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Staying Power: Examining Resistance in West Virginia

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STAYING POWER: EXAMINING RESISTANCE IN WEST VIRGINIA

Beth Nardella

Dissertation submitted
to the Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Design
at West Virginia University

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in
Human and Community Development

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Abstract

STAYING POWER: EXAMINING RESISTANCE IN WEST VIRGINIA

Beth Nardella

West Virginia has been plagued with high unemployment rates, high rates of addiction and poverty, and some of the worst health outcomes in the country. Outmigration has been the paradigm for many, but why do some people choose to stay? Numerous scholars have written about outmigration, but there is little information on why people stay. After decades of people leaving, many who remain have made a choice to stay. This choice can be seen as an act of resistance against the problematic discourses surrounding the Appalachian region and the economic disparities found within rural communities. West Virginians are often dependent on the boom and bust cycles of industry, where unjust power dynamics are developed and perpetuated. Those who stay have strong ties to place and a sense of identity connected to the region. Place plays a significant role in connecting identity constructs to social action. Communities can build on their social capital and strong ties to place in forging new paths to staying. As identity is inextricably linked to place, a love of place can be a powerful means to harnessing resistance. These identity constructs can challenge insider/outsider binaries by showing the depth of diversity within communities and people who are committed to place. Building action from placed identities can advance the region as people write their own stories instead of continuing to react against decades of negative discourse. The tide of outmigration is unlikely to end soon. Finding out why people are staying and using that information for development can be a powerful tool for disrupting problematic narratives, and agency for those who stay. Through a series of three essays, in this dissertation I research the power dynamics in West Virginia and how those relationships are perpetuated and/or resisted. I also explore how alternative acts of resistance are used by people who stay and their place-based identity constructs.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In 1958 an article was published in the journal *Land Economics* advocating for the relocation of people from rural areas (Eller 2008). B.H. Luebke, an agricultural economist, and John Fraser Hart, a rural and agricultural geographer, argued that, “Economic betterment for the great majority of the people of the Southern Appalachians is not to be found in development of the meager resources of the local area but in migration to other areas more richly endowed by nature and by man” (pg. 53). Citing a 1930 report on population density they showed that outmigration was not a recent trend but a characteristic of the region, going back as early as 1870 when the first wave to leave were “lucky children whose parents could afford to send them to boarding schools outside the community” (pg. 46). According to their findings, by the mid-1950s, only about 20% of the people were choosing to stay. They described the area as having few resources or opportunities to support the residents, who had little education and were living in substandard conditions.

As part of their research, Luebke and Hart (1958) interviewed some of the people in the area. One woman who had left and returned said she would ““not exchange local work at low wages for a pot of gold somewhere else”” (pg. 48). They found that locals, like this woman, were not interested in the amenities of the city but preferred the activities that life in the mountains offered. Despite understanding that many people wanted to remain, they proposed a plan that involved enabling and encouraging working men to leave. They first detail why people would leave, then cite successful strategies for recruiting poor migrants to urban centers. Their strategy to “smooth the road of the migrants” included vocational training (for industries not found

locally), job counseling (for careers not accessible nearby), and publishing the employment opportunities of other places (pg. 52).

While Appalachia's history of outmigration certainly didn't begin with this report from 1958, programs such as those being promoted by Luebke and Hart suggest that rural communities are not valued or valuable. The land and the culture of rural people are thus disparaged. Instead of researching how to invest in economic programs that would advance these areas, people in positions of power send the message: "get out; there's nothing here for you."

This is the story of outmigration.

It would be impossible to determine the first instance of someone leaving their community for an opportunity elsewhere. It's the story of America. However, the story for rural communities is one often written by others. These stories typically involve extractive economic situations, denigrative stereotypes, and a lack of resources. Like those touted by Luebke and Hart (1958), programs designed to better rural communities habitually include getting people to leave. There is also a great deal of evidence on tactics used to force people away (Smith 2014; Gaventa 1980; Bell 2013). Why don't these programs enable people to stay? Why isn't there sufficient and appropriate investment in small communities? Why don't researchers investigate the potential impact of development programs for rural areas? Ironically in 1958, Luebke and Hart asked the questions: "What is it that holds these people? Why do they fail to take advantage of greater economic opportunities elsewhere? Why don't they migrate to greener pastures?" (pg. 47). These are the questions that remain unanswered. This is where the story lives.

Historical Underpinnings

West Virginia is the only state that is entirely within the Appalachian region. The people who live here are known for their strong ties to family and home, their love of the landscape and that connection to the land. Appalachia is a region plagued with stereotypes of barefooted, pregnant, toothless hillbillies roaming the hollers while the plinks of banjo music surround them and their children in tattered clothes (Branscome 1976, Speer 1993). These stereotypes were created as the first missionaries came to the area to help the poor (Batteau 1990; Drake 2001; Jones 1999; Lewis 1999; Shapiro 1978). These were reinforced by the writers of the local color movement who came to the area for fodder for their serial stories (Lewis 1999, Satterwhite 2011). The “caricatures and atmospheric landscapes of the escapist fiction they penned” were published in popular magazines for the middle class in urban centers (Lewis 1999, pg. 118). Appalachia was thus invented (Batteau 1990; Lewis 1999). Their embellished and contrived accounts of the region were “all the rage” and readers believed the stories and held those images as true to the people who they represented. These fictional portrayals, “the idea of Appalachia as a homogeneous region physically, culturally, and economically isolated from mainstream America” then became the narrative used by politicians and the news media as historical truth (Lewis 1999, pg. 119).

Academics, however, are resisting that same narrative, arguing for “the coherence, adaptability, and expressive aspects of white working class identities” (Anglin 2004, pg. 76). Instead of disputing the “idea” of Appalachia—the construct, scholars are often drawing further attention to and perpetuating the stereotypes by claiming the appealing and socially acceptable parts of that narrative (Smith 2004). This is how the story of outmigration has flourished, and how it has become the paradigm on which Appalachian studies has developed.

Based on these *stories* of backward, worthless people, Americans took stances politically (Batteau 1990), and social and economic policies were developed (Billings and Blee 2000). Appalachia was used as the test subject for experiments in development (Shapiro 1978). As such, programs were created to help, but these policies were often unproven and underfunded (Eller 2008). West Virginia's economy began to rely almost entirely on extractive industries like natural gas, coal, timber, and salt, which can cause communities to be at risk (Bryson 2015; O'Leary and Boettner 2011). This economy based on extraction grew in the larger system and "process of private industrial development that ... created modern America" (Eller 2008, pg. 4).

The boom and bust monoconomy of coal thrived in this environment, feeding the cycle of outmigration and poverty in Appalachia, and specifically West Virginia, where coal has become synonymous with the state's identity (Bell and York 2010). Anglin (2016) writes, "here we remain, with a model in which the dilemmas of a coal-based economy and the exploitation of a particular set of workers—a predominantly white, native-born, and male labor force contending with the unsafe conditions of the mines—are writ large as *the* history of Appalachia" (pg. 52). To many, coal is the symbol of WV, and the symbol of wealth. However, the stereotypes that were developed before the rise of coal were strengthened and perpetuated by the realities of the deplorable conditions of the coal camps. The first photographs of the region (many staged) depicted the people subjected to the dangerous effects of the coal industry as immigrants rushed to the area to find work.

Economic Repercussions

The impact of the coal industry on West Virginia is staggering. Branscome (1976) shows that between the passing of the Mine and Health Safety Act in 1969 as a result of the disaster in

Farmington, West Virginia that killed 78 coal miners, and the publication of *Annihilating the Hillbilly* only seven years later, 10,000 miners were injured and 700 killed (pg. 3). At the time, that legislation had been the most strict to be passed (Branscome 1976). However, according to a recent MSHA report, an additional 2,287 coal miners have died since the publication of Branscome's text while the total number employed by the industry has declined to 37% of the numbers employed in 1976 (United States Department of Labor 2020). This report did not include the number of deaths from injuries or related causes.

Deaths are not the only damage caused by the coal industry. A West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection study of the effects of mining on downstream waters showed that ninety-three percent of mined streams are contaminated (2008) and within five years, over 2,400 miles of streams will have been destroyed or harmed. After surface mining, most ecosystems were not reclaimed (Lutz, Bernhardt, and Schlesinger 2013). The health impacts of coal are also well documented. As the federal government has cut funding to black lung programs (Lilly 2014), new cases of the disease are on the rise (Berkes 2012). Residents of communities in close proximity to coal mining face higher rates of hypertension, cardiopulmonary disease and COPD, lung disease, and kidney disease (Hendryx and Ahern 2008). Higher levels of carcinogenic chemicals are also found in West Virginia. A 2012 study by Hendryx et al., formerly of West Virginia University's Department of Community Medicine and School of Public Health, found cancer rates to be significantly higher in coal mining areas.

These poor health outcomes are not limited to coal producing regions. The entire state is overwhelmed by an opioid epidemic and high overdose rates, high levels of obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, among others. Rising healthcare costs and changes to PEIA, the insurance plan for all state workers, including teachers, was one of the impetuses for the 2018

WV teachers' strike. Because of the bracketed pay-based scale, when teachers would get a bump in salary, they would face an increase in premiums. For many, that ultimately led to a decrease in take-home pay. To complicate matters further, teachers in neighboring states make \$10,000 - \$20,000 more per year (Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia 2018). Jessica Salfia, a high school teacher in the Eastern Panhandle's Berkeley County, writes that her pay would double if she taught in nearby Virginia or Maryland (Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia 2018). West Virginia currently has a shortage of teachers with "more than 700 full-time vacancies, and 38 percent of the state's math classrooms [with] an uncertified teacher" (Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia 2018, pg. 10). Many teachers are leaving for better opportunities elsewhere.

The extractive nature of West Virginia's economy is not always underground. Billings (2016) draws from Marx when he writes that wealth "is *produced* through underground labor (or increasingly aboveground by MTR labor)" (pg. 57, emphasis original). However, this labor includes our institutions that train students who get jobs in other states, and prepares a workforce beyond coal that finds employment somewhere else. "In Appalachia, we have never been witness to a time when people were as valuable as our extractable resources" (Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia 2018, pg. 113). The rates of outmigration demonstrate the effects of this on the Appalachian people. Bryson (2105) writes, "Appalachians are already abandoning the region in droves, especially younger populations who seek better job opportunities and a different standard of living than what's available in economically depressed (and often rural) areas of Appalachia" (pg. 54).

As evidenced by Luebke and Hart (1958), extracting human resources has always been part of the design. Their plan involved "distributing" and "importing" workers to industrial centers so "the nation as a whole will profit from more efficient allocation and utilization of its

manpower” (pg. 53). Outmigration isn’t a side effect of an extractive industry. It is part of the design. “The proposal that Appalachia is irredeemable and should be simply abandoned to the wilderness is not novel. West Virginia was created to be abandoned by both industry and residents” (Bryson 2015, pg. 53).

Sacrifice Zone

It’s as if West Virginia was designed as a sacrifice zone, a region whose only purpose is to sustain others through its resources (Bryson 2015; Eller 2008). Appalachia’s invention was very much about power over the powerless (Batteau 1990). Fisher and Smith (2016) discuss the “processes whereby powerful outside industrial interests establish control, exploit the region, and maintain their domination. These exploiters make concerted efforts to label their work ‘progress’ and blame any of the obvious problems they cause on ignorance or deficiencies of the Appalachian people (pg. 46). This social construction makes it easier to extract resources.

The value to many lies only in those resources, leaving two primary issues: what to do when those resources are gone, and how to justify the situation. Bryson (2015) writes that “West Virginia was never intended to survive extraction” (pg. 238). Therefore the discourse that surrounds the state is that of abandonment, and always already part of the story whose first draft was written as fiction by early visitors to the region. This discourse includes denigrating and belittling the area where the extractive resources lie in order to rationalize these actions. This concept, the internal other, was developed by Jansson (2003) who initially used it to describe the American South. The process involves a minor region being defined as unappealing or unattractive to the rest of the country to develop a national sense of identity around more favorable traits. The subordinate region then becomes mired in unflattering stereotypes (Jansson

2003, 2010). Gradually those stereotypes became pervasive. Baird (2015) writes, “I always knew that I was Appalachian but it wasn’t until college that I realized that this was something different, something other and outside. The place where I grew up ... is often seen as a forgotten space, a place that doesn’t fit into the description of modernized or contemporary America” (pg. 69). The stereotypes rely on the trope of people being backward, not moving forward with the rest of society.

Stereotypes

West Virginians are seen as hillbillies (mountain people), hicks (rural people), and rednecks (working people) by the rest of America. The list of negative representations is long. From the earlier Snuffy Smith, *Deliverance*, and others, to the more recent *Wonderful Whites of West Virginia*, these harmful stereotypes are the prevailing message that everyone sees—not just the people that live elsewhere but the people who live here too.

There are countless negative portrayals of Appalachians in the media. This is not merely history, but an ongoing situation. Recently, Netflix released an episode of *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (2020), “Kimmy and the Reverend.” The characters travel to rural West Virginia and, as typical for such a scenario, the background score is banjo music. The character Titus refers to the people they meet as “filthy little creatures” and “savage beasts,” a man in a bar opens a beer bottle with the grip of a handgun, and another exchanges his tractor for a watch that he plans to sell for opioids. “There’s an epidemic,” he says. If the people of a minority group or any other region were portrayed similarly in the media, it may be considered a hate crime. However, with Appalachia, it’s acceptable and mainstream. Because these are the only stories about Appalachia

that many people experience, they are seen as *the* story of Appalachia. This single story has long overwritten the multiplicity of realities in the region.

This rhetoric isn't considered problematic despite the research that shows otherwise (Speer 1993). In fact, many pundits see Appalachia as the problem. They ask, "Why don't you just leave?" In a 2009 interview with Diane Sawyer, Bill O'Reilly suggested that people living in Appalachia, "get the heck outta there." He argues that, "there is a reason why some areas remain poor generation after generation despite massive assistance. The culture in Appalachia harms the children almost beyond repair. There's really nothing we can do about it" (O'Reilly 2009). After blaming it on drunk, irresponsible, meth-addicted parents, his suggestion to "end the cycle of poverty" is for people to move to Miami for jobs. "I think it's hopeless," he says. "People have to help themselves. They have to wise up and they have to see that there's a culture of poverty, a culture of ignorance there and you either leave or you try to improve it any way you can." O'Reilly's sentiments echo the opinions of many people outside the region.

The popularity of the book *Hillbilly Elegy* is proof of the pervasiveness of the ideology that people are poor because they are lazy and ignorant. There is a lack of understanding that what they see as a culture of poverty is actually the product of years of structural inequality and systemic oppression resulting from the extractive nature of the economy (Anglin 2016; Billings and Blee 2000; Fisher and Smith 2016). There's a common saying, "How can you pick yourself up by your bootstraps if you have no boots?" The solution to ending the cycle of poverty is more complicated than O'Reilly claims. Lohmann (1990) writes, "Appalachian poverty has seldom been portrayed simply as poverty, but as the expression and symbol of something larger" (pg. 76). It's the culmination of years of extractive industry combined with deeply embedded

stereotypes about the region. These stereotypes have become part of the identity of the people who live here.

Impact of Stereotypes

Stereotypes invade the mindset of youth and impact their senses of self and their life choices (Speer 1993). “We have been taught for so long ... that we are powerless that, to some degree, we have begun to believe it,” writes Silas House (2016). “The apathy that results [is] from generations being told that we are powerless, or worthless, throwaway people” (pg. 66). Many in Appalachia and rural areas feel an attachment to place. When that place is constantly degraded by the media, it affects the choices that young people are making. They don’t see a future in an area with few apparent opportunities (Corbett 2007a).

Outmigration has often been found to be a result of harmful images of regions (Gould and White 1986; Towers 2005). Towers (2005) investigated the impact of stereotypes on youth in West Virginia. He suggested that young people are discouraged from staying because of the negative stereotypes. “They direct people away from places” (pg. 76). A 2003 study found that West Virginians believe stereotypes to be one of the reasons we can’t make progress toward positive change (*Huntington Herald Dispatch*). The hillbilly stereotypes become part of the consciousness of young people and this leads to outmigration (Towers 2005).

Middle and high school students across West Virginia were asked in a study by Towers (2005) to identify the region they were from, then provide preference for the regions where they would want to live. The researchers also asked students if they were planning to leave or stay. Not surprisingly, 52 percent did not plan to live in West Virginia after graduation. Only 32 percent wanted to stay (pg. 80). When the students who planned to leave were asked why, their

responses often included slurs such as, “hillbilly,” “redneck,” and “hick” (pg. 81). It is clear that these labels are linked to how young people see the state. While being cognizant of how others are looking down on Appalachia, the students are ironically stereotyping “other” West Virginians.

Stereotypes have negative effects, as Shelby (1999) illustrates: “I live in the middle of somewhere, a real place. Maybe that’s the trouble. We live in a real place that other people see as a symbol. And in the wide gap between the reality and the symbol—we have to live there, too. Being Appalachian means being presented throughout one’s life with images of Appalachia that bear little or no resemblance to one’s own experience” (pgs. 153-154). All of this adds up to the “story” of WV, of Appalachia, the narrative written and perpetuated—normalized, by others. This narrative continues to be played out in the mainstream media. Branscome (1976) was one of the first to look at stereotypes of Appalachia in the media. “America is allowed to continue laughing at this minority group, because on this, America agrees: hillbilly ain’t beautiful” (pg. 1). Little has changed in the 45 years since Branscome’s text was published. Loyal Jones, former director of the Berea College Appalachian Center, (2003) writes, “Poor rural people are about the only ones in the country that you can make fun of all you want to with near impunity. Political correctness fades away when the subject is a poor hillbilly.”

Appalachian communities are routinely reminded of their difference, poverty, and their apparent lack of options. Baird (2015) explains that “the effect of the repeated stereotypes and images on the collective imagination of Appalachian communities is a negative force. As a consequence, the force of the collective imagination to create a modernity that argues for the continuation of change comes into question” (pg. 79). Instead of staying, many leave.

Social Impacts

After graduation, West Virginia students leave at rates higher than any other state in the nation (Weekley 2015; Carr and Kefalas 2009). Leaving is so pervasive that better students are groomed to leave. Educators “mobilize” the good students into paths to higher education (Corbett 2007a). But in places like rural communities, where people are more linked to family, local jobs, and traditional gender roles, adolescents learn that this connection to place no longer matters.

Howley, Harman, and Leopold (1996) echo this sentiment. “Appalachians who aspire to develop the sense of the place in which they live,” they write, “accept the badluck bargain of low pay, low-status employment as the necessary price of their aspiration to cultivate local roots” (150). Students are taught that in order to succeed, they must leave. Success, they learn, is not found at home; rural communities, specifically those in Appalachia, are inferior. “Schooling, and indeed the tenor and imagery of urban society generally, encourages rural youth to develop aspirations that lead them away not only from where, but from who, they are in relation to that place,” they explain. “Rural youth can choose to stay, but they are likely to believe—with most of the world—that choice is a mark of their failure” (159). Corbett (2007a) found that for youth in rural communities, education equaled leaving and that those who stay are considered “stuck.” In a report on place attachment, Beckley (2003) called staying in places with poor economies an “irrational” decision.

Further, “for the most school-successful children in rural communities, leaving is a foregone conclusion. Mobile youth are prepared for leaving through family educational conversations, travel, or extended family linkages outside the immediate locale” (Corbett 2007b,

pg. 782). As value is increasingly removed from rural areas, opportunity is seen to lie elsewhere (Weekley 2015).

West Virginia has consistently lost population due to outmigration for decades (Governing 2020) and in the last ten years, almost 30,000 residents have moved to other states (Population Reference Bureau 2020). Not all migration is out of state. Exchange migration, migration within a state, typically from rural to urban areas, has greatly contributed to population loss in rural communities.

One outcome of outmigration has been the impact on health and access to healthcare services. Appalachians have some of the poorest health outcomes and highest mortality rates in

Figure 1. Outmigration Cycle

the nation (Wasserman 2017). Population loss has led to the closure of hospitals across the region, disproportionately affecting rural areas as they have a higher percentage of residents who rely on Medicare for services (American Hospital Association 2019) and healthcare may be one of the largest employers in an area.

Counties in the Southern part of the state have been hit the hardest by population loss. Mingo County, in particular, has lost 50% of its population since 1950, over 11% of that in the last 10 years (WVDHHR 2002, World Population Review 2020). It is near the bottom of West Virginia county rankings for length and quality of life and health factors with 30% of residents with fair or poor health and 39% of children living in poverty (County Health Rankings 2019). This makes the closing of hospitals across the state even more troublesome. The recent closing of Williamson Memorial Hospital in Mingo County led to a loss of hundreds of jobs.

There are people who are resisting the tide of outmigration and working to combat the negative consequences of the monoconomy. While it may seem that West Virginia is a lost cause, many are choosing to stay and enabling the same path for others. There have been protests that include a March for Science and local participation in the Women's March. 2020 saw numerous Black Lives Matter Protests across Appalachia. The teacher strikes also made national news and inspired educators in other states to do the same. But less visible are the smaller acts of resistance such as commenting on a blog post after an event like the Elk River Chemical Spill. Building a clinic to provide access in a healthcare desert is an act of resistance. These acts may not be what you think of as typical resistance but they have been impactful. There are many ways to participate in the dynamics of power and resistance.

My research focuses on these alternative ways that West Virginians are making change happen in their communities and the critical theory that helps to illustrate these dynamics in action.

Overview of Dissertation

I examine resistance in West Virginia to highlight reasons for staying in opposition to the vast amount of work that has focused on those who have left. I investigate how the construct of

Appalachia plays a role in identity formation for West Virginians who have chosen to stay and various types of resistance and power dynamics. Despite the stigma and economic drivers that continue to feed outmigration, there are groups of people who are working to make their communities more livable and who are enabling others to stay. Others choose to engage in alternative acts of resistance against the power structures, demonstrating identity constructs tied to place.

Theoretical Framework

Whisnant (1980), an Appalachian scholar, argues that Appalachian culture is a “web of both resistance and complicity.” This is the story of resistance in West Virginia: stories of striking miners and stories of complacency. Where there is power, there is resistance. Without resistance, there is no power. Resistance is power.

For this essay, my working definition of power comes from Foucault (1990). Power is the function of a person or group to control how others act or what they believe. It’s not always top-down but can come from below. Therefore we need to see resistance as not just one act but a series of actions or, very importantly as we have seen throughout history, inactions that are related to power. A future for Appalachia involves seeing resistance as *for* instead of against. This is the resilience of the region.

Methods

Methodology. My original plan for this dissertation included a study using the data from a series of semi-structured interviews with community members who are involved with providing healthcare to Mingo County citizens. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic started

to devastate rural communities, especially those in the West Virginia coalfields. Requesting even an hour of a healthcare provider's time became an impossible and unethical task that would prioritize the needs of my research over the health and wellbeing of healthcare workers and the people they serve. Therefore, I decided to redirect my research toward a more humanistic approach, using quotes from previously conducted interviews to support trends in the literature.

With IRB approval (1505693129), I conducted a series of 6 interviews using open-ended questions with community leaders, local residents, and people involved in the healthcare field in Mingo County in the Summer of 2020 before the first surge in COVID-19 cases. I recruited subjects through the connections and friendships I had made during the service learning trips. I also asked participants to connect me to other potential interviewees. As travel was restricted at that time, I talked with participants via Zoom and recorded the sessions. When internet connectivity allowed, video was used. The participants knew their names would not be used and the recordings and transcripts were deidentified and stored in a secure location to ensure anonymity. Instead of using aliases, broad job titles were used to show the participants' relation to the situation. The IRB-approved protocol is shown in the appendix.

This project seeks to create new knowledge by looking at staying through the lens of resistance. I specifically look at social media and the simple act of posting comments to a blog as resistance. I also look at providing healthcare as resistance. To do this I employ some of the tools of narrative inquiry to demonstrate how resistance, identity, and place play a role in people's lives. When narrative inquiry is used as part of a methodology, it allows us for greater complexity. Bruner (1990) argues that everything is contextual. Nothing has meaning without the layers of elements that comprise each phenomenon, in place, with context.

These layers of meaning are essential to understanding place-based identity constructs, part of the story that will be told. West Virginia has a culture of marginalization perpetuated by negative stereotypes and propelled by a wave of outmigration. This is part of the *place* of West Virginia, and Mingo County is in the region most affected by leaving. Doreen Massey (2005) argues for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of place and space:

But places change; they go on without you. ... A nostalgia which denies that, is certainly in need of re-working. ... For the truth is that you can never simply 'go back', to home or to anywhere else. When you get 'there' that place will have moved on just as you yourself will have changed. And this of course is the point. For to open up 'space' to this kind of imagination means thinking time and space as mutually imbricated and thinking both of them as the product of interrelations. You can't go back in space-time. To think that you can is to deprive others of their ongoing independent stories. It may be 'going back home', or imagining regions and countries as backward, as needing to catch up, or just taking that holiday in some 'unspoilt, timeless' spot. The point is the same. You can't go back. ... You can't hold places still. What you *can* do is meet up with others, catch up with where another's history has got to 'now', but where that 'now' (more rigorously, that 'here and now', that *hic et nunc*) is itself constituted by nothing more than – precisely – that meeting-up (again). (124-125).

Most importantly, Massey (2005) shows how time and space are inextricably linked. Thus, when we consider a methodology that works best to get at an essence of what place means to a subject from West Virginia, when place is one of the more salient features of one's identity construct, narrative inquiry is the optimal choice. A narrative shows change through time (Andrews et al. 2008; Clandinin and Connelly 2000). Narrative inquiry can help us understand a subject's

relationship to space and place by listening to how they, as Massey explains, go back. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write that life “is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (pg. 17). Life is experienced as part of a longer story. It’s temporal. Everything happens over time. Space and place happen over time. Neither of these concepts can exist without the other. West Virginians are finely attuned to place. As that place has changed over time, many have remained rooted in tradition as a way to resist change while others are resisting those stereotypes to move forward, to write a new history of the state by the people who have chosen to stay. My goal for this research project is to capture what this movement looks like. How much tradition has informed our need for progress? How is a sense of progress attached to place?

Theoretical Perspective. In my research into how agency, place, and identity are linked, I want to show how the power relationships that have served as the status quo for West Virginia have created vast injustice. That long history has provided the foundation for our identity and the lens of critical theory is the most appropriate and the most compelling as it allows for a suspicion of constructed meanings that serve those hegemonic power structures. Critical theory requires that the researcher challenge the constructs required of the constructionist epistemology while using them as the raw materials in making meaning. As researchers, critical theory requires us to simultaneously build on and dismantle the established ideologies of our participants (and ourselves) in order to create new meaning. Critical theory, for my work, is about having the constructs of what we know about identity, place, and resistance (that we are always questioning) help inform new understandings based on the research.

Critical theory challenges this framework and power structure through practice (praxis). Its content looks at conflict and oppression. I want my research to exist in this space—to be part of the conversation about power and resistance. My theoretical framework relies heavily on Foucault (1990), Agamben (1998, 2005), Farmer (1996, 2004), and Gaventa (1980), theorists who illustrate the complex dynamics between those in positions of power and the oppressed. I draw from this work, focusing on the constructs of identity and place in a marginalized group. Because of this, Freire (1970) also speaks to me. I agree with his idea that we cannot be liberated—but that to be more free we must work together, to learn from each other, and that learning and teaching are not mutually exclusive.

Crotty (1998) writes that critical inquiry, “is a contrast between a research that seeks merely to understand and a research that challenges ... between a research that reads the situation in terms of interaction and community and a research that reads it in terms of conflict and oppression ... between a research that accepts the *status quo* and a research that seeks to bring about change” (p. 113). I draw from Horkheimer (1982) who wrote that critical theory strives for change rather than presenting the status quo. Further, critical inquiry allows for new patterns to emerge, better ways to understand, and a potential for social action (Crotty 1998). Crotty (1998) explains that it is through “emancipatory knowledge” that critical theory becomes praxis (p. 159). As researchers we must question the traditional power structure and its relationship to culture, to always be open to our subjects’ understanding of these relationships and what they mean in context—and how that differs among subjects and over time. Drawing from Crotty, Golafshani (2003) adds that generating understanding while realities change with shifting context helps to look at those multiple realities.

Critical theory acknowledges that our culture is hegemonic and therefore its systems and structures are oppressive. Crotty (1998) explains, critical inquiry “emphasizes that particular sets of meanings, because they have come into being in and out of the give-and-take of social existence, exist to serve hegemonic interests. Each set of meanings supports particular power structures, resists moves toward greater equity, and harbours oppression, manipulation and other modes of injustice and freedom” (p. 59-60).

Positionality

I feel that it’s important to discuss my positionality as a researcher and writer working with a community in which I am an outsider. As a native West Virginian, I both celebrate and mourn my state. It seems natural for me to focus my work, once again, on both this space and place, although it is difficult. After my uncle died in the Sago mine, I felt compelled to do something more and I believe education is the way for me to make that happen. My strengths include working with students and I plan to stay in academia. This work brings full circle my love for the state and my longtime involvement in service and learning.

My background, therefore, will undoubtedly affect my research. I am extremely invested in this project and my ultimate goal is to work as objectively as possible. As a resident of a different county, I am an outsider in the situation. I need to make connections and develop trust.

When developing this project, I drew heavily from *Humanizing Research* edited by Paris and Winn (2014). The collection of essays centers on the voices of marginalized people. Kinloch and San Pedro (2014) discuss the work of stories. They explain that narratives help researchers co-construct stories. Stories, they write, are often “messy, complicated, complex, and multivoiced” (p. 22). These non-linear accounts force researchers to think of working “with”

participants instead of doing research “on” or “about” these particular groups. This is echoed by Irizarry and Brown (2014) who draw on the concept of power “with” and not “over” subjects, building on Freire’s concept of praxis (1970) and that all people have an important perspective. What Paris and Winn (2014) demonstrate throughout *Humanizing Research* is that social justice research must not just espouse the tenets of the genre, it must actively work to give agency to its subjects through a co-constructed narrative that shows the context (place/history/culture) as well as the intended meaning. This is at the forefront of my thinking as I continue to work on this project. As Jack Zipes (2019) writes about the power of the powerless, “... we must first begin thinking out of the box, from the margins, so to speak, not about reforming a corroded and corrupt political system, but about the potential for genuine defiance that might contribute to alternative ways of relating to one another with dignity and compassion that reflect a truthful and high regard for humanity” (pg. 245).

To work toward accomplishing this, I have been spending time in Mingo County for the past two years. My first visit there was in the Fall of 2015. As the Director of Global Education and Service Learning for the Department of Human Performance, I am charged with creating empowering and engaging study abroad opportunities for students. I believe that students should experience local communities and interact with local citizens before travelling to other countries to participate in service learning. Like Daniela Papi, I want students to learn service. Many of my students plan to become healthcare providers. In a classroom, they will be taught all of the clinical skills they need to develop into practitioners. However, they don’t always understand what it means to serve. To close this gap, I have created a program where students travel with me and other facilitators to Mingo County. They earn community service hours through listening and learning, in addition to helping with community-driven projects. While on these trips I am

learning about the community first-hand and listening. The students bring their experiences back to their home communities to share stories and transform the traditional narrative. As part of my commitment to social justice, it is important to me that I give back to the community I am working with. Research can be an extractive process but I want this project to resist that.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed through an examination of the relationships between power and resistance, place and identity:

- 1) What are the dynamics of power in West Virginia?**
- 2) How are those power relationships perpetuated and/or resisted?**
- 3) How is a place-based identity construct expressed in those who stay?**
- 4) In what ways are those who stay engaged in alternative acts of resistance?**

These questions are answered by a series of three essays.

Essay 1. Why People Stay: Power and Resistance Dynamics in West Virginia

This essay is an analysis of the power and resistance dynamics at work in West Virginia. Because identity constructs are often place-based, I investigate place and the meaning of place in Appalachia as it informs identity construction and is a powerful tool to harness for resistance. With extensive outmigration pulling Appalachians from home and local communities, the facets of identity tied to place become even more complex. Loss impacts the saliency of the “idea” of home for many Appalachians. Identity that is place-based can offer a framework for building a deeper understanding of a region. At the same time, in order to comprehend resistance, it must have a specific context and location. Places are made up of many different identities that make

creating solidarity extremely difficult. Resistance must be place-based but in order for movements to be effective, it must not rely solely on place. Appalachia has a strong history of resistance and resilience. Therefore, I also explore the role of power in resistance, contextualizing West Virginia's rich history of protest.

Essay 2. Identity Politics and Resistance: The Social Media Response to the Elk River Chemical Spill

In 2014, thousands of gallons of a chemical used to clean coal leaked into the Elk River, the source of drinking water for three hundred thousand residents of the Charleston, West Virginia, area. The crisis inspired a community to use new media in acts of resistance against internal othering and to embrace marginalization. With the internet as a tool for social change and a platform for resistance, passionate blog posts went viral and motivated many to comment, reinforcing/re-centering place and space in identity politics. This article illustrates how one blog post written after the spill created an opportunity and a space for members of a community to use social media to participate in a process of resistance. Their remarks demonstrate the complexity of identity politics in a marginalized region, long defined by otherness.

This essay was published in the Journal of Appalachian Studies 2019.

Essay 3: Staying as Resistance: One Community's Path to Sustainability through Health and Wellness

Taking a health and wellness approach, one community in southern West Virginia is working to disrupt the negative stigma surrounding rural Appalachia and provide a sense of agency. West Virginia has high unemployment rates, high rates of addiction and poverty, and some of the worst health outcomes in the country. Staying here can be seen as an act of resistance. Rural communities are building on the social capital linked to place-based identity

constructs to harness resistance, challenge insider/outsider binaries, and allow people to write their own stories, instead of reacting against decades of negative discourse.

Chapter 2

Power, Resistance, and Place in Appalachia

In Appalachia, resistance takes many forms. Whisnant (1980) argues that Appalachian culture is a “web of both resistance and complicity” (qtd. in Fisher 1993, pg. 11). Appalachians are forced to resist the persistent hillbilly stereotype, the political structure that led to an acceptance of those stereotypes, the subsequent stigma of place, and the history of oppression those have entailed—while living within that system. Fisher (1993) writes that, “Appalachians are generally viewed as backward, unintelligent, fatalistic, and quiescent people who are complicit in their own oppression” (pg. 1). However, Appalachia has a strong history of resistance and resilience, pushing against the age-old tropes. The relationship between resistance and power is complicated and multifaceted. Without resistance, according to Foucault (1990), there is no power. “Where there is power, there is resistance ... a multiplicity of points of resistance” (Foucault 1990, pg. 95). Power is the function of an individual or a group to control how others act or what they believe. Power isn’t always top down, however, but can come from below (Foucault 1990). Resistance, therefore, is not just one act. It is a series of actions (or inactions) related to power.

There is a strong history of resistance (collective and individual) to oppression in the region (Fisher 1993, Fisher and Smith 2012). West Virginia’s history is rich with protest, a form of resistance, and those protests were often met with violence. Coal was one of the first industries in the region. As it grew, many people came to work in the mines and the trades that emerged because of it. Coal is an industry plagued with periods of growth and decline, producing a boom and bust economy which left workers reliant on the coal companies for their livelihoods.

Coal companies often owned the houses the miners and their families lived in. At first they only paid their workers in scrip, an exploitive form of payment that could only be used in the company town where the coal company owned the shops, hired the doctors, and provided other necessities for a fee. During times when coal prices were low, coal companies would pay the miners less, leaving them indebted to the system. To protest these conditions, workers would strike.

Some of the first strikes turned violent as striking coal miners were arrested (George 1898). The most notable was the Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921 (Shogan 2004). Known as the largest uprising of civilians in the United States since the Civil War, the confrontation began with miners attempting to rescue other miners who had been imprisoned for trying to unionize the mines. Tensions escalated and eventually around 10,000 miners were involved, culminating in President Warren Harding calling in 2,500 troops and dropping bombs on citizens. The use of violence was extremely effective. The United Mine Workers Association (UMWA) lost 80 percent of its membership in subsequent years. This is just one of many incidents where miners were met with hostility. Striking miners were evicted from their homes by coal company detectives; there are numerous reports of law enforcement shooting at miners (often killing them); and many accounts of families being threatened in their homes, while at work, or dropping their kids off at school.

This history paved the way for the West Virginia teacher wildcat strikes of 2018 and 2019. It was frequently referred to during legislative debates on a 2021 bill that reinforced existing legislation prohibiting public employees from striking. Further, during the teacher work stoppage of 1990, many miners joined teachers on the picket lines (Mochaidean 2018). This was a show of solidarity and support for their act of resistance, linking the two historically. The

railroad strike of 1877 and a strike by state road workers in 1969 are two other examples of large-scale strikes. Strikes were not the only form of protest, however. The Kanawha County textbook controversy started with debates over the inclusion of a new multicultural curriculum and led to boycotts, book burnings, and eventually bombings (Michael 1974). As the coal industry became more mechanized, fewer people were employed by the mines. This led to fewer protests as workers were afraid to lose their jobs. Many people left to find employment elsewhere.

Census data reveals that more than three million people left the Appalachian region between the years of 1950 and 1970 (Smith 1987). Outmigration has been, and still is, the paradigm for Appalachia. The act of staying can be seen as resistance to this, and outmigration as a form of quiescence, or complacency. Quiescence is not apathy or lack of action but the result of a power dynamic in which groups are deprived of power (lack of resources, choices, and access) by those in power (Gaventa 1980). However, as coal has lost dominance with the decline of the industry, the power dynamic of staying/leaving Appalachia has become more complex. It is no longer about an abstract Goliath controlling the underdog. While coal still maintains a position in the Appalachian coalfields, the largest public employer in West Virginia is now WVU Medicine, a spot until recently held by Wal-Mart.

Despite massive outmigration, there are people with the social, mobility, and financial capital to leave, but who stay. There are people who want to leave but don't have the resources. When minimum wage in Kentucky is \$7.25 an hour and \$8.75 in West Virginia, many people don't have the nest egg required for a move. In areas that have faced massive depopulation, housing values have decreased, leaving homeowners without the opportunity to sell and buy elsewhere. This essay focuses on these two very different groups of people and the forces

surrounding their situations. First, there are people who want to leave but can't. Second, there are people who have chosen to stay, and may potentially enable others to stay through developing programs and giving back to communities. Both groups have a multiplicity of beliefs that often contradict the story told in the mainstream media about "Trump Country." West Virginia is the parent of a nonbinary kid who voted a straight Republican ticket; West Virginia is the pro-gun, pro-life Democrat; West Virginia is everything inbetween and all of the extremes. The typical story, however, only depicts a poor, uneducated, white hillbilly. There is resistance to this stereotype in many ways, from the Affrilachian poet to the doctor who returns home to start a nonprofit clinic.

Staying is an act of resistance against the cycle of poverty and outmigration affecting Appalachia. This social inequality manifests prominently as the coal industry's "quest for unbridled growth" and "disregard, even hatred, for the poor.... These conditions are the cause and result of displacements, wars both declared and undeclared" (Farmer 2004, pg. 317).

Although the War on Poverty was announced in 1964, fifty years later, over 30% of all children in West Virginia live below the poverty line (Cardosi 2014). Despite this, in 2013, House Republicans wrote legislation that would reduce the SNAP (food stamp) budget by \$40 billion dollars (Nyden 2013). Recent legislation such as this shows that the War on Poverty has become a war against the poor (Orleck and Hazirjian 2011, Perry 2011).

This paper will look at staying through the lens of resistance. To begin, I will examine the meaning of place in Appalachian identity constructs. Place matters. And place plays an important role in resistance and resistance movements. The next section analyzes the history of extractive economies in West Virginia and the power dynamics resulting in a marginalized population, the people who might want to leave but aren't able to. Finally, I explore the potential for identity to

be used for resistance, the formation of resistance identity or project identity constructs. These are place-based identity constructs that play a role in resisting leaving, stereotypes, and the stigma of Appalachia. These are seen in those who choose to stay and participate in initiatives that will define the future of the region and potentially enable others to stay.

Place / Meaning of Place in Appalachia

With extensive outmigration pulling Appalachians from home and local communities, the facets of identity tied to place become more nuanced. Place is a significant factor in identity formation because of experiences and the expression of beliefs being embedded in landscape (Relph 1976, Massey 2005). Place is important because of how it connects people. Massey (2005) writes, “Some of our strongest evocations of place ... indeed draw on hills.... We use such places to situate ourselves, to convince ourselves that there is indeed a grounding” (pg. 131). This grounding is based on constructs of home and community. While identities are multifaceted, those associated with geographical locations “can be among the most salient and provoke the greatest degree of ambivalence and conflict” (Herb and Kaplan 1999, pg. 1). Spatial identities are salient because of their ties to memory and shared history, and the layers of meaning within each person’s community.

Place is one of the primary determinants in identity construction because location is not just important. In situations where the landscape itself is affected, it becomes the center from which the community is based. This is evidenced in mountaintop removal sites where members of a community come together to protect their local environment from the negative effects of surface mining. For example, when the town of Sylvester, WV was inundated with black dust from a nearby coal preparation facility, two women organized to make the company comply with

safety and environmental regulations. Mary Miller, one of the two, said, “We were seeing our homes being destroyed, and our mountains being destroyed, too. We couldn’t sit back and let them completely destroy [us]. We need to get out and fight. We are not going to move off—we shouldn’t be the ones to be moving” (Bell 2013, pg. 36). The landscape and the love of their town was what united these citizens in efforts to protect the community. Regional stereotypes are another way that place impacts identity. Shelby (1999) writes, “We live in a real place that other people see as a symbol. And in the wide gap between the reality and the symbol—we have to live there, too. Being Appalachian means being presented throughout one’s life with images of Appalachia that bear little or no resemblance to one’s own experience” (pgs. 153-154). These situations show the importance of place.

Lippard (1998) writes that, “When we know where we are, we’re in a far better position to understand what other culture groups are experiencing within a time and place we all share” (pg. 10). Place can center and define a community both geographically and through shared experiences. Familiar locations carry the weight of shared memories and histories. These places are evocative, connected to both the future and the past (Lippard 1998). Place is a significant part of our consciousness and thus features prominently in identity construction. A person’s memories are tied to place. Humans are spatial and memories are tied to specific locations. “Place is more than just cultural symbol,” Eller (1998) writes. “Sense of place bridges location and provides the framework for understanding who we are, where we are going and how we are going to get there. It provides the reference point for our interactions, the *locus*

in which life is experienced and known. As such it shapes our behavior in the present and the decisions that we make for the future” (pg. 4, emphasis original). Place and our inherent

Figure 2. I Sometimes Wonder

understanding of place are what link us to each other. Identity construction relies on these relationships. Without place we would not be grounded nor connected to others. When we are attached to place, we are connected to each other, to our communities. Place attachment does not mean that people are fixated on a particular patch of ground but to the whole idea of a place (Eller 1988). A primary feature of Appalachia is its residents' attachment to place (Barcus and Brunn 2009).

Another factor to consider is a person's understanding of place. Raitz and Ulack (1982) write that a person's impressions of places are informed by the images they see of those places.

They studied the perceptions of Appalachia by people from both inside and outside the region. When asked to draw maps of Appalachia, subjects would center the region based on where they were from. They found those in Southern regions showed Appalachia reaching far Southward while maps of people living in New York stretched far Northward. Ohio put the West Virginia-Ohio border directly in the center, while residents of Virginia centered Appalachia at the West Virginia-Virginia border (Raitz and Ulack 1981). They found that those living inside the Appalachian region drew the largest and most inclusive maps. After organizing the participant data into subgroups by region, they also found that people shifted the core and the boundary of the region toward where they lived. The study included questions about characteristics of Appalachia as well. Negative qualities of the region including poverty, poor health, and poor education, common stereotypes perpetuated by the media, were mentioned far more frequently by those who lived outside the region than by those living in Appalachia (Raitz and Ulack 1982). This understanding of place, including how it is perceived by others, has an effect on identity construction.

The factor of loss also impacts the saliency of the “idea” of home for many Appalachians. Those who have had to leave their communities to escape stereotypes or for employment or opportunities elsewhere construct a powerful narrative. Baird (2015) writes that “the most common way to speak about home is to associate it with some place” (pg. 70). What is called home for many Appalachians, however, is “something different, something other and outside ... often seen as a forgotten space, a place that does not fit into the description of modernized or contemporary America” (Baird 2015, pg. 69). He argues that home is more than a physical location but an abstract space formed by connections. There is a collective imagination deeply and negatively affected by stereotypes and the constant reminder of disparity and lack of

possibility (Baird 2015). There is a similar sentiment found by Corbett (2007a). He studied a rural coastal town that experienced a decline in industry much like coal communities in Appalachia. “Backward rural spaces,” he writes, “are defined as doomed places to be left behind as soon as one is able to move on” (Corbett 2007a, pg. 65). The result of this belief system is that young people realize that education offers a way out to only a few people. He found that those who stayed had stronger ties to community and an identity more deeply connected to place (Corbett 2007a). Both Baird (2015) and Corbett (2007a) show the negative impact of stereotypes of rural people and places on identity construction.

Locating Resistance in Place

Identity that is place-based can offer a framework for building a deeper understanding of a region (Whisnant 1980). At the same time, in order to comprehend resistance, it must have a specific context and location. Corbett (2007a) and Welford (2010) both discuss resistance movements that are located in places. Corbett (2007a) conducted research in a rural coastal fishing community in Digby Neck, Canada. Much like rural coal communities in Appalachia, the residents there are facing a crisis of outmigration due to the boom and bust economic pattern of their industry. In Digby Neck, young people resist education in order to stay. Instead of following what is now a typical path from high school, to college (out of town), to leaving, young people, specifically males, will drop out of high school to work with their fathers in the fishing industry. Corbett (2007a) discusses that resistance in this community is less about power and agency (or lack thereof) but the context in which these two forces exist. Without a place-based concept of resistance that includes multiple generations, each with their own relationships to the community, the decisions they have made in relation to location, history, and identity

constructs can't be understood. Actions (or inactions), people's choices, are located within specific places. The meaning of resistance, in Digby Neck, is connected to place. "To resist schooling," he writes, "is therefore to resist mobility, or at least to grasp the multiple problems mobility entails for a working-class youth. In isolated rural places, to resist schooling is to commit at some level to membership in a community of others who stay put" (Corbett 2007a, pg. 57). These findings show the struggle that many young people in rural places face in regard to leaving or staying. While education does provide mobility capital, many youth there resist that in order to stay. The system at work in Digby Neck, and in many coal communities in Appalachia, is one that offers only two choices: education and leaving, or subsistence living and staying. Corbett suggests, "If getting out is the only goal, ... perhaps the only remaining form of resistance is staying" (2007a, pg. 259).

Wolford (2010) studied the Worker's Movement, MST (Movimento Sem Terra), in Brazil. MST was one of the largest social movements in Brazil. Their primary tactic was squatting on land not in use and establishing a claim. These non-violent protests aimed for land reform and were successful in significant redistribution of land to some of the poorest farmers in Brazil (Wolford 2010). While the primary purpose of Wolford's research was to understand the role of various positions of power within movements, her work stresses the importance of context. She demonstrates the importance of "locating resistance in people and places" (pg. 31). To Wolford (2010), the meanings of justice/injustice are subjective. Acts of resistance/social movements are part of a larger situation that includes socioeconomic factors. Wolford (2010) is writing about a specific act of organized resistance to an oppressive situation. Because of this, she views her subjects as subaltern with a voice, a sense of agency. A significant factor in this is

their connection to place. This leads to a multiplicity of experiences and a wide variety of different actors who have different motivating factors and levels of engagement.

Both Wolford (2010) and Corbett (2007a) illustrate the importance of place in resistance, that context is essential. Likewise, political action is connected to a specific commitment to place (Harvey 1995). While Corbett (2007a) shows individual acts of resistance, the connection to place is similar to the MST movement discussed by Wolford (2010).

Extractive Economies in West Virginia

Southern West Virginia is called the coalfields because coal is the primary source of revenue for the counties in that region. Historically, this has made the residents there dependent on what has always been a boom and bust industry, allowing for an unjust power dynamic to be developed and perpetuated, otherwise known as a monoconomy. This specific place has had a long history of oppressive extractive economies. This section will focus on the people who may want to leave but are unable to do so because of lack of resources such as social, economic, and educational capital. The history of extractive economies in West Virginia has marginalized a population because of unequal power dynamics.

As those with power constantly exert that power, the powerless adapt with an “unconscious pattern of withdrawal” followed “by a sense of powerlessness [manifested] as extensive fatalism, self-deprecation, or undue apathy about one’s situation” (Gaventa 1980, pg. 15). Quiescence isn’t always a result of fear of those with power, “the conceptions of the powerless may alter as an adaptive response to continual defeat” (Gaventa 1980, pg. 15). This sentiment is found throughout *Our Roots Run Deep as Ironweed: Appalachian Women and the Fight for Environmental Justice* by Bell (2013). Donna Branham, an interviewee from the

coalfields of WV, said, “It’s not so much that [local people] don’t care—everybody’s just sort of been brow-beaten or they just sort of [believe] it’s not going to do any good to try to fight” (pg. 137). As this statement supports, quiescence doesn’t come from a place of willingness; the powerless are actively silenced. Many who were dependent on the coal industry for jobs are:

prevented from either self-determined action or reflection upon their actions. The culture of silence may preclude the development of consciousness amongst the powerless thus leading to the dominant order an air of legitimacy. As in the sense of powerlessness, it may also encourage a susceptibility among the dependent society to internalization of the values of the dominant themselves. (Gaventa 1980, pg. 18)

Power strips away values and a sense of community until residents are no longer in solidarity with each other. “The coal industry works to cultivate an ideology of ‘us’ versus ‘them,’ attempting to erase the local residents from the movement” (Bell 2013, pg. 4). They then begin to shape the beliefs of those who are reliant on the industry. This structure explicitly works in extractive industries such as coal and timber that were able to maintain power in communities by connecting their industries to identity while continuing to decrease jobs and economic benefits (Bell and York 2010). Groups such as Friends of Coal constructed the idea that coal is the center of the economy and identity for West Virginia (Bell and York 2010). The process, called the “treadmill of production,” started with the loss of jobs in the region due to the technological advances that led to a more mechanized industry. Therefore, as job opportunities disappeared, residents of areas with the monoconomy of coal became even more tied to that industry. With so few jobs available, these residents would then stop fighting against the industry (striking for more pay, benefits, and safety and environmental regulations) for fear of additional job losses.

The system works to perpetuate the subjugation of the people in these communities which leads to communities accepting the oppressive system. Bell and York (2010) show how Friends of Coal further tied industry to identity through ad campaigns and sporting events. The billboards depicting images of miners with the phrase “Coal Keeps the Lights On” are one example of this in practice. While coal is certainly one way to supply energy; it is not the only resource available. However, with identity being linked to coal, the billboards speak to a sense of self and belonging. It’s a mantra. “Due to this legacy, many rural communities are left with an identity tied to a particular extractive industry, even though that industry no longer provides many jobs or plays a dominant role in the local or regional economy” (Bell and York 2010, pg. 112). The powerless often adapt to the belief systems of the powerful in reaction to the oppression they are facing. Rather than accept powerlessness, residents gradually take on the ideologies of those with power “as a means of escaping the subjective sense of powerlessness” (Gaventa 1980, pg. 15). This gradual taking ownership of a new belief system allows the subjected to feel less powerless, even if it is not in line with their own best interests.

According to Gaventa’s (1980) earlier work, what follows is that the powerless, who have not been allowed to participate in choosing the direction their lives should take, become disengaged from the larger issues. They are then (through this system of oppression) incapable of joining with others in their communities to establish their own circumstances and future directions. This pervasive ideology becomes the status quo as legislators draft policy giving further power to industry in the form of weakened environmental protections and right to work laws. For example, United States legislators recently signed an MOU with China. As part of a 250-billion-dollar plan for energy investment, over 83 billion dollars would be invested in West Virginia. While many West Virginians understand that this agreement would continue to

perpetuate the history of absentee landownership and resource extraction without appropriate return or respect for the people who live in the areas affected, there was barely a reaction to the announcement (Harris and McCarthy 2020).

A majority of the population voted those legislators into office. This process is a passive revolution representing the larger system that includes both the mechanisms and the time frame through which the structure is established (Gramsci 1971). Power is maintained through controlling the ideology and norms of the culture. It is “revolution” only in the sense that change happens to an entire group. For example, environmental legislation that benefits the coal companies doesn’t just harm those communities in close proximity to mining operations; the legislation affects everyone who needs access to clean drinking water or air. Since the change comes from those in power, however, it typically is to the benefit of the leaders and not the rest of society. It is a “‘revolution’ without a ‘revolution’” (Gramsci 1971, pg. 59). A passive revolution is also not necessarily passive—just gradual. It is not always peaceful. It is a situation where those in power make the conditions more beneficial to their needs over time. Eventually the circumstances set in place become the status quo and nearly impossible to change or overcome. West Virginia’s gradual cycle of outmigration enabled those in power to perpetuate and develop the status quo, further stripping agency away from the people who stayed.

Depopulation is one way that coal companies eradicate agency in the communities near mining sites. When beginning a mining operation, they will first attempt to buy properties that affect access to a site. They will often offer prices above market value (Ward 1998). As residents of these communities sell, a smaller group of people is left to fight. Those who do stay are forced to deal with the aftermath. It is one of the most powerful ways that agency is restricted. Without a community and the solidarity it provides, it is much more difficult to fight. In rural areas where

financial capital is already limited, social capital is valuable. A loss of community creates the sense of an individual battle rather than a unified effort. In addition, as the coal companies push people out, often the only jobs left are in mining. This creates an environment where residents are pitted against each other as the fight for clean water is spun as a fight against jobs. The fight for clean air is called a war on coal. Further restricting agency, the coal industry helps to develop this mindset. There are few places to go to not be complicit in the power dynamic by using electricity generated by coal.

The options for the powerless are few. As coal companies buy out homes and land before beginning mountaintop removal operations, those who rent have no choice. Many residents leave as their leases are not renewed. Homeowners are also hurt in this process. In some areas, homes lost as much as 90% of their value after mining operations were located nearby (Bell 2013). When possible, and with resources, people move from rural mining communities to bigger cities or to other states where there may be new opportunities or a family support system. Not all who stay do so by choice. This leaves a population struggling to maintain a sense of normalcy. Some resist the power system while others become a part of that system:

The consciousness of the relatively powerless, even as it emerges, may be malleable, i.e. especially vulnerable to the manipulation of the power field around it. Through the invocation of myths or symbols, the use of threat or rumours, or other mechanisms of power, the powerful may be able to ensure that certain beliefs and actions emerge in one context while apparently contradictory grievances may be expressed in others. (Gaventa 1980, pg. 19)

The evidence of this lies in court proceedings involving coal companies. In a hearing, a representative of Arch Coal said, “It is easier to mine coal without people around. Because it’s

been our experience that people don't enjoy living close to mining operations" (Smith 2014). Those who don't want to leave, often because their families have been there for generations, have few, if any, choices. That leaves a very small group of people often unable to resist the coal companies because many of them rely on the monoecconomy of coal for survival. Quiescence isn't always a choice. The powerless often adapt to the belief systems of the powerful in reaction to the oppression they are facing. Rather than accept powerlessness, they gradually take on the ideologies of those with power. This new belief system allows them to feel less powerless, even if it is not beneficial (Gaventa 1980). Quiescence in Appalachian coal communities is a result of power dynamics where those in power succeed in getting the powerless to act against their best interests.

Coal's monoecconomy has helped create poverty in much of West Virginia. Depopulation leads to a cycle of poverty as the people left are often those without the capital to leave. When areas are depopulated and people are forced out of their homes, the market shifts and existing homes become devalued. This then allows the coal companies to accrue more property at lower prices. Those who stay are left with a fraction of the value of what their homes were once worth (Bell 2013). This reveals deep social inequality. While West Virginians may have agency in being able to leave, the fact that many are being forced out takes away any sense of agency in the situation.

The coal industry has created a world in which some people are worth saving and others are not. Those living in the sacrifice zone are excluded, worthless. "He can save himself only in perpetual flight or a foreign land" (Agamben 1998, pg. 183). This is the situation for many residents of West Virginia. Many people do not have the resources to move if they wanted to.

The power structure in place has created an unbearable situation for those who lack the resources to leave. Weller (1965) defines them as “yesterday’s people”:

Who stayed behind? ...It was the poorly trained and the poorly educated, who could find either no jobs or else such poor jobs that life in the cities would have had to be lived in undesirable slums; the unambitious, who could tolerate a subsistence living at home; those above forty, who find it hard to be retrained and who are not wanted in the already overfull labor market; the aged, the sickly, and the retarded [sic]; and the psychologically immobile, who could not move away from the familiar, protective mountain culture. ...

Many such families who just couldn’t make it out in the cities and have come back to eke out the barest existence. (pg. 21-22)

This situation is well illustrated by the poor treatment of ill and aging miners. In Appalachia, cases of Black lung are on the rise (Berkes 2012). Black lung, or coal workers’ pneumoconiosis, is a preventable disease caused by breathing coal dust. The cost of treatment is approximately \$10,000 per year (Davidson 2019). As coal mines close, the increasing burden of healthcare costs fall on the federal government, whose funding has suffered since the late 1970s. However, legislators recently approved a cut to the coal tax rate, causing massive deficits for the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund which helps cover treatment (Davidson 2019). Their lives are being treated as “collateral damage” to protect a profit margin:

Where there is a conflict between the economic purposes of capitalism and the mere biological survival of the indigenous [sic] peoples, it is all too easy for the colonial power to persuade itself that the general interest is best served by letting people die. However, rather than managing these interactions to enhance the vitality of the social body, they are manipulated to enhance the economic value of local resources for the external metropole,

even at the expense of “letting die” many of the people indigenous to the colony.

(Kearns 2007, pg. 7)

These power dynamics illustrate a system in which violence shifted from that of intimidation and threats to structural violence (Farmer 1996 and 2004). The system was designed to give power to a few, and to explicitly harm others. For Farmer (1996), structural violence is always an action. These actions lead to the suffering of individuals—not just groups. He asks, “By what mechanisms do social forces ranging from poverty to racism become *embodied* as individual experience? Political and economic forces have structured risk [for disease] and for most forms of extreme suffering, from hunger to torture to rape” (1996, pg. 11). Structural violence is psychological terror, social inequality (racism and poverty), systems that favor the powerful over the powerless, and both the condition and the continuation of a system that meets the needs of only those in power. As structural violence *is* the system, many of the acts against the oppressed are legal. The acts, therefore, are conscious acts. Further, “structural violence is structured and *stricturing*. It constricts the agency of its victims. It tightens a physical noose around their necks, and this garroting determines the way in which resources—food, medicine, even affection—are allocated and experienced” (Farmer 2004, pg. 315 emphasis original). Structural violence is also silencing. Acts of structural violence such as depopulation, overprescription and overdistribution of opioids, legislation affecting education and healthcare, among so many others, are oppressive in that they remove the voice, and therefore agency, of its victims, primarily the poor. The poor, he writes, “are not only more likely to suffer; they are also more likely to have their suffering silenced” (1996, pg. 21).

Implicated are not just those who perpetuate systematic violence but everyone who is part of the “social order,” as “structural violence is exerted systematically—that is, indirectly”

(Farmer 2004, pg. 307). Farmer (2004) explains that “oppression is a result of many conditions” and “the concept of structural violence is intended to inform the study of the social machinery of oppression” (pg. 307). The effect of the social marginalization of rural communities (West Virginia as an Internal Other to the rest of the US) and the extent of resistance are important in measuring the degree of structural violence in place in coal communities. An effective means to gauge the impact of structural violence is by looking at “the degree to which agency is constrained [as it] is correlated inversely, if not always neatly, with the ability to resist marginalization and other forms of oppression” (pg. 307).

In the Appalachian coalfields, the mechanism of structural violence coincides with “death, injury, illness, subjugation, [and] stigmatization” (Farmer 2004, pg. 308). These are the experiences of the marginalized West Virginia communities living alongside mountaintop removal sites. Psychological terror is an outcome of what, more often than not, are real threats and actions of the coal operators. Residents of these rural communities perceive the aggressive actions of the coal companies as tactics of intimidation. It’s structural violence in that the companies employ tactics to depopulate these areas. Again the importance of perception rises. Coal companies are required to keep dust down, inspect slurry impoundments and other containing devices, and maintain safety mechanisms (Bell 2013). However, little has been done historically to enforce the regulations. For example, in Sylvester, WV, the coal company would only wet the coal (to keep dust down) when inspectors would be arriving (Bell 2013). Coal companies may be able to prove that they did everything in the best interests of the residents of mining communities. They may be able to prove their procedures were legal. Much structural violence is legal. The residents, however, feel terrorized and believe that through the structure of the system, created over many years, the coal companies are trying to force them out. Regardless

of whether or not the communities can, want to, or do resist this violence, the violence was/is felt. In this, and many other scenarios, the violence is tangible and acknowledged. It is not just perceived—it is experienced every day.

As coal's dominance has waned, there is no longer a dichotomy between us and them. However, there is pervasive heteronormativity, white supremacy, and patriarchy. This oppressive political climate is cited as one of the reasons people leave (Raby 2021). The LGBTQ+ community is particularly at risk in West Virginia. Because of state laws, LGBTQ+ youth are susceptible to discrimination, ranking last in social acceptance by state. There is also greater stigma resulting in high rates of bullying, harassment, and family rejection (Mallory et al. 2021). Despite the NCAA announcing that they would pull all championship events from states with transgender athlete bans, the West Virginia State Legislature passed a law prohibiting transgender girls and women from participating in sports at all levels from kindergarten through college (Pierson 2021). The Fairness Act, a bill which would ban discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, however, did not pass. Homophobia was not the only issue taken up by the legislature. The antiracist CROWN Act, a bill that would make discrimination against natural hair illegal, was rejected. West Virginia also has one of the least diverse legislative bodies with only 3% minority representation (NCSL 2015). Further, while West Virginia has high rates of poverty, Black West Virginians make 70 percent of what white households make and Black men and women have higher rates of unemployment (O'Leary 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic amplified disparities with less access to testing and vaccines for people of color.

In the legislature, Women are also not fairly represented with approximately 15% female representation in the West Virginia House and Senate. Further, the legislature once again refused to pass the Katherine Johnson Fair Pay Act. This bill was not mandating equal pay. It merely

would have prohibited employers from using salary history to determine compensation. These actions and inactions show a governing body not open to inclusivity. This is a governing body elected by the people, confirming the state's stereotypical reputation as the homophobic, white, xenophobic, and backward. It is a difficult environment for someone with more progressive politics, and another reason for leaving.

Identity Constructs for Resistance

Despite the statewide political climate, people who stay in Appalachia can be empowered through identity constructs. Resistance can take many forms. While place can offer a context for resistance, place-based identity constructs can also be harnessed for resistance. Identity formation is contextual and contingent on power dynamics (Castells 1997). The two main identity constructs for resistance are resistance identity and project identity. Resistance identity is primarily reactionary. In Appalachia this may include reacting against negative stereotypes for example, keeping an accent. Project identity involves the creation of an identity that will change the system; not merely a reaction. Resistance identities “may be the most important type of identity-building in our society” (Castells 1997, pg. 9). When people come together to resist oppression, they embrace stereotypes, reclaiming and reinforcing the recognizable aspects of their culture they deem essential. This flips the narrative around and allows for an acceptance and glorification of aspects of a culture that were previously deemed undesirable.

Resistance identity also can be engaged by connection to place. Discourse surrounding place can help social movements. The identities connected to political boundaries, while “situational and contextual,” can help “clarify the mix of other identities based on other attributes such as gender, ethnicity, language, and religion that help link the shared cultures and social

bonds among its members” (Hardwick and Mansfield 2009, pg. 387). Regional identities are strong because they are often linked to these shared bonds and cultures that exist within communities. It is the romanticized notion surrounding a region (or a reaction to a negative stereotype) that spurs people into further connections with each other. Satterwhite’s advocating for the use of resistance identities (Smith et al. 2010) as more than combating negative stereotypes can be used in tandem with regional identities when people connect to bring about change. Group identities, however, are not always enough for collective behavior. The sentiment of place has to be tied to a larger issue that is of central importance to those in the region (Stephenson 1988).

Appalachian identity can be a powerful force for change, especially in young people who are just beginning to discover who they are in the world. “Claiming Appalachia has given me a place and a people and a sense of who I am and who I want to become and has brought focus and commitment to my work and politics. ... I firmly believe that people have to develop pride in who they are before they can begin to fully accept the dignity and equality of others” (Smith et al. 2010, pgs. 59-60). To embrace the region, it is important to also critique the status quo. Ferrance (2012) asserts that, “the residents of a region can, and perhaps must, step forward to describe the actuality of lives lived within their specific places” (pg. 128).

Embracing Appalachian identity has proven to be an empowering experience. A regional identity can help provide a space for working against assumptions (Smith et al. 2010). “Claiming Appalachia” can give young people “a sense of who they are and want to become” based on place (Smith et al., pg. 60). Important to this is helping people recognize that Appalachian experiences are diverse. “Being Appalachian means something different depending on who you are and where you are in the region” (Smith et al. 2010, pg. 59). Deconstructing stereotypes and

claiming Appalachian identity based on personal definitions of what that means can foster pride in place and helps create conscious citizens. The predominant concept of a singular Appalachian identity is deeply flawed:

We must challenge the idea that there is only one legitimate Appalachian experience by recognizing all the varied life experiences in the region.... Our romanticized notions of place and identity ... sustain and connect us. Place and identity, by themselves, are not enough to equip us for claiming an Appalachian future against the forces of globalization arrayed against us. They aren't enough but they are crucial components in the struggle against those forces and are most certainly worthy of our attention. (Smith et al. 2010, pg. 61)

Romanticizing Appalachian histories allows people to “consciously and intentionally, and despite a nearly lifelong struggle with alienating influences” come to accept the region with pride, and to act on shared histories for a better future (Smith et al., pg. 43-44). This has been seen as positive but it can also impede progress as people cling to outdated and romantic notions of place and identity (Eller 1988). There are issues inherent in these mythologies of Appalachia. There is danger in reinforcing insider/outsider binaries which can be harmful and exclusive. One identity construct is not “more authentic than another” (Smith et al. 2010, pg. 57, Ferrence 2012). Appalachia is as much the coal miner as the person who owns the mine, the landlord and the tenant, the teacher and the student. It is vital to accept all people living in the region as Appalachian, regardless of politics.

It is equally important to recognize the valid space of those who might defend mining, or who might not consider attention to the environment as a crucial Appalachian act. These perspectives, too, must be accepted as authentic Appalachian points of view. The

existence of stereotype does not imply that all residents act in opposition to stereotype, nor that 'stereotypical' options are in some way backward or ill-informed. (Ferrance 2012, pg. 128)

Perpetuating insider/outsider binaries connected to stereotypes can harm movements for change. Smith (2010) writes, "Here in the Appalachian region, deindustrialization, economic extraction, and forced migration undermine the viability of place-based communities, while the literal destruction of place through mountaintop removal proceeds apace. Even as regional identity emerges as a potent counter-force, its boundary-marking distinction between those who belong to this place and those who do not can also have ominous, albeit unintended, overtones and consequences" (pg. 57). Further, as Powell (2007) warns, "If we stipulate, for example, that Appalachia is a place of strong familial connections, even if we do so to endorse the powerful networks of mutual support kinship affords folks facing capitalist domination, we risk tacitly endorsing a patriarchal politics that ignores the very real struggles of female and queer (not to mention progressive male) Appalachians within and against patriarchal strictures" (pg. 47).

Conclusion

Resistance isn't always a reaction to power. Resistance can be *for* instead of against. This was most recently demonstrated by the West Virginia teachers' strike. They weren't resisting working or working conditions. In fact, during the work stoppages, many teachers spent long evenings preparing meals for students while the schools were closed (Dawson 2018). They were resisting for affordable healthcare and a livable wage. Shifting the perspective on resistance in this way can be transformative for the people engaged in providing opportunities for change in the region. It takes various forms of resistance to enact change. Humanity is characterized by

words and actions, originality—and the desire to make these permanent (Arendt 1958 and 2003). This is the potential of power.

The dynamics of power and resistance in West Virginia and Appalachia are manifested in those who stay, who have resisted the dominant paradigm to leave. As Wolford (2010) shows, movements are varied. People become involved for different reasons; they have different memories of past resistance shaped by current events. Those who stay and work for social justice strive to create an Appalachia that can move away from the oppression and stereotypes. There is a great complexity in these identity constructs that can be harnessed to bring about positive change for the region. These identity constructs are strongly tied to place. Further, place attachment is strong for many Appalachians.

As resistance is contextual and place-based, we look to the history of the extractive industries in Appalachia to see how a system of vastly unequal power dynamics led to the marginalization of people, specifically those close to mining operations. Coal companies didn't only affect poverty. Social capital was impacted as well, leaving communities even more vulnerable. Resistance to this is part of the long history of striking for labor reform in West Virginia. As there is no longer a monolithic industry driving the economy of the state, however, resistance now looks different. Using resistance and project identities, people are challenging stereotypes in new ways. Local development programs like tourism initiatives, to craft and retail endeavors such as the Appalachian Botanical Company reclaiming a mountaintop removal site by growing lavender, and Blenko Glass' recent collaboration with artist Liz Pavlovic who designed Flatwoods Monster and ramp vessels, are changing the narrative. Artisanal body products and limited edition handblown glass pieces don't conform to the stereotypical pursuits of a barefoot hillbilly but mountaintop removal sites and glass blowing are deeply embedded into

the state's history. Other community-driven efforts include the passing of the CROWN Act by both Morgantown and Beckley city councils, and the electing of Rosemary Ketchum, an openly transgender woman, to Wheeling city council.

Gaventa (2019) recently revisited his unparalleled 1980 *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence in an Appalachian Valley*. In it he admits to having overlooked acts of resistance that weren't as noticeable as large strikes and work stoppages. Locally, there are smaller ways that people fight back including grassroots organizations and community-driven initiatives. While the media focused on electoral politics, this "behavior may disguise, or at least not reflect, subaltern patterns of organizing and resistance which are also occurring in these communities. What is at play is the difference between a form of discourse-based national politics and a more radical and potentially transformative local place-based politics" (Gaventa 2019, pg. 448). This is what Gaventa was observing in his 1980 study of the community in Clear Fork Valley who organized to open a pallet factory and build local health clinics. These are the types of programs and initiatives that are still taking place, regardless of the political views of the organizers. What is left to be determined is the extent to which these programs enable others to stay, and their potential to bring new people into the state. The decision to stay and to develop/redevelop communities into places that empower others to stay is resistance to the paradigm of leaving, the stigma that follows the negative Appalachian stereotypes, and the political structure that led to these unequal dynamics.

Chapter 3

Identity Politics and Resistance: The Social Media Response to the Elk River Chemical Spill

On Thursday, January 9, 2014, approximately ten thousand gallons of crude 4-methylcyclohexanemethanol (MCHM), a chemical used to process coal, leaked from a storage container at a Freedom Industries site located on the bank of the Elk River and just over a mile upstream from the intake for the water company serving Charleston, West Virginia, and the surrounding areas (“Company Increases” 2014; Ward 2014b). The chemical contaminated the drinking water of over three hundred thousand residents in nine counties and was declared unusable for days (“Company Increases” 2014). Despite the large number of people affected, the spill initially remained largely unnoticed by the national mainstream media.

Local news media, unsurprisingly, were quick to report the leak. Instead of solely relying on traditional approaches such as newspaper and radio coverage, reporters used the internet to send information via Twitter and even Instagram (Boucher et al. 2014). These new media outlets allow for a greater conversation to evolve regarding the local crisis that was affecting many West Virginians. Following the initial reports, and after the enormity of the situation was realized, people from all over the state began posting to blogs, which led to further activity on social media sites. The posts and subsequent comments show intense loyalty to a state marginalized and forgotten, and outrage at yet another environmental catastrophe. Incited by the chemical spill, social media was used as a tool in the process of social change, showing how West Virginians claimed ownership of an outcast and overlooked region.

The lack of attention, however, was no surprise for West Virginia. A second spill just over a month later of over one hundred thousand gallons of toxic slurry into Kanawha Creek

would unlikely have made national news if it were not for the leak into the Elk River (Ward 2014a). These incidents were only the latest in the line of environmental catastrophes to hit the state (Biggers 2014). West Virginia has long been a site of collateral damage in the nation's need for cheap energy, and an internal other poised to represent the backward segment of a modern nation moving forward. Further, West Virginians' seeming acceptance of this colonialist exploitation, where egregious violations of laws have become routine, has been extensive and long-term.

Coal is the foundation for the state's identity, an identity firmly linked to its landscape and economy. It was not always like this. In 1880, a turning point for industry in Appalachia, independent farms were prevalent (Eller 1982). The industrial revolution in West Virginia started with timber, brought railroads, and then the boom-and-bust mono-economy of the coal industry. Coal dominated until the mid-1980s but began to play a less important role as mountaintop removal mining became more prevalent. In addition, the rise in production of natural gas and an increase in renewables eventually led to coal's decline (US Energy Information Administration 2016a). Scott (2010) writes: "People talk of boom and bust cycles in industries like coal, but the history of West Virginia coal mining is more like a single boom and an increasing bust—at least for the people who live in the coalfields" (pg. 23).

This impact has been felt economically and socially. Bell and York (2010) write that "due to this legacy, many rural communities are left with an identity tied to a particular extractive industry, even though that industry no longer provides many jobs or plays a dominant role in the local or regional economy" (pg. 112). Further, they argue that extractive industries like coal exploit this identity construct to "maintain their political influence, which is often used to avoid government regulations aimed at ensuring the protection of the environment and public

health” (Bell and York 2010, pg. 112). An industry with fewer jobs should have less power in the sociocultural landscape. However, one way the coal industry fought to keep its legacy was through developing the group Friends of Coal to perpetuate the historical construct that coal is a significant contributor to the economy (Bell and York 2010). Through their research, Bell and York (2010) found that the purpose of the Friends of Coal campaign was to get rid of obstructions the coal industry would face. This “faux grassroots” movement “appropriates West Virginia cultural icons” and establishes “a visible presence in the social landscape of West Virginia through stickers, yard signs, and sponsorships” (Bell and York 2010, pg. 129) to depict the coal industry as a “provider—both for West Virginia’s families and for the nation’s energy demands” (Bell and York 2010, pg. 131). By conflating the idea of the coal miner with that of the coal industry, Friends of Coal manipulates its supporters, “attempting to construct a pro-coal ideology that shapes community economic identity” (Bell and York 2010, pg. 139). This successful campaign was built on the myth of the hardworking miners who provide for their families and the nation. “In the coalfields, for example, there is the national romance of the miner, the charisma of the power to move mountains, and the incipient nostalgia of a disappearing Appalachian culture” (Scott 2010, pg. 13). As such, West Virginia became a “sacrifice zone,” an area exploited for its resources but lauded for its efforts. “As a marginalized region,” argues Scott (2010), “Appalachia is excluded from the American mainstream, while at the same time it represents for many the ‘heartland,’ or the ‘real America.’ The billions of tons of coal taken from the mountains have cost the lives of countless workers and caused untold damage to the environment” (pg. 137). This dichotomy has become part of the complex identity construct of the region.

Social media can show how West Virginians are embracing their marginalized status and forging identity ties to the region, using the chemical spill as the impetus for participating in the process of social change. David Jansson's concept (2003, 2007) of the internal other, Johnson and Coleman's (2013) interpretation of that theory, and the work of Dittmer (2010) and Fenton (2008) on the use of new media by the subaltern offer a lens through which to view the role of place in identity construction for this population. A blog post by Eric Waggoner (2014a), a professor at West Virginia Wesleyan University and native West Virginian, became the epicenter of the discourse surrounding the spill. Its passionate calls to action that simultaneously embraced and confronted "the idea" of West Virginia motivated readers to comment and participate in the reactionary rhetoric that has become part of social media engagement. The scale of the Elk River chemical spill in the Kanawha Valley inspired a community to use new media in acts of resistance against internal othering, to embrace marginalization, and reinforce/re-center place and space in identity politics.

Appalachian Identity Constructs

As early as 1890, Appalachia was seen as a region defined by otherness (Shapiro 1978). In his policy-changing 1962 book on poverty in America, Harrington (1962) wrote: "It seems likely that the Appalachians will continue going down, that its lovely mountains and hills will house a culture of poverty and despair, and that it will become a reservation for the old, the apathetic, and the misfits" (pg. 46). This idea of Appalachia is now firm in the consciousness of American citizens who rely on stereotypes of the region. Shapiro's *Appalachia on Our Mind* explains how this portrait fed into the desire of missionaries and charities to come to the aid of the poor:

What is significant about this situation is not the doubt thus cast upon the motives of those who initiated benevolent work in Appalachia because of an a priori definition of the mountaineers as “needy” rather than out of a simple humanitarian concern for their welfare, but the relationship it suggests between explanation and social action as responses to the dilemma generated by the perception of Appalachian otherness. Both patterns of action depended upon a definition of the southern mountain region as a strange land inhabited by a peculiar people. (Shapiro 1978, pg. xvi)

It is an indelible part of history that shows no sign of erasure. The dominant culture (the rest of America) frames Appalachia as backward, perpetuating negative stereotypes in order to marginalize and exploit the people who live where the resources are (Bell and York 2010; Jansson 2010; Smith 2015).

West Virginia, a resource-rich state, faces persistent challenges—more than fifty years after the War on Poverty was declared in 1964 (Moore 2014). Except for brief moments where West Virginia is lauded (for example, the West Virginia University men’s basketball team making the NCAA Final Four in 2010 and the 2018 teacher work stoppage), when headlines from the state make national or international news, it is most often because of a mining disaster (most recently, Sago, 2006 and Upper Big Branch, 2010) or natural disasters where West Virginians are posited as hardworking people who always help others in times of need (2012’s derecho is one example; see Kane 2012). Unfortunately, stereotypical portrayals are more often the norm (Speer 1993). West Virginians are negatively represented in the mainstream media through reality television shows such as *Buckwild* and films like *The Wild and Wonderful Whites of West Virginia* that further exploit peoples seen as “less” to the average American.

David Jansson has written extensively on the internal other, a concept where regions are disregarded for the benefit of a dominant representation of a larger territory or country (2007). He echoes Shapiro (1978) by arguing that “the internal orientalist discourse represents a subordinate section of the state in a particular (unflattering) way so as to produce a national (i.e., state-scale) identity with desirable characteristics. The creation of the exalted national identity thus involves the production of negative stereotypes about people from the subordinate region” (Jansson 2003, pg. 297). Without the pervasive *idea* of West Virginia, the imagined space of this community in the minds of the viewers, stereotypical television programs and films would not hold such popularity. Jansson claims that the spatial element is significant. “What matters is the clarity of the regional idea, the imagined space . . . to the extent that the . . . regional identity informs the national identity” (Jansson 2003, pg. 311). While non-West Virginians may not know exactly where the state is located (“Is that near Richmond?”), they certainly have an understanding of the stereotypes of the region, reinforced by popular culture.

Johnson and Coleman (2013) add a discussion of identity into their work that builds on Jansson’s concepts of the internal other. They write that the othered regions of a nation help reinforce the nation and therefore help create and strengthen national identity. Space and place are inherently linked to identity. They write: “Internal difference within states is . . . essential to the creation of a common purpose that is the defining feature of the modern state” (Johnson and Coleman 2013, pg. 864). Without the construct of West Virginia, the United States would not be able to move forward. The state serves the purpose of being the geographical other:

When identity becomes mapped on a particular place or region (which it inevitably does), certain elements of that messiness can be glossed over. In other words, the undesirable can be mapped on a specific region. . . . These places are constructed as repositories for

backwardness and consequently become the spatial containers that are home to impediments to national progress. . . . The difference in the service of identity formation is spatialized, and regions become the key sites where spatial evidence can be found. (Johnson and Coleman 2013, pg. 865)

Identity is linked to geography. West Virginia's hills and valleys have made connectivity difficult. Its rural residents have less access to resources that those in cities take for granted: large libraries, cheap internet access, museums, and so forth.

The relationship between geography and identity, which partly led to West Virginia's subordination, has had extreme consequences. When James Blaut wrote that "with fresh land and a brisk market, moral scruples were brushed aside," he was criticizing colonialism and imperialism (1970, pg. 77). The sentiment rings true for West Virginia, where it often seems that profits come before people. In 2009, the CEO of Massey Energy (the company that owned the Upper Big Branch Mine at the time of the explosion that killed twenty-nine miners) received a \$17.8 million salary (Berkes 2010). That same year, the Upper Big Branch Mine had injury rates higher than other coal producing states. Further, four Massey mines had injuries more than double the national average (Berkes 2010). In 2014, 18,330 people were employed by coal mining in West Virginia (US Energy Information Administration 2016b). This is a mere 3 percent of the total workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015). When other businesses such as trucking are included, the coal industry employs closer to 5 percent. Some politicians may argue that the economic impact of the coal industry is much larger than those directly employed by the mines. A 2009 report found that coal actually cost the state \$97 million (McIlmoil et al. 2010). The cost/benefit analysis showed legacy impacts through reclamation, state road repair, and

worker's compensation. The report did not include an investigation into the impacts on health and wellness, which, they argue, would have led to an even higher cost calculation.

West Virginia's historical monoeconomy in coal has led to a situation that Gramsci (1971) addresses, where the world's leaders have constructed the norm, and the majority of the marginalized accept the status quo. He terms this a "passive revolution" (Gramsci 1971, pg. 114) as it comes from the top and happens slowly over time. While the hegemony in West Virginia is not using violence to prevent voters from going to the polls, in the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections, the state had the second lowest voter turnout, ranked fifty out of fifty-one (Sullivan 2013; Pillsbury and Johannesen 2017). In addition, according to a Gallup Poll, for eight years in a row, West Virginia was ranked the unhappiest state (Witters 2017). These statistics give the impression of a climate of apathy and discontent. West Virginians have been living in a space of exception, where the needs and wants of some are more important than those of others. Agamben (1998) argues that, in a state of exception, individuals have lost a voice and a sense of agency over their own lives. They live a "bare life" in which "they are manipulated to enhance the economic value of local resources for the external metropole, even at the expense of 'letting die' many of the people" (Kearns 2007, pg. 7). The marginalized of West Virginia have few tools to resist the coal companies. Dittmer (2010) writes: "Identity and power are . . . invoked in multiple dimensions" (pg. xvii). As value is assigned to places, "it constructs hierarchies of people and places that matter and those that do not" (Dittmer 2010, pg. xviii). As West Virginia's identity is shackled to coal, many of its residents have begun to give it increasingly more value as the industry declines.

New Media and Agency

As soon as reporters noticed something was not right with the water, local media outlets began reporting. Due to the enormity of the situation and severity of the events, those same outlets turned to new media to supplement their stories. *Charleston Daily Mail* and WOWK-TV in Charleston used Twitter extensively (Boucher et al. 2014). The *Guardian* commissioned Roger May, a photographer and West Virginia native, to document the spill and post images to its Instagram feed. Countless blog posts were written, posted, re-posted, and published on larger platforms such as the Huffington Post. Dittmer (2010) argues that new media allows a greater number of voices to get noticed. While the marginalized have few strategies for participation, he writes,

the Internet and similar media allow subaltern voices to bypass the corporate, hegemonic mainstream media and either engage in anti-geopolitics or in postcolonial discourse that dissolves the hegemonic framing of an issue. However, the use of new media is unlikely to be influential unless it somehow piggybacks on some form of broadcast media, or is part of some sort of viral marketing campaign. . . . This necessarily involves more than just “getting a message out,” it requires people’s identities to be changed as a result of their engagement with new media. (2010, pg. 146)

This is precisely what happened with the new media response to the Elk River chemical spill. It was the medium *and* the message that elicited such a strong reaction to events. The blog posts were informed by, and published in addition to, the reporting of the local mainstream media. The further dissemination of information and opinions through Twitter and Facebook (re-tweeted, re-posted, liked, and shared), and the powerful images posted to Instagram and reproduced by the cable outlets and national forums such as the Huffington Post, forced this

event to “go viral,” but only as much as the limited power allowed in the face of other news events, such as the Bridgegate scandal, happening at the same time.

In response to the spill, social media became a platform for resistance. Fenton (2008) argues that the internet presents a way for the marginalized to get involved and to become connected to building communities. It “has become home to mediated activity that seeks to raise people’s awareness, to give a voice to those who do not have one, to offer social empowerment, to allow disparate people and causes to organize themselves and form alliances” (Fenton 2008, pg. 233). These alliances are essential to the identity of the community. Echoing Fenton, Bimber (1998) writes that the development of communities is one of the primary outcomes for the political use of the internet. It can bring people from different areas together for social change and help form and enhance community identity. The anonymity of the internet forces respondents to stake claims on their sense of identity—to participate in the community and to name the community. This is often done through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, but blogs also play an important role due to the multiple ways in which they can be used. Hookway’s (2008) literature review discusses the potential for blogs to impact social change. Although they are a relatively new genre, blogs encourage participation in journalism and help establish new communities (Hookway 2008). News outlets such as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* have added blogs to their existing websites. These posts are a way to disseminate additional information about the featured stories and are often editorial in nature. The comment feature allows readers to get more involved with the conversation.

Unlike other forms of social media, blogs are inherently public and are considered published material (Hookway 2008; Sin 2015). Blogs, therefore, are an ideal tool for scholars to learn the ways in which members of a community engage in acts of resistance online. Postill and

Pink (2012) argue that digital ethnographies, because of the way people interact with the internet, “can also become particularly relevant in relation to specific localities” as they help show how the political climate of a place is connected to its history (pg. 123). Their research illustrates both the connect and the disconnect between the social media movements and the existing situations, and how people participate in each (Postill and Pink 2012). Blogs serve as an ideal tool to promote civic engagement among rural West Virginian populations. Online research allows contact with people who lack the physical access to become engaged in the process (Hookway 2008). Access, however, is also one of the main drawbacks to participation. “Membership of these communities is inherently restricted to the digital ‘haves’ (or at least those with digital social capital) rather than the ‘have nots’” (Murthy 2008, pg. 845). While the internet may give the subaltern a voice (Dittmer 2010), those same people do not always have access to the internet. In fact, according to 2013 Census data, West Virginia was ranked sixth in the nation for lack of connectivity, with 35.9 percent of residents reporting they had no access (Governing Data 2013). Where service is available, it is often cost prohibitive or extremely slow. Despite this limitation, after the chemical spill, West Virginians were motivated to use social media to express outrage, resist the dominant discourse, and embrace marginalization. The comments show us the ways in which these sentiments can be expressed in an online environment and reveal the significant role that place plays in identity construction.

Resistance through Social Media

One blog post that went viral after the chemical spill was “Elemental” by Dr. Eric Waggoner, Associate Professor of American Literature and Cultural Studies, and chair of the English Department at West Virginia Wesleyan College in Buckhannon, West Virginia (2014a).

Waggoner posted to his blog, *Cultural Slagheap*. Moments after “Elemental” was published, friends started posting it to Facebook and Twitter, where it was shared and re-posted. Two days later, it was published by the Huffington Post. There, it received over forty-eight thousand likes, 12,648 shares, and numerous other hits on social media sites (Waggoner 2014b). Waggoner was also asked to appear on CNN with Brooke Baldwin (2014), effectively connecting to the nationwide mainstream media. The piece describes what shapes the identity of West Virginia and is a call to action.

Early in “Elemental,” Waggoner writes: “Yesterday, Saturday January 11, I drove to Charleston, WV, the city where I was born, and where my parents, my sister and her husband, my niece, and many of my family still live. I’m two hours north now, up in lumber country. They’re still down south in coal country” (2014a). Claiming the site of the disaster as one’s own adds legitimacy to the argument. His family is still there. Although the insider/outsider notion is problematic, in this case, Waggoner uses it to show he has lived through similar situations and has the experience to comment. He uses this tactic again as he begins to draw a conclusion. He adds: “For years, I’ve watched from the inside and out while the place I grew up in, the place where many people I love still live, got sold out and scorched and plowed under and poisoned and filled with smoke” (2014a). The comments follow suit. Many of the responses written by people who left West Virginia make sure to state where they’re from. Janet writes:

I have become interested in environmental issues because I, too, was born and raised in the Charleston area. From there, we moved north along the Ohio River because of my father’s work, in a chemical plant. Now, after seeing what mountaintop removal and fracking, along with the chemical plants lining our rivers, are doing to this beautiful state, we all need to say ENOUGH with our vote. (comment 16 in Waggoner 2014a)

Her comment shows that even those who have moved away still connect to the state. In this case, Janet's relationship with West Virginia led to her involvement in environmental issues, another role in identity development. Identity has long been associated with place, and place is often the center of a community (Massey 2005). As evidenced by many of the comments (whose authors' first names are provided below as originally posted), the act of leaving a physical location does not always force one from the community. People return to their origins when necessary. Herb and Kaplan (1999) argue that, while identities are multifaceted, those associated with geographical locations "can be among the most salient and provoke the greatest degree of ambivalence and conflict" (pg. 1). Sharon draws attention to this:

By now, I've lived longer outside of WV than inside, but I'm still a West Virginian, from Kimberly in Fayette County. Notice that we have to locate ourselves specifically, because geography is so important to us. I connect with your offhand references to "coal country" and "lumber country" and "the smells I associated with chemical leaks growing up."
(comment 84 in Waggoner 2014a)

Location is not *just* important, as Sharon's comment shows. In situations where the landscape itself is affected, it becomes the *center* from which the community is based. This leads to a greater understanding of each member's place in that community. In *The Lure of the Local*, Lippard (1997) writes that "when we know *where* we are, we're in a far better position to understand what other culture groups are experiencing within a time and place we all share" (pg. 10). The acts of posting comments on a blog center and define a community both geographically and through shared experiences. She explains:

Inherent in the local is the concept of a place—a portion of land/town/cityscape seen from the inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar. Most

often place applies to our own “local”—entwined with personal memory, known or unknown histories, marks made in the land that provoke and evoke. Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person’s life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there. (Lippard 1997, pg. 7)

These ties to landscape and place are what make Waggoner’s piece so riveting. He is writing from within the space to which so many people are connected. Landscape is the visual representation of place, and Waggoner articulates what aspects of the landscape have kept people tied to it for so long:

I-64 West into Charleston, coming from southbound, unrolls in a big left-hand curve just after you come into the city. I’ve driven this route hundreds, maybe thousands of times. I grew up here. I recognize every building from the freeway—the banks, the hospitals, the hotels and apartment complexes, all of it. (2014a)

Very few, if any, residents of Charleston commented on this blog post. The reader is a person removed from the actual disaster. Waggoner describes the scenario the audience has experienced: driving home. Whether it is Charleston or some other town, driving home is part of the collective conscious, the “known history,” Lippard describes, of the people who had to, were forced to, or were able to leave (1997, pg. 7).

Identity is also essential toward the end of the piece when Waggoner turns his rage toward himself and his fellow West Virginians who have been so complacent for so long that another accident becomes not a surprise but routine:

Since my own relatives worked in the coal mines and I can therefore play the Family Card, the one that trumps *everything* around here: To hell with all my fellow West Virginians who bought so deeply into the idea of avoidable personal risk and constant sacrifice as an honorable condition under which to live, that they turned that condition into a culture of perverted, twisted pride and self-righteousness, to be celebrated and defended against outsiders. To hell with that insular, xenophobic pathology. To hell with everyone whose only take-away from every story about every explosion, every leak, every mine collapse, is some vague and idiotic vanity in the continued endurance of West Virginians under adverse, sometimes killing circumstances. To hell with everyone who ever mistook suffering for honor, and who ever taught that to their kids. There's nothing honorable about suffering. Nothing. (Waggoner 2014a)

Waggoner is able to put into words the deep-rooted nature of what it means to many people to be a West Virginian. As part of the community he is so angry with, he takes ownership of this identity and further claims it by prefacing with his own personal ties to coal. He attacks the problematic insider/outsider binary while working from within its construct. He uses this position to legitimize his anger and defuse what may, to some, be seen as a personal attack.

The rage Waggoner expresses is echoed by community members who identify with his words and have hope that the chemical spill is the event to elicit change for the state. Susan writes:

After leaving the state, I certainly experienced the same kind of nasty remarks about West Virginians that you describe. I could not begin to tell you how many times people have expressed surprise that I am educated, wear shoes, do not have one leg shorter than the other, and that my parents are not cousins. I suppose it is easier to sacrifice people

who are painted as somehow lesser than the rest of the country. My parents, and many of my family and friends remained in the Charleston area, and many of them were impacted this past week by this latest man-made crisis. I share your rage at those who think, as you so beautifully expressed it, that the people of West Virginia have been seen as the eggs to be broken so the companies could make breakfast. Anyone who has roots there has a right to be outraged. . . . I hope somehow that anger and rage will be channeled into meaningful action to bring about change. (comment 117 in Waggoner 2014a)

This comment also speaks against the negative stereotypes of the state and points toward its marginalization. Susan articulates the work of Agamben (1998) and Said (1978) when she points out how West Virginians have been sacrificed because they are seen as less important. This post, like many of the responses, is a call to action, an act of resistance using one of the few tools available to this marginalized community propelled not only by the disaster but by the eloquence of Waggoner's words and the passion they share for West Virginia.

New media provides agency to a marginalized group. Dittmer (2010) argues that, "rather than using language to try and describe a fundamental truth (like who you really are), language and discourse are tools used to make action possible" (pg. 157). By reading the blog posts and being able to participate in the discussion, the people who feel powerless gain a sense of community and realize the potential to create change without fear of negative repercussions. Jansson (2010) writes that "resistance against oppression is often informed by constructions of identity, and . . . certain constructions of identity can also *create* a sense of oppression" (pg. 204). Many of the posts are written by people who have left West Virginia. They no longer feel a sense of marginalization or oppression. However, for those writing from within, the comments are acts of resistance against othering. Carla criticizes those who accept the power dynamic:

I moved to WV . . . 14 years ago, and I call it home now. I am amazed at the “bend over and take it” attitude so many people have when it comes to “progress,” “industry,” and “jobs,” the buzzwords that induce so many to forsake the very ground they stand on. I hope your article helps these people wake up and see how industrial employers will laugh up their sleeve while they take all that suffering and sacrifice straight to the bank. I hope they will finally see the need for real, binding government regulation of industry.

(comment 70 in Waggoner 2014a)

Carla shares her experience in having moved here from out-of-state and questions the apparent complacency of West Virginians. For Waggoner (2014a), to stay is itself an act of resistance. He writes: “We’re still in the middle of the mess that got made for us” (2014a). The implication of blame does not lie with the people who live here but with those who own the mines and the industries with either lax regulations or whose inspectors take money to overlook safety violations. Waggoner has spent his entire life living through chemical spills, polluted streams, and toxic air. His piece is not only a reaction to the despotic industrial complex, it’s a response to the perpetuation of negativity that continues to oppress West Virginians:

To hell with everyone who ever asked me how I could stand to live in a place like this, so dirty and unhealthy and uneducated. To hell with everyone who ever asked me why people don’t just leave, don’t just quit (and go to one of the other thousand jobs I suppose you imagine are widely available here), like it never occurred to us, like if only we dumb hilljacks would listen as you explained the safety hazards, we’d all suddenly recognize something that hadn’t been on our radar until now. To hell with the superior attitude one so often encounters in these conversations, and usually from people who have no idea about the complexity and the long history at work in it. (Waggoner 2014a)

Because it is the landscape that is affected along with the people, these acts of resistance are as much about place as they are about identity. Routledge (1992) argues that place can inform identity, that place can provide “the context where social movement agency challenges the dominating practices of private capital and the state” (pg. 590). Waggoner and the comments written in response to his post attempt to address the issues that are important to their community, located within a specific space. The state politicians are tied more closely to the industry subjugating the people than to the people they are supposed to serve. Akin to Gramsci (1971), Waggoner explains:

It’s essential for state and federal governments to consult with scientists—actual, real scientists, in spite of this area’s long and fierce tradition of anti-intellectualism when it comes to public policy—and provide a regulatory apparatus for maintaining safety standards and making sure things are up to code, and that there’s a protocol in place for when systems fail. That’s what a society does to protect the people who live in it. Or the people who live in it will—should anyway—naturally come to the conclusion that their health and safety mean zero in the calculus of industry and politics. (2014a)

This is a call to action, and many of the readers of the post responded by using social media to get this message out to a larger population. West Virginians are living in a space of exception where the health effects of coal, the high cost to infrastructure, and the destruction of the living environment helps to form the identity of the people who live there and reinforces this marginalization long ago written in the history books.

Many of the comments echo this call to action rooted in anger. Léna writes:

This is an anthem of legitimate rage, sung for all who have suffered, for all who may yet be suckered. It should be a banner to lead all of us who have had it with the extraction-industry predators who feed on decent folks before they can resist or revolt, who steal their homeland, their health, their hope. (comment 29 in Waggoner 2014a)

These comments are acts of resistance against the industry. As Agnew (1994) discusses, “the representations of space we use in everyday life to signify our political, social, religious, and moral outlooks . . . go largely unremarked. They are remarkable yet deeply symbolic of how we define what is right and wrong and who we identify against” (pg. 55). It takes an event like the chemical spill to underline what is worth fighting for. The posts emphasized the connection to landscape that informs the community identity. To Sharp (2009), it is linked to difference. “Our national identities,” she argues, “are as much about who we are not as who we are. . . . Our identities are formed through the representation of acts that mark us as different from others” (pg. 16). Many of the comments partly define West Virginia, as Sharp explains, through difference. Members of the community claim ownership by showing not how they are like others in the community, but through how they are not like those outside West Virginia. Rose writes:

12 years ago I chose to come back here to live and had to endure all kinds of comments from people thinking I was nuts. And now they still think I’m nuts for staying here. I am sick and tired of our lives being trivialized and my home ruined. (comment 121 in Waggoner 2014a)

What is essential to Rose’s comment is the choice she made to return to West Virginia. Her identity, then, is centered around the act of moving back after leaving. Rose is not the person who left and stayed away. She chose to be a part of this community. These acts of resistance

indicate a connection to the marginalized of West Virginia. To speak out about the injustice thrust upon a community ties you closer to those who share the same identity politics.

West Virginia has long been exploited. America's need for an internal other to posit itself as a nation moving forward and the desire for cheap energy forces West Virginians into the stereotype of the backward, uneducated, and needy. However, in the aftermath of the chemical spill that poisoned the drinking water of three hundred thousand residents of the Kanawha Valley, West Virginians used the space of marginality to resist oppression. bell hooks writes:

If we only view the margin as sign, marking the condition of our pain and deprivation, then a certain hopelessness and despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being. It is there in that space of collective despair that one's creativity, one's imagination is at risk, there that one's mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom one longs for is lost. Truly the mind that resists colonization struggles for the freedom of expression. . . . We are more often silenced when it comes to speaking of the margin as a site of resistance. (1990, pg. 342)

hooks argues that those who accept the space of marginalization will lose a sense of identity. This is a warning to those living in the margins that to not resist is to become fully silent. In a roundtable discussion on Appalachian identity, Emily Satterwhite explains that "people in power tell stories about certain groups in order to rationalize their domination and exploitation" (2010, pg. 69). Marginalized groups need to challenge these stories in order to evolve. One way to do this is through resistance and project identity building. Satterwhite draws from Castells's (1997) work on identity politics. She explains that resistance identity forms when an oppressed population draws from and reacts against the stigmas placed upon them. Project identity, however, develops when groups forge a new identity that is transformative. While

resistance identity may be problematic in how it can reinforce negative stereotypes, it is also very powerful in its “collective resistance” and is part of the process toward social change (Satterwhite 2010, pg. 71). West Virginians who used social media after the chemical spill demonstrated how these identity constructs play an important role in resistance.

Conclusion

While we may never know the extent to which participation in the social media response to the chemical spill led to further political action and subsequent social change, the 2018 teacher strike provides ample evidence. Ryan Frankenberry, Political Director of the American Federation of Teachers--West Virginia, said: “This strike wouldn’t have happened without the grassroots organization through the private Facebook group” (quoted in O’Donovan 2018). The Facebook group was started in late 2017 for teachers and other service personnel by Jay O’Neal and Emily Comer, West Virginia teachers. Comer noticed that the union had not been very active and felt that Facebook would be an easy way for people to communicate. As the group grew, so did the teachers’ frustration. They used the forum to strategize and disseminate information about what was happening at the capitol. In January, they started talking about a strike (Quinn 2018). Erica Newsome, a member of the group and teacher from southern West Virginia said the strike “would not have happened if it wasn’t for social media” (quoted in O’Donovan 2018). Social media became the space where teachers from all ends of the political spectrum were able to unite around a singular goal with their identity as teachers and as West Virginians at the forefront. After their success, teachers in other states were inspired to do the same.

Waggoner’s piece motivated many to act, through posting comments and disseminating information about the people affected by the chemical spill. This created a culture where West

Virginia's marginalization became more salient for current residents and out-migrants alike. People who had left the state for other places re-centered their identity back to West Virginia through the use of social media. Both groups embraced the culture stereotyped and denigrated by claiming and re-claiming West Virginia's landscape as their own. The comments show resistance against the pervasive stereotypes of otherness that have plagued the state since the beginning of the twentieth century and draw attention to the status of the marginalized. The blog posts provided a forum for social action, where people who were not able to meet in the same physical location because of geography (lack of access) or distance (having moved) were able to come together to express their shared love of the state. The comments confirm an identity construction strongly tied to place. As Massey (2005) and Lippard (1997) assert, place is the center of a community. The Elk River chemical spill served as a centralized "location" on the internet, a virtual space via social media where members of the community, often marginalized, were able to participate in the larger conversation against internal othering.

Chapter 4

Healthcare as Resistance: One Community's Path to Sustainability through Health and Wellness

The image of West Virginia is plagued with stereotypes of barefoot, pregnant, and toothless hillbillies staring blankly from front porches of dilapidated houses surrounded by lush tree-covered hills. While the media perpetuates this poverty-driven fantasy, the truth is far more complicated and bears little resemblance to popular imagery. Much of this internal othering stems from the boom and bust monoconomy of the coal industry. When a region has value because of its resources, the people who live there must be denigrated in the drive for wealth (Jansson 2003). Historically, West Virginia has served as a sacrifice zone as extractive industries rely on negative social constructions in order to justify their actions and subsequent abandonment (Fisher and Smith 2016, Bryson 2015, Eller 2008). While coal once was the dominant industry in the state, with increased mechanization and gradual decline, there have been fewer and fewer jobs. Many people left to find employment elsewhere. Yearly, West Virginia has some of the largest population losses in the country, following decades of decline including higher death rates and low birth rates (US Census Bureau 2019). The loss of population causes schools to consolidate and post offices to close (Smith 2015). Some counties like McDowell have lost almost 60% of their population since 1980 (Smith 1987). In context, Detroit's population in the 1950s was 1.86 million. As of 2012, it was 700,000 (Brennan 2013). That loss of 62% made national news. West Virginia, however, did not get a bail out like the auto industry.

Outmigration has led to increasingly high unemployment rates (as industries have left, the smaller trades that they supported dry up in turn). As such, West Virginia has one of the

highest unemployment rates in the United States (US Dept. of Labor 2019). Despite that, the state is facing a teacher shortage while teacher pay is one of the lowest out of all 50 states. Salaries in neighboring Kentucky are \$5,000 - \$7,000 higher per year, and over \$20,000 more per year in Maryland (Will 2019). The majority of those leaving are young people. Thus, the number of deaths is higher than the number of births (Malone 2019). While this has been a recent trend in the United States, in West Virginia this has been consistent for over 20 years.

The coal industry has had repercussions beyond the economy. Despite a decline in the number of miners employed, there are still high death and injury rates (United States Department of Labor 2020), and cases of black lung are rising (Berkes 2012). Other damage to the state includes the contamination of streams (United States EPA 2016) and higher than average levels of cancer-causing chemicals (Ward 2014c). In coal mining regions, people have higher rates of cancer (Hendryx et al. 2012), hypertension, cardiopulmonary disease and COPD, lung disease, and kidney disease (Hendryx and Ahern 2008). With much of the population living in rural areas, these health issues become more dire. Like schools and post offices, rural hospitals have also closed due to lack of funding, leaving healthcare deserts. This paints a bleak picture of the state where leaving has become the paradigm. Staying, therefore, can be seen as resistance against the stigma and the stereotypes, the call to work in other states, and the lack of resources.

Typically, resistance is seen as protests, marches, and organized strikes to raise awareness of an issue or injustice. When workers resist it is often for higher pay or better working conditions. Because alternative forms of resistance are rarely newsworthy, they are not often discussed or acknowledged as resistance. They are, however, just as important as the movements that appear to bring about change. When people are marginalized or living under oppressive conditions, the ways in which they resist are subtle. When your struggle is the

everyday struggle for food, water, and shelter, your actions are going to look much different from those whose basic needs are met. Organized resistance is reserved for the middle classes, those with some power to effect change (Scott 1985, 1990). People working multiple jobs to make ends meet don't have time for picket lines but will gossip, talk back, or keep an accent (Fisher 1993, 1999). Organized resistance is a luxury, even dangerous for some (Scott 1985). Instead, in context, the powerless might act lazy, sing songs, steal, or lie to resist the demands of those in power (Fisher 1993; Scott 1985 and 1990). And most importantly, they may pretend they don't understand these actions (Scott 1990). Over time these white lies and seemingly petty acts can add up, even though they don't draw attention to themselves. "There is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable, others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested or sacrificial" (Foucault 1990, pg. 96).

This is how staying can be seen as another form of alternative resistance. As the paradigm in rural communities is leaving, young people may resist education in order to stay. Instead of following what is now a typical path from high school to college (out of town) to leaving, young people, specifically males, will drop out of high school to work, or do so poorly in school that traditional 4-year university tracks are not an option:

To resist schooling is therefore to resist mobility, or at least to grasp the multiple problems mobility entails for working-class youth. In isolated rural places, to resist schooling is to commit at some level to membership in a community of others who stay put. (Corbett 2007a, pg. 57)

There is a struggle that many young people in rural places face in regard to leaving or staying (Corbett 2007a). While education does provide mobility capital, some youth resist that in order

to stay. The system in many rural communities offers only two choices: education and leaving, or subsistence living and staying. Young people, particularly those in Appalachia, have so few choices that staying, creating their own path, can be seen as resistance to this system.

In a state like West Virginia that has poor health outcomes and a raging opioid epidemic—that has been abandoned by the mainstream healthcare system, providing access to healthcare can also be seen as an act of resistance. One rural community is using its long history of resistance and deep-rooted social capital to show its resilience. Mingo County, in the heart of the Southern WV coalfields, is taking a health and wellness approach that shows that resistance can take many forms. Foucault (1990) writes that there is no power without resistance. But that resistance isn't always in direct opposition to power or because of power. Resistance can be for instead of against. Resistance can look like staying. Resistance can be providing access to fresh, healthy food for a community that no longer has a grocery store. Resistance can be hosting a 5k race in a state with highest rate of obesity in the nation. The coal industry no longer dominates, leaving no “Goliath” left to battle. These are alternative forms of resistance that inspire and engage.

Resourcefulness as Resistance

Internationally there are examples of marginalized communities who used their limited resources to resist. To explore how power acts within and across liminal spaces, Mountz (2011) studied the actions of Afghan migrants detained on an Indonesian island. They had been captured while heading to seek asylum but were in limbo. They did not want to go back to Afghanistan, nor were they able to legally move forward with asylum procedures elsewhere. The refugees used technology (the internet and mobile phones) to organize, create networks, and protest while

they waited. They were also able to connect with lawyers and activists who helped publicize their situation abroad. Their small acts of resistance were the only options available to the detainees who were not allowed to go to school, to have jobs, or see family (Mountz 2011).

Technology was similarly used after the Elk River Chemical Spill in Kanawha County, WV where people posted comments on blog posts about the incident as acts of resistance (Nardella 2019). In a state where approximately 30% of residents lack internet access, participating in this type of resistance is remarkable.

From the coal mining strikes of the late 1800s and early 1900s for better working conditions and the infamous Battle of Blair Mountain where the United States Army dropped bombs on civilians to thwart a union uprising, to the West Virginia teachers' strikes, Appalachia has a long and rich history of resistance. Much of that is related to community, or social capital (Lewis 1987, Fisher 1999). People in the mountains have long forged communities of support which are a foundation for resistance. "Historical memory and a reliance on and defense of traditional values—a strong commitment to land, kin, and religious beliefs, and emphasis on self-rule and social equity, and patriotism—have fueled many of the popular struggles of the region" (Fisher 1999, pg. 207). They have little material wealth and a tradition of sharing. During difficult times they will come together as a community:

Networks of kinship, friendship, shared crafts or recreation offer lines of communication and allegiance. Traditional communities give people the interests for which they will risk their lives. Appalachian communities have been the base for many radical protests because they have had the resources with which to wage a struggle. They had a little land, they had a turnip patch, they had friends and neighbors who would share their food with them, who would let them go on contract strike every year. The coal miners of

Appalachia have been one of the most militant of all union groups and have held out longer on strikes than just about anybody. And they have much more to lose if they do not succeed than those already removed from traditional communities. (Lewis 1987, pg. 23)

The biggest weapon, according to Lewis (1987), is community.

In Britain a new form of indirect community-based activism is called the Slow City movement (Pink 2008). Instead of grassroots organizing from marginalized residents, members of the middle class who have social, financial, and political capital are creating change through development projects that include local festivals, cooperatives, and trainings. These often focus on folk or traditional skills like cooking and crafts. The initiatives build on local identity and help resist loss of culture in small communities. “This activism needs to have a place—it needs to be situated or materially ‘emplaced’ in an actual physical environment” (Pink 2008, pg. 166). They use local relationships to build community capital.

Similarly, in West Virginia, there are several towns that have built on their tradition of strong communities, developing initiatives that have helped them begin to recover from the effects of outmigration. Notable are the efforts in Princeton, Pineville, Huntington, and Hinton. Princeton is unique in that it has taken an arts-based approach. The RiffRaff Arts Collective, led by Lori McKinney, started in 2004 with events like Culturefest, a festival featuring music, dance, art, and workshops (Harvey 2013). Shortly after, they renovated a historic building in the heart of downtown to serve as a studio space and gallery for visual artists (The RiffRaff 2021). That led to the opening of a center for the performing arts (Chuck Mathena Center 2020).

Working with the West Virginia University Reed College of Media in 2018, Pineville developed a brand identity to help boost tourism related to the Hatfield-McCoy ATV trails. Led

by Rita Colistra, a professor with ties to the area, and funded by grants, the two-semester initiative paired college students with community development projects (Lindsey 2018). Their new motto, “All Trails Lead to Home,” is featured on a website that highlights the many recreational opportunities in Pineville and provides information on local restaurants and places to stay, events, and various shops (Visit Pineville 2021).

One of the largest cities in West Virginia, Huntington is turning its brownfields around through citizen-led development projects and massive grantwriting initiatives (City of Huntington 2021). To engage the community, they hosted block parties that included fashion shows, local music, and food trucks while staging abandoned storefronts to attract new occupants. Hinton, a small town in Summers County, is promoting its rich history. Once a booming railway hub, the town has a walking tour featuring many historic buildings. Pulling in tourists from the New River Gorge and Gauley River recreation areas, the Hinton Area Foundation has been raising funds to continue development projects (Vannorsdall 2020). These community-driven initiatives are acts of resistance against the dominant paradigm of outmigration that led to a decay of small towns all over Appalachia. Creating change is resistance for a better future. Further, they are enabling others to stay by developing jobs and fostering places where people want to live.

Healthcare as resistance

Healthcare can also be seen as an act of resistance. Historically, it has not been easy for people to establish clinics in resource-poor areas. After the War on Poverty was declared in 1964, however, funding was made available to increase access to healthcare for the poor as part of the Economic Opportunity Act. This ultimately led to the opening of several clinics in the

South, rural Appalachia, and in highly populated urban areas in the North. In some areas, communities organized and built grassroots clinics and created jobs. In others, they worked to start school lunch programs and provide other resources for those in need. These efforts were not easy and those advocating for the poor faced opposition that ranged from mistrust and bureaucratic red tape, to threats and even violence.

In the South, conditions were notoriously bad for African Americans. In addition to a lack of clean water and suitable housing in the poorest counties, many had no access to hospitals because of a need for transportation and a discriminatory health insurance system (Nelson 2005). In Mississippi, infant mortality rates were high (Ward and Geiger 2017) and conditions in black hospitals were deplorable. Due to lack of funding, women in childbirth and patients with cancer were often treated in the same rooms as those with contagious diseases (Dittmer 2009). That everyone should receive equal access to healthcare was one of the main tenets of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR) was developed to realize these goals (Ward and Geiger 2017). Among these, they organized to desegregate hospitals in the South, provide medical resources, and address systemic inequality (Ward and Geiger 2017). Unfortunately, their work and that of other organizations striving to meet these same goals was deemed controversial. In addition to racism, they faced significant opposition. Bureaucracy was a primary challenge. One considerable barrier was the denial of membership in the American Medical Association to black doctors. This limited their ability to work in certain hospitals and have a say in policy decisions (Ward and Geiger 2017). White doctors and those opposed used their political connections to stop plans. Zoning laws were changed and funding was cut (Nelson 2005; Orleck and Hazirjian 2011; Ward and Geiger 2017).

While the red tape was a hindrance to progress, organizers were pressured by violence. Reports of these tactics included bomb threats, men with guns, and other types of fearmongering (Ward and Geiger 2017). Pharmacists suggested to patients that they could poison prescriptions, adding to the hostile environment for black doctors, and a white nurse described hiding in cars to provide healthcare to black communities (Dittmer 2009). The Ku Klux Klan reacted to the projects with violence and threats, and clinics were destroyed by fire (Orleck and Hazirjian 2011). The opposition community organizers and healthcare workers faced to provide essential services to the poor in the South shows that these types of efforts are acts of resistance. Further, their resistance was successful. Many of these clinics survived and are still serving the needs of patients.

In Appalachia, the situation differed little. They, too, had to deal with extreme opposition to their efforts to provide access to healthcare. Like much of the coalfields at that time, Clear Fork Valley, a community that Gaventa (1980) studied in the late 1970s, had some of the worst health outcomes in the United States. Miners and their families, however, were given free medical care at Appalachian Miners' Hospitals as part of their union membership. In 1962, those hospitals were closed after only serving the miners for 6 years. The residents of Clear Fork Valley organized to open a clinic. They got the help of a community organizer and formed a board comprised of miners, retirees, unemployed people, and various other workers. The board opened a pallet factory to provide jobs then built four community-owned clinics, each governed by a local board. This led to around 7000 residents owning and running their own healthcare system in an area where only 15% of the land was owned by the local population. Unfortunately, the people in power felt threatened by the organizing. Their reaction was violent. In addition to the typical bureaucracy where a landowner refused a doctor's request for a small

parcel of land for a clinic, community workers were threatened. A school and a health office were set on fire and the home of one of the organizers was shot at multiple times (Gaventa 1980). This again shows that providing access to healthcare is an act of resistance.

The most notable acts of resistance for healthcare in Appalachia were by coal miners. Conditions in the early coal camps were poor and federal legislation did not cover working conditions until the late 1800s. Coal companies would hire in-house physicians to diagnose and treat miners who were required to pay for the visits (Smith 1987). While this may seem benevolent, in fact, this meant that the physicians were obligated to fulfill their duties to their employer:

Company doctors typically were called upon to testify in the operators' favor whenever miners filed workers' compensation claims. For physicians to increase their employers' liability by investigating occupational etiology of disease would have run completely counter to the economic logic of the system. Instead of acknowledging occupational or economic causation, the company physicians' implicit philosophy on the origins of disease was individualistic and behavioristic. (Smith 1987, pg. 16)

This led to a reduction of the number of safety risks reported by the mines and decreased their liability. After unionization, miners had more rights but still had to struggle to receive proper diagnosis and treatment for coal workers' pneumoconiosis, or black lung disease, a lung condition caused from exposure to coal dust. Miners had to fight to get the medical community to acknowledge that their disease was caused by their work in the mines (Smith 1987). Even after legislation was passed to protect miners, miners were often found to be in violation of the new laws as they were considered responsible for their own equipment. When mine companies were charged with violations, they were rarely found guilty in court. This led to a complete lack

of trust in the system by miners and their families. After funding for miners with disabilities and their families was cut, there was no action left to take but to strike. The Farmington disaster was the impetus for a strike which eventually led to the passing of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act which increased mine safety inspections and subsequent fines for violations (Branscome 1976). It also had stipulations for miners disabled from their work to receive benefits including healthcare. “The observation that it takes a disaster to produce reform simply suggests that concern for the life and health of workers is not built into the economic or political system” (Smith 1987, pg. 127). Over 10,000 miners had to stop work in order to get their basic healthcare needs met.

Top down vs. community driven

The funding that helped enable Geiger and Gibson in Mississippi was part of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) funding that came about from the War on Poverty. Their efforts in the South were successful because they worked from within communities to create services. However, when change comes from the top, it can fail. One example of this was an OEO-funded health center in Floyd County, KY (Cuoto 1975). The purpose was to create jobs for men who had been driven out of the coal industry because of automation. The center would provide skills and education to unemployed miners and other poor people in the region. The program, however, lasted less than 5 years. The healthcare providers hired by the OEO were outsiders who the locals saw as out of touch. Their salaries, based on competitive wages for urban centers, were very high in comparison to what the locals were making. This led to a lack of trust. The board, comprised of people largely appointed by the OEO without input from the community, was also problematic. They would hold meetings when the public couldn't attend which led to feelings of

manipulation. There was a great deal of bureaucracy and little transparency on financial matters and planning. In the end, intimidation, “violence and threats of violence” led to the closing of the center (Cuoto 1975, pg. 143).

Just a year after this program ended, locals organized by Eula Hall began to build a new clinic in Floyd County (Wilkerson 2019). Not defeated by the closing of the OEO-funded clinic, they began with a Summer clinic staffed by young healthcare workers trained by volunteers. Even though they charged a small fee, those without means would receive services or medications for free. It was immediately successful. They were able to add hours and grow the number of services provided. Hall and the other founders of the clinic, like Geiger, believed that healthcare is a human right, and that in order for a community to thrive, more than access to healthcare is needed. “They understood that it was not possible to change one single issue and improve people’s lives substantially; a multi-issue, broad understanding of power was imperative, even if the barriers to building that movement often seemed insurmountable” (Wilkerson 2019, pg. 145). The clinic became the community center for the region, delivering more than healthcare with a focus on education, ending poverty, the environment, and welfare rights. A fire, likely by arson, destroyed the clinic in 1982 but it was rebuilt. The Mud Creek Clinic was later renamed to the Eula Hall Health Center and is still serving the needs of the community (Sisk 2019).

The Mud Creek Clinic fire and the violence surrounding the OEO-funded clinic show that despite community involvement, providing healthcare to poor people is very much an act of resistance. The success of the Mud Creek Clinic and its ability to survive all these years also shows how important a community-driven approach is to development projects. Working with people involved increases trust and helps further build relationships.

Just 40 miles away in Southern West Virginia, a different approach also had success. During that same time period and funded by the same OEO War on Poverty program, Huey Perry, a Mingo county resident, was hired to serve as a liaison between the community and the federal government. He was a local school teacher and in his new role, he was charged with organizing the poor—to let the people decide what initiatives they wanted to develop. In areas of the county most in need, he helped create community action groups to decide what problems they would address. He wrote, “I feel it is necessary that we take our time and build an organization that involves the poor in the decisions as to what types of programs they want, rather than to sit down and write up what we think they want” (Perry 2011, pg. 6). These initiatives encouraged the poor to become active in their own causes and start to change the system (Perry 2011). Despite massive opposition from local government, and death threats against the organizers, the groups were able work within the political system to get a bridge and road repaired, fund a home improvement program, develop a park, renovate a swimming pool, start a cooperative grocery store, repair an aging school, start a school hot lunch program, among others. “If we can change the conditions in Mingo County,” he claimed, “perhaps the whole state of West Virginia can be changed. We should work to make this a model for the rest of Appalachia to follow” (2011, pg. 11). The success of these acts of resistance was due largely in part to the community-driven nature of the initiatives. The local poor decided what they needed for healthier communities and they worked within the system to achieve their goals.

The Opioid Crisis

In recent years Appalachia has been plagued with a man-made epidemic due to the overprescription of opioids, “hillbilly heroin.” In 20 years, the death rate from drug overdoses

went from one of the lowest (4.1%) to the highest at 57.8% (CDC 2020, Kriesky 2021). It is no surprise that these dates align with the release of OxyContin in 1996. As with every catastrophe, small communities worked together to respond to this health crisis. In Lee County, Virginia, the nonprofit organization, Lee Coalition for Health, fought Purdue pharma and worked to build a rehab facility.

Long before the opioid crisis was making national news, the Coalition saw a rise in addiction and deaths in their community so they decided to make OxyContin a focus of their efforts. First they petitioned for a recall of the drug. As part of that initiative, they created a survey that went to all public school students in the county in 7th through 12th grades. They found that nine percent of students in the seventh grade and 24 percent of students in the twelfth grade had tried it at least once. They then hosted a public forum to form focus groups and develop an action plan. This was followed by a seminar for the community to provide education on how to identify and treat addiction. Their biggest endeavor was the creation of the Stone Mountain Health Clinic in partnership with the Vanderbilt Student Health Coalition and retired coal miners. This clinic would be fully run by the community. After a local nursing home closed, the owners donated the building to the Coalition who remodeled it and turned it into a rehab center. Despite not receiving any financial backing from development funds and the social stigma of addiction that led to a lack of support from some residents, the Stone Mountain Health Clinic was a success. It is still owned and operated by the local board (Kobak 2013).

Long before the release of OxyContin, rural areas in Appalachia were experiencing widespread addiction to narcotics and other similar substances. In his book *Annihilating the Hillbilly*, Branscome (1976) discusses newspaper articles from early 1970 that revealed the overprescription of addictive drugs to Medicaid recipients, resulting in addiction and a black

market trade in Eastern Kentucky. Even after local laws were changed in 1969 to limit the amount of pills a patient could be prescribed, the lack of nationwide legislation enabled an increase in the number of “mountain addicts.” Vance (1970) reported half to a third of the population of one county was misusing medication, even children and teenagers displayed signs of drug use. Addicts would visit multiple pharmacies to fill prescriptions, and drugstores were robbed for narcotics. Police were unable to charge those suspected of driving under the influence because breathalyzer tests did not detect substances other than alcohol. There was an increase in deaths from overdose (Vance 1970). These problems are no different than those of today’s opioid epidemic. Stigma, lack of access to recovery resources, and poor legislation are all factors impeding the possibility of success.

Healthcare Access for Rural Communities

Healthcare for poor people is so notoriously bad, it’s become a meme.

Figure 3. What healthcare looks like when you're poor.
Social media post. Origin unknown.

If you live far from a trauma center, what happens when you get in an accident? If you live an hour or more from a hospital, it takes longer to get to treatment if you're having a stroke or a heart attack. In these cases, the sooner symptoms are recognized, the better the outcomes. Adding distance to that equation leads to a lower chance of recovery or survival. Those in rural areas who need chemotherapy often have to drive hours to get treatment. Factor in the cost of gas, hotels, time away from work for family members who help—illness becomes impossible.

West Virginia is at or near the bottom of every physical and mental health ranking. The state has twice the number of people in poverty as the average in the United States (Semega et al. 2020). At a higher number than the rest of the country, approximately 20% of residents are over the age of 65 (WVDHHR 2019). These factors are significant because they are two of the primary social determinants of health, indicators of health outcomes among a population which also include age, gender, race, and how much education a person has. The two leading causes of death in the United States are cardiovascular disease and cancer (CDC 2021). West Virginia has the highest heart attack prevalence in the United States and the third highest rates of cancer. Much of this can be attributed to the aged population but both of these diseases are also most seen in those with low incomes (WVDHHR 2019).

In Mingo County these health outcomes are much worse than the state and national averages. I have been taking students to Williamson, in Mingo County, for service learning projects. We work with local residents on community-driven service projects, listen to personal stories, and learn about initiatives in the area. Through these connections, I began interviewing community leaders, people working in healthcare, and local residents. I was able to conduct a series of six interviews with IRB approval before the first surge of cases in the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the travel restrictions, my research was no longer reciprocal. Instead of doing

additional interviews, as originally planned, I made the choice to pivot and use the interviews to illustrate what I was finding in the literature.

Mingo County is near the bottom of West Virginia county rankings for length and quality of life and health factors with 30% of the people in fair or poor health. Almost 40% of the children in the county are living in poverty, with 72% of African American children living in poverty. The median household income is \$30,880, \$30,492 below the national level, \$13,181 below the state level (University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute 2019, WVFoodlink 2019). Unemployment rates are twice the national average. They have lost 50% of their population since 1950, over 11% of that in the last 10 years (DHHR 2008, World Population Review 2019). COVID-19 has further highlighted health disparities. A comparison between Monongalia County, with a younger population, a lower unemployment rate, and a much higher median household income, shows the severity of the disparities. While Monongalia County had a somewhat higher number of COVID-19 cases per capita (12.48% vs. 10.83%), Mingo County's death rate was nearly double that of Monongalia County (WVDHHR 2021).

The opioid epidemic has put further strain on Mingo County. Despite having a population of around 3,000 people, millions of opioids were shipped to small pharmacies in the town of Williamson (McGreal 2019). Kermit, a small town of less than 400 people that sits along the Tug River in the Northwestern corner of the county, was sent over 12 million painkillers. In total, the state received enough medication in 6 years for each of its residents to have 433 pills (Eyre 2016). This contributed to the number of addictions and led to a relentless illegal drug trade situation. The community has suffered. People who live there say it's not the West Virginia they remember. Where they used to leave their houses and cars unlocked, would have packages delivered, and could leave things outside in the yard unattended, now they lock everything up for

fear it will get stolen for drugs. A community member said, “We have a whole generation—multigenerational families that are all under it. You have grandmas now that can’t take care of their grandkids because they’re drug addicts” (personal interview 2020). Housing prices have fallen because many neighborhoods have drug problems. “Every other house is on drugs or dealing drugs,” said another resident (personal interview 2020). The wake of the epidemic is far reaching. Even people not personally affected by addiction have to deal with the ramifications.

Mingo County Community Health Initiatives

There is, however, a community organization working to combat the healthcare crisis facing Mingo County by following the health and wellness approach developed by Dr. Jack Geiger. The basic tenet of Geiger’s philosophy, developed in the 1960s, is that people do not need curative care alone. Poverty will only be alleviated through health: clean water, safe housing, and healthy food. With this main goal, local residents, community leaders, and healthcare practitioners have created many opportunities for engagement.

They started with nothing in 2007. They began planning and by 2011 they incorporated as a non-profit and launched Sustainable Williamson. After opening with a primary focus on diabetes management, over the years they have added dental, podiatry, pediatrics, and optometry. The grassroots initiative has become the Williamson Health and Wellness center and now employs more than 111 people. They’ve had over 24,000 patient visits and have seen approximately 7,000 patients. Recently, they opened an outpatient recovery center for people struggling with addiction. In 2019, Williamson Memorial Hospital, the only hospital in the area, declared bankruptcy, furloughed employees, and eventually closed (Tierney 2019). Williamson

Health and Wellness was able to purchase the hospital and is currently using it as a COVID vaccination site.

While the organization's approach to healthcare is nothing new, it more closely resembles practices of the past where doctors made house calls. They do regular home visits for patients with congestive heart failure, diabetes, and COPD. For other patients who cannot get to the clinic, or can't afford to get to the clinic, they will do in-home annual wellness visits, sick visits, and follow-ups after hospital stays. Many people don't have transportation and would have to pay someone \$25 - \$50 for a ride into town. Even if services like Uber were available, many patients couldn't afford it, as some patients live on a fixed income of \$800 per month. Because of this, a van was recently purchased to provide transportation. They also do check-ins by phone and have an after-hours phone number. This creates an atmosphere where patients feel respected and cared for. A community health worker said:

You have to meet the patient where they are. You have to meet them on their education level, on their finance level. The employee has to consider all of that in order to develop a plan of care for that patient. You have to develop a relationship with the patient. If you don't have that relationship, their care is going nowhere. You can give them all the education and encouragement in the world and it won't go anywhere without rapport. We convey to the patient that they have people that really care. In the Appalachian areas, people feel that they're bothering the doctor if they call for help. People will give up here. If they don't have help, they will not seek it out once they get told, "no," so many times. (personal interview 2020)

The healthcare providers in the community must understand patient needs on multiple levels. They need to understand local culture and customs, including attitudes and beliefs; they need to

explain treatment plans in lay terms; and they need to be able to create medication regimens that will be affordable. This requires that healthcare providers be fluent in the multiple types of health insurance that patients may have.

Many patients have out-of-pocket expenses for their healthcare so the nurses and health workers need to know about their finances, and whether they are able to get to a pharmacy to get their medication. They help them avoid having to make difficult decisions. “When you’re on a fixed income, are you going to eat and keep your lights on,” one health worker asked, “or are you going to buy your insulin?” (personal interview 2020). They even found immediate housing for a patient who was evicted. It’s not just about preventing or treating disease. To follow Geiger’s approach, all aspects of a patient’s life contribute to their overall health and wellbeing. Healthcare providers foster trust and cultivate relationships that enable patients to help themselves. A community health worker said:

To some patients, we are their only family. They consider us family. I love the ability to discover a patient’s barriers and then try to knock out all that I can—to help them get what they need, proving to the patient that they can do what they set out to do. And it empowers them. Once they see that they can, and once they see the outcomes, it empowers them to do more and to be accountable for more on their own. (personal interview 2020)

The goal of the Williamson Health and Wellness Center is to create a culture of health. To accomplish this, the health workers, who are themselves part of the community, don’t limit their focus to treatment but to the holistic understanding of patient health.

Community Outreach

To foster individual patient care and increase overall wellbeing, the community itself needs to embody health as well. A director of a small non-profit said, “When you first say you want to be healthy, people automatically think it’s just going to the doctor, so they don’t take all the other things into consideration about what makes your lifestyle healthy” (personal interview 2020). Since the organization was in its early stages, their approach has involved community outreach. To improve access to affordable healthy foods, they built community gardens where locals can rent plots for the season. This led to grants for a high tunnel and eventually a farmers market. The farmers market was a huge success so they added activities for children such as planting their own flowers and vegetables to take home. They developed a mobile farmers market to serve the needs of those in the more rural parts of the county. As part of an abandoned mine reclamation project, a former strip mine was reclaimed with an apple orchard where people pay to pick their own fruit. Several citizens started their own small businesses selling pies and apple butter from the fruit they picked to supplement their work income.

Physical fitness is as important as a healthy diet. To increase the opportunities to get people active, they joined forces with another organization and added running events. These always include a 1 mile walk for people who cannot run. There are now over 26 races per year. People enjoyed the physical activity so they built exercise stations along a walking trail and started having weekly walking group meet-ups. They created an urban walking trail, have a lunch walking program, and they formed a running group. Weekly trail hikes and runs are now the norm. An empty storefront in a shopping mall is now used for yoga classes. An old warehouse was turned into a gym for crossfit. To get local businesses involved, they turned a wellness program into a competition through a mini sports tournament. They use VISTAs as

much as possible and continue to grow their network. A community leader said, “To create opportunity based around being well, being healthy and if you want to make a lasting change in the way people act, you need the people in that community to accept that change. Then it becomes an army. Once you reach that, it's like a roller coaster when it takes off on its own” (personal interview 2020). What took a major investment in time, commitment, and personal resources has paid off for the betterment of the community, continuing to work toward a goal of sustainability.

The last aspect the organization has been focusing on for an overall approach to healthier lives is job creation. While other communities in the state have focused on tourism, the initiatives in Williamson do not rely on outsiders for their goals to be realized. “We recognized that healthcare was an opportunity for us to generate income and create jobs,” said one community leader. “It is going to be the number one job opportunity in the state for the next 50 years” (personal interview 2020). Indeed, in 2016 WVU Medicine became West Virginia’s largest employer. A spot held since 1998 by Wal-Mart. Of the top ten, five others are in the healthcare field (Adkins 2020). The initial idea was to renovate empty and unused buildings in the once thriving downtown. The clinic would provide enough revenue by using the upper floors to allow struggling retailers to occupy the lower storefronts. They also sponsor a yearly microloan contest. Recent winners have included a farm-to-table restaurant, a niche boutique shop, and a bed and breakfast. The impact is clear as yearly revenues from the endeavors continue to climb. Harder to measure but equally important are the positive outcomes gained through a healthier population requiring less curative care, dollars reinvested in the community from revenue and worker salaries, jobs that create even more jobs, and stronger community relationships.

Conclusion

Stephen Fisher (1999) reminds us that, “Appalachian culture is ‘a web of both resistance and complicity’ and it is important for those organizing in the region to develop an understanding of the ways in which regional culture informs the construction of class consciousness, race and gender relations, regional identity, and community life” (pg. 208). In “creating a culture of health” the people at the heart of the Williamson Health and Wellness Center have done just that. They built their planning around sustainability which includes being healthy, healthy foods, job opportunities, and a safe environment. Because they are a strong part of the community in which they’re working, they have developed and cultivated deep relationships with the people they are serving. A community leader said, “This is who we are. We live here” (personal interview 2020). Their success has stemmed from the value they place in their community.

Like Huey Perry’s earlier work in the county, Eula Hall’s Mud Creek Clinic, and other similar programs, the most effective development initiatives grow out of partnerships between people with skills, resources, tools, and knowledge and the community members who understand what they need. “I think stakeholders and the people involved in the community need to be a part of the solution,” said one community leader. “We can’t have this top-down approach, ‘well, this is what you need to do blah blah blah’” (personal interview 2020). A director of a small non-profit echoes this sentiment:

We in so-called ‘leadership’ roles think we can sit down and devise a plan for folks to make it better. But most of the time our vision or view of it is skewed because we haven’t experienced things that these people have. So, if we engage them in codesigning

solutions, they're more likely to be effective and take less time and work. (personal interview 2020)

History has shown that programs driven solely from the top often fail due to lack of input from the people they're meant to serve. Likewise, grassroots community-only initiatives struggle due to insufficient resources and too often, in Appalachia, a system that seems rigged. The lesson is to stop discounting poor people. They know what they need and will fight for what they need but often feel powerless without access to resources and a solid of understanding of the political infrastructure. The sensitive nature of healthcare and the long history of challenges faced by those who attempt to provide access to healthcare for poor people make the success of the initiatives in Mingo County remarkable. A community health worker said:

I do feel that in the little town of Williamson that we have really made a difference as far as job opportunities, trying to put people on the right path, or placing people on the right path. I think we've done a wonderful job. I feel that my job has allowed me to make a difference in patient's lives—a good difference like their quality of life has definitely improved. I've always said that knowledge is power. Education is power. And I think once you educate and allow them to set goals and they meet their goals, it empowers them to be strong and believe in themselves. It's the simple things that people don't know about that we educate them on and it changes their lives. (personal interview 2020)

Economic factors are not enough to consider in implementing community development programs. The implications for policy are that you have to take sociocultural factors into consideration. Community-driven initiatives, despite threats of violence, when funded and in tandem with skilled leaders, were the most successful because of co-creating solutions. As one community leader explains, "Our most valuable resource really is our people—neighbor helping

neighbor” (personal interview 2020). Fisher (1993) emphasizes, it’s time to “dispel the notion of Appalachian people as passive victims and demonstrate that the study of resistance and reform in Appalachia has much to contribute to national debates and discussions about community organizing and change” (pg. 5). The healthcare workers and community organizers who fought to provide access to poor people have resisted the dominant paradigm that’s rooted in systemic oppression. This has been no easy task. In Mingo County, despite the opioid epidemic, the waning coal industry, and colossal outmigration, they have started to create change in their community. Foucault (1990) writes that there is no power without resistance. But that resistance isn’t always in direct opposition to power or because of power. In this case, resistance is *for*, not against.

History has shown that people are resourceful and resilient. From refugees using cell phones to get legal help (Mountz 2011) to people affected by a chemical spill using social media to get involved in political activism (Nardella 2019), resistance can be subtle. It can also look like the revitalization of small towns, increasing access to healthcare, creating jobs, starting farmers markets, and hosting a 5k. When the issue is healthcare, these efforts are complicated. The programs funded through the War on Poverty, the fight for Black Lung benefits, and battling the opioid epidemic highlight the need for resistance. This type of resistance, however, isn’t always a typical organized march or protest. These are alternative acts of resistance that involving staying and enabling others to stay. In Mingo County, “a lot of people here are resilient,” said a community leader. “They’re survivors” (personal interview 2020). They show a level of resilience essential to creating long-lasting change.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In West Virginia and many rural places, outmigration is unlikely to end soon. Those who choose to stay have rich stories that can help change the region through new directions for community and economic development. This dissertation has focused on the stories of those who are challenging insider-outsider binaries, countering negative stereotypes, and forging a new path for the region. The story for rural communities has long been written by others. It's a story of an extractive economy that left little access to resources for the people in its wake. The story created by others of the insignificant backward hillbilly was so pervasive it led to the development of social and economic policies that further fueled the extractive economy. The result is a sacrifice zone, where the sole purpose of a region lies within its resources. West Virginia was exploited by powerful interests from outside the region who blamed anything negative on the "ignorant" people who live there, perpetuating stereotypes and further enabling extraction. As identity constructs are deeply tied to place, these negative stereotypes impact people, especially youth. Making fun of Appalachian people is one of the last stereotypes acceptable in the mainstream media. It's become normalized. After hearing for generations that they (we) are powerless and worthless, they (we) begin to believe it. Because they don't want to be seen as the stereotype, many leave. While leaving can be seen as a form of resistance, I investigate staying as resistance.

The following research questions guided all of the research throughout this dissertation:

- 1) What are the dynamics of power in West Virginia?
- 2) How are those power relationships perpetuated and/or resisted?
- 3) How is a place-based identity construct expressed in those who stay?

4) In what ways are those who stay engaged in alternative acts of resistance?

To answer question 1, in Chapter 2 I analyzed power and resistance dynamics in West Virginia, examining the ways in which those power dynamics have been perpetuated and resisted. Further, I demonstrate the role of place in identity formation and resistance movements. West Virginia's rich history of protest provides much fodder for a discussion of the role of power in resistance. The boom and bust economy of coal sanctioned oppression in the region. The subsequent decline of the industry and loss of jobs led to a pattern of outmigration. Related to research question 4, this created an opportunity for those who stayed to participate in smaller acts of resistance that are locally based and community driven, creating change bit by bit and challenging stereotypes in new ways—challenging the paradigm of industry-driven policy.

Chapter 3 also addresses questions 1 and 2 using a specific case of a chemical spill and the social media responses to the incident. A blog post written after the 2014 chemical spill into the Kanawha River provides the opportunity to look at these alternative acts of resistance through a new lens. In the chapter, I analyzed the post and the comments posted by others. Their acts show an online community acting in solidarity around an issue. They used the Internet as a tool for social change and a platform for resistance, connecting members of a disparate community that demonstrated the complexity of place-based identity politics in West Virginia. In a region severely impacted by outmigration, social media is a way to engage with others around issues.

Chapter 4 focuses on research questions 3 and 4 through an examination of a specific community where a place-based identity construct has been expressed in those who stay. Part of this investigation included interviews with individuals who are engaging in alternative acts of resistance. Population loss impacts communities financially but also it impacts health. As people

leave, businesses close, grocery stores close or raise prices, schools and post offices are consolidated, and eventually hospitals close. This dissertation has examined this cycle of outmigration through the lens of resistance to show how the various power dynamics are connected to place-based identity constructs and the role those play in resistance. The last chapter, specifically, looks at healthcare as an act of resistance. Historically there is evidence of this during the Civil Rights Movement as fighting racism and racist impediments to providing healthcare. Other evidence is provided by coal miners striking for black lung benefits. Often, however, healthcare advocacy is an alternative form of resistance as organized protest is a luxury for those who do not have the resources to march. Many show resistance in other ways. In Appalachia, this resourcefulness is seen in community. The most successful approaches to community development have not been top-down but community-driven efforts that work within the system and use the system to benefit those in need. This is what is happening in Mingo County, West Virginia with the work of the Williamson Health and Wellness Center. Together these chapters illustrate the complexities of power and resistance dynamics in a region impacted by outmigration and the aftermath of an extractive economy.

These alternative acts of resistance show that communities are resilient and illustrate the potential for change. The reasons for leaving are clear. With this project, I had the opportunity to talk with people who have chosen to stay. Many have been impacted by the negative stereotypes of Appalachian people. A director of a small non-profit in the Southern part of the state said, “Even within the state, down South people have a much different accent. I don’t like when people think my dialect is equal to my intellect. They want to sell us short sometimes just because we’re country folk.” A community health worker said, “Sometimes West Virginians get a bad rap of being hillbillies. They think that we’re low poverty and ignorant hillbillies; they

think of us as being the drugs state.” More than one person commented on the perception by those outside the state that “we’re all a bunch of barefoot hillbillies.” The negative stereotypes cause residents to start to feel resentment toward the state and internalize the harmful misconceptions. A community member who works with the public said that “people feel down on being from here because they know the rest of the world looks at us like we’re dumb, pregnant hillbillies—because that’s what’s always portrayed on TV.” These sentiments are felt by people at all levels. A community leader said, “You mention West Virginia and people automatically think racism. A lot of people leave because of the stigma of being rednecks and uneducated. They think they can find themselves somewhere else.”

These negative sentiments were countered by a deep love for the state. Many of the people I talked with explained that West Virginia is a friendly state where people are trusting. Several people commented on the safety of the communities, saying it’s a good place to raise a family. One member of the community said, “I don’t worry about my kids not making it home alive.” Common reasons for staying included not only the natural beauty of the state but the closeness to family, to home. Many who had left and returned talked about wanting to be back with family or to help a sick family member in need.

But the reasons for staying are more complicated for many. This is why I see staying as resistance. I met with a young man who does a great deal of community engagement. He said, “I work for a non-profit. I’m happy with the pay I have but it really doesn’t matter. The pay doesn’t make any difference in my community. I didn’t leave the state. I still stay here. It’s needed here.” He works long hours and almost every weekend but his work has made a difference in his life as much as it’s impacted others. The community is full of people like this: people who could leave and make more money or have opportunities elsewhere but they choose to stay. Another

community member who works in nutrition said, “I believe in this work.” This sentiment was echoed by several of the people I talked with. They have a sense of duty that’s connected to a strong work ethic and a feeling of pride. One community leader said, “I’m proud of the coal mines and the hardworking people. The country wouldn’t be where it is without our state.”

There were similar feelings that West Virginians are problem solvers who work together. Almost everyone I talked with had a story about people helping others, that everyone in a community will pitch in to help. A community health worker said, “I love that people pull together as a community, we pull together to help those in need.” A director of a small non-profit said, “What I like most about it is Appalachian folks have a way of looking out for each other. Even though we can be fiercely competitive, but we also 100% have each others’ backs. So I do love that sense of belonging and being and feeling like this is home.” Another common theme was about giving to others. A community health worker said, “People do not have a whole lot but they’ll give you everything they have—everything they have.” This led to another common theme of resilience. Many discussed that despite West Virginians being faced with many challenges, they still persevere. A community member who works in nutrition said, “I feel like survival would be up on the top of that list and I feel like we can survive a lot of things because we are very resilient people. What we lack in a lot of typical education pursuits, we make up for with survival skills.” The common thread in all of these discussions was wanting a better future for rural communities and the people who live in them. A director of a small non-profit asked, “Why can’t we be the state that people want to move to?” This dissertation looked at the steps people are taking, both large and small to bring about the change needed to make that happen, shifting power dynamics and working within a system that was designed to work against that. These are acts of resistance by people who have stayed, perhaps enabling others to stay.

Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic was the primary limitation to this project. As the surge in Fall 2020 put additional strain on healthcare providers, it became no longer ethical to continue the interviews as planned. Further, as travel was no longer safe, student service learning programs were cancelled and my relationship with the Mingo County community was temporarily not reciprocal. I made the decision to pivot away from the case study approach. Instead of conducting additional interviews, I used the stories I had already gathered to illustrate the themes found in the literature.

Future Research

To continue this research, I plan to further investigate if development programs help people to stay or if they, perhaps, enable people to leave. Instead of focusing on one community, I would track the work of specific development agencies over a number of years. Who benefitted from a specific implementation? Did they stay or leave? What did they gain from the project?

I am also interested in the ways that outmigration affects other aspects of our lives. I have previously researched how outmigration is represented in the songs of Appalachian women songwriters. I plan to edit a book-length collection of essays centered around the theme of outmigration as it relates to music and songwriting.

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Appendix 1: Interview Plan

- Briefly explain that I am researching why people stay in WV.

Questions:

Where do you live?

Were you born in WV? As a kid, did you move around at all?

If you have a job, where do you work?

Will you please describe your job?

Why did you choose the career path you're in now?

How long did it take for you to get your current job/position?

What are some of the things you like most about your job?

If you lived somewhere else, do you think those might be different?

Are there any aspects of your job that you really don't like or that annoy you?

If you lived somewhere else, do you think those might be different?

If you had the same job but somewhere else, what do you think that would be like? Do you think you would like it more or less?

Are you satisfied with your current position?/Are you looking for a something different?

What are some of the things you like most about your home? And by home you can talk about your house or whatever place you consider home to be like Morgantown or WV?

What don't you like? OR If you could change things about that place [or WV] what would those be?

Did you go to college?

Can you describe for me the events that led you to choose WV after you graduated from college or for your career/job?

Is *–location of subject’s current address–* a choice (even a first choice) or a fallback plan?

If it was a choice, what steps did you have to take to make that happen? Was that challenging? Did you have to alter your career goals to make that work?

What does being a West Virginian mean to you?

What do you think it means to other people, people not from here?

The state has a long history of people leaving. Why do you think they leave?

Why do you think people stay?

Do you plan to stay? If so, can you explain why?

Did you ever consider leaving WV?

Did you ever leave WV and move back? If so, what were your experiences relative to living in WV?

What about your future? Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years?

Where do you see the state in 5 or 10 years?

Anything else?

Can you think of other people that I can talk to? Can you connect me with them?