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Women Of Appalachia: Common Ground, Different Matriarch

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Women of Appalachia: Common Ground, Different Matriarch
By Cecelia Bagnoli

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of Senior Independent Study Thesis

Supervised by Oscar Mejía
Department of Communication Studies
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to create a podcast that illuminates the experiences and voices of contemporary Appalachian women to dismantle media-based stereotypes about people within the region. This study addresses a gap in the scholarly literature regarding both the roles and impacts of *contemporary* women within the Appalachian region. While Appalachian studies scholars have taken a recent interest in a historical approach to the influences of women (Aiken; Beaver; Maggard; Oberhauser; Smith; Wilkerson), much of the literature focusing on current day circumstances of Appalachian women only regards their health accessibility and economic instability (Patrick et al.; Allen and Roberto). Further, there is limited research that specifically focuses on how women participate in and influence the social, political, and cultural climate of Appalachia within a contemporary context. Thus, through the employment of semi-structured interviews with eight Appalachian women in Berea, Kentucky, I was able to record current experiences of women who live within the region. Contrary to wide-reaching stereotypes about Appalachian women, it is evident that my participants are educated, influential actors within their community who possess a strong sense of place within the region.

Keywords: Women, Appalachia, Stereotypes, Social Construction, Community, Podcast, Qualitative Research

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To my dad, for reminding me to love myself when the rest of the world goes mad and even when I disappoint myself. Your assurance that we are always so much bigger than one moment, one day, and one season helped me seize my potential even on the most disappointing days. I could only ever strive to be more like you.

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CHAPTER I: Introduction

As an eleven-year-old, I discovered that revealing my Appalachian upbringing to those who grew up outside of the region is often returned with a response of genuine curiosity, and most often, the admittance of preconceived notions about what it means to be Appalachian. I had just moved across the country from my hometown of Berea, Kentucky to Grinnell, Iowa with my family. It was on my first day at Grinnell Middle School that my Iowan classmates asked me what it was like to have grown up in the "A-puh-LAY-chuhn" Mountains. I remember being caught off guard by their pronunciation and responding with, "Oh! You mean the A-puh-la-chuhn Mountains?" Despite my rebuttal, however, my classmates were insistent upon *their* pronunciation being the correct one. At first, our interaction made me feel downright confused, then it made me feel frustrated, and finally, I was so embarrassed that I retreated in defeat as they seemed to know more about where I was from than I did.

In the years that followed, I was continually confronted with individuals who, in a similar way, tried to make sense of Appalachia in ways that left me feeling confused, frustrated, and ultimately, defeated. These emotions were present when a friend used the word "hillbillies" to describe Appalachians. Such feelings reappeared when an extended family member said Kentucky "feels like a different country" to them. Perhaps these emotions were most prominent when a family-friend laughed as she claimed to be prejudiced against Appalachians, not because she fears them, but rather, because she is curious as to "whether they have any teeth." In the case of these interactions, as with countless similar ones, I could not seem to understand why the otherwise open-minded and accepting people in my life held such negative opinions about Appalachians in their minds.

In spite of these individuals, I am proud to identify as Appalachian. Having called the region home for the past twenty-two years, I know better than to equate Appalachians to oversimplified stereotypes born out of classism so that poverty might be depicted as a moral flaw. Instead, it should be known that the region has stories of activism, entrepreneurship, and community that are worth listening to and remembering. However, it has so often been the case that the story of Appalachia is told through the lens of hegemonic discourses that portray men as the main actors in Appalachian economics, culture, and society.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of my study is to create a podcast in which the stories of contemporary Appalachian women are at the center of its content in order to deconstruct stereotypes and misconceptions about their role within the Appalachian region. Specifically, I aim to highlight stories of Appalachian women who currently or have previously resided in, and have made an impact on, my hometown of Berea, Kentucky. To undertake this study, I conducted ethnographic interviews with eight Berean women who had lived in the region for at least ten years at the time of each interview. My findings take their final shape in a podcast that is easily accessible to the public.

Rationales

This study should prove useful for three reasons. First, this study addresses a gap in the scholarly literature regarding both the roles and impacts of *contemporary* women within the Appalachian region. While Appalachian studies scholars have taken a recent interest in a historical approach to the influences of women (Aiken; Beaver; Maggard; Oberhauser; Smith; Wilkerson), much of the research that focuses on current day circumstances of Appalachian women is regarding their health accessibility and economic instability (Patrick et al., Allen and

Roberto). Further, there is no current research that specifically focuses on how women participate in and influence the social, political, and cultural climate of Appalachia within a contemporary context. In other words, the story of contemporary Appalachian women is a story that has gone largely untold until now. It is not only important to recognize the importance of contemporary women within the region, but also to hear first-hand how women themselves experience and reflect upon their personal contributions to Appalachia.

Second, this study, and the resulting podcast, serve to deconstruct harmful notions and negative stereotypes that have permeated the minds of U.S Americans through media regarding what Appalachian women, and therefore Appalachians in general, are capable of being, doing, and accomplishing. Appalachian studies scholarship, up until this point, has explored the ways in which rhetorical messages have socially constructed such notions and stereotypes of Appalachia in the American consciousness (Catte; Richards). This research has revealed that media portrayals over the past two centuries, including magazine publications, comics, television shows, and movies, of the Appalachian experience have had consequences that extend beyond just mere entertainment for audiences throughout the years. According to Appalachian studies and communication studies scholars alike, such consequences include the demoralization of poverty and subsequent justification for exploitation on behalf of extractive industries as a result (Catte; Richards). Elizabeth Catte defines this process as a "profitable narrative," as such a cycle is beneficial to industries within Appalachia but not to Appalachians themselves (36). Despite the overwhelming evidence of profitable narratives throughout Appalachian history, including the cultivation of stereotypes, there is limited scholarly research that proves to offer evidence against such misconceptions about Appalachians (Cooke-Jackson and Hansen; Patrick et al.; Speer). As such, it is equally important that scholars expand their research to offer evidence to

the contrary, in addition to the development and consequences of harmful stereotypes. Thus, my study will be one of the first to offer concrete examples of contradicting evidence and to do so from the perspectives of Appalachians themselves.

Finally, this study is important for reasons beyond just what it can do for my intended audiences, and eventually, Appalachians, as they become more understood within the U.S. American consciousness. More specifically, my hope is that the undertaking of this research also proves to be beneficial to the women who decided to be participants in my study. I am a firm believer that their stories, and the accomplishments wrapped up within them, are something audiences will be inspired and empowered by. However, the hope is that the interview process as well as the final podcast, will serve to reflect how these women empowered themselves in their everyday lives, as their voices have so often been ignored throughout Appalachian history.

Method

To execute this study, I interviewed eight women from the Berea, Kentucky area, who differ in age, occupation, and socioeconomic status, but all share a commonality in that they have lived in the Appalachian region for at least ten years. At the time of my study, having lived in Appalachia for at least ten years would translate to having resided within the region since or before 2011. With the permission of my participants, I recorded each interview using online platforms, including FaceTime, Zoom, and/or phone calls. For those participants who felt comfortable, I conducted the interview in person. I then reviewed the interviews in an effort to identify dominant themes that emerge from my conversations with participants. To conclude my research process, I created a podcast in which I merge the stories of my participants and my reflections into a cohesive media representation of Appalachian women. My final product is easily accessible to the public so that its messages might permeate the U.S. American

consciousness and subsequently deconstruct stereotypes and misconceptions about Appalachian women.

<div align="center">Definitions</div>

Defining Hegemonic Discourses.

Considering the varying meanings in which the phrase "hegemonic discourses" could take on, in and throughout different scholarly contexts, I now take the opportunity to define the phrase for the purposes of my specific study. To that end, it is important to first define the term "hegemony" on its own. Hegemony, which is another way of saying social control, is present when people "see an idea or ideology as common sense, even if it conflicts with their own experiences" (Palczewski 133). Said another way, hegemony occurs when people or entities responsible for social control, otherwise known as a "ruling group," are able to dominate others not through "overt violence" but instead, through the subtle determination of "what makes sense" (Palczewski 45).

While hegemony exists in many contexts and forms, it is especially relevant to my study in regard to media representations. More specifically, hegemonic media representations "shape the cognitive structures through which people perceive and evaluate social reality" and further, "must be maintained, repeated, reinforced" to maintain influence (Palczewski 228). As is relevant to my study of Appalachian women, media representations can take form in a variety of discourses, such as magazine publications, novels, and television shows, that have been maintained, repeated, and reinforced throughout the past two centuries. With this in mind, what is defined as a hegemonic discourse is any discourse that was curated by a ruling group with the intention of gaining social control over another group of people, which, in this case, refers to Appalachian women. Understanding this phrase will be important to understanding the ways in

which ruling groups within Appalachian have been able to maintain, repeat, and enforce stereotypes about contemporary Appalachian women.

Defining Stereotype

Knowing that the nature of my study largely involves the relationship between hegemonic discourses and stereotypes about Appalachia, it is also essential to understand the meaning of the word "stereotype" on its own accord. Stereotyping can be defined as "a fixed mental image of a group that is frequently applied to all its members." More specifically, these mental images are said to originate from "depictions of a few people in a subculture" that are then "applied to all members of the group" (Cooke-Jackson and Hansen 185). As such, my study aims to demonstrate that while the common media trope of a pregnant and apolitical Appalachian woman might accurately capture *some* Appalachian experiences, such a depiction does not represent the experience of *all* women within the region. Recognizing the nuances of the Appalachian experience is, therefore, a rejection to stereotypes that would otherwise claim Appalachia is a homogeneous region. The importance in rejecting these stereotypes lies in that they "are often negative and may ignore the realities and challenges facing the group," which, in this case, is the entire Appalachian population (Cooke-Jackson and Hansen 185).

Defining Appalachia

To further understand the importance of deconstructing stereotypes about Appalachians, it is first important to actually define to whom the word "Appalachian" refers. When someone says they are from the Appalachian region, this means they are one of 26 million residents who reside within a 206,000 square mile landmass that spans from southern New York to northern Mississippi (Appalachian Regional Commission). Those who live within the region are well known for their struggle with economic factors, including poverty, per capita income, and high

school graduation rates (Appalachian Regional Commission) and its subsequent impact on the health of Appalachians (Cooke-Jackson and Hansen 189). Oftentimes, Appalachians have been blamed for their economic and health circumstances in that they are framed as being attributable to personal characteristics such as ignorance, laziness, lack of education, and participation in incestuous activity (Cooke-Jackson and Hansen 187). However, Appalachian studies scholars, such as Cooke-Jackson and Hansen, call attention to the systemic challenges Appalachians face in that they "live in poor, depressed regions far from access to quality resources such as grocery stores, employment opportunities, or quality health care" (187). Specifically, Cooke-Jackson and Hansen discuss the "toothless hillbilly" stereotype that reflects one of the major health disparities within the region: lack of access to dental care (189). In doing so, these Appalachian scholars draw attention to the fact that while Appalachian stereotypes might have some truth to them, it must also be recognized that this is reason welfare services rather than reason to blame Appalachians for the challenges they have inherited.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

In this chapter, I provide an introduction to my project, explain its importance in the realm of scholarship and media depictions, describe my method, and define key terms that will be used in my study. The importance of this study lies in the gap it fills within Appalachian studies scholarship and the evidence it provides in contrast to the stereotypes about Appalachia. The key terms included are hegemonic discourses, stereotype, and of course, Appalachia. In the chapter that follows, I will provide a review of the literature concerning the social construction of Appalachia, and more specifically, the social construction of women within the region.

CHAPTER II: Literature Review

In order to deconstruct stereotypes surrounding women in the Appalachian region, it is important to first understand the factors other scholars have identified as pertinent to the development of such stereotypes. Thus, in addition to describing the geographic region that encompasses what we know to be Appalachia, I begin this chapter by discussing how Appalachian identity and culture have been socially constructed through hegemonic systems within the United States, both historically and currently. I then discuss how the social construction of Appalachia has positioned, and more specifically, stereotyped women within the region. Further, I explore the political, cultural, and economic impact contemporary women endure as a result of such social constructions. Finally, I discuss the importance of accurate media representation of Appalachian women so that the social, political, and cultural importance of women in Appalachia might be realized.

Defining the Appalachian Region

Before discussing the social construction of the Appalachian region, it is important to first understand what people mean when referring to the geographic region known as "Appalachia." Geographically speaking, Appalachia is a 206,000-square-mile stretch of land in the eastern United States that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountain range from Alabama to New York. In addition to Alabama and New York, the Appalachian region encompasses 420 counties within eleven states: Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky, West Virginia, Ohio, Maryland, and Pennsylvania (Catte 11). Appalachia is not only home to over twenty-million people, but the region also happens to house the greatest biodiversity in North America (Fraley 365). Despite the beauty that comes with such an abundance of biodiversity, including abounding forests, roaring waterfalls,

and breathtaking mountain top views, Appalachia—and those who reside there—have become synonymous with "other" in the American consciousness. It is essential to establish that the "dirty, ugly, unkempt, and decidedly different than the rest of the country" imagery (Fraley 365) in which Appalachia provokes, are not an accidental or coincidental phenomena. Instead, the construction of Appalachia can be attributed to long-standing, persisting hegemonic industries that have successfully exploited Appalachians in the interest of self-serving economic gain and elitist entertainment. Considering this reality, it is important to further discuss the literature that explores the origins of such hegemonic discourses and their contribution to the social construction of Appalachia.

Early Constructions of Appalachia

Prior to the late nineteenth century, the perceived differences between the Appalachian region and other rural areas of the United States were based only on their distinct geographic locations, as opposed to their perceived cultural deviations. This changed, however, when *color writers,* to whom the region owes much of its original distinction, "breathed life into *Appalachia* as a discernible and distinct part of the country" through magazines, such as *Lippincott's* (Richards 156). These late nineteenth century color writers are credited with being catalysts for the social construction of deviant Appalachia because of their invention of the "hillbilly" persona (Richards 156).

More specifically, color writers painted Appalachians as "backwards" mountain people who remained "untouched by the forces of modernization" (Straw 10 qtd Hess et al. 10) in comparison to the rest of the "developed" United States. Take, for example, a 1910 excerpt from "color essay" author Horace Kephart: "in Far Appalachia, it seemed I might realize the past in the present, see with my own eyes what life must have been to my pioneer ancestor" (Catte 37).

It can be seen within this excerpt that Kephart is just one among many color authors who projected the American ideal of wealth as an indicator of progress and moral success. Further, color writers gave these "hillbilly" mountain dwellers a reputation for their so-called "excessively large families" and violent participation in "moonshining" and "feuding" (Straw 9 qtd Hess et al. 10).

Such portrayals of Appalachians functioned as entertainment for middle-class audiences who were living outside of, but seemingly yearned to understand, the "peculiarities" of the Appalachian region (Richards 156). Moreover, historian Henry Shapiro claims the beginning of the "local color" genre "emerged as a response to a substantial market for descriptive pieces which the readers of the new middle-class monthlies would find interesting" (Hsiung 103). However, other Appalachian scholars claim that such forms of entertainment had ill-intent extending beyond the aim to entertain immediate color writer audiences. In fact, communication scholar Matthew Richards claims that such characterization of the region "helped to license exploitation of the land for a variety of industries and established a vocabulary to speak for and about the Appalachian population" (156). Here, Richards calls attention to what Appalachian historian Elizabeth Catte deems a "profitable narrative." Profitable narratives throughout Appalachian history, as described by Catte, are indeed *flawed* narratives told with the malicious intent of justifying exploitative capitalistic action on behalf of industrialism (36).

The initial profitable narrative of the Appalachian region, as discussed by both Richards and Catte, is one that unfolded--and continues to unfold--in the interest of the coal industry. This long-standing, profitable narrative began with the post-Civil War era, during which industrialists focused on the acquisition of economically advantageous land. In doing so, industrialists sought the promises of wealth held within the Appalachian timberlands and mineral regions. Soon

thereafter, "coal quickly became the region's most valuable resource, fueling much of the nation's industrial expansion" such as railroad rebuilding and power generation (Catte 36). The ease with which coal companies felt they could and *should* expand into and exploit Appalachians and their land is, of course, an example of a profitable narrative in action.

More specifically, coal company scouts viewed themselves as gracing "poor" landowners living in coal-rich areas with "quick cash" in exchange for obtaining mineral rights. Further, coal companies saw their recruitment of Appalachians into the local workforce as a way to propel "backward mountaineers" into the "expanding spirit of industry" (Catte 37). In this case, as Appalachian studies scholar Jill Fraley claimed, "the iconic image of Appalachian poverty serve[d] to justify economic domination of Appalachia by the coal industry" (370). No matter how justified the coal industry might have felt in their domination of the region, however, it has done no such favors for Appalachia. Indeed, coal mining has brought mass environmental destruction to the area, including, but not limited to, the obliteration of wilderness, forest, wildlife, plants, and contamination of streams (Fraley 367). Thus, the expansion and invasion of the coal industry serves as just one example of how flawed narratives of culture and class told on behalf of color writers has led to the exploitation of Appalachian land and labor.

20th Century Constructions of Appalachia

The cycle in which middle class Americans want to understand the "peculiarities" of the Appalachian region, and subsequently share their misconstrued discoveries with the rest of America, remained largely unchanged from the era of color writers to the mid-1900s. The first example of this long-standing pattern was propelled by the Great Depression in the 1930s, when urban and suburban Americans once again became intrigued by low- and working-class people, such as those living in Appalachia. It was during this time that journalists made their way to

Appalachia to report on, gaze at, and film the region in an attempt to garner support for legislation designed to bring the region out of poverty.

Revealed in these attempts to make an "exhibit" out of Appalachia, as communication scholar Matthew Richards stated, was an America "invested in the ideals of progress and economic security" (156). Rather than provide economic security for Appalachia, however, media attention only reinforced the image of Appalachians as "dangerous, inbred, violent, ignorant, and lazy rural hillbill[ies]" (Richards 156). Seemingly reminiscent of the color writer era, stereotypical images of Appalachia were once again made popular by the likings of cartoons, periodicals, and journals. Such depictions of Appalachia, much like the media produced by color writers, served purposes beyond just that of entertaining the American middle-class. In fact, these images "strategically articulated a dependent population that made sense of poverty as a cultural and internal flaw" as they failed to acknowledge the "economic and social configurations that bound the region to outside interests" (Richards 157). In doing so, Richards claims that such stereotypes served as justification for economic policy and "the region's continued exploitation by resource extraction industries" (157). Here, Richards is echoing Appalachian scholar Jill Fraley, in his claim that stereotypes are "tools for oppression, subordination, and establishment of lasting power structures within Appalachia" (367).

These power structures became evident once again in the 1960s, when Appalachia was under the public eye once again as poverty became a priority on the public agenda in America. Just as was the case in the 1930s, historical tropes and stereotypes used to make sense of the region were relied upon to strengthen ties between the region and poverty (Richards 157). With that being said, historical tropes and stereotypes were not solely relied upon in the 1960s, as an influx of new television programs "playing on negative stereotypes of Appalachian[s]" were

broadcast across America throughout the decade. During this time, negative stereotypes were depicted through, most notably, *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962-1971), a show that portrayed "a hillbilly family from the Ozarks transplanted to Hollywood after striking oil on their land back in the hills." Among other television shows within the Appalachian television genre were *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-1968), *The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979-1982), and *Hee Haw* (1969-1971). Not to mention, comic strips, movies, and nonfiction works were also used to communicate negative stereotypes about Appalachia to the U.S. American public (Cooke-Jackson and Hansen 184-185).

As such, it was during this time that more so than ever, Appalachian culture was linked to classed vocabularies that reinforced the region as "something distinct from the norm" (Richards 157). The norm, of course, was the American ideal of "progress" that took shape in the form of "industrial production, urbanization, consumption, technology, and modern education and cultural values" (Eller 1 qtd Richards 157). Thus, the construction of Appalachians as impoverished and uneducated mountain dwellers with little to say for themselves served as the perfect "antithesis" to the American definition of "progress over time" (Richards 158).

21st Century Constructions of Appalachia

Interestingly enough, what has indeed failed to make progress overtime is not Appalachia itself, but rather the media representations of Appalachia that have remained largely unchanged over the past two centuries. Most recently, Appalachian studies scholars have discussed this phenomenon in relation to the release of the book and movie, *Hillbilly Elegy*, which, in featuring the "harrowing" childhood of author J.D. Vance, portrays Appalachia once again "as a place of alarming social decline, smoldering and misplaced resentment, and poor life choices" (Catte 8). In doing so, Appalachian studies scholar Andy Scerri, accused Vance of ignoring "the long

historical shadow cast by exploitative 'extractivism'" [from the coal industry], and further, claims that *Elegy* has given good-intentioned liberals more reason to paint Appalachia as an "alien world of rural whites trapped in false consciousness and a spiral of self-destruction" (Isenberg 27 qtd Scerri 203). For Appalachian studies scholars, however, the depiction of Appalachia as an "alien world" or said another way, the "other," is an all too familiar narrative.

Appalachia as Other

Indeed, many Appalachian scholars have drawn upon Edward Said's classic work, *Orientalism*, to describe the ways in which Appalachia has been "othered" from the rest of the United States. To be "othered" is to be subjected to "the resulting dichotomy and cultural implications" that occur "when the dominant culture manages and produces representations (codes) of a people or culture unlike their own" (Hess et al. 11). In Said's original work, the concept of *Orientalism* referred to the "styles of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and the Occident" (2 qtd Hess et al. 11).

More specifically, the concept of the "Orient" referred to what is considered "the East" while the Occident referred to "the West." As this concept applies to Appalachia, scholars, such as Matthew Richards, "do not contend that Appalachia constitutes an internal colony," however, they do argue that the region "is articulated as an internal cultural boundary" (153). In being articulated as an internal cultural boundary, the function of "othering" on behalf of the dominant culture is to unequally position the "othered" group in "relation to those doing the 'othering.'" Much to the pleasure of those doing the "othering," this process of establishing an "other" allows a "space in which they can define themselves in contrast to the 'Others' who are designated as different" (Pickered, 2001 qtd Hess et al. 12). As it applies to Appalachia, the "other" has been

articulated as a homogenous culture in that much of the population is white, impoverished, and unable to think for themselves.

Appalachia as Scapegoat

Perhaps, then, Appalachian studies scholars claim, this explains the ease with which Americans have framed Appalachia as the scapegoat for the faults of the entire country, not short of environmental and societal tragedies, and most recently, the election of President Donald Trump (Engelhardt 4; Catte 22). It was during the 2016 presidential election that, once again, journalists, specifically those representing *New York Times*, *MSNBC*, *CNN*, and the *New Yorker*, visited and attempted to decode the mysteries of Appalachia (Catte 30-31). As history repeats itself, Catte claimed that such a desire to analyze Appalachia was sustained by the release of *Hillbilly Elegy*, and "Vance's consequent media ubiquity as chief analyzer of the white working class" (32). While media outlets tried their best to isolate Appalachia as "Trump Country," Catte rejected this notion by pointing out that votes in Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and even districts in California and New York also helped Trump secure presidential office (33). Even so, Catte was sure to acknowledge that it was true Appalachia contributed to Trump's win. However, the danger in positioning Appalachia as a monolithic "other" in both Trump election coverage and portrayals in *Hillbilly Elegy*, lies in the erasure of diversity that does exist within the region. Such representations of Appalachia, as discussed by Appalachian studies scholars, ignore that there are, and always have been, individuals with progressive politics and those who are nonwhite, LGBTQ, and young residing within the region (Catte 9; Hsiung 102). Further, such depictions of the region have failed to acknowledge the contributions

that women, in particular, may they be of progressive politics, nonwhite, LGBTQ, young or otherwise, have made to Appalachia.

Intersection of Women and Appalachia

The failure to acknowledge contributions women have made to the Appalachian region speaks to the larger narrative of how women have been historically positioned within the region and subsequently stereotyped throughout the rest of the country. Until recently, Appalachian history had narrated a story in which men, in their economic roles as landowners, coal miners, politicians, behaved as the main actors for development within the region. Women, on the other hand, had either been completely ignored or positioned as valuable only in relation to domestic support provided to men (Maggard 17; "Beyond the Mountains" 5; "Walk-Ons in the Third Act" 1). Appalachian studies scholar Barbara Smith claimed that women lack proper representation within the region's history because "researchers have been understandably preoccupied with the region's poverty, underdevelopment, and extraordinary legacy of overt class conflict, especially in the bituminous coal industry" (5-6).

Such a claim, however, reveals that scholars have deemed women as irrelevant to the economic and political history of Appalachia, when women have always played an important role in sustaining the economic vitality and influencing the political climate of the region (Oberhauser 222-223; Patrick et al. 199; Wilkerson 194-195). While it was not until two decades ago that Appalachian studies scholars began taking a feminist approach to the region, the recently acknowledged examples of such economic vitality and political influence that have occurred throughout Appalachian history are abundant. For one, Appalachian studies scholars have recognized the economic importance of women's role in household labor and management in regard to survival of the working class and the sustainment of the coal industry ("Walk-Ons in

the Third Act" 12; Maggard 20). Moreover, based on research from several scholars, the political

activism of Appalachian women is evident in that they have not only been involved in, but

mobilized, industrial strikes and trade unions since the birth of industrialization itself (Maggard

17; Wilkerson 184). Take, for example, the 1973-74 Brookside Strike, a coal miner strike over

union representation, in which a large number of Kentucky women mobilized to form a picket

line and as a consequence, faced violence and backlash from strikebreakers. In recognition of

further examples of activism, Appalachian studies scholar Sally Maggard also points to another

early 1970s union representation strike in which over 200 hospital employees, a majority of

whom were women, formed a twenty-four-house picket line for over two years (16).

Despite the efforts of Appalachian studies scholars to portray women and their economic

and political involvement more accurately within the region, negative stereotypes of Appalachian

women still persist in popular media. In fact, within the American consciousness, Appalachian

women are imagined as passive, ignorant, barefoot, and pregnant (Maggard 17; Cooke-Johnson

and Hansen 187; "Beyond the Mountains" 6). Such stereotypes are not rejected in contemporary

representations of Appalachian women, such that of portrayals in *Hillbilly Elegy*, which does

little to contradict traditional stereotypes. Other contemporary portrayals of Appalachian women,

such as those featured in *Orange Is the New Black,* only serve to further reinforce the stereotype

that Appalachian women, and Appalachians in general, are "white trash." White trash, which

functions as a classist slur and racial epithet, defines the character "Pennsyltucky," who has roots

in Appalachia. In fact, rather than her missing teeth being attributed to lack of dental care access,

her "genetics" receive the blame (Scott 225). According to Appalachian studies scholars Patrick

et al., the problem with such stereotypes lies within the fact that living within the context of

negative social stereotypes only furthers the financial and health challenges women face within

the region (208). Examples of such challenges have already presented themselves, in that women face lower educational attainment, fewer economic opportunities, and higher levels of depressive symptoms in comparison to their male-counterparts (Patrick et al. 201). The solution, Appalachian studies scholars argue, is not only the rejection of Appalachian stereotypes but also a reconstruction of the important contributions women have made to the region, both historically and contemporarily (Patrick 208; "Walk-Ons in the Third Act" 22). Thus, I aim to employ this study in an effort to offer a reconstruction of important contributions contemporary women are making to the Appalachian region.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

To summarize, the social construction of Appalachian stereotypes has beginnings in the extractive industries that have had a persistent presence throughout the region. What is more, is recent research and media portrayals involving the region fall short in terms of providing representative stories about those who currently reside within the Appalachian region. Further, Appalachia and those who live there have been effectively depicted as the "other" in the American consciousness and subsequently positioned as the scapegoat for the woes of the entire country. While such social constructions impact everyone in the region, women, in particular, have been grossly overlooked and overgeneralized in both Appalachian scholarship and media. In the next chapter, I will describe provide a more in-depth descript of the methodology I used to execute my study.

CHAPTER III: Method

The purpose of my study is to create a podcast that illuminates the experiences and voices of contemporary Appalachian women in an attempt to dismantle media-based stereotypes about people within the region. In light of creating a podcast to achieve this purpose, I conducted and analyzed eight interviews to identify the dominant themes that emerged from the collective stories. By identifying the recurring themes, I will be able to articulate the ways in which the contemporary experiences of my participants compare to current portrayals, or the lack thereof, of Appalachian women in written publications, such as magazines and cartoons, as well as visual depictions, such as television and films. This will be achieved through attentive listening practices during the interviews and thorough coding techniques when analyzing the recordings of each interview. My coding techniques involve the creation of transcripts for each interview, followed by a process in which I highlight and record major themes that occur in most, if not all, interviews with my participants. Further, my analysis, along with various excerpts of my interviews, will be embedded into a podcast of my creation, so that audiences might come to hold a different understanding of Appalachia than ones promoted by prejudiced media portrayals.

In facilitating interviews, I elicit my participants' storytelling by allowing them the space to reflect on their lived experiences as they feel most comfortable. I elected to conduct semi-structured interviews to carry out my study. The semi-structured interview methodology allows for consistency across all interviews in that "they are based on a pre-established set of questions that are asked to all respondents" (Brennan 28). While the questions do remain consistent, the benefit of semi-structured interviews lies in their exploration of "deeply nuanced inner worlds" that are constructed by the feelings, emotions, experiences, and values of participants (Gubrium

and Holstein 57 qtd Brennan 29). This exploration of lived realities is facilitated by the flexibility of semi-structured interviews in that they allow the researcher to vary the order of pre-established questions and ask follow-up questions based on interviewee responses. Further, the process of making a conscious effort to understand the lived realities of each respondent implies that those who employ this methodology view their research population as "important meaning makers" (Brennan 28). In other words, researchers who embody semi-structured interview techniques are attempting to understand realities they consider to be socially constructed, and further, derive meaning from the ways in which respondents construct their own realities.

Thus, qualitative interviews provide an opportunity for participants to share their story in a space that perceives their lived experiences as determinants of important meaning. Providing this space is especially empowering in regard to marginalized groups who lack proper representation, as semi-structured interviews enable the construction of "empowering narratives that allow diverse perspectives and multiple voices to emerge" (Brennan 29). Considering women are a historically marginalized group, especially in relation to their representation in media portrayals of Appalachia (Maggard; Cooke-Johnson and Hansen; "Beyond the Mountains;" "Walk-Ons in the Third-Act"), choosing to conduct semi-structured interviews ensures that members of the marginalized group themselves are the ones in control of socially constructing what it means to be an Appalachian woman.

While a traditional ethnographic researcher would formulate a written analysis based on their attentive listening and coding processes, I elected to instead create a podcast episode that encompasses an extensive oral summary of my analyses. A podcast can be described as a type of online audio broadcast that is known for being popular among multitaskers who listen" while commuting to or from work, doing chores, working out, and so on" (Oberlo). Further, podcasts

are known for being convenient as, without a visual element, they do not require the focus that a video, blog post, or documentary demand (Oberlo). My decision to produce a podcast as opposed to a written analysis proves to be the more effective option for deconstructing stereotypes about Appalachian women for three main reasons.

First, stereotypes about Appalachian women have permeated the American consciousness for over one hundred years, meaning that they have a longstanding and widespread foundation in the United States. Therefore, it is essential that the device used to deconstruct these stereotypes has the potential to influence a large portion of Americans. Seeing as there were approximately 120 million podcast listeners in the United States in 2021 and a projection of at least 160 million potential listeners in 2023 (Götting), it is safe to say that podcasts are increasingly growing in popularity. The popularity of podcasts not only lies in their convenience for multitaskers but also their high level of accessibility for all demographics. Podcasts are available free of charge on websites platforms, Apple applications such as *Podcasts, Spotify*, and *Apple Music*, and also on Android products through applications such as *Google Podcasts*. Thus, any American who has a smartphone, or even just access to a computer at a public library, can listen to podcasts regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Second, I have found both through research and my own experiences as a community member that Appalachian stereotypes stem from a place not only of misunderstanding but from a feeling of an inability to relate to those who live in the region. Therefore, I believe it is important that the actual voices of Appalachian women are heard in the telling of their stories. It might be easy for someone to dismiss Appalachians as "hillbillies" when they have simply never met one and thus, view the region as a collective and homogenous group. I see my choice to use the power of voice as an opportunity for listeners to "meet" Appalachian women, and therefore,

come to understand that they have complex identities and stories that contribute to the humanization of their existence.

Third, I believe that no one is more capable of sharing their lived experiences than the person who has lived those experiences themselves. My decision to share my analysis in the form of a podcast rather than in written form gives my participants a platform to share their story. While I will be analyzing their responses in my podcast, I am also quite literally sharing their stories, which actively engages with the reframing of power for women who have historically been under and misrepresented in Appalachian history.

For the purpose of my study, I had the pleasure of interviewing a total of eight Appalachian women. I began this process with the understanding that each woman has unique lived experiences, but each of my participants do share the commonality of having connections to my hometown of Berea, Kentucky, which is located in western Appalachia. Further, my respondents lack racial diversity, in that each of them is white, which does reflect the historical demographic makeup of the region. However, I believe it is important to acknowledge that the lack of racial diversity in my podcast regrettably does not reflect the important work that women of color are doing in the Appalachian region.

However, my respondents do differ in regard to their socioeconomic status. I had the opportunity to conduct interviews with a retired physician, an experienced potter, an enthusiastic business owner, a dedicated preschool and first grade teacher, an administrator at a nonprofit, a tireless volunteer, and the owner of Appalachia's most famous inn. Further, my chosen research population represents a broad age range, with my youngest participant being 44 and my oldest being 82. It is also important to note that no matter their age, each of my participants has spent at

least ten years in the Appalachian region. Thus, my definition of "Appalachian" is not

constructed to having been born in the region, but rather, making a living in the region.

In order to ethically carry out the methodological steps of my research, I first sought

approval from the Human Subjects Research Committee at the College of Wooster to interview

my participants. After receiving approval, I emailed and/or called twelve women I saw as leaders

in connection to the Berea community with an approved script (see Appendix A). If the potential

interviewee agreed to participate in my study, I then requested a time and date to meet with

them, either in-person or over the phone, and then sent the informed consent form (See Appendix

B) to their email. At each designated interview time, I prefaced our conversation with an

overview of my experience with ethnographic research, the details of this specific research

project, and finally, why deconstructing stereotypes is important to me. I shared this information

not only to help the respondent understand the importance of their involvement in my study, but

also to disclose information about myself in an effort to create a sense of rapport. Once

completing this initial step, I then asked the following questions of each participant:

1. *Please tell me about your educational background.*
2. *Please tell me about the role you play in your family.*
3. *Please tell me about the role you play in your community.*
4. *Can you tell me about a time you have felt unnoticed by your community?*
5. *Can you tell me about a time you have felt acknowledged by your community?*
6. *Outside of your family and your place of work, what kind of influence do you think you've had on people who live in Berea?*
7. *What or who inspires you?*
8. *What is a challenge you have had to overcome that you are most proud of?*
9. *In what ways are your parents, one or both, most proud of you? (Are they most proud of traditional roles or professional and community-oriented roles?)*
10. *What concerns do you have about the general area in which you live?*
11. *How do you think Appalachia has influenced you as a woman?*
12. *Is there something that you would like to tell me about your experiences that I haven't asked you about?*

I asked each of these questions with the intention of reflecting dynamics of gendered power that participants have in their family, community, and ultimately, the Appalachian region. Additionally, due to the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews, I asked follow-up questions in an effort to gain a more in-depth understanding of their lived experiences as women living in Appalachia. The shortest conversation I had with a participant was approximately forty-five minutes, while the longest was just over two hours long. No matter the length of the interview, I am grateful for the time I was able to spend with these women, either face to face or over the phone, to learn more about how their reality is constructed.

After completing the interview collection, I was then able to practice attentive listening and thorough coding techniques to identify the dominant themes that emerged from the collective stories. By identifying the recurring themes, I was able to identify how the experiences of my participants compare to how Appalachian women have been portrayed for centuries in various forms of media. After having identified recurring themes, I was then able to make careful sections of audio excerpts from my interviews that capture participant stories. After completing the written script and choosing audio that best captured my interviews, I was then able to integrate this content on an application called iMovie. This application allowed me to make necessary audio edits, input music, and seamlessly piece my podcast into a cohesive piece of oral literature.

CHAPTER IV: Reflection

As previously established, the purpose of my research was to create a podcast featuring the stories of contemporary Appalachian women to offer an antithesis to the stereotypes and misconceptions about the role women play within the Appalachian region. Specifically, I aimed to highlight the stories of Appalachian women who currently or have previously resided in, and have made an impact on, my hometown of Berea, Kentucky. While stereotypes and misconceptions about Appalachians are not exclusive to women, it was important to focus on this specific population for three reasons. First, Appalachian studies scholarship lacks research regarding the roles and impacts of contemporary women within the region. Second, media representations of Appalachian women perpetuate harmful stereotypes and often fail to offer evidence against these misconceptions. Third, the nature of this research not only addresses a gap in scholarly literature and media representation, but also aims to give my research population the recognition they deserve for their many contributions to the Appalachian region.

It is also important to note that this research has been nothing if not deeply personal. That is, my Independent Study is the physical expression of my gratitude for my Appalachian roots and the women who raised, supported, and surrounded me as I prepared to plant my own seeds in the ground. I have always known Appalachian women, including my own mother, to be strong, creative, resilient, and self-sufficient individuals. Thus, the intention of this project was not to discover *if* Appalachian women defy the harmful stereotypes and misrepresentations that oversimplify their positionality within the region. Instead, my study demonstrates *how* Appalachian women defy these stereotypes and misrepresentations, and therefore, challenges the oversimplification of Appalachian women in media portrayals of the region.

While each of my eight participants shared their unique life experiences during our conversations, common themes regarding how they challenge traditional stereotypes were revealed through close analysis. The following pages will illustrate three common themes of challenging stereotypes and the implications of these findings. These common themes are educational and professional development, place making, and engaged community betterment. Education and professional development refer to high levels of educational attainment and furtherment of professional development. Second, a strong sense of place refers to satisfaction with the *choice* to live within the region as well as a sense of pride in their community. Finally, social awareness is demonstrated by participants playing an active role in community betterment through professional, political, and personal endeavors.

Educational Attainment & Professional Development

First, it is important to recall that throughout American history, media depicts Appalachian women as "ignorant" and "pregnant," leaving little room for those outside of the region to understand other components of their academic or professional identity. That is, the implication of said ignorance and pregnancy, in this case, is such that women within the region have not obtained high levels of education and further, that they are not inclined to initiate professional growth outside of their childbearing roles. Therefore, I asked the interview question, "Please tell me about your educational background" with the intention of understanding *actual* educational attainment levels among Appalachian women in an attempt to reconstruct the false narrative regarding their lack of education.

Contrary to what the commonly held stereotype might suggest, seven out of the eight women I interviewed have not only obtained a four-year college degree, but three of my eight participants have also furthered their education beyond just that of a bachelor's degree. In fact,

six of the eight interviewees obtained their degree from Berea College (Monica L; Sara M; Jenna J; Sarah C; Katie S; and Lori Z), with four of the six women stating that their initial draw to the Berea area was the educational opportunity that the tuition-free private, liberal arts institution posed (Jenna J; Sarah C; Katie S; and Lori Z). It is also important to note that three of my participants sought and obtained advanced degrees and/or certificates from various other institutions. Sara, for example, took an eighteen-month long Executive Leadership course at Harvard University after graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics from Berea College. Similarly, Lori obtained her master's with a focus in interdisciplinary early childhood education from Eastern Kentucky University after graduating from Berea College with a degree in Child and Family Studies. While Nancy did not attend Berea College, she advanced her four-year degree by not only earning a Master's in Social Work, but also through the means of attending and graduating from medical school. Thus, it is evident that the vast majority of my research population has obtained high levels of educational training in their respective areas of study. It is important to note, however, that the intention of acknowledging these educational achievements is not to claim that these women represent the experience of *every* Appalachian woman. Instead, my intention is to add complexity to the oversimplified story that women within the region are ignorant individuals simply because of where they have chosen to live.

In a similar vein, and as mentioned previously, persisting stereotypes suggest that being an Appalachian woman is synonymous with being a pregnant woman. In other words, these stereotypes suggest that the sole worth and value of Appalachian women lie only in their ability to reproduce with little recognition of other aspects of their identity, whether those aspects be personal, professional, or otherwise. It was in consideration of this stereotype that I asked my participants to "Please tell me about the role you play in your community" and inquired further

by asking, "Outside of your family and your place of work, what kind of influence do you think you've had on people who live in Berea?" The responses I received from my participants demonstrate the multifaceted personal, familial, and professional lives Appalachian women do in fact have outside of their childbearing roles.

Katie, who is the mother of two children, serves as a tremendous example of what it means to embody a multifaceted identity, as she discussed the many roles she plays in her community. Most notably, Katie is the founder and sole proprietor of two, and soon to be three, businesses in the Berea area. Her business ventures, which she considers to be her "creative outlets" are that of *Native Bagel Company* and *Nightjar,* with the bagel shop operating by day and the cocktail bar operating by night in a shared restaurant space. Further, Katie has made great strides toward opening what would be the first operating brewery in Berea, as the area has been "dry" until recent years. In addition to being dedicated to her entrepreneurial pursuits, Katie also discussed the process of becoming an elected member of Berea City Council in 2021, as well as the roles and responsibilities that come with the job. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Katie noted that she "has a strong sense she can do anything." Needless to say, Katie has an identity outside of her role as a mother. Thus, while being a mother is certainly something that is important to Katie, the way in which she conducts herself as a member of her community serves as an antithesis to the generalization that Appalachian women solely identify as mothers.

In addition to Katie, it is evident that my participants who are mothers have also made other substantive contributions to their community. Like Katie, Barbara and Sarah managed to balance being the sole-proprietors of their respective local businesses, *Snug Hollow* and *Tater Knob*, while also taking on the responsibilities of motherhood. Jenna and Lori, for example, discussed not only being committed to caring for their own children, but also to serving lower-

income children and families in their community through educational and food services. Not to mention, Sara, who is the Chief Investment Officer for the Federation of Appalachian Housing Enterprises (Fahe), a non-profit membership organization working to "bring the American dream to Appalachia," has also managed to balance the needs of her family on top of the demands of her job. Thus, the mere lifestyle of my participants acts as resistance to the preconceived notion that Appalachian women exist only to bear and raise children.

To contradict the stereotype even further that being an Appalachian woman is synonymous with being a pregnant woman, it is also important to mention that not *all* my participants have children. Nancy, for example, has instead dedicated her life's work to practicing medicine for low-income patients in both West Virginia and Kentucky. Thus, there are several ways in which my participants challenge the misconception that Appalachian women are "ignorant" and "pregnant."

Strong Sense of Place

In addition to challenging the stereotype that all Appalachian women are ignorant and pregnant, my interview conversations revealed that my participants conduct themselves in such a way that contradicts the idea that women within the region are "passive." Most often, in the case of Appalachian stereotypes, passivity suggests a lack of autonomy regarding the ability to *choose* to be within the region. That is, media portrayals depict Appalachia as being a place from which people should escape, which implies that anyone who stays is not doing so by choice. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the frequency with which the Appalachian women I interviewed discussed their strong affinity for the region (Sarah C; Jenna J; Monica L; Sara M; and Barbara N). Some participants drew specific attention to the landscape of Appalachia, with one woman stating, "I can't imagine not living in this region of heavy mountains, beautiful historical ancient

mountains" and further discussed that she "feel[s] the energy of this land we live on" (Sarah C).

Similarly, two participants discussed how much they enjoy sharing the natural beauty of the

surrounding mountainous landscape with visitors from outside the region (Sara M; Barbara N),

as well as how much they enjoy it themselves (Katie S). More specifically, Katie touched on her

appreciation for the natural capital that Appalachia has to offer in saying, "She [my sister] has a

beautiful pond. I can swim there for free whenever I want." Katie said this in light of the

realization that "There's so many rich, amazing things about living in a small community that we

take for granted." Thus, it is evident that, contrary to popular belief, the decision to live in

Appalachia is one reflecting agency rather than complacency.

In addition to their admiration for the landscape of Appalachia, several participants also

made a point to mention their liking for the cultural aspects of the region. For example, Barbara

reflected on her appreciation for how "Everybody lives together out here" and further explained

that "We don't have any gated communities [in the Berea area]. You'll be driving down the road

and you'll see a little brick house and a hundred feet from that might be a little McMansion. We

all play together, we work together, we grow up together, and it's just kind of a wonderful

way…for people to be raised." Here, Barbara is alluding to the fact that regardless of

socioeconomic status, it is commonplace for Appalachians to dwell together. Further, another

participant who moved to the region later in her life, explained "I think we made the right choice

coming here [Appalachia] and it's just…been wonderful" (Monica L). Thus, due to the clear

affinity my interviewees have for the area they live, my research population exhibits a clear

contradiction to the stereotype that Appalachian women are "passive" regarding their decision to

live within the region.

Social Awareness & Community Betterment

While it is true that my respondents exhibit a strong sense of place within Appalachia, it is also important to acknowledge their commitment toward improving the Berea community both in their personal and professional endeavors. Such commitments demonstrate the important contributions women make to the region, despite media portrayals that suggest Appalachian women are apolitical beings who are "unable to think for themselves." Thus, in asking my participants, "Please tell me about the role you play in your community" and "What concerns do you have about the general area in which you live?" I was able to inquire about *actual* efforts put toward community improvement on behalf of Appalachian women.

In response to my inquiries, four of my participants relayed their concerns related to drug-use problems within the region (Sara M; Sarah C; Katie S; and Nancy R), with Katie even claiming to want to "stop everything I'm doing and start working on reform in that field." Further, several of my participants expressed their concerns with local politics being "polarized" (Katie S; Nancy R). In response to this specific concern, Katie explained that she believes "the best way to affect change in communities or even in the world is through business," hence the foundation for her business being "love and love for community." As far as issues related to poverty in the Appalachian region are concerned, Jenna, Sara, and Lori particularly focus on relief efforts through their professional careers. More specifically, both Jenna and Lori discussed the ways in which they have served low-income children and families within their respective communities. Further, as mentioned previously, Sara has dedicated her professional career to the Federation of Appalachian Housing Enterprises (Fahe), which aims to address housing disparities between Appalachia and the rest of the country. In short, my participants are not only aware of social issues within the Appalachian region but are also putting daily efforts into

bettering the Berea area. Thus, my interviewees are living examples of what it means to have a strong sense of place while also making valiant efforts to improve their community.

Implications of Research Findings

In consideration of my research findings, it is undeniable that depictions of Appalachian women in media, and subsequently, opinions of them in the American consciousness, are a result of social construction based in oppressive systems dating as far back as the nineteenth century. Thus, it is important that Appalachian studies scholarship continues to research the roles and impacts of contemporary women within the region, such as their contributions to political, economic, and community development. Further, it is not only important that further research be conducted, but that media depictions of Appalachian women begin to reflect the actual stories of those who live within the region. Through my chosen interview methodology and podcast creation, I was able to utilize my personal connections to the region in order to give my participants the opportunity to express themselves and contest the inaccurate media depictions of Appalachian women. Thus, it is implied that ethnographic research is best suited for studying Appalachian women and their importance to the region. Last, my research illustrates the importance of giving recognition to those who make contributions to their communities.

Limitations

It was an absolute pleasure to have conversations with each one of my research participants, however, I regret that that my podcast did not include and represent more historically marginalized voices. Considering the nature of this study, I know it would have been beneficial to hear from a diverse array of perspectives beyond just that of white, middle-aged women. Further, while I thoroughly enjoyed learning about women from the Berea, Kentucky area, it should be noted that conducting ethnographic research in other areas of the region would

present a more representative depiction of contemporary Appalachian women. If I were given more time, I would use it to travel to more areas within the region to learn more stories that serve as antitheses to common misconceptions about Appalachian women.

Recommendations for Future Research

In light of the limitations of this study, I recommend that future researchers not only continue pursuing the intricacies of the stories of Appalachian women, but that they continue to do so from the perspective of marginalized voices who reside in all portions of the region. It is evident that Appalachia has a rich history as well as current happenings outside of the coal industry and poverty that are worth listening to and sharing with others. Thus, I recommend that researchers not only attempt to uncover historical events, but also the contemporary cultural and societal environment of the region. In doing so, I suggest that researchers not only focus on women, but other voices that have often been ignored throughout Appalachian history, which applies to any demographic not consisting of those who identify as straight, cisgender, white males.

Final Thoughts

I will leave you with a quote that one of my participants shared with me during our interview: "The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new." I hope that my project leaves you feeling inspired to build new ideas of what it means to be Appalachian. Further, my wish is that this study inspires you to be appropriately cautious about the stereotypes you hear about those whom you do not know, and as a result, employ curiosity to seek out their stories for yourself. Sometimes, the process of listening is a political act, but more importantly, the process of listening is *always* an act of love.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Dear [Insert Name Here],

Hello! I hope this email finds you doing well. My name is Cecelia Bagnoli, and I am writing to you today about a project I am hoping to complete for my senior thesis at the College of Wooster in the upcoming months. I have chosen to conduct research on stereotypes about women who live in the Appalachian region. The literature has told me that women who reside in the region are historically depicted as passive, apolitical, and of little value to economic development in media representations. Because I know these stereotypes are incorrect, I am hoping to create a podcast that showcases the stories and experiences of *real* women–not ones of Hollywood creation.

In doing so, I am wondering if you would be willing to participate in an interview with me that would then be featured on a podcast for my study. I am inspired by you and the impact you have had on your community, and I believe others would be inspired if given the chance to hear your story. If you are interested, I would be happy to follow up with more details about the project and the interview process itself.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,

Cecelia

Appendix B: Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER

Dismantling Female Appalachian Stereotypes
Principal Investigator: Cecelia Bagnoli, Department of Communication Studies

Purpose
You are being asked to participate in a research study where the main purpose is to analyze and document your personal experiences as a woman living in Appalachia. The goal is to understand how real stories of Appalachian women compare to the stereotypical representations. Your story will also be saved in an online archive, in tandem with other stories, for public use.

Procedures
If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to discuss your experiences of living in Appalachia. While you might be asked follow-up questions based on your answer, you will have a large amount of control regarding what we discuss during your interview. The interview then will slightly edited (i.e., taking out long pauses, background noises, etc.) as well as put in conversation with other interviewee experiences and then uploaded to a public online archive.

Risks

Some people that participate in this study may become upset remembering tragic or personally troubling aspects of their experiences. You are not required to share these aspects of your story. These interviews will also be published in an online database, so if you decide to share your name, it will be accessible online. Only your first name will be provided. You can choose to be anonymous, and your name can be changed.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits to you for your participation. An indirect benefit is that the podcast aims to provide a more accurate media representation of Appalachia than most media outlets over the past 250 years, and in doing so, dismantle stereotypes about Appalachia.

Compensation
There is no direct compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality
Your recording will remain available to the public online in the form of a podcast. Only your first name will be provided. If you decide to participate anonymously, your name will be changed. You will be provided information on how to access this database once it has been constructed. If you would like to have your information removed from the site, you may contact me, and I will delete the recording. Unique names will be stored on a password-protected Microsoft Word file. This file will be destroyed once all data is collected. Audio recordings will be stored securely on a password-protected computer. The unedited audio recordings and select transcripts will be destroyed after the conclusion of the study.

Costs
There is no cost to you beyond time and effort required to complete the procedure described above.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw
You may refuse to participate in the study. If you decide to participate, you may change your mind about being in the study and withdraw at any point during the process.

Questions
If you have any questions, please ask me. If you have additional questions later, you can contact me by email at cbagnoli22@wooster.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Oscar Mejía, at omejia@wooster.edu.

Consent

Your signature below will indicate that you have decided to volunteer as a research subject, that you have read and understand the information provided above, and that you are at least 18 years of age. Signature of participant _____ Date _____

You will be provided a copy of this form.