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HILLBILLY WOMEN, AFFRILACHIANS, AND QUEER MOUNTAINEERS:

BELONGING AND MOBILITY AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN RURAL

COMMUNITIES

A Dissertation in

Rural Sociology and Women's Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

Rural communities in the U.S. are struggling to survive and thrive as processes of deindustrialization and globalization lure youth away to urban areas. Meanwhile, young people who do reside in rural places struggle to negotiate the parts of their identity that are connected to place and their gender, race, and sexuality, which can often seem at odds with the norms of their community. Sociologists have shown that these societal patterns help create and reinforce economic, educational, and class-based inequalities among rural and urban places. Feminist theorists have developed the concept of intersectionality to better understand how the multiple identities that people embody can obscure the ways gender, race, sexuality, class, and other forms of identity contribute to inequalities. In my dissertation, I apply an intersectional approach to the experiences of young, college-educated people in rural places to understand if and how they are able to reconcile their identities in order to create a sense of belonging and how this affects their physical and social mobility and participation in their communities. I argue that sexism, racism, and heterosexism alienate young people from communities but that negotiating the intersections of identity creates space for belonging and engagement between young people and place.

I use a theoretical framework based in both sociological understandings of education, mobility, and community and feminist understandings of identity and power to ask three research questions: 1. In what ways do young people negotiate a sense of belonging in rural places through the intersection of their identity and place? 2. How are these experiences of identity and belonging relevant to young people's mobility? 3. In the context of belonging and mobility, how are young people oriented toward rural places and communities? In order to answer these questions, I used a combination of qualitative data in the form of focus

groups and semi-structured interviews with current college students and recent college

graduates living in West Virginia as well as quantitative migration data from the American

Community Survey. I also apply an intersectional approach to the methodology of this

project in order to "center" the experiences of marginalized people and to circumvent the

"insider/outsider" dichotomy present in much of the literature about the relationships of

people to place. In all, I conducted seven focus groups with a total of 65 current college

students active in student groups among three universities in West Virginia and 27 individual

interviews with college graduates under age 40 living in the state.

I divide the dissertation findings into three chapters. The first two chapters are an

analysis of the intersectional experiences of young adults across gender, race, sexuality, class,

and place. In the third chapter, I apply this intersectional analysis specifically to the tensions

between mobility and community for young people in rural communities. In the first findings

chapter, I analyze qualitative data from the focus groups and interviews to examine the ways

youth negotiate multiple aspects of their identity in order to find a sense of belonging. The

analysis from this chapter yields evidence of a "dialectic of belonging" and confirms that

many young people do feel alienated toward place through sexism, racism, and homophobia,

but also that the intersection of place and identity can be an avenue to belonging for young

men and women, youth of color, and LGBT youth. In the second findings chapter, I analyze

these qualitative data in the context of class. The prominence of class as a relevant identity

for college-educated youth was an unanticipated finding, and I show that intersections of

gender, race, and sexuality with class and place can lead to reconstructions of identity and

alliances across class. In the third findings chapter, I use a combination of quantitative and

qualitative data to examine the physical and social mobility of young people as well as the

roles that college-educated youth take on as community leaders despite their high mobility. This final chapter places the experiences of the young adults in my sample in the broader context of rural youth out-migration and community sustainability.

The title of my dissertation refers to "hillbilly women, Affrilachians, and queer mountaineers," all of which are terms that reappropriate and reconcile the sometimes mutually exclusive identities of gender, race, sexuality, class, and place. The dissertation findings reveal the extent to which these intersectional identities are accessible and the way these intersections impact the role of young people in rural communities. This research contributes important information about the struggles and perseverance of young people in marginalized places who have the potential to help create a more sustainable and just future.

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"Too many of our young people feel like they're camping here in the wilderness before their exodus because young people are leaving Appalachia. Perhaps it's to go to places where the homophobia and racism are not so collectively part of the culture. Perhaps they're leaving to find work, as they have for generations. Maybe they're fleeing a water supply that is being openly and systematically poisoned by corporations that are out of control and legislators that refuse to represent us properly. My students give all these reasons as to why they leave. But the one that hurts me the most is when they say they're leaving because they feel invisible or they feel as if they are only accepted with suspicion."

"Often I hear people talk about how accepting Appalachians are of people who are different. 'He's just a little bit quare.' –people in my community sometimes said when referring to a person they accepted as part of their world but who didn't quite fit in whether he be socially inept or actually queer in the most modern sense of the word. Of course, this is a colloquial distortion of the word 'queer;' that's easy to figure out. When I heard it growing up, I don't think the people really realized that, though. It was just part of the way we talked. As a people, Appalachians have always had 'quare folks' amongst them. Always these people were only accepted with some wariness. Consider the 'quare' women who changed the region at places like the Hindman Settlement School. They were eventually folded into the community but not without skepticism, not without having to prove themselves the extra mile. Anyone who is different, whether it be by their origins, their actions, their race, their orientation, has always been accepted only with a fair amount of suspicion. That is a kind of half-way acceptance and an acceptance that demands that the 'quare' not be too awfully visible. And in essence, that is not acceptance."

"We like to say that Appalachia is a place of diversity, but I'm going to be honest tonight and say that it's not diverse enough. The truth is that Appalachia is a largely white and largely heteronormative culture. Now one reason for this is simply historical. As a region we can't force people of color or different orientation to move here. The thing we can change is making it more welcoming."

–Silas House, Our Secret Places in the Waiting World: Becoming a New Appalachia, Appalachian Studies Association 2014 Keynote Address

Chapter 1

Introduction

The point of departure

In 1972, Richard D. Raymond published *The Myth of the Appalachian Brain Drain: A Case Study of West Virginia*. In the forward to the study, William H. Miernyk, the director of the West Virginia Regional Research Institute at the time, notes that Appalachia had lost 2.2 million people in the 1950s and another 1.4 million in the 1960s (ix).[1] This dramatic population loss was likely the impetus for Raymond's study. Using survey data analysis of college graduates from colleges and universities in West Virginia, he concluded that, overall, there was not a significant difference in human capital value between the graduates who stayed versus those who left and that the phenomenon of out-migration would not "inflict significant costs on the residents of the state" (p. 52). He goes on to say,

> In general, it appears that inaction is the appropriate course to follow. But to accept this suggestion one would be directly confronted with a public attitude which definitely regards the "brain drain" as a problem requiring immediate attention. It might be very difficult to gain public acceptance for a policy which explicitly proposed to do nothing about the "brain drain."…Needless to say, the publicity currently emanating from official sources which stresses the questionable negative effects of the brain drain should be replaced either with silence or with statements emphasizing the positive aspects of out-migration. (pp. 52-53)

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[1] This out-migration from Appalachia was part of a larger migration trend that has been, in some sources,

Over forty years later, Raymond's speculation about public attitude remains relevant. The "positive aspects of out-migration" are rarely discussed in the context of the "brain drain." For example, in 2014 West Virginia Public Radio began a series devoted to the "population problem" in West Virginia. Headlines included "How Can West Virginia Keep Its Young People Here?," "Young West Virginians Say There's a Negative Perception of Those Who Stay In the State," and "Young West Virginians Say They Want to Make the State a Better Place" (Adducchio, 2014 a, b, and c). In addition, the movement of young, educated people from rural areas to urban areas in Appalachia and the U.S. more generally continues to be a topic of consternation in popular media (some examples in the last three years in addition to the aforementioned include: Gallardo & Bishop, 2012; Headly, 2012; Miller, 2013), policy initiatives (PROMISE Scholarship Ad-hoc Advisory Committee, 2009; Schwartz, 2004) and scholarly research (Byun et al., 2012; Beasley, 2011; Carr & Kefalas 2009, Corbett, 2007; Demi et al. 2009; Petrin et al., 2014; Sherman & Sage, 2011; Towers, 2005; Winters, 2011; Wright, 2012).

Peaking at a high of 2,005,552 people at the 1950 census, the population of West Virginia has experienced a net loss overtime of 151, 248 people.[2] Although the net loss obscures a substantial population increase between 1970 and 1980 along with a general "rural rebound" in the U.S. amid a long-term pattern of urbanization (Johnson & Cromartie, 2006). After a more moderate increase between 1990-2010, the population is now expected to drop around 20,000 people by 2030 (Figure 1-1), which may result in the loss of one of West Virginia's three congressional seats (Christiadi et al., 2014). In

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[2] Based on U.S. Census 2013 population estimate.

addition, West Virginia continues to lose a substantial proportion of college graduates to out-migration.[3]
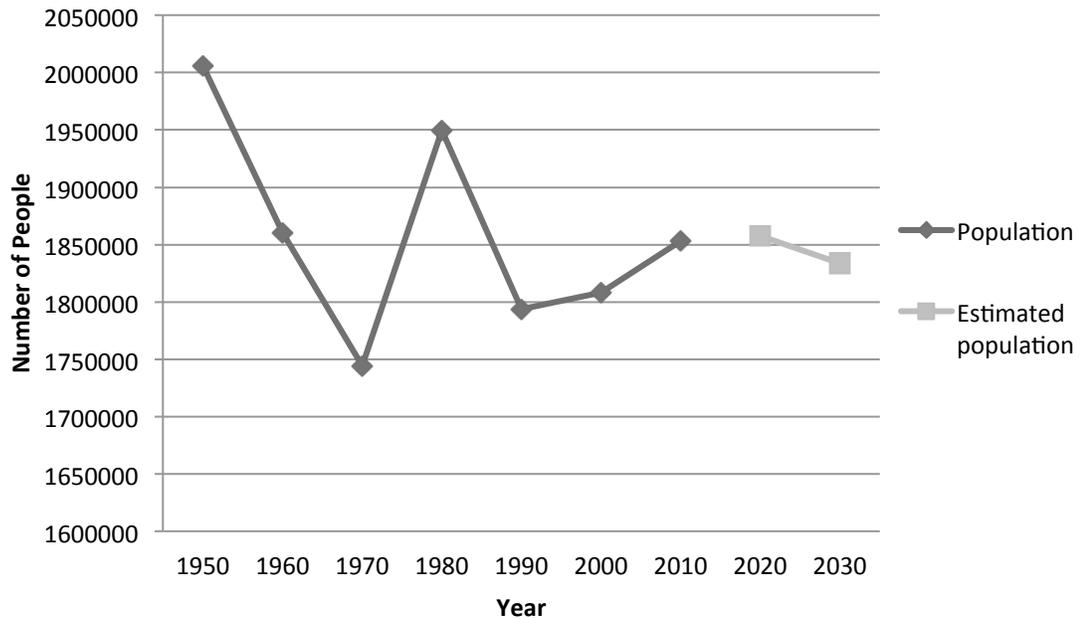
Figure **1-1**: West Virginia total population from 1950 to 2030[4]

In addition to the concern about population decline, particularly among "the best and brightest," educational attainment levels in West Virginia are quite low. Of people age 25 and older, only 17.5% of West Virginians hold a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 28.5% of the U.S. as a whole. As Figure 1-2 shows below, 80% of the 55 counties in West Virginia have an educational attainment level below the state average of 17.5% of people age 25 and older holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Only one

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[3] Less than half (47.8%) of students who graduated from public higher education in West Virginia between 2002 and 2012 were working in West Virginia in 2012. In addition, Carr and Kefalas (2009) report that West Virginia ranks first in the out-migration of college students.
[4] Based on U.S. Census population totals. Estimates for 2020 and 2030 from Christiadi et al. (2014).

county, Monongalia at 37.3%, has a higher education attainment level than the national average. Out-migration of educated people and low college-going rates give West Virginia the distinction of being the state in the U.S. with the lowest college degree educational attainment levels and the only state with a college degree educational attainment level of below 20%.

Percentage of educational attainment among West Virginia's 55 counties
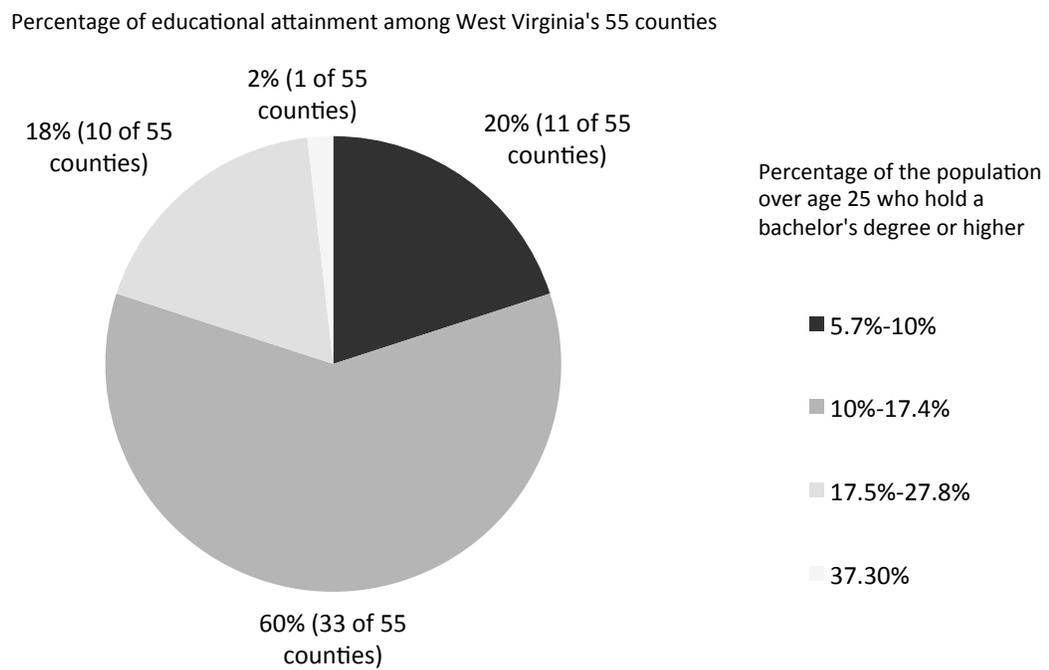
Figure **1-2**: Educational attainment in West Virginia between 2008-2012[5]

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[5] Based on U.S. Census 2008-2012 data.

Figure **1-3**: The abandoned Coalwood High School in McDowell County, WV

Photo Credit: HOLLOW, Billy Wolfe

West Virginia often pops up in 50th place in state rankings on various indicators of success, progress, and well-being. Or, if the indicator measures something considered undesirable like obesity or diabetes,[6] West Virginia likely ranks in the top five. Perhaps this is why, as the aforementioned public radio story describes, there is a stigma associated with staying in West Virginia. Indeed, the very notion of the "brain drain" suggests that anyone who is smart enough will leave and only the "others" are left

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[6] In 2010, Huntington, WV became the focus of the first season of television chef Jaime Oliver's "Food Revolution." The location was chosen because it was considered statistically one of the unhealthiest cities in the U.S. based on obesity and diabetes levels. The show featured Oliver going through the refrigerators and kitchen cabinets of a family whose members were all overweight or obese. He also attended medical appointments with them, went to the school cafeterias, and opened up a community kitchen, which still operates today under the management of the Cabell Huntington Hospital, offering cooking classes and community health outreach.

behind[7]. And, although the out-migration of young, college-educated people is a material reality, it is also true that the "brain drain" is something of a myth given the presence and profile of young, college-educated people in the state, many of whom are using their human capital capacities to address ongoing economic, social, and environmental issues in the state and region.

For example, Generation West Virginia is a state-wide network of "young talent organizations" that focus specifically on leadership development, economic development, and legislation and policy development reflecting the interests of young people age 21-45 in West Virginia. Specifically, they state, "We are working to combat the state's historic 'brain drain,' which refers to young talent leaving the state and region to find employment, career, social, and other opportunities (Generation West Virginia, 2013).

Another example is Sustainable Williamson, a community-based effort started by young people in a small town in Southern West Virginia. This campaign for creating sustainability in the community through health, education, and economic diversification is a collaborative process among younger and older community members as well as newcomers and people who have lived in the community their whole lives (City of Williamson, n.d.).

A third example, also based in the Southern part of the state, is the interactive documentary, *Hollow*, directed by young West Virginia out-migrant, Elaine McMillion. The documentary features various communities in McDowell County, WV, which, notably, is the county with the lowest educational attainment levels (5.7% as represented

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[7] In general, throughout the remainder of this dissertation, I try to avoid this term because it implies that those who stay are less valuable.

in Figure 2), and has lost 80% of its population since 1950. McMillion uses storytelling and interactive features to explore the various ways people are dealing with the threats to the sustainability of their communities (Hollow, 2012).

Finally, the STAY (Stay Together Appalachian Youth) Project is a network of young people age 14-30 in Central Appalachia, started and managed by young people, who are "working together to advocate for and actively participate in their home mountain communities" (STAY, 2013). Notably, through their membership and organizational strategies, STAY has identified the need for creating networks for LGBTQ and youth of color in Appalachia. They have specifically organized LGBTQ and youth of color gatherings in addition to annual summer institutes that bring together youth from across Central Appalachia, during which they identified three issues of focus for 2013-2015: public education, clean water, and juvenile justice (STAY).

In light of the efforts to "make the state a better place," as the public radio story mentioned above reflects, is the out-migration of young people from Appalachia really a problem? In addition, are there positive aspects to out-migration, as Raymond (1972) suggested so many years ago? The juxtaposition of the population and education "problems" next to the evidence that so many young, educated people are in fact highly engaged in their communities is a curious contradiction. It suggests that there is another narrative developing about youth, community, and mobility in West Virginia that isn't adequately captured by our current knowledge about youth out-migration in rural communities, both in contexts highlighted above or in the more recent academic literature (Sherman & Sage, 2011; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; and Corbett, 2007). The loci of young, educated people working toward creating better, more sustainable communities in a state

historically shaped by unsustainable economic, social, and environmental issues, present

a compelling starting place for examining the relationship between young people and

rural communities.

Figure **1-4**: Participants at the 2011 STAY Summer Institute

The dissertation project

This dissertation project developed out of my desire to improve a certain place in which I had a personal stake, one that has often suffered unfairly from a history of exploitation, discrimination, and other struggles embedded in political histories. Appalachia, and West Virginia in particular, is nonetheless a compelling place that is both peculiar and common. It is a region characterized as rural, even though many towns and cities within its borders are growing metropolitan centers and even most of the rural communities in West Virginia are within one to two hours of a metropolitan center—a commutable distance, at least in the summer. More precisely, this project developed out of an intent to better understand what was happening with younger people in the region as policy makers, community leaders, academics, and young people themselves seemed to be engaged in a lot of hand-wringing about the role of youth in Appalachia amidst the out-migration of young people.

Sense of belonging, youth outmigration, and community sustainability are issues in many rural communities (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Smith & Fisher, 2012). In the Appalachian region, many young people are aware of these issues and are actively trying to confront them through a variety of strategies including starting small businesses, making documentary films, working to integrate alternative energy into local economies, and developing networks among youth leaders in Appalachia. On the other hand, many young people continue to be alienated from Appalachian communities through social, political, and economic forces. This dissertation focuses on the social process of belonging as a way to understand how youth in Appalachia relate to rural places and the

implications of those relationships for their role and participation in their community. I rely on feminist theories of belonging that integrate a social justice approach to the relationship between identity and community. From a feminist theoretical perspective, the interface between the personal and the political is integral for understanding society (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). As such, a personal sense of belonging, rooted in identity, holds power in accessibility of and capacity for community (Diprose, 2008; hooks, 2009). Part of the purpose of this dissertation will be to determine what barriers to belonging exist for educated youth in West Virginia and also to uncover ways in which this population creates a sense of belonging despite these barriers. Specifically, I will investigate the intersectional aspects of belonging in terms of gender, race, class, and sexuality and how they contribute to the phenomenon of out-migration from rural places.

Intersectionality, a theoretical tool developed by feminist theorists to examine multiple identities and systems of power together, is a driving conceptual framework for this dissertation, which in itself lies at the intersection of three academic fields: women's studies, Appalachian studies, and rural sociology. In women's studies, intersectionality has been used primarily to analyze the way gender and race as identities and systems of power affect each other. As intersectionality has become widely used in women's studies and other disciplines as well, it has developed as a tool for analyzing class, sexuality, age, ability, ethnicity, nationality, and other relevant categories of identity. Although place has been incorporated into intersectional analysis (Valentine, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2011), it is much less likely to be analyzed as an identity similar to gender, race, sexuality and class. People are less free through the ways sexism, racism, heterosexism, and classism infiltrate society, and in some ways place-based discrimination follows the same pattern.

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Appalachian studies scholars have long dealt with the emotional and political relationships with place, and place-based identity has been documented as an important asset to community development and organization (Couto, 1994; Fisher, 1993 and 1999; Smith & Fisher, 2012). In this context, young people, especially educated young people, become highly valued socially, but not necessarily economically, in the community because they are rare due to out-migration. In addition, although gender, race, sexuality, and class continue to stratify people in Appalachia, the patterns of spatial stratification create commonalities among people in the region. As Smith and Fisher (2012) assert,

> [P]lace is fundamental to the operation of power, the production of inequality, and the mobilization of resistance…[E]very place, even the beloved homeplace of Appalachia, is marked by and implicated in the exploitation and injustice that are produced beyond, but also within its boundaries. The privileged and powerful are not only 'outsiders' but also in our midst—indeed, in some instances are us. Transforming places requires internal transformation; the struggle for democracy and social justice has a home front" (pp. 268- 269).

Thus, understanding the ways in which young people negotiate these various identities in relation to place and community contributes to our knowledge of the role of young people in sustaining rural places and communities.

In terms of understanding the role of young people in rural places, rural sociologists and other scholars continue to do important research on the relationship between youth, education, and out-migration in rural places and communities (Carr & Kefalas 2009; Chenowith & Galliher, 2004; Corbett, 2007; Demi et al., 2009, McLaughlin et al., 2014; Schafft & Jackson 2010; Sherman & Sage, 2011). However, the relationship between college students in rural places and communities is less understood

(for some analysis see Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; and

McDonough et al. 2010).

Often, college-educated young adults are transitory and are thus assumed to be less

invested in place and community. The assumed incompatibility of mobility and

community relies on a globalized economic and educational system that devalues rurality.

In other words, physical and social mobility is often an essential component of education

and career attainment embedded in a system where higher education and the careers that

require higher education are clustered in urban areas. The movement of people

encouraged under this system undermines rural communities (Corbett, 2007).

This research focuses on a specific sample of college-educated young adults in a

specific place: West Virginia. The findings are intended to be applicable and valuable

specifically to this population and place. However, the data and implications will also be

meaningful outside of this context. In 2010, for the first time, there were more people

living in urban places than in rural places globally (United Nations, 2009). This

movement in the global population is felt locally in many rural areas in the U.S. that have

been losing population over the past sixty years due primarily to economic and social

changes so that by 2010 over 80% of the U.S. population lives in cities (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2010). A general "hollowing out" of small towns and rural communities is part

of a broad context of hazards to the sustainability of rural communities including risks to

economic, environment, political, social, built, cultural, and environmental capital (Carr

& Kefalas, 2009; Flora & Flora, 2013; Green, 2013; Green & Haines, 2008; Lewis,

2009)[8]. One particular issue associated with these changes is the phenomenon of the out-migration of young people from rural places, particularly those who are educated, which I discussed in the context of Appalachia and West Virginia at the beginning of this chapter. Therefore, this research project is part of the broader narrative of rural communities.

West Virginia is representative of the phenomenon of youth out-migration for a number of reasons: the post-industrial economy, the mostly rural landscape, it's position within the Appalachian region, and, perhaps most succinctly, because even though West Virginia experiences a net gain of college students every year (for more details see Chapter 6), the overall educational attainment in the state remains the lowest in the nation (as previously reported in this chapter). The outmigration of young, educated people is not just an indicator of a poor economy nor is it merely one of the causes of further population decline. Rather, it is part of an interrelated pattern where economic changes result in out-migration and low educational attainment, which results in community decline, which results in further incapacitation of the economy. Yet small and rural communities across West Virginia, like those across the U.S., persist. The population of young, educated people in West Virginia is a group that provides insight to this struggle and the implications for rural places. The absence of young, educated people is bemoaned with the understanding that staying is considered a failure on some level. Young people living in West Virginia confront this contradiction.

This research project highlights the experiences of college-educated women, people of color, and LGBT people. As such, their voices and experiences add important

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[8] This trend is not limited to rural places as major post-industrial urban areas like Detroit are experiencing similar phenomena.

knowledge for understanding Appalachia and also rural places in general where "queer" lives are often made invisible by the social forces within rural communities and the stereotypes perpetuated in narratives of rural places embedded in a society where urban life is the norm. Even while the outmigration of youth is recognized as a major factor in the deterioration of rural places, the very existence of young adults choosing to live in rural places is challenged through an intersecting system of sexism, racism, homophobia, and classism. Therefore, I pose and answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do young people negotiate a sense of belonging in rural places through the intersection of their identity and place?

2. How are these experiences of identity and belonging relevant to young people's mobility?

3. In the context of belonging and mobility, both physical and social, how are young people oriented toward rural places and communities?

In this dissertation, I will present and discuss the contingent ways these young people find belonging in West Virginia and show how sense of belonging is deeply ambiguous for both college students and college graduates living in West Virginia. This is true in different ways depending on gender, race, and sexuality. I also analyze the class implications of finding belonging in a postindustrial working class culture and the way college educated people both connect across and reinforce class stratification in West Virginia. Finally, I examine the physical and social mobility of young adults in West Virginia and analyze the ways in which mobilites and community are experienced both in tension and in cooperation with each other. In the remainder of this introduction I provide

more context to the issues surrounding identity, belonging, mobility, and community for young people in Appalachia. The chapter ends with an overview of Chapters 2-7.

A brief overview of the economic, political, and social context for understanding identity, belonging, mobility, and community for young people in Appalachia

A capitalist economy based on the extraction and exploitation of natural resources has characterized West Virginia throughout its history and even before it became a state in 1863. Indeed, as Wilma Dunaway made clear in her 1996 book *The First American Frontier*, the Appalachian Mountain region became a peripheral zone of a capitalist world system as early as the 1700s through extraction of natural resources. Moreover, ownership of land and mineral rights in Appalachia have been dominated by corporations and absentee land owners starting after the Revolutionary War when warrants for free land in the western territories (meaning Appalachia) of southern seaboard states were given to military veterans, which created a market for investors from urban and plantation districts to buy the warrants for a fraction of their value (Williams, 2002). Over 200 years later, the collection of researchers who produced *The Appalachian Land Ownership Study* in 1983 concluded, "that corporate and absentee ownership of land made it difficult for local communities to pursue alternate economic development and to provide adequate housing for residents, and the low tax-base resulted in poor education systems and a lack of infrastructure development" (Scott, 2008:236).

Starting with the Industrial Revolution, West Virginia has long been defined by the coal industry, which dominated its economy and culture for much of the state history

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over the twentieth century. As such, classic Marxist definitions of social class aptly describe the status and communities of people in a peripheral region with a significant amount of corporate and absentee land ownership who sold their labor to extract raw materials. Working-class consciousness was deep-seated in the state where many families hung a portrait of John L. Lewis (president of the United Mine Workers of America, UMWA) next to a depiction of The Last Supper in their homes (Goode, 2006:208). During the boom coal-mining times, Appalachia became home to a more racially and ethnically diverse population including an African American population as well as eastern and western Europeans, including a Jewish population (Wagner & Obermiller, 2004; Weiner, 2005). The mine wars in West Virginia between 1912-1927 "produced some of the most dramatic episodes in American labor history" including the Matewan Massacre and the March on Blair Mountain (Williams, 2002, p. 270).

One hundred years later, the coal industry and unions are still powerful political forces in West Virginia. For example, UMWA protests against Patriot Coal Company in West Virginia and Kentucky occurred during the summer of 2013 over plans to eliminate miners' pensions after Patriot Coal declared bankruptcy. On the other hand, the class consciousness associated with unions has changed dramatically as union and union membership decreased and unions and companies work together against environmental activism.

At present, Wal-Mart is the largest employer in West Virginia, and has been since 1998 (Workforce West Virginia, 2013). Like many rural places, service sector industries are becoming dominant within the state economy, and at number five, Consolidation Coal Company is the only non-service sector company in the top five employers in West

Virginia (Vias & Nelson, 2006). Moreover, of all the graduates from public universities between 2002 and 2012, over half were employed in either health care (27.0%) or education (23.4%), while another 21.1% were employed in retail trade, professional and technical services, or public administration (Christiadi et al., 2014: 29). Notably, both among college graduates (1.6%) and among the state as a whole (4.6%), mining and natural resources extraction accounted for very little share of employment in the state. The labor economy in West Virginia is relevant to this research because the social implications of being college-educated in a place where jobs requiring a bachelor's degree are not as prevalent as those that do not are implicit in the data reported in Chapters 4, 5, and6.

Table **1-1**. Share of employment by industry in West Virginia for public college and university graduates (2002-2012) and the state as a whole[9]

NAICS	Sector	Share of Total College Graduates (%)	State Industry Share (%)	Total College Graduates
72	**Accommodation and food services**	5.3	**9.4**	3,845
56	Administrative and waste services	4.1	4.7	3,009
1	Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	0.1	0.2	71
1	Arts, entertainment, and recreation	1.0	1.1	762
3	Construction	1.8	5.6	1,300
61	**Educational services**	**23.4**	**9.4**	17,077
52	Finance and insurance	3.0	2.7	2,224
62	**Health care and social assistance**	**27.0**	**18.5**	19,774
51	Information	1.6	1.5	1,135
55	Management of companies and enterprises	0.5	0.9	330
31-33	Manufacturing	3.2	6.9	2,358
21	**Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction**	**1.6**	**4.6**	1,133
81	Other services, except public administration	1.9	3.0	1,381
54	**Professional and technical services**	**6.9**	3.7	5,073
92	**Public Administration**	**6.4**	**7.0**	4,676
53	Real estate and rental and leasing	0.7	0.9	536
44-45	**Retail trade**	**7.8**	**12.4**	5,705
48-49	Transportation and warehousing	0.8	2.9	545
99	Unclassified establishments	0.2	0.1	165
22	Utilities	0.7	1.1	543
42	Wholesale trade	2.1	1.3	1,505

As Stephen L. Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith point out, "many have observed that poor and working-class Appalachians remain more isolated from similar populations elsewhere than from the corporate and political forces that oppress them daily" (2012, p. 4). They argue, "what counts as a 'social problem' and what remedies exist to treat it

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[9] Adapted from Bowen & Deskins (2014: 30) using data compiled from the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and Workforce West Virginia.

have shifted in ways that render collective political action more elusive" (5). As more formal systems of class consciousness have been dismantled in Central Appalachian communities, the persistent problems in the region are more difficult to interpret as collective issues rather than individual issues. Fisher and Smith use the analogy of black lung and OxyContin abuse as two public health issues in the region where the former was confronted collectively and the latter understood as an individual problem. Out-migration from the region is not just a recent phenomenon, and collective responses to this issue have been rare but not nonexistent. For example, Appalachian migration to urban areas resulted in collective identities in Appalachian enclaves in cities like Cincinnati (Obermiller et al., 2012). However, the collective action in these situations was also a result of already existing similarities based on class. Indeed, collective identity and action similar to the Urban Appalachians in Ohio has not occurred among highly educated middle class out-migrants from the region. On the other hand, as Fisher and Smith point out,

> [T]he declining viability of many communities in Appalachia has also been a spur to action. The defense and reinvention of 'place; are central to many of the organizing initiatives…However, organizing in defense of place can also be exclusionary, and the political content of such efforts…can be ambiguous if not downright reactionary. Appalachia, particularly the predominantly white and rural areas of the region, has been a receptive ground for the culture wars. Right wing politicians have successfully channeled class resentments and anxieties…into cultural condemnations of immigrants, the poor, peoples of color, feminists, homosexuals—in short, any group that apparently does not meet narrow standards of national belonging. Defense of 'place' and 'community,' in short, can have multiple, contradictory political trajectories. (p. 6)

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, some examples of the ways collective action is being taken by people in Appalachia, and West Virginia in particular, are organizations started and managed by young people including the STAY (Stay Together Appalachian Youth) Project and Generation West Virginia. Both organizations, less than a decade old, have had success in organizing around the idea that because of and despite the phenomenon of youth out-migration, young people are oriented toward and committed to place and making Appalachian and West Virginian communities better. These groups began and grew during a period of development in communications through social media, and thus in the context of information sharing about rural and Appalachian issues and experiences. These developments also exist, at least in West Virginia, during a time of relative stability despite the Great Recession. Although, to be sure, many of the persistently poor counties in the state remain so like McDowell County where the poverty rate is 33.5% compared to the state rate (17.6%) and the national rate (14.9%) (U.S. Census). However, the unemployment rate in the state remained below the U.S. average during 2008-2014 (Bureau of Labor Statistics), and cities like Morgantown were deemed "recession proof" (Breed 2014).

Overall, West Virginia is a state with particularities connected to a unique economic, political, and social history. I suggest that working class culture is a key aspect of the hegemonic culture in West Virginia in relation to which youth construct their own identities. This is important to how they interpret and relate to place. Acknowledgement of an "underclass" status typical of the state informs the way they see their role in their place. This is important in the connections they see between social and economic justice. On the other hand, just as Wal-Mart is now the largest employer in the state, communities

in West Virginia are, and always have been, part of a macro and more general U.S. narrative. In this way, the experiences of young people in West Virginia are at times applicable to their specific location and to more general social processes.

Overview of chapters

In the next chapter, I discuss the themes of mobility, community, identity, and belonging as I review the relevant literature in order to contextualize this project within current scholarly knowledge. Drawing on literature primarily from rural sociology, Appalachian studies, and women's studies, I continue to discuss why youth in particular are an important population to understand in the context of sustainable rural communities as well as the connection between community, identity, and belonging. In addition, I introduce and discuss intersectionality as a conceptual framework for the methodology and analysis of this project and provide an overview of the identity categories highlighted in this project. Then, in Chapter 3, I detail the methodological approach to this project as well as detail the specific methods used. I discuss intersectionality as method, my own positionality as a researcher, further information about the research sites, and details of the research design, sample, and data analysis.

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6 I describe the three main findings of this dissertation. In Chapter 4, I report and analyze the ways in which participants experienced belonging through their gender, race, and sexuality identities. I suggest that young people are oriented toward their communities through a dialectic process of belonging. In Chapter 5, I focus more specifically on the experience of belonging through the prism of class

identity and show the ways in which education, gender, race, and sexuality can result in alienation from place but also foster cross-class connections, particularly among young people interested in social justice. Next, in Chapter 6, I examine mobility and community. First, I employ migration data to more accurately understand the phenomenon of out-migration in West Virginia across age, gender, race, and educational attainment. Then I report qualitative data regarding the mobility, migration, and community to provide a rich narrative about the tensions between mobility and community for young people in West Virginia. Finally, in Chapter 7 I conclude this dissertation by summarizing the project and findings, discussing the implications of the findings, acknowledging the limitations of this research, and suggesting directions for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

In this chapter I place the intersectional experiences of belonging, mobility, and community among college-educated youth in West Virginia in context using existing literature and theory. I divide this review into five sections. First, I discuss mobility and community in rural places and define the use and relevance of place, community, rurality, mobility, and metronormativity within the context of the research topic and purpose. Second, I discuss the precarious position of youth in rural communities and what this means for the sustainability of those places. Third, I integrate feminist theories of belonging with sociological theories of community and the interaction of structure and agency to critically develop a notion for understanding the politics of identity within communities. I review theories of community and discuss the ways identity is relevant to understanding community. I also discuss how feminist theories of belonging incorporate community and identity. Here, I suggest that this theoretical framework is useful for understanding the experiences and roles of youth in rural communities. In the fourth section I review feminist theories of intersectionality and how this concept is fundamentally relevant to youth negotiating identity and social structures in relation to their community. I discuss the value of using an intersectional approach to the

investigation of young adults' sense of belonging, mobility, and participation in rural places. Finally, in the fifth section, I briefly discuss the four identity categories that are the focus of this project. Here, I place gender, race, sexuality, and class in context to show why each category is relevant to understanding the relationship between young people and rural communities.

Defining community and mobility in rural places

Notions of place, community, mobility, and rurality are all common ideas both in everyday and scholarly language that have multiple meanings in different contexts. In addition to being a geographic location and a material form, place is also a social construct (Gieryn, 2000). Place influences social processes. In Appalachia, the connection between the physical landscape, the formations of neighborhoods, towns, and counties, and the processes of community are closely related. Just as place was meaningful in the development and formation of communities throughout the region, place also influenced the erosion and dissolution of communities in Appalachia amidst the larger context of spatial inequality. Rural sociology and Appalachian studies are fields that have been on the forefront of scholarship on the social and political components of spatial inequality (Billings & Blee, 2000; Eller, 2008; Gaventa, 1980; Lobao & Saenz, 2002; Lobao, 2004; Lewis et. al, 1978; Tickamyer, 2000). This research project contributes to this literature by examining the ways in which identity is involved in the processes of social stratification and spatial stratification. "Place is the grounds of this struggle over how we shall live in relation to one another and to the earth" (Smith &

Fisher, 2012, p. 288). Specifically, by examining gender, race, sexuality, and class experiences in relation to place and community, I offer knowledge about the social experiences of young adults in Appalachia amidst a narrative of social and spatial inequality. The sustainability of communities and the environment throughout the region are at risk through economic, political, and social processes. However, the presence of young people in Appalachia and the way in which they are oriented to and involved in place and community tell us about the potential for sustainable community development and social justice in the region.

In a sense, a community is a place. However, a community can also exist in the void of place, and places certainly exist without the presence of communities. In this dissertation, I use both terms, and while they are connected, I use "place" to denote a physical location, that may or may not include a community, and I use "community" only when there is a clear and specific reference to a system of groups of people and organizations related to place. The physical landscape of Appalachia, as varied as it is, has been one of the defining features of the region, as early as the Hernando de Soto expedition of 1539-1543 (Williams, 2002). The mountains and natural resources in the region continue to shape the experiences of humans within the area just as humans continue to shape the physical landscape. Just as many U.S. communities, towns, and cities formed around natural formations such as waterways, communities in West Virginia were often formed around natural resources and ways of transporting and using these natural resources such as coal, timber, and minerals (Williams, 2002). The trajectory of industrial natural resource extraction included the development and eventual decline of communities across the state, and the threats to the sustainability of

communities in the state are typical of postindustrial places where the economy has yet to transition.

In the U.S., the word "rural," conjures pastoral images of nature, homes and farms, or country people. Although the Appalachian region is commonly regarded as rural, these common notions of rurality are not adequate descriptors of the area. Neither are they technically accurate because Appalachia includes many metropolitan areas. Nor are they symbolically accurate, as the rural stereotypes of the area are more likely to have a negative connotation like "backwoods" or a consumerist connotation as a wilderness available for recreation. West Virginia, specifically, is a mix of rural and urban with 26 non-metro counties, 8 micropolitan, and 21 metropolitan counties (See Figure 2-1 below). However, the state is largely constructed as rural in popular imagination. Even the largest metropolitan centers including Charleston (population 51,018), Huntington (population 49,160), and Parkersburg (population 31,261) all abut rural landscapes and communities with very few urban sprawl or suburban landscapes. The county school districts include rural and urban communities. Notably, there is no major metropolitan city in West Virginia, professional sports team, or major airport.

Figure **2-1**: Non-metropolitan, micropolitan, and metropolitan counties in West Virginia[10]

Defining what counts as rural is an ongoing task for rural sociologists, and arguments have been made for understanding rurality as a social construct; a demographic distinction; an administrative, land-use, or economic distinction; and an obsolete distinction (Cromartie & Bulcholtz, 2008; Halfacree, 1993; Fuguitt, 2004; Lichter & Brown, 2011). Cromartie and Bucholtz (2008) discuss the various ways of distinguishing rural from urban areas by using administrative, land-use, and economic concepts to identify urban areas and then, by default, rural areas. Thus, the populations of three cities listed above would include more land area and people using land-use concepts, which are reflected in which counties are designated as metropolitan. Furthermore, even census-designated non-metropolitan counties could have economic ties to these urban centers so that the boundaries of urban and rural places become even more complex. Cromartie and Bulcholtz also state that "the definition of nonmetro areas used by most researchers applies a 50,000 population threshold" (2008, p. 31).

However, Lichter & Brown (2011), suggest that the rural/urban binary is increasingly problematic in light of the myriad ways in which rural and urban society is connected. Indeed, as the findings in Chapter 6 reflect, young college-educated people are highly mobile and can be connected to both urban and rural places. Moreover, the way young people themselves conceptualize rurality is important to acknowledge in trying to understand their relationship to place. Halfacree (1993) argues that academics should account for "lay discourse" in our constructions of rurality as this discourse includes the "rules and resources" through which people experience rurality. He notes, "Whilst our social representations of 'the rural' may be fetishized and misplaced, distorted, idealized, and generalized, they nevertheless produce very 'real' effects" (p.

32). Using lay discourse to construct a definition of rurality is relevant to this research project because young people are often relying on a "practical consciousness" (i.e. tacit knowledge with which to interpret the world and make decisions) and "discursive consciousness" (knowledge with which to interpret the world and make decisions that can be expressed) that are both based in common or lay discourse that is interpreted relationally on an individual basis. This is why several places in West Virginia can be understood relationally as urban or rural. For someone from a large urban center, they might seem rural. For someone from a small rural community, they might seem urban.

Cromartie and Bulcholtz (2008) conclude by asserting that "The choice of a rural definition should be based on the purpose of the activity." The purpose of this dissertation is to better understand belonging and mobility among young adults in West Virginia. In the findings chapters of this dissertation, I use the term "rural" in my analysis sometimes to refer to specific places and sometimes to refer to the entire state. However, of course, there are real differences between a person's experience in the most rural places in West Virginia and the most urban. I use "rural" to signify the relatively small population of West Virginia, the economic history of the state, which has largely been based on rural and small town natural resource extraction, and the "lay discourse" about West Virginia, which is closely tied to rural and small town notions of family, religion, community, foodways, recreation, aesthetics, and art forms.

Closely connected to the complex constructions of rurality and metropolitanism, the concept of mobility is an essential component of understanding the experiences of college-educated youth in rural places. Here, mobility can refer not only to physical movement, travel, and migration, but also the ways in which movement is part of a

stratified and unequal system. Usually, education is understood as the most useful tool to gain social mobility, meaning achievement of a privileged status in society. The physical mobility that often accompanies higher education is thus part of the social mobility process.

However, when we apply these ideas of social and physical mobility to rural contexts, mobility is better understood as a complex process which can be privileging and oppressive. For example, scholars studying rural queer issues have used the term "metronormativity" to describe the way LGBT and queer identity has become urbanized through mobile, material, and discursive processes (Halberstam, 2005; Herring, 2010). Through metronormativity, "success" for queer people must involve coming-out and constructing a social network within a metropolitan area, which, as Herring points out, would most ideally be San Francisco or New York City. The term metronormativity is also useful for understanding heterosexual identities in relation to rurality as well. "Success" in the U.S. for non-queer people is also highly metronormative in the sense that urban place, community, and culture are valued as the standard for success while rural place, community, and culture are devalued and are met with skepticism.

Thus, in the context of metronormativity, sense of belonging among young people in rural places becomes questionable. In addition to negotiating a sense of belonging in the context of the aforementioned class, educational, and ontological norms, young people in rural places are also negotiating a sense of belonging related to gender, racial, and sexuality norms, all of which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Why youth are important for sustainable rural communities

Youth play a perpetually important role in communities because they represent the potential in emerging leadership and social, economic, environmental, and demographic sustainability (Arnold et al., 2009; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Johnson, 2011; Reichert et al., 2013; Stockdale, 2006). As many rural communities across the United States struggle through economic transitions, depopulation, particularly of young people, continues to undermine sustainability and community development in many places (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; McGranahan et al., 2010b). Thus, youth are often understood to be a crucial population for the future viability and vibrancy of rural communities, and researchers have focused on youth as an essential component of community development (Brennan & Barnett, 2009; Carr & Kefalas, 2009, Corbett, 2007; Demi et al., 2009; Kingsolver & Clemmons, 2013; Richards-Schuster & O'Doherty, 2012).

However, the connection between young people and rural community is often tenuous due to structures and discourse that alienate people from certain places (Brown, 2002; Herring, 2010). For example, the restructuring of agriculture, natural resource extraction, manufacturing, and other types of rural economic institutions that have traditionally helped maintain rural communities continues to produce challenges for the sustainability of rural communities (Brown & Schafft, 2011; Brown & Swanson, 2003; Green, 2013; Stockdale, 2006). As jobs and careers in these industries are no longer stable or available, and jobs in the new knowledge-based economy are less likely to be located in rural areas, people, particularly young educated people, are less likely to reside

in the rural U.S. (Lichter & Brown, 2011; Lichter et al., 1995). Although economic restructuring has meant the decline of many rural communities, there are pockets of rural economic and population growth around recreation and tourism in the U.S. However, there is some evidence that these growth areas yield limited economic gains for residents (Hunter et al., 2005; Saint Onge at al., 2007).

In addition to economic restructuring which has made it more difficult for young people to live in many rural areas, youth also receive negative messages about rural places that influence their relationship with place. Many people think that to live and stay in a rural community is associated with failure, and indeed, many parents and teachers tell children in rural communities that they must leave in order to be successful (Beasley, 2011; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Demi et al., 2009; Sherman & Sage, 2011; Theobald & Wood, 2010; Tucker et al., 2013). Overtime, messages from the media, schools, parents, and even individuals themselves perpetuate the degradation of rural-ness. These messages exist in a metronormative context in which only certain megalopolis areas are deemed fit for young people, and especially young people with marginalized gender, race, and sexuality identities, to fulfill their potential (Herring, 2010; Theobald & Wood, 2010). Experiences of sexism, racism, and heterosexism and homophobia in rural places reinforce these metronormative narratives.

On the other hand, young people in rural communities are often encouraged to stay and to be responsible to their families, communities, and state (Beasley, 2011; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Demi et al., 2009; Tucker et al., 2013). Hektner (1994) found that rural adolescents, compared to nonrural adolescents, expressed greater conflicted feelings about career aspirations and residential aspirations including feelings of emptiness, anger,

and pessimism. Sociologists acknowledge that individuals still have agency even when they are embedded within these tensions (Brown, 2002; Giddens, 1984). In response to these challenges brought on by the restructuring of the rural economy and the persistently pessimistic narratives about rural places, academics and community leaders have looked for innovative ways of sustaining communities (for examples in the Appalachian context see Hinsdale et al., 1995; Fisher & Smith, 2012; Lewis, 2009). Innovative strategies to promote youth leadership thus become particularly relevant for rural communities. Rural revitalization and sustainability does not necessarily depend on an arbitrary number of rural youth staying in place or an influx of new residents; researchers have shown that in-migration, return migration, and increases in human capital alone have limited effects for community development (Gibbs, 1998; von Reichart et al., 2013). Instead, researchers have acknowledged that migration can be beneficial for communities when it is combined with other aspects of community development including the inflow of new ideas and resources (Stockdale, 2006; Haartsen & Thissen; 2013). Therefore, young college-educated people are a crucial population for community development through their characteristics of high mobility, human capital, and potential. Young college-educated community leaders, in particular, play a vital role in rural communities through their capacity for bridging ideas and resources.

However, sociologists have also identified education as one of the main ways in which the relationship between youth and community is strained. Education is seen as an essential component of community development and lifting regions out of poverty (Haaga, 2004; Lichter et al., 2003; Shaw et al., 2004). Institutions of higher education see themselves as entities that benefit the public, and many are mandated to do so through the

land grant system. However, the role of education and public universities as a public good is particularly fraught in rural places where education is a main path to outmigration. There is a mismatch between young people who want to or have pursued higher education and the existing economies in many rural communities where available jobs are more likely to be blue collar or low-skilled labor positions. Young people in these communities with advanced education often have to compromise by being underemployed or commuting long distances (von Reichert et al., 2011).

Michael Corbett (2007) argues that, particularly with regard to rural people and places, "schooling is the quintessential institution of disembedding" insofar as schooling is "concerned with severing the attachments of individuals to particular places and making young people adaptable, flexible and mobile" (p. 251) in the context of a globalized economy. Corbett's study of Atlantic coastal communities in Canada, sometimes referred to as the "Appalachia of Canada," presents a theoretically and empirically thorough case for how the educational system favors urban values and economies over rural values and economies. Essentially, he argues, through education, young people in the coastal fishing villages in Newfoundland are taught skills and a lifestyle that encourages them to leave rural areas for urban ones. He says, "Backward rural spaces are defined as doomed places to be left behind as soon as one is able to move on to their antithesis: progressive spaces, urban spaces where a person can be useful, productive and a burden to no one. Their brains, it seems, must be made fit for the drain" (Corbett, 2007, p. 65). Here Corbett argues that rural young people "learn to leave" through an educational system that prioritizes individual achievement and success based on a globalized marketplace.

Although Corbett focuses on K-12 education in his analysis, he also finds that those who acquired higher education almost always moved to larger towns. Thus, among all social classes in the rural communities he studied, formal education and monetary "success" within the local community had a small or negative empirical relationship (p. 147). Further, he found that higher education required so much financial commitment that people did not see how they could afford it and stay in Digby Neck. In other words, students who spend thousands of dollars on higher education in loans are forced to go elsewhere to find a job that will allow them to pay back their loans.

Corbett concludes with ambivalence over his findings. He says, "Education failure and immobility is often tragic at the individual level in contemporary Canada, but so too is educational success and the depopulation of rural areas." (Corbett, 2007, p. 5). Ursula A. Kelly (2009) responds to Corbett by suggesting that communities that have experienced the loss of people resulting from outmigration contain possibility as well as problems. These sites of dramatic change allow for a reimagining of place and attachments to place. Keeping in mind both the problematic role of education in rural communities from Corbett's perspective and the somewhat more hopeful perspective of Kelly, college-educated youth in rural communities become an intriguing population. They have resisted, to some extent, being alienated from rural places as Corbett finds and may yield new information and ideas about youth roles in rural communities.

Carr and Kefalas (2009) suggest that community colleges might be a key site for developing human capital among those that plan to stay. Similar to Corbett, one of their main findings from their ethnographic research in a small Iowa town is that more resources and energy are put into helping the best students who ultimately leave the

community. Carr and Kefalas argue that resources should be more evenly distributed so that the students more likely to stay in the community have access to better education and training. However, McDonough et al. (2010) call for four-year institutions to have a greater role particularly in rural communities where the norm tends to be two-year programs. They argue that universities have the ability to be more relevant to rural life. Although they do not disentangle the conflicting realities of the rural and global economy, in which rural economies often do not support jobs that require four-year degrees, they provide a theoretical perspective that takes into account the importance of college-educated youth in rural communities.

The tenuous link between college-educated youth and rural communities is a result of the physical mobility often required to attend college, the physical mobility required to find a job after graduation, and the potential for social mobility that higher education offers (Corbett, 2007; Kellerman, 2012). College students themselves are a transitory population and are often not as integrated into the local community as are permanent residents. The "community" for college students is more likely to be within the campus boundaries whereas rural communities experiencing high outmigration are outside of those boundaries, even if the school is located in such a community.

There is some evidence that community ties are not associated with youth residential preferences (Kirkpatrick Johnson et al., 2005). However, there is little evidence regarding the relationship between youth and communities as part of the educational process and transition to adulthood through college (see Rérat, 2013; Haartsen & Thissen, 2013; Heuer, 2004; Gibbs, 1998). Additionally, there is scant information about the connection between youth and rural community among college-

educated newcomers as opposed to "rural youth," which are usually defined as youth who originated from a rural homeplace and return (for information on rural newcomers more generally see Davies, 2008; Stockdale, 2006; Lichter & Johnson, 2006). Instead, the emphasis in much of the literature regarding youth migration and the rural U.S. assumes an ideal of "staying home." Indeed, much of the rhetoric about brain-drain and youth roles in Appalachian communities is based on the assumption that youth "from" a place should be able to/want to "stay" in that place. However, in theory and in practice this focus on place "insiders" doesn't reflect the reality or potential of youth populations in rural and Appalachian communities. In other words, the focus on youth who grew up in rural communities limits the analytic potential of examining the role of young people in rural places because it doesn't include newcomers. Thus, our knowledge is limited about young people who might choose to move to a rural community for economic, social, or environmental reasons.

Perhaps the lack of attention to this possibility is because the population of young rural newcomers is so small and unlikely (McGranahan et al., 2010). In addition, "youth" is often defined as those age 18 years or younger, and those age 18 years or older fall into the category of "adult." However, young people in their twenties and thirties represent a highly mobile and transitory period of the lifespan that holds the potential for contributing significantly to communities. This small population of newcomers is important to include in research where possible as their experiences may yield nuanced information about the connection between young people and rural places. In this dissertation research I focus on traditional-age college students and graduates in their

twenties and thirties in order to examine the experiences of youth transitioning from high

school to college to careers.

Richards-Schuster and O'Doherty (2012) discuss the role of youth in re-

envisioning Appalachian communities and say,

> Young people in central Appalachia face significant challenges
> becoming active participants in their communities and in making
> the decisions that shape their lives. They grapple with confusing
> messages and experiences that both celebrate and denigrate their
> culture and communities. At the same time, the history of
> resistance, the desire to connect to culture, people, community, and
> land, and the richness of culturally based assets have the potential
> to position youth in central Appalachia as talented and innovative
> change   makers.   (p.   78)

Here, Richards-Shuster and O'Doherty reflect the tension described through the literature

review above that exists between youth and communities. There exists a strong message

for youth to leave rural places, and, at the same time, there is a discourse of alarm and

regret that they do so. Richards-Schuster and O'Doherty conclude by suggesting that,

"When young people re-envision themselves and their communities, they begin to create

a movement of youth activists staying home and reconstructing Appalachia" (p. 90). Here

again, the assumption that "staying home" is an ideal outcome is imbricated with the idea

of re-envisioning communities. The prospect of a movement of youth community

activists in Appalachia is interesting in light of the outmigration of young people and

threat to the sustainability of communities in the region. Yet, how can young people

effectively negotiate the structural and discursive challenges described above? In

addition, can newcomers be valuable in this work as well?

Corbett (2007) finds that those who stay in rural communities have formed an

identity of resistance to "mobile discourse." They eschew the path of mainstream

education in favor of a path that will keep them embedded in their local community and economy. However, for many young people who might experience marginalization in rural communities, education and mobility are a form of resistance. Corbett acknowledges that these groups may form "hybrid" identities that incorporate both a rural community identity and an urban, global economic identity where they as women and/or minorities are able to achieve certain success unavailable to them in their home communities.

Corbett pays particular attention to women. Their experience with schooling and community varies considerably from the men in his study because the local economy was based on traditionally masculine jobs that were often only accessible to men. Thus, women never held the same formal position in the economy and leaving the community was often the only way to achieve educational and career success and financial stability. Although Corbett notes the existence of these hybrid identities, they are not fully analyzed or theorized. The relationship between community, place, and identity, then, becomes important for understanding the way youth might re-envision rural communities and their role in their community. In the next section, I will review the literature on community and identity and how this relates to theories of belonging.

The connection between community, identity, and belonging

Community, identity, and belonging are all theoretically relevant to understanding the relationship between youth in rural places. Our theoretical and empirical knowledge about the ways communities are formed and maintained and the way that individuals both

experience community and create community help us interpret the experiences of young

people in communities. Furthermore, our knowledge about the way people form identities

in relation to places helps contextualize the bond (or lack thereof) between young people

and place. In addition, a theoretical understanding of belonging is useful for

understanding the intersectional relationship between people, place, and communities,

which points to a complex assemblage of attraction and repulsion to place and

community. In this section, I will first discuss the idea of community and three relevant

theories of community. Then, I will discuss the literature regarding identity including

notions of place identity, sense of place, place attachment, and community attachment.

Finally, I incorporate a discussion of belonging as a complement or alternative to

understanding the relationship between people and place.

Community

Rhoda Halperin (1998) writes,

> Identity and community are often linked but in complex ways. The community itself has an integrity—an identity—a set of boundaries, albeit contested ones. People have identities that may or may not be linked to place, to people, to working-class culture because of, or in spite of, the powers that be. People identify with place—especially if it has been home for lifetimes—even generations. (p. xii)

Here, Halperin is referring specifically to Appalachian migrants and the complex nature

of community identity. She brings up some ways that people might be linked to

communities such as identification with the place, people, and work. Sociologists have

been theorizing about communities since the beginning years of the discipline. The shift

from agricultural to industrial society inspired Tönnies (2001) concept of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* and Durkheim's (1997) mechanical and organic societies. Over the past forty years, sociologists have generated new theories as the shift from industrial economies to postindustrial economies in the U.S. has influenced everything from the landscape, to the types of jobs, to the types and number of people in communities. Community theory within rural sociology is particularly helpful in understanding the social impacts of economic restructuring and in and out-migration on rural communities as well as young adults' connection to community.

Human ecology

Human ecology helps explain the role of external structures that affect the relationship between young adults and community. Human ecology theory is useful for interpreting and analyzing the experiences of young adults in a place like West Virginia because of the way economic and institutional factors like education, family, and community affect the relationship between people and places. Bell and York (2010) show how identity as a state level social structure in West Virginia is bound to industry. They find that the coal industry is able to remain a significant factor in community identity in West Virginia through exploitation of media, political power, and a "(faux) 'grassroots' (111)" 'Friends of Coal' campaign" despite the industry's dwindling economic significance. This state-level identity is relevant for understanding the way individuals within communities in West Virginia develop connections to place.

Human ecology is only useful for theorizing at the macro level so using this theory can only explain the relationship between people and places in relation to macro level processes. Still, macro processes such as economic changes, population changes, as well as broad social stratification systems including gender, race, sexuality, and class can help us understand place and community characteristics that inform the identity of the community (Falk et al., 2003). This is important when we consider the ways individuals embedded in these communities create a sense of place. Although this research project focuses on the individual level, it is important to keep in mind the structural forces that contextualize the experiences of young people in West Virginia.

Social and human capital

The concept of social and human capital can help explain the value that youth might find in rural communities and their valuation of themselves in the context of the community. The concept of capital, as it has been expanded to include other forms of value beyond financial resources, has been incorporated into theories of community. These various forms of capital are understood as the assets necessary for community development (Flora & Flora, 2013; Green & Haines, 2008). Social capital, the social relationships that are assets to a community, and human capital, people's education, skills, and experiences that are potential assets to a community, are particularly relevant in the context of this research. One of the theoretical assumptions of this work, as well as most work concerned with the out-migration of young people from rural places, is that young people are a resource in terms of social and human capital.

Coleman (1988) introduced social capital as a way to incorporate both rational action and social structures into one theory. Coleman says, "Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" (p. 98). Proponents of social capital theory assert that social capital engenders trust, expectations, and reciprocity. These processes among social networks then increase the capacity for community action. Critics argue that social capital as a concept is inappropriate for analyzing communities because it equates social interactions with monetary transactions and assumes that people only do things because they think they will get something in return (Lyson & Tolbert, 2003). In addition, the system of social capital, as it is theorized to work ideally, does not account for the stratification of society, which can undermine trust, or, more generally, the ways in which social structures hold power over individual capacities (Brown & Schafft, 2011; Luloff & Bridger, 2003). Nonetheless, social capital is a useful concept in this context for understanding the extent to which social relationships, particularly social relationships within a place or community, can provide access to information and resources.

The question of to what extent young people are resources within communities is also related to human capital. Like the study of brain drain in West Virginia cited at the beginning of Chapter 1 (Raymond, 1972), the human capital investment and return has often been part of the analysis of why the out-migration of educated young people is problematic (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Domina, 2006; Sherman & Sage, 2011). The lack of human capital in the form of college-educated people indicates the out-migration of this population and an economy that is not supporting this population (Gibbs et al., 1998; Killian & Beaulieu, 1995; Lichter et al., 1995; von Reichert et al.,

2013). Thus, the out-migration of young people from rural areas is often understood as reducing the social capital and human capital assets in rural communities. From a human ecology standpoint, individual and community human capital investments and assets are embedded in the context of economic restructuring and the local availability of educational and job opportunities in rural areas, as are social capital investments and assets.

The social capital and human capital concepts are helpful in understanding the ways in which young educated people become valued as a group within the context of rural communities. This dynamic produces a tension many young people in rural communities experience based on the desire and encouragement to leave and pursue education and careers and also the desire to stay embedded in existing social networks and be responsible to family, friends, and community (Hektner, 1995). In the context of social and human capital in rural communities, policies and empirical research focuses mostly on the out-migration of young people (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Domina, 2006; PROMISE Scholarship Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee, 2009; Sherman & Sage, 2011). Information about the "brain gains" in rural communities is scarcer (for exception see von Reichert et al., 2013). However, social capital theorists have suggested that newcomers, or people with weak ties more generally, can be just as important for community development as locals with strong ties (Flora et al., 2004) Scholars focusing on Appalachian communities specifically highlight this exchange between insiders and outsiders as vital to regional organizations (Couto, 1999; Fisher, 1995; Smith & Fisher, 2012). Young adults, who are often in their most physically mobile stage of life, move in

and out of various communities along with their potential investments of social and human capital.

Interactional theory of community and social well-being

In contrast to human ecology, and somewhat in response to that theory, sociologists developed theories to explain the role of human agency in society. Like more general theories of the relationship between structural forces and human agency (Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1984), the interactional theory of community examines the way individuals experience structural phenomena and then through their own actions and interactions create community. Definitions of communities in this vein require three elements: a place, networks or organizations where people interact, and interaction that allows expression of common interests (Wilkinson, 1991).

Interaction is the key element of community for Wilkinson. He explains that the community is the space where individuals interact with larger social phenomena and that "[t]he community therefore is the largest and most comprehensive unit of society in the direct experience of the individual" (p. 78). This is particularly important when considering rural communities because as population in the U.S. has steadily migrated from rural to urban places and technological advances in media have accelerated a "global culture," the importance of small, local communities becomes questionable. Wilkinson asserts that "the community has not disappeared and has not ceased to be an important factor in individual and social well-being" (p. 6). This is a second important

component of interactional community theory as Wilkinson conceptualizes it; community created through interaction is a site of social well-being.

When people share a place in common and interact in that common territory, a common life develops. This is similar to Tönnies's concept of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in which he constructs the differentiation between rural and urban society in terms of community identity versus individualism (2001). According to Tönnies, social bonds are strongest in village society where mutual experience dictates moral responsibility. Modern, urban societies, on the other hand, are held together by individual motivation to succeed. Likewise, Durkheim's concept of mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity differentiates between social bonds due to common experience and social bonds due to common goals (1997). However, Durkheim does not conclude that social bonds are made weaker under organic solidarity. Durkheim sees the individualism of modern societies necessitating social solidarity to maintain social order. Despite their differences, both Tönnies and Durkheim equate one type of society (*Gemeinschaft*/mechanical) with community over the individual and one type of society (*Gesellschaft*/organic) with the individual over community. The persistence of tension between the ideals of the individual and the community remain relevant for people and communities in West Virginia.

Wilkinson points out that interactional theory refers to a more limited notion of *Gemeinschaft* that is focused on shared life made common by the locality rather than other aspects of social life. Thus, community hinges on interaction based on shared local experiences. In terms of identity formation in relation to community, Wilkinson says, "This awareness arises as one individual takes the perspectives of others, including the

perspective of the generalized other or community, to delineate and characterize one's own social being. The self, therefore, connects the individual and society" (p. 15). Thus, regardless of changes in the community, as long as interaction persists, attachment to and identity with place will persist in the community.

Scholars studying residential segregation use a related theory known as the "contact hypothesis" which posits that increased interaction between minority and majority groups will decrease segregation because they will have greater shared appreciation for each other. This seems logical, but empirical results have been mixed (DeFina & Hannon, 2009; Merry, 1981; Stolle et al., 2008). This may be due to the difficulty in quantifying the extent of interaction. Interactional theory is useful here because there is a more detailed sense of what type of interaction creates community. Wilkinson argues that quality of life including material indicators and a general feeling of warmth and regard increases when barriers to community interaction are reduced. He says that in rural areas the "principal barriers to community interaction are deficiencies in resources for meeting needs and inadequate social infrastructure of services, associations, and channels for collective action" (p. 24) I would add that for marginalized people, discrimination and hostility are also barriers to interaction.

Therefore, initiatives to increase interaction among diverse groups of people should stimulate community. Wilkinson suggests five conditions for social well-being: distributive justice, open communication, tolerance, collective action, and communion (pp. 73-75). As I will discuss in my review of the feminist literature on belonging and community, Wilkinson's ideas about the interactional components of community are complementary to thinking about the ways individuals find belonging in community

through social interactions. Additionally, in the context of Appalachia, Smith and Fisher

(2012) suggest that the interactional dynamics between individuals and place-based

community can be an important component of producing place-base identity and political

transformation in the region (p. 274). The interactional theory of community is

particularly relevant in the Appalachian context where working toward well-being is

often developed in place-based community. In addition, the interactional theory is similar

to feminist theories of belonging, discussed later in this section, which take a more

critical stance on community. Before moving on to the belonging section of this chapter, I

provide a brief review of the literature regarding identity, place, and community.

Identity, place, and community

Place identity, community and place attachment, and sense of place are three

terms used to refer to the relationship between people, identity, and place in social

science literature. Kyle et al. (2003) discuss place identity as "an essential part of one's

self" that is manifest in emotional and symbolic meaning (p. 251). Place identity is often

used by environmental psychologists and recreation scholars to understand humans'

relationship with the land and environmental resources (Beckley, 2006; Kyle et al.,

2003). Sociologists have been interested in community attachment from the beginnings of

the discipline when scholars sought to understand the societal changes happening in

relation to industrialization and urbanization (Tönnies, 2001). Community attachment is a

concept that encompasses emotional and sentimental attachments to a particular

community (Brehm et al., 2004). In what is referred to as the "linear model" of

community attachment, Tönnies and others (Wirth, 1938) theorized that strong social ties and networks within the local community were weakened as society transitioned from a rural agricultural society to an urban industrialized society. However, Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) tested this model against the systemic model, which they used to control for length of residence. They showed that location and urbanization were not associated with fewer social ties or lower community attachment. Subsequently, this model has been replicated and the general results supported (Sampson 1988, Flaherty & Brown 2010).

Yet Kasarda and Janowitz recognized the limitations of community attachment for fully understanding or predicting individual participation and commitment to a local community. They acknowledge, "in a highly mobile society people may participate extensively in local institutions and develop community attachments yet be prepared to leave these communities if local conditions fail to satisfy their immediate needs or aspirations (1974, p. 329). Thus, sociologists and other researchers have continued to try to better understand community attachment, as well as related concepts such as place attachment, sense of place, and place identity, and the connection to migration and participation (Barcus & Brunn, 2009 and 2010; Jones, 1999; Manzo & Perkins, 2006; McAndrew, 1998; Pretty et al., 2002; Wiborg, 2004). Beckley (2003) says,

> If we can understand individuals' attachments to place, we might learn a lot about why people make "irrational" decisions to stay in regions with failing economies…It also may be the case that the sustainability of a community or place has much more to do with persons' attachment to it than with standard empirical indicators of social sustainability or well-being." (p. 107)

As Beckley suggests, better understanding of the relationship between people and places may yield new knowledge about the social sustainability of communities. However,

Manzo (2003) points out that studies on place identity and place attachment tend to focus on only the positive aspects of people's relationship with places. Ambivalent or negative attitudes toward place are less studied and understood. The systemic model of community attachment, based on length of residence, also does not address the potential of mobile youth who are emerging community leaders but have not necessarily maintained a permanent residence.

Additionally, what is known about community attachment does not account for the experiences of marginalized people in the community, especially youth. Although some scholars have started to incorporate identity as a variable in understanding place and community attachment (Jones, 1999; Wiborg, 2004), the intersecting gender, race, sexuality, and class identities young people embody are not well understood as components of community attachment and participation. Indeed, feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young's critique of community is based on the argument that community requires similarities and is thus antithetical to difference and fundamentally exclusionary and socially unjust. Instead, she calls for a "politics of difference" where social relations "embody openness to unassimilated otherness with justice and appreciation" (1986, p. 23). This ideal is, of course, out of reach for many people in many places.

Yet, struggling toward this ideal is part of the process of creating "beloved community," which is a term popularized by Martin Luther King, Jr. who saw the beloved community as the end result of nonviolent conflict resolution. "For Dr. King, The Beloved Community was not a lofty utopian goal…[r]ather, The Beloved Community was for him a realistic, achievable goal that could be attained by a critical mass of people committed to and trained in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence."

His vision of the beloved community was not without conflict, but was a space where conflicts would end "with reconciliation of adversaries cooperating together in a spirit of friendship and goodwill" (The King Philosophy, 2014).

Feminist scholars have developed theories of community that take into account the politics of difference as well as ways in which community and beloved community is achieved. Central to these theories of community are constructions of belonging. In the next section, I review the connection between feminist theories of belonging and community.

Belonging

In her 2009 book, *Belonging, A Culture of Place*, bell hooks argues for creating "beloved communities" as an act of resistance toward racism and dominator culture and as an act of affirmation toward inclusion and a culture of place. Hooks, a Black feminist theorist who spent the majority of her adulthood in major urban centers in the U.S., describes her eventual return to a rural community in her home state of Kentucky later in life as the end result of her individual struggle to reconcile various aspects of her identity, including her sense of belonging. She defines "beloved communities" as places where people create more belonging among diverse people. As hooks notes, the goal is less about a quantitative measure of diversity and more about the qualitative accessibility of belonging.

Elspeth Probyn (1996) interrogates the notion of belonging by breaking it down into "be" and "longing." She argues that there are no intrinsic identities but rather ways in

which we desire to belong. Rosalyn Diprose (2008) argues that "conceiving of community in terms of belonging also allows a way to understand how sociopolitical meanings of gender, race, and place *together* constitute diverse and dynamic personal and social patterns of existence (that are empowering and disempowering) without recourse to an idea of common, shared, or even hybrid identity" (p. 29). This community is engendered through interpersonal inclinations toward "togetherness without commonalities" and through political institutions that frame ideas of belonging.

Contrary to Iris Marion Young's critique of community, Diprose does not define community as rooted in bonds of sameness within a hierarchy or on exclusion. Rather, she says, "community is the sensibility of belonging as inclination toward others and the attendant expression of the uniqueness of bodies" (p. 46). In other words, intersectional identities such as gender, race, and sexuality are the differences that enable us to establish community with other singular, unique beings. Dirpose goes on to say,

> [G]iving community to others does not rest on recognizing that they hold the same beliefs or come from the same place. What *harms* community is not the disturbance of a sensibility of belonging by strangers or unfamiliar circumstances. Rather, what harms community is an experience that *halts* the expression of meaning and closes off the inclination that is belonging. (p. 47)

Here, Diprose points out that it is not difference itself that creates barriers to community but instead the inability to access belonging through difference. Diprose notes that the capacity for community can be supported and restored both at the interpersonal level and the institutional level. She says community "is a gift that must be renewed in our relations with others, infinitely. The capacity for community can be restored by offers of community…However, the individual gestures that offer community to those who have

been deprived of community require institutional support. That is, the interpersonal, ethical dimension of community is always linked to the political" (p. 48).

These concepts of belonging are particularly useful for understanding the possibilities for youth roles in rural community sustainability because they provide a framework for locating alternative and potential relationships between youth and communities that might be otherwise overlooked. As opposed to similar concepts like community attachment, belonging is not necessarily associated with length of residence or yielding individuality to community expectations or responsibilities to measure the relationship between a person and place. Furthermore, examining sense of belonging highlights the role identity plays in the relationship between youth and communities, and provides a theoretical framework for more critically analyzing the relationships between young people in rural communities including positive and negative individual experiences embedded in social structures. In the next section I discuss how using an intersectional approach to understand sense of belonging is helpful for looking at both the structural and individual elements implicated in the relationship between youth and communities.

An intersectional approach to the dialectic of belonging

In order to understand belonging from a sociological perspective, it is important to consider the ways in which belonging, which is experienced at the individual level, is a social process and is embedded in social systems. According to Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration, it is impossible to separate societal structures, which he defines as the

"rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems (377)," and individual agency when trying to explain social phenomena; they are mutually dependent. Giddens was trying to explain the relationship between social structures and individual agency, or the recursive reproduction of external and internal forces. Giddens acknowledges that social structures present constraints within society but that agents are always able to either choose to act or not act. Giddens calls this social process the "dialectic of control," or, "how the less powerful manage resources in such a way as to exert control over the more powerful in established power relationships" (p. 374). In this sense, I use the term "dialectic" to refer to the way individuals are able to manage their sense of belonging while embedded in social systems, as opposed to other sociological uses of the term "dialectic" to refer to a struggle toward a theoretical social system or deeper understanding of society (Ossewaarde, 2010).

The concept of intersectionality is useful in situating individuals in relation to the constraints and opportunities they face as residents or potential residents of rural places. Identity can shape the rules and resources people understand themselves to have in terms of what Giddens's identifies as a "dialectic of control." Community and individual characteristics that may repel some people from a place may attract others. Thus, the way a person understands their identity, situated in their place and time, holds power over their actions inasmuch as the person knows and understands this power. Likewise, what I call the dialectic of belonging, which I develop in Chapter 3, applies Giddens's theory of structuration to the individual and structural struggle for belonging among young people in West Virginia. Using an intersectional approach to this analysis as well as the analysis

in all of the findings chapters helps identify the interaction and tensions between power and oppression that youth experience through their relationship with their community.

Intersectional theories have come to the forefront of academic feminism as feminist thinkers have tried to grapple with the multiple oppressions, privileges, social positions, and perspectives that make up "women" as a category. Indeed, the concept of intersectionality has become ubiquitous in many fields for understanding the race, class, gender matrix (f). The intersectional framework brings a much-needed model for addressing difference among women and systems of privilege and oppression, but critiques have been made against it as well, including that it leads to a focus on identity rather than material inequalities and flattens difference. Nonetheless, intersectionality remains particularly useful for this research because the relationship between youth and rural communities is complicated by identity norms that produce structural oppression and privilege. In this section of Chapter 2, I will first review intersectionality and then I will briefly review the specific identity categories that are the focus of this dissertation.

Intersectionality

Feminism, in theory and practice, has long grappled with the notions of equality and difference. The terms "equality" and "difference" may seem like mutually exclusive terms. If two things are equal, then there is no difference between them, and the very presence of difference can make something unequal. Butler (1990) says, "Indeed, the premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category" (6). Thus, as the

feminist movement and feminist theory have appealed to a wide swath of people, theories and the way subjects are approached are constantly being revised in order to understand how the goals of feminism can be achieved while remaining aware of difference.

Early signs of feminist movement in western society like Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (2004) originally published in 1792 promoted a liberal notion of feminism based on the ideal of equal rights between women and men. Later, feminists started questioning whether joining a society based on patriarchy was the optimal goal and instead suggested more radical options like Virginia Woolf's "society of outsiders" (1938). In particular, women of color pointed out that many women were dealing not only with sexism but racism as well, and that this difference in experience required developments in feminist theory and practice. Intersectionality is a term that was developed by feminist scholars of color to understand experiences of gender from more than one location. In other words, feminists use intersectional theory, methods, and actions to yield an understanding of gender that is influenced by race, class, sexuality, age, ability, and other relevant categories of identity.

Black feminists have been the leaders of developing intersectional thought dating back to Sojourner Truth's speech, "Ain't I a Woman?," which she gave at a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851; to the Combahee River Collective (1977), in which the authors discussed oppression as an interlocking system of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism; to Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who first used the term intersectionality in the late 1980s and continues to contribute to this literature (Cho et al., 2013). A crucial aspect of Crenshaw's perspective on intersectionality was that she

showed that oppression is not simply additive; the intersections of social positions create

a matrix of barriers and privileges. Nira Yuval-Davis (2009) adds,

> [C]ategorical attributes are often used for the construction of inclusionary/exclusionary boundaries that differentiate between self and other, determining what is "normal" and what is not, who is entitled to certain resources and who is not. In this way interlinking grids of differential positioning in terms of class, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, ability, stage in the life cycle, and other social divisions, tend to create, in specific historical situations, hierarchies of differential access to a variety of resources—Economic, political, and cultural. (p. 50-51)

Thus, the major strengths of intersectionality are not only the ways in which it allows us

to understand multiple identities at once, but how it reveals the unique oppressive and

empowering facets of those intersections *and* the outcomes thereof. In addition to

becoming something of an academic buzzword, intersectionality is widely used in various

disciplines, including sociology (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Collins, 2010) to better

understand interrelationships of gender, race, class, sexuality, and other identities.

Although intersectionality is a useful concept in a variety of situations, criticism

has focused on the extent to which it dominates feminist thought and the way the concept

is operationalized. For example, Fraser (2004) laments the shift of feminism from what

she calls a politics of "redistribution" to a politics of "recognition." This critique is

particularly relevant in the context of thinking about the intersectional experiences of

young, college-educated people in Appalachia. What do their intersecting identities have

to do with the pressing social issues in the region? Intersectionality provides a framework

for better understanding the systems of power in our society, which is helpful in the

Appalachian studies context when we want to better understand inequalities and how we

might be able to alleviate these inequalities. The political implications for the way

identities and place intersect in Appalachia are at the core of many of the issues that continue to perpetuate the marginalization of Appalachian communities. This includes the way class and place intersect to create a complex system in which environmental disasters and daily environmental hazards are imposed and allowed to persist (Bell & York, 2010), the way gender and place intersect to create a complex system in which masculinity tied to an unsustainable economic system leaves men and women struggling to find satisfying and financially viable work (Scott, 2007), and the way sexuality and place intersect to create a complex system which divides rural and urban communities by their safety or danger (House, 2014).

By highlighting these examples, I am suggesting that applying an intersectional approach to the study of Appalachia offers a helpful a more complex way of mapping the various systems of power that come together specifically in the Appalachian context. In addition to using intersectionality as a way of understanding Appalachian identities as multifaceted and for analyzing the politics of place in Appalachia, intersectionality holds perhaps the most potential as a tool for social justice in the region. Much of the work being done both in Appalachian studies scholarship and Appalachian activism require working across boundaries and identities (Fisher & Smith, 2012). Knowing more about how people are able to effectively negotiate these intersections is an important step in advancing these efforts.

Gender, race, sexuality, and class in rural and Appalachian contexts

Hillbilly women, Affrilachians, and queer mountaineers are all terms that have been appropriated by people at the intersection of gender, race, sexuality, and place in the Appalachian region as a way of reconciling multiple identities that can otherwise seem mutually exclusive. In his 2012 Appalachian Studies Association keynote address, Si Khan asked,

> How much of being a 'real Appalachian' do we attribute to place of birth, parentage, grandparentage, class, sexual orientation, occupation, ethnicity, language, physical ability, religion, race, culture, [and] education [?] Do you have to be born Appalachian? Can you decide to become Appalachian? Can you decide you no longer want to be Appalachian? (pp. 21-22)

These questions acknowledge the dual realities of a culture rooted in common traditions and history and a diverse and mobile population that is changing along with global demographic patterns. In Appalachian studies, numerous deconstructions and reconstructions of Appalachian identity make clear distinctions between popular culture ideas about Appalachia and scholarly understandings of the region and its people. Despite this, practical ways of understanding Appalachian identity as intersectional are less developed. In this final section of Chapter 2, I discuss the specific identity categories on which I focus in this research in the context of rurality and Appalachia.

Gender and place

The intersection of gender and place is an important relationship to investigate in rural societies as both traditional notions of masculinity and femininity are reproduced

and challenged. In order to understand how men and women construct their own identities and connection to place, we must interrogate the role of gender norms and also how those norms are operationalized in daily life. In the past, and still today to some extent, rural scholars tended to look at how men and women negotiate traditional gender roles that seemed to be a static part of rural society. However, as new theories about the ways gender is constructed were theorized, scholarship about gender and rurality has developed into a deeper examination of the ways both gender and rural identity are constructed together and the implications thereof (Butler, 1990; Bryant & Pini, 2006; Campbell et al., 2006; Little 2006).

The intersection of gender and place identity is complex. There is some evidence that men, at least certain types of men, may be more embedded in rural communities because the culture favors a hegemonic masculinity and the economies of many rural communities are based on single industries that relate to traditional men's roles, require great physical strength, and largely employ men (Bell & York, 2010; Corbett, 2008; Little, 2006). However, other evidence suggests that women, at least certain groups of women, have found their own place within rural communities that allows them to feel a deep sense of belonging and purpose (Little, 2006; Trauger et al., 2009). Of course there have surely always been men that felt alienated from rural communities and women that felt closely connected to them. Moreover, oftentimes even when women did have embedded roles in rural society it was not recognized as being as important as men's roles—for example identifying as farm wives instead of farmers or mothers instead of working women (Sachs, 1996; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2006). In addition, some evidence suggests that men are more likely than women to claim an Appalachian identity

(Alexander & Berry, 2010). Although this does not necessarily mean that communities are more welcoming of men than women, this may indicate that the characteristics associated with an Appalachian identity, or a West Virginia identity, are more acceptable for men than for women. But the point here is that both patriarchal hegemonies and space for gender flexibility exist in rural places, as noted by Sachs (1996) and others (Little, 2006; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2006).

Indeed, women's and men's symbolic roles in rural society are often both highly valued but rigidly segregated. For example, pageants and mascots display the intersection of gender norms and place identity as representations of community. The Pennsylvania Bituminous Coal Queen, the Preston County, WV Queen Ceres (goddess of agriculture), and the Pennsylvania Dairy Princesses are part of long traditions celebrating the dominant industries in rural communities. Even as these industries have changed and often waned in economic importance, the values and culture surrounding them persist (Brandth, 1995; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2006,). Moreover, even as women have entered traditionally male industries the symbolic roles of traditional masculinity and femininity remain entrenched in rural society, at least to some extent, as they do across the U.S. and the world more generally (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2006).

The interpretation of gender and sexuality norms in rural societies has important implications for lived experience in rural communities. Gender is an important factor in understanding how people relate to what Falk et al. (2006) call "communities of work." In terms of college graduates in West Virginia, specifically, if the only jobs in a community that require higher education are "women's jobs" then there are other factors pulling men to the community. If the only "good jobs" in a community are "men's jobs"

then there are other factors pulling women to the community. Given that men's jobs in West Virginia are more likely to be involved in natural resource extraction, and women's jobs are more likely to be in education or health care, we can expect that men and women might have different connections to the job market and thus the places they identify as viable options (Corbett, 2007).

Recognizing that these norms exist and have real consequences for people in rural communities, it is also important to recognize that gender roles are always dynamic. In the past two decades, scholars have started to look at contestations and reproductions of masculinity and femininity within rural settings (Little, 2006) and the ways feminism in various forms is enacted in rural Appalachian communities (Cohen-Jordan, 2008; Terman, 2009). Most recently, feminist scholars have incorporated the study of gender and rurality into an intersectional framework to assess how these experiences affect diverse realities in rural society (Bryant & Pini, 2011; Tickamyer & Henderson, 2009). These new directions are important not only in order to understand empirically the experience of men and women in rural society but also to examine theoretically the way gender and rurality operate to influence one another.

In terms of my own research, the way notions of gender and rurality intersect are highly relevant for understanding the way young adults relate to communities in West Virginia. Young people often want to escape rural places, and perhaps this is because they don't see norms and roles that operate in their community as dynamic or inclusive. This has consequences not only for the individual who may lose the value that is associated with their community, like social capital or community attachment and identity, but also for the community that loses the individual. Therefore, the questions

that remain about how young people in particular experience gender and rurality in their home communities as compared to other places, or expectations about what those gender and rural experiences are in other places, are important not only theoretically but also to the future viability of many rural communities.

Race and place

In 1991, poet and artist Frank X Walker was confronted with the oxymoronic realization that to be African-American meant that one could not be Appalachian. He had attended a reading featuring four writers from the Appalachian region, but because one writer, Nikky Finney, was African-American (the rest were white), the title of the event had been changed from "The Best of Appalachian Writing" to "The Best of Southern Writing" (Douglas, n.d.). Walker responded by creating the term "Affrilachian" in order to make space for the intersecting identities of race and place for people of color in Appalachia. The Affrilachian Poets collective is an example of individual agency as a site of societal change.

By coining a new word, Frank X Walker and his fellow Affrilachian artists created a space for multiple identities and thus expanded the boundaries of what we imagine African-Americans and Appalachians to be. In terms of place attachment, this term bonds African-American identity to the Appalachian region and thus offers a new heuristic for developing an identity embedded in place. On the other hand, the relative obscurity and newness of this term also highlights the barriers that exist for people of color in terms of their attachment to places that are stereotyped as white or racist.

As this example highlights, racial identity can impact place attachment in both positive and negative directions. Groenke and Nespor (2010) analyze racist language among teenage boys as an expression of the changing nature of local and global processes in rural places. The research participants often connected racist language with images of people of color from urban areas rather than the "normal" people of color from their own towns. This kind of constraining discourse on what counts as urban verses rural or unacceptable verses acceptable is problematic for those embedded in seemingly opposed identities. On the other hand, hooks (2009) argues that rural places can create space for belonging because they already exist outside of the urban norms that have come to define our society. She describes the integrated mountain holler neighborhoods of her youth in rural Kentucky where both blacks and whites were able to create space for themselves.

Sexuality and place

In his 2005 book *Loving Mountains, Loving Men*, Jeff Mann describes escaping his rural hometown of Hinton, West Virginia to go to college and then to several urban areas where he felt he could better live his life as a gay man. However, Mann eventually returns to Appalachia because he finds that leaving causes him to have to leave behind another part of his identity, that which is tied to place. He explains,

> For gays and lesbians in Appalachia who want to live full lives, who want to embrace both their gay and their mountain identities, who refuse to dismember themselves in order to assimilate, it can be very difficult to find some compromise between love of the same sex and love of home. If a gay man flees to the city, he is often encouraged to drop "that funny accent" and "those country ways," to feel ashamed of his mountain culture. If a lesbian stays

in the mountains, she might face bigotry and abuse, especially from intolerant fundamentalist Christians; she might feel obliged to stay in the closet; she might suffer from the relative lack of social and romantic opportunities. (p. xi-xii)

Just as Adrienne Rich (1980) concludes that compulsory heterosexuality creates an "absence of choice" (p. 659), Mann explains how the intersection of heterosexism, homophobia, and place creates an absence of a good choice.

Perhaps sexuality is one of the hardest identities to reconcile in places where gays and lesbians and their allies are still struggling for equal civil rights. Furthermore, the remoteness and isolation of many rural places may deteriorate a sense of belonging among gays and lesbians. D'Augelli and Hart (1987) show that the lack of community and support for gays and lesbians in rural places pushes many to seek urban areas where they can more freely and easily live. Although much has changed over the past two and a half decades, even the internet and increasing social tolerance in rural areas cannot compete with the welcoming haven of urban communities.

However, the overwhelming urban bias in LGBT discourse, politics, and media representation is now being critiqued by scholars. Scott Herring (2010) argues that the myopic focus on New York and San Francisco in gay culture creates an urban hegemony that obscures rural gay culture. In addition it denies acceptance of rural gay life by characterizing it as incomplete, closeted, or less than. Thus, not only do hegemonic perceptions of rurality deny the inclusion of LGBT people, but the hegemonic perceptions of gay life, for example "metronormativity," deny the inclusion of rural people.

Mary Gray (2009) identifies this contradiction, but her qualitative research provides empirical evidence of the ways in which rural LGBT youth negotiate their sexuality within place. She finds that the network of family and familiarity among people can mitigate the effects of difference. Likewise, Thomsen (2013) finds that LGBT people living in rural Minnesota define their community as their place-based community, not a LGBT community. More information about how rural youth find belonging in their communities and what issues are still problematic for them will help policymakers and community activists to understand how to better welcome LGBT youth in West Virginia.

Class and place

Class is necessarily an important component and identity to acknowledge because this research focuses on college-educated youth in West Virginia. As Kingsolver and Clemons point out, young leaders in Appalachia who are college-educated often offer alternatives to the traditional elite leadership in the region that has been critiqued for maintaining a system of dependency on unsustainable natural resource extraction and industry (2013). In this way, the participants in this study are distinct from the most powerful class in West Virginia, which is often made up of absentee business and landowners. However, they hold a distinct class privilege through their educational attainment. Additionally, their class identity is complicated in relation to place identity, both of which must be understood in the context of a white, heteropatriarchal working class norm in which heterosexual relationships form the basis of families and the male members of families hold the most power in society. Moreover, although class identity

was not explicitly part of the research design or interview guides, class emerged as a very relevant component of identity for the participants. Class identity is implicated in this research at the intersection of place, education, gender, race, and sexuality.

Activists and scholars have used Marxist analyses of class to characterize Appalachia, especially in the areas where coal and natural resource industries predominate. Appalachia is described as an internal colony where residents sell their labor to absentee business and landowners who own the means of production and where the profits of production are not invested back into the local communities (Helen Lewis 1970 from Beaver & Jennings 2012, Appalachian Land Ownership Taskforce 1981). Although the reality of natural resource exploitation and wealth extraction continues to undermine the well-being of communities in the region, scholars have also noted that a stratified class system within the region distributes power through educational, political, and social status in addition to the relationship to the means of production (Billings & Blee, 2000; Duncan, 1999).

For young people in the region today, pursuing a college education often means participating in a socialization process of alienation from the local labor market dominated by low-skill jobs. In addition, college education socializes people away from working-class culture and signifies a higher class status than those who are not college-educated. Morris (2011) points out, "class is experienced and reproduced through emotional lives and sense of self, not just through their objective economic standing" (p. 221). In this way, place and class are often inextricably bound, particularly in rural places. The working class remains predominant in West Virginia, both symbolically and by the availability of jobs. Bourdieu explains that class is reproduced through a system of

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symbolic and cultural representations that serve to designate class status. In this system, the dominant class determines what cultural aesthetics and practices are best (1984). In the case of West Virginia, working class culture is reaffirmed through business and political elites who exploit the rural working-class work ethic to maintain an economic and political power despite offering fewer jobs at lower pay and undermining community and environmental sustainability (Bell &York, 2010; Scott, 2007).

Scott (2007) explains that the dominance of the coal industry in the state both materially and symbolically relies on a hegemonic masculinity that is white, heterosexual, and working class. She argues that this masculinity is hegemonic in the sense that it upholds the sex/gender system, but that it is marginalized in that the miners are dependent on the companies, bosses, CEOS, policymakers, and politicians (Scott, 2007); although, the companies and politicians must use this hegemonic masculinity in order to maintain power in the state (Bell & York, 2010). The white, heteropatriarchal working class symbolically maintains a race/class/gender system where women, LGBT people, and people of color are dependent and "othered" in comparison to the white working class male who is breadwinner and worker.

Young college educated people are alienated from this culture through their educational attainment status, but many educated people in the region still symbolically identify with the working class. The issue here, in terms of social justice, is that working-class culture is symbolically and, in terms of job availability, materially predominant, but is also still ultimately exploited by corporate and political elites. Like Kingsolver and Clemmons point out, young college-educated social justice leaders represent an

alternative elite class with the potential for creating alliances across classes rather than continuing to exploit the working class (2013).

However, the extent to which cross-class consciousness is developed among young leaders in Appalachia is unclear. Sociologists have critiqued class analyses that assume class-consciousness, as Marx theorized it, as people have come to dis-identify with class (Bottero, 2004; Phillips, 2011). Feminist theorist Nancy Fraser argues that recognizing and representing difference became the focus of social justice work just as neoliberalism was becoming dominant and increasing economic injustices. She says that social justice efforts need to turn again toward the politics of redistribution. Fraser insists that equality and justice are the ultimate goals (2004).

Fraser's perspective on the role of economic justice in social justice is highly relevant in understanding the way those young college-educated leaders in Appalachia experience and interpret class. As I show in Chapter 4, there is a clear disconnect between classes symbolically and materially, even when college educated youth are highly motivated toward social justice goals.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I used the existing literature to contextualize the concepts of mobility, community, rurality, and belonging and why these ideas are germane to the role of youth in Appalachia. In addition, I created a theoretical framework for analyzing the experiences of college-educated young adults in West Virginia amidst the phenomenon of out-migration. This theoretical framework is based on an innovative integration of

sociological, feminist, and Appalachian studies scholarship in which the application of intersectional identity and community belonging in the context of Appalachia contributes to understanding the relationship between young people and rural places.

Intersectionality may be particularly helpful in understanding the agentic power of individuals in the face of social structures that are most commonly relied upon to explain migration decisions. For example, scholarship on rural queer experiences is taking form, and recent efforts to shed light on this population show the survival strategies gays and lesbians create in order to reconcile their sexual and place identities (Gray, 2009; Herring, 2010; Mann, 2005). At the same time, both bell hooks, in *Belonging, A Culture of Place*, and Jeff Mann, in *Loving Mountains, Loving Men*, explain that they intentionally moved to university towns in rural Appalachia in order to achieve a compromise between the push factors associated with race and sexuality and the pull factors associated with place. Gender, race, sexual orientation, and class are important categories of analysis for understanding how individuals negotiate their orientation to their communities and navigate the decision to leave or stay in a community. Using intersectionality is essential because it helps to conceptualize the simultaneous constraints and freedoms experienced by young educated people in the context of rural communities. Clearly, mobility and sense of belonging in a community are influenced by social structures, but by examining the intersections of identity, the agency of individuals becomes apparent as well. The framework of intersectionality is useful in placing diverse systems of oppression and empowerment in conversation with each other in order to more fully understand these social phenomena. Therefore, I pose and answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do young people negotiate a sense of belonging in rural places through the intersection of their identity and place?

2. How are experiences of identity and belonging relevant to young people's mobility?

3. In the context of belonging and mobility, how are young people oriented toward rural places and communities?

Chapter 3

Methodology and Methods

In this chapter I discuss the role of intersectionality as a methodological approach that is helpful toward fulfilling the goals of this project in rural sociology, women's studies, and Appalachian studies. Then I discuss my own position as a researcher in relation to the research site and sample. I then describe the research design, qualitative data collection, and quantitative data collection. Finally, I connect the research design and methods back to intersectionality as a methodology.

Methodology

The concept and theory of intersectionality is useful as a sociological and feminist tool that helps me design this research as grounded in rural sociology, women's studies, and Appalachian studies. Specifically, I use an intersectional approach to design the sample, methods, and analysis that I use to understand young people's experiences and mobility in rural places. By doing so, I situate this research as a feminist and social justice project. Although intersectionality has become widely used in sociology as well as other disciplines dealing with gender and identities, it is not as often used as a methodological or theoretical tool outside topics focused on gender or race (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Simply put, an intersectional method is an approach to research that integrates the complexities of social positions and systems of stratification

in society. McCall (2005) delineates three broad types of intersectional methodology: *anticategorical*, *intracategorical*, and *intercategorical*. The *anticategorical* approach assumes that through the matrix of gender, race, class, and other categories, identity is more complex than the language we use can accommodate and contribute to the perpetuation of inequalities and thus should be deconstructed and eliminated. The *intracategorical* approach focuses on a particular identity category and uses the matrix of gender, race, class, and other categories to extrapolate outward the complexities of this particular identity. Finally, the *intercategorical* approach examines multiple identity categories together and analyzes the systems of inequalities and power across these categories using the matrix of gender, race, class, and other categories (McCall, 2005).

It is the third type of intersectional methodology, the *intercategorical* approach, which I employ in this dissertation research. I rely on feminist methodological theories of centering the voices and experiences of marginalized populations as a way of addressing issues more robustly and strategically in order to examine the ways social systems of power interlock (Collins, 1986; hooks, 2000; Smith, 2004). As I discussed in Chapter 2, and will detail later in this chapter, I chose to construct my sample and analyze my data according to categories of gender, race, sexuality, and class. In addition, place holds an important status as an identity in the intersectional approach to the methodology and analysis.

I use Patricia Hill Collins's (1986) idea of "the outsider within" to think about the angle at which to approach answering my questions about youth in rural communities. Collins notes that the standpoint of the outsider within may provide several sociological insights, based on Simmel's notion of the "stranger," who can "see patterns that may be

more difficult for those immersed in the situation to see" (p. S15). Collins was suggesting the concept of the "outsider within" as a way of acknowledging the valuable contributions of marginalized academics, specifically those who contributed to Black feminist thought, and also as a methodological tool for sociologists to use in general for potentially accessing their standpoint as an outsider within to develop sociological knowledge that remains inaccessible from the mainstream. I also find this standpoint useful as a researcher with an outsider within status in the communities that I visited through this research.

I see Collins's concept of the outsider within as a fundamental component of the research design including the purpose of the research, the research questions, my perspective as a researcher, and the perspectives of the sample, whom I chose to represent young people's experiences in rural places. Collins, in discussing the value of centering the experiences of people at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, suggests that these perspectives "rarely project separatists solutions" and instead offer ideas for creating solidarity across struggles (p. S21). Although Collins discusses the "outsider within" status mostly in the context of academic identity, I suggest that women, people of color, LGBT people, and young people with college education in West Virginia occupy an outsider within status. They occupy a minority or marginalized status situated within a rural, white, heteropatriarchal working class culture. As Naples (1996) indicates, an "outsider phenomenon" in which most or all members of a rural community can identify some way in which they are "outsiders" to a mythic community norm may be a common experience This is particularly the case as "outsider" status is dynamic through the intersection of identities and changes across time and space. Based on Collins's assertion

that perspectives on the interlocking nature of social power can yield potential connections across identities, I suggest these intersecting experiences can give us important information regarding the sustainability of communities in Appalachia and the rural U.S. Through the intersections of identity, the voices of the participants in my sample and my own voice as a researcher to the extent that I am also an "outsider within" (see the discussion in the next section of this chapter) are not unified, and thus, the voices that come through in the data are not part of the process of self-definition and self-valuation, as Collins suggests, but rather are part of a process of using intersectionality to bringing multiple voices to the center of analysis.

However, Choo & Ferree (2010) critique intersectional methodology and analysis in sociology that stops at merely "giving voice" to multiple identities or simply highlighting the places in the data where intersectional identities seem to matter in relation to a dominant norm. They argue instead that intersectionality should be used to examine the systems that reproduce inequalities. In the final section of this chapter I discuss how I apply Choo & Ferree's ideas to the analysis of the data in order to improve the quality and usefulness of the intersectional approach. Here, I want to point out that the design of this research is an attempt to deconstruct the hegemonic notions of what rural places are like and where and how certain types of people live. Roslyn Diprose (2000) argues that it is only through the "other" that we are able to learn. She says, "To remain living within what we think we know would be to relive an unproductive autonomy that exhibits the world in a way that is familiar but that doubly contests us and so haunts our lives over and over again" (p. 128). Therefore, I think centering the experiences of the outsider within, while an interesting endeavor in itself, is particularly

useful to rural sociology where the stories of marginalized people lead us toward an inclusive process of redefining ideas about rural society.

From a feminist perspective, intersectionality theorists suggest that applying an intersectional method confronts the issue at hand more wholly and that when we center marginalized people in our analysis, we find information and solutions to problems that are not just particularly relevant but are broadly applicable (Collins, 1986; MacKinnon, 2013; Smith, 2004). For example, MacKinnon (2013) shows how using the intersectional position of race and gender to examine an issue like sexual harassment demarginalizes the experiences of women of color and thus yields more robust analysis and solutions. For this project, I apply this methodological perspective to the way I constructed the sample so as to bring together intersectionally marginalized perspectives to the center of analysis in order to more fully understand young people's relationship to rural places, a marginalized perspective itself. By doing so, I frame this dissertation as a feminist project, which includes "[T]he aspiration to live and act in ways that embody feminist thought and promote justice and the well-being of all women" (Devault & Gross, 2007, p. 174).

Furthermore, although I do focus on gender, race, sexuality, and class in this project, age, education, and place are additional categories that influence the experiences of the participants. These intersections are relevant in the context of Appalachia because they point to the ways in which young people's identities are part of systems of social stratification that can lead to alienation and/or belonging. In other words, the idea that Appalachia is not a place for young people, or educated people, or women, or people of color, or LGBT people is a stereotype but also a lived reality for many (House, 2014).

Using an intersectional analysis to understand the ways in which people at these intersections negotiate this alienation is part of the purpose of this research.

Positionality

The way I developed the research questions and design, executed the data collection, and analyzed the data for this project was all informed by my knowledge and academic orientation as a student in rural sociology, women's studies, and Appalachian studies. In addition, the way I approached and was able to execute this project was informed by my position as someone who has personal and professional experiences with many of the places and people involved in the project. In this section I describe two formative experiences that led to the development of this project as well as a discussion of the ways in which my personal connection to the project and my position as an "outsider within" affected the research process. As Naples (1996) maintains, the status of "outsider" or "insider" can shift across place and time, and as I discuss in this section of the chapter, my position within and outside West Virginia as a resident and an academic as well as across time and identity positions me both within and outside the perspectives reflected in this research project.

I started thinking about my dissertation in elementary school. I had the good luck to attend Central Elementary School in Morgantown, West Virginia. This small public school was unique in my hometown, and certainly my home state, because the school district included the part of town where West Virginia University's married student housing was located. Thus, I went to school with children from West Virginia, but also

the children of international students from Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, South Korea, and Turkey. When I was nine years old, my family moved across town, and I found myself in First Ward Elementary, a different, larger public school. Here, almost all the children, like me, were white. In addition to the racial changes I saw, I also noticed outright racism for the first time. I couldn't articulate it then, but I knew there was something beneficial at Central School that wasn't present at First Ward.

My inspiration for this research comes from my personal experience growing up in West Virginia. I remember sitting in school on a Saturday at age fourteen and feeling dumbfounded. I was taking the Golden Horseshoe Exam, a test every eighth grade student in West Virginia takes after a year of West Virginia Studies class. I was so proud to have made it to the semi-final round, and I really wanted to be a finalist and receive the small golden horseshoe pin from the governor in recognition of my great academic achievement. I spent extra time studying the facts and figures about the state like the major industries—coal and chemicals, the Potomac River that made up the border with Maryland, and, my favorite, how Abraham Lincoln created a loophole to let us secede from Virginia during The Civil War. But then I came to the essay section. The topic was, "Why should young people stay in West Virginia after they graduate high school?" I had no idea. Why would anyone want to stay? I made up an answer about the beauty of the state, and, needless to say, I never received the golden horseshoe.

These early experiences foreshadowed my interest in Appalachian communities and possibilities for social change. I saw the social benefit of diversity in communities-- that people and places can be positively affected by their social milieu. As an undergraduate and then a graduate student, I began to understand better how systems of

oppression were interlocked. I remembered the children at First Ward and realized how their racism was linked to their own class oppression and how my inability to answer the essay question was linked to my class privilege. I became more troubled by the barriers I saw that prevented people, particularly women and minorities, from feeling a sense of belonging in Appalachian communities.

In West Virginia, like other rural and marginalized places, successful lives often depend on leaving. I came to realize that young women often don't see a place for themselves in rural communities after college graduation when I was working at High Rocks for Girls, a youth education and empowerment program in rural West Virginia. I was inspired by the women at High Rocks who were working to create a place where women could be successful professionals while remaining embedded in the local community.

My experience growing up in the state and doing previous research and work, particularly with young activists and leaders in the state, gave me an insider status that helped give me access to many of my research participants. However, this varied slightly depending on the location within the state. For example, people often reacted positively to knowing that I was from West Virginia, and I made sure to state that information clearly in my recruitment communications. However, a few times when people would ask exactly where I was from, my response of "Morgantown," would signify that I had a different, perhaps privileged, position and was separated from a lot of the daily challenges that people face in more rural and Southern parts of the state because Morgantown is a university town and is much more economically stable and prosperous than other parts of the state. Furthermore, I also identified myself as a researcher from

Penn State University, which further signifies myself as an outsider and someone who left the state to become "successful." Although, as I argue elsewhere in this dissertation, the entire state is characterized by a rural working-class culture, the material and political realities of living in one of the cities in the state as opposed to a community of 200 people in more rural parts of the state is certainly part of a geographical hierarchy. This system of inequality was palpable at times during the recruitment and data collection process. Ultimately, however, I think I benefitted more from my shared knowledge and experience regarding place than I suffered from my position.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge my own intersecting identities in regard to gender, race, and sexuality since my sample was constructed around the categories and my interview and focus group guides involved discussing issues related to these categories. My identity as a white, heterosexual, woman in her early thirties did not seem to impact substantially the quality of data I was able to collect. Although, to be sure, my identity was likely helpful in some contexts and disadvantageous in others. My identity likely gave me access to certain participants, group settings, and places to which I might not otherwise have had access. On the other hand, my identity likely limited my access to other individuals, groups, and places that might have yielded different perspectives within the data.

Research sites

I chose West Virginia as a state for marking the boundaries of the research both because of my previous experience with the place and because it has several

characteristics that make it a useful location to intersectionally examine young adults'

sense of belonging and relationship to rural community. As I discussed in the previous

chapter, gender, race, sexuality, and class have somewhat particular meanings in the

context of Appalachia and West Virginia, specifically, which is the only state to be

completely contained within the borders of Appalachia[11]. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the

culture in West Virginia is predominated by a white heteropatriarchal rural working-class

norm. West Virginia loses a large percent of young, educated people and continues to

have the lowest educational attainment levels in the country. This is due, in part, to the

out-migration of college graduates. For example, at West Virginia University, 72% of

graduates will leave the state within five years of earning their degree.

In addition, overall, the average level of racial diversity in West Virginia remains

much lower than the average racial diversity in the U.S. Racial diversity in West Virginia

is also increasing more slowly than in the U.S. overall. In 2012, the U.S. Census

estimated that 94% of the population in West Virginia was white (compared to 77.9% for

the U.S. as a whole) while 3.5% were black or African American (13.1% for the U.S.),

1.5% were two or more races (2.4% for the U.S.), and 1.3% were Hispanic or Latino

(16.9% for the U.S.). These diversity levels are based on a limited definition of racial

diversity, and of course should not detract from the populations of people of color in

West Virginia and Appalachia more generally or the other types of diversity in the region

including ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality. However, this dynamic is often obscured

[11] This is according to the official designation made by the Appalachian Regional Commission, an entity of the federal government. The entire state is often included in other common definitions of Appalachia, specifically Central Appalachia, which is most often recognized as a cultural marker. Although some definitions of the region do not include parts of the Northern and Eastern panhandles, which are proximal to Pittsburgh and Washington, DC (Williams, 2001).

by the characterization of a white, patriarchal, heterosexual, poor, and uneducated norm born from stereotypes of Appalachian culture as backwoods and backward—rednecks that are racist, sexist, and homophobic. These characterizations based on stereotypes and actual levels of diversity do not capture the small groups of minorities in the state or the history of racial and ethnic minority communities and culture in the state, particularly related to the development of coal and other industries in West Virginia, which attracted inmigrants from diverse backgrounds.

In addition to the distinctive gap between West Virginia and the U.S. in terms of educational attainment and racial diversity, West Virginia also ranks lower on many indicators of well being related to gender, race, and sexuality than do other states. In 2013, the Institute for Women's Policy Research found that the status of women in West Virginia was lower-than-average on many indicators including ranking 50th out of 50 states for its proportion of women in the paid workforce. In addition, women of color and LGBT women often faced additional challenges in status in the state (Hess et al., 2013). Although data on LGBT people in West Virginia is scarce compared to race and gender information, we do know from the 2010 Census that 2,916 families identified as same-sex households in West Virginia (about 0.4% of households compared to about 0.6% of households in the U.S. as a whole). From these data we can see that in terms of sexuality, West Virginia is more similar to the rest of the country. However, young adults are likely not captured in these measures since they only include same-sex households, not the sexuality of individuals.

Recognizing the current demographic composition in West Virginia, I suggest that it is a particularly useful site for examining the intersectional experiences of young

people regarding their relationship to rural places. The demographic patterns present both

an alternative story and a reaffirmation to narratives of rural communities in the U.S. as

homogenous and hostile to the "other." Ultimately, as bell books points out, the goal is

not just to achieve a certain level of diversity but to create more welcoming and

sustainable communities. Hooks's conceptualization of "beloved communities," where

what is most important is a sense of belonging instead of diversity, rings truer to this

ideal, and for places like West Virginia that struggle to meet the status quo for

marginalized groups, let alone surpass it, alternative narratives about the ways gender,

race, and sexuality work in rural places can offer helpful paths forward.

In looking for these alternative narratives, I conducted focus groups and

interviews with participants in 13 counties across the state (Figure 3-1). Five of these

counties are categorized as metropolitan according to the U.S. Census, one is

micropolitan, and seven are nonmetropolitan.
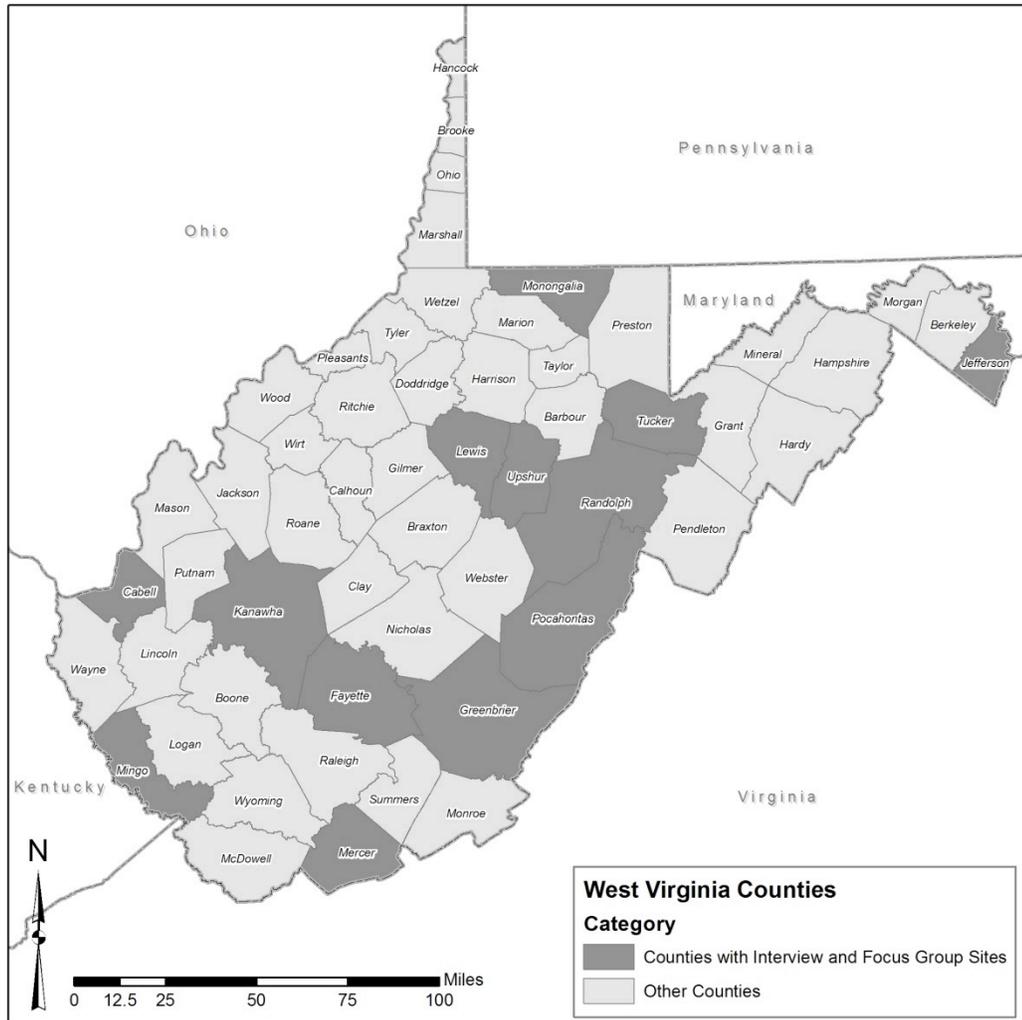
Figure **3-1**: Counties where data were collected[12]

Research design

In designing this research project, I planned methods of data collection that would best answer my research questions and yield data that would be useful to an intersectional analysis while systematically working to achieve the greatest possible validity and reliability within the research design. First, I systematically constructed the sample in order to triangulate the qualitative data I collected and improve the validity and reliability of the research. Second, I collected empirical evidence from young people in their own words. Doing so would yield a deep understanding of their experiences, which would be important in analyzing sense of belonging, mobility, and community roles interesectionally and providing valid answers to my research questions. Third, I included quantitative demographic and migration data to accurately contextualize the qualitative data, specifically regarding mobility. In this section I detail these decisions and describe the methods I used to answer my research questions.

The organization of the research is based on the "quant followed by QUAL" model wherein the quantitative data is used as a complement to the qualitative data "to identify specific populations or issues that need to be further explored in depth" (Leckenby & Hesse-Biber, 2006). In this design, the primary research method will be qualitative, noted by the uppercase "QUAL." The secondary method will be quantitative, noted by the lowercase "quant."

Table **3-1**: Research design

Research Objective	Model	Method
1. To discover how young people negotiate a sense of belonging in rural places through the intersections of their identity and place	QUAL	Focus groups and semi-structured interviews
2. To understand how identity and belonging are relevant to young people's mobility	quant and QUAL	Descriptive and statistical analysis of ACS migration data, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews
3. To determine the community orientation of young people in rural places	quant and QUAL	Descriptive and statistical analysis of ACS migration data, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews

I organized my sample to represent two groups of young people: current college students and recent college graduates. I collected qualitative data from current college students and recent college graduates in West Virginia. College students have been the subjects of studies that measure how social and psychological factors affect their plans for geographic mobility and their connectedness to place (Frieze et al., 2006; McAndrew, 1998). However, these studies have not incorporated an intersectional approach. In this research, college students and graduates were included purposefully to examine a population that simultaneously exhibits characteristics of rootedness to place and also a likelihood of migration. Haraway (2008) calls for the seeking out and use of "contact zones," or places where different perspectives can find common ground. College-educated youth may prove to be a contact zone where rural/urban and local/global values meet. I focused on the population of people that have stayed or come to rural places.

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Within this population my sample is divided into two categories, students and graduates. I might call them the antithesis of the "brain drain." However, as I show in Chapter [3], many of the participants have also been or will be outmigrants at some point, too.

In their 2009 study of youth outmigration in the rural Midwest, Carr and Kefalas categorize young people into achievers, stayers, seekers, and returners. The authors show that the community puts more resources and support toward the achievers, those who will leave the community. Originally, I thought that the current college students would represent Carr and Kefalas's "achievers" and would be more likely to want to leave West Virginia. I also thought that the college graduates would represent the "high-flyer returners." This group would, as Carr and Kefalas explain, be like the achievers in terms of their educational success but would be aware of their role in maintaining their communities. In other words, they would be those with a greater potential for staying in their community. I chose these two groups thinking that they would offer different perspectives on relationship to place and mobility.

However, a key difference in my approach to these categories in comparison to that of Carr and Kefalas is that I included both people from West Virginia and from elsewhere who were now living in West Virginia in my sample. I included both groups because I think both are essential components for sustainable communities in Appalachia. Like the system of bridging and bonding social capital explained by Flora et al. (2004) that I outlined in Chapter 2, people with strong ties to the community, institutions, and environment paired with people with new ideas and connections to outside resources set the stage for strengthening rural communities.

MacKinnon (2013) points out that intersectional method should be based on the lived experiences of people in hierarchical systems, and this is the basis on which I constructed the sample within the two groups that make up the total qualitative data sample for this research. Thus, for reasons I discuss in Chapter 2, I recruited participants who represented identities and perspectives on gender, race, sexuality, and place.

Qualitative data collection

I used a combination of focus groups, individual interviews, and participant observation to construct my qualitative data collection. I chose this combination as a strategy to efficiently access the best quality data from the different groups of participants. I planned and conducted focus groups with current college students, who represented the group of young people in the state most likely to leave. I chose the focus group format in order to engender critical discussion among the participants who were still in a transitory life stage (Morgan, 1996; Wilkinson, 1998). I planned and conducted individual semi-structured interviews with young college graduates, who represented the group of young people in the state that had decided to reside in West Virginia after gaining college education. I chose the interview format in order to collect narratives and rich detail from participants who had already made the transition from high school to college to career. Finally, during the course of conducting the focus groups and interviews, I was able to use participant observation in the context of organizational meetings, social gatherings, private residences, and digital communities. Overall, 92 people participated in the focus groups and interviews combined: 65 people were in the

focus groups and 27 people were in the individual interviews. All names used to refer to participants, schools, and places that would identify participants, are pseudonyms. I obscured minor details where necessary to protect participant confidentiality. In the following sections I detail the focus group, interview, and participant observation data and collection processes.

Focus groups

I first conducted focus groups with college students at three universities in West Virginia. I chose these three locations because they represented three distinct geographic regions in the state and three different types of schools in terms of their size. All three schools were public universities. Participants from these focus groups were recruited from campus groups that deal with issues affecting marginalized students: women, African American, and LGBTQ students. I targeted these groups in order to construct homogeneity within each group based on gender, race, and sexuality as a way to take advantage of pre-existing familiarity among the group members and, in particular, experience discussing issues of gender, race, and sexuality. However, heterogeneity also existed within the focus groups. Importantly, although the LGBTQ groups were largely comprised of gay and lesbian students, these groups also incorporate transgender and queer identified students, many of whom are heterosexual.

I planned to conduct one focus group for each group totaling nine focus groups in all (Table 3-2). However, I was not able to recruit two of the groups (noted in the light gray cells in Table 3-2). These two groups did exist at these campuses; however, they

were not well organized during the time I was conducting field work, and after several

attempts to organize the focus groups with these specific groups I was unable to recruit

enough participants. Instead I conducted a total of seven focus groups among the three

schools. The purpose of these focus groups was to obtain information about how college

students are thinking about their identity in relation to place and sense of belonging. The

focus group format was particularly useful to engender discussion about potentially

sensitive issues.

Table **3-2**: Focus group sample matrix

Lockwood University	Vandalia University	Allegheny University
1. Women's student group	1. Women's student group	1. Women's student group
2. LGBT student group	2. LGBT student group	2. LGBT student group
3. African American student group	3. African American student group	3. African American student group

Table **3-3**: Number of participants from each identity group at each school

	Lockwood University	Allegheny University	Vandalia University
African American student group	15	8	N/A
LGBT student group	15	11	6
Women's student group	N/A	6	4

Overall, the majority of the focus group participants (91%) ranged in age from 18-24 years old. However, six participants in the focus groups were graduate students or non-traditional students whose ages ranged from 25-49 years old. Of the 65 focus group participants, 35 were from outside the state, and 30 were from West Virginia. The majority of focus group participants were from metropolitan counties (45 participants). Nine were from micropolitan counties, six were from nonmetropolitan counties, and three were international students from urban places outside the U.S. (one additional international student did not specify a city of origin).

Table **3-4**: Gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality self-identification of focus group participants

Gender	Race/ethnicity	Sexuality				Total
		Bisexual	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Other[13]	
Man		1 (1.5 %)	8 (12.3%)	15 (23.1%)	1(1.5%)	25 (38.5%)
	African American	0	4 (6.2%)	2 (3.1%)	0	6 (9.2%)
	Latino	0	0	3 (4.6%)	0	3 (4.6%)
	Multiracial[14]	0	3	1 (1.5%)	0	4 (6.2%)
	White	1 (1.5%)	1 (1.5%)	9 (13.8%)	1 (1.5%)	12 (18.5%)
Other[15]		0	0	1 (1.5%)	3 (4.6%)	4 (6.2%)
	White	0	0	1 (1.5%)	3 (4.6%)	4 (6.2%)
Woman		9 (13.8%)	18 (27.7%)	5 (7.7%)	4 (6.2%)	36 (55.4%)
	African American	1 (1.5%)	10 (15.4%)	0	0	11 (16.9%)
	Asian	0	1 (1.5%)	0	0	1 (1.5%)
	Latina	1 (1.5%)	0	1 (1.5%)	0	2 (3.1%)
	Multiracial	1 (1.5%)	4 (6.2%)	1 (1.5%)	0	6 (9.2%)
	White	6 (9.2%)	3 (4.6%)	3 (4.6%)	4 (6.2%)	16 (24.6%)
Total		10 (15.4%)	26 (40%)	21 (32.3%)	8 (12.3%)	65

Parentheses include the percentage of each identity combination out of the total number of participants

The focus groups were organized in collaboration with student, staff, and faculty leaders and were all conducted on the college campuses in the meeting spaces where the groups regularly met. The focus groups lasted from one hour to one hour and 45 minutes.

[13] Includes "homosexual and fluid," "other," "asexual," "pansexual," "queer," and "queer and questioning"
[14] Includes "African American and Latina/o," "white and African American," "Asian and Turkish," "Asian and Indian," and "Multiracial"
[15] Includes "transgender," "queer," and "other"

Some of the groups included a regular or shortened meeting directly preceding or following the focus group session, during which time I was able to conduct participant observation (described in another section below).

Interviews

I also conducted in-depth interviews with young people in the state that had already graduated from college. This group was comprised of college graduates living in West Virginia between the ages of 22 and 40 who were involved in their local community and/or a place-based organization. I used the information from this group to generate a cross-sectional perspective between current college students planning for the future and recent college graduates who have had time after graduating to make migration decisions.

I used snowball sampling from the key informants associated with groups or organizations that promote diversity, community development, or both in West Virginia (see further recruitment criteria in Table 4). I targeted five organizations in West Virginia to recruit participants: The STAY project, Fairness WV, Generation WV, Create WV, and Sustainable Williamson. I then used a mix of snowball sampling from these organizations and personal contacts to construct my sample. My goal was to create a sample that had representation from people that focus on issues specific to gender, race, and sexuality or community development and youth retention in general. Recruitment through organizations that focused on certain identities, both for the focus groups and the interviews, helped me create a purposive sample of young women and men, youth of

color, and LGBT youth that were knowledgeable and already interested in identity and community issues and therefore able to provide a perspective more useful to this study (Maxwell, 1997). On the other hand, this recruitment method limits the generalizability of this study because the participants, as those already active in communities, are people that already have some type of support network and structural sense of belonging in their communities. Still, this data provides insight into why and how young people can feel a sense of belonging amidst individual and structural constraints.

The STAY project is a "diverse regional network of young people working together to create, advocate for, and participate in safe, sustainable, engaging and inclusive communities throughout Appalachia and beyond." STAY was started by a group of young people in their late teens and early twenties during a youth meeting at the 2008 Appalachian Studies Association Conference. These young people decided to form an organization specifically for young people who wanted to confront the issues in their communities that made it hard for them to stay in Appalachia. They have been supported by and are affiliated with Appalshop, Highlander, and High Rocks for Girls, three long-term community development/activist organizations in Appalachia.

Fairness West Virginia's mission is "to ensure LGBT people can be open, honest and safe at home, at work and in the community. We represent the diversity of Appalachia, and our membership is open to everyone who believes in fundamental fairness." Fairness West Virginia is a statewide organization that promotes LGBT equality including legislation and social and cultural initiatives. They have organized campaigns for marriage equality, ending discrimination in the workplace, and greater understanding of the rural LGBT community in West Virginia.

Generation West Virginia and Create West Virginia are both organizations aimed at local and statewide development strategies in West Virginia. Generation West Virginia's mission is "(1) Identifying and advancing the interests of young people, age 21 – 45, in West Virginia (2) Promoting the growth and success of local young talent organizations in West Virginia (3) Retaining, attracting, and advancing young talent in West Virginia (4) Helping to make West Virginia a great place to live, work and play (5) Improving West Virginia's image internally and externally." Create West Virginia is an "independent grass roots organization launched by Vision Shared (www.visionshared.com) whose vision is to empower West Virginians at a local level to place themselves among the most innovative, dynamic, prosperous, creative communities in the world."

Finally, Sustainable Williamson is a collaborative project aimed at creating "a replicable model of sustainability for economically distressed communities throughout Central Appalachia… [using a strategy that] will reduce "brain drain", increase the quality of life, and create an atmosphere in which local entrepreneurs can thrive." Sustainable Williamson is a community-based initiative focused on one specific community in the southern West Virginia coalfields. Notably, although the leaders and members of these groups are all distinguishable, there are also connections among these groups through online and face-to-face social networks across the state. These organizations represent the current vanguard of youth leadership in West Virginia.

I encountered more difficulty than I expected including participants of color and LGBT people in the sample. Taylor (2009) explains that intersectional methods can lead to difficulties in locating hard-to-reach groups. This may be true because these

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intersectional identities serve as barriers for joining or participating in groups or places. For example, young people may not be as likely participate in the older, more established groups, which seemed particularly true among the few African American community groups in the state. Nonetheless, I was able to recruit a sample that yielded the intersectional information I needed to answer my research questions.

The individual interview participants ranged in age from 24 years old to 39 years old. Of the 27 college graduates, 17 identified as women, and 10 identified as men. Eighteen grew up in West Virginia and nine grew up outside the state. An equal number of individual interview participants were from metropolitan counties and nonmetropolitan counties (11 participants each). Four were from micropolitan counties, and one was from a city outside the U.S. However, the majority (18) of the individual interview participants were currently living in nonmetropolitan counties, whereas eight were living in metropolitan counties, and one was living in a micropolitan county.

Table **3-5**: Gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality self-identification of interview participants

Gender	Race/ethnicity	Sexuality				Total
		Bisexual	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Queer	
Man		1 (3.7%)	5 (18.5%)	4 (14.8%)	1 (3.7%)	11 (40.7%)
	African American	1 (3.7%)	1 (3.7%)	0	0	2 (7.4%)
	White	0	4 (14.8%)	4 (14.8%)	1 (3.7%)	9 (33.3%)
Woman		0	14 (51.9%)	1 (3.7%)	1 (3.7%)	16 (59.4%)
	Biracial[16]	0	4 (14.8%)	0	0	4 (14.8%)
	White	0	10 (37.0%)	1 (3.7%)	1 (3.7%)	12 (44.4%)
Total		1 (3.7%)	19 (70.4%)	5 (18.5%)	2 (7.4%)	27

Parentheses include the percentage of each identity combination out of the total number of participants

The interviews lasted from twenty-five minutes to one hour and 45 minutes, although most were about an hour long. The interviews took place in participants' homes and offices, at restaurants and coffee shops, and one outside in the woods at a campground. Two interviews were conducted over the phone, and one was conducted over Skype. During the interview data collection, I also participated in social gatherings, organizational meetings, and events, during which time I was able to conduct participant observation (described below).

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[16] Includes "African American and Native American" and "African American and white"

Participant observation

  I employed participant observation at several points during the data collection process. During the focus group data collection, all of the groups were already-existing organizations, which I was meeting with during or immediately before or after their normal meeting times. Thus, I was present for some or all of their meetings where I observed the way the individuals interacted with one another, the issues they were discussing, and the role of leaders or authority figures (advisors) within their organizations. Throughout the process of interviewing college graduates, I conducted several interviews while attending events related to the recruiting organizations listed previously. I have been an active in-person or online follower with all of these organizations for the duration of the research project.

  In addition, during the recruitment process, I found some of the organization and individual contact information through their Facebook pages where I could read posts regarding various topics. These participant observation portions of the research process did not yield data that I analyzed systematically. However, I did keep track of these interactions in my field notes, which helped me analyze the data from the focus groups and interviews.

  The qualitative data collection was conducted solely by myself, and each focus group and interview was digitally recorded while I also took notes. I had the focus groups and interviews transcribed, and I then coded each focus group and interview using Nvivo qualitative data software. I coded the data based on key themes of the study related to my research questions and based on emergent themes. I coded each focus group and

interview for gender, race, sexuality, and social class discussions, both explicit and implicit. Finally, I arranged the codes among broad themes in order to develop the findings chapters. Broad themes included: barriers and access to belonging, reconciliation of belonging, ambiguous feelings about place, desire to live in West Virginia, desire to leave West Virginia, future life plans, community involvement, and feeling better able to make a difference in West Virginia. In the results chapters that follow, I highlight some participant voices more than others based on the quality of what they said as a reflection of the themes found through the data analysis.

Quantitative data collection

In order to help answer my second and third research questions, "How are these experiences of identity and belonging relevant to young people's mobility?" and "In the context of belonging and mobility, what are the roles of young people in rural places?" I constructed a quantitative data set from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS). I selected data from the 2008-2012 American Community Survey (ACS) single year files to construct a five-year file in order to contextualize the mobility of young college-educated people in West Virginia. The ACS is a nationwide survey that continuously collects data about how many people reside in the U.S. and their relationship within the household, where they reside, their age, sex, race, ethnicity, housing and employment status, income, education, disability status, migration, and other

variables. The ACS samples about one in every 40 addresses every year (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2009). The U.S. Census Bureau randomly selects addresses and mails a paper

copy of the survey with instructions for how to fill out the survey online and follows up

with an additional copy of the survey as well as telephone calls and in-person follow-up

visits with randomly selected households that did not complete the survey (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2013).

I calculated net migration flows in and out of West Virginia across age, gender, race, and

educational attainment using the IPUMS data set. I then compared these migration rates

by gender, race, and education using chi-square tests for significant differences. I used

variables based on ACS survey questions regarding age, sex, race, educational

attainment, and migration. Table 3-6 shows the language used to ask the survey

questions.   I also calculated the margins of error for each combination of variables

using a replicate weights formula. I then checked the difference between the population

estimates I compared in the chi-square analysis with the margin of error to confirm the

statistical significance reported in Chapter 6.

Table **3-6**: ACS survey questions asked for the variables used in this project

Variable category	Question asked in ACS
Age	"What is Person 1's age and what is Person 1's date of birth?"
Sex	"What is Person 1's sex?" [options are either male or female]
Race	"What is Person 1's race?" [multiple racial category options including "some other race" with an option to write in the specification]
Educational Attainment	"What is the highest degree or level of school this person has COMPLETED? *Mark (X) ONE box. If currently enrolled, mark the previous grade or highest degree received*."
Residence 1 year ago	"Did this person live in this house or apartment 1 year ago?" If the answer is "no," "Where did this person live 1 year ago?"

Unfortunately, in the context of this research project, a major limitation of quantitative data is that sexuality is not available as a variable from these data sets for this type of analysis. Surveys rarely include sexuality as a demographic question. Indeed, this is a difficult demographic group to capture because identifying with a particular sexuality can be fluid, particularly during youth. In addition, a multivariate analysis including gender, race, and sexuality would be more appropriate as a complementary quantitative analysis to the intersectional qualitative analysis. Still, this quantitative analysis provides a broad understanding of the differences gender, race, and education make in patterns of migration. I then rely on the qualitative data to bring in the experiences of gays and lesbians, which are not included in the quantitative analysis.

Intercategorical intersectionality

The research design, data collection methods, and analysis connect back to the intercategorical methodological approach discussed earlier in this chapter (McCall 2005). In the qualitative and quantitative data collection, I constructed samples that integrated variability in gender, race, and sexuality. As tables 3-4 and 3-5 display, the matrix of gender, race, and sexuality was a key feature of the sample. The focus group and interview guides (see appendices A and B) were organized to ask broad and easy questions initially. In the context of the focus groups, responses to these broad questions tended to include discussion of how the groups' common identity category (gender, race, or sexuality) influenced participants' experiences. I also asked follow-up questions about gender, race, and sexuality when non-common identity categories came up in conversation. In the context of the interviews, I also started out with broad questions and then asked follow up questions about gender, race, and sexuality among all the interview participants. In addition, class identity and status emerged as a particularly strong theme in the data, which I had not anticipated. I incorporated follow up questions about class more systematically about one-third of the way through my data collection. As the following three findings chapters reflect, this intersectional approach to the research allows experiences of gender, race, and sexuality to come in and out of focus through the analysis of belonging, class, mobility, and community.

Chapter 4

Belonging and Community

While I do not claim an identity as Appalachian, I do claim a solidarity, a sense of belonging, that makes me one with the Appalachian past of my ancestors: black, Native American, white, all 'people of one blood' who made homeplace in isolated landscapes where they could invent themselves, where they could savor a taste of freedom. –bell hooks (2012, p. 4)

In her 2009 book, *Belonging, A Culture of Place*, bell hooks argues for creating a version of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "beloved communities" that includes belonging as an act of resistance toward racism and dominator culture and as an act of affirmation toward inclusion and a culture of place. She describes her own return to Kentucky as the end result of her individual struggle to reconcile various aspects of her identity, including her sense of belonging. Thus, "beloved communities" are places where people create more belonging among diverse people. As hooks notes, the goal is less about a quantitative measure of diversity and more about the qualitative accessibility of belonging. In this chapter I provide a sociological analysis of belonging. I present qualitative data regarding the way the participants in this study experience a sense of belonging and examine the intersectionality and social structures that affect access to belonging. This sociological investigation of belonging is important in understanding how people relate to place. Specifically, based on the data I present in this chapter, I suggest a dialectic of belonging wherein an intersectional dynamic between individuals and community leads to a process

toward belonging. Gender, race, sexuality, and class impact this dialectic process, which orients people at different positions within the community.

The theoretical connection between belonging and community

As I noted above regarding hooks's conceptualization of "beloved communities," quantitative diversity does not necessary yield positive relationships between individuals and their communities. Indeed, sociologists and other social scientists have found ways that ethnic and racial diversity in particular is associated with lower social trust and social capital, neighborhood and community satisfaction, and civic engagement (Rice & Steele 2002, Hipp 2009), although others have shown this finding to be contingent by age and class and able to be mediated by social interactions (Gimpel & Lay 2008, Stolle et al. 2008). Young college-educated people living in West Virginia negotiate belonging through their education, gender, race, and sexuality. The possibility for a "beloved community" is influenced by the intersectional matrix of privilege and oppression.

Just as college-educated or "gifted" youth in general are expected to leave rural places (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, Corbett, 2007), LGBT youth are expected and encouraged to leave (D'Augelli & Hart, 1987, Gray, 2009, Herring, 2010). As I discussed in Chapter 1 and 2, social constructs that perpetuate the degradation of rurality are developed in a *metronormative* context in which only certain megalopolis areas are deemed fit for young people, and especially young people with marginalized identities, to fulfill their potential (Herring, 2010, Theobald & Wood, 2010). Sexism, racism, and heterosexism and homophobia in rural places reinforce these metronormative narratives.

Many youth that are alienated in rural communities do continue live there. Are they able to reconcile the alienating forces of gender, race, sexuality, and class norms? Through analysis of the data in this chapter, I suggest that youth struggle with these factors through a "dialectic of belonging." In other words, the dynamics between individuals and their social milieu create conditions where belonging is more or less likely, and young people then construct a sense of belonging from different positions in relation to their communities. Gender, race, and sexuality affect belonging at both the individual and structural level, and young people experience belonging through a recursive internal and external process. In other words, an internal sense of belonging that reflects the agency of individuals is always in tension with external social systems that frame sense of belonging.

According to Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration, it is impossible to separate societal structures and individual agency when trying to explain social phenomena. They are mutually dependent. Identity can shape the rules and resources people understand themselves to have in terms of what Giddens calls the "dialectic of control." In other words, social systems influence the tacit and discursive understanding of available options for individuals, who in turn always have agency. Similar to Wilkinson's (1991) interactional theory of community, although less specifically about the development of community, Giddens says,

> Social interaction refers to encounters in which individuals engage in situations of co-presence, and hence to social integration as a level of the 'building blocks' whereby the institutions of social systems are articulated. Social relations are certainly involved in the structuring of interaction but are also the main 'building blocks' around which institutions are articulated in system

integration.   (p.   89)

In other words, individuals experience social structures through social relations, and these social relations produce and reproduce social structures. The concept of intersectionality is useful in situating individuals in relation to the constraints and opportunities they face as residents or potential residents of rural places. Community and individual characteristics that may act as barriers for some people may privilege others. Thus, the way a person understands their identity, situated in their place and time, holds power over their actions inasmuch as the person knows and understands this power. The analysis in this chapter relies both on the theories of structuration and intersectionality.

In Figure 4-1, I present a typology of belonging based on the aforementioned theoretical discussion and qualitative data from the focus groups and individual interviews, which are reported in this chapter. Sense of belonging is constructed through a recursive process involving respondents' internal sense of belonging in tension with social systems that frame social experiences of belonging. Individuals are positioned in relation to their community in different ways depending on their individual experiences with this dialectic process.

For example, although this particular outcome was very rare in the data, some people report that they stay in their communities because it is the path of least resistance or they just feel a sense of inertia keeping them in place. For these people, their internal sense of belonging is weak. They do not feel a sense of engagement in their community. However, they experience strong structural belonging in the sense that there are not any clear or pressing "push factors" that are causing them to be completely alienated from their community. For example, they might have a supportive social network or a good

job. People who experience both weak internal and structural belonging report alienation from their communities.

On the other hand, people who report experiencing both strong internal and structural belonging come closest to what bell hooks describes as the ideal of "beloved community." This does not mean that these individuals never face struggles or conflicts in their belonging, but rather their orientation toward community is supported both internally and structurally. Finally, people also report experiencing a strong sense of internal belonging but weak structural belonging. In this scenario, a person has to endure sometimes arduous emotional labor in order to remain positively oriented toward their community. It is important to remember that these positions are not static. Instead, as part of the dialectic process, people move in and out of these types of belonging.

<div align="center">

Internal Belonging

		Weak	Strong
	Strong	Path of least resistance/inertia	Beloved community
Structural Belonging	Weak	Alienation	Arduous emotional labor

</div>

Figure **4-1**: The dialectic of belonging

Intersectional belonging may be a particularly useful concept for rural community organizing and development while avoiding the pitfalls of identity politics. In particular,

in Appalachia, place identity has become an important basis for activism and community development. As Appalachian studies scholars Smith and Fisher (2012) point out, "deliberate claiming of identity can be an act of resistance, a way of fighting back against Appalachian stereotypes, which in turn can undergird organizing against exploitation and discrimination in the region." However, they warn, "place-based identity is always at risk of becoming place-bound, that is, insular and exclusionary. The tendency for place to be romantically conflated with 'community,' envisioned as a harmonious (and homogenous) space of shared interests and values, often informs such insularity" (274-275). Smith and Fisher argue that only when place-based identity is "critical, relational, and extroverted" and used as a bridge that creates links among people and groups does it have the potential for transformative community building. In other words, Smith and Fisher echo hooks's and MLK Jr.'s ideal of community that is not based on homogeneity or agreeability. Instead, the ideal community should have space for multiple perspectives and debate. Similarly, feminist philosopher Rosalyn Diprose (2008) argues that the capacity for community is based on the ability of individuals to find belonging through their unique identities "without recourse to an idea of common, shared, or even hybrid identity" (29). This community is engendered through interpersonal inclinations toward "togetherness without commonalities" and through political institutions that frame ideas of belonging.

Belonging is a useful way of thinking intersectionally about community because it allows us to see how people find belonging on their own terms both at the individual and structural level. Furthermore, belonging isn't a binary status measured by identity, residence, or participation. Rather, belonging is a psycho-social space with the possibility of becoming stronger or weaker. Understanding the ways people might find or struggle to

find belonging yields information about the capacity for community. Indeed, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2010) suggests new directions for sociologists to study communities by interrogating the politics of communities. She argues that as feminists have transformed our thinking about the family through questioning the gender roles and intersections of power within the family structure, we can also better understand the systems of power in communities, which she argues are too often assumed to be private-sphere, naturally occurring institutions, rather than social constructs. Collins says, "Political leaders know that when people cease seeing themselves as part of a mass, a mob, a collectivity, a population, or a public, and instead claim a sense of belonging to a community, they are primed for political analysis and action" (12). In this sense, understanding sense of belonging is fundamental for understanding the connection between young people and rural places.

The focus of this chapter is specifically on the ways young people experienced a sense of belonging. The intersectional framework will be particularly relevant to understanding the complexity of how people relate to and interact with place, and these dynamic spaces can yield alternative explanations and the possibility for redefinition. This information is vital to the task of creating welcoming and diverse communities.

Definitions of belonging

Participants defined belonging in multiple ways, but overwhelmingly reflected a longing for space to express uniqueness and individuality. For the students, one participant in a group of African American students discussed the requirement of sharing

a "trait or quality" in common with others in order to find belonging. However, the vast majority of students across all of the focus groups talked about "feeling safe," "not being attacked or judged," and "the freedom to be yourself." Like Diprose theorizes, many students described belonging as a space where you are supported in expressing your full self. For example, a man in an African American student group said, "you pretty much don't feel constrained to do what you would think to do normally. Like, you feel you can just be yourself. So that sense of belonging just promotes that freedom to really just express yourself." Similarly, a woman in a gender equality group said,

> [H]aving a group of people that will anchor you, they might not necessarily be where you're from or share the same experiences, but they anchor you because they can relate to you or you have a tie to them. They just make you laugh, make you feel good about yourselves and you build each other up. When you're feeling down, this person who you never would have met before can build you   back   up.   I   think   it's   important.

Notably, this student points out that belonging is often developed across difference. Like Diprose and hooks, belonging here is not about a certain measure of commonality or diversity but rather the capacity for community whereby connections are made across societal constraints and difference.

Contrary to Diprose and hooks, however, students also defined belonging as space where labels and identity did not matter. For example, students in an LGBT focus group said, "I think it's when people really don't focus on the label that you are. It's you are who you are." Another student in the same group added, "And for me it's…mainly feeling accepted and not feeling that you're outcast or that you're different, feeling like you're included in the group." For these students, difference is problematic for accessing belonging. Yet, as Diprose points out, "The capacity for community can be restored by

offers of community" (48). Thus, as a student from an African American focus group points out, "I think [in] a broader sense you might [be] comfortable where you are [when] the community is inviting. The community makes you feel welcome." Belonging and community are linked here in the way that Diprose theorizes; individual feelings of belonging are developed through community. Belonging then, both theoretically and empirically, is a process of structuration, to use Giddens's terminology. Belonging is experienced at the individual level through interaction with other people and structural factors.

Belonging was indeed an internal and external process for the participants in this project. Deidre, a biracial African American and white woman, echoes Giddens's theory of structuration when she says, "I think you create a sense of belonging. You either create it because you're just so internally strong or you're pulling off the ideas of other people." In other words, those who do not receive belonging through cultural, institutional, or community messages must find some kind of personal source of belonging. This extra burden of emotional labor is an oppressive force that affects the accessibility of community for those that must negotiate a marginalized status due to gender, race, and sexuality. Thus, the relationship between identity, belonging, and community is that identity affects the dialectic of belonging and this process connects people to their communities differently. In the next section I report the ways in which participants experienced barriers to belonging through their gender, race, and sexuality identities. Then, I report the ways in which participants were able to access belonging through these identities.

Barriers to belonging: external and internal

Students and graduates both identified gender, race, and sexuality as barriers to belonging. For example, an Asian Turkish bisexual woman in LGBT focus groups said, "When I moved here I went to a small high school. I was the only foreign person there, the only brown[-skinned person] I think, too. And, that was why I didn't feel like I belonged." Others, who came to West Virginia by choice, described feelings of anxiety about finding belonging in West Virginia. An African American and Latina Costa Rican woman in a gender equality focus group described feeling concerned about the racial attitudes she would encounter when she moved to West Virginia for school. She said, "It's definitely a fear, moving out here." Likewise, a white lesbian and "fluid" woman from an LGBT focus group described her sense of belonging after moving from an urban area where she did not experience barriers to belonging through her sexuality to living in West Virginia,

> I was terrified to come out here. Like, I was so scared to tell people I was gay, but I grew up in a community where it didn't matter if you were gay. It didn't matter if you told people; and no one would question you or said anything. If people made fun of you then they in turn would be questioned by, like, the cool kids, like, "why are you making fun of that person?" So it's bizarre for me to be in an area where that's not the norm.

Contrary to common narratives about young people coming out once they are in college, this student's experience shows that for some young adults, they actually experienced more sense of belonging in their hometowns growing up than they did living in a college town in West Virginia. In all of these examples, the race and sexuality social norms impacted an internal sense of belonging.

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Students' sense of belonging was also often impacted by more explicit social norms. For example, several students in the Allegheny LGBT focus group discussed attending a speed-dating event put on by the university in which you are matched up with a different person for a few minutes of conversation before switching to a new partner. The idea is to have a "mini-date" with several people so by the end of the night you will have met someone you would like to go out with again. The students in the focus group described the bewilderment of the organizers that gay and lesbian students had shown up to the event. They quickly paired them with students of the same sex but who were heterosexual. The focus group students laughed that they ended up having some very nice conversations but that they were also angry for being isolated and forced into a ridiculous social situation.

Gender was not often described as a barrier to belonging for men and women students in any of the focus groups. However, gender did become more salient when it intersected with class. For example, a white bisexual woman from a gender equality focus group said,

> I do want to say, and I didn't say it before, but I regret it so I'm going to say it now. I do think that women in West Virginia, we're not expected to go to college; we're not expected to go to grad school. We're expected to have children and be barefooted and cook, and, like, that is all [my home county] is. So many girls that I graduated with have children and are married and their husbands are mechanics in town, and they're just, they're bound to [their home place] now! And I can't imagine doing that to myself…[I]t was *very* weird, so maybe that has a lot to do with my relationship with West Virginia.

This student describes a narrow and limited norm for women in West Virginia with which she does not identify, and this external structure informs her internal sense of

belonging not only to her home community but to West Virginia in general. This perspective formed relationally to a class-based cultural norm came through more strongly in the individual interviews, which I will come back to later in this chapter and also in Chapter 5.

In general, students were much quicker than were graduates to identify gender, race, and sexuality as the bases through which they experienced alienation. Perhaps this is because the students in the focus groups were in a position of heightened tension regarding belonging based on their involvement in the student groups and/or their status as students in transition from childhood to adulthood. In contrast, graduates are a self-selecting group of people who have decided that they are able to reconcile their alienation well enough to live in the state, which is discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Nevertheless, graduates also identified barriers to belonging through gender, race, and sexuality. For example, Helen, a white straight woman described apprehension about her ability to rent a house in her rural community. She said,

> I'm renting a house that is connected to a front house [where my landlord lives]. When I asked my landlord, basically, 'Can my boyfriend live here with me?' I remember feeling anxious about that. It was so surprising to me because if I was living in [cities where I've lived before] it would not have been an issue. I would have never felt the same level of anxiety of like, "Are you going to judge me? "Are you going to say 'no'?" She would have every right, I guess, to say, "No, that's not okay. I'm not comfortable with that."

In this scenario, Helen's gender, connected to her sexuality and marital status, is the site from where she feels alienated from the norm and is unsure if she will be accepted in her community. Likewise, Kendra, a biracial African American and white straight woman said, "I still … I don't feel 100 percent comfortable. Part of that has to do with your

gender in a situation where people still believe women have their place." Kendra clearly states that the restrictive gender norms in her community make her feel uncomfortable. She goes on to say,

> Sometimes people see me as a person of color, and sometimes they don't. I'm aware that I'm both. I'm aware that I could be perceived as either one. That's just how it is here. If you're different, you're different. I just sat down with some lady [who] literally sat there and told me she could not believe how many Black people had moved here. This is with a volunteering group. I was meeting with her one-on-one hashing things out for this planning [session]. She was complaining about these Blacks that had moved to her neighborhood and ghettoizing [our town], and that back whenever she was growing up, you knew the Blacks. I wanted to say, "Honey, you're sitting across from one right now." I was like, how could she not look at me and see that I'm brown? I am not light-skinned. I am a middle-of-the-road brown.

In this scenario, Kendra is viewed as an insider by white people in her community. However, this social belonging is false in that it exists only through making Kendra's difference disappear. In other words, false belonging occurs when belonging is available but is controlled and limited by others. Indeed, the white woman's comment that back when she was growing up "you knew the blacks" points to a perpetuation of false belonging controlled by white people. For the white woman, Black people only belong in the community when they are known by whites. This belonging available to "familiar" Black people is ultimately undermined by racism. Thus, although Kendra is offered community through her relationships and connections with others, she does not experience belonging because her racial identity is not accepted as part of her connection with the community. Likewise, Kendra and Helen see their gender as a barrier to belonging to the norm.

This type of false belonging was also a common experience for LGBT participants. Indeed, as I explain in more detail in the section on "unequivocal" belonging, LGBT participants, particularly white cisgender[17] men, often felt a strong sense of belonging in West Virginia because their "difference" was more easily obscured in everyday interactions. For example, a white male transgender student explained,

> It sucks, because they're nice people. I get along far better with country people than I do with city people, I really do. As long as we don't talk about what I am or what I like, then we're good, and it's a very fun interaction. All my friends back home, well they were my friends, they're not now, now that they know who I am, but it's just like, if they're not going to accept you then you eventually can't fake it, getting along.

This belonging is again false in the sense that community is only achieved through making difference disappear rather than finding community through differences.

These data regarding barriers to belonging show both explicit and implicit sexism, racism, heterosexism, and classism that impact the internal sense of belonging of young people. Notably, college students more readily discussed barriers to belonging than did college graduates.

Access to belonging: external and internal

Finding that youth are alienated from place through gender, race, and sexuality is not that surprising in the context of a sexist, racist, and heterosexist society. However, the ways that participants cited their gender, race, and sexuality as characteristics that gave

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[17] Cisgender refers to people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth, which is used to demarcate that identity from transgender people whose gender identity does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

them access to belonging and even strengthened belonging is a more remarkable finding.

For example, Christine, an African American and Native American straight woman said,

> I received more negativity when I would leave the state and people found out that I was from West Virginia. I went to DC once for a conference. I was the West Virginia representative for this conference. Someone came up to me, and it was a black man, an older black man, and he was peering at my neck. I remember asking, "What are you looking for?" He said, "Well, I'm looking for the rope burn." He was like, "Yeah, if you're from West Virginia, you must have some rope burns on you or something." I remember just being so angry and feeling so disrespected at not only someone would have the gall to say that to me, to my face, but it also would be another black person that would make a joke about someone trying to hang me just because I'm from West Virginia. It was just really upsetting, I guess, to realize that so many Americans were so, so biased and so, I guess, shallow, to think that there aren't black people in West Virginia. That makes me even more proud and happy to say yes, I'm from West Virginia. It's okay for us to be here. It doesn't make me want to leave. It just makes me want to move more people in. You, come move here. If anything, I guess [through those experiences] my sense of belonging was stronger. I'd much rather be here, where I'm welcomed, than out there, thinking like everyone else, that I'm not   welcome.

When Christine says that she finds more belonging in West Virginia through her racial identity, it is because only here does she find the capacity for community through both her race and place identities. Her reaction to the interaction at the out-of-state conference reflects the struggle for those outside the white, heteropatriarchal rural cultural norm to reconcile their intersecting gender, race, sexuality, and place identities. In Christine's experience, the external challenges to her intersecting identities reinforced both her internal sense of belonging and social constructions of belonging she experienced through her community.

Similarly, LGBT participants described finding access to belonging through

alienating experiences outside their rural communities. For example, a white transgender

man in an LGBT focus group said,

> [W]henever I'm in cities I face this other backlash because if I
> don't try hard enough my southern accent comes out, and I've done
> really good at getting rid of it, but I'll talk about stuff, or, I know, I
> showed up to see my friend that lives in Baltimore, I showed up in
> cowboy boots and a camo hat and not thinking anything of it, [and
> my friend said], "What the hell are you doing? You're in Baltimore
> now." I don't even fit into the queer community either because I
> look like a quote unquote redneck.

Like Christine, this student is expected to dismiss his place identity in order to align

himself with another part of his identity. Erin, a white queer woman expressed a similar

sentiment when she discussed the sense of belonging she feels as a queer woman in rural

West Virginia that became stronger through experiences outside West Virginia. She said,

> I went to school, where there's this very active, and radical, queer
> community. I got so sick of it and this identity politics and this
> queer culture that didn't, not that there's anything wrong with it,
> but it just felt to [me] sometimes like performative and there was a
> lot of judgment. I didn't feel that comfortable in it by the end. In
> the beginning, it was really exciting because I had never seen
> anything like it. By the end, I just need[ed] some space.

It is significant to note that in these instances participants did not describe affirmations of

belonging through community as Rosalyn Diprose theorizes but rather through the

impossibility of an integrated identity outside of a rural community. In other words, the

external messages that denied their already strong sense of belonging in communities in

West Virginia had the effect of reinforcing their internal sense of belonging.

In general, participants with some type of privileged identity more readily

expressed a sense of belonging in their community than did participants with more

marginalized identities. White straight males who were originally from West Virginia did not describe feeling alienation from their community due to their identity, although this did not necessarily mean that they were more invested in their community. It is useful to note that I did not define community for the participants and instead let them discuss their relationships to place in whatever context they thought was significant. This meant that participants talked about their sense of belonging in small groups like the student groups on which the focus groups were based, neighborhood communities, town or county communities, and a sense of community at the state level. Analysis of these data raises the question of exactly to what community these participants feel like they belong.

Reconciliation of alienation and belonging

As the data in the previous two sections suggest, sense of belonging is something that is experienced both internally and externally. As I introduced earlier in this chapter, both are part of a dialectic process where internal sense of self and belonging interacts with external messages regarding belonging. In this section, I provide data that show how participants work to reconcile this tension between alienation and belonging as a dialectic process and reflect, as mentioned before, participant Deidre's assertion that "I think you create a sense of belonging. You either create it because you're just so internally strong or you're pulling off the ideas of other people."

Most participants ultimately felt ambivalent about staying in West Virginia. They all described a dialectic process that informed this ambivalence. For the students, many of them were at the point of leaning toward leaving after graduation whereas the

graduates talked about their ambivalence through a dialectic process that had led them to reconcile many of the tensions surrounding belonging, at least for the time being. These processes were common among participants, but they were also influenced by their gender, racial, and sexuality identities. Here, I will detail this process as it relates to their sense of belonging. In Chapter [6], I provide an expanded analysis of how this process is meaningful to their mobility and plans for the future.

Students' expressions of the dialectic of belonging varied somewhat by school and the types of resources they had access to for shaping their sense of belonging. For example, like Christine's experience at the conference detailed in the previous section, a woman student in the African American student group at Allegheny University said, "Every time I go home, my family, they kinda make jokes, but they're not funny jokes, but they're, like, racism jokes. They say, 'Oh, they gonna lynch you over there' and stuff like that. They really think that all West Virginia is like that." In this quote, the student expresses the tension between external and internal social constructions of place. Indeed, many students in this focus group mentioned being afraid of being lynched when they first came to West Virginia. However, some of them had subsequently experienced positive aspects of the community while others described negative experiences. For example, a man student in the group said, "I kinda like it here. There's a lot of resources here that I've been able to take advantage of. I've met some people from the surrounding area, and they're not that bad. They'll help you in any way you need help." In this case, the student had been hired as an assistant basketball coach at a local high school. On the other hand, the same student who recalled the "racism jokes" also encountered hostility to her belonging in West Virginia. She described being stopped at various places on campus

and asked to show her student identification. During one incident, she was going to the

campus recreation center when she was asked for identification and for her bag to be

searched. She said, "I've never seen them check anyone's bag…Why did he need to see

my ID when there's other people that walked right past him?" Overall, their sense of

belonging was very precarious in the context of experiences with racism. Another woman

in the group said "The people are nice! But also, if you go to the other side of [town],

you're going to have those white people that look at you funny and follow you around

Wal-Mart. You know, stuff like that. But I guess that's up to the person, whether you're

going to let stuff like that bother you, because it don't bother me. I just look at them right

back."

These data show the dialectic process between external and internal constructions

of belonging. It is useful here to juxtapose the experiences of the Allegheny African

American student group and the Lockwood African American student group, whose

members also mentioned Wal-Mart. The Lockwood students said,

> Man: Well a lot of the people here are very friendly. In DC there
> are maybe friendly areas but a lot of it is more like you've got to
> keep a straight face or something like that, but in here it's like
> people just say, "Oh, hi!"
>
> Woman: That's true. You walk into Wal-Mart, and someone says
> "hi," and I'm like, you don't know me! [Laughing]. I'm friendly,
> but...

Unlike the experience of going to Wal-Mart reported by the Allegheny student, the

Lockwood Students reported positive interactions with people in the community. This

difference is contextualized by other data from the Lockwood focus group where students

talked about developing connections to the community and area as part of the curriculum and school programs. A woman student explained,

> You learn a lot about Appalachia, and in all my classes Appalachia comes up, and before I came here, I thought it was the Appal-eight-chian Mountains. It's the Appal-at-chian Mountains. [Laughs] I was corrected, but Appalachia just has a unique culture, and I have a respect for the people. I have a respect for the diversity. People don't think diversity when they think Appalachia, but there's English, Scot-Irish, African Americans have had a huge impact in Appalachian culture and music, and it's crazy how much you learn, and I just didn't know that coming to West Virginia. Some of my friends were like where's West Virginia? Oh Western Virginia? No, it's a state. [Laughing] There's just so much history and culture here, and the beauty and the environmental movement coming to West Virginia right now is gaining a lot of strength.

These data reveal how the dialectic of belonging for students can be highly influenced by their institutions and community. For the students at Lockwood University, their student group included a charismatic leader along with established programs to integrate students into the community. In addition, education on the region and diversity within the region was available in the curriculum, which helped the student from the Lockwood group connect to the culture and community in West Virginia.

The students in the Allegheny group, on the other hand, had some institutional support for community building and academics, but the programs seemed to be less established and the connections between students and the community were less encouraged. The Allegheny University students were much more negative about their sense of belonging in West Virginia as the juxtaposition of their experiences at Wal-Mart exemplify. The dialectic process of belonging was experienced quite differently for these groups who both expressed apprehension and low levels of belonging in West Virginia when they came to college.

On the other hand, participants who were in relatively more privileged positions often experienced a basic level of external belonging but low levels of internal belonging. For example, Krista, a white straight woman, and Evan, a white straight man, who were both from the same area described feeling a high level of belonging in their communities through external structures such as family and a safe and stable life growing up. At the same time, they expressed frustration with these experiences and said that they felt stuck in their communities. Krista had lived in the same community her whole life and attended college a short distance away. She was finishing a graduate degree and wanted to move. She currently held a position in social services after working as a waitress for many years. She expressed a desire to ultimately work as a college professor, and she acknowledged that she would be more successful if she moved elsewhere. She also expressed frustration with the gender roles in her community. She said, "I feel like a lot of the girls my age are married with kids, and that's what they worry about; that's *all* they worry about!" However, she conceded that she had been too scared to move and felt a responsibility for staying to take care of family members.

Evan, on the other hand, had moved away to go to college in the state and then moved out of state to a coastal city many hours away from his hometown. However, he had returned to his hometown to take over his recently deceased grandfather's position in their family business, where Evan's father also worked. He noted that he swore to himself that he would never go into the family business when he was growing up, but that he had returned because he wanted to help out and the position offered a good salary and opportunities to travel. Both Krista and Evan had strong ties and external affirmation of their belonging in terms of their identity. However, they both felt constricted by their

gender roles in relation to family expectations and job opportunities. For Krista and Evan, although external messages made them feel accepted in their community, their internal belonging remained low.

However, most of the college graduates expressed a more positive attitude toward reconciliation of alienation and belonging even though they remained ambivalent. For example, Sam, a white gay man who moved to West Virginia, explained his sense of belonging as being a process that included both internal and external messages. He said,

> I have always been alien to my environment—counter to it in a lot of ways. It is my natural orientation towards things. Those sorts of feelings are really pretty typical for me. I get the fact that that I am different and I am not going to be able to have normal small talk conversations with people, and I really don't have much interest in that all the time.

He goes on to say that this internal understanding allowed him to be open to opportunities to create a sense of belonging. He went on to explain that, "The thing that kept me grounded in there and kept me committed to the place was I found my first boyfriend in West Virginia." He said that this relationship helped create a space for him to stay in the community and develop an appreciation for the "vitality in the LGBT community." He noted, "There is a strong and fascinating [LGBT] history in [the community where I live], specifically, that I really came to admire and to understand."

For Sam, the internal work he does to overcome barriers of difference in the dialectic process of belonging allowed him to discover external paths to belonging. Unlike many of the LGBT students who felt like the work required to overcome feeling different was overwhelming or not worthwhile, this work seemed to be more acceptable and feasible for Sam.

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Likewise, the dialectic process of belonging in West Virginia also involved

mobility for Erin, a white queer woman, and although she and Sam were both in their

twenties, Erin was able to reconcile the dialectic of belonging at a different stage of her

life than Sam, who moved to West Virginia after graduating from college. Erin explained,

> I came home for nine months, and I guess there's different feelings
> of belonging in different places. It's really nice to have a place
> where I can walk down the street holding her hand, or where I can
> dance with her, or kiss her in public…You know? [B]ut I think
> ultimately I feel like I'm getting to a point where I want to be doing
> something, not just because it's new and exciting, but because I
> want to really design my life in the way that I want it. I think that
> West Virginia has more of that. The sense of belonging here, I
> think, is really -- it's made me have to exclude parts of myself at
> moments, but overall it feels like it's just more natural. There's a
> community that known me since I was like two. My connection to
> the land, here, is really intense. My family was always kind of
> changing and inconsistent but the land that I grew up on was really
> -- like that is what home is, the land that I'm now getting to live on
> again.

For Erin, her connection to the land and community where she grew up in West Virginia

were social factors that ultimately informed her internal sense of belonging. She

recognizes that her sense of belonging is still a struggle, especially for parts of her

identity like her sexuality, but the intersection of her place identity and other parts of her

identity have led her to a reconciliation of alienation and belonging. She expanded on this

reconciliation when she explained,

> I was talking to a really good friend of mine who I've known since
> I was like three. They were also hippie kids. Their parents bought
> goats from our parents when we were little. We were all the same
> age.   She is now [working in a nearby community]– we had this
> conversation where she was like, "I wanted to have a coffee shop
> in Paris. I wanted to start a bakery in San Francisco. I never
> wanted to live (she just bought a house in Jefferson) in Jefferson."

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But we've also been having conversations about how being out in the world, and being involved in activism, and feeling like there's so much to work on, and realizing that maybe the best place where we have any power or sway or right, which would be like trying to make those changes, is our home. But she said, "I feel really comfortable in that I feel like I belong here on the outside." I thought that was a good way of saying it. I belong here kind of in my own little world.

In this part of Erin's interview, she elaborates on the dialectic and discusses her privileged position, along with her friend, in terms of education and having the option to leave. In addition, she and her friend indicate that they are operating on the border of belonging and not belonging, and that this awareness ultimately helps reconcile their alienation and belonging. Similarly, Alice, a white straight woman indicated that she was attracted to living in West Virginia in part because she feels a sense of belonging in places where she is "not expected to fit in."

Likewise, Joe, a white gay male, discussed his sense of belonging as being a process between internal and external factors, which he expressed as being tense but reconciled. He explained,

I think I always assumed I shouldn't belong in this community. The truth of the matter is, I did, and I felt very comfortable here. It's funny, I have so many friends that are gay and around my age group, and they have these horror stories of these terrible growing up moments where people are so mean to them. People were mean to me in middle school, but people are mean to everybody in middle school. I don't try to put on my martyr hat after making it through seventh grade, I just go, people are mean to everybody in middle school. I got called fag, other people got called fat, other people got called ugly. Other people got called a million other nasty   names.

Joe goes on to explain how his sexuality impacted this dialectic process. He said,

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I don't know if it gets me a greater sense of connection to the area I'm living in. I think it sort of forced me to be more comfortable in my own skin. For me, I think it's the opposite that I think it's done for a lot of people. [I]t's ingrained in me, I would have to work harder to be accepted. It sort of became very comfortable to me to go into a situation of people and say, first off the bat, they're not going to like me, so what can I do to make them like me? Or what can I do to make them feel more at ease around me? It's definitely made me more assertive in a positive way. [I]t's also made me be very comfortable in my own skin because I realized at an early age I had to be very comfortable in my skin, or this would destroy me. I saw that happened to other people. I have to be completely comfortable with who I am, be out there, and put it all out on the line. They hate me, but at least I know I like myself.

As this quote from Joe makes clear, and as is evident from the other examples of the dialectic of belonging, participants were able to reconcile the external and internal tensions of racism, sexism, and homophobia that influence their sense of belonging; however, this does not mean that the participants no longer have to deal with these tensions. Instead, these participants reflect an ability to effectively deal with external and internal barriers to belonging in order to maintain a strong sense of belonging in their communities.

Unequivocal belonging or alienation

In light of the ways gender, race, and sexuality can create both barriers and access to sense of belonging for marginalized youth in West Virginia and the process of reconciling these tensions, it is important to point out that some participants expressed their sense of belonging or alienation as unequivocal. For example, in one LGBT student group focus group, when I asked the group if they felt a sense of belonging in West

Virginia, several white cisgendered male students spoke up right away. They talked about feeling like they belonged to the "family" or broader community in the state. However, in the same focus group, a transgender woman said she had a very low sense of belonging. She said "With West Virginia, I guess it goes back to the sense of belonging, it's hard for me as a trans person to do my health care. I had to trek it up to Pennsylvania once a month to get hormones. And with all the laws and social stigma, I don't feel belonging to the [broader community] as a trans person." Noteworthy here is the way participants in the same focus group expressed unequivocal feelings about belonging both positively and negatively. The intersectionality of gender and sexuality yields vastly different experiences depending on access to privilege, even within a group that can be characterized as oppressed generally. The cisgendered white gay males have easier access to belonging despite their sexuality status in the context of a white, heteropatriarchal, rural culture. The transgendered woman, on the other hand, experienced structural and cultural barriers to belonging. Moreover, although they might both find a sense of belonging in their small community group (student group), they have very different orientations toward the broader community and place.

Joe, a white gay man expressed a similarly unequivocal sense of belonging in West Virginia. He described growing up in rural West Virginia where he was afraid to come out to his parents until he was eighteen for fear that they might send him to a "gay camp" and where he was physically and emotionally abused by the "rednecks," as he said in quotes. However, he also notes that he was able to come out to his friends' parents in seventh or eighth grade and that he doesn't think about the abuse he suffered as a terrible event in his life. He concludes,

> [T]hey really haven't affected my life that much. [E]ven at that age, I kind of knew that there wasn't anything against me personally, it's just I was different, and it was because of their ignorance that these things happened. It's funny, I see some of these kids now, and they're really nice to me and they talk to me. I have no [ill] feeling [toward them]. A couple of kids have gone up to apologize to me.

Here, Joe describes a high level of internal belonging that mediated the effects of external barriers to belonging. He then goes on to connect his sense of belonging to his social and class privilege. He says,

> So to wrap that up, yes, I always felt I belonged here, I have a lot of pride about coming from here, I love living here…Being known has always been really important to me, and having a sense of stature has always been important to me. My father [and mother] were both prominent members of the community. Everybody always knew who I was even if I didn't know who they were. But that's always been very important to me, makes me feel very comfortable.

In this scenario, Joe experienced alienation through his sexuality but ultimately expresses unequivocal belonging as his social privilege through his race, gender, and class reinforced his internal sense of belonging.

Participants also expressed an unequivocal sense of belonging as a way of disregarding the effect of external influences on access to belonging. For example, Chad, an African American gay man, Courtney, a white straight woman, and Anthony, an African American straight man who was married to Courtney, all had a similar attitude toward fitting in and belonging across racial divides in West Virginia. They did not express feeling out of place and also all either overtly or more subtly expressed that they didn't care what other people thought, that no one in the community bothered them, and that everyone got along. Chad called it "laissez-faire." However, they also gave examples of overt hostility. For example, Anthony, evading the issue directly through much of the

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interview, told me that he was almost run down by a vehicle while walking on the road once, which he attributed to his race. He told this to me like it wasn't a big deal. They all said that they don't think about discrimination and don't let others make them feel bad.

Expressions of belonging or alienation often belied the ways in which participants reconciled their intersecting gender, race, sexuality, and place identities. Some participants privileged their place identity more prominently compared to their gender, race, or sexuality identities whereas others did the opposite. Still others were able to integrate their intersecting identities. These different strategies may, to some extent, represent different life stages and future trajectories of the participants. Overall, younger participants still in college were less likely to express an integration of identity than were older participants. Indeed, the sample of both students and graduates represents a population beginning the process of negotiating identity as independent adults and then making mobility decisions.

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Ambivalence

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Despite these examples of unequivocal alienation from and belonging to community, most participants overall actually felt ambivalence about their sense of belonging in West Virginia. In focus groups students described over and over stories of experiencing sexism, racism, and homophobia and heterosexism. Yet within the course of the same focus group, students would describe times when they felt a strong sense of belonging.

For example, in an African American student group an African American straight woman described being singled out and stopped on her own college campus by campus authorities to search her bag and check her ID. However, later in the same focus group the students started talking about a recent rally that was held in response to the Trayvon Martin shooting[18]. The students described this event as a time when they felt a sense of belonging in West Virginia because "it wasn't just Black people, everyone was there." They said not only were white students participating but also white people from the surrounding community. Interestingly, toward the end of the discussion, an African American straight man challenged several of the other participants by arguing that their aversion to living in West Virginia was because they had never experienced it outside of campus or the college town. He discussed feeling a strong sense of belonging through a job he had as an assistant coach at a local high school.

In this focus group, students' experiences encountering racism in combination with living in a predominantly white community left students with a deep sense of alienation from place. However, sense of belonging was also strong when community was offered in recognition of difference, like the example of the Trayvon Martin rally.

On the other hand, in a gender equality focus group, the following exchange between an African American straight woman and a white gay woman reflects the internal effort that many participants expressed in reaction to external alienation,

> African American woman: I remember when I told my minister, one of them, that I was coming here. She was like, "Kara, who's

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[18] Trayvon Martin was a 17 year-old African American boy who was unarmed and shot to death in 2012 by George Zimmerman, a 28 year-old man of mixed racial identity who identified as Hispanic and was identified as white in the media. Zimmerman was not immediately arrested but was eventually arrested and tried for murder after national media attention and protests.

going to do your hair? How are you going to get your hair done?"
It was really weird.

White woman: Is it harder to get your hair done here?

African American woman: Oh, I don't get my hair done here. It was weird because it's just the overall sense to me, like, where do I, as a black woman, where am I going to fit in? How is that going to work? Am I going to see people like me? Is that going to happen? It's not like I'm moving to some place so removed that no one will be…it is college, so I'm like, I might be lucky.

White woman: It's not like you're going to Kentucky.

African American woman: Hey! Aren't the Neelys[19] from Kentucky?

White woman: Who? Who are the Neelys?

African American woman: From Food Network, sorry y'all. I think a lot of the negativity comes from outside the state."

White woman: "Yeah, people who have watched *Wrong Turn*[20] one too many times."

In this example, Kara describes the way she dealt with challenges to her sense of belonging from her home community when her minister asked her about where she would get her hair done. Then, during the focus group exchange, she again negotiates a challenge to the idea that her racial identity would prevent her from accessing belonging in a certain place. Kara is unsure of whether or not she will belong in West Virginia, but then ultimately countered her fellow focus group participants teasing about Kentucky being an even less hospitable place for her by noting that an African American celebrity

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[19] The Neelys are an African American man and woman married couple who are television cooks and personalities on the Food Network cable channel. The Neelys are actually based in Memphis, TN.
[20] *Wrong Turn* is a horror movie from 2003 set in West Virginia where a group of tourists find themselves in the woods and are attacked by cannibals. The movie exploits the stereotype of deranged hillbillies residing in remote places in Appalachia.

couple is from Kentucky. Ironically, she adds that most of the negative associations with West Virginia come from outside the state.

Erin, a white queer woman who recently moved back to her rural community in West Virginia described an ambivalent sense of belonging that she struggles with through internal and external changes in the way she is able to negotiate her sexuality in her community. She said,

> I also think this area has really changed. When I was in high school here, there was not a single out person that I knew of in the state. I think it's partially like I've changed personally and the region is sort of changing. I think that it's hard, when you leave the place when you're young, to imagine what it could be like to live there when you're not dependent on your family and you have more control over your life. So I think if I thought about coming back and being at the parties with the people I went to high school with, that's terrifying being queer, right? But when I'm actually living here, I hang out with some people but not like – there are certain parties I probably still wouldn't go to because I might feel more uncomfortable about that and that's maybe just in my head.

Likewise, Deidre, an African American and white straight woman described the ambivalence she works through to reconcile her identity and her place in the community. She said,

> You know, I do a lot of community work so I don't know…I definitely belong in this community, and I think that because I feel like I belong that there's a certain sense of entitlement so then my feelings get hurt if I don't get [get certain perks]. I think that that's a little bit of ego, but then sometimes I do feel like, oh, is there a resistance to me because of my politics, am I seen as a wild card, am I … and then sometimes you're met with blatant instances where it was very clear that someone was being prejudiced to me, and then there's these moments when I have just realized that the way I was thinking was completely wrong. So, I think that's the sort of … I have to self-evaluate there, and I always try to just stay in love with the things that are very special and unique about this community.

As I mentioned earlier, ambivalence regarding sense of belonging might be particularly

extreme for this sample due to the stage of life which the participants were experiencing.

For example, a white male transgender student in an LGBT focus group discussed the

institutional barriers as well as the cultural barriers for belonging in the state. He said,

> But just finding a therapist for trans, it doesn't happen. There's no resource center, there's no therapist, there's no doctors or surgeons. There's none, and the closest is like D.C or Pennsylvania. So with that aspect, I'd have to leave. I can't mentally or financially afford to be traveling, transitioning, living here, all of that. At the same point, my parents are aging. They're disabled. I have to weigh that, and I have to weigh that it's more important for me to hold off my transition and my happiness to take care of them until they basically die. Is it more important for me to take care of my family or have my happiness? The farther it goes, it's more important for me to take care of my family. Even though they're not always the best people, but that's just something that I need to do morally, and if there was a more accepting community in West Virginia, then, yay, I'd go for it, but at the same point I'm an advocate for LGBT rights in West Virginia, and I just don't see it happening. There's going to be those pockets, there's going to be those places that overall there's still going to be the KKK that's chillin' on the border or the institutionalized views that are passed down from your great great grandpa who says "You see two guys holding hands, shoot them." That's okay in some people's minds, so it's never going to be this accepting place in my mind, and it's never going be a place where LGBTQ can live openly wherever they want. I mean if we could do it, great, but I don't think I'll see it in my lifetime, which is saying a lot since I'm young. I want to live in an area like this without   the   bigotry.

As this student's discussion demonstrates, participants expressed both feelings of

alienation and belonging.

Discussion and conclusion

Thinking back to bell hooks's placement of belonging as central to "beloved communities," and Rosalyn Diprose's idea that belonging is essential for creating a strong but not insular community, these data suggest that belonging is a process of structuration between internal and social structures. When both internal and structural belonging are weak, people are alienated from their communities. When internal belonging is strong and structural belonging is weak, people are faced with significant emotional work in order to maintain their own sense of belonging. On the other hand, when internal belonging is weak and structural belonging is strong, people may feel comfortable in their communities as the path of least resistance but these insular structures may keep some people in place that do not inspire the "critical, relational, and extroverted" spaces that Smith and Fisher argue are essential for building and transforming communities. Finally, when internal and external belonging are both strong, people feel belonging as bell hooks describes in the "beloved community." They belong in their difference. Family and sense of safety are not enough to create sustainable, thriving communities. This is particularly true for marginalized actors who face the many structural barriers to belonging identified in this chapter.

Internal Belonging

	Weak	Strong
Strong	Path of least resistance/inertia	Beloved community
Weak	Alienation	Arduous emotional labor

Structural Belonging

Figure **4-2**: The dialectic of belonging and orientation toward community

I don't offer this typology of internal and structural belonging to suggest that the relationship between belonging and community fits neatly into a binary system. Rather, through the process of intersectional structuration, gender, race, and sexuality are constantly reconstructed in relation to community as either barriers or access points to belonging. There is a strong desire among most of us to feel belonging. Some people long to belong so much that they are willing to endure the arduous emotional labor of both ignoring and letting go of structural alienation and singularly affirming their own internal belonging. And ultimately, it doesn't take much to begin to move from alienation to belonging. To repeat Rosalyn Diprose, "The capacity for community can be restored by offers of community" such as the example of the African American students who discussed feeling very alienated from their community in West Virginia but also finding belonging through community when white students and community members participated in the Trayvon Martin rally.

As we continue to struggle with diversity and belonging both locally and globally, how can spaces be created that include those on the margins? The politics of inclusive

communities are particularly exigent for many rural areas in the U.S. that suffer both

population loss, significant risks to community sustainability, and low levels of diversity.

In this chapter I offered analysis and evidence of how "the dialectic of belonging" is

helpful in understanding the relationship between belonging and community and

ultimately creating "beloved communities" where differences are not made invisible but

rather are acknowledged through community.

Chapter 5

Class and Community

[My work has] really brought home to me the importance of modeling what it means to be a strong empowered woman in this area. One of the things that [my boss] told me when I started working was "Make sure to dress up when you're out in the community." She said, "You guys have to remember, the girls in middle school aren't used to seeing women your age in this area look like professionals." That really hit me when she said that because I never thought about it that way. Basically, she was saying, remember when you're out in the community, you're modeling what it means to be a professional woman in this area, and that's a really big deal. [Because of that], I think that I take more pride now in being a young professional woman in this area and living here.
           -Helen, a white straight woman

In the example above, Helen becomes conscious of her class status in relation to her age, occupation and education status, gender, and place. She recognizes her privileged status as a college-educated professional and her minority status as a young, college-educated woman in her rural community. Her class-consciousness gives her a sense of pride when she thinks about herself as a role model across classes. Helen sees her privileged position as a way to confront social inequality in her community. In this chapter, I provide analysis of data collected from young college-educated people living in West Virginia regarding their identity in relation to notions of class and how they construct, bend, and ally themselves within a white, heteropatriarchal rural working-class culture.

Analysis of the way the college-educated youth in this study construct and act on their class identities contributes to our understanding of how class works in rural places and the potential role of college-educated youth in collective efforts to reduce inequalities

in the Appalachian region. Furthermore, this analysis reveals the way intersections of gender, race, and sexuality with class and place can lead to reconstructions of identity and alliances across class.

How class works in rural places

Marx theorized class to be based on the conflict of different groups of economic actors to the means of production and that class-consciousness would form through recognition of shared interests among those of the same class. However, class theorists have noted shifts in the way people construct class, wherein their own identity is formed relationally through social and cultural hierarchies along with the classical economic factors (Shucksmith 2012; Phillips 2011; Bottero 2004). Bottero (2004) argues that as people have come to disidentify with their own class and instead rank themselves in relation to others, scholars have conflated these relational cultural identities with material class identities. Bottero says this conflation is problematic because it perpetuates an assumption that collective action results from the relational process of constructing class.

Shucksmith (2012) argues that using a Bourdieuian approach to class analysis helps rectify the problems associated with the disidentification of class and the constructed and relational nature of class. For Bourdieu, "it is the very non-recognition of the power and significance of class which leads to deep-rooted and enduring inequality" and class has material, symbolic, and cultural components (382). From this perspective, Duncan's (1999) argument for studying class in rural places provides a unique way of understanding class consciousness due to the bounded nature of rural communities where

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"Class and race relations 'happen' within the boundaries of a coherent place, and people have direct experience with how they matter, with their consequences for the families they know" (192). As Helen expresses in the quote above, she constructs her class identity relationally and collectively in a certain place.

The potential role of college-educated youth in collective efforts to reduce inequalities in the Appalachian region

Collective action and class struggle based on the classical Marxist definition of class aimed at confronting material inequalities has a long history in the Appalachian region, but through the processes of deindustrialization, deunionization, and neoliberal globalization, much collective action in Appalachia has become based on a more culturally relational definition of class and social exclusion based on gender, race, sexuality, and other social identities (Williams 2002; Fisher 1993; Fisher and Smith 2012). Pini and Leach (2011) note that class analysis has been excluded while social inclusion and well-being are foregrounded in the social science literature and argue for bringing back class as key to the analysis of rurality. They say, "[Class] is a key determining factor in terms of poverty as well as mediates access to all aspects of life from housing and education to transport and health" (1).

Duncan (1996) argues that the absence of a strong middle class is one of the key components in the persistence of poverty in rural areas. She says, "When there is a large middle class that invests in public, community-wide institutions, social relations and social institutions are more inclusive and cross class boundaries. The poor are not isolated

from other classes. They have access to informal networks for work and contact with role models who participate in the mainstream" (113). The importance of this mainstream middle class role becomes intensified for young adults in places where low educational attainment and out-migration results in the "brain drain." The participants in this study represent this "missing" demographic group, but does this position result in a kind of class-consciousness? Are their actions collective? And for whose benefit?

"Postsocialist" feminist theorist Nancy Fraser advocates for social justice movements that combine economic, cultural, and political issues, or what she calls redistribution, recognition, and representation. Fraser critiques the imbalance in feminism since the rise of neoliberalism by pointing out the way recognition of identity politics redirected social justice away from efforts of redistribution and class issues (2009). Fraser confronts one of the main questions social justice advocates face: How can we collectively work for justice while also properly recognizing our differences (2004)? What Helen's quote above exemplifies is the way social identities like gender, race, and sexuality intersect with class identity for the participants in this study. Their goals for confronting sexism, racism, heterosexism, and class inequalities are often linked, and these connections are potential sites for collective action.

Class and culture in West Virginia

In general, most people identify with the "middle class," or what is considered to be the "normal" class (Dugan 2012). In West Virginia, like other places characterized by rural and/or Appalachian stereotypes, the norm is characterized by white

heteropatriarchal rural working class culture (Cloke 2006; Gray 2009; Campbell et al. 2006; Bell and York 2010). The symbolic role and meaning of class has shifted in the U.S. as we have become a predominantly postindustrial society. Phillips (2011) argues that emotional capital and morality are both important to interpretations of class and can possibly lead to a broader understanding of assets and capital and, at least, will lead to a richer understanding of class in rural areas.

Similarly, Sherman (2009) shows how a system of moral capital related to work becomes highly meaningful in rural communities affected by deindustrialization, job loss, and poverty. Sherman shows how paid work, subsistence work, and family help are strategies with the most moral capital while cheap housing, unemployment, and disability provide lower moral capital. She finds that welfare and illegal activities result in negative moral capital. In reference to Sherman's moral economy, the refrain of and reverence for "hard work" as opposed to "drawing a check," "the welfare mentality," or "drugs" can be seen as a class distinction between "working class" and "poor white trash." People often distinguish themselves from "poor white trash" by confirming their own commitment to hard work in comparison to the morally degenerate work ethic of people who are poor (Sherman 2010; Hartigan 1997; Duncan 1996).

In West Virginia, people often deride those who "draw a check" or are involved in the prescription drug trade. There is a distinction here between Weber's conceptualization of the Protestant work ethic as a vehicle for wealth accumulation for its own sake under capitalism and working class culture which also valorizes hard work but only for modest and heteropatriarchal goals, e.g. 'we're not trying to get rich, we just want to be able to provide for our families.'

Symbolically, working class culture based on the historical role of the coal industry is the dominant culture in West Virginia despite material realities. Bell and York (2010) show that the reproduction of a hegemonic working class culture is the result of systematic efforts by the coal industry to maintain power despite the industry's declining economic role, particularly as a supplier of employment. Bell and York explain that the industry, through a "grassroots" mouthpiece called "Friends of Coal," appropriates West Virginia cultural icons, sponsors community and sporting events and spaces, and even offers grant money to teachers for development and implementation of K-12 educational materials promoting the coal industry. Significantly, the hegemonic working class image in West Virginia is also highly masculine, heteropatriarchal, and racially white. Just as Bell and York point out that miners and masculine sports culture are appropriated by the coal industry to endear itself to the population, these cultural icons are representations of the overwhelmingly white, working class in West Virginia typified by the hard working husband and father who works to support his wife and family.

But what does the history and present status of working class culture have to do with college-educated youth who are or will most likely be moving into middle class occupations? First, I argue that working class culture is a key aspect of the hegemonic culture in West Virginia in which these youth relationally construct their own identities. This is important to how they interpret and relate to place. Second, acknowledgement of an "underclass" status typical of the state informs the way these more educated young adults see their role in their place. This is important in the connections they see between social and economic justice.

A traditional heteropatriarchal working class culture is still symbolically relevant for people in the region. Thus, a system consisting of a hegemonic cultural norm (the rural working class) and "others" (including the disparate urban middle and upper class and "white trash") persists even though, in reality, material conditions and embodied, lived experiences are much less dichotomous. College educated youth negotiate this dichotomy whether they are from West Virginia or elsewhere. In addition to the higher class identity available to college-educated youth, they are of course also dealing with other aspects of identity including gender, race, and sexuality. In the context of the hegemonic white masculine working class culture in WV, women, people of color, and LGBT people occupy a minority status and must negotiate their belonging in this context. Thus, their sense of belonging is relational to a white, heteropatriarchal working class culture that is symbolically dominant but not materially dominant. The potential for making alliances across class exists here and is affected by the intersectional experiences of gender, race, and sexuality.

Constructing class identity: placing themselves in the hierarchy

Participants expressed a complicated relationship with class. They both differentiated themselves from the lowest classes and the rural working class but they also sometimes strongly identified with the rural working class. In addition they expressed frustration with older politicians and leaders, whom they saw as ineffective, and often saw themselves as part of a new generation of leadership. Their perceptions of class identity are shaped through gender, race, and sexuality.

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Students and graduates differentiated themselves by pointing to economic and educational disparities between themselves and other people in West Virginia. For example, the following focus group exchange shows how participants construct their class identity in relation to both lower and higher classes,

> Participant 1: This summer, I really got to see [my socioeconomic privilege] firsthand because I have this job through extension here at the university to go to these camps and teach science to kids, and encourage them to come to the university, get a better education, instead of going to a community college or going to the coal mines, to give them an out. A lot of kids down there were either intentionally failing because of things their parents told them to do or because they didn't think they qualified or were good enough to come to the university. They really look at the university as the Holy Grail, and it's crazy, because so many people here look at it like…

> Participant 2: A toilet

> Participant 1: [agreeing]…a toilet. It's Podunk U, party school, it's cheap, it's easy to get a degree, blah blah blah, but kids in the southern part of the state look at it like, that is going to get me a job, a career, that is going to improve my status, my family, and I had one kid who had a 4.0 GPA in high school. He was a junior, and he said, "Do you think I qualify for the Promise scholarship?" like he wasn't aware at all, and it was really sad.

This student understood herself and the other members of the focus group to hold a higher social position in relation to the young people at the camp. First, she describes participating in a program that is designed to reach out to children who, unlike herself, lack either the financial or cultural capital necessary to attend college. Second, she perceives that this population of people in the state feels like they would be lucky to be able to attend her university in order to reach a higher socioeconomic status. Meanwhile, the participants perceive their status as lower in relation to even higher classes that are able to go to an urban, prestigious, and expensive school that is presumably not a toilet.

Educational attainment is often used as a proxy for class, but the participants themselves identified with a range of class identities (see Tables 5-1 and 5-2). I asked my participants to fill out a short demographic survey (see Appendix C), and many of them hesitated at the question that asked about their class identification. Several people indicated that in other places they might be lower middle class or working class, but that in WV they were middle or upper middle class.

Table **5-1**: Participant responses to a survey question asking them to identify their social class growing up and their social class now

	Social Class Growing Up						Social Class Now					
	Students		Graduates		Total		Students		Graduates		Total	
Working Class	15	23.1%	5	19.2%	20	22%	14	21.5%	4	15.4%	18	19.8%
Lower Middle Class	14	21.5%	5	19.2%	19	20.9%	11	16.9%	6	23.1%	17	18.7%
Middle Class	25	38.5%	10	38.5%	35	38.5%	22	33.8%	11	42.3%	33	36.3%
Upper Middle Class	10	15.4%	4	15.4%	14	15.4%	17	26.2%	2	7.7%	19	20.9%
Upper Class	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Prefer Not to Answer	1	1.5%	2	7.7%	3	3.3%	1	1.5%	3	11.5%	4	4.4%
Total	65		26		91		65		26		91	

Table **5-2**: Social mobility as reported through the survey question presented in Table 5-1

	Students		Graduates		Total	
Social class stayed the same	35	54.7%	13	56.5%	48	55.2%
Upwardly mobile	17	26.6%	6	26.1%	23	26.4%
Downwardly mobile	12	18.7%	4	17.4%	16	18.4%
Total	64		23		87	

The modal response for both students and graduates was "middle class" both while growing up (35 participants) and now (33 participants). However, taken together, identification as lower-middle class or working class made up the majority of responses both while growing up (39 participants) and now (35 participants). In addition, most participants indicated that they identified as the same class now that they did growing up (48 participants). However, 39 participants reported movement between classes with more moving up than moving down in class status.

Many participants positioned themselves in a class of relative privilege by referring to people and communities in the state that were disadvantaged in some capacity. Often, these would be abstract descriptions of more rural, southern, or poor places in the state that some participants described as the "real" West Virginia. As the quote on page seven exemplifies, participants often conflated lower classes even though distinctions between "poor white trash" people and "working class" people are also very

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clear at times. For example, Deidre, a biracial African American and white straight

woman constructs her class identity at the intersection of gender, race, and class in

relation to her own class privilege, and the working class background of her family, and

the "welfare mentality" in the state. She says,

> In slavery days there was always the house Negro and then the field
> Negro, right, and so the house Negroes were always the light skinned
> ones, the ones that usually got the good jobs. So someone told me that
> in West Virginia, I got to sit on the porch of the house. Now I've been
> thinking deeply about this. It means that because of the way I look,
> right, because of my interests and connections, that I'm afforded the
> opportunity to quote unquote "sit on the porch," which I guess, the
> compliment in there is that I'm not a total sell out.

> I think for me there's definitely a sincere struggle in terms of being bi-
> racial, being an ambitious woman. I think we're tough people,
> hardworking people, you know, get it done kind of people. I come
> from strong women. I come from independent women. I come from
> women that get things accomplished. And it may not be a pedigree of
> degrees, or it may not be what city folks would say are life
> achievements, but I think about my grandmother that was from here
> that was a domestic, and she raised several families that are from the
> good neighborhoods, and those folks still stop by my office and give
> me hugs and kisses and say that your grandmother raised me and I
> miss her and I love her. I think, wow, what a woman to raise her own
> children and then raise somebody else's children and create this sense
> of community and do it, you know, very pressed and very coiffed. I
> feel that my sense of identity is a lot in hard work and then also trying
> to be independent but also realizing that sometimes you can cut your
> nose off to spite your face, so to speak. In West Virginia, we have a
> definite, I'll call it 'welfare mentality,' 'poverty mentality' like we'd
> need a big dose of Oprah that comes in and says, yes, you can and it
> doesn't have to be always such a fight.

The metaphor of "sitting on the porch" that Deidre introduces, although offensive in the

context she describes, brings to mind Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) concept of the

borderlands where a person's identities together create a marginalized space where one

has to straddle positions and is never quite able to completely be in one space. As Deidre

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describes, her race, appearance, education, family history, and social status place her more or less firmly in relation to more privileged social positions, rural working class culture, and "poor white trash." She is partially alienated from her race and class identity when she is told that she "sits on the porch." Although she notes her privileged class position in this quote and elsewhere in her interview, she also affirms her working class identity by relating her work ethic to her working class family background. Finally, she separates herself, although not completely, from the "poor white trash" "welfare mentality" and "poverty mentality."

Other participants also aligned themselves with the rural working class norm even while acknowledging their privileged social status. A graduate who talked about visiting cities outside the state for conferences related to his job explained,

> We don't have a lot of the real high-class business type guys and the five-star restaurants, things like that. When you go to a city and maybe have a conference in Dallas or Philadelphia, or Denver, where I was at, you visit a real nice hotel and you're like, "Okay, why is this guy holding out his hand?" He was just helping me carry my bags. Or even a bathroom attendant. You don't see that stuff in West Virginia at all. I think there's been some restaurants that are real fine dining where I'd say the majority of West Virginians feel like they don't belong there. I'm not putting us down. It's just something we don't have available here.

This participant moves back and forth from saying "we" to "they." In doing so, he expresses a characteristic and norm in the state that is not "high-class," and he positions himself both as someone who is partially alienated from "high-class" culture (he's used to West Virginia where high class restaurants and hotels are rare) but also not quite part of the "majority of West Virginians" (he has experience through his occupational status at high class hotels and restaurants). Similarly, another graduate explained that she grew

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up in a modest neighborhood, and that "I never was interested in [becoming part of the wealthy crowd], but I also never really did identify with the people who lived in hollers because I definitely did not live in the holler." This participant positions herself relationally as consciously separate from the upper class while also acknowledging that she was still part of a privileged group distinct from those living in the hollers (rural mountain neighborhoods often characterized as poor).

Many participants, like Deidre earlier, positioned themselves in terms of their work ethic. Like the quote above, they were not interested in achieving a high-class status, but also identified with being a hard worker. This was true across gender, race, and sexuality. For example, Joe, a white gay male said,

> For me there are not too many options of people I want to date. Not to say there's not a lot of gay people in the community. They're just not the kind of people I want to date. That sounds so nasty. There's just not a lot of drive around lower education levels. Next time I try to get into a serious relationship, they're all going to have to fill out applications. If they don't have at least two degrees after their name, I probably won't. Just one date. I'm just kidding. I think most of the gay men around here are sort of comfortable living with nothing. I don't mean only financially, I mean mentally, all that sort of stuff. I feel like they're very complacent and just without much drive.

Similarly, Emily, a white straight female, said,

> For me, there's no mate here, and there's incredible competition between the women here. It's not really good, and the guys are dopey and they don't like to work, and they smoke a lot of pot. A lot of the girls that are my friends from other places and they come here to hide out and they're very happy being waitresses and not interested in fulltime work, a lot of them have children with someone who they're not with, or maybe who they're friend is with, or just they'd gotten drunk and had unprotected sex and then they decide to keep the baby because they're like, "Oh, I'm 25 or 30, or whatever, so I should probably keep the kid." There are a lot of single moms from the people that have come here. They're city

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kids who want to get back to the land, and they want a garden, and they want a homestead, and have babies and they found the whole thing very romantic, and the sense of community is actually really cool here because of that, but I roll my eyes a lot because they're making these connections and I'm like, "Duh. Of course you have a garden for food." "You don't do it for your image." You do it because it feels good to grow something and it's cheap. There are a lot of really great women who are very able, and there are a lot of men who are just floundering, alcohol problems, smart, and handsome, and intelligent, but not driven. Mostly I find that women are working or are the providers, and readily accept that position and expect very little of men, just kind of feel lucky to have snagged one. It's very sad, that's part of what I don't like about here. I bet you could go out west to resort places and there would be men who wanted to just ski all day there and not do work, but I think here, it's mixed up with a lot of poverty and different education expectations, too, so maybe there's two kinds of cultures that are coming together that makes it especially weird or something.

It is interesting here that education, class, and work ethic seem to be the key barriers to forming romantic partnerships for these two rural graduates. These examples from Joe and Emily also show that college-educated youth construct their class identity relationally not just by education or income. Joe constructs his class identity as a mix of financial, educational, and cultural statuses in addition to the value he places on work ethic. Emily, on the other hand, finds that even those from privileged backgrounds do not share her work ethic that she relates to rural working class culture. In addition, both Joe and Emily live in communities where employment options are very limited. Just as Sherman (2009) and Duncan (1996) show, the changes in gender dynamics in rural areas after the shift of industrial jobs that employed mostly men to service sector jobs that employ mostly women, the experiences of the participants in this study reinforce the role of hard work in the rural masculine norm across sexualities.

It is clear these college-educated youth in West Virginia construct their social

class relationally to perceptions of the rural working class norm, the wealthy, and "poor

white trash." Although they see themselves as distinct from these classes in terms of

educational privilege, work ethic, and cultural capital, they are not completely separated

from aspects of these classes. Although the "poor white trash" mentality is not the ideal

norm, many participants recognized it as a characteristic of the state and thus the

environment in which they lived. As the quote from Deidre above exemplifies when she

says, "In West Virginia, *we* have a definite, I'll call it 'welfare mentality,' 'poverty

mentality' like *we* need a big dose of Oprah that comes in and says, yes, you can and it

doesn't have to be always such a fight" (emphasis mine). In addition, participants aligned

themselves with a rural working class work ethic, which values hard work and rejects

pursuit of wealth as a primary goal.

Bending class identity: appropriation and misappropriation of class

Although "class benders" doesn't have the same ring to it as does "gender

benders" (maybe class contortionists?), the appropriation or misappropriation of class

identity is similar to gender bending[21] in that it reflects the movement and possibilities of

an otherwise rigid social system. As Judith Butler notes, notions of masculine and

feminine gender that are repeated in queer contexts are sites for disruption of "regulatory

practices of identity" (43). Here, I use the term "appropriation" to suggest the legitimate

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[21] Gender bending is a term used to broadly refer to the playful or serious act of resisting or reversing expected gender role behavior

use of working class culture that disrupts social divisions and "misappropriation" to suggest the illegitimate use of working class culture that reinforces social divisions.

Several participants discussed the adoption of style or behaviors in order to affiliate with the working class in some capacity. For example, Joe, the white gay male quoted earlier said,

> I'm wearing a hoody, a flannel shirt, a pair of skinny jeans, Kenneth Cole boots, and a scarf. This is my postmodern Appalachian hipster look. I always call them my costumes for the day. I love those traditional Appalachian, I'm not talking traditional like banjos and building skills, but my generation's traditional Appalachian activities. I like to go mudding, I like to go 4 wheeling, I like to get dirty. I like to go dig ramps. I like all that stuff, and when I go to do that, I'm wearing coveralls and my work boots and all that sort of stuff. I have a million different camo things. If I'm meeting someone for coffee or something like this, I'll put on an outfit closer to what I have on today. I do sort of do that transition back and forth thing. I think I'm always myself. I don't feel like I'm ever masking something, I feel like there's a piece of each of those groups in me, so when I'm with those groups, I access that in myself. *I think that makes it easier. I think if people were able to do that, there would be a whole lot less global issues…it makes acceptance come much easier.* I can absolutely go to the dirtiest, dingiest, roughest redneck bar and talk with the biggest, baddest redneck with the most tattoos of the rebel flag and be fine with him by the end of the night." [Emphasis mine]

The symbols that Joe uses to "access" the part of his identity that is associated with place are clearly part of the working class norm that he describes as his generation's Appalachian culture. These pieces of clothing and activities aren't practically related to his occupation, but they are part of his place identity and strategy for belonging in the midst of a white, heteropatriarchal, working class culture. Significantly, he indicates that it makes it easier for him to fit in and sees the ability to transition between identities as a broadly applicable strategy.

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Indeed, I found in my interviews that appropriating working class style or behaviors was a way for college-educated youth to fit in. Interestingly, participants didn't necessarily see white, heteropatriarchal working class culture as exclusive of other races and sexualities. After moving back to West Virginia from another state, Erin, a white queer female talked about the rural cultural connection between the two states. She said,

> I got really, really into two stepping, country dancing, which you can't do anywhere else, really. And really into a gay country bar that I was a regular there for about a year and a half, and it was amazing. Like cowboys waltzing, and it was really wonderful. I feel sort of ridiculous when I talk about how important this country bar was to me, but I feel it was the first time that I found a space that was queer and sort of celebrated rural America. Even though it was in the city, but it was about country music. We were dancing with other queer people to songs about farming and songs about the South. I would get so emotional there sometimes. I would just tear up. I think I found some of that sense of belonging in terms of being queer and being out, but also in a way that wasn't like oh, the South's fucked up.

In this example, the participant is able to appropriate heteropatriarchal working class music and dance as a way to belong both in her sexual identity and her rural identity. Similarly, Deidre, the African American and white biracial straight female quoted earlier, expressed the satisfaction she felt by being able to embody multiple binary identities. She explains,

> I think having a [city] influence makes me different than a lot of other quote unquote "West Virginians," you know, but I still love that I grew up with motorcycles and four wheelers and hunting season. I grew up with these certain things that are cool because if you look around, most of America is rural. Right now I love the duplicity of my life and I think that alone makes me unique that I crave rural and urban, that I embrace being black and white, that I am a creative artist but also am a business professional, and to me that's how I live my life.

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Here, Deidre identifies both with an urban creative class culture and a rural working class culture. Her identification with working class symbols like four wheelers and hunting season give Deidre access to the symbolically significant culture of place even as she also is able to access other aspects of her identity that might otherwise separate her from place. She defies binaries and exhibits an intersectional identity.

The data presented above reveals ways that class bending can be used to disrupt class divides and create alternative spaces, especially for those marginalized by their intersecting social identities. However, class symbols and behavior can also be misappropriated both in ways that exploit class privilege and create further alienation. For example, Joe, who is quoted above for appropriating working class culture as a strategy to fit in, also related a story that reveals the way class bending can be used in ways that reproduce class inequalities rather than circumvent them. He and I had the following exchange in our interview,

> Joe: My friend Amanda and I set up what we call a social experiment for ourselves. We set a goal to do something really outside of our realm of comfort. Then we do them, and then we get really excited. Our biggest one ever was to go to Wal-Mart and have a portrait taken. I wore black Wranglers, black cutoff sleeves, cowboy hat; I found a wig that was a greasy ponytail. She went in a white cotton hippie dress and cowboy boots. We made her the best pregnancy belly ever. We looked like the biggest white trash in the world. The goal is to convince this woman that we are for real, and to feel sorry for us. That's the big thing; she has to feel sorry for us. I had also just gotten a tattoo that day, so I had this big bandage over my arm. At the end, she felt so bad for Amanda because I yelled at her in there and walked out, that she gave us the photo package for half off. If was really fun.
>
> Rachel: The Wal-Mart thing is interesting. It's like the idea of being a drag queen. It's like dressing up in a different class.

> Joe: It is. I'm very fascinated by doing that.
>
> Rachel: Class bending.
>
> Joe: Yeah, it totally is class bending. That's where that thing of transitioning between social groups or I guess riding the class system or whatever, but I think that's super fun and super interesting. Again, I would give that to my theater background because it's always about becoming somebody else.

Like his earlier quote, Joe thinks of this event as disrupting the class system. However, in this scenario he actually reinforces class divisions by reproducing problematic stereotypes about "white trash." It is important to note here that even though the participants, like Joe, can be broadly defined as social justice orientated and overall had a sense of Appalachian identity and awareness of the economic inequalities that are unfairly maintained partially through the persistence of stereotypes, many of them reproduced class hierarchies by distinguishing themselves from and generalizing about "white trash" culture. In this scenario, constructing a relational class identity becomes more of a process of "othering" rather than using class-consciousness as a space to find unity.

In a very different scenario, a white student who identifies as genderqueer in an LGBT focus group discussed appropriating a rural working class image in order to pass as male. He said,

> I think one of the most rewarding things that happened was I was outed by residence life to a lot of the population on campus, which I wasn't happy about, but because of that I got invited to an allies meeting, which wouldn't have happened at that time because I was trying to pass so well as a male. And I looked like a country guy, and [the allies members] thought I was going to kill them. That's what they told me after the meetings, that they thought I was going to kill them. I came to the meeting, and at the time met this really awesome person, and they helped connect me to other queer

people who were around or trans or part of the LGBT community who also thought "I like West Virginia, I like this rural area, but I don't obviously fit in with the norm around here, but I love farming, and love being in the country." And it was really great to find people who were part of the LGBT community, but also weren't like "I got to get to New York." Everyone I always talked to was like "I got to get to the city," and I was like "I don't want the city, I don't like the city. It's claustrophobic, it kills me, and I have huge social anxiety." That was really great, and most of those people, unfortunately, have left, but honestly a lot of the time I don't feel part of the LGBT community because before I passed so well as looking like this heterosexual male that I didn't even identify as, and now I'm trying to become something a lot more female and feminine. It's this hard balance to find, even when you go to gay clubs and stuff around here, if your trans you just don't fit in, and the trans support group meetings are all older trans women who are very, I mean they're trans, but they're still very conservative in the fact that they think to be a woman that means you have to want to wear a dress and lipstick and frilly colors and flowers and all that stuff, and they don't accept that you can be somewhere more in between so it's hard in terms of that, but I think one of the greatest senses of belonging that I did find here is finding LGBT people who, or even just more radically liberal people who did want that kind of rural experience.

As this student's experience shows, appropriation of a masculine rural working class style backfired by alienating him from the LGBT community where rural working class culture is often rejected. In addition, using the masculine rural working class style helped him pass as male, but left him, as he says, "looking like this heterosexual male that I didn't even identify as." Although this student was able to find a sense of belonging briefly, he ultimately still struggles with finding the same sense of satisfaction that Deidre described earlier. In this context his use of working class culture reveals his "other" status in relation to place, sexuality, and gender.

According to Butler, gender bending can be politically significant by disrupting the hierarchal system of gender by troubling the naturalness of the gender binary. Perhaps

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bending class is not as radical as gender bending because people can easily move in and out of a symbolic class identity, but this is not often disrupting to the social stratification experienced through material class status. However, just as Butler makes the distinction among anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance (187), the class "performances" above show how class is performed in addition to a class identity and material class reality. In all of these examples of the appropriation of rural working class symbols and behaviors, the participants are accessing the part of their identity that is connected to that culture. Perhaps class bending is radical in the sense that the individual actions add to a developing reconstruction of race, gender, sexuality and place (Affrilachian Poets, 2010; Gray, 2009; Herring, 2010). In other words, when people whose identities intersect in ways that disrupt binaries and stereotypes about place are able to create space for their whole selves, the white, heteropatriarchal working class culture becomes less dominant. However, the individual appropriation of working class culture is not convincingly beneficial across classes in terms of reducing material inequalities. Yet as the data below shows, reconciliation of belonging through the appropriation of working class culture has important implications for collective action across class.

Allying class identity: social justice across class

Many participants discussed feeling like they were better able to make a difference in West Virginia as opposed to elsewhere. Sometimes, just their presence as young educated people in the community generated positive feedback from the community. This

sense of power in being able to make a difference is tied to the participants' privileged

status and also their desire to improve their communities. For example participants said

things like, "We've also been having conversations about how being out in the world, and

being involved in activism, and feeling like there's so much to work on, and realizing that

maybe the best place where we have any power or sway is our home" and,

> I have had other job opportunities for a lot more money even in
> West Virginia, but I haven't been interested in leaving Woodhull.
> If I would move up or move onto the next chain of command, I
> don't know if I'd feel like I'd be making a difference. Here I feel
> like I'm making a difference.

These examples are vague in terms of what counts as a "difference," but other

participants were very explicit about the way they saw their role in reducing material and

symbolic class inequalities in ways that intersected with gender, race, and sexuality.

Emily, who was quoted above regarding romantic relationships and class, explained the

way she appropriates the hegemonic heteropatriarchal rural working class culture in order

to effect change in that very norm. She describes the gender dynamics at her job where

she works with older men and younger women. She accepts the sexism in her workplace

as part of the culture and a means to an end that she hopes will ultimately change the

culture. She says,

> I love my job because I realized that a lot of it sucks, and I'm not
> interested in changing it…I like the backwoods men that I work
> with. Some people have problems with them, but I actually love
> them, and I talk to them because I'm interested in what they're
> interested about. I like to talk about trucks. I have that side of me,
> too. I'm very happy there, and they say all kinds of god-awful
> things, but I say them right back, and you have to have a
> personality to work there, or else you'd feel like, "Oh my god. Did
> you just say that to me?" You can't be uptight. The girls that come
> [to work] there have either been steeped in a world of education or
> a world of rich-kid therapeutic programs up north. They have more

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problems with the staff. And I learned early on; I'm not going to ruin my days by trying to change things that aren't going to change. I'm not here to change adults. I have a hard time watching the girls go through that because I see what they're going for, but I'm not interested in paling up with them while they try and figure it out. There's a fine line you've got to walk, and they don't. Because they like trying to push the boundaries. What's going to happen is they are going to make enemies and not get anything done…I'm at a position where I'm very lucky to have that job with my education…I'm in a position to demand of the boys I work with [as a counselor], to demand respect. I don't know that the women in their lives have been in the position to do that, and I have to train them. That sounded really bad, but it's kind of true. I think their parents are so beaten down that that's not their main objective.

In this example, Emily negotiates her gender and class privilege and oppression in a way that reinforces sexism in one scenario in order to confront sexism and classism in other scenarios. As Emily's example shows, college-educated youth in West Virginia see the appropriation of hegemonic working class culture not only as a way of fitting in, but also as a conscious path toward improving their own lives through reconciliation of their identities, as the previous chapter details, and as a way to work toward social change.

Similarly, Susan, a straight white and African American biracial woman, discussed the connections she saw between race and class in her work with communities in West Virginia. She was influenced toward coming back to West Virginia by learning about the connections between critical legal theory, critical race theory, feminist theory, and environmental justice while she was in school outside the state. She explains,

I had wanted to basically gain power to contribute, to really substantially contribute to making the world better. I discovered that mountaintop removal mining was happening, which I had been totally unaware of for my entire life, and I was sort of shockingly made aware of it while I was living in New York City. So I saw that there was this environmental injustice happening in my state, and that got me really amped up, and the sort of central tenet to environmental

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justice is to deal with the ones that are near your backyard, that are affecting your home and your life first, and then you can come and help other people if you have time. So I was living and working in New York City, and the truth of the matter is, there were a lot of people working on environmental justice there, and they had a lot of good people, and I just felt like I was needed more in West Virginia, and I really wanted to live in the country.

Through her education, Susan was able to connect her interests in social justice with class-based inequalities in West Virginia. Thus, her privileged educational status helped her ally herself across class. Similarly, during a focus group with African American students, the participants described their interest in being engaged with local communities to reduce the racial and class inequalities they observed around them,

Lockwood is a city, but it's not a city. There's Lockwood and there's the university. I've never seen a university like that in general. Usually universities make cities flourish, and in Lockwood I don't see that. The University is doing all these crazy things, nationally renowned things, and Lockwood is still suffering. I see the black community in general, and I'm just like why? It doesn't make sense to me.

A female student in the same focus group agrees,

Yeah. You can walk two blocks, and it's a totally different setting. We have all these Ph.Ds. and masters and people getting their education, people traveling around the world, and two blocks down you have a needle on the ground. It makes me upset, and that's why I like to do community service, and I like to work inside the community, but I'm one person. I feel like there should be so many more people that have been doing this, and I know there are, but I feel like there should have been a shift already. A university doesn't take this much space and do so many things and not have an impact on their community. That doesn't make sense to me.

Another male student goes on,

Yeah, that's one thing I have been really…disappointed [about] because we have the outstanding black high school student weekend, and it's so hard to get students from Lockwood High School to come down who have been nominated. It's just so close.

> People have walked here and everything. That's one thing that I struggle with just because I'm Lockwood born and raised. [Laughing]. That's one thing I'm going to continue to strive to do, just   to   change   things.

Similar to Susan, these students are conscious of the class system through their position as privileged students in relation to an area exhibiting class inequalities. The students in this group allied themselves across class through the intersection of race and place.

In addition to connections among gender, race, and class, participants involved in the LGBT rights movement made explicit alliances across class. This image of the coal miner with the message "hard work doesn't discriminate" is from a LGBT equality campaign through an organization in which some of the participants were involved.

Figure **5-1**: Employment non-discrimination campaign by Fairness West Virginia

Photo credit: Designed by 84 Agency in January 2013for Fairness West Virginia

Again, although this campaign is to promote LGBT rights, the image clearly evokes the same white working class culture Bell and York (2010) describe in the Friends of Coal campaigns. Although, in this context, it presents a challenge to the heteropatriarchal social system usually imbued in images of the working class. The intersection of sexual

politics, material class realities, and the hegemonic working class culture in West Virginia creates the potential for alliances that might not otherwise be realized. Scott, a white gay man who was highly privileged educationally and economically explained to me that his experience in the military under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy revealed to him the class privilege he had as an officer compared to the "grunts on active duty who were scared for their life to come out because this was their way that they were escaping poverty from rural West Virginia or rural Oklahoma or rural Arkansas. It was a way for them to make themselves better." He then explained how this experience related to making alliances across class back home in West Virginia. He said,

> I'm a boss. I'm well respected. I can make a decision, and I call my own shots. My partner is the same way. He's the boss. No one's going to affect his income or his way of livelihood. We feel very comfortable just living our lives and that no one is going to threaten whether we can turn on the electricity at our house or make the mortgage payment or do whatever. So many of these less fortunate, the lowest of the economic LGBT people in West Virginia who are this worker bee, blue collar, who were so afraid to come out or to live openly. They're afraid to even go into town with their partner to have a dinner because they're afraid that they're going to be seen and they'll lose their job because there are no job protections in West Virginia for LBGT people.

> Your boss can walk into your ... You can be a secretary and your boss can just come up to your desk one morning and say, "I found out Mary that you have a partner named Sally, and I don't believe in that. You're fired." That's legal in West Virginia. I find that people of lesser economic means are in a much greater disadvantage and have a much higher level of stress and anxiety and the burden is placed on them.

> My partner and I both said, "If we're in a position to [be activists] then we have to." Like I said, we're our own bosses and no one's going to affect our income and our way of life. We viewed it as we're fighting for our own family essentially, for our child, our children's peers [so they] will know a day in West Virginia where discrimination isn't common.

Like allies in the LGBT rights movement who use their heterosexual status to advocate for LGBT people, Scott is a class ally in that he is using his privileged status to reduce material inequalities for LGBT people and working class people. Scott creates a connection with working-class culture through working against heterosexism. These data represent ways educationally privileged youth ally themselves across class. Importantly, these results show that it is often through the intersection of gender, race, and sexuality that these young people positioned themselves as allies across class.

Conclusion

Young people living in Appalachia have varied material privileges, but they all negotiate their identities in a culture where white, heteropatriarchal, working class values are the norm. These data corroborate relational theories of class, but the participants also expressed ways this relational construction embedded in a class cultural norm can foster collective action. Thus, as the data show, college-educated youth are distinctly privileged but not entirely separated from disadvantages created by class inequalities. Many college-educated youth appropriate the style and behaviors of rural working class culture in order to make space for themselves in their communities and to reconcile parts of their identities that can otherwise seem mutually exclusive.

Importantly, the individual appropriation of working-class culture is not always beneficial for those outside the white heteropatriarchal rural norm, like the transgender student who struggled to reconcile his gender and place, or for those disadvantaged by material inequalities, which was reinforced by Joe when he dressed up as "white trash."

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However, when participants were able to make connections among and across gender, race, sexuality, and class, collective action seemed to become more likely. These data point to this interesting conclusion, and more research on alliances across identities and collective action could better examine the connection.

A particularly important finding here is the way in which gender, racial, and sexual politics intersected with participants' efforts to work across class boundaries. Participants created class alliances, especially by understanding the role of sexism, racism, and heterosexism in the context of the rural working class culture. Does this mean they are aware of their class privilege and understand their stake in collective action to reduce inequalities? The privileged class-consciousness exists whereby they can say that they recognize the problem of inequalities and that they are distinct from those classes which endure those inequalities. Yet collective action exists across class when social exclusion and material inequalities are linked. Similarly, Carastathis (2013) argues that these types of identity "coalitions" are an overlooked but key component of intersectionality experienced by individuals and theorized by scholars. Carastathis points out that identity-based groups are always intersectional and coalitional or potentially coalitional due to the fact that no group is completely homogenous.

If the ultimate goal is a reduction in social inequalities in rural places, the role of privileged groups in constructing, bending, and allying across class is important to consider. College-educated youth represent a particularly interesting demographic as their role in communities is significant both symbolically and through the potential for collective action. Jay Rockefeller, U.S. Senator from West Virginia, represents, perhaps, an extreme version of the privileged class allying themselves with working class culture.

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Rockefeller came to West Virginia in the 1960s as a VISTA volunteer and decided to devote his life to public service for the underprivileged communities of West Virginia. As class-consciousness has changed in the fifty years since Senator Rockefeller came to West Virginia, young people are still working toward reducing inequalities in rural places. However, this now includes connecting struggles against sexism, racism, heterosexism, and classism in order to form collective action across class.

Chapter 6

Mobility and Community

I quickly realized that I could live in two worlds and that I wanted to. –Deidre, a biracial African American and white straight woman

As I show in the first two findings chapters, young people are negotiating multiple identities that affect their relationship with place. In the first findings chapter, I show that these intersecting identities influence a person's orientation toward their community through their sense of belonging. In the second findings chapter I show how dealing with class status can either reaffirm class distinctions and inequalities or build stronger connections to place, particularly through the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality. Importantly, these data come from a population that is both privileged through education and is highly mobile. In this chapter, I report data findings specifically regarding young people's mobility in order to better understand the connection between sense of belonging and identity in the context of youth out-migration.

First, I briefly discuss the relationship among belonging, class, and mobility. Then, I present quantitative migration flow data of people in and out of West Virginia and an aggregated description of mobility among the sample participants in the qualitative data collection. I also look at mobility differences in gender, race, and educational attainment. Next, I present qualitative data regarding the way participants talked about their experiences and plans for mobility. Overall, the intersectional analysis that I used in the previous two chapters is somewhat deemphasized in this chapter where

experiences were more common among participants regardless of their identity status. Still, gender, race, and sexuality remain important contextual factors and the sample continues to center the experiences of marginalized experiences and voices. Finally, I conclude by offering this analysis of mobility and community as part of the ongoing body of knowledge about the brain drain in rural U.S. communities and the role of mobile young people in rural places. By examining data from samples that represent college students and young college graduates, I find that mobility extends beyond the transition from high school to college to career and that mobility can both disembed people from places and serve as a pathway to greater belonging and sense of community.

Mobility and community

Mobility, as it has developed in academic literature, is a general term connecting various movements including those of people, things, and ideas (Hannam et al., 2006). Sheller and Urry (2006) describe the "new mobilities paradigm," which they argue is counter to a social science that "treats as normal stability, meaning, and place, and treats as abnormal distance, change, and placelessness" (p. 208). Additionally, this developing conceptualization of mobility draws attention to the ways in which movement is stratified and concentrated in spaces of access to mobility and limitations to mobility (Shellar & Urry, 2006). In the context of this research, mobility can refer not only to physical movement, migration, and travel, but also the movements of ideas, perspectives, and goals embedded in a stratified social system. The participants in this research are in the midst of these various kinds of mobilities and experience access to movement, migration,

travel, and new ideas as well as limitations to these mobilities. As with the relationship between mobility and community attachment discussed in Chapter 2, mobility and sense of belonging are usually understood to be oppositional in two general directions: low sense of belonging causes mobility, and mobility results in low sense of belonging.

However, some recent literature points to a more complex understanding of mobility and belonging suggesting that mobility and belonging may be positively correlated in some contexts (Fallov et al., 2013; Gustafson, 2009). Savage (2010) argues that economically privileged middle class people who are mobile actually are highly invested in place whereas those with less resources and low mobility describe their relationship to place as less intentional and also express more nostalgia about place. Savage describes this "elective belonging" that exists among the mobile middle class as a condition which is more about attachment to the physical landscape and a sense of ownership and belonging in an appropriate place. Savage is basing his arguments on data collected in Great Britain, and the cultural and material meaning of class and mobility is somewhat different in the U.S. context.

The findings reported in Chapter 5 depart from Savage's typologies of belonging, class, and mobility in that many of the participants who occupied some version of a mobile and middle class existence, expressed "elective belonging" both in terms of the landscape and people. To be sure, a clear, developed social cohesion among the participants and less mobile and disadvantaged residents was not evident. However, participants did express some ideals of solidarity, concern, and connected identity among mobility experience and class distinctions.

The connection between class and mobility among young people in Appalachia is important because, as Duncan (2006) argues, a robust middle class is necessary as a buffer between extreme social inequalities. Although this argument is somewhat inadequate in addressing the social systems that undergird the assumptions that a middle class is necessary for more egalitarian communities, the social positions that young, educated people in Appalachia hold are crucial components of sustainable communities. Young educated people have important skills and experiences and often bring new ideas into communities. They serve as roles models for younger children, and have the capacity for working both with and outside the status quo. Therefore, the information in the chapter represents a very specific group of people targeted for their educational, class, and community status. The experiences of physically and socially mobile, educated youth who are involved in their communities offer important insights about the relationship between belonging, class, and mobility for young adults in rural places.

As I already discussed in Chapter 2, pursuing a college education is often a physically and socially mobile process. Educational systems in rural places are embedded in a globalized market economy, and success is often associated with moving beyond home (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007). For traditional college students, going to college is often the first time they are living away from family and their home communities. Socially, pursuing a college education is another development in what Corbett (2007) refers to as a process of being disembedded from rural places. Rural economies are often not able to support jobs that require college education, and thus, economic and social segregation is perpetuated in rural places. Furthermore, for college-educated young people, or young people on track to go to college, who also occupy

marginalized identities within rural communities and culture, mobility can be an expectation and an escape route. Thus, for college educated young people and marginalized young people, it is not surprising that many of them have moved or are planning to move in the near future.

In order to analyze the mobility experiences and plans of young adults in West Virginia, it is helpful to more accurately understand the level of mobility among this population in the state. In this chapter, I first describe mobility in the state by presenting quantitative measures of migration flows both in, out, and within the state. Then, I present qualitative data from the focus groups and individual interviews that specifically address mobility experiences and plans.

Migration in West Virginia

Overall, between 2008 and 2012, there was a small net out-migration of people from West Virginia (Table 6-1). However, singling out the age category of 18-22 year-olds reveals a net in-migration of people in this age group. This may seem counterintuitive in the context of "brain drain" in West Virginia. However, West Virginia does attract a substantial number of out-of-state college students each year. In addition, the age categories 18-22 year-olds, 23-30 year-olds, and 31-40 year-olds (the age ranges captured in my qualitative research sample), show the highest levels of migration in general. Of the 18-22 year-olds in West Virginia, 9.5% migrated into the state, 5.6% migrated from West Virginia to other states, and 23.4% migrated within the state. Thus, 38.5% of 18-22 year-olds in West Virginia were moving between 2008 and 2012, which

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makes them the most mobile age category represented here. Of the 23-30 year-olds, 5.6%

migrated into the state, 6.5% migrated from West Virginia to other states, and 19.3%

migrated within the state. Thus, 31.4% of 23-30 year-olds in West Virginia were mobile

between 2008 and 2012. Of the 31-40 year-olds, 3.0% migrated into the state, 3.3%

migrated from West Virginia to other states, and 10.2% migrated within the state. Thus,

16.5% of 31-40 year-olds in West Virginia were mobile between 2008 and 2012. Also

noteworthy here is that migration within the state was the most common form of

migration among all age categories and highest among 18-22 year-olds.

Table **6-1**: Comparison of percent in- and out-migration to and from West Virginia across age ranges between 2008-2012[22]

	Age range in years					
	1-17	18-22	23-30	31-40	41+	Total
% of people who migrated to WV from other states	2.1%	9.1%	5.3%	2.9%	1.1%	2.4%
% of people who migrated from WV to another state	2.7%	5.4%	6.2%	3.2%	1.4%	2.5%
% who migrated within the state	9.8%	22.3%	18.2%	9.9%	4.4%	8.3%
% living in WV who did not migrate	85.4%	63.2%	70.3%	84.0%	93.1%	86.8%
Total # of people living in WV, ACS sample	16833	5811	7990	10530	51247	92411

Percent who migrated to West Virginia from abroad excluded

Gender

Using chi-square analysis to test the statistical significance of the differences in migration between males and females, I found that females age 18-22 were significantly more likely to migrate within the state than were males in this age category (Table 6-2). In addition, males age 18-22 were less likely overall to migrate than were females in this age category. Of the 23-30 year-olds, there was no statistically significant difference between male and female migration. Of the 31-40 year-olds, males were significantly more likely to move into West Virginia from another state and to move from West Virginia to another state than were females in this age category.

Table **6-2**: Comparison of migration in West Virginia across age ranges and gender between 2008-2012[23]

		Age range in years				
		1-17	18-22	23-30	31-40	41+
% to WV						
	Male	2.1%	9.4%	5.6%	3.2%*	1.1%
	Female	2.2%	8.8%	5.0%	2.5%*	1.1%
% from WV						
	Male	2.9%	4.9%	6.3%	3.8%***	1.3%
	Female	2.5%	5.9%	6.0%	2.6%***	1.2%
% within WV						
	Male	10.0%	19.3%***	18.8%	10.5%	4.0%
	Female	9.5%	25.5%***	17.6%	9.3%	4.3%
% did not migrate						
	Male	84.9%	66.4%*	69.3%	82.5%	82.4%***
	Female	85.8%	59.9%*	71.4%	85.6%	93.4%***

* p < .05
** p < .01
*** p < .001
Percent who migrated to West Virginia from abroad excluded

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[23] American Community Survey IPUMS data 2008-2012 single year files

Race

Using chi-square analysis, I also compared the migration rates between whites and blacks and between whites and "other" races, which included all other races and those people that indicated two or more racial identities. These analyses yielded mostly significant differences between whites and people of color (Table 6-3). In particular, blacks were significantly more likely to move into West Virginia than were whites among the 18-22, 23-30, and 31-40 year-olds age categories. This was also true comparing whites and other people of color (not including blacks alone). Of the 18-22 year-olds, 20.4% of blacks and 20.8% of other races (as a percentage of these populations living in the state) moved into West Virginia compared with just 7.9% of whites in this age category. Blacks among the 18-22, 23-30, and 31-40 year-olds age categories were also significantly more likely to migrate from West Virginia to other states than were whites in these age categories. However, compared with whites, other people of color (not including blacks alone) age 18-22 and 23-30 were no more likely than whites to move from West Virginia to another state. Moreover, among 18-22 and 23-30 year-olds, whites and blacks as well as whites and other races were equally as likely to migrate within the state between 2008-2012.

Table **6-3**: Comparison of migration in West Virginia across age ranges and race between 2008-2012[24]

		Age range in years				
		1-17	18-22	23-30	31-40	41+
% to WV						
	White	1.9%**	7.9%***	5.0%***	2.5%***	1.1%***
	Black	3.8%**	20.4%***	9.9%***	7.7%***	2.8%***
	White	1.9%***	7.9%***	5.0%*	2.5%***	1.1%*
	Other	5.2%***	20.8%***	7.7%*	7.3%***	1.9%*
% from WV						
	White	2.5%***	5.2%***	5.8%***	2.7%***	1.3%***
	Black	5.4%***	10.1%***	11.8%***	9.2%***	3.5%***
	White	2.5%***	5.2%	5.8%	2.7%***	1.3%**
	Other	5.0%***	8.0%	8.1%	9.1%***	2.3%**
% within WV						
	White	9.4%**	22.6%	18.2%	9.6%*	4.2%***
	Black	12.5%**	18.2%	18.2%	12.5%*	9.2%***
	White	9.4%***	22.6%	18.2%	9.6%***	4.2%***
	Other	14.9%***	21.7%	19.5%	17.2%***	8.5%***
% did not migrate						
	White	86.2%***	64.6%***	71.0%**	85.2%***	93.5%***
	Black	78.3%***	51.3%***	60.2%**	70.7%***	84.5%***
	White	86.2%***	64.6%***	71.0%**	85.2%***	93.5%***
	Other	75.4%***	49.6%***	64.8%**	66.5%***	87.3%***

* p < .05
** p < .01
*** p < .001
Percent who migrated to West Virginia from abroad excluded

Educational attainment

Using chi-square analysis, I also compared the migration rates between those with no college experience, those with some college experience but no degree, and those with no college experience and those with a bachelor's degree or greater. Across all age categories, people with a bachelor's degree or higher were significantly more likely to leave West Virginia than were those with no degree (Table 6-4). The comparison in the age 18-22 year-old category reflects the substantial out-migration of people after just earning their college degrees. In general, people with more education were more mobile than those with less education. However, for those age 18-22 and 23-30, there were no significant differences between people with no college and people with a bachelor's degree or greater who migrated within the state, which were the age ranges with the highest internal migration overall.

Table **6-4**: Comparison of migration across age ranges and educational attainment between 2008-2012[25]

		Age range in years			
		18-22	23-30	31-40	41+
% to WV					
	No College	8.2%*	4.7%	2.5%***	1.0%**
	Some College	10.0%*	5.2%	3.6%***	1.4%**
	No College	8.2%	4.7%*	2.5%	1.0%**
	Bachelors or more	11.8%	6.4%*	2.8%	1.4%**
% from WV					
	No College	4.5%	4.8%	3.1%*	1.1%***
	Some College	5.2%	5.8%	2.3%*	1.7%***
	No College	4.5%***	4.8%***	3.1%**	1.1%***
	Bachelors or more	20.4%***	9.0%***	4.5%**	1.9%***
% within WV					
	No College	19.9%**	19.3%	11.1%	4.8%
	Some College	24.8%**	17.5%	10.0%	4.4%
	No College	19.9%	19.3%	11.1%***	4.8%***
	Bachelors or more	26.3%	17.4%	7.3%***	3.0%***
% did not migrate					
	No College	67.4%**	71.3%	83.3%	93.2%
	Some College	60.0%**	71.5%	84.1%	92.6%
	No College	67.4%***	71.3%	83.3%	93.2%
	Bachelors or more	41.4%***	67.2%	85.4%	93.7%

* p < .05
** p < .01
*** p < .001
Percent who migrated to West Virginia from abroad excluded

The relationship among age, gender, race, education, and migration in West Virginia

Overall, these data show that 18-22 and 23-30 year-olds are the most mobile populations in the state, which aligns with the expectation that young adults are a more transitory population overall than younger and older age groups. Among all age groups, migration within the state is the most common form of physical mobility. Gender did not seem broadly related to migration; although, there were significant differences between males and females in certain age and migration categories, which may indicate differences in education, job availability, and family responsibilities between men and women.

Race had a broader relationship to mobility, and people of color were significantly more mobile than whites in most age and migration categories. Notably, people of color across all age ranges were significantly more likely to be newcomers to West Virginia than were white. However, blacks were also more likely than whites to move out from West Virginia to another state. These in-migrants are likely arriving to attend college in West Virginia, and this data shows that, at least among blacks, there may be a higher "brain drain" of people of color than of whites.

Through the analysis of educational attainment specifically, those with a bachelor's degree or greater were more likely to leave West Virginia across all age groups than were those that did not attend college, thus confirming the out-migration of young college-educated people in West Virginia. In order to understand these migration patterns more fully in the context of mobility and community, I now turn to the qualitative data results.

Mobility as a process of disembedding (?)

Keeping in mind Corbett's (2007) assertion that education in rural places is "the quintessential institution of disembedding" (p. 251), these data add to this argument by extending it into the context of higher education. The great majority of participants in this project had already experienced some form of mobility (the small minority being those college students who were living with their parents). Even college students who were from West Virginia originally had moved from their hometowns to the college town. Among the college graduates, many had moved for college, jobs, family, and other reasons already and sometimes multiple times. In this section, I analyze the qualitative data relating to the ways higher education and the mobility, both physical and social, inherent in pursuing and having earned a college degree is indeed part of the process of disembedding people from place.

College students: a group in transition

Traditional college students are a group in transition from childhood to adulthood. In this time of transition, many young people are searching for success and happiness, and college is often marketed as the vehicle for achieving these goals. For many students, mobility is closely connected to success, and the ability to move physically and socially is a sort of freedom that adds to the value of a college education. In this sense, mobility is a mark of independence, which college students are often in the midst of developing.

However, at the same time, there are social structures tethering mobility, of which the participants were keenly aware. Many of the participants in the focus groups were

attending schools in West Virginia as part of the PROMISE scholarship program.

PROMISE is a statewide merit-based college scholarship available to any West Virginia

high school student entering college in West Virginia with a minimum GPA and

standardized test score. The state generates revenue for this scholarship fund by taxing

video lottery revenue in the state. The scholarship covers a substantial portion of in-state

tuition and can only be used for attending school in the state. Many PROMISE scholar

participants noted that they had not wanted to attend school in West Virginia, but the

PROMISE scholarship was too good a deal to refuse. In addition, many focus group

participants from out of state also indicated that they were not enthusiastic about

attending college in West Virginia, but that it was financially the best option when even

out-of-state tuition was significantly lower than in-state tuition in their home states.

Students from all seven focus groups talked about attending school in West

Virginia because of the PROMISE scholarship. In addition, many PROMISE scholars

talked about the opportunity to move from a more rural part of the state to a more

cosmopolitan part of the state. For example, a student in the Vandalia LGBT focus group

explained that moving even within the state was a chance to live in a different type of

community. She said, "That was one of the biggest reasons I why I chose Vandalia as my

school, because I still wanted to go in state, because I have a PROMISE scholarship that

pays for tuition. But Vandalia, it's in West Virginia, but it's not. The people, it's

completely different from where I live. So that was one of the deciding points." When

this student says, "it's in West Virginia, but it's not," she is noting some of the cultural

and social differences between the community and town in which the school is located

and other parts of West Virginia. For her, the move to go to school meant a change in

community and cultural dynamics. In addition, students who grew up in the college

towns described shifts in their experiences as well during the transition to college. For

example, a woman student in a gender equality student group at Allegheny University

said,

> Woman 1: Growing up here for me was difficult. It's actually a lot easier for me, coming into college, which is interesting because I've always hated that the University was here. It makes living in this town really hard for eight months out of the year…Originally, I was going to go to a branch campus of Penn State and staying here, I mean, I've enjoyed it, definitely. I love the university for the material I've been able to get, but my overall feelings about the university are not extremely positive.

For this student, accepting the PROMISE scholarship had limited her access to mobility,

and she stayed in her home community, which she had negative feelings about,

particularly related to he university's position within the town. However, she also

acknowledged that the experience of education, itself a form of idea movement and social

mobility, did have some positive aspects. Other students in that focus group added,

> Woman 2: I agree. I came here because I'm a PROMISE scholar, so, I think we all are. The State of West Virginia will pay for you to go to school in-state if you have certain grades.

> Woman 3: Yeah, it's really hard to refuse that, especially nowadays, because I wanted to go to Purdue, but financially, it was just not feasible.

> Woman 4: Yeah, that's exactly where I stand, was the financing.

> Woman 5: Yeah, and growing up in this town and going to high school here, we just spent two hours running into people we knew in high school. We see them all over the place.

> Woman 2: It's not really a positive thing.

> Woman 5: Yeah, because we're so different from how we were before. We've changed, we've grown and it's not that we don't want to revisit

that … I guess some people might, I can't speak for everyone … but, yeah.

As this exchange shows, the limited mobility offered by the PROMISE scholarship is a mixed experience. The students are grateful for the financial and educational support, and they have experienced some forms of social mobility through their educational experience, but it hasn't given them the social experiences that movement to a new location might offer.

For the most part, students in the focus groups, regardless of their sense of belonging or attachment to place during college, expressed a desire to move away from West Virginia after graduation. This has been a troubling aspect of the way the PROMISE scholarship works within the context of a largely rural state with limited employment opportunities embedded in a global economic system. The intended outcome is to keep "the best and the brightest" young people in the state, which it has done with some success. Ultimately, however, a large proportion of these young people leave after graduation, as do other graduates. Thus, as the migration flow data presented above shows, the population gains made in the 18-22 year-old age range are reversed to yield net outmigration in subsequent age ranges.

Nonetheless, the qualitative data reveals the various contingent factors that influence the migration of graduating college students. For example, later in the same focus group of Allegheny University students quoted above, two white women students, the first straight the second gay, described the tensions influencing their plans. The first student said,

I'm applying for grad school programs outside the state. I'm applying [in state] as well, but again only because I know that they will pay me to go here. It's a fallback option, by and large. I do want to come back to West Virginia. This is also where all of my family resides, all my close immediate family. I'm a social work student, and I'm interested in community level development work, especially in transitioning economies, and it's a *desperate*, desperate hope of mine that a lot of the southern part of the state will have some economic transition in the coming years. I would love to be a part of that, but I know that right now, it's in my best interest to leave this area for a while.

The second student followed,

I personally have thought about leaving just because my partner is in engineering and I feel like as much as there's a lot of job opportunities for her here, with the mining industry and things, I feel like if we were to go somewhere that isn't as rural, she might have better job opportunities. Also in terms of my own career endeavors…I would love to work in a battered women's shelter or in some way helping a community, and I feel like sometimes that's a lot easier to do in a big city because there's just more for you to choose from, but at the same time, like Sheila said, the majority of my family is here. And more than my family, my friends are here. My small, close-knit group of friends is my family. I couldn't imagine, at this point in my life, being away from them. Also, I'm horrible with change, and I've lived here for 21 years, so that's a factor. I'm not opposed to leaving. I'm not in the rush that I used to be in. Next week that could be different.

Both students report conflicted ideas about their mobility. They discuss career options and family and friendship networks. Notably, they both express value in the desire to do community-based work and have a sense that they could contribute to improving their community or West Virginia in general. However, as both students say, they also feel the need to leave in order to better fulfill their goals. Although, of course, it is unknown what they actually did after graduation.

Likewise, students from the Vandalia University LGBT focus group also expressed conflicted feelings about mobility. A white, genderqueer queer student said,

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I would never want to live here as a whole, but I really don't like cities. I've lived in a couple of them and I really don't like it. I grew up in a very small town in [Appalachia], and I like small towns, and I like the country, and I want to own a farm, but I want to live closer to more liberal politics. I want my farm to be on the west coast, or in the Northeast, or not in the U.S. Because, like you said, it's just the conflict and viewpoints, and not being able to comfortably expose how I feel and who I am as a person…I'm graduating this semester, and I'm a soc[ial] work major, and I will be moving…to start my graduate school in June. My ultimate goal is to either live somewhere in the Northeast like Massachusetts or Maine or out West in Oregon near Portland or another major city but kind of out in the rural area looking for a non-profit that specifically deals with LGBT issues. And I want a farm, maybe a collective. We talked about having a collective here or in the UK, with lots of animals, farms, and awesomeness. Overall I just want to be surrounded by cool people and not be surrounded by lots of city lights and be doing some kind of advocacy and social work in terms of helping the LGBT population.

A gay man Latino student adds,

I'm a biology major, chem minor. I was planning on taking my MCATS and then going to medical school, and now that's changing, but hopefully I can get into some school and try to get my masters in nursing. I've lived here my whole life. I'm 21, almost 21 years I've lived in [a nearby town], and I just want to get out of here and maybe go to a bigger city. It was Chicago where I wanted to go; now it's D.C., just because I'm very family oriented so it would be a lot closer.

A questioning/queer man transgender student follows with,

I didn't really want to come to college in general. Never really was my life goal, but being a first generation, and the big push to get first gens' into college and educate us, that's just kinda where I ended up. Every other day of the week, I either don't want to be here or I'm trying to find a new major to switch to, or switch my minor, because I've switched it four times since I entered in August. But, as for after graduation, I still have three years. I don't know that I'll be here for those three years; don't know that I'll be in college. If I do graduate, who knows what my degree will be in. I've been raised in, have been educated to stay in West Virginia and or stay in Appalachia and just keep some kind of culture here, and at some point I'd like to do that, but I think I need to get out of

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here and away and find myself and fully transition and then come back here, because it's not going to happen here. And so, three years from now, I may or may not be in the United States. I may have a degree, and I might not, but that's okay, there's a job somewhere, even if it's just a trash man.

These students' experiences again show the conflict between career, family, community, and place. In addition, for two of these students, their queer identities also weigh heavily in their plans for mobility. Thus, not only is education a process of disembedding, but the intersectional experience of educational and class mobility is also influenced by identity.

College graduates: mobile paths to place

Dara, a white gay woman college graduate living in West Virginia explained her own decision to initially leave West Virginia after college graduation. Having grown up in West Virginia and not receiving support from her family to attend college, Dara was encouraged by a teacher to apply to an in-state school. She came out as a lesbian after graduating from this school and eventually went to graduate school in another state. She said, "Going to [that particular state] was about the [graduate] program. The decision to leave West Virginia was about being gay." Dara explained that she wanted to be "more out" and thought an urban area would be more comfortable. In this sense, education, career, and identity can all function as processes of disembedding. However, Dara eventually decided to return to West Virginia where both she and her partner live and have found careers. Likewise, college graduates who had moved away from home for college and other reasons often felt a stronger desire to return to West Virginia. For

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example, Erin, whose return to West Virginia was described in Chapters 4 and 5,

explained her initial decision-making regarding leaving West Virginia. She said,

> I thought I wanted to study documentary filmmaking because pretty young I got interested in environmental activism and had seen some really political documentaries that I thought were so cool so I thought that's what I was going to do with my life. I didn't know if I wanted to go to a big school or a small school or where I wanted to go. I applied to maybe four or five schools of all different sizes and different places and Vandalia was my safe school, and I didn't get in. That's the only place I didn't get into. [The private small liberal arts college I went to] actually gave me the best financial aid, which is interesting because it's not known for that. I applied to [a mid-size regional public university in Central Appalachia, a large public research university in the South, and an elite private liberal arts college in the Northeast, and the school I went to in the Northeast].

Like many young people, Erin wasn't exactly sure what the best path was to achieving

her goals, but she was initially able to pursue them by leaving West Virginia. However,

after leaving and spending time in a couple different locations, she had returned to West

Virginia by her late twenties. In addition, the ideal of leaving and the desire to leave are

often contextualized by the threat of failure in staying. Deidre, a biracial African-

American and white straight woman explained,

> I think that if you stay, you're always seen as a failure by folks that leave…That's certainly the sense that I get. Like, "Now why are you still here?"
>
> And so, I mean, I struggle with that…I know why I'm here. I know that I want to make a difference. But is it really sort of a fear that I won't be able to, you know, succeed? I laugh because this is Chemical Valley, and so the last Wednesday of [every] month, there's a siren. It's a shelter in place siren. So just the metaphor alone of every month, there is an alarm, there is a warning that says, "Do not leave. Stay where you are." Right? Because this is where you're safe. I have heard that siren since I was—you start

practicing that in kindergarten. I think, you know, it's like is there sort of a fear of you won't make it kind of mentality. So I don't know, I do think that there's a definite judgment on those that have left on those that stay.

Deidre's discussion of the tension between social narratives that urge people to "stay in place" versus narratives that value mobility connect back to the theories of community discussed in Chapter 2. Young people receive mixed messages about staying and leaving embedded in the context of social structures like population change and access to education and jobs. Their value is connected to mobility because it implies greater human capital and success. Yet, at the same time, those who have decided to reside in West Virginia and who are investing their human and social capital in their communities are viewed skeptically.

Susan expresses a similar fear of staying. She explained,

Yeah, there was no question, I was adamant about leaving the state for college and my feeling on it at the time was that it was sort of essential to my survival, almost. I wanted to go to a school that I felt was challenging, and I didn't think that most of the colleges in West Virginia I would find to be academically challenging, and, to be blunt, I didn't think I would find *any* of the colleges in West Virginia academically challenging…So I definitely worked really hard to get out of state and didn't consider at all going to any schools in this state.

I just thought that if I stayed—I just saw a certain path for myself if I stayed in state. My parents forced me to apply to Lockwood, and so I did, and I had some friends who had gone there the year before me, and they all just seemed to kind of like wither there. They just seemed so depressed and bored, and I just felt like it was leading down a dark pathway to stay in state…There wasn't any sort of … deeper analysis to it… I think I was just afraid I would end up like a bank teller or something. I mean, I know this is like really kind of … sort of cynical maybe or derogatory or something,

but I just felt like there was really sort of restrictive career opportunities.

So when I decided to come back, I mean, basically, I had left and gotten a really good education and I'm really supportive of people doing that. I think that the educational system in West Virginia is abysmal, [and] I don't think it is good enough for a lot of the really phenomenally intelligent people in this state. So I really strongly feel it was the right decision for me to leave and come back, and then when I came back, I basically felt like I had gotten what I needed to get from other places and now I had things that I could bring back and really contribute, and I had just been exposed to other ideas and ways of living and perspectives.

Dara, Erin, and Susan's ideas reflect a privileged class experience of being able to leave West Virginia while also still being able to return. Thus, in one sense they are disembedded from West Virginia, but never fully. To be sure, there are plenty of young people who leave the state for college and do not return. However, for some people, mobility and education seem to actually work together to re-embed people in place. Importantly, Dara, Erin, and Susan, as well as many of the other college graduates had used their education and experiences of mobility to secure jobs in the state. In their study of young people in Iowa, Carr and Kefalas (2009) refer to the people creating this phenomenon as the "High-Flyers." Rather than people who return to their home communities after failed attempts at college or other life plans, "High-Flyers" are "successful" people who choose to return and who possess highly valued skills. Carr and Kefalas acknowledge that these people are quite rare in rural communities, as does Corbett (2007) who argues that although the skills college graduates have might be theoretically valuable, they don't have material or cultural value in many rural places. In addition, as Dara, Erin, and Susan's experiences reflect, social mobility is not just about

gaining job skills at college but rather an opportunity to expose oneself to different people and experiences.

In this way, social mobility reinforces cultural class distinctions, which can also disembed people from place even when their educational and job skills don't fully disembed them. In other words, educational attainment and human capital development can move people into a higher class status even though they remain embedded in place. For example, April, a white straight woman explained,

> Well my first year of college I did go to community college, and then I transferred up here. It was either Allegheny or Lockwood. I wanted to stay in state mainly because of my parents. I did not qualify for financial aid so I knew it would be out of pocket for them, and they were going to support me through college. I kind of had to stay in state because I didn't want to go out of state to put that financial burden on them, and they didn't want me to take out student loans. That was one of my main decisions just go to Lockwood, and plus if anything were to happen I would hate to be eight hours away from home rather than 2 hours away.

April was working toward a graduate degree that she hoped would allow her to work in the rural community and surrounding communities where she grew up. In these ways, April was able to remain embedded in her community even while she moved away to pursue her degrees. However, she also expressed ways in which going to college was a process of social disembedding. She said,

> Sometimes [I feel like I don't belong]. Yes, especially when I meet with old friends because they're so focused on their families and they take pride in, "Well, I have a three year old daughter, and she just made a full sentence," or "she was able to cut cookies on her own" or something like that. I don't even know what three year olds do. It's kind of [like] I take a step back when I go back home because [here] it's more, "What are you doing with your career?"

and just more career focused. And [back home] they're more family focused.

Another thing that bothers me is they ask me, "Well, do you have a boyfriend?" I'm like, "No, I don't have time for a boyfriend" more or less, and they're like, "Oh you're never going to get married." I'm 24 years old; I have time. It's very disconnected on how the thinking is from being up here to going back home but now sometimes I feel at home which I feel more at home when I'm with my family but when I'm with people that I grew up with it's kind of like they're all married and have kids now, and some of them are even divorced. It's very different.

Here, gender, sexuality, and class intersect to influence the extent to which April becomes disembedded from her community through her education, marital, and parental status. Still, these experiences of physical and social mobility have not completely disembedded April from place.

Likewise, both Emily and Joe's experiences, which are reported in Chapter 5, both moved for college, jobs, and relationships between age 18 and through their twenties. Age 29 and 31 at the time of their interviews, respectively, they were both living in rural West Virginia with mixed feelings about staying or leaving. Their experiences also show that the desire to find a partner with similar cultural and intellectual interests reinforce cultural class distinctions. Mobility is often seen as the only option for dealing with this issue. For example, Joe, a white gay man college graduate, has stayed in West Virginia his whole life, although he has moved around the state a few times. He has also thought about moving elsewhere since he was a teenager but so far has not done so. He said,

I knew immediately [that I wanted to stay in West Virginia for college when] I visited [the university] for 4H Day. Actually, their collegiate club invited juniors and seniors from around the area to come and stay the night and do all of the normal activities. And I

went and stayed, and I really liked it. I knew that's where I wanted to go. I had all these big dreams my junior and senior year that I was going to New York or go to NYU, or go to one of these huge colleges that were so far away from what I was familiar with and what I knew. After that weekend, I had made friends. I really liked the size of the school. I decided to go, and that was the only school I applied for.

At this point, I still feel that itch to leave gain. I always felt that I would leave. I always wanted to have a place here to come back to. I have to be financially able to have two places for that to work out. That's sort of my biggest, get out of dodge thing about Elkins, just the career-wise, this is not much. I also think that relationship wise…[t]hat aspect [is relevant], too. I'm 31 now, and the thing that I'm looking to do in the next five years is be in a serious relationship and adopt a kid, that's something that's really important to me, too. I want to do it by 35 because I want to be around for the majority of their growing up experience and their college and all that stuff. That's why I sort of think when this degree is finished and I can make some money, it's time to head off somewhere else for a while. It makes me sad because there's so much I loved about this area. Not just the community, but the land in general. The outdoor activities are big for me. I love that at any point, I can leave work if it's warm enough and keep a tent in my trunk and find a place in the woods. It's easy. That part of it I will miss too, but I guess we all sacrifice for other things.

Joe is clearly reluctant leaving West Virginia and has so far been able to stay. However, it is particularly noteworthy that he still wants to leave and has a plan, however vague, for leaving.

The vast majority of people, both college students and college graduates, in my sample expressed a desire or intention to leave West Virginia at some point in the future. In this way, the process of disembedding continues through college and after, perhaps especially for those, like the PROMISE scholars, who had limited access to physical mobility at the time they went to college. The intention to move is not the same thing as

actually doing so, and, as the migration flow data shows, people are less likely to migrate the older they get as adults.

Intersectional identities are also relevant in this continuation of mobility and embeddedness in that class, gender, and sexuality, in particular, influence the experiences of pursuing career and family goals, which often come into focus between ages 18-40. Furthermore, all of the college graduates who were living in West Virginia at the time of their interview had either grown up outside of West Virginia and moved there or had moved to other states and countries or around the state already. The narrative of community embeddedness and immobility seems to be non-existent in the population that this sample represents. At the same time, the participants also represent a population of young people who are community-oriented despite their mobility. In the next section, I present data that shows how mobility and education can increase alienation in some ways while increasing community attachment in other ways.

Mobility as a process to belonging—but where?

In addition to finding that young adults were disembedded from place through mobility and that their plans for mobility continued throughout their twenties and thirties, mobility also emerged as a process that developed belonging and embeddedness. This process was reported by the participants in two contexts. First, participants noted that going to college made them appreciate their home communities more. Second, the college student participants described feeling dubious about attending college in West Virginia but also expressed a development of positive feelings about their schools,

communities, and state. Physical mobility and social mobility seem to create a space for young people to compare and assess places and their orientation to them.

Overall, participants reflected finding an increased appreciation for their home communities and West Virginia through their mobility, whether they were from West Virginia or elsewhere. For example, the following exchange includes three perspectives on this process from in-state and out-of-state students in the gender equality group at Allegheny University. The first student, who grew up in the university town, describes changing her attitude toward West Virginia through her experience in college. The second student, who grew up in another state, describes her appreciation for her new community but also laments the process of being disembedded from her family. She wishes for a "bubble in the sky" where she could merge these two parts of her life. The third student, who also grew up in another state but whose parents and relatives had lived in West Virginia, describes moving to West Virginia as an escape from some of the oppressive aspects of her home community while at the same time being a site for developing her connection to Appalachia. They said,

> White straight woman: I think that my perspective on West Virginia as a state and population has really changed since I got into college, and I feel like part of it has to do with the fact that [I grew up] in the same town my whole life. I saw the same people for my entire primary education, and it was like this small snapshot of what West Virginia was like, and a lot of it was not very positive. The university itself, as much as I feel it has some downfalls for the state…it gives me a sort of sense that maybe our state isn't as backwards as everybody makes it seem, or there is a part of it that isn't necessarily as single-minded and focused on things that me, growing up, I saw as negative. I'm actually very glad that I stayed at Allegheny because I can appreciate the state I live in now. I can feel better about where I came from, whereas when I was younger, I didn't, and all I wanted to do was get out of here.

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African American and Latina straight woman: I've been really, really blessed here. I really feel like I met some great people. I really feel like I have some great opportunities here. I just wish it could be somewhere else. I just really miss my family. It boils down to that. I just wish we could all go somewhere—people I met here, my family—we could all just go to a bubble in the sky and everything would be fine, but it's just not like that. I terribly miss my family, and I have a sister that's up here. I really think I'm kind of missing the other parts of my life, and I feel like this part is finally growing and I'm so excited about it, but I really do miss the other part.

White pansexual genderqueer and woman: I get really mixed messages from my family, and I can't really say that my family's keeping [me] here and not keeping me here, because my family is here. We're all just kind of like in Diaspora. We're not in any one place. Everyone moves to a different part of the state. Everyone moves to a different part of Appalachia. It's very strange. Even my extended family and beyond, like my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, they're even farther in Diaspora, so it's very hard. It's a very strange thing. I feel very tied here, yet we're all over the place. And my parents have this weird dynamic where my dad is from West Virginia. He looks at me and says, "You need to go, back to Kentucky; there's more opportunities. Go back to Tennessee; there's more opportunities." They don't want me to go north because they don't trust northerners. They think that northerners will poison me and will make me sick or liberal, and gay. On the flip side, my mom was from Maryland originally. She came here and she really loves West Virginia; it's her adopted home. So they kind of give me mixed messages, but they both seem to insinuate that they want me out of West Virginia, even though they really do like the state, just because of the economic stuff. They don't think that I could find a job. I could do so much better elsewhere. I'm so talented. Why don't I go somewhere else? But I have such an attachment to West Virginia, mostly because it was my escape. I was fleeing the south, and this was as far north as I could get. So I don't know what I'll do. I'd like to stay in Appalachia, but I think I'd need breaks because it can be very stifling at times. Probably my most immediate thing is, I want to go teach somewhere in Appalachia, preferably.

In these three examples, both physical and social mobility can be understood as a process

that allows young people to develop a sense of belonging, attachment, and possibility

toward place and community on their own terms. However, at the same time, the conflicting forces of family, career, and identity "success" are still constraining realities.

These structural tensions continue in later life stages, as the data from the college graduates corroborates. Indeed, it is common for many people in their late teens, twenties, and thirties, regardless of where they live, to spend time searching and exploring various options and goals in life. Erin, a college graduate quoted earlier, observed that she felt uncomfortable in her home community in West Virginia and in other locations. She said, "For a long time I felt really anxious and uptight and uncomfortable in other settings, you know? I think it has taken me, what, ten years—I mean in some ways it's taken me that long to be comfortable—that I'm going to be fine no matter where I am." In this way, physical and social mobility and disembedding reinforce each other during a time of seeking out options. However, physical and social mobility for the college graduates also created paths to belonging and community, and, in addition, was understood as a condition of belonging and embeddedness. For example, Deidre said,

> I left [West Virginia] right after high school, but I've been back now a long time—very thankful that I have the ability to travel. I think without that I would absolutely die. You have to have, I have to, have different perspectives, and I think that's what people are missing. If you're only judging yourself based on your town, then you're very limited. So, you know, I think I can take risks and do things because I feel, like, a mountaineer's independence. So that affords me to be an artist and that affords me to be this, let's say, like, toughness to walk in New York City and say, "Okay, I'm an artist from West Virginia. So what?" right?

Deidre was able to leave West Virginia after high school and is now raising a family in the state but still values mobility in the form of travel as part of her identity and ability to

maintain her commitment to her home community and that "home" might be more than

one place. She goes on to say,

> I quickly realized that I could live in two worlds and that I wanted
> to. My goal is very clear. My goal is dual citizenship. So I need my
> house, well, I'm going to get to maybe two, one in [this town] and
> one in Fayetteville, which is my favorite little town, or maybe in
> Lewisburg, with another part of my life in a big city. You know,
> not like Charlotte; I need a big city. I need like New York, LA, you
> know, and that's my goal.

In Deidre's case, like the majority of the college graduate participants, access to mobility,

whether in the form of travel or migration, was still an important part of life, even when

they had already "settled down." In addition, mobility was understood as an essential part

of sustaining their relationship to place. As Erin explained, she thought her access to

physical mobility played an important role in reconciling her sexuality and place identity.

She said,

> I think about that a lot. I wonder, it's such a weird thing, I think I
> used to think, like, "Oh my God, if I'd never left maybe I would
> just be in straight relationships and would never figured it out." It's
> probably not true since I never really had very many. I think that's,
> like, a kind of fucked up way to think about it, but I think if I'd
> stayed and kind of like figured this out about myself in West
> Virginia, it probably would have changed, I don't know, some
> things about my identity and my sense of being queer. I'm really
> glad that I went to school where I did and that I had exposure to
> this world of really radical conversations about gender and
> sexuality and all sorts of other things. I don't know what would've
> been different, but I do feel like if I had stayed in the state, I would
> probably be at a different place with my sexuality, at least. And all
> sorts of other things like politics and the way I think about the
> world and all sorts of things.

Likewise, Emily also noted the benefits of mobility in reassessing her sense of self and

relationship to place. She said,

I remember, people would say, "Where are you from?" I would put my head down, "Oh, West Virginia." That's how I felt about it all because that's how I feel like everyone thinks about it, it's just like that's a really clear vision of how other people think about you. Actually, my best friend, who was from [the Baltimore areas], her mom was from West Virginia, and she was just enamored with the fact that I was from here, and I owe a lot of gratitude to her. She made some of my memories that I was maybe somewhat shameful of like, "Oh, we had this broken down chicken coop, and the neighbors have cars—lots of them. We've had the satellite dish out there for five years now." All of those kind of things that are pretty stereotypical in West Virginia, and she made me feel special for having that because she didn't have it. She spent her entire life studying other cultures, trying to find something because she grew up in the mall. It's an awesome mall and a lovely mall, but I'm glad I'm not from there. So I grew exceedingly pretty proud to be from West Virginia, and also my family, a lot of people didn't have a nuclear family that was fighting for … to stay together.

I really wanted to leave…Going to school outside of the state. It's a point to prove to one's self that you can function outside of West Virginia. That was an important move, I think. A lot of my close friends did not go to school in West Virginia, which is the most practical and smart thing to do. And it's weird, but I still have that feeling; I still don't want to go to school anywhere in the state. I want something different if I go to get more schooling.

Again, as both Erin and Emily's quotes express, physical and social mobility was an important factor in developing their identities and sense of place. Both participants live in rural communities in the state where they are very active in their communities. For them, like Deidre and the other college graduate participants, mobility was a pathway to belonging and community in the state.

In addition to mobility working to strengthen connections to place, I found that the college student participants, in particular, expressed dubious feelings about attending college in West Virginia but also noted that they had developed positive feelings about

their schools, communities, and state. For example, the following exchange from the

African American group at Lockwood University reflects this dynamic.

> Woman student 1: I didn't want to come to [Lockwood], to be honest. My parents really wanted me to and I had an older sister that went here, but now that I'm here I wouldn't change anything but initially I did not want to come here. Too close to home. I wanted to go some place that was farther from home, but my parents wanted me to stay close to home.
>
> Researcher: And why did you change your mind? You said you wouldn't change it now.
>
> Woman student 1: I think because it's like we said earlier, there is such a sense of community here, and everybody is so friendly that it's almost impossible to not love [Lockwood]. You just come here and fall in love with it for one reason or another.
>
> Man student 1: Yeah, I agree. I live really close, and originally it was probably a week before I needed to decide what college I wanted to go to, and I was like, "I guess I'll go to [Lockwood], and I wanted to go far away, but then I kind of didn't. I wasn't really sure. Then when I got here, I agree with [woman student 1]. It's like there's something about it that makes it all worthwhile. Just the other day we had [a memorial ceremony], and I sang for it, and you can look around, and it's just remarkable how many people are filling up this plaza, and how everyone is there for one purpose, and I just feel like it's hard to find in other places.
>
> Woman student 2: You do hear that a lot, though. Everybody is like, "Well I guess I'll go to [Lockwood]." I've heard that so many times from people. "Well, it wasn't my first choice." But everybody is still here…yeah, but we love it.
>
> Man student 1: No one aspires to go to [Lockwood].
>
> Woman student 2: Yeah, I know. Everybody, like, lands here some way, shape or form and stays.
>
> Woman student 3: Money played a big part, too, because if [Lockwood] hadn't given me so many scholarships, if I didn't have so many in-state scholarships, I would have been at [an out-of-state school with a] whole bunch of black people. That sounds really bad. [Laughing]. It sounds really bad, but I like [Lockwood]. I

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know a lot of people here, and I like it. It's a lot more friendly than other   places.

Like the African American student group from Allegheny University, reported in Chapter

4, out-of-state students in the Lockwood group also noted being concerned about racism

in West Virginia when they chose to attend Lockwood. The exchange above also reflects

the feeling among many of the students that schools in West Virginia were not their first

choice, whether they were from the state or not. Many students decided to attend these

schools for financial and family reasons. However, it is notable that although the students

are in a highly transitory stage, they are also developing connections and attachments to

place. Later in the focus group when the students were discussing their mobility plans

after graduation, several students expressed an interest in creating further connections to

West Virginia. They said,

> Woman student: I'm going home [not West Virginia]. I feel like I could possibly come back. I went to some law school program for a couple of years…and I was talking to a few of the professors about education in West Virginia, and I'm really big into education, education reform, and there's a lot to be done in West Virginia. There's, like, a lot of things where if you have an idea you can pretty much run with it if you get enough support and stuff. I feel like it would be a great place to just be able to grow and be able to learn a lot of things and have an impact. I could see myself   coming   back   for   a   stint.

> Man student: I feel like I have things I need to accomplish in [university town]. There's just that burning desire that I can't leave, not yet at least. I can't leave. I don't know what's going to release that feeling from me, but I want to leave [university town] when it's on the upswing. I don't know if you can call it a downswing, but it's a no swing, at least. I have a job [at a local company]. Then programs I want to develop will be in [university town] because I feel like the students from elementary to high school to college, they need that guidance, and I want to be able to give them that sense of guidance. Put people in positions to give them guidance as well because you mentioned that you're just one person and

everything so put other people in positions to be able to have that positive effect that I want to have on the students as well.

Man international student: People would ask me, "Why West Virginia? You came halfway around the world; why would you come to West Virginia?" The community here…I don't think my experiences would have been as rich, and I would not have enjoyed life as much [if I had gone to a big city]. I've enjoyed this state, and I would like to come back.

These students describe their experiences and plans regarding physical mobility and social mobility and express a sense of connection to community and place. Moreover, the first two students identify specific roles that they can envision for themselves in improving communities within the state.

Likewise, many college graduates, who were already actively involved in these types of endeavors, described feeling like they were better able to make a difference in West Virginia, particularly as young people. As the woman student above said, "[I]f you have an idea you can pretty much run with it if you get enough support and stuff. I feel like it would be a great place to just be able to grow and be able to learn a lot of things and have an impact." Many of the college graduate participants were doing just that. For example, Kristal, a white straight woman living in rural West Virginia had come to West Virginia as a college student from out-of-state. After graduation she planned to apply for a Ph.D. program but needed a job in the meantime. She applied for and accepted an Americorps VISTA position in West Virginia. She was then accepted to a Ph.D. program, but did not get enough financial support to enroll. She said,

I decided to stay, and then I got this job [project manager for a community health organization] offer. I'm going to hang out for a while longer. I justified it in my head to be beneficial to my future career plans because [these are] human health concern[s], [] major one[s], especially in Appalachia. Through my own self-discovery,

I want to be an ethnobotanist in Appalachia. I haven't quite determined exactly what I'm going to do. I like edible and wild ... edible and medicinal plants. It does overlap a little bit when it comes to eating healthy and stuff.

There's a couple of different reasons [I stayed]. Boys. [T]he guy that I dated in Morgantown, I wasn't sure what was going to happen. I wanted to stay close just in case, even though this is four hours away from Morgantown. Not all that close for me, maybe three. Anyway, I had a summer job with the US Forest Service. That was awesome. I worked throughout all of the Monongahela National Forest. It's amazing. I actually know more about places in West Virginia. I've been to more places in West Virginia than I have ever, like, when I was grown up…I'm really glad that I stayed in West Virginia just because of the fact that there's all these towns in West Virginia. Even in the areas where there's major tourism, there's still like all these towns; they're just dying completely. We saw a lot of that when we were traveling. That was a large part of it is just like going all through West Virginia and seeing how beautiful it was. It's definitely a place that I want to stay. I do like the people that I have met in West Virginia, have all been pretty cool. They have a strong attachment to where they're from. I don't have that attachment to where I'm from. I like that about here. Even when people do move away, West Virginia is always their home still…I'm glad to be here to try to help prevent that [towns dying] from happening.

Similarly, Deidre, quoted earlier identified her role in her community in a way that aligns

with her goals of social and physical mobility. She said,

Well, it's even my struggle now … It is definitely my struggle now and has been, it's the familiarity of home, the comfortableness of home, the ambition that I have to, and always have had to, be an activist or to try to, like my grandmother said, you know, "Make better here." Do something better here, the family, the region I love … I love West Virginia and then also just like good shoes and good department stores and restaurants and the diversity of ideas and thinking. I feel like I'm definitely a person that's a path maker, a bridge builder, and so I feel a sense of responsibility to connect rural-urban, connect city … the diversity of thoughts in those two worlds. Because just as much as people kind of see West Virginia or Appalachian folks being very closed minded, I think sometimes city folks have their own perceptions too, of what we are and how … and trying to open up their mind in terms of what is a West

Virginian.

As these examples show, young people who are both formally engaged in their community (college graduates) and who have the potential to be engaged in their community (college students), can identify specific roles that they can contribute as young people in West Virginia. Concurrently, they are also a group of people who have access to and act on physical and social mobility.

Thus, mobility and community are not mutually exclusive here. In addition, mobility and community were both highly valued by participants, overall. There was clear tension involved in reconciling mobility and community, as Deidre, above, calls it a "struggle." Young people recognized the opportunities to "make a difference" in West Virginia but did not necessarily equate this role with committing to a community long-term.

Conclusion

Understanding the link between mobility and community among college-educated young people is particularly important in the context of Appalachia where community sustainability is threatened by the out-migration of this population. Often ignored as a transient group, college students present an interesting opportunity to explore the ways mobility and community might be more compatible than previously understood.

In West Virginia, it is particularly compelling that college-age young people are the only age range where there is a net in-migration of people to the state. Although the migration data reveals that there remains a net out-migration of young people in the

following age categories (23-30 and 31-40 year-olds), the qualitative data reveals that college students, both those from West Virginia and from elsewhere, are engaged in a process of developing new connections to their schools, wider communities, and the state in general. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data, at least for college students specifically, suggests that there is some underdeveloped potential for connecting college students to specific community efforts in the state. In this sense, the PROMISE scholarship may be an important opportunity to develop connections between young people and rural communities within the state.

Furthermore, mobility and community seem to work together in important ways for participants after graduation as well. Mobility was highly valued by participants, and many participants expressed a desire to get out of West Virginia at some point in their lives. On the other hand, access to mobility was often a way in which young people reestablished connections to their communities and place on their own terms. Indeed, the college graduates currently living in the state had all moved around for education, jobs, and family reasons. Overall, they still didn't think of themselves as completely settled in one place. Even for those participants who had been living in the same area for several years, they often described plans for leaving or continuing to travel. In this way, the quantitative and qualitative data presented in this chapter corroborate the argument that young, college-educated people are in fact disembedded from their communities. All of the participants were sampled because they were actively involved in organizations and groups in an effort to improve their place, whether that was at school, in a small rural community, a city, or the state in general. In addition to being involved in their communities, the qualitative data suggests that the processes of mobility, physical or

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social, can actually establish or reestablish relationships between young people and place. Therefore, the mobility that characterizes this group of college-educated people exists in a context in which community attachments and sense of belonging are present.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation was to determine what barriers to belonging exist for educated young people in West Virginia and also to understand how they might create a sense of belonging despite these barriers. I investigated the intersectional aspects of belonging in terms of gender, race, class, and sexuality and how they contribute to mobility and community in rural places. The findings presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, offer a unique perspective of young, educated adults in West Virginia, Appalachia, and rural places more generally. The findings also add to our knowledge of the social systems involving identity, belonging, class, community, and mobility. This knowledge is valuable in the context of the risks to sustainability that all places face as changes in economics, society, and the environment are felt locally. In particular, in Appalachia, local, community-based efforts have been at the forefront of sustainable development (Couto, 1999; Fisher, 1995; Fisher & Smith, 2012; Keefe, 2009; Lewis, 2009). Youth involvement in these efforts is especially remarkable given the economic, social, and environmental pressures on young people to disassociate and leave rural places. In West Virginia, a state that suffers from the out-migration of young, educated people and low educational attainment levels, the orientation of young people toward community is a compelling phenomenon for considering new ideas and strategies for sustainable community development in Appalachia.

I posed and answered the following research questions:

1. In what ways do young people negotiate a sense of belonging in rural places through the intersection of their identity and place?

2. How are experiences of identity and belonging relevant to young people's mobility?

3. In the context of belonging and mobility, how are young people oriented toward rural places and communities?

To this end, I conclude that young educated people struggle to find belonging and reconcile desires and forces of mobility and community; however, at the same time, an intersectional analysis reveals the various factors including gender, race, sexuality, class, education, and family that can exacerbate or alleviate this struggle. Before moving on to the implications of the research I will briefly summarize the findings of the study and offer some discussion connecting the overall themes. In addition, I highlight the contribution of these findings to theory and empirical literature.

Connecting themes: belonging, class, mobility, and community

I offered a typology of belonging that reflected the dialectic processes that orient young people toward their place and community. These processes involve a relationship between internal and external social systems regarding various aspects of belonging. When both internal and structural belonging are low, people are alienated from their communities. When internal belonging is high and structural belonging is low, people have to find a restricted sense of belonging and are faced with significant emotional work in order to maintain their own sense of belonging. On the other hand, when internal belonging is low and structural belonging is high, people may feel comfortable in their

communities as the path of least resistance, but these insular structures may keep some people in place that do not inspire the "critical, relational, and extroverted" spaces that Smith and Fisher argue are essential for building and transforming communities.

Finally, when internal and external belonging are both high, people feel belonging as bell hooks describes in the "beloved community." They belong in their difference. Notably, "belonging through difference" points to an essential component of community, which makes it distinct from other types of groupings like friend or kinship networks or simply existence in shared space or place; community involves a coming together of people, perspectives, and interests. In this way, the ideal of belonging and community is in tension with the intersectional experiences of gender, race, and sexuality. Through intersectional processes, gender, race, and sexuality are constantly reconstructed in relation to community as either barriers or access points to belonging.

I extended the discussion of belonging to incorporate issues of class identity experienced both materially and symbolically. Young people living in Appalachia have varied material privileges, but they all negotiate their identities in a culture where white, heteropatriarchal, working class values are the norm. College-educated youth are distinctly privileged but not entirely separated from disadvantages created by class inequalities. Many college-educated youth appropriate the style and behaviors of rural working class culture in order to make space for themselves in their communities and to reconcile parts of their identities that can otherwise seem mutually exclusive.

The individual appropriation of working-class culture is not always beneficial for those outside the white heteropatriarchal rural norm. However, when participants were able to make connections among and across gender, race, sexuality, and class, collective

action became more likely. The ways young, educated people approach class distinctions

are important in the context of Appalachian sustainable communities because many of the

pressing issues in the region today involve constructing connections and community

across class and identity, which I discuss further in the implications section of this

conclusion chapter.

Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, I examined migration

patterns and mobility as they relate to place and community. Through this analysis, the

tension between mobility and community is both evident and complicated. Young adults

are the most likely to migrate, and the majority of the qualitative participants had

migrated and planned future migration. People of color were significantly more likely to

migrate into and out of West Virginia than were whites. Although they represent a small

proportion of the overall population, the experiences of people of color are an important

supplement to the study of migration. When sociologists, and others, discuss migration

we usually only take notice when the scale is large. For example, "brain drain" is

considered a general problem, but because the highly educated in our society tend to be

mostly white, middle/upper class youth, the experience of minority groups is obfuscated.

Likewise, the other prominent migration issue in rural areas, Hispanic immigration, tends

to be characterized by economic hardship. Stauber (2001) argues that we should instead

see immigration in rural places as an opportunity for innovation and entrepreneurship.

If we look closer at the experiences of people of color in relation to sense of

belonging, we will have a better sense of the struggles and opportunities for rural

community development. In addition, just creating space for the voices and experiences

of young, educated people of color in West Virginia helps to ease the binary tension

between race and place. Indeed, the path to improving communities in West Virginia must attend to the experiences of people of color in the region. Too often these individuals are ignored as an "insignificant" proportion of the population. Continuing to neglect the experiences of minorities in the state will do nothing to increase a sense of belonging.

Participants also expressed a keen interest in place and community. The high migration rates for college students both in and out of West Virginia along with their expressed attachment and interest in West Virginia, suggests that there is some underdeveloped potential for connecting college students to specific community efforts in the state. Furthermore, young people were most likely to migrate within the state, and although the IPUMS data do not allow me to discern if this internal migration flows from rural to urban areas, it may be particularly strategic to identify rural communities within the state that could most benefit from these connections.

Physical and social mobility were also highly valued by college graduates, and many participants expressed a desire to get out of West Virginia at some point in their lives. On the other hand, access to physical and social mobility was often a way in which young people reestablished connections to their communities and place on their own terms. Specifically, many college graduates discussed the ways in which moving to new places and incorporating new ideas into their perspective through meeting new people and learning new things helped them appreciate their role in West Virginia more. Therefore, mobility exists in a context in which community attachments and sense of belonging are still present.

The phenomenon of youth out-migration is disturbing on several levels because it indicates that home communities are not "good enough" for reasons ranging from economic to social to environmental issues. Out-migration creates distance among families, friends, and communities, and it results in a "hollowing out" of places where there are very few young college-educated role models and mentors for children and youth. However, the prospect of immobility is also disturbing, given that mobility is materially and symbolically valuable. The freedom to move is often essential for making individual progress in life and for reaching individual potential. In some ways, this may undermine community stability and sustainability. However, mobility is also a process which can reaffirm connections to place and community or create new ones. Thus, the general mobility of young people in and out of West Virginia is not completely problematic considering the dialectic of belonging and the possibility for alliances across class through intersectionality. The data show that young people, even newcomers to the state, can form a sense of belonging and connection to places and communities in West Virginia. These are often forged through a combination of offers of belonging and community from external sources and an internal sense of belonging. Given the potential for the investment of young people in place and community while they are in the state, the general pattern of missed opportunities for retaining educational in-migrants is remarkable.

In addition, our academic and non-academic language and understanding of mobility and community seems to currently lack a way of holding both the beneficial aspects of mobility and our ideals of community together. Mobility is a common experience and a rite-of-passage at several stages of life. To be sure, there is something

valuable about history, traditions, and communities based in long-standing social connections. Perhaps this social system based in place is one of the traditional "Appalachian values" that is difficult to reimagine because it is one of the positive aspects of the region, which is often stereotyped negatively (Jones 1994). However, the values of "neighborliness," "familialism," and "love of place" (Jones 1994) are also stereotypes, and ones that are complicated by gender, race, sexuality, and class. These findings of this research suggest that there is room for both, but that a new "Appalachian value" needs to be developed around becoming more welcoming and making space and creating value for newcomers.

Implications for scholarship, policy, and social justice

Scholarship

These findings contribute to the theoretical and empirical literature regarding youth and identity in rural places and communities as well as policy and social justice in West Virginia and Appalachia. First, in terms of theoretical contributions, this research integrates sociological theories of community, feminist theories of belonging, and emerging social science theories of mobility by revealing connections between individual identity and the ways young people are highly mobile and strongly community-oriented. This integration has applications in rural sociology and women's studies. For rural sociology, these findings corroborate the community theories that highlight the role of social structures in influencing the development of communities and the ways in which

individuals experience social structures within their communities. Systems of gender, race, sexuality, and class influenced the ways young people were oriented toward their communities. Moreover, the findings suggest that mobility is a social phenomenon that is part of community rather than a necessarily opposing force of community for young adults in rural places. In addition, the physical and social mobility accessible to young, college educated people is a point on the rural/urban interface, which can be developed into social and human capital assets for rural communities. This research also contributes to intersectionality theory by developing the understanding that place is not just a contextual factor in the ways people experience identity and social stratification, but also that place can be an identity itself in tension with our gender, race, and sexuality.

The findings from this research also contribute to our empirical knowledge. In terms of youth in rural places, this project helps develop our knowledge of the cohorts of young college students and college graduates. These groups represent the next life stages of rural youth under age 18, who are more often the focus of research on youth and rural communities. The findings presented here show that young people struggle with the tensions between mobility and place and community, but that migration and mobility can also help strengthen and manage the connections young people have to place and community. This knowledge is helpful for thinking about youth roles in community and residential trajectories as well as cross-generational connections themes. These are applicable in rural sociology, Appalachian studies, and youth and community studies. In terms of identity in rural places, these findings add to our knowledge about gender, race, sexuality, and class in Appalachia and are suggestive for the rural U.S. in general. In addition, the intersectional analysis provided here reveals the social systems that interact

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with identity including education, family, and social networks. This knowledge is useful to our developing ideas about identity dynamics in the rural U.S. and the roles identity plays in people's relationships with places and communities, which is applicable to rural sociology, Appalachian studies, and women's studies.

Policy

The implications of these findings in West Virginia, and Appalachia more generally, apply to both government and organizational policies. Many states have instituted merit-based scholarship programs to ostensibly keep the "best and brightest" students at in-state public universities. In West Virginia the PROMISE (Providing Real Opportunities for Maximizing In-State Student Excellence) Scholarship, started in 2001, represents the most explicit and wide-ranging policy toward the goal of maintaining and developing human capital in the state. After a full decade of this scholarship program, there is modest evidence as to the efficacy of the program (Bowen & Deskins, 2014). Furthermore, many have argued that merit-based scholarships transfer economic resources from disadvantaged populations to already advantaged populations. In the case of West Virginia, the PROMISE scholarship is funded by video gambling revenue. To be sure, the PROMISE scholarship has supported the education of many worthy students in the state. However, the shift to merit-based aid scholarship programs as a policy trend in state education systems, as opposed to need-based scholarships, has been critiqued for appropriating funds to students who are more likely to be able to afford college in the first place (Heller & Marin, 2002).

The findings presented in this dissertation suggest that some alterations to this program might be more beneficial in achieving the desired effect of increasing human capital and staunching the "brain drain" in West Virginia. As the qualitative data presented in Chapter 6 shows, many young people do choose to stay in-state for college because of the financial support provided by PROMISE. However, this also had the effect of limiting mobility for these students, which in many cases increased their desire to leave the state after graduation. Furthermore, this scholarship is only available to in-state students. The West Virginia state government should also consider the potential of out-of-state students, which likely represent the largest population of in-migrants to the region. Financial and employment support for these students during college and after graduation could entice these newcomers to stay.

Of the participants in the study, college students who grew up in the state and those who grew up outside the state expressed connections to community and place at varying levels depending on their experiences, and these perspectives were often influenced by community connections students were able to make while at school. Currently, the PROMISE scholarship legislation *suggests* doing 20 hours total of community service in the state either during high school or college. Perhaps combining a need-based and merit-based qualification for the PROMISE scholarship could free up some of the funds allocated to the scholarship fund, which could then be put toward programs for connecting college students to community organizations throughout the state. Increasing opportunities to connect young people to communities would foster their sense of belonging in the state and take advantage of this dynamic population of residents and newcomers in the state.

In terms of organization policy, again, leaders should consider the population of college student in-migrants as well as young returnees as potentially valuable assets to communities throughout the state. Organizations such as STAY and Generation WV focus mostly on West Virginia residents. However, they also have digital social networks that connect them with many young people that have moved for education, jobs, or other reasons. In addition, the findings presented on belonging in Chapter 4 suggest that these organizations can play an important role in fostering belonging, especially across gender, race, sexuality, and class difference. STAY has already made significant efforts toward this end.

As Lichter and Matthews (1999) point out, raising educational attainment alone cannot stem the long-term inequality problems in Appalachia. Promoting human resource development in the absence of good jobs leads to greater out-migration. Still, increasing the number of college-educated youth in communities, particularly rural communities, can produce positive effects. In this sense, government policy and organizational efforts are auspicious outlets for developing innovative strategies for improving the role of young people in communities across the state. Mobility and community were both valuable components of the participants' lives. Thus, I suggest three target groups for improving the relationship between college-educated youth and West Virginia communities.

1. PROMISE scholars and other young people who have had limited mobility experiences

    a. State government and organizations should develop ways to encourage mobility while maintaining a connection to West Virginia.

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2. Youth from West Virginia who migrate out of the state for college, jobs, etc.

   a. Government and organizations should develop ways to foster connections to the state and encourage job and lifestyle opportunities, perhaps temporarily, for young people in 20s and 30s.

3. Newcomers that arrive primarily to be educated in the state

   a. Government and organizations should develop ways to foster connections to West Virginia and encourage job and lifestyle opportunities, perhaps temporarily, for young people in 20s and 30s, as well as maintain a connection to the state.

Possible examples include exchange internships between rural and urban places, tax incentives for returning PROMISE scholars, and digital communities for young adults that are highly mobile but also strongly oriented toward communities in West Virginia. Particular attention in the form of outreach and organizational support should be paid to people of color that are newcomers to the state as well as other marginalized groups. As the data in the dissertation show, these groups often experience significant tension in forming and maintaining connections to communities in West Virginia and the state in general.

However, social structures and institutional support was often a way in which people in these groups formed support communities within the state, which are then useful as a basis of forming connections to broader communities within the state and the state in general. These connections between various "levels" of community are relevant in the context of the data in general where participants were oriented toward community in different ways depending on scale.

Social justice

      Finally, these findings have implications for social justice. In particular, Chapter 5 reveals the connections young people are making to their communities through intersectional identities. Much of the work being done both in Appalachian studies scholarship and Appalachian activism require working across boundaries and identities. For example, there are people working across class lines to develop alternative energy production that alleviates job loss and environmental disasters like those involved in Sustainable Williamson in Williamson, WV; people working across racial and place divides to confront the prison industrial complex development in the region like the Central Appalachian Prisoner Support Network; and writers, musicians, and visual artists who are creating new representations of Appalachia like authors Crystal Good and Jeff Mann, musicians that make up The Carolina Chocolate Drops and WV Hip Hop artists, and documentarian Elaine McMillion Sheldon, all of whom contribute to defying racist, sexist, heterosexist, classist, and ageist stereotypes about the region. The project of creating more socially just communities is an essential component of sustainable community development in Appalachia, and, as the terms "hillbilly women," "Affrilachians," and "queer mountaineers" suggest, the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, and place are pivotal loci of this process. Knowing more about how people are able to effectively negotiate these intersections is an important step in advancing these projects.

Limitations

The limitations of this research mostly cluster around generalizability. The qualitative sample was created targeting groups and people that were already involved in organizations and community efforts. Thus, there is a high potential for bias in the results given that the participants may be independently more likely to be interested and engaged in place and community. Furthermore, the college students sample was constructed from students who were part of gender equality, African American, and LGBTQ student groups. This was purposeful as these participants would be more likely to be knowledgeable about identity issues and comfortable talking about them. However, their responses may not be representative of students who do not have the same support networks. In addition, the data collected is cross-sectional, and although the qualitative data included information about participants' past experiences, these data do not provide a longitudinal record of how, for example, participants' migration plans matched up with actual behavior.

Although I specifically attempted to include diversity among participants, a more robust sample would have come closer to thoroughly exploiting the use of intersectional methodology and analysis. Finally, the quantitative data also had limitations. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, sexuality is not available as a variable in the same way as gender, race, and education. Thus, this identity category is missing from the quantitative analysis. Furthermore, the samples in the state were small, especially among racial categories, and thus it was not possible to carry out an intersectional analysis of the quantitative data.

Further research

In light of the findings, implications, and limitations of this dissertation, I suggest future research in three general areas. First, a longitudinal study using qualitative and quantitative methods would allow for developing knowledge about the transitions between high school, college, and post college life and how the connection between youth and rural places and communities develops through this time. New directions in thinking about mobility as a part of community would provide a compelling direction for this research.

Second, the development of youth-led organizations, particularly in Appalachia, are compelling sites of study in understanding the way young people themselves are organizing in response to the place and community issues they face in the midst of patterns of out-migration. Case studies and participatory action research would be fruitful research avenues as would analyses of the digital networks and information that young people are creating and using. A few examples include viral essays by former West Virginia natives that describe the tensions of mobility, place, and community, the West Virginia Water Crisis Blog that was started by a former West Virginia native after the chemical spill near Charleston, WV in January 2014, several very successful crowdsourcing fundraisers that promote art, community development, and social justice in the region, and the many Facebook groups devoted to West Virginian and Appalachian

places and communities. These forms of connection to place have developed quite recently and add to the phenomenon of organizing by young people in the state.

Finally, an investigation into the roles and effect of "allies" in mediating social stratification for marginalized people, especially in places of extreme inequality, is a potential area of future research. One question that emerges from the findings in Chapter 5 is, how do people and organizations use privilege to bolster and affirm belonging, inclusion, and collaboration? Using intersectionality theory to explore the bounds of social stratification would provide feminist and sociological insights into how privilege is maintained or used to dismantle the very systems that produce it in the first place.

Appendix A

Focus Group Guide

Intro: Today I'd like to talk with all of you to find out how college students feel about living in West Virginia.

1. First, I'd just like to get a sense of whether you like living in West Virginia and why or why not. Can you describe how you feel about living here?
2. Can you tell me about a time when being a [member of X social group] prevented you from feeling like you fit in while living in West Virginia?
   a. *Follow up* -- Visceral: Is that a visceral feeling? Like when you walk into a room, you can just feel that you fit in or not without anyone saying anything?
   b. *Follow up* -- Objective: Are there laws or other kinds of structures, like the way things are set up that make you feel more or less like you belong?
   c. *Follow up* -- Subjective: Have you had interactions with others that make you feel like you belong or not?
   d. *Follow up* -- Have you ever felt like being a [member of X social group] and being a "West Virginian" were mutually exclusive? How?
3. Can you tell me about a time when your identity as a [member of X social group] gave you a greater sense of belonging?
   a. *Follow up* -- Was there a certain group or person that helped you feel this way? How?
4. How do you find a sense of belonging, even if you feel like the odd man out?
   a. *Follow up* -- Can you tell me about a time when you felt like you belonged with people that were very different from you?
5. What are the pros and cons of being a [member of X social group] in this part of West Virginia versus other places you've lived?
6. Where would you like to live in the future after graduation?

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Intro: Today I'd like to talk to you to find out how you feel about living in West Virginia.

1. To start off, can you tell me about your path from high school to college to work?
   a. *Follow* up -- What were your future plans when you were in high school?
   b. *Follow* up -- What type of community did you hope to live in in the future?
   c. *Follow* up -- Did this change after you went to college?
   d. *Follow* up -- Did this change after you graduated?
      i. *Follow up* -- Why do you think you changed your mind?
2. Is having a sense of belonging important to your future plans?
3. Do you feel a sense of pride about where you are from? Went to school?
4. Does this give you a sense of responsibility toward your home state?
   a. *Follow up* -- where you went to college?
   b. *Follow up* -- any other community?
5. Do you identify as being a West Virginian?
6. How did you decide where to go to college?
7. Did you feel you gained a greater sense of belonging along the way?
   a. *Follow up* -- Were there any groups or certain people that helped you feel this way? How?
8. How do the different places you've lived compare in terms of how you feel you belong?
   a. *Follow up* -- Visceral: Is that a visceral feeling? Like when you walk into a room, you can just feel that you fit in or not without anyone saying anything?
   b. *Follow up* -- Objective: Are there laws or other kinds of structures, like the way things are set up that make you feel more or less like you belong?
   c. *Follow up* -- Subjective: Have you had interactions with others that make you feel like you belong or not?
9. Have you found any unexpected connections with people that are very different from you or that have very different values from you?
   a. *Follow* up -- Has this helped you in any way?
10. Have you or are you making certain compromises in order to stay in the community you live?

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire for College Students

Instructions: As part of this research, I would like to ask you some demographic questions about your background. Please circle the letter of the option you feel best describes yourself. If you prefer not to answer any of these questions, you have the option to not answer each question. ***This information is only for my reference in understanding the total population of people I talked to during my research. This information will be kept in my personal, secure files and will be destroyed at the end of my project (2013). No one else, besides me, will have access to these demographic questionnaires.***

1. Name: _____

2. E-mail: _____

3. What is your year in school?

a. Freshman   d. Junior

b. Sophomore   e. Senior

c. Graduate

4. What is your major? _____

5. How do you define your gender?

a. Woman   c. Other, Please specify _____

b. Man   d. I prefer not to answer this question.

6. How do you define your race or ethnicity? You may choose more than one option.

a. White/European American   e. Asian, please specify _____

b. African American   f. Latino/a, please specify _____

c. Native American   g. Other, please specify _____

d. I prefer not to answer this question.

7. How do you define your sexuality?

a. Heterosexual   c. Bisexual

b. Homosexual   d. Other, please specify _____

8. Please specify your city, county, and country of origin.

a. City (where you grew up): _____

b. County (where you grew up): _____

c. Country (where you grew up): _____

9. How would you describe your social class when you were growing up?

a. Working Class

d. Upper-Middle Class

b. Lower-middle Class

e. Upper Class

c. Middle Class

f. I prefer not to answer

10. How would you describe your social class now?

a. Working Class

d. Upper-Middle Class

b. Lower-middle Class

e. Upper Class

c. Middle Class

f. I prefer not to answer

11. What year were you born? _____

Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire for College Graduates

Instructions: As part of this research, I would like to ask you some demographic questions about your background. Please circle the letter of the option you feel best describes yourself. If you prefer not to answer any of these questions, you have the option to not answer each question. ***This information is only for my reference in understanding the total population of people I talked to during my research. This information will be kept in my personal, secure files and will be destroyed at the end of my project (2013). No one else, besides me, will have access to these demographic questionnaires.***

1. Name: _____

2. E-mail: _____

3. Please specify your city, county, and country of origin.

City (where you grew up): _____

County (where you grew up): _____

Country (where you grew up): _____

4. Please specify where you reside now.

City (where you reside now): _____

County (where you reside now): _____

5. Did you attend college? (circle one)   YES   NO

6. Did you complete your degree?

If so, what was your degree in? _____

7. How would you describe your social class when you were growing up?

a. Working Class   d. Upper-Middle Class

b. Lower-middle Class   e. Upper Class

c. Middle Class   f. I prefer not to answer

8. How would you describe your social class now?

a. Working Class   d. Upper-Middle Class

b. Lower-middle Class   e. Upper Class

c. Middle Class   f. I prefer not to answer

9. How do you define your gender?

a. Woman   c. Other, Please specify _____

b. Man   d. I prefer not to answer this question.

10. How do you define your race or ethnicity? You may choose more than one option.

a. White/European American   e. Asian, please specify _____

b. African American   f. Latino/a, please specify _____

c. Native American   g. Other, please specify _____

d. I prefer not to answer this question.

11. How do you define your sexuality?

a. Heterosexual					c. Bisexual

b. Homosexual					d. Other, please specify _____

12. What year were you born? _____

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PUBLICATIONS
Terman, A.R. "Intersectionality and Appalachian Identity." In Rebecca Fletcher and William R. Schumann (Eds.) *Appalachia Revisited*. Forthcoming from University Press of Kentucky.

Sachs, C. with M. Barbercheck, K. Brasier, N.E. Kiernan, and A.R. Terman. *Women Farmers on the Rise: The Changing Face of Sustainable Agriculture* (working title). Submitted for review.

Allen, P., C. Sachs, C. Hatcher, A.R. Terman, J. Hayden. (2013). "Front and back of the house: socio-spatial inequalities in food work." *Agriculture, Food, and Human Values*.

Kiernan, N.E., M.E. Barbercheck, K.J. Brasier, C. Sachs, and A.R. Terman. (2012). "Women Farmers: pulling up their own educational boot straps with Extension." *Journal of Extension* 50(5).

AWARDS AND HONORS
2014 Sara Woods Women's Studies Outstanding Graduate Student Teaching
2012 The Francena L. Miller and Michael F. Nolan Graduate Scholarship in Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology
2012 The Thomas C. and Jackie M. Floore Memorial Scholarship in Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology
2012 Penn State University College of Liberal Arts Dissertation Support Grant

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE
2009-2014 Research Assistant, The Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education; The Penn State Commission for Women; and The School of Labor and Employment Relations, The Pennsylvania State University

TEACHING EXPERIENCE
Penn State University, Graduate Instructor
Introduction to Women's Studies (in-residence Fall 2012, Spring 2013 and 2014)
Introduction to Women's Studies (online Summer and Fall 2013)
Appalachian State University, Graduate Instructor
Diversity in Appalachia (in-residence Fall 2008)
Women in Appalachia (in-residence Spring 2008)
A Woman for President? Global, Historical, Current (in-residence Fall 2008)