatedly told by Ethard and his siblings—a story which illustrates how an event and subsequent stories about can be re-created differently among family members and how narrative can be used to challenge the construction of identity and categorizations.
CHAPTER 5
MULTIPLE TRUTHS, MULTIPLE KNOWERS: TALES OF TRAUMA AND TRAGEDY IN THE FLATWOODS

Confronting Authority in the Flatwoods

While the respondents in this study told many, many stories about their experiences in the Flatwoods, a predominant one from all of them centered on the time Ethard lit a stick of dynamite and blew his fingers off. In fact, this story was such a central narrative in Ethard’s life and in the lives of his siblings that it stands out as meriting further investigation. Thus, this chapter explores this event from a variety of perspectives, including: a newspaper account of the explosion; Ethard’s description of the event; his siblings’ versions; a comparative analysis of the multiple viewpoints; and an experimental tale in the form of a poem that describes the event itself and how it inscribed who Ethard became and his desires to resist power structures—as well as increase his own status in his kinship/knowledge network. Taken together, these differing accounts provide what Laural Richardson calls crystallization—“a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic” (Richardson, 1994, p. 518).

The article about Ethard’s involvement in the dynamite explosion ran on June 8, 1939, in The Somerset Journal, which described itself as the “Largest Democratic Newspaper in
the Mountains of Kentucky.” The article provides another perspective of the way Ethard lost three fingers and his thumb. It says:

Dynamite Cap Costs Child Disfigurement

The old story of children playing with dynamite caps was repeated Thursday afternoon, and as a result an eight-year-old boy will go through life without three fingers and the thumb of his right hand.

Ethard Jasper, son of Mr. And Mrs. Charles Jasper, of Windsor, was the victim. He and some of his playmates found a box of caps on the side of the road near the Jasper home. One of the boys struck a match to the caps and Ethard lost the first, second and third fingers and thumb of his right hand in the explosion which followed.

The child was also burned and cut about the face. He was treated at the hospital here and his condition is reported to be satisfactory.

It is the same, sad story.

This article offered a much shorter and obviously less emotional version of events than Ethard provides in his own stories. In fact, the piece called what happened that day “an old story,” the kind of event that continually repeats itself. Consider the first lines of the opening sentence: “The old story of children playing with dynamite caps was repeated Thursday afternoon…” The article then quickly notes the consequences of such

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32 See article, Appendix B.
behavior. “…and as a result, an eight-year-old boy will go through life without three fingers and the thumb of his right hand” ("Dynamite Caps Cost," 1939). The next paragraph identifies the victim as Ethard Jasper, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Jasper of Windsor. And then briefly explains that the event occurred because “one of the boys struck a match to the caps.” It then repeats that Ethard lost his first, second and third fingers and thumb of his right hand in the explosion that followed and mentions that he was also “burned and cut about the face.” After saying that Ethard was treated at the hospital and his condition was satisfactory, the article ends in much the same way it began—by calling the explosion “the same, sad story.” One overriding theme of this article was that children getting injured by dynamite caps in the late 1930s in the mountains of Kentucky was nothing new. The news article emphasizes that fact by both leading with the terms “old story” and ending with the terms “same, sad story.” This is in line with other research that shows that trauma to bodies in the Flatwoods at that time was more expected than shocking. Coding of Ethard’s stories, for example, showed that during several hours of interviews on October 21, 1994, Ethard discusses trauma to bodies 161 times—significantly more times than he mentioned any other topic, including the second most frequent subject—making money (137)—and the third, which was trading cars (87).  

There was certainly no outrage or surprise expressed in the newspaper account of a boy losing his fingers. There were no questions about how it happened or why it

33 See Appendix B.
happened or how boys so young might have come to possess something as dangerous as
dynamite caps. Instead, the article illustrated an almost careless acceptance of children in
danger, and in possession of dynamite caps, as a normal part of everyday life. Further, the
reporter who wrote the story\textsuperscript{34} did not attempt to find out who specifically caused the
accident. Who lit the match? Was it Ethard? Was it someone else? Who were the other
boys at the scene? Were any of Ethard’s other brothers at the scene? Were neighbor
children there? The article does not say. It merely says that, “Ethard and \textit{some of his}
playmates} found a box of caps on the side of the road near the Jasper home” and “\textit{One of
the boys} struck a match to the caps…” (“Dynamite Caps Cost,” 1939, italics added).

Such vagueness could simply be an indication of the difficulty in getting information on
deadline out of Windsor, Kentucky in 1939. Or it could illustrate that such events
happened so frequently that they did not merit too much investigation. The story’s
repeated emphasis on the fact that this sort of occurrence happened all the time might
lead one to draw the latter conclusion. However, even though the tone of the story
conveyed a distinct lack of surprise, the editors’ placement of it—at the top of the page
just under the main headline—shows the event was viewed as at least worth some weight
and attention.

\textit{Ambiguities and Uncertainties}

Ethard’s version of this story was somewhat inconsistent about the specific
happenings that June day. For many years, he began this story by saying that his little

\textsuperscript{34} There is no byline on the story so the author is not known.
brother, Leon, who was three years old at the time, put the dynamite cap in his mouth, lit a match and stuck it to the dynamite, and said, “smoke, smoke, smoke” to indicate he was smoking a cigarette. Ethard said he grabbed the cap out of Leon’s mouth and it went off—blowing up his hand and face but saving Leon’s life. Ethard’s brother, Leon, Levi and numerous other family members—including myself—also remember Ethard telling the story exactly this way. Later, however, during an interview just before his death, Ethard’s details of that day were much more ambiguous. He said:

Either me or Leon one, *I can’t remember*, had that dynamite cap. We thought it was a shell. It looked exactly like 32’, like a 22’ shell that comes out of a 22’ rifle. That’s the only gun we had. So I took him in the bedroom and shut the door. And he put that dynamite cap in his mouth, but as he put it in his mouth, he said, “smoke, smoke, smoke.” And I said, “Yeah, we’ll smoke.” See I was trying to get his mind offa Dad. So I said, “We’ll smoke.” Well, I reached down and got the dynamite with my right hand, got the dynamite cap with my right hand, cause I was right handed, and either he struck the match, or I struck the match, *I can’t swear either way.*” (Interview, October 21, 1994, italics added)

That account appears to have been the first time Ethard acknowledged, at least in a forum he believed would be made public, that he could not recall who actually had the dynamite cap or who lit the match. It was the first time he had expressed a not knowing around what happened.
Leon offered an all together different perspective on the event. He tells the story this way:

When Ethard got his fingers blowed off, you know, he found the dynamite cap, and he apparently tried to light it or struck a match to it or something and it blowed his fingers off. So he went and told Mom and Dad and them, that I was, uh, had the dynamite cap and was goin’ to light it like a cigarette and he jerked it out of my mouth. And therefore he was the savior, see. Well, see, I grew up owing allegiance to him all my life because of this. My thought was if it hadn’t been for him I’d been dead. But there was always questions about that. Not just from me but from a lot of people. How come I didn’t get anything, not one single fragment or anything, you know? So then Levi came to me one time several years ago and said, “Leon, you don’t have to feel guilty anymore.” And I said, “Why’s that?” And he said, “He didn’t jerk that dynamite cap out of your mouth.” He said, “He didn’t save your life.” And he said, “He got drunk last night and told me about the whole thing. And told how it happened and told the whole bit.” And Levi said, “I want you to know that you are relieved from that, because I know that you always felt an obligation, you know.” (Interview, September 3, 2007)

Alma, too, disputes the veracity of Ethard’s account. She said she was in the house when the explosion occurred and Leon was not in the bedroom with Ethard. She explains:
Ethard could take a little bit of truth and make it the most amazing thing in the world. We all knew not to smoke or mess with those dynamite caps, so Ethard knew he’d be in trouble. But Leon wouldn’t be in trouble cause he was just a baby. But we all knew if Leon had really been there his head woulda been blown off. All those years Leon got blamed, and he was too young to realize what happened. But we was there…. And we all knew if any of us had been in that bedroom we’da had shrapnel too. (Interview, November 29, 2007)

There are other discrepancies as well. Ethard frequently recalled that he was about eight years old when the incident occurred. The newspaper article also describes him as an eight year old. But Ethard was born on July 16, 1928. That would have made him ten years old in June of 1939. In addition, Ethard always said he was right-handed, and explained that never learned to write well because he lost his fingers and thumb on his right hand. But Alma said he was left-handed before the event occurred. To be sure, such disputes and uncertainties are not surprising. As Carolyn Steedman (1986) notes: “Personal interpretations of past time… are often in deep and ambiguous conflict” (p. 6).

On the other hand, there are some areas of shared agreement between Ethard’s version of events and the article’s depiction. Consider the headline “Dynamite Caps Cost Child Disfigurement.” Ethard repeatedly described the explosion as one that was disfiguring. Here, his take on the event was similar to the newspaper account, though of course far more detailed. He said, “Course I was disfigured so bad, my face blowed all to pieces and a big S marks, and all that you know, and all my teeth, blowed all my teeth out and my gums through here and my lips” (Interview, October 21, 1994).
To provide another layer of insight into the story about the dynamite cap explosion, I have included here an experimental tale derived from Ethard’s accounts. The tale is told in the form of a four-section poem, and though some repetitions and extraneous information were not included, the poem is told directly in Ethard’s own words. In the first section, Ethard talks about getting his fingers “blowed off.” In the second, he discusses how he was subsequently treated in school. In the third, he explains how the explosion inscribed in him a deep desire to challenge authority and prove his competence. In the final section, he describes how his ability to roller skate helped him win over his peers. This four-part experimental tale provides additional insight into how and why he went to great extremes to challenge authority figures and develop the cultural capital he needed to blend into the dominant culture and thus escape reprimands and penalties.

*An Experimental Tale: All My Fingers Was Gone*

Course I was just nine years old when the dynamite went off

It blowed my fingers all off

And blowed my eyes and my face

And my left shoulder

And all the meat off my left hand

It just blew me all to pieces

Well it blinded me so bad

The blood did

The biggest thing they found in that bedroom was my thumbnail
But the rest of it was just giblets of meat
I tried to get out and I couldn’t
I tried to open the door with my right hand
And I couldn’t
Cause I didn’t have anything to open it with
All my fingers was gone

So I rubbed the blood out of one eye
Out of my right eye
Cause it blowed my left eye out
You know
Blowed it out on my cheek
I opened the door with my left hand
And I seen then that I was tore all to pieces
And the blood was just a pourin’
So I run out the front door
Run down through the yard
A screamin’ to my Daddy
Cause I had my hand blowed off
And I had my face all blowed up
And ever thang else
So when I started back to school
I walked in the school room
Course I was disfigured so bad
My face blowed all to pieces
And big S marks
And all my teeth blowed out
And my gums and my lips
That when I walked in
Thomaseeny screamed real loud
And grabbed all the girls
And they all run on the outside
From there on out
The teacher’d make me sit up front
Where nobody could see me
And at recess I’d sit on a stump
While the other kids played ball
They all hollered and screamed when I walked by
And all that
So I lived that way
I went to school eight year
Til I finished eighth grade
And they’d say
You can’t even draw water out of the well
And I thought
I’ll just show *them*
I can draw water out of the well
So I’d go out there
And I’d let that rope and bucket down in the well
And get it full of water
And I’d jerk it
Just as hard as I could jerk it
And pull it down to the ground
And I’d set my foot on it
And reach up there and get that rope
And jerk it again
And I’d put my foot on it
And I could draw a bunch of water
Just as quick as *they* could
And I didn’t have to use that hand
Yeah I could draw a bunch of water
Just as quick as *they* could

I learned I could do anything
Lord God, I could tear that skatin’ rink floor up
I was one of the best skaters you ever seen in your life
It was a site on earth to watch me on the skatin’ floor
I could turn flip flops in the air
And land back on my skates
Now I ain’t braggin about it
Cause you know

But I picked pieces of dynamite cap out of my neck
Out of my face
Out of my chin
Out of my hairline
Out of my eyebrows
Little sharp pieces that would work out
And oh they’d hurt so bad
They’d just be little tiny pieces of that dynamite cap
Wedged in there so far
That I pulled ’em out for five years
But the scars was goin’ away by then
And the girls would watch me jump barrels on skates
Lord God, I could tear that skatin’ rink floor up
And the prettiest girls in the county
Geri and all of ’em
Wanted to skate with me

*Conflicts, Fragmentations and Eccentricities*

Jill Green and Susan Stinson caution in their article on *Postpositivist Research and Dance* that in an emergent research design we cannot know what constructions will be introduced during our investigation and cannot predict in advance what claims, challenges and issues will arise (1999, p. 94). Presenting multiple voices means embracing fragmented memories, conflicts, imaginings and eccentricities instead of trying to smooth over them or ignore their existence. It also means embracing counter viewpoints as possible enhancements to the credibility of data. Indeed, the various perspectives of this event can be viewed as part of an ironic validity that interrupts the tidy patterns—the beginnings, middles and ends—so prevalent in good storytelling. Such perspectives confirm that, “The stories we tell of who we are, may not be consistent and reliable in the positivist sense, because they vary each time we tell them” (Green & Stinson, 1999, p. 94).

Comparing stories told by Ethard to stories told by his brothers and sister also helps create transferability by showing how certain events are remembered differently among family members who experienced them—while others are recalled in exactly the same way. There seems to be widespread understanding among those of us with siblings that childhood memories are often disputed accounts. Yet we also recognize that in particular instances stories are told so often that they become family lore. Ethard, for example, used to talk of the time his brother Don was killed, two weeks before he was
due to be released from the Army. He said his mother did not know he was on the stairs when they broke the news to her about Don’s death, and her response was: “Oh Lord, why couldn’t it have been Ethard?” Asked about that story, both Leon and Levi were adamant it did not happen. “No, mom woulda never said anything like that, no matter what” Levi said (Interview, September 5, 2007). Leon agreed. “No. Never happened. What somebody probably said was you expected it to be Ethard but not Don. But not, ‘Oh Lord, why couldn’t it have been Ethard.’ No, no, no, no, no.”

In other cases, storytellers recount stories in the exact same sequence and use the exact same lines. Ethard, for example, often told the story of the time his Uncle Cliff, as a toddler, slipped off the kitchen counter into a bucket of lard. When Ethard’s grandmother scooped him up and held him in the air, dripping grease, she asked, “What in the world are we going to do with him?” Her husband looked over his shoulder and said, offhandedly, “Why, fry the little devil!” (Interview, October 21, 1994). More than a decade later, unprompted, Leon tells the exact same story in the same sequence. “And grandma come in and picked him up by his shoulders like that and the lard was just streamin’ off of him and she said, ‘Well, what am I gonna do with him?’ And grandpa looked at her and said, ‘Fry the little devil!’ ” (Interview, September 5, 2007). Asked about the story about Uncle Cliff, Alma responded, “You mean the one where grandpa said, ‘Fry the little devil?’ ” (Interview, November 30, 2007).

Such comparisons provide insights into how family members grapple with blurred memories, multiple truths, exaggerations and fabulations and how such recollections are shared, disputed, encouraged, reinforced or reinscribed. Comparing different versions of
events demonstrates “the infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach” (Richardson, 1994, p. 522). Further, as Dominick LaCapra points out in his book, Writing History, Writing Trauma, stories of trauma, in particular, “invite distortion, disrupts genres or bounded areas, and threatens to collapse distinctions” (2001, p. 96). In the case of the dynamite explosion detailed in this chapter, whether such explosions were routine in 1939, this particular incident was certainly anything but routine for Ethard. Whether he was eight or 10, whether he lit the match or someone else did, whether Leon was there or he was not, it was a story so burned into Ethard’s memory and onto his body that he re-presented it repeatedly as one of the most identity-shaping and dramatic events of his life.

In the last two chapters, I have tried to provide insights into what kind of knowledges, skills, practices and intelligence were valued by members of this particular kinship/knowledge network in the Flatwoods. I also examined how those values affected whether domination was resisted, accepted or reinforced, as well as how different respondents described and remembered such responses in various ways. In the next, final chapter, I expound on these insights, discuss the ramifications and implications of this research, what I learned and unlearned while conducting it, and explore its limitations as well as my future goals and directions.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

An Imaginary Erupting

Listen and relisten to Flatwoods stories for months on end and they crawl inside your head. In the middle of the afternoon, you find your mind wandering to the Methodist Church in Mintonville, where Mary, at 17, got saved on a Monday morning. She just thought about the sermon sittin’ there on the door step and asked the Lord to save her.

Stop to pump gas at the Shell station on the way home, and images surface of Newt and his buddies sittin’ round the gas station on a Saturday night… and this guy says somethin’ about his wife bein’ pregnant with twins and another one said, ‘Well if my wife come up pregnant with twins, I’d probably just shoot myself.’ And (Newt) just says, real slow like… ‘Yeah… and you might kill an innocent man.’ Fixing dinner, and you see Ethard, always Ethard, stealing tomatoes or runnin’ shine, or standing on a Coca Cola crate at the Bethany Church window, peering in at Brother I.K. Cross, who is preachin’ hellfire and redemption. And what he would say would blow your mind. He’d announce what he was going to preach the next night, like Seven Ducks in a Muddy Pond, or the Three Things that God Doesn’t Know. And people would think, Lord, there’s nothin’ God don’t know. But there was lots of things God didn’t know, one of them is that God didn’t know a person who wouldn’t repent of his sins and be saved. Then there are the stories that haunt you—that play over and over in your mind. There’s Levi, just a little boy, three
or four years old, skinny as a rail and clutching a fat wad of Juicy Fruit wrappers in his tiny fist. He touches it to the cook stove, you know, just to see what will happen, and watches wide eyed as it erupts into flames. *I threw it at the wood bucket but I missed and it went over against the wall and the kitchen was wall paper and in about three seconds, that kitchen was on fire.* Now the whole house is burning. There’s Alma, running through the upstairs bedrooms, tossing quilts out the windows. *I grabbed a drawer from our bedroom that had war bonds in it, that Cecil had sent home for us to live on, and I headed for the front door with Dad yellin’ ‘Get out of here, get out of here’ And right when I stepped out the floor fell into the basement.* Then everything’s gone. Erased. Just like that. Charlie standin’ in the yard, grimly surveying the damage. Mary sobbing, clutching at her smoky skirt and roundin’ up the babies. Nothing to do but stuff everybody into the shed out back. *It was a 12 x 20 smokehouse and we lived there for a year... and Mom was worried to death, sayin’ ‘What are we goin’ to do? What in the world are we goin’ to do?’* All the boys, even Leon, who’s just a little feller, pushing crosscut saws all day. *Sometimes I’d have to build up rocks and stand on ’em, cause I was just 9 or 10. We sawed down 15 trees. Dad ud mark ’em and clean ’em up. Mavis hauled the logs out with a team of mules, and took ’em to the mill and had ’em sawed.* Nobody cares the new house has no indoor plumbin’ or electric or fancy appliances. It is a real house, with real rooms and real beds. And with the boys back in school and Charlie back hucksterin,’ maybe he’ll make a little extra today, and, who knows, maybe we’ll get some store bought thangs…
Prying Open Spaces

These are just a few of the Flatwoods stories that leave me “haunted by reliving the past in its shattering intensity….,” (LaCapra, 2001, p. 90). They are the stories I first started hearing nearly 40 years ago, when I sat each morning at the Liar’s Table at Jerry’s Restaurant, listening to men recount stories about all manner of wild times. They are the stories that motivated me in this research to try to pry open spaces, probe memories, and unforettings—to try to measure becoming, to document life histories that connect with an(Other) people in an(Other) space and time. Like Kathleen Stewart, who evoked an “Other” America during her work in West Virginia, I found myself in this research in the middle of “the fabulation of a narrative ‘space on the side of the road’ that enacts the density, texture, and force of a lived cultural poetics, somewhere in the hinterlands of ‘America’” (1996, prologue). The Flatwoods is a space where people do not get tipsy but drunker than Cooter Brown. Where they do not talk of driving 100 miles per hour but of laying it down on the dollar mark. It is a space where your neighbor ain’t worth killin, but your buddy will give you the shirt off his back. To be sure, it is a space where people still know how to romance you with words, to beguile you and break your heart.

I have learned during this study that I am still enamored with the power of a compelling story. Like Britzman, I confess that I continue to have difficulty “uncoupling myself from the persuasive promises of ethnography. I desire to construct good stories filled with the stuff of rising and falling action, plots, themes, and denouement” (2000, p. 27). I still feel the yearning to produce work so persuasive it allows its audience to “imaginatively step into the world the ethnographer is portraying” (Britzman, 2000, p.
It is an evocative temptation, one that tantalizes you with glimpses into private affairs and cultural secrets, and one where “the goal of understanding—albeit through secondhand knowledge—is assumed to be within reach” (Britzman, 2000, p. 28). Yet in the midst of this seduction, along came Foucault, Lather, Britzman, Stewart, Giroux, Bourdieu, Banks, Bauteau and others who forced me to pay increasing attention to a world that is more plural, multiple and fragmented (Collins, 2000, p. 51). Through them, I arrived during this research at that place where “the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all” (Foucault, 1985/1984). I was persuaded by arguments that new perspectives are needed on knowledge, discourse and power relations “which can equip us with such tools of analysis capable of discerning that slippery interface between modern forms of power and knowledge and rationality and institutions that have served to create new forms of domination…” (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000, p. 115). I began to recognize how my own longings and expectations for this work shaped, contorted and pulled at its construction. In confronting my own desire to produce ethnographies that captivate and shatter myths, I bumped up against the difficult knowledge that all I could really offer were “partial truths and my own guilty readings of other people’s dramas” (Britzman, 2000, p. 33).

Armed with these methodological insights, I entered the field prepared in new ways to explore the questions that guided this work about how natives constructed their experiences, what was significant in theorizing resistance and how acts of narrative inform us about living. Looking at these questions through an interpretive lens influenced
by postmodernism provided a heightened opportunity for understanding how Flatwoods natives presented multiple constructions of their lived experiences. I started to unravel not only what the respondents in this study said—but also examine how they were saying it and equally important, what was not said? I paid more attention to inflections, accents, ambivalences, gaps, 4-H quilts and 4,000-square foot houses. I saw that everything was a text. Everything was dangerous. “All categories are unstable, all experiences are constructed, all reality is imagined, all identities are produced, and all knowledge provokes uncertainties, misrecognition, ignorances, and silences” (Britzman, 1993, p. 22). At the same time, I tried to stay mindful that “deconstruction is not about tearing down but about rebuilding; it is not about pointing out an error but about looking at how structure has been constructed, what holds it together, and what it produces. It is not a destructive, negative, or nihilistic practice, but an affirmative one” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 482).

*Rethinking Resistance*

In examining how Flatwoods natives’ stories of resistance were constructed, what such constructions produced and what held them together, I first looked closely at how at the authoritative gaze spawned a range of escape strategies, in particular covert ones. As detailed earlier, Ortner, Giroux, Britzman, Pitt, Katz and many others theorists provided useful perspectives on the shaping of microresistances in this region. But a Foucauldian lens, in particular, opened up new ways to think about how an environment of surveillance and authority pervaded the Flatwoods’ classrooms, churches, homes, and bodies—as well as what responses this gaze provoked. Foucault notes that the
panopticon, Jeremy Bentham’s architectural tower where the fundamental experiment of surveillance was carried out, symbolized the shift in society from disciplinary regimes that inflict bodily harm to regimes that control and keep bodies docile. To work, it needed the kind of visibility that is unverifiable. In other words, prisoners had to be aware that at any moment they might be spied upon but must never know in which moment that might take place (1995/1975, p. 201). Foucault uses the panopticon to describe a variety of disciplinary mechanisms that rely on surveillance, including schools, armies, workplaces and the state. However, he also notes that power relations include far more than institutions and formal structures:

Between every point of a social body, between a man and woman, between the members of a family, between a master and pupil, between everyone who knows and every one who does not, there exist relations of power which are not purely and simply a project of the sovereign’s great power over the individual; they are rather the concrete, changing soil in which the sovereign’s power is grounded, the conditions which make it possible for it to function. The family, even now is not a simple reflection or extension of the power of the State; it does not act as the representative in relation to children… For the State to function in the way that it does, there must be, between male and female or adult and child, quite specific relations of domination which have their own configuration and relative autonomy. (Foucault, 1972/1977a, p. 187-188, italics added)

Clearly, members of the Jasper family in the Flatwoods operated within specific relations of domination and developed ways to weaken disciplinary power over their
bodies by hiding from, running from, dodging, and slipping past authority figures. Such measures worked because power, as Foucault points out, requires its subjects to be seen. “It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection” (1995, p. 187). Like prisoners facing the guard tower, Flatwoods natives found innovative ways to challenge and operate outside of the gaze, and these strategies both constrained and opened up their construction of themselves. As a result, parents, police, neighbors and church authorities often discovered their surveillance and punishment strategies failed to create the docile bodies described so thoroughly by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*.

Contesting Constructions

An analysis of how Flatwoods natives actively contested and partially penetrated a variety of power structures also requires an examination of what spurred such resistances. In *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-Critique* (2004/2005, p. 88), Hoy says governmentality—instiutions, procedures, analysis and tactics used by the state to wield power—subjugates people by deciding what counts as a person, as proper actions, as a citizen right. Lareau says structures wield tremendous power over families. After all, she says, they do not build their own roads, choose the teachers for their children’s schools, establish the values of their homes, or compose the racial, ethnic, or social class balance of their neighborhoods. Nor do they determine the “availability of high-paying jobs in the area, set the education and skills required to fill those jobs, pace the growth of the national economy, or guide the position of the United States in a world economy” (Lareau, 2003, p. 14). Bourdieu argues the habitus leads individuals to “a kind
of immediate submission to order.” It legitimizes economic and social inequality by providing a “‘practical and taken-for-granted acceptance of the fundamental conditions of existence’” (Swartz, 1997, p. 105, citing Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54).

Yet, while such structures affect families’ every day practices, just as surely people respond to those forces as well as create their own. Giroux says that people are not merely pawns of their schools, employers, churches or even their families. They are not only constructed but also construct, are not only pushed but also push back. Even the subordinated wield power. Hoy points out that critique of power structures still provides an opportunity for escape. It gives people a way to resist their attachment to their social identities and ideals, and allows them to challenge their understanding of who they are (2004/2005, p. 14). Foucault says people find ways to resist if there is even the smallest amount of freedom for resistance to be possible. He says that even when the power relation is completely out of balance, when one side is said to truly have ‘total power’ over the other, “a power can be exercised over the other only insofar as the other still has the option of killing himself, of leaping out the window, or of killing another person.” (1997/1984, p. 292). Without at least some freedom to resist, he notes, there would be no power relations. Finally, as discussed earlier, St. Pierre argues that freedom is no longer an idea that manifests itself in a concrete, revolutionary freedom but in rebelling against who we have been defined and categorized to be (2000, p. 493). It is a resistance to “how we are being constituted and are constituting ourselves as subjects” (2000, p. 492).

As this data show, rebellions described by Flatwoods natives repeatedly centered on resisting the ways others were defining and categorizing them as subjects. Alma
refused to be constituted as a meek, dress-wearing girl. Levi refused to be constituted as a backward hillbilly who talked funny. Ethard refused to be constituted as a disfigured, incompetent outcast. Indeed, in Ethard’s narratives, resistance appears to stem from a deep awareness of such labels, or from a “double consciousness”—W.E.B. DuBois’ idea of watching oneself through the eyes of the Other (Britzman, 2006, p. 51, citing DuBois, 1903, 1989). Ethard revealed this double consciousness when he contested the way people defined him after he lost three fingers and thumb on his right hand in a dynamite explosion. “They’d make fun of me, they’d say, ‘You can’t even draw water out of the well,’ and I thought, ‘I’ll just show ’em I can draw water out of the well…”’ (Interview, October 21, 1994). Ethard explained such dismissals inspired him to become someone they did not think he could be—someone who could draw water with just one hand, make more money than anyone else and date the prettiest girls in the county. Thus, his resistance to authority was part of his larger life strategy to “show them” that he could “outdo” all of them.

Cause, see, they made fun of me all the time, anyway, and told me I was the sorriest one in the bunch, and that I was the black sheep of the bunch, and that I wudn’t worth killin’ and on and on. See that’s why I was so determined to outdo ever one of ’em. I wanted to outdo ever one of ’em. I wanted to outdo ever brother I had, and I wanted to outdo my Daddy. All of ’em. (Interview, October 21, 1994)

To be sure, not all members of the Jasper family engaged in successful resistances to authority or even wanted to rebel. Leon’s strategies for attaining more freedom and
cultural capital involved becoming a businessman and well-known Baptist minister, and conforming to church codes and authority. He saw no reason to resist the way he had been constituted as a church leader because it was a high-status space to occupy. As Leon noted, many of his peers who moved to Cincinnati or another northern city to work never reached the level of success he attained as head of a large missionary organization. “As far as accumulatin’ things I’ve done just as good as any of ’em. Just this year… I have been on all seven continents and in 16 foreign countries” (Interview, September 3, 2007). Leon’s religion clearly affects his “regimes of discourse,” or his authoritatively sanctioned ways of speaking and acting (Foucault, 1980). During interviews, he talked often of others’ resistances growing up in the Flatwoods but took great care to emphasize that his own rebellions occurred before he took the Lord as his savior and became a minister. In pointing out the influence of the church on the way Leon constructs himself, Levi said: “Leon was never much different from the rest of us until he got really religious. The funniest and most fun guy that you’s ever around in your lifetime was Leon with about three beers in him. Oh, he was a riot. He was a ton of fun. But he just changed completely. Just completely changed” (Interview, January 25, 2006).

Thus, Leon’s motivations to attain and maintain cultural capital and personal freedoms through conforming to church authority present a vastly different picture than Ethard’s motivations to “outdo” others and challenge attempts to make his body docile. Such opposite portrayals reveal how the motivations for resistances are as complex as the conflicts between structure and agency. Even Ethard did not always challenge authority to prove his worth or attain a higher community standing. Consider his explanation for
why he and his friends ignored the rules and raided watermelon patches in the summertime. “A bunch of us boys would sneak down in that water melon patch, and of course, we couldn’t eat but, all of us wouldn’t eat over two or three, but we’d cut open and ruin 50 or 100 just for meanness” (Interview, October 21, 1994, italics added).

Acknowledging the multiplicity of such motivations offers a less romanticized view of resistances and helps erase the temptation to see “small-v” acts as universal or coherent attempts to take on power. Bourdieu emphasizes the way that various status groups, not just the controlling class, enact cultural logic, shifting the focus from ideological hegemony and consciousness to different class identities and cultural practices. “The more philosophical discussion of class and class-consciousness can, therefore, easily incorporate both an ‘economic’ (controlling the mode of production) and a ‘cultural’ (displaying the cultural logic) definition of social classes” (Foley, 1994, p. 170). As Flatwoods narratives demonstrate, people are both shaped by external factors and internal intentions, by “micro and macro, voluntarist and determinist dimensions of human activity” (Swartz, 1997, p. 8).

*Overlooked Maneuvers*

To be sure, some will argue the microsistances displayed by Flatwoods natives do not reach the level of resistance at all. Giroux says researchers should not to hang the label of resistance indiscriminately “over every expression of oppositional behavior” (Giroux, 2001, p. 110). “It must be strongly emphasized that the ultimate value of the notion of resistance has to be measured against the degree to which it not only prompts critical thinking and reflective action, but more importantly, against the degree to which
it contains the possibility of galvanizing collective political struggle around the issues of power and determination” (Giroux, 2001, p. 111). Further, Katz argues that some oppositional practices might instead be described as survival practices, resilience, recuperation, reactive acts of consumption or reworking. To define resistance, she asks how, or whether, the practices she saw in her research “produced massive disruptions or pierced people’s everyday lives.” (Katz, 2004, p. 242).

From these perspectives, it is clear how small maneuvers get overlooked when resistance is only understood as that which offers “new modes of intellectual appropriation” or “contains the possibility of galvanizing collective political struggle” (Giroux, 2001, p. 111). What appears to be missing from such narrow definitions of resistance is an acknowledgement of the way some acts of resistance do not create obvious collective political struggles—such as overthrows of government or improved working conditions through new union contracts—or even raise consciousness of a particular issue on a widespread level. Yet those acts can still enable critical thinking in an individual or particular kinship knowledge network. Ethard’s resistances often prompted his own critical thinking about what he was accomplishing—a chance to “outdo” others, increase his status and gain more personal freedom. He also clearly created disruptions and “pierced people’s lives” in his own kinship network. Such microresistances contain a less visible critique of domination but still provide “theoretical opportunities for self-reflection” and for “struggle in the interest of self-emancipation”

35 For more a more detailed analysis of these categories, see Chapter II.
(Giroux, 2001, p. 110). Viewing resistance only as acts resulting in a collective political struggle should prompt the question, what kind of collective? And whose struggle? Small v resistances may be no more—but certainly no less—than a focal point for the construction of lived experiences in which people can improve their lives or the lives in their particular kinship/knowledge network. As even Giroux has acknowledged, some resistances can simply offer opportunities for people “to find a voice and extend the positive dimensions of their own cultures” (Giroux, 2001, p. 110).

All of these definitions illustrate how defining and delving into resistance theory is a messy process that involves multifaceted definitions, visions, and critiques. While it is important to recognize that not all actions are resistance, it also is clear that they do not always fit neatly into other categories either. Nor do the motivations for such resistances. As Hoy says, “Not all resistance will strike everyone as justified or emancipatory, so some will feel that more needs to be said about how to distinguish resistance that is emancipatory from other forms, such as resistance that is reactionary” (Hoy, 2005, introduction). As discussed in Chapter II, some resistances operate in in-between spaces, in gray areas or in more than one space. For this work, I was far less interested in constructing complex categories to try to contain slippery definitions of resistances and more interested in examining their impact. In other words, I tried to focus less on defining resistances and more on how resistances define people—in this case how microresistances play a role in constructing natives of the Flatwoods. It is a complex undertaking. Stories of resistance often seemed to start out as smooth-flowing narratives but quickly tumble into complexity as questions arose about who was resisting, what was
being resisted, and why. In *Disrupted Lives: How People Create Meaning in a Chaotic World* (1997/1999, p. 6), Gay Becker explains that people organize stories of disruption into linear accounts of chaos that gradually turn to order. Yet circulating within the Flatwoods, as with any culture, were an array of contesting and contradictory discourses that vied for attention. Lives, places and resistances are rarely as coherent as our narratives attempt to make them out to be. People may organize stories of disruption into linear accounts, but “disruption is part of the human condition” (Becker, 1999, p. 7).

An Unlearning

As Britzman points out, “every learning is also an unlearning” (1998, p. 79). Because of my own experiences as an Appalachian native, I had assumed when I began this research that detailing the lived experiences of southern Kentucky storytellers and their thousand tiny resistances to power structures would not only provide powerful stories but also help me trouble the idea of Appalachians as “backward, unintelligent, fatalistic, and quiescent people who are complicit in their own oppression” (Fisher, 1993, introduction). I imagined that stories of resistances and rebellions would challenge the shortcomings and incompleteness of stereotypical Appalachian imagery and unmask the notions of ignorance and lack of agency in a region that continues to be inscribed by countless artifacts and media forms, including: hillbilly souvenirs of lanky, grizzle-bearded men carrying jugs of moonshine; jokes and comedy routines about rednecks and trailer trash; and movies and television shows ranging from *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994) and *The Blue Collar Comedy Hour* (Foxworthy, 2004) to reruns of *Deliverance* (Boorman, 1977) and *The Beverly Hillbillies* (Henning, 1962). Frankly, I had spent so
many years hearing Ethard’s stories about all kinds of resistances to power in the
Flatwoods I expected to find that such resistances were pervasive. Indeed, I thought that I
would find that the respondents involved in this study possessed a strong sense of agency
and a predilection for using small v resistances to challenge a variety of authority figures.
Yet obviously not all of the narratives in this work supported such a tidy premise.

Instead, I found each respondent in this study put forth complicated and unique
views of their own resistances. Comparing and contrasting stories of these maneuvers
illustrated how different siblings in various circumstances embraced blatant resistances,
covert resistances, or in some cases, no resistances at all. Thus, positing Flatwoods
natives as a unifying people with high levels of agency and strict operational codes would
have presented a seamless picture that failed to take into account their complexities. My
more suspicious reading found that instead of a monolithic place where natives share
unifying stories or culture, the Flatwoods is a “site where antagonistic meanings push and
pull at our sensibilities, deep investments and relationships with others” (Britzman, 2003,
p. 71). In light of such insights, this study took a strategic and important turn. I found I
could not, nor did I want to, substitute ingrained images or universalisms of Appalachia
with new facile portrayals or cultural constructions that claimed to be somehow more
authentic while still essentializing the region and its inhabitants. Nor did I want to
produce stories that “smoothed over contested definitions, fuzzy borderlines,
fragmentation and power relations” (Shuman & Briggs, 1993, p. 122) or merely displace
“accepted narratives with new totalizing accounts of what ‘really’ happened.”
These representations are situated and perspectival, written through the prism of discourses available both to the storytellers themselves and to me as the translator of these stories. To be sure, Flatwoods natives relish a good dramatization and understand storytelling involves multiple truths, stylized memories, blurred identities, and complications. As Alma so aptly put it, with any event, “if you’ve got 10 people (who remember it) 10 people will remember different parts. We all have our own perspectives” (Interview, November 29, 2007). In particular all three siblings acknowledged the role that exaggerations and stylized memories played in good storytelling by Ethard. Alma described it by saying, “Ethard could take a little bit of truth and make it the most amazing thing in the world” (Interview, November 29, 2007). Leon added that, “Ethard could take a story and just polish it over and make himself sound like a hero” (Leon, Interview, September 3, 2007). But perhaps Levi put it best when he said: “Ethard never did let the truth get in the way of a good story.” (Interview, September 5, 2007, italics added). With these perspectives in mind, my goal for this research moved away from dispelling myths about Appalachia and focused on looking beyond the humanist idea of finding or establishing which stories from the Flatwoods arrived at the “truth.” As Archbishop Tutu said at a 1996 hearing of the Truth & Reconciliation Committee of South Africa (October 1998), the commission would listen to everyone because “everyone should be given a chance to say his or her truth as he or she sees it.”

Interrupting Knowledge Claims

My additional unlearning came in letting go of the notion I had early on that this work might somehow “give voice” to Flatwoods storytellers. I first became enthralled
with the idea of “giving voice” while in an undergraduate course on Appalachian culture at Eastern Kentucky University in the 1980s. This was a time when those identified as having no voice included women, people of color, gays and lesbians, Appalachians and other groups who were just beginning to represent themselves in social issues. As a woman and an Appalachian, I understood all too well that, “women, indigenous peoples and colonized peoples have all traditionally been marginalized within such historiography, understood as supporting actors or as players who have had history happen to them rather than being the makers of such history” (Danaher, G. Schirato, T. and Webb, J., 2000, p. 103). I wanted to disrupt that view, to show how Flatwoods natives were indeed players and makers of history. Ethard and other Flatwoods natives could and did speak for themselves. But as Mary Anglin points out in A Question of Loyalty: National and Regional Identity in Narratives of Appalachia, (1992, p. 105), the privileged voices of local color narratives, academics, anthropologists, missionaries and filmmakers are often heard over the voices of working-class Appalachians. The subaltern, the subordinated, can speak, “but only through the institutionally sanctioned authority— itself dependent on and implicated in the power relations that produce subalternity—of the professional journalist or ethnographer, who alone has the power to decide what counts in the narrators’ raw material and what to turn into a literary and/ethnographic narrative” (Beverley, 1996). In other words, there are only certain “regimes of truth” that society is willing to accept and only some speakers with enough status to count (Foucault, 1995, p. 131). But as I delved further into this work, I recognized the fallacies in assuming anyone can give voice to someone else. As Lather emphasizes:
Given the dangers of research to the researched, ethnographic traditions of romantic aspirations about giving voice to the voiceless are much troubled in the face of the manipulation, violation and betrayal inherent in ethnographic representation. (Lather, 2001, p. 483, citing Visweswaran)

In navigating this dilemma for this research, I let go of the idea of “giving voice” and focused on trying to re-present the life histories of Flatwoods storytellers and Appalachians to a new audience—and on trying to increase practical knowledge of those who were traditionally the subject of the ethnographic gaze. Deborah Reed-Danahay writes that there is an “increasing production of ethnography by ‘native anthropologists’ working in their own cultural milieu,” adding, “The ‘natives’ will tell their own stories,” (2001, p. 418). In collecting my own family stories, I understand that this work will in no way meet the lofty goal of “serving a greater good for mankind” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 2) or delivering emancipation, redemption or even “voice” for the oppressed. I do not want to prescribe goals for this research with positivistic arrogance. But I do want to increase knowledge about the Flatwoods during a particular time period and foster webs of cultural understanding about a particular family who lived there. A fundamental assumption of research, after all, is that the “examined life is educative. The act of simultaneously recounting and re-creating one’s cumulative experiences should provide critical insight into lived lives. Likewise, in reading about others, we may learn something about ourselves and come to value our own struggle for voice” (Britzman, 2003, p. 67).
A Strategic Unknowing

As this work illustrates, there is still much to explore and grapple with in Appalachia through a postmodern lens. Acts of overcoming romantic and contrived characterizations, and assertions that no true, authentic Appalachian culture exists, invite resistance. Grassroots activists, for example, have protested a postmodern turn in Appalachian scholarship because they say it “complicates the politics of coalition-building” (Banks, Billings & Tice, 1993, p. 286). They argue that the postmodern emphasis on difference, diversity, fragmentation and skepticism about truth claims make it difficult or impossible to build support for or even agree on the nature of Appalachian causes. There is widespread concern about the impact of postmodernity on coalition building outside of Appalachia as well, particularly in post-colonial studies where researchers weigh the impact of postmodernity against the value of essentialism in the political realm. As Gayatri Spivak once acknowledged, it is necessary at times to embrace a strategic essentialism to achieve political aims, saying: “‘In fact, I must say I am an essentialist from time to time’” and remarking, “‘I think it’s absolutely on target…to stand against the discourses of essentialism…(but) strategically we cannot’” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1998, p. 79, citing Spivak, 1984, p. 184). Other feminists worry that postmodern theorists are now “more concerned with language and discourse” than with working to improve lives (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 7). Yet as Appalachian scholar Banks points out, we must learn to negotiate these tensions if we are to fulfill the promise of helping to reconstruct a public sphere through which people can work to
democratize the structures of politics and every day life (Banks, Billings & Tice, 1993, p. 297).

I hope that this work has provided some insights into how to deconstruct essentialized notions of Appalachians without merely replacing old universal portrayals with new versions. As I continue my work in an academic and Appalachian arena, I hope to get more involved in research that acknowledges multiplicities while sustaining workable forms of regional politics. I want to produce research in the region that emphasizes the plurality, multiplicity and difference among Appalachians and adds to the way scholars rethink Appalachian identities and unpack such binary oppositions as Appalachian/non-Appalachian or insider/outsider. In future research, for example, I want to sketch out a new conceptual space and seek to better understand the ways people traverse slippery borders and shifting identities. More specifically, I hope to collaborate with other Appalachian scholars and continue to research microresistances and identity formation in Appalachia. I recognize this will not be easy maneuvering. Still, as Douglas Foley points out, cultural borders are never impermeable. “They are made to be transgressed” (Foley, 1994, p. 203).

Another goal for this research stems from one of my major concerns about the limitations of this study—that in introducing the voices of Flatwoods storytellers to a new academic audience, I am leaving another important audience behind. In the middle of this work, I began to chaff at academic rules and boundaries and mourn what must be left unsaid and undone. I also began thinking of how I might open Flatwoods stories to new avenues and determined that this would not be the end but a beginning. As I confessed
earlier, I am still enamored by the romance of powerful storytelling. I come from a long
line of storytellers and part of me wants to at least attempt to step back from the angst of
representation and the uncertainties and complications of postmodernism—and adopt a
strategic unknowing—in order to create a space where I can try to attend not only to the
stories told but to the pleasures in the telling. So in addition to my continued academic
research in Appalachia, I also want to transform this study, with its necessary theoretical
language and academic turn, into a more accessible reading. In other words, I want to
write a book that paints a more vivid portrait of these Flatwoods natives, so others, too,
can get to know them, how they lived, what they cared about. So they can feel the bitter
wind blowing through the cracks of the loft in the morning where Ethard and his brothers
are sleeping. So they can smell the bacon sizzling on the cook stove and hear Mary
shuffling in the kitchen, calling everyone down to breakfast. We’d stick our heads out
from under the covers and shake the snow off, cause it was just as cold up there as it was
outside. There was no difference in it. And ice would be froze in the water bucket and
mom’d bring it and set it on the stove and thaw it just to get the dipper out of the bucket…

These are the stories that captivate me, disturb me, keep me awake at night.
Finally—finally—these are the stories I want to tell.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A


FIGURE 1: IMAGES FROM THE FLATWOODS
Recovered From Cumberland River

Outbreaks Inspection Of Cumberland River This Week

Resurfacing Elihu Road Is Under Way

The resurfacing of the Elihu Road, which was constructed some time ago by the Rural Highway and W. A. forces, is under way. The work is being done by the two agencies and the Cumberland was recently purchased by the Rural Highway Division to repair the Hill Bridge on the Strawberry Road. The work is to be done county forces.

It was learned this week that it is necessary to move the Rural Highway, W. P. A. and county forces from the road, in view of the work progress along the Lyons Creek Road. The Rural Highway Locating Committee made a trip over the proposed Route road and several locations were scouted. The work on the proposed road will be started soon.

PRAISERS NAMED

By Judge Hall

Appraisers appointed by County

Ice Lawrence Staff have visited

DYNAMITE CAPS COST CHILD DISFIGUREMENT

The old story of children playing with dynamite caps was repeated Tuesday afternoon and as a result an eight-year-old boy will go through life without three fingers and the thumb of his right hand.

Ethard Jasper, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Jasper of Windsor, was the victim. He and some of his playmates found a box of caps on the side of the road near the Jasper home. One of the boys struck a match to the caps and Edward lost the first, second and third fingers and thumb of his right hand in the explosion which followed.

The child was also burned and cut about the face. He was treated at the hospital here and his condition is reported to be satisfactory.

It is the same sad story.

Wendell Tarter, 18, When He Goes In Morning Bath

FRIENDS STATE HIS WAS POOR SWIMMER

Disappearance Notes Hour Later. Many Searching Party

The body of Wendell Tarter, who drowned in the Cumberland River yesterday morning about 9:00, was recovered from the water yesterday afternoon after a search of several hours had gone on for the purpose of finding the young man. The body was found by the body of Wendell Tarter, 18, who drowned in the Cumberland River yesterday morning about 9:00, was recovered from the water yesterday afternoon after a search of several hours had gone on for the purpose of finding the young man. The body was found by William J. O'Brien, of the company, who was engaged in straining the water for the purpose of finding the body and the company, who was engaged in straining the water for the purpose of finding the body and the company, who was engaged in straining the water for the purpose of finding the body and the company, who was engaged in straining the water for the purpose of finding the body and the company, who was engaged in straining the water for the purpose of finding the body and the company, who was engaged in straining the water for the purpose of finding the body. The body was found by William J. O'Brien, of the company, who was engaged in straining the water for the purpose of finding the body.
Despite repeated attempts authority figures to create docile bodies, Flatwoods natives found myriad ways to escape the authoritative gaze. The top chart illustrates the kinds of power structures being resisted. The bottom chart demonstrates how respondents viewed their escapes from the authoritative gaze and the steps they took to attain invisibility.

FIGURE 3: SYNOPTIC CHART/AUTHORITY CHALLENGES
APPENDIX D

Coding Key:
(TRA) Number of times Ethard mentions a traumatic event or mental or physical trauma. (161)
(MM) Number of references to making money. (137)
(MC) Mentions of cars, usually tied to significant events. (82)
(RES) Number of stories focused resistance to surveillance, punishment or authority figures. (67)
(POV) Number of descriptions of poverty-related hard times or lack of money. (38)
(FD) Number of times talk of food occurs. (10)
(RLG) Number of references to religion. (9)
(NOS) Number of times Ethard expresses nostalgia for, and/or claims about, the “old days.” (9)

Note: These references were coded from an all-day interview with Ethard Jasper completed on October 21, 1994 that focused on his childhood years growing up in the Flatwoods.

TABLE 2: CODING CHART
CODING ANALYSIS

The coding chart above provides insight into the kinds of topics that Ethard focused on as he told stories about growing up in the Flatwoods of Kentucky in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. The chart is based on a count of the number of times he discussed or mentioned a particular topic, such as food, cars and religion, and provides insight into Ethard’s perspectives. For example, more than any other topic Ethard discussed traumatic events. The number of times he mentioned trauma (161) suggests that it played a major role in Ethard’s childhood, as did making money (137), cars (82) and resisting authority in some way (67). While Ethard did not mention the word “resistance” itself, his stories focused on how he resisted different kinds of power structures in myriad ways, from stealing food to disobeying his parents to running moonshine. Cars also seemed to play a large role in Ethard’s childhood, which should not be surprising considering Ethard went into the car business at age 15, worked much of his life as a car salesman and eventually owned Jasper’s Pontiac and Buick Dealership. Yet coding these interviews brought into greater focus the role of cars in Ethard’s life. He talked not only about selling cars but about buying them, driving them, racing them, stealing them, wrecking them, fixing them and taking them for joyrides. Coding also highlighted Ethard’s ability to remember even the smallest details about the cars in his life—from what kind of motors they had to how fast they were and what wheels were on them.
APPENDIX E:

FIGURE 4: CASEY/PULASKI COUNTIES