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Motherhood and Environmental Justice in Appalachia: A Critical Analysis of Resistance, Care, and Essentialism in Our Mountains

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Dedicated to all Mountain people

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Introduction: What's All This Ruckus About?

In the face of the past, present, and future climate crisis, there is an imperative for advocacy and care work so that our communities, local and global, may imagine better futures. This imperative has been answered by many different types of people, but this particular story is about mothers. Since environmental justice became a common word in environmental and academic communities, women and often women who are mothers, have been a topic of frequent inquiry and discussion (Pellow & Brulle, 2005, pp. 7-8). At the advent of the environmental justice movement in the late 1970s and 1980s communities of poor and/or black people were faced with clear and pressing environmental dangers which were invading their homes and poisoning their bodies (Pellow & Brulle, 2005). The movement that rose from this injustice would challenge the overwhelmingly upper-class, white environmental movement and open the doors for environmental activist ethics with more holistic and liberatory aspirations (Pellow & Brulle, 2005).

Women's central role in these activist uprisings against environmental injustices is certainly acknowledged by contemporary scholars of environmental movements, and looking even farther into history Federici (2014) notes that most peasant revolts in the face of land enclosure and labor exploitation were led by women (p. 174). Though those acts of resistance are not quite in the arena of what we would call environmental justice today, the pattern of womens' concern and action regarding the environment, labor, and social well-being begins far sooner than the genesis of our contemporary climate crisis.

Within the gendered study of environmental justice activism, I am specifically interested in the discourse and narrative of motherhood. Hugely successful national

groups like Mothers Out Front, international groups like Women's Earth Alliance, and localized movements indicate that mothers are at the forefront of environmental justice activism all over the world. Peeples & DeLuca (2006), Bell (2013), and Thomas (2020) each demonstrate how independent sites of environmental injustice have activists heavily utilizing motherhood as a discursive tool and motivation for their work. This is explained through these women's proximity to children, illness, and other care work tasks which women are normatively expected to manage. Further, their moral and cultural position as mothers offers an effective rhetoric for the activist work they are engaging in (Peeples & DeLuca, 2006; Bell, 2013; Thomas, 2020). Though the use of motherhood in environmental justice activism has been acknowledged and studied, there has been little critical analysis of the motherhood identity and what makes it so effective.

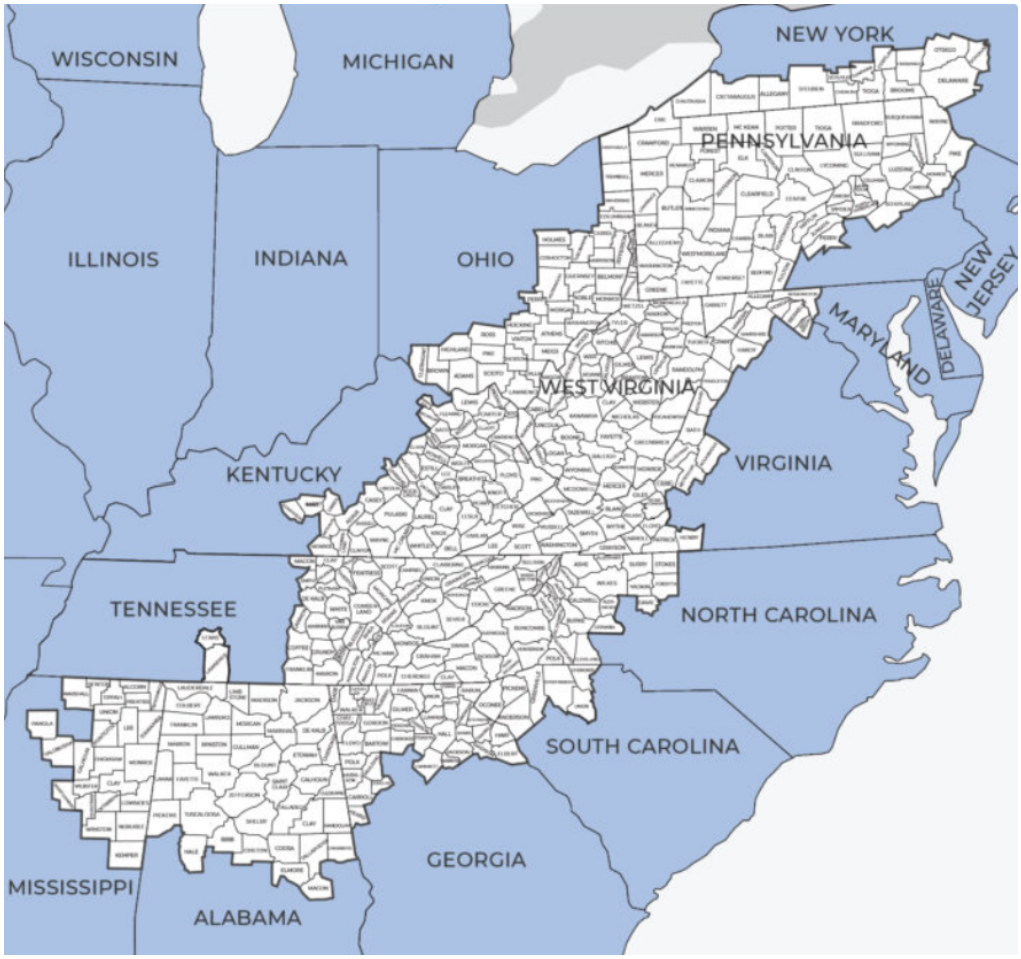
Understanding both the historical legacy of women's environmental justice activism and the continuing need for environmental justice work today, I will analyze gendered discourse and narratives about environmental justice activism in the context of the extractive industry. This work is specifically situated in central Appalachia due to its vibrant history of resistance, long-standing experiences of extractive industry, and my own familial ties to the region. I will use discourse analysis to analyze interview data, and theoretical tools of environmental justice, ecofeminism, maternalism, and queer ecologies to examine the ways that environmental justice activists use and are subject to dominant western cultural ideas of motherhood and their implications when fighting against the extractive industry in central Appalachia. The specific study of the motherhood narrative and environmental justice will give way to a larger conversation about libratory futures, gender, and environmentalism. These topics are important due to the insight they will

offer to the global fight against climate change and our current destructive energy paradigm. Further, the social and cultural dynamics examined and critiqued may offer insight to the liberation of vulnerable communities in Appalachia.

This thesis is essentially grounded in the context of place, so it is imperative to define the Appalachian region and acknowledge the particular relevance of its history of resistance.

Figure 1

Map of the Appalachian Region



Note. (ARC, 2022)

The Appalachian Regional Commission defined Appalachia as “206,000 square miles, from southern New York to northern Mississippi" containing twenty-six million residents in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia (ARC, 2022). Though this definition is convenient and functional, it is not without its flaws. The Appalachian Regional Commission is a political organization with its own goals and motives that necessitate clear borders and distinct characteristics of Appalachia when the region is, in truth, permeable and changing.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge past harms and contextualize Appalachia in the ongoing maintenance of white supremacy in America. Appalachia is not exempt from participation in the forced removal of indigenous peoples from the region (Stoll, 2017). I am writing this thesis in Athens, OH, the stolen ancestral land of the Osage, Shawandasse Tula, Kaskaskia, Hopewell Culture, Adena Culture, and Ofo (*Native Land Digital*, n.d.). Regardless of the perceived “racial innocence” of white Appalachians, subsequent erasure of people of color such as black miners has also supported white supremacist ideals (Smith, 2004).

My work in this thesis focuses on the narrative surrounding activism against extractive industry primarily in central Appalachia where the coal industry has been dominant. Across the wide expanse of Appalachia, as defined by the ARC, communities have been engaged in extractive industry in one way or another, and are certainly dealing with the environmental, economic, and social implications of the industry. That being said, the scope of this research does not attempt to encompass the entire region. The Central Appalachian region, as used in this thesis includes all of West Virginia, eastern

Kentucky, western Virginia, and south-eastern Ohio. These communities are still presently dealing with mountaintop removal, fracking, pipeline projects, polluted water, and the legacy of past extractive industry.

Figure 2

Map of the Appalachian Region, Central Appalachia Highlighted

Note. Adapted from Map of the Appalachian Region by (ARC, 2022)

Appalachia has a long history of social and political struggle. Rapid industrialization and upheaval from 1880 to 1930 brought by extractive industry transformed the region as resource extraction became a priority to modernize American life (Eller 1982). This changed the distribution of people, their political power, labor

patterns, land ownership, and gave rise to new elite members of society in Appalachia (Eller 1982). This enclosure of land and transformation of labor trapped many residents in a state of dependency and poverty that was a radically different lifestyle than previous modes of living based on autonomy and subsistence in Appalachia (Stoll, 2017).

The reordering of life caused by industrialization and extractive industry described by historians and sociologists also eventually led to the people of Appalachia forming rich traditions of resistance. Said resistance may have surrounded the male-dominated industry of mining, but many leaders in the movement were women. The activism of women, such as Mother Jones, was a crucial part of community resistance and has left an illustrious legacy for other women activists in the region. Mary Harris Jones, or "Mother Jones," was a well-known and extremely successful union activist active across the country, including in southern West Virginia, whose speeches and organizing transformed the economic and social landscape of communities. Jones's approach was brash: embarrassing miners for their lack of courage. Yet, Mother Jones was also intersectional, inviting miners of color, women, and children to participate in marches and picketing, therefore engaging the whole community in the fight for labor rights (*Mother Jones | AFL-CIO*, n.d.).

Although historical labor movements surrounding coal mining and unionization in company towns may be the most well-known acts of resistance and organizing in the Appalachian region, it is by far not the only movement that has been a force in the history of the region (Wilkerson, 2019). Contemporary action against environmental degradation and injustice has also become a strong presence in the region and brought about significant change. The study of these movements and their politics is necessary for what

they can teach us about social, cultural, and political values and change, especially in the context of the rapidly changing climate of our planet. It is here that I aim to add to existing scholarship on Appalachian resistance, as well as the intersections of environmental activism's work with gender, sexuality, and culture.

Women environmental activists in Appalachia are fighting against harmful societal norms ascribed to them due to their gender identity, residency in the region, and the behemoth powers of coal companies dominating the land and government. Nonetheless, Appalachian women have affected great change in the region, often leveraging their identities as mothers as part of their strategy to fight back. This can be seen both in the acts of individual activism of women like the "dust busters" Pauline Canterberry and Mary Miller, and the actions of the many women, such as Lorelei Scarboro and Julia Bonds, involved in fighting back with organizations in the region like Coal River Mountain Watch (Bell, 2013). The activism and testimony of these women will be explored in detail in my thesis, as well as scholarly literature, news, documentaries, and art which add to the discourse of the motherhood narrative in central Appalachia. The motherhood narrative will be critiqued to determine this discourse's viability to reach future environmental justice goals and work towards liberatory futures.

Literature and Questions

Ecofeminism

The core of my ecofeminist perspective is Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1990). Merchant's historical analysis of the transition from feudal economic, political, and social relations to those of early capitalism calls into question the accepted inevitability of capitalist development and the normative associations of women and nature. Merchant recounts the shift from an organic worldview of the late Medieval period, which was not without gendered divisions, to a mechanistic worldview propelled by the scientific revolution and Christian religion which had catastrophic results for women and nature. Pre-existing connections between women and nature (for example, the earth-mother mythos) were perverted by the necessity of a capitalist society to dominate and exploit both women and nature for labor and the accumulation of wealth.

The scientific revolution and transition to capitalism are normatively recounted as a great stride forward for humanity - here Merchant's work resists. The major shift in people's relations with their environment - from coexistence to extractive - demanded a parallel ideological shift to mend the cognitive dissonance (pp. 2-6). Merchant places the mechanistic worldview as the center of this ideological shift. Detailing examples such as the lauding of mining's 'rape of the (female) earth' for industry (pp. 29-41) and the perceived disorderly character of women's minds and sexuality (pp. 132-140) Merchant shows how mechanistic worldview naturalized women's subservience and nature was deadened and feminized to make way for its mass exploitation.

Fitting in snugly with Merchant's historical work, Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* (2014) further examines the transition to capitalism through the body and labor.

Centering on witch and witch hunting, Federici explains how this "war against women" (p. 14) decimated women's control over their own reproduction, bodies, and labor. Therefore witch hunting was pivotal in the creation of women's docile position to aid the accumulation of capital. Federici also posits that lost in the transition to capitalism, there are alternative ways of living and being that would offer a more liberatory existence if only women could reclaim them.

Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) picks up the thread of ecofeminism and pulls it into conversations about humanism and futurity. Grounded in the present and looking towards the potential future, Haraway's book builds, or perhaps salvages, a new ethic for coexistence. Using the ever-evolving tool of 'SF' – string figures, science fact, science fiction, speculative feminism, and speculative fabulation – Haraway prompts readers to interrogate current understandings of human-non-human relationships and remake them in a 'compost heap' that gives way to a more livable future for human and non-human living beings on earth.

These texts, looking both into the past and towards the future, create a vibrant picture of how woman-nature relationships were created and maintained, what those relationships might mean for human-nature relationships at large, and how we might move forward from the state we find ourselves in right now. Of course, these are not the only scholars discussing these topics, other authors have more specific writings on ecofeminism such as Anne Fausto-Sterling *Sexing the Body* (2000) regarding medical science and gender, Mel Y. Chen's *Animacies* (2012) which explores ideas of the animate/inanimate using race, sexuality, and linguistics, and Kuura Irni's "Queering Multispecies Bonding" (2020) which questions human/non-human relations. Each of

these texts has also contributed to my understanding of ecofeminism, as well as introduced me to queer ecologies, and prepared me to critically analyze people, culture, and environment in Appalachia. With a more robust understanding of queer ecologies I am able to examine the queer potential of Appalachian culture and environment, contributing to the ways I imagine change and futurity in the region by deconstructing the cishetro normativity inherent in current organizations of power over vulnerable people and nature.

Additional ecofeminist scholarship translated through embodiment and environmental justice is also found in Federici's *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* (2020) and Alaimo's *Bodily Natures* (2010). These texts are critically engaged in the liberatory politics of embodiment in feminist and environmental work, adding important and intimately material perspective to ecofeminist theory. Federici (2020) explores labor, reproduction, identity, discipline, and exploitation at the scale of the body, ultimately reflecting on the revolutionary potential of an unalienated body and pursuing joy through embodiment. Flowing from this commentary with special attention to environmental justice, Alaimo (2010) incorporates permeability into ideas of embodiment. Alaimo argues it is necessary to understand how this permeable body is affected by environmental harms and transformed into something new with revolutionary potential. Furthermore, using trans-corporeality, we can understand both body and land and changeable and relational in a way that resists cultural norms that uphold our current oppressive capitalist, patriarchal society.

Maternalism

Contemporary feminism is highly interested in care work: the people who do it, how it is valued, and its relationship to normatively productive labor. Intertwined yet distinct in this conversation is maternalism. Sometimes in agreement and sometimes at odds with the politics of care work, maternalism is concerned with motherhood and its political concerns and possibilities. Reviewing the history of maternalism and its political uses Stavrianos (2015) reviews its various fluctuations in popularity through time and the contexts of its use. Maternalism was quite popular during the first wave of feminism, and after a decline in usage during the mid to late 1900s, it is coming back into vogue again. Though maternalism has been used frequently by feminist movements, maternalism is not necessarily feminist work (Stavrianos, 2015). Stavrianos examines the strengths and weaknesses of maternalist frameworks, finding that caution must be taken in regard to political motherhood's claims to being apolitical, the reification of gendered norms, a narrow definition of what motherhood can include, and exposing activists to further gendered violence. These identified issues must be addressed to fully enjoy the strengths of maternalist frameworks which include flexible rhetoric, general legibility as an organizing identity, large numbers of mobilized people, pre-existing organizational skills, and a deeply ingrained cultural idea of motherhood associated with positive characteristics such as superior morals and care. Stavrianos (2015) concludes that maternalist frameworks are currently becoming more popular in political organizing, and this shift could be a very powerful force for positive change if engaged with critically. Werbner (1999) does a similar historical review to Stavrianos while adding the important dimension of the public/private spheres. Citizenship and civic participation are performed

in the public and typically understood as masculine, and women have been historically relegated to the private sphere doing the feminine work of reproduction. Maternalist participation in politics upsets this separation, giving women more political power and in some ways feminizing politics with ethics of care (Werbner, 1999).

Carreon & Moghadam (2015) and Briggs (2018) take a more contemporary view of maternalism and its relevance. Carreon & Moghadam (2015) use case studies to display how the normative identity and values of motherhood can be used for any range of radical to conservative aims. The authors organize their insights about activist mothering through maternalism-from-above and maternalism-from-below. The former is a strategy used by people in power through institutions such as the government or military. The latter is populated by people separate from power and is usually activism against institutions "in an enactment of bottom-up self-empowerment," (Carreon & Moghadam, 2015, p.21). Brigg's book *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics* (2018) is not explicitly about maternalism, yet contextualizes care work in the political landscape of contemporary America in important ways for this thesis. Briggs focuses on how reproductive labor's politicization has caused reproductive politics to pervade all contemporary political issues due to the neoliberal states' aversion to supporting care work and the absorption of all able laborers into the arena of productive labor. Brigg's analysis and framing of reproductive labor and politics is important to stay in touch with the greater repercussions of maternalism (Briggs, 2018).

Motherhood (or maternalism) and feminism also have a troubled history which is part of the context of this scholarship, but recounting and analyzing this specific story is not the goal of this work. Maternalism and feminism, regardless of their prioritization of

the concerns of women, do not necessarily have the same goals. As Carreon and Moghadam explore in "Resistance is Fertile" (2015), Maternalist politics can be deployed for both conservative and liberal politics by grassroots and state-sanctioned groups in the interest of goals that are at times reinforcing patriarchy and the material and cultural subservience of women.

Research into political motherhood and maternalism is expanded and complemented by Hancock's *The Politics of Disgust* (2004) and Edin & Kefalas *Promises that I Can Keep* (2011). Both texts do political analyses of motherhood in poverty, though each with specific niches. Hancock (2004) examines the vilification of the 'welfare queen' in the 1980s and the weaponization of disgust against black women. The soured affective relationship that people have with women and disgust is a potent and effective tool to diminish the struggles of poor women of color endeavoring to care for their children. Edin and Kefalas (2011) examine poor women's commitment to motherhood over all other goals in life, often seeing motherhood as their only route to achieving a respectable identity under the constraints of their position in society.

Appalachian Context

After exploring these ecofeminist and maternalist texts, I was eager to ground my interest in ecofeminist and maternalist studies in the context of place in line with my training in geography. Working from an experiential understanding of cultural and material relations with land in Appalachia from growing up in the region, I suspected there would be rich possibilities for ecofeminist inquiry into Appalachia. Indeed, a variety of ethnographic, historical, and critical texts about gender, labor, identity, and environment in Appalachia contribute important insights to understanding the specific

synergy between gender and land in the region, as well as the overall liberatory potential of the region.

The 'Appalachian identity' and its plethora of implications in Appalachian studies is a continuous discussion, and texts which examine and problematize the normative Appalachian identity and region are abundant. For example, in *Uneven Ground* (2013) Ronald Eller reviews the history of the region in relation to the rest of the country and the inequality that shapes it. Articles like "Appalachian Identity Roundtable" (Smith, et al., 2010), "The Hollow and the Ghetto: Space, Race, and the Politics of Poverty" (White, 2007), and *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia* (Fisher & Smith, 2012) have all done work to interrogate perceptions of Appalachia and assess the liberatory potential of the region and identity.

Eller (2013) focuses on Appalachia's history and development, and the region's dual role of backward other to leverage the modernity of the whole country and national philanthropy cause. With a special eye for industrial development and policy choices, Eller analyzes Appalachia's progress, or lack thereof. Eller's conclusions about Appalahia's future development, as well as its parallel story to America as a whole, call us to imagine bigger and understand that "transformational change seldom comes from within institutions of power" (Eller, 2013, p. 264). Eller's insight on regional political transformation and grassroots change is instructive to the future of activism in Appalachia, and echoes an ecofeminist sensibility regarding power dynamics.

Eller's (2013) call to action is extended by Smith, et al. (2010) and White (2007) whose work negotiates the politics of the almost mythological 'Appalachian identity' in their research. In the conversations about change and progress scholars such as Eller

(2013) begin, the role of a unified Appalachian identity seems intuitive for organizing, but Smith, et al. (2010) and White (2007) problematize the instinct to organize Appalachian folk around purely their Appalachian-ness.

Smith, et al. (2010) posits identity as having the potential for resistance, yet questions what Appalachian identity really is. Smith, et al. (2010) claims that Appalachia is perceived to be racially, politically, and economically heterogeneous, but this obscures the complex history of the region. Appalachia has been other for America, as well as internally othered minority groups with as much violence as anywhere else in America. Simtih, et al. (2010), also explores how Appalachia has been romanticized as an agrarian community suspended in time, free of modernity's ills. This critical analysis of the region and its history calls into question the validity and ethics of the 'sense of place' of Appalachia, as well as the outside perception of the region. Fisher & Smith (2012) pick up the thread of sense of place in Appalachia, working to realize the revolutionary potential of holding on to place in the face of capitalism and globalization's compression of space and time, the power of public spaces, and the power of the commons.

White (2007) uses the theory of internal colonies to assess Appalachia's revolutionary potential through racial, labor, and cultural conditions. For similar reasons cited by Smith, et al. (2010), White concludes that Appalachia cannot be a fully realized internal colony because of the region's racist history and the region's current failure to act as a resistant identity the way true internal colonies do. These critiques of Appalachian identity and sense of place form a road map of challenges that must be overcome for Appalachian people to begin to effect more equitable and empathetic

change. Using an ecofeminist and queer lens on the issues of the region, as this thesis does, is part of said journey to equitable and empathetic change.

Appalachian scholars and activists have also started the difficult work of bringing diverse identities, experiences, and critique into the field. Queer critique and scholarship are quickly gaining more of a foothold in the field through the work of McNeill (2022) and Garringer (2017). McNeill's *Y'all Means All* (2022) and Garringer's "Fabulachians" (2017) challenge the stereotype of the meager existence of country queers - bringing to light the essential role queer individuals and community play in the building of Appalachia and the joy cultivated in the region. Garringer (2017) takes an ethnographic route, while McNeill (2022) brings the voices of queer Appalachians to the forefront using interdisciplinary essays to tell stories of history, resistance, and identity. Queer folk are challenging normative ways of being and knowing by building solidarity, challenging capitalism, and organizing to cultivate justice in mountain communities (Garringer, 2017; McNeill, 2022). The work that queer people are doing in Appalachia is essential to the equitable and empathetic future that many are wishing for.

Long's "Cripistemology of Appalachia" (2022) is an important example of leading-edge queer Appalachian scholarship. Long (2022) looks into the intersection of disability studies and Appalachian studies to examine the cultural tradition of othering Appalachia as a disability to America's 'body' and the experience of being disabled in Appalachia. Long (2022) identifies the stereotypes prescribed to Appalachia, such as inbred, stupid, etc., as signifiers of disability to the greater body of America. This form of othering is an important part of assessing the role Appalachia plays in the cultural and philosophical landscape of the country. Long (2022) also acknowledges the specific

dimensions of disability that come with the history of mining in Appalachia – black lung disease and other physical disabilities caused by harsh labor conditions and poor healthcare in the region. Long's (2022) commentary is exciting, bringing the less prominent field of disability studies into the forefront of Appalachian studies and adds a much-needed dimension of analysis to the region's scholarship. Long (2022), as well as the queer scholarship of McNeill (2022) and Garringer (2017), do imperative work to fight back against the homogeneous appearance of the people and community of Appalachia. Queer and disability scholarship are an integral part of the liberatory potential of Appalachia, offering new ways to assess our reality and demanding that vulnerable people and communities are acknowledged and served.

Historical and ethnographic texts regarding women and activism in Appalachia are a cornerstone of my work, providing intimate details about the thoughts and lives of women in the region. These texts offer an important look into activist's motivations and tools, as well as the challenges they face. Bell's influential contribution to the field of Appalachian studies, *Our Roots Run Deep as Ironweed* (2013), recounts the personal experiences of women activists in central Appalachia working against environmental degradation through interviews and photos. With a wide variety of activists and forms of involvement, Bell (2013) shows the various ways that extractive industries are affecting the communities of the region, and the ways that women community leaders are acting against these injustices. More recently, Wilkerson's *To Live Here You Have to Fight* (2019) has offered a historical account of women's activism in the region. Wilkerson adds important temporal context to work such as Bell (2013), as well as highlighting a wider variety of issues women have been involved in organizing around in Appalachia.

Shifting towards Appalachian women's navigation of family, financial stress, and local politics, Duncan's *Worlds Apart* (2015) and Scott's "My Mothers, (Grand)Daughters, and Me" (2016) also combine historical account, ethnographic work, and gender analysis to tell stories about women in Appalachia. Duncan's (2015) work examines spatial distribution of wealth, poverty, disability, and health. Duncan (2015) also describes complicated social relationships layered on top of these material conditions. This commentary necessarily has gendered outcomes due to women's role in reproductive labor. Women's account of family dynamics, a nearly feudalist organization of power in the coalfields, and struggles with employment paint a vivid picture of the gendered struggles of poverty in Appalachia (Duncan, 2015). Scott (2016) does a historical review of the women in her own family and their residency in Appalachia and how they navigated labor, marriage, motherhood, migration, and the opioid crisis. Both Scott (2016) and Duncan (2015), as well as aforementioned Bell (2013) and Wilkerson (2019), leave us with messages regarding the importance of imagination, women's experiences, and the critical power of what narratives are shared. These ideas are integral to my research into the motherhood narrative in activism against extractive industry, demonstrating the power of these women's activism, the futures being shaped by their work, and what power is gained or lost in these narratives.

When referring to the extractive industry in this thesis, I will often be discussing contemporary mountaintop removal (MTR). Mountaintop removal is a type of surface coal mining that basically entails blowing the tops off of mountains to directly access coal seams, removing the coal, and using the rubble to backfill the adjacent valley (US EPA, 2022). Coal in Appalachia was historically mined in shafts, but modern technology

has made MTR more popular and efficient (Zipper et al., 2021). Other aspects of extractive energy infrastructure like fracking and pipelines are also becoming increasingly present in the region with their own unique social and environmental risks ("Fracked Gas in Appalachia," n.d.). The Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP), has been a particularly contentious site. In construction to run for 303 miles through West Virginia and Virginia, the pipeline has garnered years of active resistance from residents turned activists ("Mountain Valley Pipeline," n.d.).

My Questions

Bringing together knowledge from geography, environmental studies, women gender and sexuality studies, political science, and Appalachian Studies I explore inequality, justice, and potentially liberatory futures in central Appalachia by examining motherhood narratives of resistance to the extractive industry. Ethnographic texts and interview data about women activists in the region repeatedly tell the story of women's actions motivated by their children, families, and duty to protect land and community. These stories are accompanied by gendered stereotypes including explicit associations between women and nature, assumptions of women's inherent nurturing role, and the general absence of men from both reproductive labor and activism. This pattern is seen in works like Bell (2013) which demonstrates it in activist's own stories, and Caretta (2020) which shows how the woman-nature connection is still perpetuated in academic literature and is antithetical to the frameworks of ecofeminism and queer ecology. The implications of strengthening the woman-nature connection and gender roles in Appalachian activism through this narrative are dangerous for activists, as well as jeopardizing overall visions of liberatory futures for people and land in Appalachia.

In this critical analysis, I use perspectives from environmental justice, ecofeminism, maternalism, and queer ecology to delve into the way the motherhood narrative is used as a tool to garner power for women in Appalachia. I am interested in how reliance on this narrative by activists, news sources, and our larger culture might be explained as well as problematized. This inquiry into the prevalence and utility of the motherhood narrative will garner important insight into the landscape of activism in Appalachia and offer clues to the future of environmental justice work.

This thesis aims to answer two questions. First, why is the mother identity as a narrative invoked so frequently in the context of resistance to the extractive industry in central Appalachia? Second, what are the strengths and flaws of the motherhood narrative in central Appalachian activism? To answer these questions, I will analyze how the narrative of motherhood allows predominantly white cis hetero women activists to resist the disgust that is associated both with their residency in the Appalachian region and their gender identity to gain power and respectability necessary to organize and act against extractive industry. Further, holding on to the narrative of motherhood is compatible with the expectations for gendered care, labor, and maintenance of the bounded home environment and the more diffuse natural environment. In this way, activists are able to advocate against extractive industry in a way that is effective and congruent to their overall expected role in society.

I will also criticize the motherhood narrative for being anti-feminist, reifying woman-nature essentialism, exclusionary, and obscuring the work of marginalized activists. Although the nurturing and dutiful mother is a potent and deeply held sociocultural identity, the current maternalist frameworks are exclusionary and harmful to

several groups of people such as BIPOC, queer people, men, and other community members that cannot benefit from and engage with the motherhood narrative in the same way as white cis hetero women. While acknowledging the considerable shortcomings of current discourses based on the motherhood narrative in Appalachian activism against extractive industry, I will explore how the strengths of maternalism might be part of future activism in the region. Thus, I will reflect on avenues for the development of meaningful activism in Appalachia which are more intersectional and more equitably platform activists.

This research will address a lack of critical ecological feminist analysis of gender dynamics in Appalachian environmental activism while adding to the growing body of contemporary critical work on Appalachia's social and cultural conditions. Critical studies of disability and queer issues are finding traction in Appalachian studies, exemplified by the new Speculative Fabulation: Queering Appalachian Futurisms (2022) ASA journal edition that came out in 2022, but ecofeminism, politics of disgust, embodiment, and other branches of feminist thought are not being utilized to their fullest extent to explore the specific gendered experiences in Appalachia. This work will also add to the literature exploring more equitable and radical community building in Appalachia, the literature on women and queer people in feminist activism, and understandings and methodology of resistance to fossil fuel industry propelling climate change.

Methodology

This thesis draws upon several different fields of scholarship. Primarily I am a student of geography and environmental studies, while women, gender, and sexuality studies, Appalachian studies, and political science have also made significant impacts on my interests and scholarship. In the following chapter, I will detail the methods that I will use to conduct my research. This includes my relationship to the work, the type of analysis I am conducting, the data sample, coding, my theoretical standpoints, and so on. I also detail my theoretical standpoints as they inform my methodology, and my methodology must be able to sufficiently represent my theoretical standpoints.

Theoretical Framework

Ecofeminism

Though texts regarding ecofeminism and motherhood/maternalism have already been reviewed in "Literature and Questions," it is important to the theoretical aspects of this thesis for my analytical frameworks to be established clearly. What exactly ecofeminism is and what people, behavior, and attitudes fall under "mother" are both points of debate. To clarify where I stand on these topics and to strengthen my theoretical frameworks, I will explain my current standpoints on ecofeminism and motherhood/maternalism.

My ecofeminist frameworks in use here are not ontological in nature. Ecofeminism in the past has been rightly criticized for being essentialist, and I am not using such tools in my analytical work here. Ecofeminisms that are criticized for essentialism are often making some kind of ontological claim about women, nature, or both and claiming to draw power from such a connection. This 'reclamation' of power

through the woman-nature connection fails to leave behind the hierarchy and essentialism of the current organization of power over women and nature – therefore failing to reach any libratory politic.

The ecofeminism that I utilize is much more concerned with material and cultural linkages that place women in relation to nature far more often than men. This perspective is informed by the feminist historical work of Carolyn Merchant (1990) and Silvia Federici (2014) which examines the ways that the massive changes in labor practice and land ownership during the transition to capitalism bound women and nature as unfortunate and exploited bedfellows. This sort of ecofeminist scholarship does justice to the socially constructed connections and attributes, such as the feminization of nature and the naturalization of feminine subservience, that have resulted in the proximity of women and nature. The ideas of ecofeminism are interesting and potentially liberatory, therefore I feel they should be reanalyzed and reinvigorated after the general abandonment of ecofeminist thought after the 1980s and 1990s.

Val Plumwood in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1994) thoroughly unpacks the cultural history and continued reality of dualism's role in western society, clearly indicating the social constructions which place women and nature in such close proximity. Plumwood (1994) posits that dualism "results from a certain kind of denied dependency on a subordinated other. This relationship of denied dependency determines a certain kind of logical structure in which the denial and the relation of domination/subordination shape the identity of both the relata," (p. 41). Plumwood (1994) also defines dualism as a form of difference that places the subordinate in "an inferior and alien realm" (p. 42) which naturalizes power and difference. These dualisms

facilitate domination and accumulation by serving as justifications, and the mutually constitutive relationship makes the liberation of the subordinate group very difficult (Plumwood, 1994).

Plumwood (1994) details some prominent dualisms such as human/nature, culture/nature, male/female, reason/nature, rationality/animality (nature), production/reproduction (nature), and self/other. These pairs consistently push women and nature into subordinate positions, and naturalize the oppression of non-men, people of color, the poor and working class, and nature.

Though I understand that the woman-nature connection is socially constructed, it is also imperative to also fully realize the physical violence and material deprivation that results from the aforementioned dualisms which construct and sustain the woman-nature connection. Federici (2014) details historical violence against the female and feminine through witch trials. Daly's (1979) work regarding modern gynecology practices communicates the deep physical and affective pain inflicted by contemporary iterations of the woman-nature connection through medical practice. Though I disagree with Daly's (1979) attitudes on gender essentialism and transness, her writing still holds value to me in the ways that it captures the visceral experiences and pain inflicted upon people.

Scholars such as Kirk (1997) question the possibility of enmeshment between ecofeminism and environmental justice, yet in this paper I do so. Kirk proposes common ground between the two standpoints can be found in common interest in environmental health, food production, and making cities livable (Kirk, 1997, p. 14). Though I do not disagree with this assessment in the overlap between ecofeminism and environmental justice, in this thesis the commonality between the two standpoints is through labor. The

gendered labor of maintaining home, children, and environment is situated by ecofeminism and prompts many women to become environmental justice activists.

Political Motherhood, Maternalism, and Care Work

The figure of a mother is incredibly iconic in society. Though translated through a myriad of different cultures, motherhood maintains a cultural legibility that is quite impressive and wields potent political power. The political power of motherhood has been studied thoroughly, and some of this scholarship is explored in my literature review. Moving forward from the history and use of maternalist politics, it is necessary to ask who exactly mothers are and if this definition is adequate for the scope of this work. Ruddick (1995) states that "to be a 'mother' is to take upon oneself the responsibility of childcare, making its work a regular and substantial part of one's working life," (p.17). This definition places motherhood in relation to time, labor, and affect as opposed to a certain biological or gendered imperative. This sex and genderless framework of motherhood is supported by other maternalist scholars such as Stavrianos (2015), scholars interested in reproductive labor like Briggs (2016), as well as queer scholars such as Gibson (2014) exploring and problematizing the construction of family and labor of care. Additional examples of motherhood's flexible frameworks are othermothers in the Black community. These mothers normally have no formal familial tie to the young people in their care, further diversifying the avenues for people to come into being mothers (Stavrianos, 2015).

Though the task of decoupling motherhood from normative sex and gender roles has begun, it is also important to acknowledge that motherhood thus far in history has been disproportionately a role fulfilled by women (Ruddick, 1995, pp. 40-41). I share Brigg's

(2016) continued hesitation with “mother” and “motherhood,” yet have similarly not found a lexicon that functions better. So, I will continue, for the time being, to rely on the language of motherhood and the stipulations I can make upon it.

In contemporary feminist studies, the language of care work has become a well-loved tool for discussing reproductive and feminized labor. How do motherhood and care work fit together? Ruddick (1995) argues that they are distinct, and that the significance of their separate names should not be downplayed. Though many types of mothering labor are also care labor, they are not always the same. Caring for a sick person or an elderly family member is surely care labor, but necessarily different from doing the labor of caring for a child (pp. 46-47). I also argue that the political significance of motherhood sets it apart from generalized care work. Care work has a normative connection to gendered labor, yet it avoids the language of motherhood which calls up deeply held cultural ideas about mothers, as well as personal experiences and memory. This is especially relevant since this thesis concerns itself with the rhetoric and narrative of motherhood in activism, not a review or analysis of mothers and their actions.

Discourse Analysis

I conduct a Foucauldian discourse analysis using qualitative methods and critical theoretical frameworks to garner new insights from already published work. Though the tools of this analysis were laid out by previous scholars writing these texts, I found myself asking questions about human-nature relations and the nature/culture dualism that was not explored by Appalachian scholars, even though it seemed to me that the political and natural history of the region would put the relationship in a unique state of stress. Using a critical approach to ecofeminism, maternalism, queer ecology, and environmental

justice, I have reanalyzed the gendered narratives of activism in Appalachia against the extractive industry and laid out my own claims which are alternative perspectives based on critical gendered and ecological study not explored in the literature I draw from. I do not bring together these texts to test a hypothesis, but rather I have brought together a variety of theoretical and qualitative sources to analyze empirical examples of the contemporary narrative of motherhood in Appalachia. The scope of this project is not focused on the individual activists or instances of environmental resistance but on the overarching discourse and narrative surrounding these ideas and what cultural and philosophical norms uphold said narrative.

Foucauldian discourse analysis is a geographic method of research that aims to understand why some forms of thinking, being, and doing are dominant and seen as 'true,' while alternative ways of thinking, being, and doing do not gain the same power (Waitt, 2016, p. 288). Foucault defined discourse as writing or speech which worked together to convince people of the truth and existence of meanings and representations they see in the world. These meanings and representations subsequently have the power to affect what people say, do, experience, and become (Waitt, 2016, p. 289). In the interest of completing a thorough discourse analysis of the motherhood narrative, I have collected a diverse sample. A sample with a wide variety of texts supports my commitment to intertextuality in this thesis. Intertextuality describes the belief that meanings are "produced as a series of relationships between texts, rather than residing within the text itself," (Waitt, 2016, p. 293). This focus on relational meaning-building aptly captures how the motherhood narrative is created, perpetuated, and growing from many sources.

Discourse analysis is an effective form of analysis for my questions because its wide consideration of discourse also takes into account the active role of audiences of discourse and the power wielded over them. This first component, the audience's autonomy over interpretation, is affected by social, spatial, and temporal factors (Waitt, 2016, p. 302). In the case of this thesis, the motherhood narrative will be affected by the spatial Appalachian context, as well as social factors of class, gender, and Appalachian culture. The second component is Foucault's power of persuasion. Persuasion is "disciplinary power that operates through knowledge," (Waitt, 2016, p. 304). Discussing persuasion will allow me to demonstrate how the motherhood narrative interacts with power dynamics and expected gender roles.

Sample

Why is the mother identity as a narrative invoked so frequently in the context of resistance to the extractive industry in central Appalachia? What are the strengths and flaws of the motherhood narrative in central Appalachian activism? In order to answer these questions, I analyze a variety of sources to gain a holistic understanding of the motherhood narrative from many different angles. Especially in "Motherhood: An Activist's Multitool," I interact closely with four main sources which are based on interviews with central Appalachian women activists who are resisting extractive industry. These sources are also integral to "Is the Multitool Rusted," yet to most effectively answer the second research question I use additional sources which challenge the core four.

When selecting my core four sources, my priorities were variety, substantive interview data, and author commentary. Each source fulfills important aspects of these

goals. While there are many relevant pieces of literature about women involved in activism in Appalachia, such as Gipe (2015), Pancake (2015), and Kingsolver (2013), the four main components of my sample include direct participant interviews from environmental activists in central Appalachia, which is imperative to addressing my research questions.

First, Bell (2013) is a well-known and respected author in Appalachian studies and includes extensive oral history interviews with twelve participant activists. The amount of participant interview data in this text makes it an extremely valuable source. Further, Bell (2013) spends little time with her own scholarly analysis, dedicating the vast majority of the text to the interviewees. Bell's interview questions also prompt participants to share information about not just their activism, but also their personal lives, relationships, family history, and so on. This information paints a dynamic picture of the activists and their lives in the context of their families and community. Activists in Bell (2013) are primarily from southern West Virginia, with only one participant interviewee from eastern Kentucky. The activists are resisting mountaintop removal and the negative effects on the surrounding people and environment associated with the mining activity. That being said, participant activists were dealing with different aspects of mountaintop removal: coal dust from processing, overloaded coal trucks, contaminated water, flooding, etc. Bell (2013) has the highest amount of interview data of the four main texts and therefore is quoted directly the most frequently. Overall, Bell (2013) is an integral source in this thesis because of its volume and variety of interview data.

Caretta (2020) and Caretta et al (2020) are based on the same set of interviews with 25 water stewards from West Virginia. Each article includes several block quotes

alongside a majority of paraphrasing and Caretta's own scholarly analysis and claims. This source adds to the sample by providing a slightly different arena of environmental activism against extractive industry, and more insight into a scholarly framing of women's activism in central Appalachia. Though the participant interview quotes are undeniably helpful, the strength of Caretta's articles is their contribution to my understanding of scholarly attitudes regarding the motherhood narrative. These sources have the highest proportion of author commentary and analysis out of the four main sources in the sample.

Walter (2020) is a graphic novel based on three real-life activists' resistance to injection wells in Athens County, OH. The interviewees are each residents of Athens County and mothers, yet have vastly different backgrounds and methodologies regarding their activism. Walter (2020) provides important breadth to the sources in this thesis with participant interviewees from Appalachian Ohio and creative representation through the format of a graphic novel. Being able to analyze Walter's visual depiction of the activists adds dimension to my arguments, as well as the additional quotes from activists.

In addition to these four core texts, I include additional sources including some images, news coverage of activists, and documentaries. These supplementary sources support the core four components of the sample and demonstrate variations in the motherhood narrative coming from places other than activists and scholars. These sources were identified with keyword searches (activism, women, Appalachia, mother, MTR, MVP, etc.), and selected for relevance to the questions and themes of this thesis.

Though I will be interacting with the interview data frequently and extensively to analyze participant activists' statements and experiences, the interview data is not a true

primary source. The filtering and framing of this data by the original authors of these texts is an important consideration. Certainly, each author has chosen to include or exclude certain quotes that are irrelevant to their specific arguments, wrote their own questions, and other various methods of filtering their data to suit their own research questions. In this regard, each of the four core texts has two sources folded into one. First, the participant interview data was communicated through quotes and paraphrased ideas. Second, the author's own organization of the data, scholarly analysis of the data, conclusions about activists, and internal biases. Both are of interest to me in this thesis, as the motherhood narrative is perpetuated and interacted with by a multitude of sources: activists, scholars, journalists, documentarians, etc.

I originally read Bell (2013), and Caretta (2020) a year before I started to write this thesis, and I periodically referenced them in the interim, resulting in a robust familiarity with the texts. In this regard, I began coding Bell (2013) with a few themes I knew were already present. Bell (2013) was also a good choice for the first source to code, as it was the longest and most interview-dense text and would help me identify more nuanced themes to code. To begin analyzing the texts in reference to my research questions, I established codes for motherhood, woman-nature connection, and experienced environmental degradation based on my previous reading of the text and literature such as Merchant (1990) which guide my analysis. More fine-tuned codes branching off of the first three include compromised home environments, emotional distress, violence/threats, considerations of futurity, accessibility of activism, commentary on men, and miscellaneous gendered commentary.

With a coding system generated based on my analysis of Bell (2013), I applied the full set of codes to the rest of the texts, coding the subsequent three in the same manner as I did for Bell (2013). As Caretta (2020) and Caretta et al. (2020) contained several interview excerpts but predominantly scholarly analysis, my own coding of these sources was limited to those few excerpts. Each of the three interviews included and illustrated by Walter (2020) held important insight from the participants, and there was some brief scholarly analysis from the author at the conclusion of the text.

Since I am conducting secondary research it is important to acknowledge the narratives and perspectives I am interacting with are bounded by preexisting scholarship. Especially regarding the existing texts on activists in Appalachia, the stories told and people focused on are almost exclusively white, working-class, cis-gendered, heterosexual women. The critical dimensions of race, class, and gender are therefore underrepresented in my analysis of activists, with race being the least represented dimension. In subsequent research on these topics, it is my hope that scholars with expertise in critical race, class, and gender studies conducting interviews and ethnographic work will contribute primary data on the stories of people of color, people in poverty, and gender-nonconforming people in Appalachia fighting against the extractive industry.

Reflexivity

In an effort to make clear that my research and claims are informed by specific scholarship and my own experiences and identities, I will use the first-person point of view in this paper. I do this in the fashion of other feminist scholars and the practices that they have started to open up scholarship to more styles of writing and acknowledge

standpoint theory (Narayan, 2004; Harding, 1986) which places scholarship soundly in the subjective reality of its making. I grew up middle-class in Appalachia, calling West Virginia my home. I identify as a queer, cis-gendered woman, and I am white. These identities provide insight, as well as leave me with blind spots in my understanding and thought processes. With this set of experiences, as well as subsequent scholarship on these topics, I feel competent in discussing gendered experiences as a racial majority, Appalachian politics and experience, and queer community in Appalachia. Of course, my experiences in these arenas are not comprehensively representative of all gendered, Appalachian, and queer experiences. I simply feel confident in my personal place in conversations on these topics. With a lack of lived experience and limited educational exposure to other identity-based topics such as race and disability, I am a more appropriate listener in discussion and scholarship. In this thesis, I will do my best to interrogate and remedy those gaps to provide equitable scholarship.

The personal context of my academic work is also heavily influenced by the work of bell hooks, specifically her dialogue with Cornel West in *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life* (2017). The path of an intellectual is not one that is easy to choose, especially for those belonging to a marginalized group. Though I have vastly different life experiences than hooks regarding race, I am called in by her situating of intellectualism as an act of resistance. Hooks says:

> "Never thinking of intellectual work as being in any way divorced from the politics of everyday life, I consciously chose to become an intellectual because it was that work which allowed me to make sense of my reality and the world around me, to confront and comprehend the concrete. This experience provided the groundwork for my understanding that intellectual life need not lead one to be estranged from community but rather might enable one to participate more fully in the life of family and community. It early confirmed what Black leaders in the 19th century well knew—that intellectual work is a necessary part of liberation

> struggle, central to the efforts of all oppressed and/or exploited people who would move from object to subject, who would decolonize and liberate their minds." (p. 150, 2017)

With this framework of intellectual work hooks reevaluates academic pursuits as an essential part of liberatory projects.

What is to Come

In "Motherhood: An Activist's Multitool," I will address my first research question: "Why is the mother identity invoked as a narrative so frequently in the context of resistance to the extractive industry in central Appalachia?" I reference core text interview data in tandem with qualitative and theoretical texts regarding Appalachia, gender, motherhood, poverty, and environmental justice in this chapter. I use said texts to explain the social, cultural, and material conditions Appalachian women activists operate under that make the mother identity so effective as a narrative tool to gain respect and power to organize against extractive industry. The empirical interview data utilized in "Motherhood: An Activist's Multitool" includes shared stories and insight from their activism, often reflecting on gender dynamics and care work. My core qualitative and theoretical framework in this chapter is influenced by "Resistance is Fertile" (Carreon & Moghadam, 2015), *The Death of Nature* (Merchant, 1990), and *The Politics of Disgust* (Hancock, 2004). These texts contribute to understanding patterns in political motherhood, the long-standing and troubled association between women and nature, the barriers that poor mothers face, and the greater societal implications of these normative ideas about gender and nature.

By using the presently described sources, I will delve into what I call the motherhood narrative. This narrative consists of the normative characteristics and

attitudes associated with motherhood, which are used by activists themselves as well as being echoed back to them by various commentators like journalists, academics, and documentary filmmakers. The four main tenets of the motherhood narrative that I have identified are duty, instinct, nurturing, and love. The beginnings of these characteristics' relevance can be seen in the texts reviewed in this section and will be further evidenced by participant interviews and analysis from Bell (2013), Walter (2020), Caretta (2020), and Caretta et al. (2020).

My main claims regarding the first question are as follows. First, the motherhood narrative in Appalachia is augmented by the sense of place that the participant activists describe as an additional part of their motivation to resist extractive industry. Second, the role of motherhood is accessible to women when other powerful and high-status roles are not available. This is supported by texts like Duncan (2014) and Edin & Kefalas (2011). Third, that motherhood is one of the few respectable and politically effective roles for women and displaces the disgust for women and the disgust for Appalachia at large. This is supported by ecofeminist texts like Merchant (1990), Hancock (2004), and the article Carreon & Moghadam (2015). Fourth, women are normatively understood as closer to nature and therefore best suited to its maintenance in addition to reproductive labor. Therefore, when extractive industry interrupts the performance of care work, women must resist the industry as a whole to be able to fully perform their expected labor. This is supported by texts such as Merchant (1990), Federici (2014), and Perkins (2018).

In "Is the Multitool Rusted: Yes, No, Maybe" I will answer my second research question: "What are the strengths and flaws of the motherhood narrative in central Appalachian activism?" To answer this question I will rely slightly less on the interview

texts, bringing in more critical texts to fully realize the strengths and weaknesses of the discourse of motherhood in central Appalachian environmental justice activism. Important texts will include Stavrianos (2015), Merchant (1990), and McNeill (2022). I have endeavored to utilize a variety of sources with the aim of not only understanding what activists are saying about their own work, but also how they are narrated by the media, politicians, and their own community. “Is the Multitool Rusted: Yes, No, Maybe” will also address how activists fit into the wider conversation of environmental justice, critical studies, and liberatory futures.

Strengths of the motherhood narrative include cultural and historical relevance, preexisting organizing skills, community-building strength, flexible metrics of inclusion, and high yield for participation. Each of these characteristics contributes to the success of the motherhood narrative’s use to advance environmental justice work in the region. Some weaknesses of the motherhood narrative include anti-feminist elements, woman-nature essentialism, excluding some groups, and obscuring the work of marginalized activists. These weaknesses make the motherhood narrative harmful to vulnerable groups and lessen the overall efficacy of the motherhood narrative’s use for environmental justice activism.

After answering both of my research questions, I explore the future of the motherhood narrative in central Appalachian environmental justice activism. Though there is certainly much work to do within the environmental justice movement in central Appalachia, I ultimately find the tools at use to be effective and worth salvaging and remaking.

In “Explorations of Liberatory Futures” I will explore the implications of my findings and identify the avenues through which change might be enacted. Despite reflections on the future of Appalachian activism and community, ultimately finding solutions in an evidence-based way is not within the scope of this project. I claim that by using the tools of ecofeminism and critical scholarship to build a more equitable and empathetic community we might sustain activism, uplift care ethics, and bring more diverse activists to the forefront of the narrative of resistance in the region.

“Maybe the Multitool is a Seed!” will conclude this thesis, wrapping up my main findings and claims regarding maternalist narratives in activism against extractive industry in central Appalachia. I will also consider the significance of my work, future research on this topic, and lessons learned from this thesis.

Motherhood: An Activist's Multitool

"Why is the mother identity as a narrative invoked so frequently in the context of resistance to the extractive industry in central Appalachia?" In order to answer this research question, I explore primary sources where activists have shared their own viewpoints on their work to more clearly define the motherhood narrative in subsections "Women Environmental Activists…," "The Motherhood Narrative…," and "Connection to Homeplace and Environment." Then I examine the social conditions, ideologies, and structural barriers that have led to the dominance of the motherhood narrative in this context, as well as theoretical texts that allow me to pull out the themes discussed by activists and the forces that have affected their testimony and actions in subsections "Accessibility," "Respectability," and "Maintenance of Home and Environment." A clear understanding of why the motherhood narrative has become so prominent in central Appalachia will provide a sound and effective foundation for subsequent analysis of the motherhood narrative's strengths and weaknesses in "Is the Multitool Rusted," by illuminating what assets and barriers women environmental activists in central Appalachia are faced with. I find that complying with a regional sense of place expected spheres of labor, as well as easily utilized respect of the motherhood narrative, creates the power that central Appalachian environmental justice activists need to succeed. Understanding these factors is important to understanding the conditions activists act under and why environmental justice discourse is dominated by motherhood.

Women Environmental Activists in Central Appalachia and Scholarly Interpretation

To define more clearly what the motherhood identity and narrative are and the context in which women are using the tools and characteristics that make up the motherhood narrative, I rely primarily on four sources: *Our Roots Run Deep as Ironweed* (Bell, 2013), *Intercepting Injection* (Walter, 2020), and two articles, "Homosocial Stewardship" (Caretta, 2020) and "Women's organizing against Extractivism" (Caretta et al., 2020). The author's analysis of the interviews and the words of the participant interviewees are of interest to me and will be used as sources in this chapter. Though approaching the topic of women's environmental activism from different angles, oral history, a graphic novel, and scholarly articles respectively, each author interacts directly with women involved in environmental justice activism in the region and their experiences of resistance. The author's analysis helps to better understand the participant activist's motivations and craft a larger narrative, while the participant interviews highlight their individual experiences and barriers.

The Motherhood Narrative: Duty, Instinct, Nurturing, Love

Beginning with Bell (2013), her scholarship captures the testimony of women activists explaining why and how they become activists. Bell (2013) begins by situating the participant interviews as part of a larger pattern of women-led environmental justice movements. Martina Caretta's (2020) scholarship situates her work similarly, stipulating that even though many water stewardship organizations have a man leading through formal positions, women in the lower ranks of the organization are the most visible and

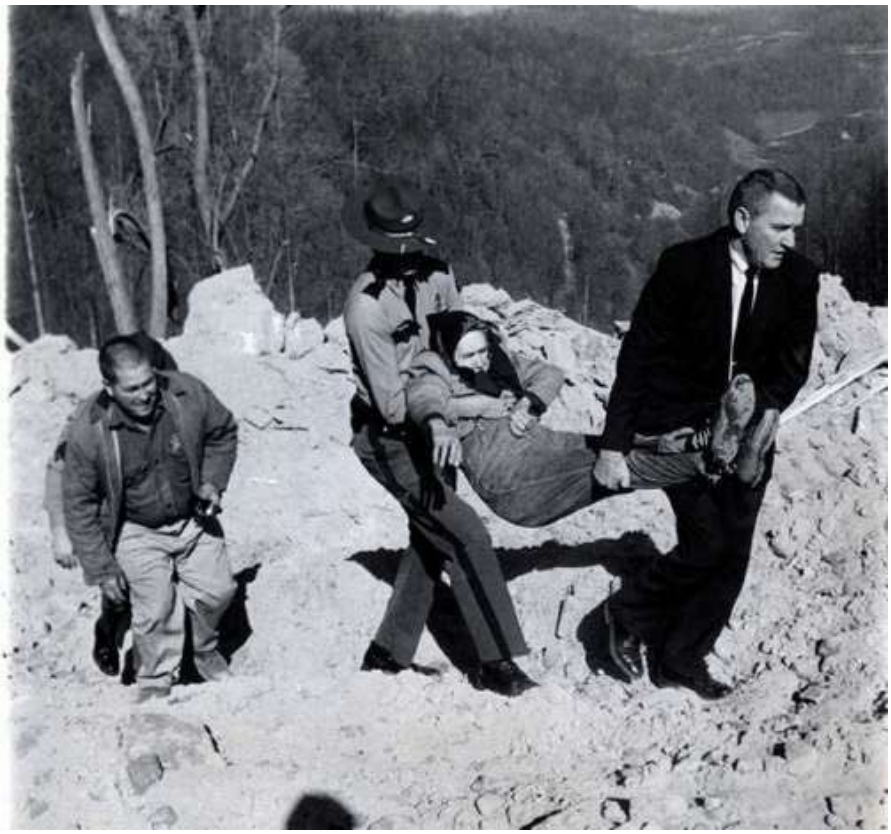
active in making change. Additionally, Bell's (2013) scholarship explains how women in Appalachia have been

> "...falsely stereotyped in the mainstream media as passive and ignorant, [when] Appalachian women have, in actuality, been some of the fiercest and most active advocates for many social justice causes, such as healthcare rights, environmental protection, black-lung benefits, welfare, unionization, and employment rights." (p. 6)

Due to the fervor with which women have fought for the well-being of land and people, Appalachian women have established themselves as a formidable group in the region and beyond.

Figure 3

Ollie "The Widow" Combs



Note. (William Strode, 1965)

For example, Figure 3 shows Ollie "The Widow" Combs being dragged off her property in 1965 while protesting surface mining. This photograph made its way into newspapers all over the country. Wilkerson (2019) details the extensive role
that women have played in social justice movements in Appalachia from labor rights to the grassroots war on poverty, all held together by an acute understanding of the importance of care work. Images such as Figure 3 corroborate Bell's (2013) scholarly claims about Appalachian women's fierce activism and their commitment to land and people through her analysis of participant interviews.

Along with this history of social action, many women have engaged with "activist mothering" which ties together the well-being of family and community as well as builds from an understanding that the labor of mothering is also tied up in fighting oppression (Bell, 2013, p.7). This commitment to social action as a part of mothering extends far past the localized participant examples that Bell (2013) includes in *Our Roots Run Deep As Ironweed*, making activist mothering a concern of mothers across class, race, and region. Bell's (2013) analysis of the motherhood identity's use, especially in the context of environmental justice work, is similar to that of other maternalist scholars such as Stavrianos (2015) and Carreon & Moghadam (2015). Overall, each author used in this chapter is discussing how motherhood has acted as a motivator and a way to garner power for women in central Appalachia resisting extractive industry.

Ultimately, my overarching conclusions corroborated those of Bell's (2013) analysis, in that about two-thirds of the women interviewed stated that they were motivated to take action because they wished to protect the well-being of their children/grandchildren. Further, both Bell (2013) and I identified that this was often

accompanied by a sense of duty to also protect their communities, the mountains, and Appalachian culture. Though this majority is clear, there were some interviewees who did not communicate motherhood as a primary motivator for their activism. Bell (2013) does go on to claim there is a broader "protector identity" at play motivating women beyond motherhood (p. 9). From the brief outline of Bell's (2013) protector identity, I feel that my more flexible definition of motherhood utilized in this thesis is similar if not more encompassing.

Though the interviewees in Walter (2020) also displayed the characteristics of the motherhood narrative. First, similar to the language of Bell's (2013) scholarship and participant interviewees regarding a protector identity, Walter's (2020) participants used the language of a protector, Roxanne defines herself as "a grandmother, an activist, and a protector," (p. 25). Overall, the interviewees in Walter (2020) can be introduced by a quote from participant Felicia describing her motivation to take action against extractive industry, "Act for [my] children, for your neighbors, for everyone taken advantage of by those with money and power," (p. 51). This call to action exemplifies activist mothers' core ethic of protection.

Bell's (2013) participant interviews are an important primary source for my analysis because of the amount of interview data included and interview questions specifically about gender dynamics observed in the activist's lives and work. Once coded, these interviews resulted in illuminating data for my specific analysis of the motherhood identity and narrative in environmental justice activism against the extractive industry in central Appalachia. Interviewees cited a certain grit specific to Appalachian women, and/or their roles as mothers. In these conversations, keywords such as duty, instinct,

nurturing, love, and protector were common and are key terms that I use subsequently to define the motherhood narrative. I also find that even the interviewees that do not explicitly tie their activism to motherhood exemplify the characteristics of the motherhood narrative through their work. The words of participant Debbie Jarell exemplify these themes well,

> "We are Appalachian women, and I believe that I can speak for them as well—our roots run so deep, you can't distinguish us from the earth we live on. It's just a part of us. So, you know, this is us, when you talk about Appalachia you're talking about us. That, plus the fact that the mothering instinct that women have, I think—it's wanting to make things right, wanting to correct something, not wanting the children to be harmed, you know. I think a mothering instinct may have a lot to do with that as well." (Bell, 2013, p. 119)

Jarell's reflection on Appalachian women and their activism shows how women in the region see their role in activism and sustain motivation for the difficult labor of resistance. To address my research questions I specifically focus on the motherhood narrative as communicated in the participant interviews in Bell (2013), Walter (2020), Caretta (2020), and Caretta et al. (2020).

As Bell (2013) states in her analysis in the introduction, the women she interviews see themselves as protectors of their families, community, and land in the face of environmental degradation due to extractive industry. Other characteristics mentioned previously such as duty, instinct, nurturing, and love fall under this protector identity. To better understand these characteristics and how participant interviewees speak about them, I explore each characteristic as represented in each source in detail.

Beginning with duty, most women interviewed, whether using the exact word or not, communicated a sense of obligation or responsibility to act out to protect their family, community, land, etc. In participant Judy Bonds' interview, she explicitly

expresses the sentiment of duty, pulling on threads of the well-being and future of her children and grandchildren and the necessity of clean air and water,

> "Why is it worth it to me? It's because of the future of our children and God's creation, and my soul… It's everyone's child. Everyone's child has to have clean air, and everyone's child has to have clean water, and I want my great-great-grandchildren to be able to live on this earth. Why shouldn't they? Why shouldn't they be able to live on this earth? It's my duty to protect it for them. And that's what I'm doing." (Bell, 2013, p. 156).

Other participant interviewees make similar connections to duty through the imperative to act to protect the well-being and health of their children or grandchildren from coal dust, polluted water, overloaded coal trucks, and the other associated hazards that come with living in the wake of mountaintop removal mining operations. Caretta (2020) interviewed water stewards and her analysis of the interviews identifies a sense of responsibility as a component of the water steward's activism.

Another motivation for the action these women are taking against extractive industry in central Appalachia is an instinct to care and protect which flows from their motherhood. Though used in a similar way to duty, the use of mothering/protecting instinct is distinct in that it calls to a perceived biological imperative instead of a social or emotional one. Participant interviewees report that it is natural and instinctive for them to stand up in the face of injustice and threats to their family's well-being and that the men in their families and communities simply lack this instinct (Bell, 2013, pp. 21-22; Caretta, 2020). A participant interviewee in Caretta (2020) demonstrates this specific biological instinct to protect by stating that "It's in my DNA that I want to see justice, fairness, and equality," (p. 3). Participant interviewee Roxanne feels similarly, talking about an instinct to protect, and that women are fearless due to their roles as protectors of land and people (Walter, 2020, pp. 54-55). This protective instinct expressed by women activists does not

end with family (children, grandchildren, etc.) but can extend to neighbors, ecosystems, and animals, situating mothers as stewards of the entire more than human community (Bell, 2013, p. 79). Participant Madeline corroborates this, explaining that she has the instinct to care for and protect children, elders, families, and communities (Walter, 2020, p. 54).

Moving from duty and instinct as instigators of action for Appalachian mothers resisting extractive industry, one of the principles that shape this action is nurturing. In her interview participant Teri Blanton says, "I think [women are] caregivers, we're the nurturers…" capturing the normative feminine relationship to nurturing life (Bell, 2013, p. 91). Participant interviewee #11 in Caretta (2020) corroborates the role of nurturing in maternalist activism saying that she has an, "almost intuition-kind of thing, or it may be kind of our maternal aspects of caregiving and nurturing young and all that that put us there. I don't know exactly what makes it that way…" (p. 3). This language from participants sets a precedent for the type of gentleness and patience that is generally understood as part of the motherhood relationship, which is therefore extended into the activism of these mothers. Another example of nurturing in participant interviews is Felicia, who characterizes her activism as flowing from her identity as a mother (Walter, 2020, p. 55).

Love deeply permeates the words and actions of the participant interviewees in the core texts. Participant interviewees in Bell (2013) repeatedly communicate their intense love of their homeplaces and their families. Love is simultaneously a motivator to begin to resist the power of extractive industry in the region, what sustains action through violence and isolation, and an outcome for their efforts through finding belonging in

activist and environmentalist communities (Bell, 2013). Women activists in Appalachia take very seriously the emotional power and consequence of their labor to protect land and people – speaking of love, anger, fear, and pride throughout their accounts (Bell, 2013). Caretta et al. (2020) and Bell (2013) participant interviewees both acknowledge this affective aspect of their resistance to extractive industry,

> "This passion and having an emotional attachment to my work is seen as a weakness. It's seen as flighty. Oh like … it's not logical. The industry totally plays on this all the time, saying oh you're just being rash or emotional. Even if you're not. You're a woman so you must be." (Focus group, 22 September 2018) (Caretta et al., 2020, p. 55)

Though Caretta et al. (2020) and Bell (2020) participant interviewees often are belittled for their emotional ties to the work they do, yet affective investment is one of the core reasons for their environmental justice activism (Caretta et al., 2020, pp. 54-55).

These four main tenets of the women activists in central Appalachia resisting extractive industry - duty, instinct, nurturing, and love - come together to form the motherhood narrative. As noted previously in this section, both my own and Bell's (2013) analysis of participant interviews found that two-thirds of the interviewees explicitly cited motherhood as a motivator for their activist work. What about the remaining third? Although they did not specifically discuss motherhood, my analysis shows their accounts still display many, if not all, of the tenets of the motherhood narrative. For example, the 'Sylvester Dustbusters' Pauline Canterberry and Mary Miller never mention motherhood or children as a reason for their actions, yet use the language of being protectors, express deep love for their home and community, and convey a sense of duty to act when other people would not (Bell, 2013, pp. 27- 43). This adoption of the motherhood narrative even by people who do not identify with motherhood, indicates the dominance of the

motherhood narrative in contemporary central Appalachian activism against extractive industry.

The narrative of motherhood is also echoed back to activists through the accounts of journalists and filmmakers. News coverage of the resistance to the Mountain Valley Pipeline referred to activists obstructing construction as a "raging granny" (Smith, 2019) or simply "a grandma" (Sax, 2018), linking their resistance to their motherhood. Another article covering the Mountain Valley Pipeline details a mother and daughter tree sitting together, also highlighting their motherhood, gender roles, and commitment to land and people (Schneider, 2018). Though these articles may not provide the same depth of insight as the projects of Bell (2013), Walter (2020), Caretta (2020), and Caretta et al. (2020), they often express the same characteristics of the motherhood narrative and familiar gender dynamics that interviewees shared.

Documentaries about contemporary resistance to extractive industry in central Appalachia, such as *On Coal River* (Wood, 2017) and *Mountain Top Removal* (O'Connell, 2008), also display women and the motherhood narrative. O'Connell (2008) and Wood (2017) include interviews and coverage of activists also covered in Bell (2013), further solidifying their thoughts and attitudes included in the text. Seeing the motherhood narrative not only used by activists but also by a variety of commentators is compelling because it solidifies the motherhood narrative as the dominant narrative in all spaces concerned with resistance to extractive industry in central Appalachia.

Additionally, although the values and behavior associated with the motherhood narrative are ideals expressed in maternalist frameworks outside of Appalachia, as discussed by participant interviewees in Bell (2013) and Caretta et al. (2020) there is a

distinct element of Appalachian resilience that activists understand as part of their identity and work. This combination of gender and place works to construct a specific narrative of Appalachian motherhood which includes a connection to homeplace and nature.

Connection to Homeplace and Environment

An additional component in the Appalachian motherhood narrative is participant interviewees' specific commitment to land which adds to the normative connection between women and nature. Although the cultural connection between women and nature is pervasive throughout geographic regions and time periods, there are specific connections between women and nature that can be identified in the contemporary activism of central Appalachian women that are noteworthy. The deep connection to homeplace and land that is repeatedly recorded in Appalachia is a topic of frequent scholarship in Appalachian studies. Likewise, each participant interviewee in Bell (2013) and Walter (2020), and the excerpts included in Caretta (2020) and Caretta et al. (2020) express their commitment and love for their homeplaces and the ecosystems they are a part of. In Caretta et al. (2020) participant interviewee #7 describes this feeling,

> "I love West Virginia … Until I came here, and I got my first sense of place and I just absolutely fell in love with it here, so there's the physical component. I love these woods and these trees and these animals … I can't really do that anywhere else, so this is the place that I love, these are the mountains that I have fought for and will fight for and have and will put my life on the line for many times …" (p. 54)

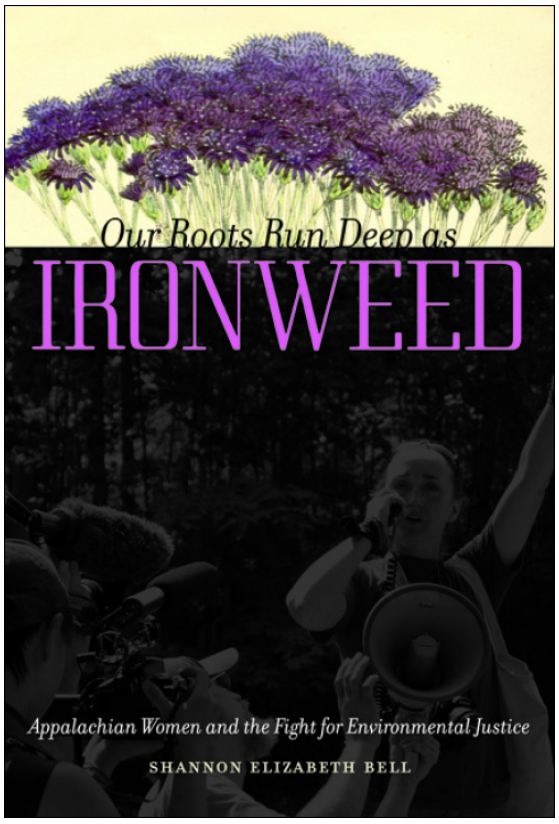
The commitment and love for their homeplaces described by participant interviewees add to their convictions to act against the extractive industry and its negative effects on land. One participant stated that "you can't distinguish us [Appalachian women] from the earth we live on," (Bell, 2013, p. 119). Participant interviewee #12 in Caretta et al. (2020)

characterizes the land at her homeplace to be part of her most essential being, “I grew up in one of the most pristine forest of WV and if they ever got destroyed because of a stupid pipeline or fracking operation, that’s like my heart and soul …” (p. 54). This mindset which intertwines the self and land illuminates how deep the commitment and love of land goes for these activists who participated in interviews.

This robust relationship to homeplace and land often follows a cultural link between the women acting as stewards of the land and the land itself. Even in the title of Bell’s (2013) book, *Our Roots Run Deep As Ironweed*, Bell’s scholarship likens the activists she is interviewing to the hearty ironweed plant.

Figure 4

Cover Art for *Our Roots Run Deep As Ironweed*



Note. (Bell, 2013)

This comparison is heard through Bell's (2013) participant's own testimony, demonstrating Appalachian women's personal ties to the land they live on, and how they imagine their identities as intertwined with the land. Beyond ironweed, participants draw comparisons between Appalachian women and mother bears (p. 21), as well as frequently using the notion of what is natural to describe actions and attitudes in participant interviews (Bell, 2013). By using metaphors of Appalachian flora and fauna to describe themselves, these participants are placing themselves as mirrors of the Appalachian environment and their beloved homeplaces. This connection is also used by journalists and community members speaking about activists, as evidenced by the husband of a tree-sitter likening his wife to a mother bear (Schneider, 2018).

The connection to homeplace and nature is important to the motherhood narrative and its specific context in Appalachia in this case because of women's firm commitment to protecting land with their activism as well as people. In discussing the characteristic of instinct in the motherhood narrative, examples from participant interviewees in Bell (2013) and Walter (2020) both included land, ecosystems, or nature as part of their instinctive and protective duty. Though the motherhood narrative is generally transitive to other regions and contexts, as evidenced by scholars such as Stavrianos (2015) and Carreon & Moghadam (2015), in the cases I am analyzing the sense of place and commitment to homeplace that is characteristic of Appalachia makes the motherhood narrative distinct.

Accessibility

Moving on to the factors that have caused the motherhood narrative to be invoked so frequently, I will henceforth examine how the motherhood narrative's

popularity is bolstered by its accessibility for women. Limited employment, educational opportunities, and low mobility in rural and often poverty-stricken areas in central Appalachia leave women with few options for gaining social and political power (Duncan, 2014). Therefore, there are few effective options to gain power and take action against extractive industry. These barriers leave motherhood as perhaps the most powerful and accessible identity for women to capitalize on. In the absence of the prestige found in other roles more accessible outside of the region, there is always the need for motherhood and the care work involved in it.

When participant interviewee Lorelei Scarboro was asked by Bell (2013) why there were more women involved in resisting extractive industry in central Appalachia she said, "I think it's the job market. I think it's the mono-economy. I think it's no options, no other options. Maybe it's the brotherhood. I'm not sure. Maybe there are just more of us than there are of them," (p. 129). Duncan's (2014) research on poverty, politics, and social conditions in central Appalachian coal fields confirms Scarboro's hypothesis about gender and opportunities. Often focusing on women and families, Duncan (2014) demonstrates the limited opportunities available to women in the region, as well as the barriers they face while making their way through employment, raising kids, and health issues. Duncan (2014) notes that in the absence of social infrastructure, public services, or diverse employment opportunities people can become isolated, leaving the familial unit as one of the few reliable things to rally around. This is further exacerbated for women, as the near-feudalist organization of the coal fields produced an extremely paternalist community where the few powerful mining families with formidable patriarchs have all the power over the community. This organization of power

is effective for maintaining power for the coal patriarchs and detrimental to poor families and women due to few coal jobs available, with most other people working service, public sector jobs, or cobbling together odd jobs – all not paying well (Duncan, 2014).

With Duncan's (2014) insight into these central Appalachian community dynamics, social conditions, and economic landscape, the participant interviewee's actions and attitudes reported in Bell (2013), Walter (2020), Caretta (2020), and Caretta et al. (2020) regarding their families become more clear. Edin and Kefalas's (2011) research on motherhood and identity and meaning-building also help bring the reasoning for mothers' commitment to resisting extractive industry in central Appalachia into focus. The themes seen in Duncan (2014) regarding motherhood are directly studied through Edin and Kefalas's (2011) ethnographic text regarding poverty and motherhood. Edin and Kefalas (2011) seek to understand why poor women prioritize motherhood over all other pursuits in life, including marriage, education, and career. Through speaking with mothers in Philadelphia, PA and Camden, NJ, Edin and Kefalas (2011) uncover patterns regarding how these mothers build their own identities and find meaning in their own lives. Poor women communicated seeing marriage as a distant dream or luxury, but having a child as a necessity to prove themselves and build identity (Edin & Kefalas, 2011, p. 6).

The women interviewed by Edin and Kefalas (2011) heavily prioritized their children's well-being and found employment and marriage to be secondary goals, or simply a means to an end for their children's care. Since meaning-making activities like a job, education, or marriage are not equally available to lower-class women, children have become the primary avenue for validation and fulfillment for lower-class women (Edin &

Kefalas, 2011, p. 206). This confirms the scarcity of high-status roles for women, and the response of women to focus on motherhood. Further, this same sentiment is echoed by participant Lorelei Scarboro, "It's not just what I choose to do, it's also, I think, what I have to do. I've always been a very fierce protector of my kids, and I'm still doing that." (Bell, 2013, pp. 128-129). Though Edin and Kefalas (2011) interviewed mothers in urban areas, many of their findings about motherhood being the most important way for poor women to build meaning and identity in their lives are echoed through the testimony of central Appalachian mothers. Bell's (2013) interview with participant Maria Gunnoe also demonstrates this clearly,

> "The biggest thing that I aspired to do—all I wanted to do was to be a mother. That's all I wanted to do growing up. And the first years of their life, I was a very dedicated mother. And after all this had taken place, in order for me to be a mother, and in order for me to keep my children safe, and ensure my children's future as free American citizens, I've had—it's not an option—I've had to stand up and fight for our rights." (p. 14)

Gunnoe goes on to say that standing up for her children's health is her link to who is fundamentally (p. 21), and this sentiment is far from unique to Gunnoe's interview. Participant Maria Lambert said "All I wanted to do was have babies and be a wife…" (Bell, 2013, p. 79). Even when not explicitly stating these sentiments, Bell's (2013) participant interviews show women who have dedicated their lives wholeheartedly to being mothers, or protectors, and see that as a deeply ingrained part of who they are as individuals.

Another important aspect of motherhood's accessibility as a tool for activism is the variety of ways that mothers find themselves involved in resisting extractive industry in Appalachia. Often participant interviewees in Bell (2013) recount instances where they connected with other activists or organizations through their kid's schools or other

community ties. Then participant interviewees started to attend community meetings, write letters, and enter organizations working against extractive industry through volunteer work. These activities were important acts of resistance to protect their families and land, but simultaneously something that required no professional skills or knowledge. Participant Donna Branham recounts this in regard to her activism, “I’m really not an articulate person, but I can tell my story. You just feel it inside that what you’re doing is right, and it needs to be done, and you’re so afraid if you don’t do it, it’s not going to be done.” (Bell, 2013, p. 146). Through testimony such as Branham’s one can observe how activism can become accessible and effective for women with relatively low social and political power by utilizing the motherhood narrative.

Duncan’s (2014) and Edin and Kefalas’s (2011) work brings more clarity to the accounts of participant interviewees in Bell (2013), Walter (2020), Caretta (2020), and Caretta et al. (2020), and indicate that motherhood can be more or less important due to your class and the region you reside in. In the case of central Appalachia, motherhood is a more high-value and accessible role due to the scarcity of other opportunities for identity-building and career choices. In the face of extractive industry’s destruction of land and people, these women find their roles as mothers to be an effective and accessible route to gain power and social clout in their communities.

Respectability

Hand in hand with accessibility, the cultural respect that comes with motherhood is an essential part of central Appalachian women’s success in acting against extractive industry. Through the lens of normative class and gender expectations, Appalachian women are of low status, yet to be effective activists they must have some kind of

authority and respect from their community. Appalachian women face barriers due to their status as working class or poor, the stigma attached to being a resident of central Appalachia, and the oppression of patriarchy. Women activists gain the power to overcome these barriers due to their experiential knowledge of the land, understanding of extractive industry, and respected role as mothers – or utilizing the characteristics of the motherhood narrative.

Though I claim that motherhood is an important tool for women activists in central Appalachia to gain respect, there is still a stigma against certain types of mothers. For example, Hancock (2004) explores the vitriol and hate aimed at poor black mothers relying on welfare money. Growing from long-held prejudiced ideas regarding race, gender, and poverty, the emotional response of disgust for poor, black, single mothers infiltrated the core of politics and discussion regarding welfare and social support (Hancock, 2004). Though the activists examined in this thesis are primarily not people of color, the types of disgust and mechanisms of oppression examined by Hancock (2004) are applicable to central Appalachian women. The same characteristics of hyperfertility, laziness, stupidity, and personal responsibility for poverty have been and are attributed to Appalachians, ultimately making them the recipients of a similar type of disgust from the general populace.

Then, as opposed to Hancock's (2004) description of a politics of disgust regarding mothers, Stavrianos (2015) examines the political power of motherhood. Stavrianos (2015) characterizes our deep cultural connection to motherhood characterized as a figure with superior morals and a capacity for caring for others (p. 118). This cultural ideal of motherhood is supported by Merchant's (1990) work which finds women's most

valuable role in capitalism as passive and nurturing. Werbner (1999) also explores the negotiation between public and private spheres that mothers navigate when doing public work, which has historically been spearheaded by political motherhood. Stavrianos (2015) demonstrates that there is a clear 'right' and 'wrong' way to be a mother, using unfair metrics that are often out of women's own control, such as systemic poverty or race.

Comparing the work of Hancock (2004) and Stavrianos (2015) illuminates the tension that mothers in central Appalachia resisting extractive industry must negotiate – disgust for poor and needy mothers coexisting with reverence for moral and nurturing mothers. Therefore, it follows that these women's power must come from being *good* mothers to perform public and disruptive work and retain the respect and power associated with normative motherhood. Seeking to speak out against an industry that is poisoning their children and land is just the kind of valiant thing that can gain these women respect amid all of the barriers they face due to their gender, class, and region. This can be seen in Bell (2013) where participant interviewees describe being accused of being sexually promiscuous, called derogatory names, and threatened with violence demonstrating the disgust for these women and what they stand for. Participant Maria Gunnoe in Bell (2013) captures the conflict between disgust and respect for these mothers,

> "We're parents, we're good parents at that. We take care of our children, we see to it our children has got the necessities in life, and we see to it that they are educated beyond what these rural schools are able to educate them. And really, it's always a gender attack. When I run into a strip miner and they have a problem with me, I'm always a "bitch" or a "whore," you know, something to that effect. I've been called a "loud-mouth woman." (Bell, 2013, p. 18)

Gunnoe's statement highlights that she feels she is a good mother, yet is being called a whore. Here the scales are still tipping towards respect, as seen by the success and recognition that participant Gunnoe and other mother activists in the region have earned. Walter's depiction of participant Felicia in the graphic novel also reinforces her as a good mother, being drawn with a "BEST MOM" tank top and her body labeled with "BIG hard working brain" and "BIG hardworking arm" (2020, p. 42). These quotes from participant interviewees and scholarly representations of the participants reinforce that environmental justice activists are good mothers because they must be good mothers or they will be in an increasingly precarious position.

Caretta's (2020) participant interviewees note that they always try to be patient and foster personal relationships with community members and legislators alike (p. 5). Similar to participants in Caretta (2020), participant Roxanne noted that when speaking with regulatory agencies, she makes an effort to be courteous on the phone, not raising her voice like she would at a protest (Walter, 2020, p. 21). This methodology for activism capitalizes on the respectable facet of motherhood and demonstrates their commitment to the characteristics of the motherhood narrative. This is similarly demonstrated by participant Pauline Canterberry who, when reflecting on Don Blankenship calling her a bitch says,

> "He won't face me. …I'm an old woman! I worked hard for everything I've got. I worked forty-five years—I never took nothing from nobody, I never begged nothing from nobody else. I believe in doing for yourself, and I don't believe in nobody coming and taking it away from me." (Bell, 2013, p. 40)

Canterberry's statements about her "doing for yourself" call upon debates between deserving and undeserving poor and therefore she distances herself from the disgust for mothers discussed by Hancock (2004).

The tension between good/bad mothers, un/deserving poor, etc. that women activists in central Appalachia are navigating to gain and maintain respect is a constant balancing act. Participant Patty Sebock acknowledges this saying,

> "[Being a woman] can go against you, [or] it can work for you. I think sometimes doors might open a little easier for women. … But then, to tip the scale back the other way, when you're dealing with government agencies or coal companies and stuff, I don't think they take a woman as seriously as they do a man, especially when it comes to the coal industry thing." (Bell, 2013, p. 105)

Sebock's statement highlights how respectability is a more unstable factor that contributes to the frequent invocation of the motherhood narrative by activists. Women identifying with the motherhood narrative cannot be exempt from the vitriol and violence of the patriarchy yet, the narrative of motherhood allows activists to be more shielded than they otherwise would be. This partial protection and increase in respectability are enough to contribute to the dominance of the motherhood narrative in contemporary Appalachian resistance to extractive industry.

Maintenance of Home and Environment

The final major reason that motherhood is such a prevalent narrative and tool for activists in central Appalachia working to resist extractive industry is its congruence with the expected gender norms. Through expectations regarding labor, care, and environmental stewardship women are situated to be the obvious choice to mitigate and adapt to the repercussions of extractive industry in the region through their labor maintaining family, home, and land. Due to this expectation, I claim that the disruption caused by their activism is in some ways diminished and justified in the eyes of society by the activist's inability to perform feminine and mothering labor due to the destruction caused by extractive industry.

Women's role as understood and enforced by Western patriarchal society is to reproduce capitalist society through not only sexual reproduction but also the reproduction of the home environment to maintain laborers. This includes the maintenance of the private, dirty, sticky, and unruly parts of life that should be unseen to uphold the facade of a clean and rational public life. This expectation includes child rearing, managing excrement and other bodily fluids of children, menstruation, and creating a pristine home environment. This labor enforces the barrier between culture and nature. Combining an understanding of Merchant (1990) and Federici (2014) with additional texts such as Gruen (1993), one can see a clear picture of how the woman-nature connection's development has placed women as barriers between unruly natural spaces and orderly public spaces. Merchant (1990) reviews how women were first tied up with nature in the beginnings of capitalism when the hard separation of productive/reproductive labor, culture/nature, and public/private were solidified. Subsequently, women were strictly bound with the latter entity in each dualism. Federici (2014) hones in on how the transformations Merchant (1990) describes and the advent of the "body-machine" produced a twisted disgust and alienation for the body and its natural functions. Therefore, excrement and body function which would remind men of their animality needed to be hidden and minimized (Federici, 2014, pp. 148 - 154). Predictably due to their tie to nature, women were made to be responsible for this task. Gruen (1993) succinctly notes that "women have been placed at the boundary between nature, with its "contaminants," and civilized sterility" (p. 69). With a more full understanding of the social and cultural baggage that women find themselves with at the border between nature and society, one can better understand the imperative that central Appalachian

women have to address the ways that nature is seemingly seeping into their homes, bodies, and children due to extractive industry.

How does life in central Appalachia complicate this? Women in closer proximity to natural spaces, such as those living in rural areas, have an additional responsibility to manage the environment. Due to the historic and continuing presence of extractive industry in the region, the environment in central Appalachia is often toxic and unruly in ways that invade the body, mind, and home. Participant interviewees in Bell (2013) report difficulty performing their labor as mothers and/or spouses due to a variety of issues. Polluted water is making their children sick or making mothers too ill to be able to work, homes are constantly plagued by coal dust, flooding destroys gardens and degrades soil that supports the family, and children and mothers are emotionally drained and fearful (Bell, 2013). Participant interviewees in Caretta et al. (2020) also connect their activism to concerns about children's wellbeing (p. 54). Participant Joan Linville tells this story about how her ability to keep her home safe and maintain a garden has been totally disrupted by extractive industry,

> "My vegetable garden beside my house was destroyed a few years ago because of landslides from abandoned mine lands. I had to pay a couple thousand dollars to have all of the mud and debris removed from my land. Neither Pocahontas Land Company, which owned the abandoned mine lands, or the coal company that mined the land would help me pay for the removal of the mud. Leaving it was not an option because water is constantly running off the mountain behind my house, and all of the water would have went under the house. After the landslide, I also had to have a ditch dug and a wall built behind my home to protect it. I am now afraid to grow vegetables in my garden because the soil is so contaminated." (Bell, 2013, p. 47)

It is evident that the barrier keeping the natural world out of Appalachian life is increasingly permeable in the face of extractive industry's effects on the region, thus

creating an increased workload for women and complicating the social relationship with nature.

In the face of disruption to family and home due to extractive industry, women activists' actions can be understood as an extension of their labor as mothers, homemakers, and care workers. Current circumstances significantly obstruct women's ability to complete their expected labor, therefore, they have an imperative to act out against extractive industry to regain their ability to maintain the barrier between nature and society and complete reproductive labor. With a deeper understanding of both the obstacles women are facing to perform care work, as well as the industry that is causing these disruptions, the important role of motherhood in activism in central Appalachia against extractive industry can be understood clearly as a part of mothering labor.

Participant Mary Miller deftly identifies how her labor in the home prompts her to become an activist, while men continue life as usual:

> "I [also] think it's things that we see that maybe the men don't see, as far as like coal dust and breathing coal dust. *They don't have to clean it* [emphasis added], and they don't have to see this every day. We have to continue cleaning the coal dust and all—I don't think men notice that as much." (Bell, 2013, p. 41)

Participant interviewee Madeline discussed how due to women's care-taking responsibilities, they are the first to notice changes in children's and elder's health (Walter, 2020, p. 54). This sentiment of being able to see things that men cannot mirror Mary Miller's quote above. Participant interviewee Teri Blanton tells a story about her kids slogging through "coal muck" up to their knees to reach the school bus, yet another example of the type of feminized care labor which put these women activists in the ideal position to experience environmental degradation intimately and need to act to continue to perform their expected labor as mothers or home-makers (Bell, 2013, p. 86).

Participant Patty Sebock's fight against overloaded coal trucks also revolves around her fight to get her kids to school safely (Bell, 2013, pp. 94 -111). The words and experiences of interviewees in Bell (2013) exemplify points made by Perkins (2018) wherein they claim that environmental vulnerability and responsibility for mitigation have been feminized, therefore making women conduits of environmental justice rather than recipients of it. Further, with a clear understanding of how women's normative roles in reproductive labor and maintaining the barrier between nature and society prompt women to act against extractive industry, the maintenance of home and environment becomes another reason that the motherhood narrative is so frequently invoked in resistance to extractive industry in central Appalachia.

As established in existing literature, the characteristics of the motherhood narrative - duty, instinct, nurturing, and love - are also evident in the participant interviews and scholarship analyzed in this chapter. In addition, the themes - connection to homeplace and environment, accessibility, respectability, and the maintenance of home and environment - contributed to the understanding of the motherhood narrative's dominant role in contemporary central Appalachian activism against extractive industry. Bringing power and respect to women, the motherhood narrative is a tool that also allows women to come as they are and make significant changes without the necessity of prestige or previous social power. Especially in Appalachia, where resources can be more scarce, the motherhood narrative has been a factor in the success of many activists pushing back against the injustice and environmental degradation brought by extractive industry.

Is the Multitool Rusted: Yes, No, and Maybe

With a clear understanding of the motherhood narrative and the context of its role which has led to its discursive power in contemporary central Appalachian activism against extractive industry, the next question is as follows: "What are the strengths and flaws of the motherhood narrative in central Appalachian activism?" In asking this question I aim to understand more fully what aspects of the narrative make the motherhood narrative effective and what gaps the motherhood narrative may leave in Appalachian resistance – decreasing its efficacy. Ultimately, answering this question will lead to a reflection on the future of the motherhood narrative and Appalachian environmental justice activism, finding the best ways forward which keep the assets of the current paradigm of activism while acknowledging the continual imperative for growth and equity.

The Motherhood Narrative's Strengths and Accomplishments

Historical and contemporary examples of Appalachian activism show that the motherhood narrative has been a part of incredible success for activists in the region (Wilkerson, 2019; Bell, 2013). Some of those reasons are explored already in the previous chapter, such as the motherhood narrative's accessibility to women of all statuses, the ability to gain activists' respect, and its congruence with the expected roles for women. As noted in the Methodology of this thesis, I adhere to a definition of motherhood that defines itself in relation to time, labor, and affect as opposed to a certain biological or gendered imperative.

There are additional strengths that the motherhood narrative has, including cultural meaning, preexisting organizing and social skills, community-building strength,

flexible metrics of inclusion, and a high yield of participation. First, motherhood invokes a long historical context and personal affective responses. These long-standing, personal, and political meanings situate motherhood as an effective identity to adopt in an effort to create change due to the moral value and caring associated with motherhood (Stavrianos, 2015, p. 118). Motherhood's cultural relevance extends far past central Appalachia. Motherhood has been shaped into an iconic and morally upstanding identity over decades of cultural, religious, and political messaging (Stavrianos, 2015, pp. 11-19). These factors explain why the motherhood narrative is so salient today, as well as lend its strengths by providing women the power and safety necessary to be successful.

Further, the social and political role of activist mothers is already strongly established in Appalachian history, which Wilkerson (2019) explores at length. As also mentioned in the previous chapter, contemporary activists are able to call upon the sense of place that is shared between Appalachians (Bell, 2013) as well as iconic activists such as Mother Jones (*Mother Jones | AFL-CIO*, n.d.). This cultural relevancy and historical context offer Appalachian women activists the opportunity to pick up a mantle of Appalachian resistance rather than having to blaze a completely new path.

Second, since the majority of people who are adopting the motherhood narrative are engaged in mothering labor, they often have many preexisting organizing skills growing from care work. This includes administrative and social skills from being a part of groups like PTO or helping to fundraise for their child's extracurricular activities. Further, they have intimate knowledge of their community through the aforementioned community activities and social ties (Stavrianos, 2015, pp. 121-122). These patterns can be seen in Caretta (2020) where she describes the activists' organizing educational

initiatives at K-12 summer camps and festivals and 5K runs to fundraise for their water stewardship organizations (p. 4). Similarly, participant interviewees in Bell (2013) and Walter (2020) describe how collecting information about other people's experiences and connecting to activist organizations usually happens through informal community social ties then is an integral part of their activism.

Third, activists utilize the motherhood narrative to protect land and people often report building strong connections with other activists that enrich their lives and build their confidence. Participant interviewee Donetta Blankenship is one example of this (Bell, 2013, pp. 66-69). Blankenship was brought to tears discussing how transformative her activism has been to her self-esteem,

> "I really didn't realize that there was so many—so many caring people out there. And what makes it even greater—I'm forty years old. I'm not young, you know? To see so many young people out there wanting to make something better—[caring about] babies and kids that are younger than them — you know, it just overwhelms me. It's just so great to see that. I think about that so much. … I've already said, I have more or less always felt like I'm a nobody. Now I feel like I'm somebody, I, I feel like I can . . . [pauses, sobs softly] do something for somebody—do something for my kids . . . [pauses, crying]." (Bell, 2013, pp. 66-68)

Blankenship's testimony illuminates the important counterbalance of community building and belonging that the motherhood narrative can provide to the affective distress which is also involved in environmental justice activism.

Last, the motherhood narrative has flexible metrics of inclusion, which often results in high numbers of people being mobilized on issues. Stavrianos (2015) provides differing examples of othermothering in Black communities, flexible connections through care work, people's connections with their own mothers, as well as normative uses of the motherhood narrative wherein mothers are acting to protect their children (p. 120-121).

Further, Stavrianos (2015) shows how mass demonstrations based on the motherhood narrative have brought out thousands of people (pp. 120-121). Though these examples discussed by Stavrianos (2015) are not environmental justice groups, groups like Mothers Out Front show that the specific overlap of mass mothering groups and environmental justice is there.

Where the Motherhood Narrative Falls Short

Thus far, I have demonstrated the extensive successes and strengths of political motherhood in central Appalachia and its role in environmental justice activism against extractive industry. However, the motherhood narrative is not without its faults and shortcomings. In the following section I will examine the ways that the motherhood narrative is incongruent with feminism, harmfully utilizes the woman-nature connection, excludes some groups, and obscures the work of marginalized activists. The motherhood narrative captures and coexists with harmful ecological, gendered, and labor constraints that have roots in the early stages of capitalism, and maintain the precarious position of women and nature. Federici (2014) parses out how femininity changed drastically after the medieval witch hunts,

> "Out of this defeat [the witch hunts] a new model of femininity emerged: the ideal woman and wife – passive, obedient, thrifty, of few words, always busy at work, and chaste. … While at the time of the witch-hunt women had been portrayed as savage beings, mentally weak, unsatiably lusty, rebellious, insubordinate, incapable of self-control, by the 18th century the cannon has been reversed. Women were now depicted as passive, asexual beings, more obedient, more moral than men, capable of exerting a positive moral influence on them. Even their irrationality could now be valorized, as the dutch philosopher Pierre Bayle realized in his Dictionnaire Historique et Critique (1740), in which he praised the power of the female "maternal instinct," arguing that it should be viewed as a truly providential device, ensuring that despite the disadvantages of childbirthing and childraising, women do continue to reproduce." (p. 103)

Merchant's (1990) commentary on the shift from feudalism to early capitalism and the shift from an organic to mechanistic worldview happening in the same historical period adds further layers to Federici's (2014) analysis. Combining these insights, one can see how the motherhood narrative is based in oppressive ideas about nature, labor, and gender roles, and fails to challenge them in multiple contexts. Though the motherhood narrative does offer a different story about mothers and women than is often offered by hegemonic masculinity, it is currently not a subversive or radical standpoint. In the following sections, I will break down and examine the motherhood narrative's shortcomings.

The Motherhood Narrative is Not Feminism

Beginning with the most generalized critiques of the motherhood narrative, there are several aspects of the narrative which put it at odds with feminist ideas about activism and liberation. Carreon & Moghadam (2015) and Stavrianos (2015) both detail the dovetail of the motherhood narrative and feminism. Carreon & Moghadam (2015) discuss that sentimental and conservative uses of motherhood can often reinforce the gendered division of labor and other aspects of the patriarchy (p. 20). Stavrianos's (2015) historical account of maternalist activism discusses how the motherhood narrative was a popular tool for pro-life activists during the 1960s (p. 4). The reification of patriarchal norms can be seen in participant interviews from Bell (2013), Caretta (2020), Caretta et al., (2020), and Walter (2020) wherein they embrace stereotypes and the gendered division of labor.

Another aspect that distinguishes maternalism from feminism is the claim that the work the women are performing is not political. Stavrianos's (2015) study of maternalist groups identified a pattern of rhetoric that maternalist groups would employ, wherein the

activists would claim they were not political activists. Rather, the motherhood groups and their members would claim that they were just being good mothers (Stavrianos, 2015, pp. 5-6). This claim is congruent with the gendered expectations for women to be in the home and out of the public sphere, as well as protect participants from scrutiny, regardless of the fact that their work has highly political implications (Stavrianos, 2015).

Participant interviewees in Walter (2020) demonstrate the hesitancy for being a political agent as the maternalist groups that Stavrianos (2015) found. Felicia states explicitly that she "never wanted to be an activist" (p. 45). This reluctance to be labeled or call oneself an activist can also be seen in Bell (2013). It is often implied by the interviewees' attitudes towards their public life, and also clearly communicated by participants such as Pauline Canterbury who said that "the farthest thing from my mind was ever being an activist of any kind," (p. 30). Though Felicia and Pauline demonstrated the initial wish to be apolitical, both women now see themselves as activists. This shift in attitude is important because claims of being apolitical can ultimately disempower women, making it easier to dismiss and deny women activists space in public discourse (Stavrianos, 2015, pp. 124-126).

Woman-Nature Essentialism

As previously explored in the chapters "Literature and Questions" and "Methodology," there are certain aspects of ecofeminism that ontologically connect women and nature that I do not claim as part of my theoretical framework. There is tension in my analysis between the connection to homeplace and environment that Appalachian activist participant interviewees communicate and essentializing claims about the connection between women and nature. There are many quotes I analyze in

"Connection to Homeplace and Environment" which communicate powerful conviction and connection to the land which sustains environmental justice activism, yet also leans into woman-nature essentialism. For example, participant interviewee #12 in Caretta et al. (2020) says, "I grew up in one of the most pristine forests of WV and if they ever got destroyed because of a stupid pipeline or fracking operation, that's like my heart and soul …" (p. 54). This quote demonstrates a deep commitment to the land, yet also implicates harmful ideological bedrock essentializing the connection between women and nature. This ideological bedrock must be questioned to avoid further perpetuation of said gender essentialism which limits possibilities for both humans and nature. Further, the characteristics of the motherhood narrative (duty, instinct, nurturing, and love) are naturalized as an inherent part of women's being (Stavrianos, 2015, pp. 11-16; Merchant, 1990, pp. 149-163).

The specific variety of Appalachian woman-nature connection is not only seen in the participant interviews in Bell (2013), Caretta (2020), Caretta et al. (2020), and Walter (2020) but is also perpetuated in academic scholarship and art produced in the region. Caretta's (2020) scholarship looks into water stewardship and activism in West Virginia, and interview excerpts included in the article include similar sentiments about women and land to the ones found in other participant interviews. Ultimately, Caretta's (2020) analysis of said participant interviews draws the following conclusion regarding women and their connection to the environment, which motivates action to preserve water resources in the state:

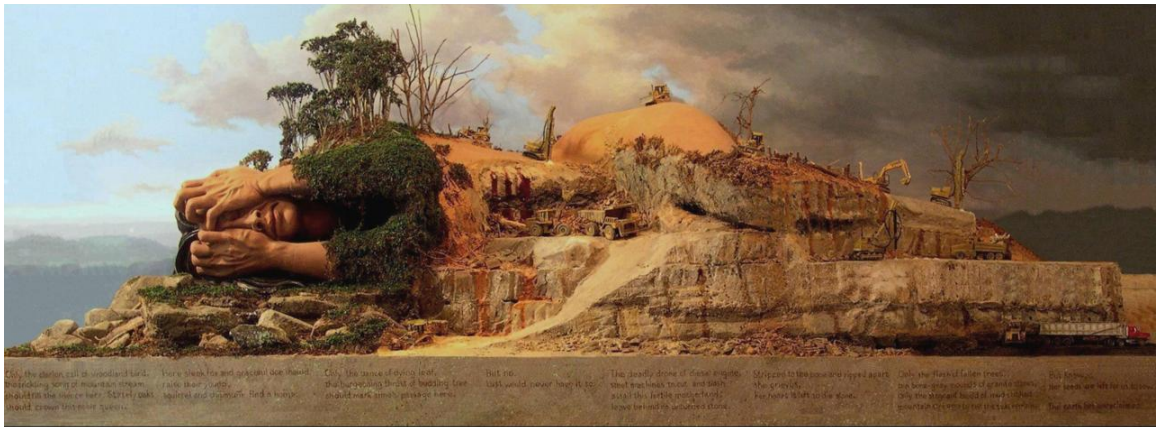
> "These statements encapsulate women's motivation for engagement: they care. They care about future generations and the environment because of an *intrinsic, ethical, and emotional connection with their surroundings* [emphasis added] that pushes them to act." (p. 3)

Caretta's (2020) framing of Appalachian women's connection to their surroundings as "intrinsic" implies a belief in essential ties between women and nature. Caretta's (2020) analysis regarding the woman-nature connection here moves beyond the identity-building metaphor and into the essentialism that ecofeminism has been rightly criticized for in the past. Additionally, non-academic writers such as Hampton (2020) draw upon the same ideas as Caretta (2020) when commenting on the region as a whole. Hampton (2020) claims Appalachia has been misgendered by society and that Appalachia is in reality a deeply feminine place. Though Hampton (2020) leverages some pointed critiques against dominant stereotypes about the region, she alleviates the tension with a turn to woman-nature essentialism.

Artistic ideation of the woman-nature connection can be seen throughout region and temporality, and Appalachian artists are no exception. Jeff Chapman-Crane, an artist who works in Kentucky, made a popular protest art piece titled "The Agony of Gaia" (2004) which shows the nude body of the woman earth goddess Gaia being mined.

Figure 5

"The Agony of Gaia"



Note. (Chapman-Crane, 2004)

This art piece protests mountaintop removal in a provocative way which has been very effective, yet it also plays into long-standing associations between women and nature that are ultimately harmful. The feminine, passive, and penetrated body depicted in "The Agony of Gaia" (Chapman-Crane, 2004) plays on centuries-old cultural ideas explored in Merchant (1990). Merchant (1990) recounts how an ecological lens helps one understand the shift from an organic to mechanistic worldview between 1500-1700 and how extractive industry and the beginnings of capitalism hastened the shift (Merchant, 1990, pp. 42-43). The beginning of modern mining practice collided with a revered and feminized cultural conception of the earth. To alleviate the ideological stress of plundering a planet that was previously seen as active and alive, and subsequently, the female referent had to be made passive and pliant to the physical and ideological rape of mining (Merchant, 1990, pp. 29-41). Chapman-Crane easily rehashes this long-held idea with "The Agony of Gaia" and reifies the woman-nature connection.

The reference to the rape/mining of the earth in Chapman-Crane (2004) is also found in the words of participant interviewee Lorelei Scarboro who describes the extractive industry as raping Appalachia (Bell, 2013, p. 134). The comparison drawn is even more alarming when one considers that another participant interviewee said, "you can't distinguish us [Appalachian women] from the earth we live on," (Bell, 2013, p. 119). Combining these testimonies, the interviews in Bell (2013) provide a shocking image of violent woman-nature essentialism.

The artwork of Chapman-Crane (2004) and participant interviews in Bell (2013) represent the pliant and submissive aspects of the characterization of women and nature through their cultural connection, yet other parts of the discourse surrounding extractive

industry in Appalachia draw on the malevolent and chaotic characterization of women and nature. In O'Connell (2008) a scientist interviewed about the coal slurry in the impoundment above Marsh Fork Elementary describes the sludge as a dangerous "witch's brew" which contains unknown components (0:27:30). This description of the chemical refuse calls upon anxieties about the perceived unpredictability of women and nature, which Federici (2014) explores at length. Witches were accused of a variety of gruesome crimes, as well as having unnatural powers such as having power over the health of livestock and crops and summoning storms, which were the most egregious affronts against the church, natural order, and the state (Federici, 2014, pp. 165-169). The parallel drawn between coal slurry and witch's brew is especially interesting since witch's potions were often either accused of having infant flesh as an ingredient or affecting the fertility of land and women (Federici, 2014, p. 180). In contemporary Appalachia, coal slurry is not made of stolen children, but is certainly a mixture of ingredients that often remain mysterious to community members and it is poisoning land and people. Therefore, referring to coal slurry as witch's brew captures anxieties about women's power over the environment, reproduction, and labor.

Through the ecofeminist works of authors such as Merchant (1990) and Federici (2014), we can see how the perpetuation of the cultural conflation of women and nature is harmful and only amplifies the exploitation of each by othering them in subordination of white male cis-hetero capitalism. Though the connection to homeplace and environment that participant interviewees discuss is a valid and important part of their resistance, it is also imperative to hold the woman-nature connection in question for the harmful role it plays in the exploitation of both women and nature.

Exclusion

For all the flexibility of motherhood discussed by Ruddick (1995) and Stavrianos (2015), the reality of the accepted aesthetic and role of motherhood still excludes many groups who are also deeply invested in resisting the extractive industry in central Appalachia. This can look many different ways, and in this section, I will explore groups of people who for one reason or another (gender identity, sexuality, sex, parental status, etc.) do not find resonance with the motherhood narrative. Two major groups are discussed: men and queer people. Further, this inquiry prompts a discussion about futurity and children as a core guiding principle of their resistance to extractive industry.

Though in "The Motherhood Narrative's Strengths and Accomplishments" I have discussed how a flexible definition of motherhood is an asset that invites many kinds of caretakers into political motherhood frameworks, that does not mean that is always a reality. Men, queer people, and people with different caretaking duties may not find the motherhood narrative to be appealing or welcoming as a community and platform for environmental justice activism. This may be due to an incongruence with expected roles and behavior at a societal level or due to the other standpoints and beliefs of people utilizing maternalist frameworks.

Beginning with men, the lack of involvement in environmental movements from men has been the subject of recent scholarship which helps to illuminate how the motherhood narrative and environmental activism frameworks at large are ineffective to appeal to this demographic. Hultman (2017) identifies three types of masculinities in an effort to better understand men's interactions with environmentalism. First, industrial masculinity is the hegemonic masculinity that has shaped and maintained the

human-nature relationships we experience today which prioritize economic growth and production over all else (Hultman, 2017, pp. 243-245). Second, ecomodern masculinity generally follows the footsteps of industrial masculinity, but has a non-transformative commitment to green capitalism through things such as energy politics and sustainable development (Hultman, 2017, pp. 245-247). Third, ecological masculinity is the opposite of industrial masculinity. This type of masculinity prioritizes caring, gentleness, and sharing, as well as focusing on localization, renewable energy, and the decentralization of power (Hultman, 2017, pp. 247-248). The former two types of masculinities are by far the most dominant, and with an understanding of these models of masculinity, it is more clear to understand how the central values of the motherhood narrative (duty, instinct, nurturing, and love) would not be attractive or compatible with dominant masculinity.

Though there is a scholarly consensus that men are less involved in environmental activism (Bell, 2013), visual representations of environmental justice activists in central Appalachia often depict equal participation of men and women in activism. Documentaries from O'Connell (2008) and Wood (2017) about mountaintop removal and its effects on central Appalachia film and interview a roughly equal proportion of men and women. This representation is counter to the words of interviewees in Bell (2013) and the focus of authors such as Wilkerson (2019).

Observing the words of participant interviewees in Bell (2013) regarding men in their communities, one can see some of the reasons that they identify the motherhood narrative has not been utilized by men in central Appalachia, or even why most men abstain from involvement in activism in the region completely. Speaking on men in central Appalachia, the participant interviewees had a variety of different things to say

about men in their community and generally seemed to think men weren't necessary to their successes in resisting extractive industry (Bell, 2013). Participant interviewee Maria Gunnoe says,

> "The men are just . . . the men are more easily intimidated by the workers and the people in the coal industry, too. … Men and women are as different as day and night, especially when it comes to this fight." (Bell, 2013, pp. 21-22)

Gunnoe's statements are built upon by other participant interviewees also speaking about men and their absence from activist spaces. Some thought it was a biological and social difference between the genders, interviewee Maria Lambert says,

> "[the nurturing part of people] comes out more in women than it does men because men have that thing inside of them that just makes them men. It's maybe testosterone, I don't know. They feel that they can't be emotional, and women are more emotional. So, I would think that women don't mind letting their feelings show, and they don't mind telling somebody what they think." (Bell, 2013, p. 79)

This understanding of men's disinterest in participating in environmental justice activism in central Appalachia is corroborated by Bell & Braun (2010). Bell & Braun (2010) examine how identity correspondence dictates participation in environmental justice activism in central Appalachia. They find that women's identities as mothers and Appalachians coordinate with the overall character of environmental justice organizations, while men's connection to mining and hegemonic masculinity dissuades them from being a part of the movement (Bell & Braun, 2010).

Circumventing any commentary on why men don't participate, interviewee Teri Blanton's humorous comment, "men's too chicken, I guess!" succinctly captures central Appalachian womens' apathy to men's participation in resistance (Bell, 2013, p. 91). Regardless of men's participation, these women are moving forward with their activism.

That being said, there must be some deeper analysis to understand this pattern more clearly.

Another concern raised by the interview data in Bell (2013) is the strong reliance on a strict gender binary and gender roles. Gunnoe's quote, "men and women are as different as day and night, especially when it comes to this fight," demonstrates a strict and anti-feminist outlook on gender found in all the core texts used in this thesis (Bell, 2013, pp. 21-22). Perpetuating this understanding of a gender binary will only reify environmental justice work as an extension of care work and mothering, as women's responsibility while no action or support is expected from their masculine counterparts. A strict gender binary is damaging to both men and women, as well as further excluding any potential activists who are gender-queer, nonbinary, etc.

When reflecting on why most environmental justice organizations in central Appalachia are populated by women, participant interviewee Mary Miller identified some structural barriers to men's involvement,

> "There is the fact that [women] do have the time we can spend doing this. A lot of the men, they work, and they don't have the time. The women more or less have a lot of time. … You know, I think a lot of men see what they're doing to our mountains, [but] it's hard to get them to speak out. … We've got some [men who speak out], and they are good speakers. But there are some that are just kind of backward-like, and they just don't want to get involved." (Bell, 2013, p. 41)

Similar to this, participant interviewees Gunnoe, Miller, and Branham also both acknowledge that men in the movements are more likely to be targets of violence and job loss in the coal-mining industry than the women involved (Bell, 2013, pp. 21-22, p. 41, p. 145). Bell & Braun (2010) report similar findings regarding men's vulnerability to harsher consequences from participating in environmental justice activism, which helps

one understand why some of the biggest indicators for men's participation in activism is never having worked for the coal industry (p. 808).

Queer people are another demographic that is not always effectively represented by the motherhood narrative. Texts such as Garringer (2017) and McNeill (2022) show that queer people are active and invested in Appalachia, yet are not seen as part of the normative narrative surrounding activism against extractive industry. There are a variety of reasons this may occur. The most dominant discourse on activism in the region – such as Fisher & Smith (2012), Wilkerson (2019), and Bell (2013) – focus on heterosexual and cis-gendered activists. Although some queer people might strongly identify as mothers and ascribe to essentialized woman-nature connection, there are other barriers that may make the motherhood narrative unattractive to them. Often queer families and kinship do not conform to heteronormative nuclear family structures, and queer people may not feel welcomed by people and groups utilizing the motherhood narrative.

Further, the focus on futurity, which is a large component in the motherhood narrative and maternalist frameworks, has been heavily critiqued by scholars in queer ecology. In this way, the motherhood narrative is both exclusionary to queer people and can be more broadly critiqued by queer ecology. To begin, queer ecology can be defined as a way of thinking that "disrupts categorical boundaries and heteronomative values that are projected into nature," (Butler, 2019, p. 271). Butler (2019) uses queer ecology to critique reprocentrism, or the assertion that reproduction is central to all people's life (Butler, 2019, p. 271). Edelman (2004) identifies how the figure of an innocent child to be protected is central to all dominant politics and is in opposition to queerness. Dominant modern environmentalism is no exception. Sustainability is defined as resource

use that provides for people in the present without putting the survival of future generations in jeopardy; this definition sets a standard for reproduction and future thinking that exists in the same framework of white cis-hetero capitalism (Butler, 2019, pp. 278-279). The viewpoint that Edelman (2004) and Butler (2019) are critiquing can be seen in participant interviewee Maria Gunnoe's statement,

> "But I really believe that that's the ultimate award—what will benefit the future generations. I don't think in my lifetime, I don't think that there'll be that much change. But I think what I do with my lifetime will bring about a renewable energy future for my children." (Bell, 2013, p. 25)

The focus on future generations in environmentalism, as shown in Gunnoe's statement, highlights environmental disaster as an impending disaster, disregarding the climate crisis's current effects (Butler, 2019, pp. 278-279).

The focus on futurity identified by Edelman (2004) and Butler (2019) can be further demonstrated in the words of interviewees in Bell (2013), who express deep concerns about the health, opportunities, and cultural life of future generations of Appalachian children. Participant interviewee Maria Gunnoe discussed her children's safe future as a major motivator for her activism at length saying,

> "As mothers of future generations of Appalachian boys and girls, we can't allow them to steal this from our children—it's too precious. And it can't be replaced." (Bell, 2013, p. 21)

Speaking about why women have been more active in resisting extractive industry in the region Gunnoe said,

> "The reason is [women are] more responsible and obligated to the future, mainly because of the fact that the future holds their children's health, their children's well-being. As a mother, you have to realize that a part of seeing to it that your child grows up in a safe environment is seeing to it that the environment is tended to and not done the way that it is now. People are connected to this environment. Their health is connected to this environment. When you see your kids'

> water—future water—being polluted so that you can keep your lights on, it just becomes a no-brainer." (Bell, 2013, pp. 21-22)

Gunnoe's values regarding her children's health and future are shared by participant interviewees Judy Bonds and Lorelei Scarboro (Bell, 2013, p. 156 & p. 121). Gunnoe also was adamant that her children be able to grow up in their own homeplace, carrying on the culture and traditions of West Virginia despite the cultural oppression and environmental struggles they face (Bell, 2013, p. 23). Participant interviewee Donna Branham also speaks about children and the future in reference to career and educational opportunities in the region.

> "I wanted to make sure that the children growing up, our teenagers, not just mine, but everybody's, says, "Hey wait a minute." … Even if they keep fifteen thousand [mining] jobs 'til these children get old enough to work, there're not going to be enough jobs [in the mines] for our children. If they don't understand now that they need to get out and do different things and change the system around here, the way we're going, they're going to be stuck in a rut. You always want to see young people aspire. You know, even if you work in the coal mines, you still need to get an education, you still need to know what's out in the world, you need to look at your surroundings as a whole. Take the whole thing in, not just have blinders on." (Bell, 2013, p. 146)

Branham's concerns for children's future also capture the ways that extractive industry has also affected the career and educational opportunities available to young people, and sees remedying this as an important part of her resistance to the industry.

All of this is not to say that any consideration of the future is inherently cis- and heteronormative. Butler (2019) uplifts the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy adage which encourages 'considering the impact on the seventh generation from now' when making choices, yet is not predicated on a model of reproduction which further marginalizes certain populations (p. 281). Queer ecology's critiques of futurity can also help us understand why people with different care-taking responsibilities may not be compelled

by the motherhood narrative's use of futurity and reprocentricity, regardless of their sex, gender, or sexuality.

Through the examples of men and queer people, one can see how the motherhood narrative are not always compatible with certain groups' values or are simply unwelcoming to people with differing identities. This exclusion decreases the efficacy of the motherhood narrative and creates blind spots for activists through the lack of more diverse perspectives which therefore creates environmental justice solutions that may not address the needs of all groups.

Obscuring the Work of Other Activists

Following the fact that the motherhood narrative is not an effective tool or welcoming community for all people interested in environmental justice activism resisting extractive industry in central Appalachia, the dominance of the motherhood narrative as told by white cis-hetero women and its palatable place in society obscures the work of more marginalized activists in the region. Acknowledging and celebrating the diverse perspectives and experiences of Appalachians is an essential part of true environmental justice work in the region to not only understand the intimacies of harm but also imagine more creative and effective solutions.

As acknowledged previously in this thesis, my secondary research is bounded by available literature on activism in central Appalachia, and in no section is it more evident than this one. Scholars such as Garringer (2017) and McNeill (2022), and ongoing discussions in Appalachian Studies circles evidenced by publications like the *Journal of Appalachian Studies* special edition titled "Speculative Fabulations: Queering Appalachian Futurisms" in spring of 2022 show that queer Appalachians are present and

active in the community. Yet, the proportion of the work focused on queer people as compared to that of literature on cis-heteronormative Appalachians is very small.

Further, perspectives from racial and ethnic minorities on Appalachian environmentalism are scarce. Race and ethnicity are not an explicit part of Bell's (2013) analysis, with only one interviewee identifying themself as having a mixed race in passing (Bell, 2013, p. 16). Bell (2013), Caretta (2020), Caretta et al. (2020), and Walter (2020) each chose not to use race as a component of their interview methodology and analysis.

There are some news stories regarding environmental justice activists with minoritized racial or ethnic identities. Pam Nixon, a prominent Black environmental justice activist has done monumental work to resist chemical air pollutants from the Union Carbide plant in West Virginia's "Chemical Valley" located near Institute, one of West Virginia's few primarily Black communities (Ward Jr., 2021). Though not about primary extractive industry, Nixon's resistance to secondary processing industry and its effects is extremely important and just as worthy of academic attention as the work done by activists in texts such as Bell (2013), Caretta (2020), Caretta et al. (2020), and Walter (2020). Institute has been an epicenter of environmental justice activism in West Virginia since 1985 when the Union Carbide plant had a chemical leak (Ward Jr., 2021). That would not be the last time the plant was the cause of chemical pollution. Even with this legacy of resistance, it is not the subject of substantive texts.

Another example of news coverage of environmental justice work done by minoritized activists is Pacheco (2021), covering the work of indigenous environmental activists. Desirée Shelley and Crystal Cavalier, who are Monacan and Occaneechi Band

of the Saponi Nation respectively, have been deeply involved in resisting the Mountain Valley Pipeline. The Mountain Valley Pipeline has and will cause massive environmental damage and destroy sacred lands. These women represent the motherhood narrative through their comments about family, land, and culture, as well as being part of both Mothers Out Front and the Women's Earth Alliance (Pacheco, 2021). Mothers Out Front is a national organization mobilizing mothers on climate issues, and the Women's Earth Alliance is an international program with goals to foster women-led grassroots climate solutions (*Mothers Out Front: Mobilizing for a Livable Climate*, n.d.; *Women's Earth Alliance*, n.d.). Although Shelley and Cavalier are utilizing the motherhood narrative, their work has not reached the same levels of notoriety as white women using the motherhood narrative.

Literature about marginalized Appalachians, in this case those involved in resisting extractive industry, is incredibly important. As demonstrated in the former paragraphs, coverage of environmental activists with marginalized identities is not substantial. Further study of how people with marginalized identities use the motherhood narrative would be fascinating, but as of now the critique remains that the motherhood narrative, usually utilized by white cisgender women, is eclipsing the work of activists with different identities. Participant interviewee Madeline in Walter (2020) speaks about the fact that often women of color and indigenous women are stepping forward to take action against environmental harm (p. 54). Yet, even with this awareness in activist and scholarly communities, the majority of texts cover the stories of white cisgender women.

For this reason, the recent book project *Y'all Means All* is ground breaking (McNeill, 2022). McNeill (2022) includes essays by Appalachian queer people, some

people of color, which illuminate the rich variety of resistance present in the region, making it perhaps the most substantive text on Appalachian's with minoritized identities involved in environmental justice activism to date. Out of the seventeen chapters and authors, three directly pertain to environmental justice and activism.

Chessie Oak, is a white queer/non binary tree sitter active at the Virginia portion of the Mountain Valley Pipeline. Oak's writing is important illumination of "a community in which the vast majority of us are queer/trans and are doing what we can to upend settler colonialism and contribute to active decolonization of peoples and land" (McNeill, 2022, p. 112). Further, Oak contextualizes their entire ethic of activism in the larger context and implication of land and space, saying that "to blockade is to occupy space in a what that disrupts the day-to-day exploitation and oppression committed by the capitalist, colonial hetero-patriarchy that we live under," (McNeill, 2022, p. 112). This account of the resistance along the route of the Mountain Valley Pipeline is opposite to that of popular news sites that have had little to say about queer communities and decolonization (Sax, 2018; Schneider, 2018; Smith, 2019).

In a chapter titled "An Appalachian Crip/Queer Environmental Engagement" Rebecca-Eli Long, a queer disability scholar and activist, explores how an alliance between crip/queer activists and environmental activists (and those who are both) to think in new ways about harm and justice. Long details how central Appalachia has developed into a "disabled and disabling" landscape, yet environmental justice activists and scholars have failed to adequately acknowledge ableism in the region (McNeill, 2022, pp. 87-90). Ultimately Long asks us "can we recognize that a post-coal future doesn't need to eliminate disability and acknowledge the relational aspects of disablement between

human nonhuman systems?" (McNeill, 2022, p. 91). Disability and queerness have an important disruptive power that can prompt us to think critically and imagine new ways of living (McNeill, 2022, pp. 90-92).

Heather Brydie Harris – a Black, multiracial, non binary, femme scholar-activist – shares insight into critical queer activism in Appalachia and the South. Though not directly in discussion with environmental justice activism, Harris's work in the chapter is highly applicable to the future of environmental justice activism in central Appalachia. Harris highlights the major successes in "we're-all-in-this-together" and coalition-based activism in the region through groups like the Highlander Research and Education Center and Southerners on New Ground (SONG) (McNeill, 2022, pp. 62-63). Harris highlights queer activism's understanding of the body as the most intimate location of resistance and understanding of space to ultimately work towards collective transformation (McNeill, 2022, pp. 65-66).

Environmental justice scholars and activists acknowledge that the most poor communities of BIPOC communities are the worst hit by environmental injustices, yet their stories are only murmurs in the wake of the stories of white communities in central Appalachia (Pellow & Brulle, 2005). White women's relative privilege over other marginalized communities allow them to dominate the narrative about environmental justice, even though white communities are not always the hardest hit by environmental injustices. The work of activists interviewed and the scholarly analysis in Bell (2013), Caretta (2020), Caretta et al. (2020), and Walter (2020) is important, but it does not deserve a monopoly on the discourse on motherhood and environmental justice activism in central Appalachia. The future of central Appalachian environmental justice activism

must be transformed by the perspectives and methodologies of queer, disabled, indigenous, and peoples of color to more fully and equitably imagine just futures.

What is Next?

"Why is the mother identity as a narrative invoked so frequently in the context of resistance to the extractive industry in central Appalachia? What are the strengths and flaws of the motherhood narrative in central Appalachian activism?" I have identified what the motherhood narrative entails (duty, instinct, nurturing, and love), and the following factors for its frequent use: connection to homeplace and environment, accessibility, respectability, and maintenance of home and environment. To answer my second question I have detailed the motherhood narrative's strengths as its aforementioned accessibility, respectability, and maintenance of home environment. Further, historical context in the region, cultural meaning, preexisting organizing and social skills, community-building strength, and flexible metrics of inclusion add important assets to the motherhood narrative's repertoire. Next, I discussed the motherhood narrative's weaknesses as incongruencies with feminist politics, woman-nature essentialism, exclusion, and obscuring the work of other activists. Having answered my two research questions the next query is: should activists still be relying on the motherhood narrative?

Though there is much potential for growth and should surely be critique of the motherhood narrative, we should not throw the baby (multitool) out with the bathwater. As Stavrianos (2015) contends, the political power of motherhood is, at least for now, still very useful for providing leverage for women engaging in activism and maintaining that mothering labor is difficult and worthy of political attention. Further, the motherhood

narrative is ideological ground that is likely to be subsumed by conservative groups if it is not still utilized by liberal groups as well (Stavrianos, 2015, pp. 128-134). Stavrianos (2015) brings her book to a close reflecting on how "groups—particularly progressive ones—need to construct maternal frames that are more directly oppositional to and critical of normative conceptions of mothers and mothering," (p. 128). The consequences for inaction on this front are too high for women, care workers, and the spaces they occupy.

Further, the motherhood narrative grounded in the context of environmental justice has interesting implications for overall system change and liberation. Pellow & Brulle (2005) note that environmental justice work implicitly challenges the capitalist growth economy and has an acute sense of othering through its leadership from poor people and/or people of color (pp. 3-4). Di Chiro (1996) expands further upon this, saying that environmental justice work challenges

> "modernist and colonial philosophies of unlimited progress, unchecked development, the privileging of western scienctific notions of objective truth and control of nature, and the hierarchical separation between nature and human culture." (p. 310)

This critique and resistance to dominant systems of power and knowledge creates the opportunity to 'reinvent nature' through cultural modes of thinking which have been oppressed by white male cis-hetero capitalism (Di Chiro, 1996). Combined with the motherhood narrative's embrace of care of land and people, the work conducted by central Appalachian activists is poised at a deeply critical intersection of environmental advocacy and social change. This potent combination has great potential for working toward liberatory futures.

The majority of this chapter has been dedicated to critiquing the motherhood narrative, but I still hold robust faith in the past, present, and future good that is possible through utilizing the motherhood narrative as a tool. Even as some of the activists utilizing the motherhood narrative studied here have contradicted the claims about environmental justice's assets as a way forward for liberatory futures made by Pellow & Brulle (2005) and Di Chiro (1996), I see the wholistic discourses occurring in environmental justice spaces as more powerful. It is my hope that during the ongoing fight against environmental injustice that activists in positions of relative privilege are able to learn and grow out of these prejudices and shortcomings. As Chessie Oak says at the end of their essay, "while we challenge the system, we must also challenge ourselves," (McNeill, 2022, p. 114). The motherhood narrative must become more flexible, and find ways to address the weaknesses detailed in this chapter. Further, I am sure that the vernacular will change, and someday this thesis will be cringed at for using "motherhood" or some other term that will evolve to something more apt for this conversation. Yet, the values expressed in the motherhood narrative, especially love and commitment to land, will grow with us through time.

Explorations of Liberatory Futures

After answering my two research questions, I now turn to a myriad of other questions to be asked about gender and environmental justice activism in central Appalachia, the themes that can be identified in the discourse surrounding it, and the greater implications of this work. In this chapter, I will identify some of my most pressing questions for future analysis and contextualize the significance of this work as a piece of research with implications about environmentalism, gender, Appalachia, and liberatory futures for all. Based on the analysis presented in the previous two chapters, here I present emerging themes regarding the future of environmental justice and community activism and how my research questions might help us understand those themes. As stated at the beginning of this thesis, I will not be offering any formal or evidence-based plans for future action. Yet, I would feel remiss to leave these ideas unshared. I hope to create the opportunity to start weaving these threads together – potentially beginning the process of finding tangible ways to embrace the future.

The first thematic thread to spin is the discourse of gender and care. My research regarding gender dynamics in Appalachia and political motherhood have both coalesced to show heightened scholarly and popular interest in understanding marginalized experience through major texts like Bell (2013) and McNeill (2022) and finding new ways of being through insights gained by listening to the stories of women, mothers, and people belonging to marginalized gender identities, especially in Appalachia. In the subsequent section I will examine the testimonies and scholarship on these topics, seeking to understand what needs and wishes these authors, activists, and scholars are seeking to fulfill through their focus on gender and care.

Second, in examining the lives and resistance of Appalachians, as well as exploring scholarship regarding environmental justice, ecofeminism, queer ecology, and posthumanism, I see possibilities in beginning to redefine human-nature relationships in the wake of toxic land and bodies implicated in environmental justice concerns. Environmental degradation and disaster often create immediate change in the observable landscape we interact with, but as one can learn from Bell (2013) and other environmental justice literature, these disasters deeply change the people living there, too. I am curious about the possibility of using environmental justice frameworks to pull away the membrane between human/nature and imagine different ways of being. If we were to take the tandem transformations of land and people seriously and to understand humans as both invaders and invaded by the natural world, what could we learn and how could we grow?

The Resurgence of Maternalism: Crying Out for Care?

Much of the literature used in this thesis recounts and celebrates the activism and labor of women – especially mothers. There is no question that people are interested in mothers, what they stand for, and the role they play in public and private life. Stavrianos's (2015) research on maternalism and activism shows that maternalism is on the rise, with mother groups with political focuses and marches mobilizing mothers showing up increasingly often (p. 133). This is appearing parallel to the widespread discourse on care work and unpaid labor during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Especially during and directly after the initial lockdowns, there was no shortage of articles, interviews, and discussions on care work, and how the pandemic had exposed deep and long-standing inequalities (Kisner, 2021). World events allowed important

scholarship about care work, such as Briggs (2018) to be brought to both the world stage and dinner table conversation, and prominent academics like Silvia Federici were extending their reach in pointed New York Times articles like Kisner (2021). This was a conversation happening in Appalachia as well, and coincided with the developing regional discourse around gender that has been building in the recent past with prominent academic texts like Smith (1998), Bell (2013), Wilkerson (2018), and McNeill (2022) delving ever deeper into marginalized gendered experiences. Further, in November of 2020 an article by Leah Hampton about the gendered characteristics of Appalachia generated a lot of conversation about gender in Appalachia as we hunkered down with our computers during lockdowns.

Though each factor, motherhood, care and COVID-19, and gender in Appalachia, has its own distinct nuance and scholarship, there is a larger narrative emerging about femininity, care, and community. This narrative highlights our need as a society for increased attentiveness to care and community, which is normatively labor performed by women, and the ways in which quality of life might be benefitted by a focus on care and community. By reviewing a variety of articles and books here, I hope to begin to connect these ideas and identify potential pitfalls in the developing narrative regarding care and community as it relates to my thesis.

Stavrianos's (2015) analysis of motherhood in America sets the scene for this conversation, highlighting the resurgence of motherhood-based groups in the current political scene in America. Further, Stavrianos's data shows that a significant amount of motherhood groups are already focused on environmental issues, and more than half use liberal ideology (2015, pp. 41-45). Stavrianos's work has been explored at length

throughout this thesis, and has confirmed the importance and resilience of the motherhood narrative. Therefore, an uptick in motherhood-based groups indicates a new interest in utilizing this political niche, and promises significant mobilization. One such group, also mentioned previously, "Mothers Out Front" was founded in 2013 and has been active at a national and international level (*Mothers Out Front: Mobilizing for a Liveable Climate | USA*, n.d.).

Briggs (2018) uses political policy analysis to emphasize the importance of mothering and care work by identifying how all contemporary political issues can be connected to reproductive politics. Though not the hopeful message offered by Stavrianos (2015), Briggs (2018) offers important context for why more mothers and care workers should be involved with politics than ever before.

It is also pertinent to fold in the climate crisis in this exploration. Along with the COVID-19 pandemic's illumination of reproductive care work and exploitation, it is an existential threat to the world as we know it. Or perhaps as we once knew it. The climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic are of the same class of both material and ideological crisis. Each has put stress on our resources and infrastructure, while also calling into question the ideas and values which inform our daily lives. Natural disasters, crop failure, refugees, water crises, and etc. scream out to us that change is necessary now, as was necessary yesterday. In the face of the climate and pandemic's persistent disaster, there is a reciprocal wish to engage in gentleness and escapism (Slone, 2020). Think the pervasive cottage core aesthetic online which packages natural beauty, rurality, creativity, and gentleness into an adorable wicker basket (Kashi, 2020). The cottage core aesthetic tugs on a lot of the themes in this thesis: rurality, reproductive labor, and

environmentalism (Slone, 2020) Further, cottage core repackages the rural mystique – which positions rural life as more moral, virtuous, and simple – into a youth-led aesthetic (Brown & Schafft, 2011, pp. 9-10). Cottage core and leaning into the rural mystique is just one example of how people are responding to the climate crisis, COVID-19, and other societal upheavals, but its popularity indicates that the wish for a different way of life is pervasive.

Figure 6

Cottage Core Influencer

Note. @grove_cottage_ on Instagram, (Kashi, 2020)

Scholars and academics, too, are turning to gentleness and different ways of relating to the world to respond to the climate crisis. Dr. Chris Cuomo, among many others, proposes a care ethic as the guiding principle for current and future climate

activism (Guthrie & Cronenwett, 2019). Cuomo imagines care, and the courage and learning that care would facilitate, as the way to move forward through emotionally and physically trying times that will be ahead of us. Similarly, Harris (2017) uplifts ecowomanism's empathetic and caring ethos as a way to liberate humans and nature.

So, what about Appalachia? Hampton (2020) received significant buzz in Appalachian studies online communities, and picks up a lot of the threads of rurality, gentleness, and gender that can be found in cottage core discourse, relating these topics to the "misgendering of Appalachia." Overall, Hampton (2020) must be regarded skeptically, for interchanging one gender essentialism for another one is not a fair or sustainable way to envision a better future for Appalachia. Hampton does a beautiful job of identifying aspects of the culture/nature dualism which are played out in Appalachia, critiquing stereotypes of hostile landscapes and underdevelopment.

> "The inconvenient truth is that every aspect of American rurality leans heavily towards the feminine, the nonbinary, and the Other. It is far easier, far more profitable for Americans to reduce rural life to a narrow masculine stereotype, one that amplifies penetration and conquering the land over the more complicated reality."

Yet, after this deft analysis, Hampton draws familiar and insidious parallels between the female body and the land, and shapes Nina Simone, a pillar of her argument, into the Appalachian divine feminine. Regarding positive examples of men in the region Hampton (2020) says she "might get around to mentioning some of their names later" the same dismissive attitude towards Appalachian men as participant interviewees in Bell (2013). Instead of asking more of everyone, Hampton seems to ask readers to simply switch the masculine imagination of Appalachia with a feminine one and uplift the region as an idyllic rural haven for the feminine and creative. The women that Appalachian

commentators, authors, and scholars are uplifting certainly deserve the recognition and respect they gain from this type of writing, but the women activists, artists, and community leaders are already doing more than their fair share of work.

So, what do we dream of when we dream of the feminine? Certainly there is a history of femininity being fetishized, dominated, abused, and made to be subservient, and this is a history that must be taken seriously. Though these associations are not to be dismissed, in this case, the dream is different. The narrative emerging – or the dream – is calling out for gentleness, care, and community to help us respond to environmental and societal degradation and injustices. So, the question becomes how might we hear this call and make all us arbiters of gentleness, care, and community - not just those of us who may align in some way with femininity? This imperative for a different way of being is justified and overdue. Yet, it is essential that as we imagine potential futures we are able to find gentleness and care that is not predicated on the labor and exploitation of women. Perhaps an expansion of the motherhood framework would be part of this, wherein more people may be able to take ownership of their responsibilities to maintain community and share the labor to overcome the ongoing climate crisis. Hultman's (2017) ecological masculinity offers a path forward to this more egalitarian care ethic (pp. 247-248). Queer scholars and community members in McNeill (2022) also offer insight into diverse activist spaces which are creating new ways of resisting while caring for each other. These seeds of equitable care are important opportunities to make care a core part of our strategies to face both local and global challenges in the future.

Toxic Land, Toxic Bodies: A New Way of Being?

As evidenced by this thesis and an immense body of academic and non-academic work regarding toxic environments and ailing people, Appalachia is facing a crisis of health and well-being (Morrone, 2020). Soil and water are contaminated, dust is suspended in the air, landscapes have been ripped apart, creating human and non-human life as toxic creatures (Bell, 2013). Just as humans have invaded the natural environment, humans have been invaded by toxins and chemicals bringing on premature illness and death (Morrone, 2020; Bell, 2013). This arrangement of causality challenges long-held ideas that only humans could act upon passive nature and that the human body is a discrete fortress impervious to nature.

If we were to take seriously the deeply permeable nature of life and systems, what would happen? If Appalachians, or any other group coexisting with a degraded environment, were able to see their own health as deeply intertwined with the health of ecosystems and non-human life, what would happen? Butler (2019) draws upon queer ecology to begin imagining a queer environmental sustainability "deeply skeptical of categorizations of nature and yet still works to support ecological communities through care, solidarity, and communal valuation." (p. 283). Scholars such as Donna Haraway also go to extreme lengths to resist the categorizations Butler (2019) identifies, making permeability and ideological compost a priority for moving forward into an ecologically and socially uncertain future (Haraway, 2016). This theoretical groundwork laid by Butler (2019) and Haraway (2016) can be contextualized by Alaimo (2010) discussing environmental justice and embodiment. Interviewees in Bell (2013), Caretta (2020), Caretta et al. (2020), and Walter (2020) demonstrate how deeply physical and emotional

their experiences with environmental justice concerns are – enabling theory and praxis to coexist when considering the radical implications of solidarity between land and people.

Participant interviewee Donnetta Blankenship recounts how she and her family were plagued by health problems, and eventually found out that their bodies were full of copper from coal slurry which polluted their well (Bell, 2013, pp. 64-66). Participant interviewee Maria Lambert has a similar story (Bell, 2013, pp. 80-83). Reflecting on the state of illness of land and people in Appalachia Lambert said, "You can't garden, you can't raise your garden and all that stuff if the land is destroyed. The land and the people connect." (Bell, 2013, p. 81). This awareness of human's place as agent and acted-upon in the interconnected dance Appalachian land and people are embroiled in could lead to new ways of relating to our more-than-human world. Environmental justice concerns demonstrate in a clear way how our separation and mastery of nature is an illusion.

Alaimo (2010) recognizes this unique and subversive position, examining how the environment and embodiment become entangled through nature's degradation. Questioning subjectivity, humanism, and science, Alaimo (2010) states that "'the environment' is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves," (p.4). Alaimo's assertion challenges a foundational belief that humans are distinct from nature, and that our 'superior' evolution makes humans most worthy of consideration in the global community (2010, pp. 15-22).

Alaimo's (2010) excitement for the body as a site of radical learning and reordering is shared by Federici (2020) who identifies the body as an important place to begin resisting the exploitation and alienation of capitalism. Acknowledging that capitalism's genesis was predicated on the separation of people and land, and that

subsequent control of the body is maintained through the manipulation of space and time, Federici's (2020) analysis can easily be applied to environmental justice concerns in central Appalachia which commit violence against land and people (pp. 120-121). We might learn from Federici's joyful framework that uplifts the body's knowledge as an exciting new way to orient our understanding of the world:

> "Our bodies have reasons that we need to learn, rediscover, reinvent. We need to listen to their language as the path to our health and healing, as we need to listen to the language and rhythms of the natural world as the path to the health and healing of the earth. Since the power to be affected and to effect, to be moved and to move, capacity that is indestructive, exhausted only with death, is constitutive of the body, there is an immanent politics resideing in it: the capacity to transform itself, others, and change the world." (Federici, 2020, p. 124)

Combined with Alaimo's (2010) special attention to the body enmeshed with a toxic and degraded landscape, Federici (2020) offers a body politic that could transform central Appalachian environmental justice activism through an alliance between soil and flesh. I see this as one potential opportunity for joy and liberation in the region.

Alaimo (2010), Federici (2020), and McNeill (2022) once again lead us to the conclusion that diversifying the environmental justice activism narrative is imperative for the wellbeing of our more than human world. Queer activists and scholars are working through the possibilities of more relational ways of being that consider the more than human world, Harris saying "queer activism understands our bodies as sites of resistance. It acknowledges the way the physical forms but also the fictions and discourses of our beings' code and contour space." (McNeill, 2022, p. 65). Kendall Loyer's essay in McNeill (2022) titled "Performing the Queer Corpo-Rural in Plant Time" offers some tangible examples of alternative ways of being coming out of Appalachia that takes the body and its relations to the more-than-human world seriously to challenge oppressive

systems of power (pp. 96-107). Loyer coins “plant time,” which “ruptures the flow of convention and resists the call for militant adherence to linear time,” (McNeill, 2022, p. 97). Plant time is rural, queer, caring, anti-capitalist, patient, adaptable, unruly, and deeply informed by Loyer’s creative and embodied life as a dancer (McNeill, 2022, pp. 96-107).

The seeds for a more interconnected, intersectional, and joyful paradigm of environmental justice activism are here in central Appalachia. Bell (2013) showcases the humor and rich community present. Participant interviewees Pauline Canterberry and Mary Miller, a pair of friends and activists said,“we have had to laugh through this—we have always tried to make fun out of this,” (Bell, 2013, p. 39). Canterbury and Miller recount painting their faces with dust and sharing moments of joy with their community members while collecting samples (Bell, 2013, pp. 39-42). Participant interviewee Donetta Blankenship recounts similar experiences of deep community engagement and love through her activism (Bell, 2013, pp. 66-67). These stories are an opportunity, we just have to decide to move forward carrying the seeds with us.

All people in central Appalachia are deeply affected by the extractive industry in one way or another: drinking polluted water, developing black lung, bounded by the mono-economy, or living with fear of the landscape’s increasingly unexpected changes. These people need to be cared for with gentleness and compassion – pulling on the themes discussed in the previous section. Further, these people have the potential of using the circumstances of their position to cultivate new ways of being and knowing that are intimately interwoven with our more-than-human world.

Maybe the Multitool is a Seed!

The motherhood narrative offers a cultural touchstone and political power to people resisting the devaluation and disruption of reproductive labor and environmental justice in its many forms. Through my analysis of the four core texts, as well as supplementary sources such as documentaries, news, visual media, etc., I find that the motherhood narrative derives its salience in central Appalachia through its utilization of the Appalachian sense of place which values homeplace and environment highly, accessibility of power for often undervalued women, the narrative's ability to maintain respectability for activists in the face of barriers, and environmental justice activism's congruence with the expected maintenance of home and environment for women. Then, in answering my second research question, I identified a variety of strengths and weaknesses of the motherhood narrative. The motherhood narrative is advantageous due in part to the characteristics discussed in my exploration of the first research question. The narrative being compatible with the Appalachian sense of place, accessible, and respectable make it an effective tool for activists in the region. Further, the narrative is versatile, culturally and historically relevant, has flexible metrics of membership, and a high yield for participation. That being said, the motherhood narrative has significant flaws in its deviation from feminism, woman-nature essentialism, exclusion, and obscuring the work of marginalized activists.

Overall, I conclude that the motherhood narrative has weaknesses that must be critically and equitably addressed, but that the narrative and its core characteristics will remain relevant and powerful as time goes on. Each of us wishes to be cared for and loved, pulling on the strings of the motherhood narrative's four core components. The

task now is to find ways to move forward, continuing to fight for environmental justice, while also addressing injustices within the movement. The current use of the motherhood narrative, using binary gender roles, reliance on the culture/nature dualism, and eclipsing the work of marginalized activists, must evolve to seek equity within as well as outside of the movement.

Even as I write this thesis the catastrophic train derailment in East Palestine, OH is exposing a still unknown amount of people to toxic chemicals via air, water, and soil (Hauser, 2023). Residents have been left with questions about who is telling the truth about the disaster, and if they are safe in their own homes (Ricciutti, 2023). It is a familiar story for Appalachians. East Palestine, OH is within the ARC's boundaries of the Appalachian region (*About the Appalachian Region*, n.d.). The severity of this disaster will have implications on the health of land and people in Ohio and beyond for many years. Further, a similar train derailment has occurred on the New River in WV, in our country's newest national park, wherein 362,000 gallons of crude oil where released into the river (Tate, 2023; *3 Injured in Fiery Train Derailment Caused by Rockslide*, 2023). The dangers and injustices meted out by the prevailing systems of power will continue to prompt people to have to rise up and demand better for their communities and ecosystems. Therefore, it is imperative that we examine the discourses surrounding environmental justice, and the tools and narratives that activists are using to take action. In this struggle we must not let women and mothers continue to act as a sacrifice zone in environmental justice activism. We must find new ways of speaking, moving, and acting that make space for all people to be a part of a joyful, active, and resistant community.

The work of activists using the motherhood narrative in Appalachia and the stories that are told, by activists, scholars, and journalists, about resistance and environmental degradation are of great consequence for both the material and ideological reality of central Appalachians due to the prominent place they occupy in the discourse about environmental justice. The motherhood narrative in Appalachia is worthy of greater scholarship due to the implications for both the power dynamics that are woven into these narratives on class, gender, sexuality, region, ethnicity, and race and the global fight against fossil fuel industry and climate change.

Similar struggles for justice found elsewhere are indicative of the global community's struggle for survival against a capitalist machine that demands the sacrifice of both human and non-human life and dignity. Therefore, my work here is connected to a larger framework of critical studies that demands a more ethical and equitable world free of the oppressive and exploitative systems that have defined both human and non-human life and labor. Social and cultural discourses regarding gender, queerness, and race are also at play in this work. Entangled with the work of the activists I study and the discourse surrounding them are norms and valuations of identity, which must be examined with care to understand how power is leveraged throughout these activist's stories. Working toward liberatory futures for all land and people necessitates a critical eye to these power dynamics and reflection on how we might create more equitable futures for all.

Ultimately, the motherhood narrative and the environmental justice activism being performed in Appalachia is fertile ground for learning, growth, and imaginations of liberatory futures. The motherhood narrative multitool has served its purpose, and served

it well, for central Appalachian activists resisting extractive industry. Yet, the multitool is a seed for growth for communities and activists. It should be deconstructed and salvaged – tinkering and imagining new ways to live and resist in our more-than-human world.

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