

Unmarked and unheard: Voices of working class White men in an Appalachian borderland

Jonathan K. Grove

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Committee:

Emily Noelle Sanchez Ignacio

Charles Williams

Charles Gallagher

Michael Kimmel

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Jonathan K. Grove

University of Washington

Abstract

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Jonathan K. Grove

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Associate Professor Dr. Emily Noelle Sanchez Ignacio

Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences

This thesis responds to Walls and Billings (1977) call for a study of work in an Appalachian cultural context. Given this, intersectionality theory along with Marx's theory of alienation guide the analysis. Since intersectionality has not often been applied to White men's experience of race, particularly with respect to marginalized class and rurality, this thesis begins with the *voices* of this population in *this* particular space, which also heeds Reagon's (1981) challenge to understand what is happening "at home" before attempting to build coalition. Additionally, analysis of the historical constructions of work from Colonial tobacco plantations, to the Appalachian frontier, through the neoliberal present, helps to contextualize the anti-oppression tactics present in the data. Further, this thesis offers a self-reflective discussion of the rationale and experience of the author's return "home" to do scholarship in the complex socio-historical setting context in which he was raised, yet struggles to belong.

For granddaddy.

Thank You.

As with every complex project, there are many people to thank as this would simply not have been possible without them. First, my great thanks to the men who shared themselves and their stories with me. Thank you for your trust and I hope I have done justice to your voice.

Prior to applying to the program, I contacted Dr. Emily Ignacio to ask if a project like this would fit my interests; turns out it does. What I could not have foreseen was the growth – the intellectual preparation and confidence – into which “Dr. I” would shepherd me. If there is a scholar in me, she is primarily responsible for its emergence. Thanks also to my readers: Dr. Charles Williams for consistent support and for guiding me through Marx, Dr. Charles “Chip” Gallagher for laying critical (Whiteness) foundations and insightful feedback, and Dr. Michael Kimmel for a body of work that helped me arrive at this project in the first place and for challenging me to re-inhabit my own accented voice. Every graduate student needs to commiserate and sharpen their intellectual tools and in Douglas Avella-Castro I was lucky enough to find an intellectual wingman and friend as well. I am proud of what we have accomplished and the change we have yet to create. Thanks also for the sharp editing skills of Amy Whitcomb at UWT, and Emily H. Moore – who was just looking out for an old friend.

Having barely survived the “gettin’ above my raisin’” that was my undergraduate experience, I owe a perpetual debt to George Mason University’s Dr. Kim Eby and Dr. Rebecca Walter. Together these two incredible teacher/mentors helped me find my true calling while assuring me that I did in fact belong; for that I will remain forever grateful. Thank you also to my Pacific Lutheran University Women’s Center friends who not only convinced me to pursue a graduate degree but put up with me as I did so. To Jen Smith, Jennifer Warwick, and Bobbi Hughes I have many thanks to offer; this is but one. Balancing graduate school, work, and family leaves little time for friends or hobbies, yet my health and sanity continues to be buoyed by the fun and fellowship that is Marc Core. Thanks for taking me to the mountain top(s).

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Preface

- My "Southern" Accent -

“stress and comfort alike make my accent broader... We only speak in our parents’ voices when we are enraged...or believe we are safe and no one will laugh if we expose our souls”

- Jennings

“... and I sort of see myself as ah... Southern... someone to bring... one of my big pet pieces is ah, people assumin’ that I’m not as educated or as intelligent b’cause I talk slower... er I have an accent an’ ah, I think that’s probably one of the common, most common, ...ya know, stereotypes...”

-”John,” study participant

I live at the intersection of poor-ignorant-hillbilly road and Southern-middle class-Whiteman highway. That’s where I’ve built a home for myself. See, I was raised a carpenter’s son and I grew up to be one myself – a hard workin’ man who takes great pride in his craft and the calloused hands that come with it. Trust me, this house is solid. Matter of fact, it’s strong as a prison – and it has to be to hold all this conflict. Turns out the place where those roads meet, that intersection, those are the walls of the cell... in a place I fig’rd I’d find an easy spot to hop the fence. But, I can’t tell you ‘bout that without explaining ‘bout my Accent.

My Accent is distinct. No matter how many reality TV shows, like Discovery’s *Moonshiners*¹, attempt to confuse folks about Southern accents passing for Appalachian, there *IS* in fact a difference. We have our very own accents, and everybody ‘round here knows the difference between ‘em all, so don’t think you’re kiddin’ anybody. If you ain’t from here, we know it about the time you pucker up to speak – and that goes double for Yankees. ‘Sides if

¹ Magilla Entertainment, 2013

there weren't no difference, how would *you* know who was a hillbilly and who was White trash? But most the time you ain't got no idea no way.

So see, my hillbilly accent can be either Union or Confederate when it needs to be. Growin' up 'round here you learn early how to know when to use the "right" one. Well that was until I got "too big for my britches," as granddaddy'd say, and decided I'd move to the city. Now, this wasn't actually the city, but growin' up that's just what we always called the kids with money who all seemed to live in town. They damn sure weren't from out in the county, and they made sure we all were clear on that too. Livin' in what ya might call the suburbs just outside D.C., I knew they really pro'bly couldn't tell, but my accent *needed* to be Southern.

And that's when I started to think, maybe even believe, those deliciously savage dreams of my childhood that painted beautiful bleeding fictions in my mind at night might come true. They were seductive dreams of a life where shame, desperation, and want didn't exist and never had. They were addictive dreams that I didn't have to be poor – in a hillbilly land where hope seems forever tempered; that the pain of feeling *un*-wanted, and the heart-wrenchin' pain of secretly resentin' my daddy for not protecting us – just as I loved him more for his hard work and struggle and idolized him as a *god among men* - would be erased. It was then that I sold my soul to the devil. I didn't realize it, and I sure never said it, but it sounded like this: "Give me a life of ease and I'll let it go; all of it." I sold my Accent for the fiction painted in those American Dream images that inspired and tormented me at night – and the reality of it is just as savage as the dreams.

I sold my soul and the exchange took four mostly hellish years – the years I earned a "higher" (read: Better) education. Now don't get me wrong, I *love* my "intellectual life," but I learned long ago even brilliant things said with my Accent, just ain't. My Accent is the stuff of the sodomizing rapists in *Deliverance*. I sold my soul when I left my Accent in a box at my

parents' and then traded in my Southern accent for a Northern Virginia accent, we'll just call "speakin' NoVA." See NoVA is bland with just a hint of Southern, but it *is* "sophisticated"... in the suburbs just outside of D.C., Northern Virginia has some of the richest counties in the country. NoVA ain't Southern – and it damn sure don't sound Appalachian.

My brother, who had been my best friend for my entire life, noticed. He applied "Yankee" as liberally as others might use "college boy" to shame the sibling who gets above their raisin' – but there's a critical difference between the two. He knew it, and I knew it. *Yankees* were the vicious conquering army that beat the Confederate army, sure; but they also raped and pillaged the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia that we call home. *Yankees* are Georgia's Sherman and our Sheridan². *Yankees* are carpet-baggin', citified, rich exploiters, from New York or some damn place that sure ain't here. And in Appalachia, history is full of, and written by, exploiters.

To escape my own pain, I sold out and became one too; but it didn't stick. What I got instead was an easier life to dull the pain, and a load of imposter's self-doubt and collaborator-guilt to make up the difference. And I'm done with it. But don't think I can't still speak traitor fluently enough to punch holes in that "dream." We gotta learn to reject that shame that makes us rely on somebody else to tell us we're good enough; they – our "betters" – ain't ever gonna say so, but we're good enough as is. Let's claim pride on our own terms; not over, but *with* one another. That's why family and community's always been so important 'round here – we need each other. B'sides it's not just easier, it's more fun when you have somebody workin' alongside ya too. Those cheatin' "gentlemen" didn't have answers that helped anybody but themselves then, and ain't nothin' changed. But we have to believe it first. Or we can just keep cuttin' each other off at the knees while they sit in their rocking chairs and sip their mint juleps;

² In late September of 1864 Union General Philip Sheridan acted on orders from Grant to leave the Shenandoah Valley at least unproductive if not uninhabitable – an act known as "the burning" that foreshadowed Sherman's March through Georgia later that same year.

you choose. Knowin' how to talk like them sure can be useful though.

Experiencing life at the intersections

³When setting out to study the situated intersections of poverty, Whiteness, and masculinity in Appalachia, one finds a dearth of scholarship. Yet intersectional scholars have long argued that studying the experience of oppression must be contextualized. That is, to fully understand experience intersectionally, *systems* of domination must be studied (Collins, 1990; Combahee Collective, 1977; Davis, 1983; hooks, 1984; Glenn, 2002; Jordan, 1981; Mohanty, 2006; Reagon, 1983; Shields, 2008; Warner, 2008). Mohanty (2006) allows that a decontextualized, oversimplified attempt to understand intersectionality may come easily to us; as we experience the world in ways that are “often discontinuous and fragmented.” However, she continues that “experience must be historically interpreted and theorized if it is to become the basis of feminist solidarity and struggle, and it is at this moment that an understanding of the politics of location proves crucial” (2006, p. 122). In particular, a historicized understanding of the experience of – and identification with – poor male Whiteness in Appalachia is critical to understanding the systems that constitute it – namely American capitalism, patriarchy, White supremacy – without which we cannot fully appreciate the harm to this particular population. Moreover, as Reagon (1983) makes clear, the kind of coalition that could offer meaningful change begins with understanding these foundational dynamics.

Indeed, given the critical importance of location, its context, and the instability of such contexts, an intersectional understanding of those who simultaneously benefit greatly from

³ Note the font shift is intentional to distinguish between voices and here returns to the academic language generally held in high esteem to describe why the accented lived experience matters.

injustice and are marginalized offers a largely untapped resource for coalition work⁴. Thus, I entered the field, hoping to add to our understandings of intersections of oppressions by focusing on poor, working-class, Appalachian men for three reasons: (1) they are an understudied population yet play a particularly important role in the maintenance of these structures that deeply impact them because (2) while what Roediger (1991) called the “wages of Whiteness” of poor White men in the South is necessarily different than in the North (Conley, 2000; Shirley, 2010; Wise, 2005), this is altogether different than in Appalachia (Bageant, 2007 & 2010; Jennings, 1998). And finally, this is my home and my story.

(Only) Geographically Appalachian

“Appalachia’s White right?, and you’re talking about White men, so what could they know of injustice and oppression...? Sure Appalachia is poor, but not inner city (black and brown) poor... How could you say Appalachia was an internal colony... that’s reserved for oppressed (brown) people. What voice do you have to say anything about justice...?” asks my defector-self. There are so many assumptions there that come with this “education” I got, *and* it grates against my Accent. Sure, I know my story, my pain, and my injustice, and I’m not alone. But when you hear it is it an Appalachian or Southern accent? Is it the castoffs of empire, or plantation owner you hear?

⁴ For over thirty years, critical scholars, primarily women of color, have consistently argued for a coalitional approach to justice work (Collins, 1990; Combahee River Collective, 1977; Davis, 1981; Jordan, 1981; Mohanty, 2006; Reagon, 1983). Such a project challenges a reductionist understanding of oppressed populations and/or identity that construct so-called “safe spaces” through the marginalization of those deemed “outsiders” or “unsafe” (Frankel, 2004; Gorski, 2012; hooks, 1984; Jordan, 1985; Reagon, 1983). Further, there is a need to examine differential impacts of various oppressions within and across communities in order to make possible coalitions that can pose meaningful challenges to those systems of oppression (Frankel, 2004; hooks, 2000; Jordan, 1983; Liu, 2005; Middlebrook, 2010; Mohanty, 2006, Reagon, 1981; Sandoval & Davis, 2008)

Don't feel bad if you can't tell the difference – for most of us, it ain't so clear either. Virginia Tech or UVA? Farm or factory? West Virginia or Virginia? Ralph Stanley or Toby Keith? Stonewall or Lee? Baseball or basketball? Which boots, work or cowboy? I could go on forever. I wanted to move to Georgia after high school to have a stronger accent. Why not just to the west, in West Virginia? – "*West Virginia, where men are men, and the sheep aren't safe,*" said my high school football coach and gym teacher – regularly. He's from West Virginia. These are the daily boundaries and negotiations to claim an Accent; to make a choice.

If I chose to use my “education” and speak traitor, to speak about my Accent simply as the experience or identities of a White man with a European mother, a Mennonite father, who grew up working-poor in a Virginia county that both is and isn't Appalachian, which has been a part of and brutalized by neo-liberal “development” would that explain my Accent? Even an impossibly complete listing of the component parts of my life experience, presented in so many tidy boxes, would never communicate my Accent. The earth-shattering, liberatory power of what Collins termed Black Feminist Thought is that it establishes that my life is more than anything a simple calculation can describe. In fact, it is more than the words on this page could ever hope to describe – no matter how fancy. It is exactly this quality that makes that sell-out/limbo feeling the confluence, rather than just the sum, of all those systems of oppression enacted on a person – the living result. Audre Lorde speaks of the power of poetry to communicate the vivid depths of life. It is not the words that make it poetic; it is what I am calling my Accent that gives the poem life.

Why this project?

As Reagon, (1981), Sandoval, (2000), and Shields (2008) have articulated, painting a picture of the holistic lives of these rural, White, working-class, Appalachian men cannot, by definition, be simply additive. That is, one must take into account the fluid, interrelationship

between the impacts of place, race, social class, region, and gender described in human experience to best understand how they have been and are affected by oppression. This allows us to better assess the commonalities and differences (Cole, 1986) between this population and other White, male communities that are more readily available in the literature (Diamond, 2006; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Frankel, 2005; Harris, 2010; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel & Messner, 1992; Kaufman, 1999; Liu, 2005; Laker & Davis, 2011; Scott et al., 2001). This also echoes Mohanty's (2006) point that "it is not the experience of being a woman, but the meanings attached to gender, race, class and age at various historical moments that is of strategic significance" (p. 118).

Further, the experience of this population is important in that while the context is indeed quite different than the urban poverty of Conley's *Honky* (2000), the structure that produces these results is a common one. If the inequities in the contemporary global economic system are to be remedied, the varied manifestations and impacts of the system must be studied. From the farm and construction laborers to the miners and corporate retail employees of the Appalachian South, to the projects of New York City, and sweat-shops of Bangladesh, no context is without importance. This project is meant as a first step toward understanding the human face of the system's victim/defenders along the Appalachian border with the "plantation-land" South (Jennings, 1998).

As we have seen, intersectionality can't be decontextualized. Therefore, such an omission of the context – and with it a historical understanding of such a location – delegitimizes the analysis of experience-in-power⁵ as a liberatory project precisely because it is necessarily incomplete. Further, to ignore context and the politics of location constitutes a political refusal

⁵ As opposed to without power

to acknowledge our positionality as both “oppressor and oppressed” (Alice Walker as cited in Sandoval, 2000). This echoes Walls and Billings’ (1977) caution that applying metropolitan middle-class frames of reference to Appalachia is simply ineffective. In contrast, it is the purpose of this thesis to embrace the uncomfortable positionality of an outsider. As both former – and emotionally persistent – poor Appalachian, this is not simply the struggle to see myself as both insider and outsider. Rather the call here is broader, to seek understanding and challenge others to do the same outside our comfort zones, in the name of good scholarship and the politics from which the choice to exclude or include the entire context cannot be divorced.⁶

In retrospect, the kind of liberation (freedom) June Jordan describes at the close of “Letters from the Bahamas” (1981) reminds me of the incredible experiences I have had in really engaged, honest, and supportively/brutal/accountable coalition moments. The reality is seemingly so simple – that when we accept that we are both oppressor and oppressed, we can more effectively join with others to do meaningful and rewarding liberation work (Sonnie & Tracy, 2011; Wagner, 2011). Truly, it is when we uplift and celebrate the lives and dignity of others that we free ourselves as well. It is through releasing our self-interest that we’re able to escape the prison of our own oppression – and our roles in systems of domination. Our egos/self-interest make the bait we accept and thereby consent (in)to hegemony work, and to the extent that we deny or dismiss it, the bait has no power... nor does the system. So, the extent to which we set our self-interest aside determines our freedom to be, and our liberation is wrapped up in the collective. Self interest or freedom; we must choose. Ultimately it is my wish and belief that in articulating a cost of privileges, unmarked and yet painful experiences of systems of domination, we will be far more able to understand how we are our own jailor. When we all

⁶ For instance, while research done on and with college students is certainly easier for scholars struggling to “publish or perish,” there is a political choice inherent in staying on campus.

realize that collectively we hold the keys, it seems only logical that coalition based change can happen. In fact, there are great examples such as the Rainbow Coalition of the 1960s (Sonnie & Tracey, 2011), Helen Matthews Lewis's efforts to build bridges between Appalachian Virginia and the Black Panther movement in Harlem, and Tennessee's Highlander Center's anti-racist coalition work (Wilkerson & Cline, 2011). It has been done and can be done again – and with it greater equity and less pain in the faces of our children.

I can't tell you what racism and sexism feel like in the way that a Black woman can, but I can tell you about being privileged but having ketchup for lunch and groceries on a check that hadn't yet been cut much less cashed, four months living in a camper, and losing most of my friends when I was found out... Apparently we were poor, and that was a problem. Freezing in my summer jacket when the weather turned cold and lying to my mom that I was fine so she and my dad wouldn't feel guilty isn't anything I want to feel ever again. I did my part to pretend, but I'm sure it hurt them more – though reading this might take the cake. A deep and abiding love was always in great abundance in my family, and still is. Thanks to my parents' efforts and an incredible community around us, our needs were met and “us kids” learned that family and friends come first. Everyone pulls together when somebody needs help; even if it's the shirt off your back, that's just what you do. After all, it might be you next time. And besides, it's more fun to have somebody to laugh with, especially when life knocks you down.

Yet there was always someone or something to make sure I knew we weren't quite good enough somehow. All of this is the kind of shit I never want to feel again, and that I never wanted my kids – our kids – to know... The reason people call it grinding poverty is because it can take hope and turn it into dust on the breeze. Today there are millions of families with children in exactly the same situation – for many of them, it is an appalling heritage. If we are

going to do something about that, we have to be willing to face poverty and the systems that perpetuate it. Perhaps one day we will heed Dr. King's words and change the society that produces beggars, while their neighbors become the richest on the planet.

Conclusion

I grew up poor in an Appalachian borderland – a place where always knowin' what people think of you is part of survivin'. Where White trash are the "common" lazy people closer to town, who don't work but choose to be selfish, dependent mainly because they have no self respect. "We ain't THAT poor, " even though we were. Don't get me wrong, I knew kids way worse off, but then I also thought we were middle class. And it wasn't for my parents efforts – if you imagine I'm ashamed of them, you're *damn* wrong. As soon as I started working myself, I quickly regretted my irritation at my dad for working us hard Saturday's and then wanting to nap Sundays after church. The almost-not-poor work harder than anyone, but when you're generations deep it's damn near impossible to get out in your lifetime.

And that's where the "American Dream's" attempts to shame and manipulate begins. Is it my fault? Why couldn't I make it in this meritocracy!? It must be me... well, us. Hegemony sure is a big word for convincing me to beat my own ass anytime I start thinkin' I might change things, but there it is. After all, changin' things... "Whell, somebody's sure's gittin' above their raisin' and thinkin' they're better than the rest of us. Whell... their family better stay humble with *that* travesty of a place, and don't get me started on what I heard..."

We police ourselves. Corporate governance in Richmond and D.C. can just sit back and collect the votes.

"Well at least we ain't (dependent) on welfare; I *earn* my way and stand on my own two feet."

Yep, sure thing buddy – *you* are your own man! Except, how's that job search going now that they closed down the plant? Yeah? Nothin' but that retail distribution center... an hour away is it? Yeah, I guess McDonalds ain't gonna cut it and I wouldn't be caught dead in that yuppy Starbucks out by the interstate neither.

Neoliberal... globalization... Now with words like that, you *know* it's got to be bad, Jo-Bob! It has been through this valley...

Been and gone off with the factories...

But it's come back! With jobs!

Yep, with low wage "service sector" jobs.

Service? You mean, like as in servants?

Some things just never change...

Introduction

"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences...When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak."

- Audre Lorde

What matters in this world is how hard you can work and the reputation that you can be trusted to do so; your family and indeed your community count on it.

- My granddaddy's life lesson (paraphrased)

I still do not know quite why we were there together in his beat-up old truck. Maybe I had stayed up too late the night before and, as a result, moved too slowly and missed the bus that would take me first to the high school, where I would then catch the "express" bus – that was anything but – to my middle school 25 miles (and 45 minutes) away. In any case, along a familiar stretch of two-lane country road that rolls over and through the kind of farmland that my granddaddy spent most of his life working, a piece of an otherwise long-forgotten conversation stands out in my memory. After reminding me that land was valuable because "they aren't makin' any more of it" and that it could feed my family when nothing else could – knowledge gained from decades of hard work and a brutal work ethic grounded in memories of hunger – granddaddy elaborated on work in relation to our destination. While the wording has eroded from my memory, the message is and was clear: What matters in this world is how hard you can work and the reputation that you can be trusted to do so; your family and indeed your community count on it. He continued; a piece of paper – meaning the degree he had never received – doesn't tell anyone either of those things. In short, school is important sure, but what *really*

matters is your physical labor.

Certainly this was true in his lifetime. Born into a poor farming family as the First World War came to a close, he caught skunks before school for the cash their pelts would bring, and described his memories of the Great Depression as no different from any other time of struggle. Moreover, he had already quit school to work year round on the family farm by the time he was my age that day on the way to school; I was 12. His life was one in which a man's hard work – by which I mean physical exhaustion – would provide for a large extended family. There was always plenty to be done, and grandchild or guest, you were expected to help. Regardless of wealth or income, those who did not work hard exemplified sloth and those they loved suffered.

To be clear, I knew him as a deeply religious, joyful, and profoundly kind Mennonite man whose hard work at the General Electric factory, on his farm, and in his massive gardens provided for and fed his family. This was no small accomplishment given their six children and the many community, foster, and Fresh-Air children who were also loved in my grandparents' home, no matter their color. I have only memories of his patient teaching as I helped him work the soil, haul tons of hay in that truck, mend fences, collect eggs, and create a toy wheelbarrow for me from scrap wood, wire, and old toy wheels all held together with nails that moments before had been bent. Granddaddy was a pacifist who understood the purpose of his life to be an example of the love his Savior showed when he died on a cross for no reason but love. Indeed I remember only love and laughter; for all I know the man was never angry. Yet this amazing man held a special disdain for those highly educated elites he only ever experienced as exploiters of hard-working people. The purpose of this thesis is to extend tools gained in the kind of elite spaces he was never permitted to enter, in service of those he worked to provide life and love.

Workin' in Appalachia

Critically, little has changed since Walls and Billings (1977) noted that “an obvious deficiency in the sociological literature on the Appalachian community is the analysis of work” (p. 14). Further, still today their critique that studies of social power structures in Southern Appalachia “are practically non-existent” (p. 9) holds. Indeed, even those studies of low-status White⁷ Appalachians are disproportionately related to the coal industry, which has tremendous power yet is limited to particular segments of the region. While Bell and Braun (2010; see also Bell, 2011a) note the gendered allegiance to employer over environmental concerns in the coal regions, and nationally Faludi (1999) presents the connection between individuals’ sense of masculinity and work (particularly their feelings of “betrayal” when work is unavailable and/or stigmatizes them), Appalachian men’s relationships to work remain unstudied. Additionally, though important scholarship about poor Appalachian women has emerged in recent years (Allison, 1994; Bell & Braun, 2010; Sorrell, 2013), the gender expectations of contemporary U.S. American masculinity necessarily produces different results in terms of how these men articulate work, culture, and success. Further, as I discuss in the following two chapters, important scholarship has been done to examine low-status Whiteness as a method of critiquing White supremacy, yet there has been little examination of the differences between such representations.

In response to these additional needs, this thesis serves as a foundational step toward the scholarship on understanding the complexities presented as these White men try to create and

⁷ Throughout this thesis I will refer to *Blackness* or *Whiteness* as the social constructions built around having supposedly “black” or “white” skin. These capitalizations are meant to denote the construction rather than any physical characteristic; a distinction that will be explored throughout. See Omi and Winant (1994), as well as Jhally (1996) and Pounder et al. (2003) for approachable discussion of these complex processes.

protect a “home” – in the deeply spiritual way Marx (1992) described – through their work in a stigmatized and economically challenged location on the edge of empire. Moreover, in another context these men might be called privileged, yet particularly in an area that both is and is not Appalachia, non-elite White men’s historically situated masculinities leave them to strive for self-worth in a shamed context. While the broader culture suggests attaining both a college degree (that facilitates a social climb into the middle class) and the American Dream should be the goal, doing so for these men is to ally themselves with their historical and present oppressor. As I will argue, it is the *acceptance* of patriarchal, White supremacist narratives related to work, embedded in neo-liberal American Dream ideologies, which produce simultaneously experiences of pride and shame that effectively enlist these men in supporting the very systems that ensure their struggle.

My central purpose here is to present an examination of the ways in which these Appalachian men attempt to claim a sense of self that avoids this shame – yet also avoids creating perceptions among friends and family that one has become not just an elitist but, with the weight of social/cultural death, a middle class Yankee. This response to Appalachian men’s relationships to work and identity is not the niche topic it may seem. Rather, given the constructions of “hillbilly” particularly – but American masculinity more generally – work is *the* central characteristic at the (intersectional) center of these men’s lives. As a result, this study is hardly peripheral, but instead has significant implications for Appalachia (and beyond).

Thus, I argue that we must critically examine not only the acceptance of hegemonic narratives of race, class, and gender, but also place and regional history – and how place and regional history affect the hegemonic narratives of race, class, and gender – that impact this community. Critical here is that while it is often assumed that these men embrace these tools of

domination, their acceptance of these narratives is hardly a given. Understood through an intersectional analysis, their positionality suggests that these men have a vested interest in challenging those systems; in fact the narratives in this thesis present compelling evidence of resistance. And yet, this is only a viable claim if their voices (and thus stories) are heard.

What, then, do the contexts that produce different constructions of “White man”-as-citizen in the North, South, and Appalachia look like in relation to normative metro-middle-class representations? Further, how do these contextual differences relate to the hierarchy of redneck, hillbilly, and White trash Whitenesses that support, yet challenge, White-supremacy? Ultimately, what might those differences suggest about the inner workings of the “empire,” and how does this population understand and enact benefit and resistance in their relationship to it? Answers to such questions would offer a powerful platform from which to build coalitions between those already working to challenge these systems and this population. While there are historical examples of such coalition (Middlebrook, 2010; Sonnie & Tracy, 2011), at a time when conservative forces capitalize on this population’s justified frustration and fear (see McVeigh, 2004), a contemporary understanding of what is happening “at home” for these men is sorely needed.

In this thesis, I begin to examine such questions through relevant regional history and representations, methodology, and, finally, the narratives of people in a particular county in Appalachia. Given that this is a region and people rarely studied, particular historical meanings and redefinitions of work, Whiteness, masculinity, and Appalachia itself are required knowledge in order to understand the contemporary context that shapes the lives of the narratives to come. In other words, how can we understand that intellectual work can be either highly valued or reviled, how can “Yankee” mean both Northern (foreign) exploiter and Southern elitist, and why

is Appalachian Virginia both the South and not? Further, the changing stigmatizations leveled at people based on changing ideas of who is valued and in what context must also be understood in order to differentiate between the meanings associated between such concepts as “redneck” and “hillbilly”. Indeed, while graduating high school and continuing on to college may be exactly what is hoped for in many communities, to understand the narratives we must understand why in Appalachia “making it” is understood as “gettin’ above your raisin’” and becoming a traitor.

Therefore, in Chapter One, I present two very different histories and cultural values associated with them that present a complex web of relationships to power, personal value, and freedom. Chapter Two then takes up the complex representations produced by such a historical location using intersectionality theory to explore these varied experiences. Shifting the analysis slightly, Chapter Three offers my methodology and method, while an extended discussion in an Appendix argues that the academic mode by which this project attempts to be liberatory has its own problems. Finally, I present the narratives of three men who have spent their lives in a county that is historically and geographically, but not politically, Appalachia. After all, location makes all the difference, no matter if one is in the ‘hood or the holler.

It is my hope that by looking at intersectional stories unexamined in terms of (1) the experience, (2) of White men, (3) who are not in fact “privileged” in the way this is commonly understood, there can be greater understanding and coalition between this population and others working to create greater equity. Their experience is certainly raced and gendered, but overwhelmingly their experience is one of place-based economic oppression; for them everything else follows. Yet, all experience is intersectional, and the contributors each demonstrate both that they know others face oppression – in fact, they have a finely honed ability to see oppression – and yet are unwilling to speak for those different experiences. While this

may sound like minimizing less privileged experience, it is only through a deep and thorough understanding of the lives and challenges of populations such as this one that true solidarity and struggle can be born as it was in the Rainbow Coalition (Sonnie & Tracy, 2011; see also Tarrant & Katz, 2008). Indeed in this neo-liberal, Tea-Party moment, understanding and coalition-based movement toward justice is precisely what we need in order to realize *greater*, rather than less, equity.

Chapter 1

- American Dreams, Southern & Appalachian style -

“Ya know, there is a lot of people out there that believe ya gotta work for what ya got, an’ that is *deep* in this area.... I work 40, 50, 60, 70, 80 hours a week sometimes, an’ that’s just how I was raised... and there's a lot of people in this area who, ya know, have a good work ethic... an’ I think that is a positive aspect of where we are... some of the forward thinkingness of our society kind of puts hard work outta the picture... Ya know, they’re just like oh this is what I, where I want to end up, an’ ya know along the way I'm going to play video games every day, I didn’t do that, I had to work for what I got.”

- “Luke,” Study participant

In 1977, Walls and Billings closed their definitive review of the literature, entitled “The Sociology of Southern Appalachia,” with requests for further research. Primary among them was a call to explore the cultural importance of work in the region – a statement that followed their still important critique of scholarship which has largely continued to apply a metropolitan middle class value set to Appalachian contexts⁸. Particularly following the shift in which the majority of Americans moved from farms to cities, the national story since the Civil War has obscured the values which historically defined work in Southern Appalachia. However, to understand the cultural meanings of work in the region, we must recall the early English colonies of Virginia and the Carolinas. These Southern colonies were largely structured around plantations that produced tobacco through a system requiring vast amounts of labor and huge tracts of productive agricultural land.

As we see reflected in the contemporary quote above, in this neo-feudal system one was

⁸ See Algeo’s discussion of the “Local Color” literature to Chenoweth and Galliher’s “Factors Influencing College Aspirations of Rural West Virginia High School Students,” 2004

either a land owner or laborer; a man of leisure or of work; independent or dependent. Given that provider/protector meanings associated with work are so central to American constructions of masculinity (Faludi, 1999; Kaufman, 1999; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel & Messner, 1992), to study Southern Appalachian men, we must first understand the socio-historical foundations of work if we are to understand the lives and choices made in the region⁹. Through this lens we can understand the different contexts and experiences that produce varied White male American experiences – especially with regard to class and region – North and South, rural and urban.

(Don't) Carry me back to ol' Virginny: Colonial America North and South

The version of Southern history that finds particular resonance in much of the rural South – Appalachia included – is that of Jefferson's yeoman farmer¹⁰ where every White man had 40 acres and a mule, worked hard and honest in the dirt, and benefitted from a benevolent culture built on honor (see Bageant, 2007 & 2010). This is, in many ways, the foundation of the "American Dream," a hopeful *dream* of a prosperous new life to which Americans should aspire, construct their own, and take pride in. Ironically, and yet quite telling, the honor-infused ideal of Jefferson's independent agrarian life was never real because it was predicated on the very specific citizenship requirements of the day (Haney-Lopez, 1996). As a citizen, this yeoman farmer-citizen was by legal description a "free White man," or what today we would call a propertied, and therefore independent, European (preferably English) descended male (Jacobson, 1998). Critically, these traits were understood to confer value only as a propertied, English, male

⁹ Walls and Billings provide an example in their critique of metropolitan middle-class scholars' assumptions that they apply their own (often historically Northern) rationale, which leaves conceptual gaps, which in turn are filled in by adopting stereotypes of class and region that describe poor Southerners as ignorant. It is not the poor man's failing, but that of the scholar.

¹⁰ founded in republican ideals of work and citizenship. See Roediger (1991) for historical background.

unit. Moreover, this construction of citizenship and social value takes on a specific meaning in the plantation-based economy of the time, because from the earliest days of England's American colonies this freedom was constructed to be forever out of reach for most.

Before the trans-Atlantic slave trade supplanted indenture in the 1700s, the early labor force on the tidewater region of Virginia's tobacco plantations consisted primarily of poor, non-propertied dependents, and therefore not "free," English conscripts. As various scholars have noted, many early colonists came to North America as indentured servants, either to escape generations of poverty and violence or were arrested (or simply kidnapped) off the streets where they lived as paupers¹¹ (Caudill, 1963; Goad, 1997; Jackson, 2006; Jacobson, 1998; Roediger, 2003; Wray, 2006). This was a time when England's colonies were depositories for people considered undesirable for their immoral poverty if not racial inferiority¹². Indeed, the Scots-Irish – who were themselves the descendants of colonized Irish and their Scottish (colonized)¹³ colonizers – later would comprise the largest number of immigrants to the South and southern Appalachia (Caudill, 1963; Goad, 1997; Jackson, 2004; Jacobson, 1998; Roediger, 2003; Straw, 2006; Wray, 2006).

Notably this is quite different from the prevailing story of mostly Northern immigrants, who were motivated to colonize a New World to claim religious *independence* rather than indenture. The Protestant Work Ethic that emerged in the North and as a result of the Civil War

¹¹ While perhaps only Georgia was overtly a debtor's prison, the colonies benefitted from the labor supplied by England's unwanted poor until they were supplanted by the African slave trade.

¹² Writings of the time, Georgia's function as a debtors' prison, and the regular conscription of sailors in the Americas provide evidence of the value and state of "freedom" for poor Whites in those days. Important here is also that race was understood in quite different ways before the African slave trade took hold – think here of the Irish and other "White ethnics" of eugenics later.

¹³ The Scottish colonizers of Ireland were themselves colonized by the British before being exported as foot soldiers of the English empire.

became the national story, merged salvation, work, and national progress into a new American view of work as the practice of freedom. This value system contrasts sharply with the Euro-Southern model that produced the realities of a Virginia tobacco plantation, and the frontier expansion designed to protect it (Hofstra, 1998; McCleskey, 1990). Especially later as revolution neared, the laboring yeoman farmer ideal was necessary to distance the new American elite from appearing to be a new aristocracy. Further, this Enlightenment imaginary was a re-envisioning of what was really a neo-feudal system that conformed to contemporary ideals of freedom, liberty, and ultimately to a meritocracy. However, early Southern history describes a hierarchical economic and political system run by elites or “gentry” who held decidedly different *European* values regarding work and leisure.

Since classical times Europeans had reserved physical work for lesser *others* as it was believed to “erode the faculties” required of a citizen (Glenn, 2002). Thus, in the plantation system of the southern colonies, a White man was either “gentry” – the propertied intellectual-citizen-statesman whose leisure was proof of their freedom and citizenship – or a lesser laborer whose role was to *work* rather than own and *provide* the gentry’s leisure and wealth. To quote Hofstra (1998),

Never had Virginia freely distributed land to all takers. Virginia history had been the story of the engrossment of land in larger and larger quantities by social and political elites drawing ever closer in the nexus of kinship, land ownership, and political power. This elite never achieved stronger and more exclusive control over political power, especially the power to distribute land, than when it was creating a backcountry frontier of outsiders. (p. 1282-1283)

Hofstra further describes the defense of this practice through the statement of Lt. Gov. William Gooch to the English Board of Trade who oversaw the Colony. Gooch (1729, as cited in Hofstra, 1998), “reasoned that ‘where the greatest Tracts have been granted & possessed’ by

'men of substance' the 'meaner sort of People [have been encouraged] to seat themselves as it were under the Shade & Protection of the Greater" (p. 1283). As a result, poor White men in the early plantation economy, even after the American Revolution, were not citizens as they did not fit the stated requirements of citizenship at the time (Haney-Lopez, 1996). These men were considered "dependent" and "unfree" – therefore not manly, nor as Wray's (2006) title suggests, *Not Quite White* – in short, not valuable to the state. Notably, this was true in a society where the same was true of women, American Indians, and increasingly African slaves.

Thus, the laboring yeoman farmer ideal was necessary to distance the new (Northern) American elite from appearing to be a new aristocracy. Further, the yeoman farmer responded to the Protestant work ethic ideals of republican citizenship that established self-sufficiency as a prerequisite to legitimate citizenship, both for elites and indentured White men. Southern planters needed to connect themselves to agrarian uses of the land in order to contrast themselves against the Northern social and economic order, which was increasingly arranged around mercantilism trending toward industrialization. Thus a romanticized fiction was created by the planter-elite in order to imagine themselves as deeply connected to the life (and wealth) giving potential of his land, while providing motivation for those actually working it. As I will return to later, the rift created between these two value systems and the elites that led those societies would create difficulties in the formation of a nation, and ultimately bring about Civil War.

Re-imagining Citizenship: Regional Imaginings/Impacts of Race, Class, and Gender

Merging old-world hierarchies in which elites alone controlled land, with a new democratic model, was, however, no easy task on a continent of seizeable land¹⁴. Yet access to

¹⁴ Consider the example of poaching in Europe to not only hunting, but claiming land to the

productive land and the labor to work it were prerequisites to value and social status. Here in the early 18th century was what would later be described in Jefferson's concept of the heroic yeoman farmer-citizen comprised nation, an ideal image to extend to those who might *theoretically* become citizens¹⁵. Further, paired with the promise of land to be had, this farmer-citizen ideal effectively divided those who were literally working the planter's land, along race, gender, and potentially (propertied) citizenship lines. As a result, early on Virginia's elite used this complex social hierarchy as a mechanism for stabilizing their colonial hierarchy, simultaneously expanding the colony, creating a *stable* White Protestant buffer against slave revolt and escape, and the French and their American Indian allies, while also providing the illusion of opportunity on the frontier¹⁶.

Indeed as McCleskey (1990) notes, Colonial elites and their agents in the colonial frontier that would become Augusta County, Virginia¹⁷, leveraged this sense of opportunity to attract and yet hold Scots-Irish and German settlers effectively as indentured servants. Politically connected Colonial elites would be granted huge tracts of land provided they found settlers to live on the land. However, the law did not require the sale of deed to the land. As a result, common practice was to require twice the sale price as bond, and after developing a

west, in this period. While some stayed within the plantation system, confronted with a situation all too familiar to them, many poor Whites headed west to the Appalachian frontier where there was land to colonize and freedom to be claimed. See Pearson (2013) for an important critique of the re-imagining of Appalachian settlers as "native" to the region.

¹⁵ as defined by the 1790 Immigration Act

¹⁶ Colonial elites especially wanted an all-White buffer in the frontier so that escaped slaves could not easily hide among the local population. Though the Shenandoah Valley's breadth was a rare exception, this desired White-border was possible as a result of both the small size and limited amount of farmland in the narrower valleys, and the recruitment of Northern Irish and German landless (to this point) farmers.

¹⁷ Augusta was initially a vast county that stretched from the Blue Ridge to the Pacific Ocean east to west and the Potomac to the James Rivers north to south. While the county is dramatically smaller today, the county seat has always been Staunton, Virginia, giving Staunton a connection to colonial power unseen anywhere nearby.

homestead the sale would be completed. In practice, however, this meant that the elite landowner had no legal requirement to sell, yet held money that no immigrant could stand to lose. As a result, the aspiring landowner would have to work the land to the satisfaction and timing of the owner, which obviously conferred great power to the elite. Further, when the County was officially established as a political entity, those few who held deeds to nearly all the land were also the few eligible for office in the new local government. As a result, as increasing numbers of immigrants came to claim land, those in a position to grant it were the already powerful local gentry. Unsurprisingly, the diversification of ownership did not keep up with immigration, and increasingly land and power were consolidated. In other words, the elite were still masters, and a serf's claim to citizenship was dependent upon their ability to legitimately claim land, which would still be impossible – and thus a source of shame – by design.

Additionally, McCleskey's description of the process by which land was granted to immigrants provides a clear picture of how land was divided as a mechanism to create hegemonic social hierarchy, though only in the fertile valleys (see p. 482). Much like Caudill's (1963) description of Kentucky history, the valuable Augusta County lands were largely held by local elites with ties to (outside) Colonial power. In contrast, the highlands were not surveyed at all and left for "waste" (McCleskey, 1990, p. 481-482). As a result, these undesirable and far less productive uplands were available to those who could not afford bottom land. In short, the same neo-feudal system of the tidewater's plantations existed in Augusta County, but with one *critical* difference – hope that, even for the poor, there was land to be claimed.

Thus while it seems contradictory, Hofstra (1998) points out that the yeoman farmer model was actually the standard west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. As Hofstra describes it :
"They were yeoman farmers instead of planters-smallholders raising grains and livestock,

employing family more often than slave labor, practicing handcrafts, and trading locally in the context of community self-sufficiency” (p. 1281). Culturally, the settler population was primarily Scots-Irish and German rather than English, having come south down the Shenandoah Valley from Pennsylvania (see also Jackson, 2006). In contrast to the ideas of a meritocratic yeoman farmer citizenry, these communities’ hard work would never have equal returns due to the quality of the farmland. Yet given the socio-historical and religious backgrounds that predisposed these settlers to communal and individual defiance of elites, and as large farms were generally not available due to economics or geography, these settlers had few qualms about claiming land outside surveyed, and therefore Colonial, boundaries.

As a result, the defiant people of the highlands were simultaneously a problem, as they literally and figuratively symbolized existence outside of Colonial power, and yet a useful tool. In the Carolinas these mountain squatters were killed by local elites who became vigilantes known as Regulators (Hofstra, 1998; Wray, 2006). However in Virginia, these mountain men were seen as useful to elites as the front line of a now extended defensive White border, and more so because self-sufficiency was a prerequisite to legitimate citizenship for plantation elite and indentured White men alike. While these mountain people did not legally own the land outside recognized Colonial territory, by settling and working it, they did what was required of them to remedy all that they lacked for citizenship; their hard work provided an independence and livelihood¹⁸. Critically however, they would still be denied the equal political and social status they had legitimately worked for and believed they had earned (Caudill, 1963; Hofstra, 1998). This tenuous claim has long linked their insecure status(es) to their work; indeed as the narratives will later demonstrate, even today hard work is the sole grounds upon which a claim to

¹⁸ though not citizenship

home (legitimate belonging) can be made.

Further, this approximation of power – something that *could* look like landholding citizenship – was conditionally conferred on and claimed by these White men as proof that those who worked the land could be as a result independent, though they would never be citizens in the way that their low-country neighbors would recognize. While this approximation did in fact stabilize the volatile hierarchy in Virginia, it was dependent on the subjugation of the indigenous and the consent of local and Colonial elites, along with the mountain settlers themselves (Hofstra, 1998). This relative power to reject Colonial power would play an integral role in the formation of West Virginia later and, as we will see in chapter two, the differential construction of poor White Southerners as either White trash or hillbillies. Regardless, the reality in the early colonial period was that poverty was deviant, if not criminal, and the penalty was compelled labor (often as a colonizing force) and constant threat of inferiority¹⁹.

While the White male planter-elite accumulated wealth and enjoyed their leisure-produced citizenship, others had to compete to belong in the conditional-citizenship hierarchy²⁰. It had been the English way for centuries, and as we will return to in chapter 3 and quite profoundly in the narratives, this struggle to claim a home – a sense of belonging – is still felt today. Thus, while celebrated as a foundational ideal²¹, the yeoman farmer formula of the American Dream built on honor, self-sufficiency, (valued) citizenship, land, and industriousness has never been attainable through these means for the modern White metropolitan working-class,

¹⁹ In fact, including the genocide of American Indians, from the Scots-Irish to Buffalo Soldiers, Vietnam, mass incarceration, and Iraq, this has never changed. Rather, particularly as “post-racial” arguments are made, this has become the favored vehicle for White supremacy.

²⁰ Glenn’s (2002) definition of one who can work for the opportunity to become propertied is in response to being categorized with “un-free” communities such as women and slaves.

²¹ In various media to public discourse – including politics, one finds narratives (overt and implied) of connection between honor and valued citizenship to land and self-sufficiency.

nor poor rural Southerners. In fact, in contrast to their attainment of the land on which they lived – and worked, which might seem a case study in social mobility – the Dream has not been real for poor Appalachians either. However, as we see in the opening quote to this chapter, the American Dream continues to prove an effective incentive for those who produce wealth yet will never possess it themselves.

Neo-liberalism's new Dream

The neoliberal revision of the American Dream in the 21st century appears to address this inconsistency in the American Dream mythology and reify earlier explanations for Appalachia's supposed backwardness. As the socio-cultural implications of neoliberalism have framed the individual as solely responsible for one's own economic reality, the relationship with and between morals, norms, and poverty has also increased (Allison, 1994; Bageant, 2007; Garcia & Martinez, 2013; Goebel, 2014; Hacker, 2008; Kotz, 2008; MacEwan, 2009; University of California Television, 2010). Hacker (2008) deems this the "Personal Responsibility Crusade", in which the well-being of the individual depends on their own efforts separate from any larger contexts. Additionally, American masculinity is deeply connected to providing and protecting through economic and social success (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Diamond, 2006; Faludi, 1999; hooks, 2004; Kaufman, 1999; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel & Messner, 1992; Laker & Davis, 2011; Liu, 2005; O'Neil, 1981; Reed, 2011). As a result, an individual man's economic and social reality is a direct reflection on his value as a person: poverty then is proof of his worthlessness and heightens his shame. As previously noted, although poor Appalachian men had found a means to secure minimally productive land through their physical work, because it was not surveyed the land did not legally exist nor belong to him bring. Thus

regardless of how hard he worked, prosperity and a valued social status would remain outside his grasp. As a result, shame becomes a powerful motivator, or rather a tool, through which these men especially might be controlled.

Further (and specific to this region), as the European values of leisure were also connected to intellectual capacity, in reaction to leisure, intellectual work became and remains "selling out" and crossing over to the intellectual-leisure class of the gentry. To be sure, in an agrarian context, preserving self-worth as a man requires working with your hands (Morris, 2008). Yet as Gooch's 1729 quote makes abundantly clear, the poor who labor were a different class of human, never intended to become gentry (citizens). As a consequence, the mountain land that poor Appalachians were able to claim – and with it their attempt at citizenship and valued place in society – was still not legitimate. While the colonial elite's strategic sleight of hand might seem to be a past event, this pattern has continued through natural resource exploitation, the brief period of industrialization, and the post-industrial shift to low service sector employment. Poor Appalachian men's shame was and is therefore compounded for their failed effort to realize a legitimate place in society through their work ethic and the increasing 21st century focus/dependence on serving those with money to spend (hence the present ubiquitousness of "customer service" language). Thus, a cycle – though not a culture – of despair came to characterize the experience of poor White Appalachian men.

Therefore, as a result of the merger of neoliberalism with the long-standing yeoman farmer ideologies in the social fabric of Appalachia, narratives of shame *and* pride simultaneously emerge within the Appalachian experience²². As stated, the pride a White Appalachian man may take in his value as a worker and provider/protector exists within the

²² Parallels with others facing persistent, systemic poverty here are many. See Banker (2000), Hurt (2006), Lichter et al. (2012), Partridge and Rickman (2007), Tickamyer and Duncan (1990)

representational bounds of (regional) narratives. Therefore his impoverishment is justified as a personal failing, as is his marginalization. In his book *Appalachian Values* (1994), Loyal Jones describes navigating shame with dignity as a cautious approach to individual pride and high expectations in order to avoid disappointment. Such a view is understandable given the context, and yet it can stifle hope and opportunities for change.

Indeed, this conflict between pride and shame shapes the region's material future through the hope and aspirations of the youth. For those poor or working-class Appalachians with the luck, dedication, and social capital of a propertied White male body who are able to attain the college (middle-class) education that is the gateway to intellectual rather than physical labor, leaving may seem the only valid option for a "successful" life (Bollinger et al., 2011; Duncan, 1996; Glenn, 2002; Tickamyer & Duncan, 1990). By presuming a goal of "escape" to a "better" (read: middle-class, metropolitan) life for Appalachia's youth, however, the very families and communities they come from are defined as less-than²³. Even those aspiring young Appalachians must change how they are perceived in order to protect themselves, including the deeply personal way that they sound when they "speak the world"²⁴. Thus, even those who become part of the "brain-drain," which has plagued Appalachia and many other persistently poor communities, are saddled with shame about the home they simultaneously love, even if they are able to succeed (according to neoliberal norms) and fully embrace pride in their accomplishments (Kurtzman et al., 2012; Reed, 2011; Reay, 2001; Sutherland, 2006; Willis, 1977). Thus, even achieving success and escaping poverty result in a loss of self and home that – at best – make leaving the lesser of evils.

²³ See DeYoung's (1995) discussion of the "cultural bridge" along with Wright (2012) for an important critique.

²⁴ from class notes – Parker, 2012

“Culture of poverty”: Hillbillies and Southern White Trash

Hillbillies. In order for exploitative systems to avoid challenges to their legitimacy, the people impacted must believe that this is indeed natural. As this is unlikely to function perfectly, there must also be mechanisms in place to divert reactionary energy; both shame and hope, along with an emphasis on resilience²⁵ are a few such tools. However, historically Appalachian hillbillies are by definition those who rejected or were outcasts of empire, and were as a result fundamentally deviant and outside citizenship and legal belonging (Harkins, 2004; Jacobson, 1998; Wray, 2006).

This backward ignorance is supposed to be demonstrated by the populations’ rejection of the norms asserted by those in power. As stated, the European value system still is used to describe the historical and contemporary struggle and hard *physical* labor in rural Appalachia as “backward” in contrast to highly differentiated Northern-influenced metropolitan spaces where *intellectual* labor offers considerable leisure and “sophistication.” Yet this population’s perceived anarchy is directly related to the macro-level economic structure that serves to marginalize Appalachia more broadly. As previously discussed, since the settling of the region, the land and resources of the region were reserved for those with connections to outside power. Further, as I elaborate on in chapter two, the resulting persistent poverty of the (White by design) region also requires explanation in a White supremacist society; supposed anti-social deviance provides this justification.

For example, the region was settled by those seeking to escape forced labor, the criminalization of poverty, and the lack of opportunity to attain a measure of self-sufficiency in

²⁵ see Neocleous (2006; 2012a & b) for insightful discussions

the colonies. Further, these European settlers shared space and blended culture and families with the American Indian and runaway African slaves on the frontier. These perceived rejections of status-norms regarding “appropriate” relationships between, interactions with, and expressions of race, class, gender, and beyond resulted in a labeling of mountain people as “deviant.”²⁶ In short, mountain people had appeared to reject both the economic and social structure of the colonial power and even seemed to revel in doing so (Algeo, 2004; Bollinger et al., 2011; Duncan, 1996; Glenn, 2002; Lewis et al., 1978; Tickamyer & Duncan, 1990; see also Caudill, 1963).

Southern White Trash. While not as fundamentally deviant as hillbillies, poor White Southerners continue to be stigmatized as inherently lazy due to assumptions about their access to and refusal to benefit from the same economy in which the prosperity of gentry (past and present) can exist²⁷. While this view is profoundly oblivious to Southern economic and cultural history²⁸, such a stigmatized position is in direct contrast to the republican notion of work and citizenship which provides psychological opportunity to the hillbilly. Put another way, while poor Southerners are “trash” because of their sloth, the poverty in Appalachia is understood to be a macro-level issue. Rather than an individual failing, White supremacy can still claim

²⁶ This labeling is clear in Local Color literature (Algeo, 2004), social and public policies (Sorrell, 2013), and various pop culture examples from the films *Deliverance* (Boorman et al., 2007) and *Wrong Turn* (Winston et al., 2003) to Saturday Night Live’s “Appalachian Emergency Room” (see also Harkins, 2004; Mason, 2005)

²⁷ See Gans (1975) for an instructive discussion of poverty’s important economic role.

²⁸ Given the heavily class-stratified English lineage in which poverty was a moral and legal crime, the persistent system of White supremacy that limits economic access by differentiating and supporting oppressive measures against those who are legally considered “non-White,” northern industrialists’ exploitation of the agrarian South for the raw materials that made them wealthy, and the economic, cultural, and psychic damage caused by the Civil War, Southern poverty is hardly simply the result of sloth.

Appalachia as the racial preserve of the White frontier it was constructed to provide. Yet particularly those who rejected plantation elites, and settled outside the realm of elite power, have a long history of being un-willing partners in exploitation. In contrast, it is the perception of poor Southern Whites as colluding in the White supremacy that underlies so much of the cultural and economic system that sets Southern “White trash” apart. It is both their utility as non-threatening fellow-Whites within the same cultural and economic system that relieves “White trash” of the profound “other-ness” of hillbillies. Indeed, rather than critically examine and challenge poverty in the region, reductive hypotheses abound about the overly superstitious, ignorant, inbred (read: immoral/mutant), and stupid populace who create a “culture of poverty.” Perhaps more politically savvy language is used, yet as chapter two will discuss, the argument has not changed in generations.

Context Matters

Further, it is important for us to contextualize the origins and continuing impact of these differences in relation to one major historical moment that fundamentally changed the political and economic history of the United States: the U.S. Civil War. Thus, this region was impacted differently from the North or South, which then produced unique race, class, and gender experiences in the lives of the region’s people²⁹. At the heart of the Working Men's parties Glenn (2002) discusses was a rejection of the idea that the leisure-intellectual class alone were legitimate political citizens. This was intended to claim legitimacy, pride, and sense of personal value through ownership of one’s work, in contrast to the characterization of leisure as value and work as dependency. We see this in Northern narratives of working class masculinities rejecting

²⁹ DuBois and Anna Julia Cooper spoke to differences in experiences of Blacks in the South

“high class” leisure-intellectual masculinities and defining intellectual work as not fully “manly.” Yet the population in Appalachia also exists within a history overshadowed by Civil War.

As stated previously, Southern gentry defined themselves within the pseudo-aristocratic agrarian culture they ruled, in contrast to the Northern elite. However, the Northern elites’ response was to assert their dominance³⁰ by focusing on the (im)morality of slavery, which was critical to the function of the Southern economy. The resulting Southern secession and return to union with the North – but as a defeated and ravaged culture – established a national norm that Southern-ness itself was and is profoundly wrong. To be sure, slavery cannot be justified, and still the feeling and impact of cultural defeat remains present in direct relation to the stigmatizing of Southern- (and implicitly rural-) ness. Particularly along what then became the West Virginia/Virginia border, this traumatic retching of society between Union and Confederate allegiances ripped through communities and families – between and within brothers, fathers, and sons. That trauma has merged with more recent socio-historical events yet is ever-present.

In addition to this cultural trauma, as many in the region also supported the Union, Southern elites also persecuted Appalachians for being seditious, barely-White hillbilly renegades and, thus, part of the threat to an ideology of White supremacy upon which the Southern plantation system was predicated. As a result of this history, from an outside perspective, an association with a Northern identity (presumed to also be male, metropolitan, middle-class, and White) might be advantageous for poor Southern Appalachians; yet they have reason to distance themselves from the dreaded Yankee, who destroyed and exploited mountain communities during and after the war ended³¹. Additionally, in Appalachian Virginia, the socio-

³⁰ This is evident, for instance, in the Emancipation Proclamation’s promise of freedom only to enslaved Africans in Confederate slave holding territories rather than throughout the nation.

³¹ From the Civil War’s damage, pillaging, and casualties, General Sheridan’s famous “burning”

economic connections to the South complicated – if not precluded – any affinity for the North.

Indeed, in a Southern Appalachian context, outsiders have generally been exploiters, regardless if from the South (the gentry elite) or the North (“carpetbagger” Yankees). Therefore, given the greater social, political, economic, and cultural similarities, along with shared histories of conflict with the North, poor White Southern Appalachian men’s efforts to respond to characterizations of a deviant hillbilly-land might understandably encourage adoption of Southern identities – so long as associations with Southern racism and “White trash” can be avoided. Critically, we can see clearly that an Appalachian location is one which straddles yet denies such simple allegiances as Northern or Southern; to claim Appalachia is to embrace a history and lineage outside belonging.

Understandably, having to construct an identity that is a pure fiction created by combining safer/more accepted other-selves³², there emerges a resulting struggle against a sense of loss of belonging or home³³ in much of the literature on and from Appalachia (Bageant, 2007 & 2010; Fulks, 2011; hooks, 2009; Jennings, 1998). Further, because scholars have not yet bothered to critique this incompatible and romanticized past and present in a way that the general population can access, this conflicted sense of home among Southern Appalachians is pervasive (Bageant, 2007 & 2010; Caudill, 1963; Ching, 1997; Holbrook, 2009; Jennings, 1998; hooks, 2009; Roberts, 2007; Russ, 2010; see Jones & Brunner, 1994, and Campbell, 1994 for notable scholarly exceptions). Moreover, claiming home is indeed difficult as the cultural memory of the

of Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, to the deployment of federal troops at the Battle of Blair Mountain, and mountaintop removal (see Bell, 2011 and Haney et al., 2011), Northerners have presented a significant threat.

³² See also related scholarship on constructions of Whiteness (Glenn, 2002; Jacobson, 1998) and masculinity (Connell, 2005; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Kaufmann, 1999)

³³ This goes beyond exploitation to a spiritual sense of loss of self, of belonging, of home. See also Guevarra (2009) and Ignacio’s (2005) discussions of belonging and home.

region often contrasts with the sanitized and nearly fictional history provided by school systems (see Zinn, 2001). Additionally, such a fractured sense of self³⁴ produced by the tenuousness of a pride desired, yet denied by shame (internalized and from without), produces a need for belonging in which conformity – or the rejection of it – takes on a new importance.

Yet it is only when we understand how members of this community describe themselves that their sense of belonging becomes visible. However, their voices are often hidden because, as Mason (1998) has demonstrated, Appalachia (and/or rural America) continues to be represented alternately as *the* home of deviant, poor, in-bred, White racists, in an agrarian utopia that time forgot³⁵. Given that the boundaries of social constructions are constantly shifting, and the projection and adoption of any particular identity is dependent upon changing contexts, the sense of self created is far more than the sum of its parts. This means that acceptance or belonging for White, male Appalachians is not simply about Whiteness, masculinity, class, accent, etc. and cannot truly be understood without the voices of those who live it.

Thus, much of this thesis focuses upon contextualizing and presenting the narratives and observations of people navigating unique experiences of both shame and pride in a particular county in Appalachia. In this spirit, I argue that we must critically examine not only the acceptance of hegemonic narratives of race, class, and gender, but also place, regional history – and how place and regional history affect the hegemonic narratives of race, class, and gender – that impact this community. In short, to understand the narratives to follow we must apply an intersectional analysis to these working-class, White Appalachian men's experience in order to understand their relationships to work as it is and has been a critical source of both dignity and

³⁴ in terms of socio-historical location and promise of upward mobility – in which there exists personal and historical knowledge of such dreams being used as exploitative tools

³⁵ see Algeo on local color and Frost's "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains" (1899)

control. To that end, in chapter two I will discuss the socio-historical and cultural representations of poor White Southerners and Appalachians so that the nuances of chapter three's narrative elements and the narratives themselves will be more clear. As a result, the subtle complexities that inform, conflict with, and ultimately produce this scholarship can be more fully appreciated as they are the human realities at the heart of this project.

Chapter 2

- Deliver us from *Deliverance*³⁶ -

“In this way, the hillbilly serves as a foil for middle-class social mores, defining modern norms against the perceived abnormality of a liminal subject whose sexuality, gender, class, and race are distinctly ‘other.’”

- Mason’s 2005 article *The hillbilly defense*

“ahm, I would say, as far as like the geography goes, I would say... ahm... ya know where... I was born, and where I’ve lived and, ‘n then, the Appalachian mountain range anyway... an’ I mean, I’m not... you know I didn’t grow up back in the mountains of Appalachia. Ah, I’ve been more in the, ya know, Shenandoah Valley, ahm... which, I think is its own breed of individuals I would say...”

-“Mark,” study participant when asked if he identifies as Appalachian

Representations of poor Southern Whites: Appalachian, hillbilly, or White Trash

Appalachia is a region at once romanticized as simple, innocent, wholesome, and virtuous while also cast from American memory as the incestuous and dangerous land of festering poverty and those who choose ignorance over progress (Algeo, 2003; Huntley, 2007; Nitzberg et al., 2010). Critically important here is that Appalachian-ness is described as both “good” and “bad”³⁷. This becomes evident in the distinctions between the terms (Appalachian) *hillbilly* and (Southern) *White trash*, in that both are the lowest forms of a simultaneous class-race formulation. As we have seen in Chapter One, this status was projected onto these poor rural Whites because they rejected the plantation system and culture that would not allow them participation. Those free White men who had claimed less productive mountain land faced

³⁶ Boorman et al., 2007

³⁷ See especially Algeo’s (2003) discussion of the local color movement’s shaping of Appalachian stereotypes, and Mason’s (2005) description of the way good and bad produce a liminality used in national rhetoric.

similar hardships to their White trash peers, yet lived outside of the plantation system altogether. Particularly in Appalachia, however, hillbillies could claim independence, yet largely failed to observe the anti-miscegenation³⁸ fears of the lowlands. Indeed as evidenced by the incorporation of the African banjo and the Irish fiddle into a unique mountain music, the existence of land outside of the plantation system offered hope and a relatively welcoming home for other marginalized communities who resisted as well, primarily former and escaped slaves and Indians (Caudill, 1963; Jackson, 2006; see also hooks, 2009). In short, hillbillies could be “good” or “bad” and thus “proof” either that Southern White trash simply were not trying or proof of the inherent deviance in rejecting the system itself. As a result, hillbilly stereotypes were made to shame or instill pride based on a complex mixture of class and place-dependent ideas of work, race, and reputation.

This rejection exposes major ideological problems for a plantation system increasingly legitimized through White supremacy, as a supposed insider is compelled to challenge the legitimacy of the superiority granted them based on their race and others’ class. Stated simply, their White poverty had to be explained within the same system that made the gentry wealthy and powerful. As we have seen in the 1790 Naturalization Act, the acceptable standard for political citizenship was to be a “free White person” of “good character.” Translation: one must be Anglo-Saxon, male, property owning, free, and – interestingly – have a good reputation. For those free White men within the plantation system who had no land, their “character” was the only rationale for denying them economic access that might avoid revolt, a very real concern at the time.

³⁸ the White supremacist fear of “racial mixing” that drives what Davis (1983) called the myth of the Black male rapist, and the “scientific” racism seen in Eugenics (Jacobson, 1998) and contemporary genome research (Roberts, 2011).

Indeed, this rejection took violent form, exemplified in Bacon's (multi-racial and socio-economic based) Rebellion and the Whisky Rebellion, which advised (White) elites that they must ensure a broader coalition within Whiteness to divide the poor into more manageable racial groups with varying degrees of social capital. This capital was, and is, then framed as very clearly under threat even if the economic struggles are quite similar. Thus begins the litany of racially specific terms meant to morally shame and justify poverty, which produce the same powerful cultural connections between racism, xenophobia, and economics that persist today. Indeed, the national discourse is built upon a legacy of probationary Whitenesses that welcomed non-Anglo Saxon Europeans into "Caucasia" only after the popular support for Nativism and Eugenics of the early 20th Century faded (Jacobson, 1998, Roediger, 2003). Notably, this shift took place as the out-migration of Southern African-Americans and poor rural Whites reached Northern cities. Ultimately then, racial stigma and fear has always been a tool for disenfranchisement and exploitation of the poor, including White Southerners in and out of Appalachia.

Indeed, "White trash scholars"³⁹ argue that while poor White Southerners have different histories, their stigmatization is no less a fundamental part of White supremacy's structure. As Wray states in *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (2006),

Under the logic of White supremacy, wherein all Whites are imagined to be superior to people of color, the low social status, impoverishment, and immoral and lazy behavior of poor Whites were damning evidence to the contrary. Poor White trash required an explanation... (p. 55)

In precisely this way are redneck, cracker, White trash, and hillbilly simply the classist face of

³⁹ Goad (1997), Jennings (1998), and Wray (2006)

White supremacy – and notably these are used everywhere (Newitz & Wray, 1997; O’Connell, 2010). Yet as Mason further notes, by locating (White) racism in poor rural Whiteness – particularly in the South – middle class White America has a ready-made scapegoat.

However, just as Wray notes that the existence of White poverty exposes the lie of White supremacy, Appalachian poverty also challenges the American Dream’s insistence that work can produce freedom. If land ownership, control of one’s labor, and hard work should produce independence and freedom, the hard work of Appalachian mountain farmers, miners, factory workers, and now retail associates, should have made the region rich. Instead, the continued exploitation of the region’s people and resources has continued to strip wealth from Appalachia and make clear that modern gentry have an even greater hold in the 21st century. Thus within the current neoliberal narrative of the American Dream, choices about whether one is characterized as middle-class and Southern, or even working class and “country,” rather than Appalachian, are very important boundaries to negotiate. To identify these faces of White supremacy then, we begin not with constructions of masculinity, Whiteness, *or* class, but the situated and re-presented whole that produce normative ideals to which these men must respond.

Thus here in Chapter Two, I present first a brief history of the relevant connections between work and the representations that justify oppression. Following this, I present an intersectional examination of first the idea of the hillbilly, followed by that of Appalachian men. Indeed, as we will see quite clearly in Chapter Three and the narratives, the difference between being a stigmatized and/or colluding pawn and proudly independent Appalachian is profound, even if the words *Appalachian* and *hillbilly* are nearly synonymous in the culture.

The politics of virtuous work

When the “work as freedom” ethic of the industrializing 19th century North met the “free” market ideology of neoliberalism in the mid-20th century, it revived Jacksonian and Working Men’s movement ideas of limitless opportunity for those who will and are allowed to work. As both poor White and Black⁴⁰ men’s work was understood as un-free, the northern Working Men’s groups of the 1830s asserted that *opportunity* was the key difference between the poor White laborer and the slave. If given opportunity, their argument went, poor Whites would rise on the virtues of hard work inherent in their White male-ness. Notably, this ideology could only exist where land ownership was no longer an economic barrier, and thus re-emerged as the largely agrarian rural South was also becoming increasingly industrial at mid-century.

As a result, *opportunity* rather than land ownership seemed a viable path to prosperity, while rural life was increasingly seen as backward. As a result, Southern poor White trash seemed to have even less legitimate barriers, and hillbillies even more stigma. In this way, the emerging metropolitan middle-class adopted an American Dream grounded in the (Northern) Protestant Work Ethic’s twin concepts of opportunity and work that suggest everyone has the same measure of freedom to claim independence and prosper. In contrast, the very real limits on access to opportunity had to be minimized or denied to ensure Jackson’s (White) “producing classes,” continued to strive for their own independence (Glenn, 2002; Jacobson, 1998). Thus pride and/or shame related to one’s work and individual freedom became highly effective social and political tools used to define fitness for citizenship and produce an American hillbilly identity in which ones’ work can provide relative independence and pride, yet remain

⁴⁰ Here also *Black* is used to denote the social construction of African-descended non-Whites. As the legal construction of Whiteness described by Haney-López (1996) makes clear, Whiteness is a moving target and being outside its bounds is the only (semi-)clear position. It is this “other” status that makes fiction an incredibly concrete reality of experience.

simultaneously stigmatized.

Exposing this is precisely the project of Goad (1997), Reed (2011), and Willis (1977), who address the factors that fuse Whiteness, masculinity, and class, yet often shape rebellion against class marginalization into the reification of the very structure that locates them there; yet only Reed discusses rural Appalachia. Further, Bageant (2007, 2010), Caudill (1963), and Keefe (2000) have unintentionally described the way that this misdirection plays out in the particular historical and social context of the Central Appalachians. However, their lack of clear purpose results in an incomplete picture of these men's nuanced intersectional understanding and experience as deindustrialization has again redefined the region's economic structure. Further, while particularly journalists (Alvarez et al., 2006; Bageant, 2007 & 2010; *Class Matters*, 2005; Goad, 1997; Jennings, 1998; Lubrano, 2004; Sawyer, 2009; and Sutherland, 2006) have come closest to presenting personal narratives with these nuances intact, there remains little scholarly work that does the same with the particular people living in these contexts. However, there are very well established tools and examples of doing just this.

Intersectionality: Application

Intersectionality is a theoretical approach to understanding the simultaneous impact of multiple systems of domination on our lives. The term itself came from Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and extended by Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) as she theorized the work of feminist women of color such as the Combahee River Collective (1977)⁴¹. However, Sojourner Truth (1851) was one of the first to illustrate the importance of understanding intersectionality, when she asked, "Ain't I a woman?" Moreover, this theoretical tool has been widely applied to great effect

⁴¹ see also Davis (1983), hooks (1984), Jordan (1985), Lorde (1984 & 1988) and Reagon (1983)

in providing a more complete, and thus powerful, critical analysis of how oppression operates at various levels (i.e., inter- and intra-personal relations to transnational movements; Allen, 2004; Gorski, 2012; Liu, 2005; Martinez, 1972; Mohanty, 2006; Peterson & Hamrick, 2009; Scott & Robinson, 2001; Shields, 2008; Warner, 2008). Ultimately, intersectionality takes into account both the historical formation of the forces which act upon us, and the ways in which we are situationally constituted in relation to those forces and individuals with which we interact (Collins, 1990; Combahee Collective, 1977; hooks, 1984; Jones, 1998). In other words, it helps to explain how personal experience is produced by (political) systems of power that compel us to present ourselves differently depending on the context.

Further, as many have demonstrated, this approach also allows a powerful critique of the historical development of various subjectivities, or those selves we create for self-defense (Davis, 1983; hooks, 1984; Ignacio, 2005; Jennings, 1998; Jordan, 1981; Haney-Lopez, 1996; Mohanty, 2006; Reagon, 1981; Sandoval, 2008). More recently, what have become known as transnational feminist discourses have extended the reach of intersectional work to describe the global power of neoliberal⁴² political and economic forces (Guevarra, 2009; Ignacio, 2005; Salazar-Parrenas, 2001) and the challenges of organizing with Western anti-oppression movements that result (Basu, 2000; Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1989; Sayeed, 2002), which clearly situate Western feminists as both oppressor and oppressed. Most important to this thesis, scholars on intersectionality provide powerful tools to grapple with the fluid and unstable character of the power/value we are both given and denied by systems of domination.

However, this view has not been universally embraced throughout anti-oppression work, especially those whose central focus is on identity development rather than an analysis of

⁴² see Garcia & Martinez, 2013

oppressions as described previously. Though likely believing this to be a truly intersectional approach, the identity politics that result when focused on development, which necessarily limits scope to a limited segment of experience, creates an understanding of experience profoundly limited by insider/outsider dichotomies (Krebs, 1972; see hooks 2000, 2004, 2013a). As a result, attempts to read multiple, simultaneous oppressor/oppressed positionings can only result in partially essentializing some (highly nuanced by definition) experiences of oppression. Further, projects seeking a generalizable model of identity development often aspire to intersectionality, yet in order to produce a generalizable result, they necessarily define the unique synergies that make our lives unique – and which intersectionality describes – as the sum of (essentialized) identities (see Chickering & Reiser, 1993; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harper et al, 2011; Harris, 2010; Laker, 2010 for examples).

In contrast to their liberatory aims, such generalizations erase the particulars in one's story and allow for unrecognized, but power-laden assumptions to fill in the gaps. Even Gorski's (2012) passionate and complex reading of his grandmother's Appalachian Whiteness in response to Peggy McIntosh's widely used backpack metaphor still operates from an unacknowledged assumption that Appalachia, and rural spaces more generally, are "bad" places to avoid or escape. By embracing the idea that such a space is "naturally" ignorant and backward, those who defy this expectation cannot be explained and must be particularly special. These sorts of assumptions are not random but are drawn from the complex multilayered history discussed in chapter one that, while largely obscured, still shapes the present moment. Thus, as Black feminist and transnational feminist work argues, truly intersectional efforts *must* historicize and self-consciously address the perpetual re-construction of relationships between and within individuals, society, and institutional power in order to ensure over-simplified

assumptions are critiqued as well. Stated simply, the full context must be accounted for – including our own perspective – in order to fully appreciate the experience of another. To do otherwise is the foundation of the kinds of reductive politics used to divide and conquer in the service of oppression (Reagon, 1985). This is exactly the reason stereotypes of the Appalachian region, and the persistent poverty they excuse, must be similarly critiqued.

Appalachian Intersections

In this section, I therefore return to socialized representations of race (entitled to citizenship), gender (“provider/protector”), class and poverty (“poor hillbilly/White trash”), and place (South vs. Shenandoah Valley vs. Appalachia) that shame, along with forms of pride constructed as resistance to and protection against shame and structural violence. Indeed, a nuanced reading of how these representations are deployed is critical to understanding the narratives to come. While this population’s relationships to power are quite different from the working class women of color perspective from which intersectionality theory comes, the similarities and differences in their experience further expose the way domination works (Cole, 1986, Tickamyer & Duncan, 2009). In describing the full effect of oppressions they experienced, the original feminist pioneers previously described offered a method for understanding the forces that impact *all* of us in different ways (Connell, 2005; Sandoval, 2008).

The utility of the liminal hillbilly. In Roediger’s seminal 1991 book, *Wages of Whiteness*, he introduces the title concept as the unearned benefits gained by working class men deemed “White” enough to ensure their support for White supremacy. While Roediger provides a history of the gender, race, and class intersection of these wages, which Jacobson’s *Whiteness*

of a Different Color (1998) expands, both paint in rather broad strokes about the U.S. American experience. As described in Chapter One, given the regional history, poor White men in the South (Shirley, 2010; Wise, 2005) have a very different experience – and thus “wage” of Whiteness – from that of poor White men in the North (Conley, 2000; Roediger, 2003). Further, rural people will have a different experience than those from urban areas (Duncan, 1996; Lichter & Brown, 2011; Parker, 1992; Tickamyer & Duncan, 1990; Wright, 2012), and given their unique history, Southern Appalachians have a quite different experience as well (Bageant, 2007 & 2010; Bell, 2011b; Billings, 1974; Campbell, 1994; Caudill, 1963; Goad, 1997; Straw, 2006; Tang & Russ, 2007). These differences are highly context dependent and heavily informed by local histories of race, class, gender, and place stratification⁴³. A great example of this is that while the ubiquitous “redneck” of North America is potentially positive and often readily claimed⁴⁴, particularly Southern “White trash” and the Appalachian “hillbilly” are decidedly negative representations. And yet, their meanings relative to one another, as well as to “redneck,” tell of a hierarchy of White others.

Though some have written about the role of “White-trash” (Goad, 1997; Newitz & Wray, 1997; Wray, 2006) and “hillbilly” (Bageant, 2007 & 2010; Gottlieb, 2001; Roberts, 2007) Whitenesses in the context of US American power structures, Mason’s (2005) description is unique. Specifically, what she defines as the “hillbilly defense,” or how hillbilly Whiteness is used in order to construct “an examination of historical, political, and literary contexts for diverting attention to the hillbilly as a defense against criticism of America as an uncivilized

⁴³ Stratification here to mean not simply privilege or oppressed, but rather a synergy of positions within each hierarchy.

⁴⁴ Claimed particularly in the national media – country music and reality TV (especially following the 2008 economic crash) provide clear examples. See Huber, 1995 and O’Connell, 2010

nation” (p. 39), is especially useful here. Mason’s argument is applicable to the role that “hillbilly” plays in maintaining systemic oppressions such as racism, classism, and sexism. Moreover, in the (republican) White supremacist capitalist patriarchy of the United States, the hillbilly is a dichotomous construction that can continuously be re-presented as needed for contrast; gendered male and/or feminized, uncorrupted White “ideal” or White supremacist fall-guy, and the hard working backbone of America, or just a dependent mooch⁴⁵.

Just as many Appalachian ancestors were oppressed colonizers, Mason’s “hillbilly defense” offers an analysis of the ways in which hillbillies continue to exist as both beneficiaries of, and scapegoats for, U.S. imperialist White supremacy in particularly classed and gendered ways. As a result, this gendered and classed position is also implicitly raced in ways that reify eugenics hierarchies within contingent Whiteness (Jacobson, 1998). Further, in the messiness of this positionality, Appalachians have a history of various forms of resistance to such manipulations that have the potential to disrupt the hegemonic function of this defense of imperialist White supremacy (Anglin, 2002; Gaventa, 1980; hooks, 2009; Kopple, 2006; Lewis, 1978; Sonny & Tracy, 2001; Thompson, 2011; Wright, 2012). It is for this reason that the stories of “White” men, who are of a location and class which also denies full citizenship (belonging) and benefit from imperial White supremacist patriarchy, is critical to anti-oppression struggle. In short, the experiences of those contextually both blessed and/or cursed by power on the edge of empire (historically and figuratively) provide us lessons about the empire itself – and more importantly, effective ways to resist it. Indeed, the very liminality that makes hillbillies scapegoats also allows for what I will call in the narratives a static fluidity that can materialize to resist and melt away before it can be countered.

⁴⁵ see Bageant, 2007 & 2010; Caudill, 1963; Goad, 1997; Griffith, 2003; Harkins, 2004; Huntley, 2007; Jennings, 1998 and Shirley, 2010

RE-presenting White working class Appalachian men. Within the Appalachian cultural context, there has been little scholarship that might offer analyses of the particular constructions of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Diamond, 2006; Edwards, 2009; Frankel, 2004; Harris, 2010; Katz, 2006; Kaufman, 1999; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel & Messner, 1994; Liu, 2005; O'Neil, 1981), Whiteness (Jacobson, 1998; McIntosh, 1988; Roediger, 2003; Wise, 2005; Wray, 2006), race and masculinity (Huber, 1995; Reichert & Ravitch, 2010; Scott & Robinson, 2001), or class in rural America (Ching, 1997; Jarosz & Lawson, 2002; Keefe, 2000; Lichter, et al, 2012; Parker, 1992; Pfeil, 1995; Tickamyer & Duncan, 1990). Further, while Conley (2000), Gallagher (2004), Goad (1997), and Wise (2005) have discussed this confluence of working class White masculinities, none have yet located their scholarship within Appalachia. To be sure, the Appalachian experience is necessarily different and will produce different narratives than work situated in New York City, Philadelphia, the Pacific Northwest, and the Deep South (Nashville and Louisiana) respectively.

Additionally, while Jacobson (1998) and Roediger (1991) offer powerful descriptions of how “Whiteness” is constructed to support a national historical process of White supremacist economic exploitation, the particular rural Appalachian historical context is missing. Even the limited scholarship that touches on White men and class in Appalachia (Caudill, 1963; Fulks, 2011; Lewis, 1978; Mason, 2005; Reed, 2011; Russ, 2010, Young, 2010) has not sought to examine these experiences in depth through the voices of this population. This is not to suggest that these are not useful resources when studying the region, but rather that they are insufficient to explain the particular experience of this population.

For those not deeply knowledgeable about the region, its history, and people, the

Appalachian South can seem simply to be the South; many may assume that there are no differences within the South and the central experience is that people there are just poor and (all) White. As the genesis of West Virginia suggests⁴⁶ and the next chapter discusses further, nothing could be further from the truth. Thus, while Shirley (2010) studied “boundary work” among Southern White “rednecks” located in Mississippi, and Parker (1992) examined gender among rural Southern mountain folks in the Ozarks of Arkansas, these efforts, too, are unable to capture the particular impacts of oppressions in Appalachia. As a result, we must consider the unique historical context of Appalachia, taking into account the manifestations of race, class, and gender constructed in relation to one another in this context at the individual, institutional, and representational levels.

As this clearly is a complicated and multi-leveled⁴⁷ process to articulate, I borrow from the examples of scholars who approach intersectionality through history (Davis, 1983; Haney-Lopez, 1996), and the “situated knowledges” of a particular contextual location (Allen, 2004; Glenn, 2002; Ignacio, 2005; Mohanty, 2006). Yet it is most effective to do so here by utilizing Glenn’s concept of relationality (2002). Specifically, it is the ability to describe both the “unreal-ness” of socially constructed identities, and the *very* real impact of them when used to either maintain or resist inequity. As a result, the (re)formulations of White working class

⁴⁶ West Virginia was created when the (Appalachian) mountain region of Virginia seceded from Confederate Virginia and re-entered the Union in 1863 as the State of West Virginia. This split was hardly unanimous throughout the region, yet the cost of defending the slave driven plantation system and the elites who benefited from it proved too high for the mountain farmer who had a long history of marginalization at their hand.

⁴⁷ Here, the levels implied are the macro to micro levels at which various hegemonic constructions operate on past and present contexts. In other words, the constant re-formulations may draw on seemingly contradictory ideas but which are always connected by the layering effect of history. Thus, Appalachians may be simultaneously included in the White-unity of “Caucasian,” yet exist as the deviant race mutants of eugenics; *Deliverance* provides a classic example.

masculinities responding to various economic and political shifts that impacted the region must be included in this discussion.

While this may seem the type of recentring of privileged identity rightly challenged by feminists of color (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Reagon, 1981), this thesis instead aims to decenter and deconstruct the forces that impact and influence these people themselves in order to expose the hegemonic functions of those essentialized identities (Frankel, 2004; Glenn, 2002; Jacobson, 1998; Jordan, 1985; Kimmel, 2008; Liu, 2005), in addition to the identity politics of which they are a part (Cerulo, 1997; Davis, 1983; hooks, 1984; Ignacio, 2005;). In his seminal call for research on heterosexuality, Frankel (2004) offers a particularly clear request for an analysis of power that exposes the entire experience of benefiting from systems of oppression – including context-specific degrees of marginalization – and his call suggests the same here. Certainly an approach situated with/in this population would not be possible without intersectional scholars who have previously described “Imperialist, White Supremacist, Capitalist, Patriarchy” (hooks, 2013), and their contributions must remain the foundation of such a project.

Conclusion

To be sure, this nation is built on oppression, and contrary to the claims of reverse racism, the danger is greatest from those with power to write policy. Further, the historical interrelation of racist and classist policies ensure that if hillbillies aren’t the “good poor,” they are therefore “not quite White” either (Wray, 2006). As stated earlier, a result of the merger of neoliberalism with the long-standing yeoman farmer ideologies in the social fabric of Appalachia, narratives of shame *and* pride simultaneously emerge within the Appalachian

experience⁴⁸. Specifically, the pride a White Appalachian man may take in his value as a worker and provider/protector exists within the representational bounds of regional norms and ideas of moral turpitude. Therefore his impoverishment is justified as a personal failing, as proof of the legitimacy of his marginalization. Moreover, because the deviance of this White-male-body-as-citizen is defined by his work (Glenn, 2002; Jacobson, 1998; Haney-López, 1996; Roediger, 2003), the limited escape from shame and exclusion possible is directly related to his embrace of what bell hooks has repeatedly called the “imperialist, White supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy” embedded in the citizenship of what Jennings (1989) describes as “plantation-land.”

The historically situated poor White Appalachian male resides in a complicated location. He must take pride in his gendered-male physical work, even if it requires considerable risk to the people, places and culture he holds dear. Moreover, it is unlikely that his efforts will lift him out of generational poverty because, with few exceptions, such high-paying jobs would require him to break with cultural values and leave his family and home to emigrate to more metropolitan locations (Ziliak et al., 2007). Further, with the exception of an agriculture degree, to pursue the college degree that is increasingly required in a neoliberal world would be to not only engage in feminized intellectual work, but symbolically ally himself with the elitism of oppressors. As if that were not sufficient, that oppressor-alliance might be with Southern elites (past and present) should he manage to get into a gentry school⁴⁹, or compounding the insult, attend a school associated with Yankees. Given this larger structural situation, he must pursue pride in a larger context of shame – shame at his failure to succeed in a meritocracy, as well as shame related to his hillbilly deviances.

⁴⁸ The parallels with others facing persistent, systemic poverty here are many. See Banker (2000), Glasmeier & Farrigan (2003), Jarosz & Lawson (2002), Lichter, et al. (2012), Partridge & Rickman (2007), Tickamyer & Duncan (1990)

⁴⁹ Locals can easily list them: William & Mary, UVA, Washington & Lee, etc.

Thus, while he may want to escape economic struggle and claim the American Dream so as to trade shame for pride, he is caught in a paradox in which security is set against belonging⁵⁰. Moreover, if somehow he does establish a home within the American Dream, it can only be through leaving – yet retaining deep ties to home – and strategically dividing the hillbilly self from the legitimate citizen, with the weight of history hanging over him. In short, it is the same sort of no-where position faced by those who became propertied through a claim to unrecognized land: their attempts to wrest freedom from elites constructed their prison. Yet lost between Southern and Northern versions of history, the context-specific struggle of these men goes unrecognized, or even derided as entitled White men’s belly-aching. In fact, while their in-between positionality has often been used to construct alliances with oppressors, there is at least equal opportunity to forge alliances toward equity – though only if their stories are heard.

⁵⁰ Pearson (2013) accurately critiques the flaws in the internal colony analysis of Appalachia advanced by Caudill (1963) and Lewis et al. (1978). With such limitations in mind Guevarra (2009), Ignacio (2005), and Ngai (2004) offer informative discussions of similar traps.

Chapter 3

- Research setting and process -

“If European settlers were for the most part Scotch-Irish or German Palatinates, so much the better, because both groups had long served the interests of European states by occupying the contested areas of national and imperial struggle.” - Hofstra (1998, p. 1311)

“Social and economic plans for Appalachia must be based on needs outlined by the mountain people themselves. Whatever work that is done must be done with the recognition that Appalachian culture is real and functioning. This implies that change may not come easily and will not come at all unless the reasons for change are sound and are desired by mountain people.”
- Loyal Jones (1994, p.138)

This study is located in the county where I was raised because as a Southern-Appalachian borderland it offers heightened representational differences and therefore the setting is a strong empirical choice. For me, choosing to do research here was also an important ethical choice as this wasn't someone else's "home". That said, research in the county I grew up in was made more challenging having left and returned in pursuit of an academic life, which as described in chapter one is by definition elitist in such a context⁵¹. Along with the history described in chapter one, education is often not a financial benefit⁵² and has long been used as "proof" of superiority by outsiders (Ali & Saunders, 2009; Bageant, 2007 & 2010; Bollinger et al., 2011; Reed, 2011; Russ, 2010; Walls & Billings, 1977; Willis, 1977). As a result, potential participants – even family – had plenty of reasons to resist being research "subjects." In a place

⁵¹ European values connected intellectual/political work to the gentry's leisure relative to work as value in the Southern frontier both in reaction to oppression and out of practical necessity. See also Young, 2010

⁵² Along with brain-drain of the most promising, some studies in West Virginia demonstrate that it is economically better to drop out of high school and gain seniority in a workplace, than to gain a bachelor's degree (see Bollinger, et al, 2011; Ziliak, et al., 2007).

that will always be home to me, I was an outsider in a culture of outsider-inflicted trauma.

As suggested by the Hofstra quote above, geographic and social community, family reputation, trust, and profound suspicion of “experts” and exploiters are factors that must be contended with in any Appalachian research due to the history of those who settled the area. While, as demonstrated in the first two chapters, this reticence is apparent in some of the literature, I did not *really* learn it in “the academy.” Rather, I learned this in the field, from people who wouldn’t be caught dead in an ivory tower – they have rarely been invited in and are descendants of those who only entered such towers as servants or to be jailed. People were trying to teach me, but as a native son and “scholar,” I wasn’t initially prepared to learn *that, from them*. While a problem in the process of my research, it also calls up those questions of loyalty to my home community and family that have long haunted me. Given such questions, I had determined that the *voices* of the complex human beings involved in this study – myself included – were central to uncovering the experiences of power and oppression in their lives. Further, narrative analysis⁵³ was chosen to deny the kind of generalizability that would not benefit folks who wish to be heard and has historically been the source of problematic stereotypes about the region.

Setting

This study is located in Augusta County, Virginia, a county geographically within, but politically peripheral to, Appalachia (Appalachian Regional Commission, 1964 & 2011). Along with the history of the county discussed in chapter one, the unique border culture offers a glimpse of the many issues at play in the region through the positionalities and identity productions of the population. Augusta County stands out as missing in the Appalachian

⁵³ See Jones (1998) for a description of narrative’s utility in understanding classed experience.

Regional Commission's reports on Appalachia because the dividing line literally runs around the county's current southern and western borders. Specifically, the county forms the northern border of Rockbridge and eastern border of Bath and Highland Counties – all three of which are considered politically “Appalachian” (see ARC maps). As with many other arbitrary political lines⁵⁴, this boundary has been contested for a variety of reasons – often related to power and influence – since it was first officially drawn for the *1964 President's Appalachian Regional Commission Report*. In fact, the irony here is that from the formation of the county in 1738 until 1770, the county comprised most of Virginia's western frontier from the Blue Ridge to the Mississippi (theoretically the county was limitless and thus extended to the Pacific Ocean) and north to the Great Lakes (Waddell, 2006). In short, central Appalachia was Augusta County, with Staunton the county seat.

For the purposes of this study, and the focus on how work shapes and is shaped in this community, I do not contest the current political distinctions. While largely beyond the scope of this thesis, place does play a critical role in efforts to resist neoliberalism and globalization around the world. Transnational feminist scholars, for instance⁵⁵, have long described place as sites and methods of resistance to this new formulation of capitalist exploitation. Further, in *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia* (Smith & Fisher, 2012), the authors offer ways in which an “extroverted” sense of placed-belonging is a tool for building coalitions of resistance across regions and borders in line with Sandoval's articulation in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000). Thus, while place is not the central focus here, for those interested in moving beyond the description of how work functions to creating meaningful change, *Transforming Places* is a critical starting point.

⁵⁴ see Nevins, 2010

⁵⁵ see hooks (2012), Mohanty (2003), Sandoval (2000)

Rather here, place is of importance as the arbitrary political and cultural lines of Appalachia – along with the historical blurring of this boundary⁵⁶ – result in a heightened presentation of Appalachian and/or Southern identities. These border-heightened constructions are directly related to ideas of “hard work” or laziness, thereby making this border space an ideal setting in which to explore the differences between them⁵⁷ (Arnold, 2011; Cooper et al., 2011; Nash, 1997; Shirley, 2010).

Particularly in terms of socio-economics, the hybridity of the county as a political unit is evident in a comparison of the Appalachian Regional Commission’s “County economic status in Appalachia reports (2002 and 2012) and of Virginia Department of Education (2002 and 2012) data on free and reduced school lunch eligibility rates. Specifically, while county by county rates suggest Augusta County has more in common with surrounding non-Appalachian counties, participation at elementary schools *within* Augusta Co. itself tells a different story (Virginia Department of Education, 2002 & 2012). At first glance, it seems that all of the schools are located in or around the two small cities – Waynesboro the historically blue-collar immigrant town⁵⁸, Staunton the larger more heavily White-collar (established professional and elite) county seat – in the broad valley that makes up most of the eastern portion of the county (Augusta County, 2006). However, Craigsville Elementary is located in a considerably more remote community in the mountainous section of the county to the west, and the numbers there are dramatically different. While elementary school free and reduced lunch rates averaged 43.61% eligibility in all the other schools for the 2011-2012 year, Craigsville Elementary faced 73.26% eligibility.

⁵⁶ for instance, Augusta County once extended to the Mississippi River, and until the Civil War included parts of West Virginia

⁵⁷ See also Nevins, 2010 for a discussion of identity production in border spaces

⁵⁸ See Hawke, 1997 for an in-depth history

When compared to surrounding politically Appalachian counties, Craigsville's free and reduced lunch statistics suggest that the more mountainous and remote western portions of the county share the economic situation of the counties to the south and west, which are in fact closer than the county seat. Further, this finding corresponds with what others have found (Cooper et al., 2011; Duncan, 1996; Lichter et al., 2012; Tickamyer & Duncan, 1990) and many have suggested (Caudill, 1963; Lewis, 1978; Russ, 2010; Young, 2010) that there does also appear to be a correlation between remoteness, elevation, and identification with Appalachian culture (as a rejection of "outsider" cultures), which exists in Augusta County as well (Arnold, 2011; Hollberg, 2010; Nash, 1997). In fact, viewed across surrounding counties, elementary free and reduced school lunch rates as an indicator of relative poverty here also suggest that distance from economic centers and the interstate system are more closely correlated with poverty than their political status as Appalachian. This distinction between political and accessibility-defined definitions may seem insignificant; however, given the popular narrative of the region as somehow naturally impoverished and the culture of poverty models that result, this is indeed an important point.

Moreover, in an increasingly post-industrial economy, access to the few remaining factories, warehouses, and service sector jobs near the interstates and economic centers has significant implications for the financial health of these communities. Indeed, descriptions of missing markets, brain drain⁵⁹, the general decline of living wage jobs (Bollinger et al., 2011), and local attempts to reign in development by and for outside interests suggests (Hollberg, 2010), the cultural values around work are both unique and heavily impacted by neoliberalism's

⁵⁹ a term used to describe the out-migration of the highest academic-achieving young people in pursuit of college degrees and the high-paying jobs that require them. See Bollinger et al, 2011 and Ziliak et al., 2007.

development. In a region colonized through, and for the purpose of, exploitation, it is hardly insignificant that as factories have closed their doors, retail chains have arrived in numbers sufficient to change the face of towns like Waynesboro. Where there were once full-time jobs with pensions and benefits at DuPont or G.E. and their suppliers, there are now part-time low or no-skill service jobs for less pay, no benefits, and constant threat of replacement. Even the profits derived from their work are extracted by their corporate structures that funnel wealth to investors from a county with a median income of just over \$33,000 in 2011 (Augusta County Virginia, 2011).

Challenge to enter: Embracing a “shooting the shit” approach to narrative

I began this project interested in exploring the potential for the kind of coalition work⁶⁰ seen in Lewis’s connecting her Appalachian students with labor organizers and New York’s Black Panther movement (Wilkerson & Cline, 2011). However, this population and their unique positionality in such a border context has not yet been thoroughly explored in the literature. As such, I begin here with narratives from these men in order to begin establishing a baseline from which to continue study of this population’s position and commonalities that would provide a basis for coalition. In other words, what is the experience of these men as they experience various systems, and how and why do they understand and align themselves with hillbilly or gentry iconography at various times? As noted previously, those identified as part of an intellectual or academic class automatically are associated with gentry and elitism, which in turn makes establishing trust in this context no easy task, even if it is the community in which I was raised.

⁶⁰ See discussion of intersectional approaches to coalition in chapter two

Thus, having gotten “above my raisin” and left to pursue an academic life – by local definition elitist (see Young, 2010) – gaining entry into the field (Smith & Kornblum, 1996) is uniquely challenging as even a whiff of academic would make me an outsider in a culture of outsider-inflicted trauma (Russ, 2010). The exploitative extraction economy – from timber and coal to corporate retail – exists on a history of domestic (i.e., intra-White/American, African, and American Indian) colonization, which is to say those who colonized the region were themselves cast-offs of English, American, and Confederate empire (Bageant, 2007 & 2010; Caudill, 1963; Goad, 2005; Roediger, 1991; Wilkerson, 2011). Further, hegemonic republican notions of citizenship (Jacobson, 1998; Roediger, 1991) position education as a statement of superiority (Ali & Saunders, 2009; Bageant, 2007 & 2010; Bollinger et al., 2011; Reed, 2011; Russ, 2010; Walls & Billings, 1977; Willis, 1977), and thus those denied access to “higher” education logically offer plenty of resistance to being research “subjects.” Thus, unstructured interviews cross a line into urban-centric, educated, “better-than-you”, middle-class territory that immediately create outsider status (Russ, 2010). As a result, my method included easing back into relationships in my home community, bringing my Accent back up to par, and re-learning that to simply “shoot the shit” (Alvarez et al., 2006; Russ, 2010) is to say everything that needs to be said.

Method

Given the historical, social, cultural, and economic development of this particular region and its impact on communities (See Lewis et al., 1978; Tomaskovic-Devey & Roscigno, 1997), scholars interested in conducting research in this area may have unique challenges in gaining entry into the community. This is particularly true when approaching a population reductively

understood as privileged, when their experience is far more nuanced. Therefore, when approaching this research topic, it is imperative to seek such destabilizing stories of White men in the literature. The juxtaposition of situating White men in Appalachian working-class experience is just such a potentially undermined site. As Wray's 2006 "Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness" title and my own experiences suggest, this space might offer promise, and initial reviews of the interviews offer the complexity one might hope to see in such complicated positionalities. Given this, I determined that listening to the *voices* of the complex human beings involved in this study would be required in order to uncover the workings of power/oppression and more importantly the opportunities for liberation in their lives.

The methods I chose do not lend themselves to generalizability. Generalizations to the entire Appalachian region do not benefit individuals who wish to be heard and have, historically, been the source of problematic stereotypes about the region. As a result, the methods I chose were highly reflexive participant observation and unstructured interviews, along with some archival research.

Immediately upon my first foray into the field, the critical importance of participant observation to this study became clear. Whether a native of the area or not, and especially having crossed over and become a "Yankee" college-boy, gaining trust as a researcher was next to impossible. While my history and accent gained access to hours of conversation, at the slightest whiff of motive – particularly academic – the conversations generally ended. Often this abrupt end came with renewed questions about my family and place such as "what'd you say your name is?" and/or "Where are your people from?" Moreover, even requests to interview friends and relatives were denied, though informal conversation over a beer followed such a

denial in several cases. Thus, I was quickly reminded of the centrality of both geographic and social community, family reputation, trust, and the profound distrust of outsiders and “experts” in the literature (Keefe, 2000; Russ, 2010; Walls & Billings, 1977) and in my experience. As noted, I am very much aware that I am included in this demographic and this is also my story. Therefore along with the fact that any study confers a great deal of power to the researcher, the reflexive component to the participant observations was designed to address my participation in the constructions of the research context. Further, the decision to do research within the community in which I was raised was an ethical choice as this location is not someone else’s “place,” and yet it was also a strong empirical choice.

Study design

In contrast to studies that enter the field with questions designed around their preconceptions (often from the Local Color⁶¹ movement’s presentation of Appalachia), the goal here is to offer prompts that speak to common human experience to draw their stories out from the unique contexts in which the subjects live, but not on the basis of what the researcher expects to find. Thus, the study design itself applies multiple methods to more effectively locate the analysis within the empirical world of this study. This multi-method approach is critically important in this context to ensure the case studies present adequate depth in a very particular socio-historical location. Specifically, these methods include unstructured interviews, reflexive participant observation, and archival/historical records.

This research was conducted in a series of three multi-week trips home to Augusta County during two consecutive summers for the weddings of both of my younger brothers. The

⁶¹ See Algeo (2004) for a full discussion

bulk of field work was done during the first trip in June of 2010, in which I completed the interviews, significant amounts of observations, and archival research including materials found at the county library, pictures of various sites, and local radio playlists. During each visit I continued to collect reflections, some observations, and newspapers that arrived to my parents' home during that time period. True to the central purpose, I specifically chose to conduct unstructured interviews to provide both structure and freedom for subjects to tell their stories as they understand them. I intended that as a result, the participant's experience was more like the familiar community building exercises of storytelling, which necessarily lack the power-differential inherent in an interview setting. Further, being mindful of relative power was, and is, important because the interviewee's reflections on who they are, the direction of the conversations, subtleties in the duration and location of pauses and check-in phrases ("ya know?" was used heavily in all the interviews) describe their view of the world. Therefore, being conscious of my influence throughout the interviews was critical to ensure that the story was not shaped by my expectations.

Regarding the interviews, the benefits of a single county location and the unstructured nature of the interviews precludes generalization to other locations. Given that my approach to this project is best characterized as humanistic cultural studies, the specificity offered here is ideal. In order to document the most salient thoughts, experiences, and feelings related to the identities at the center of this study, interviews were sought through snowball sampling. These unstructured interviews were a specific methodological choice so as to provide as much leeway for subjects to tell their stories as they understand them, along with a degree of structure to aid the respondent. Participants were informed of the nature of the study and asked to share their experiences and reflection at a time that was convenient for them. Interviews subsequently took

place at a workplace attached to a rural home, a restaurant in downtown Staunton (the largest city and county seat) as well as over the phone. Additionally, the consent form informed respondents that their participation was based on their self-identification as part of the study demographic. The resulting interviews began with the same foundational questions, with probing questions used to explore salient topics as they emerged. These interviews were digitally recorded, coded such that the identification of the subjects would be known only to the investigator, and transcribed into the narratives that follow this chapter.

In addition to the interviews, emergent data was compared to the literature, archival records drawn from the county library, and cultural artifacts and norms documented in participant observations. Each of these comparisons served to both check the data and develop a broader complex context in which to locate the experiences documented in the interviews. Further, the archival search primarily focused on the cultural, historical, economic, and other pertinent information not available remotely, which establishes Augusta County itself as a border context. As this research centers on the stories of people who are not otherwise recorded, noting the various natural surroundings, cultural messages (from advertising to music and objects designed or claimed as local monuments), and items claimed as part of identity creation are all central parts of the context in which participants exist.

While tempered by the multiple-method approach, a broader, more comprehensive study in multiple locations should be conducted before generalizing findings to the entire Appalachian region. Additionally at the practical level, interviews were difficult to arrange, which is a product of both the scope of this project and the difficulty in gaining trust as a researcher discussed previously⁶². It is logical to assume that these, and any future requests, would be

⁶² See also Smith & Kornblum, 1996; Walls & Billings, 1977

impacted by the presence and purpose of the interviewer as well. Certainly, it is similarly assumed that the data gathered from interviews, archives, and the particular locations observed are necessarily informed by perceptions of the researcher, as well as their own experience and assumptions.

The following section contains the three narratives that are the result of interviews conducted during those returns home. The purpose here is to mitigate author/authority by retaining these as *their* experiences and reflections in their own words. As such, the interviews are presented in narrative form, and it is intended that readers should enter into conversation with the speaker. Thus, to the degree possible, not only do these men's voices come through unfiltered, but they welcome you into their world. Pull up a chair, there are some folks I'd like you to meet.

Narratives: An introduction

“Freedom is what we do with what is done to us.”

- Jean-Paul Sartre

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”

- Martin Luther King Jr.

The central question of this thesis is about exploring the concept and constructions of “work” within White, male, working class/poor, Appalachian experience expressly from an intersectional perspective. Thus, any analysis of interviews conducted about work in such a context must also apply Marx’s (1992) theory of alienation as it is a defining exploration of the operation and impacts of capitalism. Moreover, as this is the contemporary context within which these men exist, Marx provides a powerful lens through which to understand what forces they are responding to, and to more deeply understand their experience. Here in the introduction I will frame the major topics which follow in the narratives: alienation, stereotype and classism, and strategies of response/resistance.

Alienation -

Estranged labour reverses the relationship so that man, just because he is a conscious being makes his life activity, his *being* (Wesen), a mere means for his *existence*... It estranges him from his own body, from nature as it exists outside him, from his spiritual essence (Wesen), his *human* existence. - Karl Marx (1992, p. 328-329)

Often misunderstood, Marx defined alienation as impacting *anyone* who is paid for their

labor. As stated above, alienation is constituted by twin processes in which one's productive and creative efforts – that which might otherwise provide fulfillment of both spirit and body – are separated from the individual. Plainly stated, in the exchange a part of the worker themselves is converted into private property and sold. Marx used very descriptive German language to define these processes as *entausserung* and *entfremdung*, literally a process of extracting that which is within and making it a strange and even hostile thing with interests contrary to one's self. Marx describes this as “the relationship of the worker to the product of (their own) labour... to natural objects... and to his own activity... as an alien object that has power over him... confronting him in hostile opposition” (p. 327).

Further, this becomes distinctly hostile once we embark upon such a relationship to meet our basic human needs, because we no longer have a choice. *Leiden's* (Marx's German term for) anguish is that like quicksand, the effort to resist makes matters worse, or in Marx's words “activity as passivity, power as impotence, procreation as emasculation” (p. 327). The worker's will to choose how and for what purpose their creative capacity is to be used is colonized, turned against them, and we are all bound to serve his majesty, the market⁶³. Marx attempts to clarify this internal condition by emphasizing

...the fact that labour is external to the worker... that he does not therefore confirm himself in his work, but denies himself, feels miserable and not happy, does not develop free mental and physical energy, but mortified his flesh and ruins his mind. Hence, the worker feels himself only when he is not working, and not at home when he is working. His labor is therefore not voluntary but forced, it is *forced labour*. It is therefore not the

⁶³ While one might argue the worker more directly serves the employer, ultimately the worker's salary depends on how well workers and bosses compete in the wider market. As a result then, all who participate in capitalism become ensnared in a constant competition for survival which spares no one.

satisfaction of a need but a mere *means* to satisfy needs outside itself. (p. 326)

Using this description, alienation entails that when I “clock in,” my creative, life-giving (and thus a sacred) self is extracted and set directly⁶⁴ against me. Clearly, the degree to which we engage in these processes voluntarily – and are compensated for this sacred part of ourselves – exists along a spectrum from the sharecropper who has just enough independence to starve to the executive with various systems designed to protect them. Regardless of position, there is never a place of respite from the compulsion to compete; there is no home in which to rest and recover the dignity and humanity Marx called *Wesen* (self/being). This is the foundational set of relationships upon which capitalism exists. As a result, the pain caused through this extraction and hostile entrapment is experienced by all, yet the qualitative experience of it is always in relation to one’s position.

“External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification. ...Finally, the external character of labour for the worker is demonstrated by the fact that it belongs not to him but to another, and that in it he belongs not to himself but to another.” (p. 326)

Again, Marx describes these conditions in German (as *entausserung* and *entfremdung*, producing *Leiden*), yet some editions provide translations that lack the passion and depth inherent in these words. Here we must understand that while *Leiden* has been sometimes translated as pain, this should be more accurately understood to mean agony or suffering – the

⁶⁴ Directly because it is the very will to create and experience the richness of life that is turned into a tool for production.

pain of hurting someone you love, or descriptive of Christ's pain on the cross. Too often the understanding of this experience lacks a tremendous human depth that borders on the spiritual, and, thus, alienation is a torturous experience at the heart of one's humanity.

Given that this indeed is at the heart of one's humanity, it is critical to also approach these men's stories through an intersectional understanding of their lived experience. That is to say that their particular location provides particular positive, negative, and neutral forces for them to embrace, resist, or ignore – as well as a set of lenses through which to understand it all as they choose their responses and move through the world. In short, our actions are all context specific and synergistically arrived at. It is precisely this perspective that is a foundational requirement to build coalitions for change. From this perspective, we – their audience – are able to see the ways that the very forces we all navigate have uniquely impacted these men.

Stereotype and classism

A perfect example of this uniqueness will become clear by examining the stereotypes used to support classism and injustice in relation to the key question this thesis attempts to address; how is “work” conceptualized and acted upon with this population (White, male, working class/poor, Appalachian) in a particular Virginia county? Consistently throughout the narratives and the auto-ethnographic portions in the Preface and the Appendix, work is re-presented as “hard work” in such a way as to communicate that this is a form that has great pride connected to it. While it may simply be work to others, the claim here is that even if one is poor, he is still a highly skilled, dedicated, and honorable man.

To be sure, masculinity, White supremacy, and capitalism expect and promise that if he competes he will and should “win.” An inability to have the ease that is normative (though increasingly rare) in the United States thus challenges multiple dimensions of his identity and

results in very real consequences such as shortened life expectancy⁶⁵ and continued generational poverty for his children. As just discussed, this demoralizing experience is certainly related to alienation, but the forms of justification used to legitimate inequality and the stereotypes that give them teeth are drawn from the historical formulations of work discussed in chapter two. As discussed in those early pages, these stereotypes fuel classist attitudes and actions that perpetuate everything from daily microaggressions to the kinds of policy that institutionalize structural violence.

These examples of classism are the face of the abuser for these men, and their descriptions of injustice follow from seeing classism as the problem. The American Dream mythology offers a means of resisting this classism and “proving” that, even through the physical work that is “left to” working-class/poor men, he is still (relatively) valuable, belongs (disproving the stereotype), and fulfills the expectations of his positionality⁶⁶. This may sound like classic “bootstraps” framing, yet here it is hardly that. Indeed, these men refer often to social class as a painful system of inequality, yet they consistently critique consumerism. Thus, it is clear that their exploitation by others benefiting from their alienated labor – and the additional hardships a lack of money visits on them – is the source of their pain, rather than simple jealousy of material goods. Classism understood as the unfairness that means they work excessive hours⁶⁷ is the face of their oppression, and their language reflects this. However, as the narratives demonstrate, these men have a sophisticated understanding of a larger structure at times hidden behind the classism that confronts them.

In fact these men have *very* finely tuned readings of oppression – this is real life and

⁶⁵ See Lowery’s *New York Times* article “Income Gap, Meet Longevity Gap,” March 15, 2014.

⁶⁶ See discussion of 1790 Naturalization Act in chapter 2 for more on qualifications of value.

⁶⁷ Far more than the eight-hour day, forty-hour week that was so hard won by the labor movement

hardly theoretical for them. Further (and perhaps shocking to some) each also expresses a nuanced awareness that while they know their own oppression, that which others face they cannot know, but rather empathize with. They know all too well the pain of being unwanted and the anguish of internalized (self) hatred.

Strategy: “hard work” and commons

These men experience alienation yet describe their oppression as classism. Further, reframing work into “hard work” and striving to not look poor is also to distance themselves from “White trash” who are the lowest form of White, precisely because they have given up and resigned themselves to poverty; the difference is the willingness to resist even when hope defies logic. In the narratives, working hard – even if for little positive gain – proves he has not given up and sullied his family name⁶⁸ by submitting to oppression, committing the sin of sloth⁶⁹.

As a result, “hard work” is partly an economic strategy (working himself ragged when given the chance to earn currency) which both reject stereotypes and reclaims White male legitimacy, which in turn provides critical social value as a *poor* man. Marx (1992) describes the context which makes the practice and reputation of “hard work” so important in this way:

“[C]apital is the objective manifestation of the fact that labour is man lost to himself. But the worker has the misfortune to be a living capital, and hence and capital with needs, which forfeits its interest and hence its existence every moment it is not working.... The worker produces capital and capital produces him, which means that he produces himself; man as a worker, as a commodity, is the product of this entire cycle.... (p. 335)

⁶⁸ Protecting the family name is partly patriarchal honor, partly community reputation (both to and representative of), and partly cultural heritage

⁶⁹ Oppression through alienation and Southern value of work, and sin derived from Northern Protestant work ethic.

A being sees himself as independent only when he stands on his own feet, and he only stands on his own feet when he owes his existence to himself. A man who lives by the grace of another regards himself as a dependent being. But I live completely by the grace of another if I owe him not only the maintenance of my life but also its creation.”
(p. 356)

So a worker produces himself – exists – only as long as he (in this case) has a job that provides for his needs; providing equals existing. Yet when dependent on another for such a job, his existence is no longer his; humanity and life loses meaning and is rendered a de-human-ized production process. Thus, working “hard” is also a strategy to push back on the dehumanizing experience of alienation by striving to produce an ever-better product through skill and diligence. Stated simply, this is a revolutionary act to re-claim an element of humanity, to leave an enduring mark, and to exist even as his existence is carried away to market. As the narratives demonstrate, in daily practice the language and anguish of alienation is most often rendered as exploitation by a boss. Yet as a highly skilled and respected commodity (as an artisan) his boss is less able to exploit, and still retain, him. Even better, perhaps the worker is so respected that he can “work for himself” – or more accurately, directly for the market – and remove the boss altogether.

Clearly, this line of thinking could be *very* compelling when dealing with the type of workplace Mark describes in the first narrative. That is indeed the situation of the second narrative’s self-employed “entrepreneur” Luke, and while we might expect complaints about exploitative customers as the new “boss,” they are notably absent. While he does not offer an explanation, this may indicate that the increased control over the contracts he gets and his performance of the related tasks provides sufficient dignity to hang on to the illusion of control

necessary for sanity⁷⁰. Additionally, practicing/celebrating the familial/cultural traditions of hunting, fishing, and gardening/small farming provide outside the currency system, and provide a connection to a sense of home, community, and his own self-reliance – all of which push back on exploitative capitalism. As the contributors more succinctly put it (notably without overtly framing it as resistance), he and his family might *be* poor, but they don't have to look or act it. Surely, anyone confused about the impacts and depths of despair that poverty can instill has simply not been paying attention.⁷¹ Through survival strategies designed to infuse dignity through self-determination and a measure of control, each contributor – indeed, each of us – is able to create a lifeboat of dignity in a sea of anguish.

Conclusion

In the narratives to follow, the baseline experience is of oppression. Not that it exists, but that there is nothing to be done but to accept and establish some place of relative safety from which to resist this particular form of oppression. Indeed, fairness is expressed as a key characteristic both as a personal and cultural trait; these men make it clear that they are not interested in participating in another's oppression. In short, they are busy and worn down from surviving the bully, and hardly interested in being one themselves. This is not to say that even the very systems that oppress this population are not leveraged for relative status over others. Rather, what is clear in the narratives is that while some do in fact perpetuate classism, patriarchy, and/or White supremacy in order to approximate power, these men reject this. In fact, they seem to propose a sort of communal anarchy that seems likely a result of the region's

⁷⁰ This certainly parallels the power “small business” rhetoric has to motivate those who believe in the American Dream.

⁷¹ See Dorothy Allison's work, which is particularly descriptive, along with Appalachian Regional Commission (2008), Lowrey (2014), and Santiago et al., (2011)

history – including unique racial formations and economic realities in addition to cultural traditions.

As previously mentioned, nature as a place where freedom is not only found but produced will be an important theme in the narratives. Indeed, there are broader implications here as well. While not the central topic of this thesis, a hoped-for goal is that solidarity movements might gain insight into the lives of this population and as a consequence build bridges. Freedom, and a sort of communal anarchical spirit that resists oppression, can also be found in the follow quote by hooks, who contrasts her own experience of city and mountain racial segregation/power:

“Away from the country, in the city, rules were made by unknown others and were imposed and enforced. In the hills of my girlhood White and Black folks often lived in a racially integrated environment, with boundaries determined more by chosen territory than race. The notion of ‘private property’ was an alien one... [In the city] our segregated Black neighborhoods were sectioned off, made separate. At times they abutted the homes of poor and destitute White folks. **Neither of these groups lived near the real White power and privilege governing all our lives** [emphasis added].” (p. 8-9)

It is my hope that through this more nuanced reading of our collective human struggle, these narratives, and the previous contextual information there might be greater understanding and potential for such change. As these narratives reveal, these men are certainly aware of the dynamics at play, even if their description of this sounds strange to many readers. In fact, it is precisely the “strange-ness” that I argue maintains the oppression these men face. As long as rural Appalachian men like these are stereotyped as ignorant, violent, and bigoted hillbillies, injustice will remain the status quo far beyond the mountains.

- Narrative 1: Alienation -

“Estranged labor reverses the relationship so that man, just because he is a conscious being, makes his life activity, his *being* [Wesen] a mere means for his existence.”

- Marx (1992, p. 328)

In this first narrative, we hear from the youngest of the three contributors who I will call Mark. At 24, he has been working full time for nearly six years as a welder – long enough, in fact, that shortly after noting exactly where he was born and raised, he introduces himself as a welder – identifying himself as a worker first and foremost – and as the Marx quote above suggests, laughs at the idea of a life outside of work. Indeed, this is not a narrative of “privilege” but rather of identifying and using whatever agency can be found in order to survive. In the quote above Marx acknowledges that what Mark calls getting “screwed over” is one of degree, and as we shall see shortly, Mark is very well aware of systemic oppressions beyond capitalism.

One quarter of this young man’s life has already been experienced as a worker in what he describes as clearly exploitative, if not abusive, contexts. As a result, while other experiences as a rural White Appalachian man are certainly relevant, they are secondary to his (necessarily also White, male, Appalachian) experience of oppressive capitalism⁷². Because of the primacy of this current experience, in this narrative we see his strategy of learning to effectively understand these oppressive forces and survive, and the beginnings of strategies for resistance. It is through

⁷² Many will note that Whiteness and masculinity provide benefits that exempt him of the type of oppressive experience that would make those identities more central here. While those systems do indeed shape his experience, it is far too reductionist to speak of his “privilege” based on isolated identity categories as if they were not part of one complex, constantly shifting experience. Not only is this inconsistent with an intersectional approach, but this would negate the impact of capitalist exploitation on his White, male, rural, Appalachian experience. As has been previously discussed, this is a common and quite dangerous practice in contemporary metro-centric America, one that extreme political elements have used to create greater division and make coalition far more difficult. My purpose is the direct opposite.

his mapping of where refuge can be taken and what positionalities are punished or rewarded that he seeks a strategy to retain his human dignity. In short, as Marx put it, he must find or create a home to have some moments of safety if he is to retain his sanity.

This is a story of industrial capitalism in the sort of neoliberal moment where “work” offers honor, isolation, degradation, and a struggle to survive the dehumanization – indeed overt abuse – of his workplace. Clearly in this narrative, Mark provides an example of employers who will happily monetize his creativity and self (expression) for as little money and as much time as possible; in Marx’s words he is aware that he is simply a machine with a stomach (p. 285). Through Marx’s theory of alienation, we can see his attempts to retain or reclaim some degree of human dignity. However, to do justice to the particular way in which this experience of alienation and classism has impacted him, we must also contend with his reflections on the broader context of the place in which Mark experiences this oppression.

This narrative effectively has two parts. The first is an explanation of the alienation he is navigating, how hard work comes to be important in his (and others’) efforts to retain dignity, and how these both shape Wesen, or his sense of self. Second, his emerging mapping of oppressive forces offers a glimpse of how he believes that he might be able to escape this oppressed position, and in doing so realize the American Dream. In this latter portion we learn about his knowledge/assumptions about how he might move into a less-oppressed social position, and more about the specific form those forces take. This section particularly will provide a contemporary example of the historical developments laid out in the first two chapters.

I: Alienation and Leiden⁷³

In this portion of the narrative, only through his work does Mark describe life. Further, it

⁷³ Constituted from entausserung & entfremdung and resulting in anguish (Leiden)

is immediately evident that life as a worker is a battle for self-respect and dignity against an oppressive force that is in many ways won generations ago. This is an experience in which he strives to create with as much speed and skill as possible, only to have his creative efforts taken and made hostile to him. In Marxian terms, the *entausserung* and *entfremdung* of alienated labor, and the anguish that estrangement from self produces, is simply the status quo.

In his *Early Writings* (1992), Marx describes Leiden as, “power as impotence, procreation as emasculation, the workers’ *own* physical and mental energy, his personal life... as an activity directed against himself, which is independent of him and does not belong to him” (p. 327). Marx continues, “It (estranged labor) estranges man from his own body, from nature as it exists outside him, from his spiritual essence [Wesen], his *human essence*” (p. 329).

Compounding this, there is virtually no option but to participate in the system because it is the social-economic fabric that shapes all of our choices⁷⁴. This is simply the context of life, not only but especially at work. Further, Marx is clear that the worker is in anguish as long as they are working and only able to find rest “at home” when not being dehumanized at work (p. 285). Particularly in the contemporary neoliberal context of this first narrative, work is nearly life itself and his experience of home requires a deliberate creation strategy. In short, alienation – and therefore the *constant* sucking away of *Wesen* (sense of self/dignity) which produces Leiden (anguish) and provides alienated labor as a tool of further oppression and injury as we will see later – existed before him and will exist long after; it simply *is*.

I was born in a hospital in Waynesboro Virginia, and I was raised mostly in Augusta

⁷⁴ This is more true of locations in which there is no means of providing for ourselves and family through an “economy” outside of the capitalist system. For instance, it would be harder in extremely rural locations where neighbors are too far away to share resources, or conversely in more urban environments where growing or hunting/fishing one’s own food is not possible.

*County Virginia um, I guess mostly it'd be Medlock*⁷⁵, Virginia⁷⁶ ... ahm, I am a welder, (pause) slash final assembly custom, whatever... um, what I do when I'm not working, is sleep... (laughs) ahm... I mean, there's really not alot else anymore. I mean I, you know, keep up with things around the house, ahm... go for a motorcycle ride every now and then, but... yeah, um... le's⁷⁷ see I've been workin' probably at least, at least a minimum of 52 hrs a week and that normally goes up from there... um...pretty easily.*

As noted previously, Mark introduces himself as – and in the language of – a worker. Clearly, he has little choice over his schedule – even “optional” overtime. Further, as we see next he is very aware that his production results in considerable profit, of which Mark and his colleagues will be paid a disproportionately small amount. In fact, the combination of the long hours demanded of him and the relative lavishness and easy schedule that management enjoys is clearly unfair and an injustice in his eyes. Moreover, the pressure applied to meet nearly impossible production goals that are “not our fault” makes the following sound more like abuse.

... ahm, my first job outta high school, the owner of the company was definitely... makin' money, um... and not too many other people in the shop were... makin' money, and... er, makin' good money anyway, um... and the owner would essentially lie to you to keep you happy, and as long as you were working and didn't miss work, he didn't... really care, um... ahm, I guess that was the... first, the first time.

Well, I mean it's always been...you know, a lot of overtime and you gotta hurry up and get jobs done and... But to be told that you have to work all weekend–long when you're already bustin' your tail all week and then...Yet, hollered at for stupid stuff when it's not even your fault. When...it's not our fault that they moved that customer's, uh, project out two times to get sumpin' else in ... and then we have to work all weekend long so he

⁷⁵ *Denotes details changed or withheld to ensure anonymity

⁷⁶ a remote and high-elevation village/community

⁷⁷ Intentional typo to convey the sound of Mark's literal and figurative voice

didn't have to move it out one more time. You know, that's not really our fault. But... Well, yeah. So... Yeah, it is what it is...

...in my initial interview here, they told me that they made 2-3 million dollars last year in profit... I mean, nobody who works in the shop has gotten a pay raise in two years... it's hard to say where that money went...well, there were two brand new luxury cars ' bought... well, I should say leased, to the company that are bein' driven around by upper management... everybody's pretty sure that's where everybody's raise this year went, 'cause they... ahm... (long pause) we ended up findin' out how much they pay for each one of 'em... yeah. And when there's a whole lot of that, there's a pretty good pay raise for the guys that work there...*

[Later]... 'cause I, I think that while the profit went up so much, 'cause the Vice President hasn't given any raises in two years, he works ya... you know what I mean, he works ya... he works ya into the dirt... Well and then your profit is gonna go up...

This exploitation may be alienation, but the language used is that of classism. In his view, it seems that economic exploitation is the result of putting profits over the needs of people and treating them as less than human. Particularly the injustice of having your hard-earned raise repurposed into luxuries for those who simply have the power to take it when it is desired is clearly the source of Mark's discussion of classism. Further, while he hesitates to speak of poverty and prefers "working class" as a description, given that working class has a wide range of meanings (precisely the reason it is deployed here), readers should consider the context. Mark makes it clear that this exploitation is the status quo for a majority in the area. Critically, however, note Mark's acknowledgment that "getting screwed over" is measured in degrees. Though he may not use academic terms for alienation and relationality – or intersectionality as he later describes how sexuality, race, and gender shape his experience differently – he clearly

sees the structure beyond his individual experience.

Ahm... I think working class, in general... I would say gets screwed over more than, um... other classes like wealthy er... an' I know that's not a class, but... um... the more wealthy you are, more than likely, the less you get screwed over. I know most, most Appalachians have, at least in the past have been on the poor, on the poor side... ahm... and that's ... ahm... I would guess probably like... 70-80 percent, [of his community] I would assume...

Ahm... I would say I hardly ever think of being White and Appalachian... Working class, er whatever class I would fall into... I would say that I think about that quite often. Ahm, mainly at work when it's so prevalent to you, ahm... you know, at work, very few people who work in the shop have newish or new cars, they all have work clothes which are almost worn out, or really worn out and have holes all over the place and then... you know when 8 o'clock rolls around, people from the office come down, you know, in their nice Nike polo golf shirt, and nice khaki pants or shorts, and their brand new shoes an, ah... and you know come down and talk to ya a little bit and then walk off, or in my shop they yell atcha and walk off... or.. you know then they either go play golf during the work day, some weeks, and they all have brand new cars, and some of 'em have company cars, that are, you know... more than what some people in the shop make in a week... you know, for a monthly car payment.. but I think there, you know, it's so in yer face, you think about... at least, I think about it at least every day, or at least more than once or twice, um...

Yet, again what stings the most is what he sees as a celebration of relative excess. Though representative of middle class norms, the brand name “casual” clothing (indicating intellectual rather than physical work), luxury cars, beginning at a less demanding 8, rather than 6am, 30-50% fewer required hours for equal or more pay, and Friday afternoons at the golf course are particularly belligerent demonstrations of inequity in a community and region in which the majority are working poor. Though his description centers on the material goods of management that he and his colleagues lack, what he describes is not jealousy but rather an

injustice. This consistent feeling of lack erodes dignity both at work and home such that his describing being “worked hard” – language that calls up images of a mule pulling a plow – is hardly surprising. So while the language used may be that of consumerism, what he describes here is the result of being forced to acknowledge that while some enjoy a life of relative comfort from his alienated labor, he and his peers barely getting by. This mocking theft of his human dignity is the constant experience of oppression that is clearly painful and makes his class experience primary.

II: Strategy for dignity

As stated earlier, providing through physical labor is what imperialist, White supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy demands of a working class/poor White man in order to matter. In short, work is existence. While Mark is absolutely clear that he is valued by his employer for his production capacity, he yet speaks of his and others’ attempts to maintain some dignity given the systems to which they are subject. Thus, they use the pride they can take *and hold*, both in their ability to provide an income (even if meager) and almost more importantly, in their skill and craftsmanship. It is this creative capacity beyond production that cannot be (completely⁷⁸) commodified and removed from the individual⁷⁹ that he and his colleagues desire most to hold onto. Set against his all-encompassing work life, “hard work” provides a culturally legitimate concept that partly connects him to his production through his own desire to be known as trustworthy, loyal, and reputable/honorable.

Further, this set of traits is both a link to family reputation, his own (White, masculine)

⁷⁸ While low-skill workers can be easily replaced, at the level of artisan a highly skilled worker becomes unique. They alone own and choose to deploy their skill and as a result gain power relative to the market, and the unique quality of the goods they produce offers a (terrifically constrained) degree of expression not available to most.

⁷⁹ This is what Marx refers to as *entausserung*, or more literally the process of moving/constructing something from within to outside of. Further, by setting that which he has produced outside of himself, this process has also rendered his creation alien and set it against him; Marx calls this *entfremdung*.

civic/social legitimacy, and cultural values including the importance of work in the Northern – Protestant work ethic – tradition. Additionally, this responds to the Southern work tradition in that while he will not be afforded gentry status, his status as a skilled worker lifts him well above common (White) trash. By enacting “hard work”, he thus remains true to all these motivators while retaining a sense of self that is carefully positioned/constructed such that it does not openly resist his employer. Yet in this constructed meaning, his employer is lazy (the sin of sloth) in contrast to their virtuous hard work. In framing work in this way, he plays Northern ideals of work against Southern⁸⁰ and in so doing exerts some control and thus claims a degree of self-determination, of dignity. In short, he regains/retains some sense of Wesen – of his own spirit and being – that his abusive boss cannot easily wrest from him as it serves them both. It is from such a position that he perceives a bit of a refuge. Critically a refuge is not yet a home, but he is able to survive and find ways of constructing one.

Situating strategy

Before we examine his strategic responses, however, we should understand the ways in which Mark understands and constructs a placed cultural/value context to buttress and legitimize his strategies. While “hard work” may allow a bit of breathing room, this in no way protects him from the loss of self and Leiden that the system leaves him with nor the special abuses of management. Thus, Mark must seek to more fully understand how to avoid this oppression and develop a strategy for minimizing alienation and Leiden and maximize his retention of dignity and Wesen. Here Mark provides a geographic and cultural map of the social-power landscape and his own negotiation of it. Again, in Mark’s caution that his values are a result of his

⁸⁰ Refers to chapter 1’s discussion of European versus American values with regard to work; physical labor’s degrading of the mind and work as virtue respectively.

particular experience and are not necessarily representative, we see a complex understanding of how various social forces shape intersectional selves. Ultimately, this process is about learning where a place of safety, a home as Marx refers to it (p. 326), lies accessible from our unique intersections. For Mark, family is paramount.

I guess the part of Augusta County, er Shenandoah Valley..., that I grew up most in, um, I think you have, you still have um... I guess core values of ah... like, you know your word is your bond type of deal... you know, if you say you're gonna do somethin', you do it...

uh... I would say, hard work is valued more than a lot of other things... as far as being a hard worker, I would say... I guess for me (additionally) it'd be ahm... I guess trust and loyalty, an'... you know they're always lookin' out for ya, ah... you know you don't have to worry about them screwin' ya, any type a way... well, yeah, I mean... I would say for me there's not a whole lot else more important than family... in fact off the top of my head, I don't know what would be more important than family, but... that might just be my values, not... ah, across the board.

As Mark expounds on his geographic and cultural location, however, he begins not with home but where home *is not* by noting where he started life in the (Appalachian) South. As discussed in the first two chapters, (historicized) place matters as stereotype and oppression are experienced through meanings attached to specific locations. For instance, being read as located in the mountains renders different associations than the country, town, and small or large city. Here in the narrative, rather than claim a socio-economic status or location, Mark describes growing up amongst a unique population in the “unique” Shenandoah Valley, which allows for his (and their) claim to a Southern identity rooted in town or even cities as we will see later, while actually raised in rural spaces surrounded by Appalachian mountains.

If anything it'd be that I'm, I'm from the South, um... uhm... oh, ah, I don't, I mean I don't think I think about it all that... much, um... there's obviously some people who are, you know they think about it quite often... the same people who say the South will rise ag'in, I'm sure they think about it quite often, but... but, I'm, I can't say that I think about it that much. Yeah, I, I would say (in general) that you'd probably get a lot more of, you know I'm a Southerner, from the South, rather than identify with Appalachian...

Ahm, I would say, as far as like the geography goes, I would say... ahm... yes... ya know, where I've... was born, and where I've lived and, 'n then, the Appalachian mountain range anyway... fer that, an' I mean, I'm not... you know I didn't grow up back in the mountains of Appalachia, ah, I've been more in the ya know, Shenandoah Valley, ahm... which, I think is its own breed of individuals I would say...

After providing this murky explanation of his identity claim in contrast to his actual life history and location, he provides a window into what motivates his separation from, or at least resistance to, claiming Appalachian⁸¹. Note also the distinction between redneck and hillbilly in what follows.

...Ah, I'm not sure that too many people would... know how to classify Appalachian, ahm... in, in Augusta County... I, I'm not sure how they would classify that. Ahm, they might... they might throw that in with... ahm... like rednecks, or, 'mean... probably more like a hillbilly, I would think, would probably more what people would associate it with.

I, I don't necessarily think that people try to hide that part of themselves ahm... but... ya, I think that people definitely probably looked down... maybe not down on you, but definitely, because of the region that you came from...

Uhm... I guess that depends on, on... like what county you're in... I-I think you can...

⁸¹ see Gorski (2012) for a similar distancing of lived experience from stigmatized constructions of Appalachian.

like in Augusta Co, I wouldn't say that there's a whole lot of... Appalachian, from the country, pride... I mean, I would say that ah... I guess there's probably not much pride... uhm... in that, or... where you come from so to say, or so to speak.

Interestingly, after suggesting stereotype forces him and his peers to distance themselves from the region and that there is no pride to be claimed in where he is from, he provides a contrast with a place and people that he knows and respects. Further, this description is delivered in the form of describing the process by which this population did *not* “progress;” this is both a loss and benefit. To be sure, there is a sense here of safety to be had amongst people in more rural communities. However, as will become more clear later, in his estimation the trade-offs involved in being rural – and thus connected to Appalachia – are simply not sufficient. Sanity can only be found in straddling the acceptable and livable with belonging; indeed, even a Southern identity must be claimed strategically.

So I'd say it all depends on where you're at and who you're talkin' to...ah, you know you get more isolated down in the holla's between the mountains... um... so there's, I think there's a lot more community pride... but you know where it's, it's flatter... You know, it's a lot easier to get around and intermingle, so you don't have to get, as quite as much of that. I think that, you know, some places – some little towns you cruise through, even today, you know if you aren't born there, you know, you're an outsider. It's great if you go spend money there, but they prefer if you just don't hang around, and keep on goin'...

I think (close to town) they'd probably be more politically correct that, you know, yeah I'm from the South, but you know I'm, that doesn't really define me type of thing. Where in (very remote town) Craigsville, and out that way... ahm, I think they would be much more defined by... ahm... I'd say Craigsville you'd be more of a hillbilly type I would say... I you know, I don't know that fer sure... ...but, I guess... hard working, ahm, try to do what's right, try to treat people right, ahm...

Following this, Mark briefly shifts discussion to frame what he experiences as the opposite process and experience, and thus where he might find value and relief from oppression enough to construct home; namely Charlottesville, Virginia. Charlottesville is a small city in the eastern foothills of the mountains, which is geologically accurate, though those from the mountains would say it is decidedly east and not to be included. Historically, the westernmost outpost of colonial power, the city is home to the University of Virginia (Jefferson's University, as it is tellingly also known) and situated in the aristocratic horse country of Albemarle County. Emblematic of development and the corrupting influence of "city life" (read: capitalist versus communal agrarian values), Charlottesville and this narrative of escape to financial and social safety comes up often in the Blue Ridge tradition of old-time music and culture as seen in *The Waltons* and the Dillard's classic "Old Home Place." As an example, the Dillard's song speaks of forsaking the place of safety with family to pursue love in the city, only to return broken hearted to a completely destroyed homeplace. The city is understood as a sort of progressive/intellectual/affluent promised land that requires cautious engagement because one can too easily lose themselves and all that is precious. Moreover, evoking Charlottesville draws heavily upon deep historical memories of power and oppression and is itself a uniquely salient cautionary tale relative to any other city – including "D.C".

I think once you, once you go over into Charlottesville, sorta area (small city east of the mountains), I think you pretty well lose that (character traits and claiming Appalachian)... ahh, I would say that that probably goes hand in hand... ahm... I would say that more, you know, more back up in the mountain hollows you go, you know, the poorer you're gonna be... in general anyway.

I think, I think probably like in the Lyndhurst area and some of that was, a little bit more that way, I don't think it's much that way anymore... ahm... Yeah... I would say that it'd be just the amount of people they get exposed to now... I would guess, um... I, I have never really experienced a whole lot of that in the Lyndhurst, an' back in 'ere, um... I guess mainly because, you know we've always had kin of some kind who lived there or somewhat close, so we're kinda ok by extension so to speak...

Having suggested, in his thoughts about Lyndhurst – a rural and historically quite Appalachian community sandwiched between a mountain and two areas of intense service-sector development – that economic development has eroded something valuable in that community, he also suggests he could be wrong. A result of having “always had kin” there, he cautions that maybe the community connection and values have not changed, but that he never felt the protective effects that would prove their persistence. And yet he is skeptical as he continues to elaborate on the economic options available without such development and the potential for local people to benefit.

Important here is that he focuses on greater social interaction as the cause of the change – presumably following the narrative of the isolated backwardness of Appalachia – to explain what is an economic reality. Moreover, he omits the only economic growth since the brief period of industrialization that provided his grandfather a pension – an explosion of corporate retail outlets. This omission seems evidence that this development is not beneficial, but to say so is also unacceptable politically and relative to more remote areas lacking any jobs at all. In the next segment, note the trailing off and pause between Mark's discussion of how development “brought people in and the people who were there...” and the “better payin' jobs” of political rhetoric. Indeed, by the close of this segment, a sense of futility permeates.

I would say probably (the growth and development of) Waynesboro and Stuarts Draft combined did 'at, and um, I'm sure the hospital, and that helped, 'cause there's a lot more people that work there that, you know... and Hershey, Little Debbie (snack cake factory), I mean that... it all brought people in and the people who were there... you know, jobs, they were better payin' jobs than what they had... yeah I would say there's probably more... opportunities than there is in the western part (of the county), ahm... like, quite a few people I know from Highland (a very remote and politically Appalachian county immediately to the west), it's really the only thing to do there is... go to school and farm, or leave and that's it... you're in school for 18yrs and then... well not 18yrs, but until yer 18 and then you either start farmin' er, pretty much... go on. There's not really anything else to do there.

Compelled by the highly relative benefit of these “jobs,” he seems to abandon his previous suggestion that perhaps there is something unique that might provide safety in remote communities. Thus he returns to the ubiquitous framing of their complex resistance as small town backwardness – complete with accents. Yet what appears as abandonment or even selling out is strategic misguidance as he defuses and connects those communities to all rural areas suggesting that perhaps this “small town” attitude is not particular to Appalachia. In doing so he has recreated Appalachia, not as deviant, but as normative within rural America and made it a slightly safer location to call home. Perhaps most important, he has created a space between “the (deviant) hillbilly” and Appalachia.

I, I would say the more... the more isolated the area, the more you have it. If that makes sense. Ahm... I, I think that's more just, just small town... ahm... we don't really like outsiders type of thing... I don't know if that would be an Appalachian trait or not...

Again constructing a more tenable location for himself, he rhetorically locates himself as a more sophisticated town-person by hesitatingly distancing himself from the more remote

Highland County. Due to the period of industrialization in the region, the interstate system cuts through the county to the north, south, and east providing high speed access from some rural areas to town. Such an invocation of Highland is part of a pattern in which the line is reinforced between the cities of Augusta and the increasingly isolated and rugged areas largely to the west – over the political border into Appalachia. Moreover, this is the policing of the social border *across which* live the hillbillies of Appalachia. As a result, Mark has lived all his life in Appalachia but can claim that he is not Appalachian or – more importantly – not a hillbilly. This difference is important to him and becomes clear as he proves in the previous quote that this “small town attitude” is not an Appalachian trait – but *is* hillbilly – *because* he (as an Appalachian) would not associate himself with it.

... well I mean, ah, I wouldn't associate myself with... you know, somebody from ah... like a small town attitude, like in Highland County, where... you know, we appreciate you showin' up and spendin' money, nah'... don't let the door hitcha where the good Lord splitcha', you know... on the way out. Just, spend yer money and leave. I, I wouldn't... necessarily associate myself with that... an, and that would most likely be because I, I didn't really... live er grow up there... I, I guess that's what I meant by that...

In what immediately follows, however, is again a clear indication that he identifies with – or at least has affinity for – the same people and places that he distances himself from. In fact, though his home community benefits from the interstate access, it is nearly 20 miles to town and more distant than some more “Appalachian” or remote communities. As suggested by his own ear for such accents, this social distance is only a marginally defensible geographic claim – but one that is incredibly important in a border context in which only political lines are clear.

I would say the farther back in those hollows you go, the better off it is to have ah... Southern or... some type 'a accent like that... it'd benefit you... ah, they wouldn't be as quick as to... ahm... ya know, put you in a class of, which... dirty Yankee, carpetbagger type of a deal, I would say.

Responding to a follow up question about his skill at geographically locating an accent, Mark offers a glimpse of how important “reading” accents is to his daily navigation of stigma.

Ahm... I can hear, like a real thick Georgian accent, that's hard to miss... but if you go to the most south west tip of Virginia, that accent's a little bit different... um... but yeah, I— I would be able to hear that accent and know where they're... um, you know what region... at least in Virginia anyway... yeah... I would say from Charlottesville to Highland there would definitely be a difference...

Note in the preceding conversation about accents that while he specifically speaks of Northern accents as notable, he also suggests that a Georgia or Charlottesville accent stands out. This suggests that while Yankees are immediately assumed to present some type of threat, Southerners/gentry are also suspect in contrast to the “a little bit different” Appalachian accents. Clearly, social and political place have a great deal to do with his experience of economic oppression, the negotiation of which seems instinctive, but must be exhausting.

Wesen – in place

Returning to describe structure and factors that provide economic options, he provides an insider/receiver perspective – as opposed to either Yankee or Charlottesville outsiders – on the structure that limits economic options in the area. Further, he provides an explanation of how one does attain jobs and a climb that he suggests is out of extreme oppression, and into the middle class. Additionally, Mark offers an explanation of where he and others went wrong.

However, even as Mark bookends the following by suggesting maybe it is not the case, it is clearly his experience that the American Dream is a baited trap.

Uhm. I would say that I'm very much working class, um... (LONG pause)... I would say that... (LONG pause)... uhm... working class is a... it isn't som'in that you're necessarily born into; there's definitely options to get out of working class. Uhm, but I would say if you don't jump when there's opportunities, like right outta high school... ahm, to go to college and to um get a degree an' go on like that, it's very hard to get out of working class. Uhm, I would say it's a ... very much, kinda like rigged game kinda deal – a rigged game, so to speak... ah, and the ones who... you know the ones who do the work, and their employer... you know pays for 'em to get a little bit more education and move up that way, those.. I'ma say those are a select few. Um... they are not the majority by any stretch.

I would say majority are... you know, they started workin' there right outta school, had a girlfriend, ah whether they got married before they had kids or not, ah is iffy, but kids got involved.. (chuckle)... and you know they can't afford to... they can't afford to go to school, they can't... ahm, they can't afford to go to take a chance on goin' to a better job, 'cause if that doesn't work out, you know they've gotta pay them bills, where it's paycheck to paycheck, so... ah... you know, you can make it, so don't screw it up by lookin' at the fancy house kind of a deal. Ahm... so I would also say that also goes in to don't piss off your employer 'cause if he fires ya you're really screwed. My... but yeah, I, I would say it's not a rigged game... until you get a little ways into it, and then... it's... pretty much... you know, you're pretty much stuck in that... ahm... in that class I would say.

Continuing where he left off in policing the social boundaries of respectable Appalachia, Mark points out the three places one can go upon graduating high school: to “town” and what is left of factory work, to school (college), or to work on a farm. All of these, along with the

location in which he was raised, suggest that he locates himself with his rural Appalachian roots but must also hide or redefine particular aspects in order to create greater safety. With respect to this location, what is perhaps most notable is that he has no experience of living “in town.” Mark aligns himself not with the country, and negative constructions of hillbilly/redneck folks that he did in fact grow up with, but describes himself in ways that connect him to a (highly relative) metro location. This becomes clearly connected to his efforts to map how oppressive forces work, and an understanding that “town” – in particular just outside the mountains in Charlottesville – is a place of sophistication and wealth where he can simply enjoy life for a change. Clearly, learning and experiencing new things, doing the things you want instead of what you are left with or must do to survive, are activities that require money and are not available locally. This leaves us a stark image of the lack of depth and joy Mark and his peers are able to find in their life of work. In short, Mark sees metropolitan people as having time and money enough to actually enjoy a life of leisure and personal fulfillment outside of work; an experience he and his peers lack in their struggle to survive.

I mean, people who have money... people who have money in the Valley, live in Charlottesville. Ahm... they have money and they move there, or they're from there, or... uhm... you know I guess, you know, if you get money than, uh, you know, you can afford to do... things... like after work you can afford to go out to eat, uh... more than somebody is livin' paycheck to paycheck... So like in Charlottesville you have, you know, like, uhm, Indian and Thai food... or, South African food... you know, you can go experience those things, ahm, so I mean, there's more... I guess, diversity there, so you know I, I can see where if you have the means you know, you would want to be there, uhm... so, I would assume that would be why, uhm... people who have more means would, would go there...

Indeed, his description of options available as he and his colleagues contemplate a walk-out of his (current) welding shop provides more insight into his alienated work experience. Alternative employment is limited to lower paying, low-status (high-oppression) jobs which contrast sharply to the access described above. In this next section, Mark shares the avenues which might bring him a bit closer to this access, namely medical careers in the county (he describes as the Shenandoah Valley), and even more attractively (an hour's drive) in Charlottesville. Particularly worth noting at the close of this quote is the way in which labor is described as basic or simple, in contrast to the "opportunities" afforded those with degrees and jobs in those cities. Evident here is also the type of brain-drain phenomena seen in the literature⁸² and suggested earlier in his description of Highland County's social status and economic options that have helped create an exodus from Appalachian and rural communities nationwide.

Ahhhhh, if you have a college education it's not too terribly bad, but outside of that it's not too good. Yeah. Yeah, if you have a college education, it's a lot easier... (long pause) Yeah, I mean, you go to Charlottesville, Charlottesville has a lot more opportunities. Ahm, Harrisonburg is probably next, and then... that's pretty much it. Yeah... (long pause) Well, apparently VDOT is hirin'. Hourly... VDOT, yeah, but pay per hour isn't all that great, but then ya get great benefits, so it kinda makes up for it, but... ahhhh, probably just, general, whatever. Ah, just labor – general.

Through a close reading of the following narrative, Mark suggests that perhaps a job in Charlottesville is the best possible solution/location for him both in economic and exploitation terms. Notably, of the two distinct opportunities in Charlottesville he mentions, he has a plan for

⁸² See especially Bollinger et al, 2011; Durlauf, 2011; Lichter & Brown, 2011; and Tucker, 2010

attaining only the one that would pay no more, but with less exploitation and abuse he imagines. The other would pay more than twice, putting him into “six-figures” (which is rich by any standard in the area), yet he offers no plan and only knows of this person and situation through his girlfriend; this is neither attainable nor realistic for him. Moreover, right at the beginning it is clear that he would never belong there, as he would only be allowed to “assist” the *them* that belong with whatever they need; he might be safer he thinks, but this will clearly not be home either.

... at UVA there's a, uh, “OR Technician”, I think is what they call it... And pretty much just let you assist with whatever they need in the operating room. And, ahhh...I think only...they said ...it was like bare minimum stuff you had to have was CPR and some of that kind of stuff. Um... but... I don't know, so I'll see. I figured I'd put in for that. Maybe my medical training stuff will help out. There's a...there's a... Blue Ridge (Community College) off...offers a, uh, it's like a 8 week course to be, uh, a phlebotomist. Uh... (LONG pause) I might do that, and, just, just to get a better job. Just...to get away from...where I'm now. Ummm, AMC (the county hospital) I think just hired for it & so did UVA (teaching hospital).*

Yeah... and, one, one of the guys, um, that my girlfriend worked with is a nurse, anesthesiologist nurse... it's the nurse version of anesthesiologist basically, I think he works at UVA, I think... um, but my girlfriend* says that he makes like low six figures, and if he gets into a situation that, you know, that's impossible or that he doesn't know what's going on, he can call the anesthesiologist and come down and verify... Well... it's kinda, if you're a nurse and you're an anesthesiologist, there's a lot more education and responsibility as an anesthesiologist, so I imagine you get paid more. I mean, six figures sounds aight to me – ah shit yeah(!), I'd be fine with that! ...But, I don't know how true that is, an' you know, I don't how experienced he is either, so... he might have been doing it for years and years and years...*

But, um, my girlfriend apparently called around and said that, said that they'll be hiring for that again here before too terribly long, so... Uhm, I think at UVA it's actually a little bit more than what I make now. But, I mean, it is a little bit more risky than...cause I think they, I've seen one at the hospital do a ah arterial, artery stick to draw blood. So I mean, that's little bit more risky than...weldin' and building stuff. Well, probably for the patient. And if something really goes wrong they'd come back to me and the hospital, so...*

After this discussion of alternatives for work in a more sophisticated place where he imagines less alienation however, he returns to a more local and thus seemingly attainable yet still more “cultured”⁸³ environment at the historical Virginia Military Institute (VMI). VMI is located in the equally genteel and *very* Southern town of Lexington in politically Appalachian Rockbridge County to the south. Of the two cities in Rockbridge County, Lexington is considered the sophisticated home also to Washington and Lee University in contrast to the blue collar and *very* Appalachian Buena Vista that will resurface in the third narrative. I mention it here because the tension between these two spaces can only exist by being constantly re-constructed, and that appears here in Mark's discussion of the kind of role he might have there as well.

Oh...Um, my dad said apparently, um, VMI is hiring for like...pretty much doing all the labor, like taking care of the facility and places like that, so. Ah, but we'll see, I'd pretty much take anything right now. Yeah. Just to get away from that place. That's ridiculous. I'm not gonna bust my ass all the time and then to get screamed at.*

According to Mark, social mobility is still hard, but possible if one attends college and does not make the mistake of delaying and/or get married/start a family until this is

⁸³ High social status

accomplished. There is no further description of what is required, but he makes it clear that while he is single and has no children, he missed his moment as well; it is his fault. Though Mark does give himself credit for being financially shrewd, he seems unsure of what to say regarding the difference between those who struggle more than he does with the same pay. As a resolution he offers that perhaps he does not qualify as working class and struggles to say why. Initially he offers the negative in a self-blame framing of himself as a “tightwad” and therefore the deviant one, before suggesting perhaps consumerism is at fault, settling finally on the added cost of a family, which Mark established as top priority early on. When asked what he would change, Mark suggests that financial literacy is a critically important set of knowledge and skills – he specifically names the stock market and retirement accounts – that are systematically denied to working class kids. However, while he has missed the supposedly golden opportunity to attain middle-class status/position, he is intent on understanding how to maximize his income as a strategy to create a buffer from oppression.

Ahm... the more, the more I think about it the less I think that um, um, as far as financially, I don't think I would qualify as working class. Uhm... you know there's a lot of people I work with, you know, they live paycheck to paycheck an', you know, by the time they buy groceries and pay the bills, that's, you know, that's, that's everything they have. Uhm, and that's not really the case for me... ahm, but it might be that, you know, um, I'm a real tight wad... and other people aren't... ahm, you know, the same people who say well I don't have any money to spend an extra \$50 on somethin', are also payin' over \$100 for their cable, so ya, you know... but I don't know exactly how I fit there I guess. I do the same work, as them and get paid roughly the same as them, but it might just ah... different situation you know, I don't have kids, and I might manage the money a little bit better, it's a common thing I guess. Yeah...

Just as Mark is able to use culture and place as a foundation for his forms of resistance,

his employer uses negative stereotypes to justify his oppression in exactly the same way. Mark explains that stereotypes of the workers as stupid and ignorant serve to justify management's lack of interest in worker feedback about daily tasks to the outright injustices against them. In desperate response, Mark's coworkers ridicule managers amongst themselves for anything from poor leadership skills to laziness – and thus unmanliness – and seem to fantasize about taking physical revenge on them.

... You know, the stereotype is that you're stupid, and that's the normal stereotype I would assume, well, from what I've seen... ahm... (LONG pause)... but yeah supervisors and employers are pretty much always looked down..., negatively... Um...I mean there's never, like I would sit down and have a... debate er discussion with my supervisor on how he's, how you think he's doing something wrong, it's I wanna take him out back an' Im'll take care of things...

While they have no real power in the hierarchy of the shop, constructions of classed, raced, and placed masculinities that reposition the worker as dominant – and thus forcibly regain some of the dignity taken from them – are available coping strategies. Though these attempts at resistance in fact perpetuate the systems that oppress them, we should read these as desperate attempts to resist through the same might-makes-right strategy that they are intimately familiar with; it is the source of hopelessness should they submit. While many may assume that these men place more value in such “isms” than anyone else raised in contemporary America (see Jennings, 1998; Mason, 2005; Middlebrook, 2010; Sonnie & Tracey, 2011), as we will see later, the narratives suggest perhaps the opposite. That which is apparent here is that reframing workers as smarter, more powerful, manly, and empowered (full) agents is the basis of a strategy – not unlike that which Dubois called double consciousness – to maintain dignity through a social system amongst the workers that parallels the larger system dominated by management.

Ahh, I guess it's more of, I guess, take it back by force kinda deal, 'cause... yeah I think that's it pretty much... I mean I think... I think by far it's... um... they look down on me so much even though what you might say might be right, but they think you're so stupid er ignorant, or they just don't want to admit that you're right so they're just not gonna listen to it. Um, and if they think you come off as just a little bit smart, they'll write ya up or fire ya for it, so there's no real point in talking to 'em... so... I guess the... the average feeling is, when they screw up as supervisors er whatever... bosses... uh, you... normally what you consider's visiting harm upon them...

Uhm, I mean, I've worked in a couple shops... and I would say that's the average attitude, uhm... yah, I mean that... I guess that would have... I guess it could be part of the culture of you know, you know... men are manly and you gotta, you gotta be a man, and if somebody disrespects you, you hafta, you know, normally take it back by force.... I guess is the... just average here, I would say...

Later we see a concrete example as dominance is redefined as Mark describes the fallout from a particularly hated vice president's most recent verbal abuse and shaming of a senior – and highly skilled – worker. This incident was particularly egregious, partly because it took place in front of his colleagues, and also because it is presumed that he was singled out as an example precisely because of the high status his skill affords him. Further, this individual example of oppression seems likely to even result in a walk-out and possibly unionization in a profoundly anti-union area. Interestingly, while finding another job might be challenging at best, Mark initially suggests that the workers could shut down production – particularly if the worker who alone knows how to cut and shape the raw material leaves. However, later the true power of the capitalist over the workers and even management sets in. Most notable here is that though they rally around one particular incident, the primary motivation seems to come from recognition that

this moment is part of a systematic process that can no longer be tolerated.

Well, I mean, uh, it's pretty much... it's pretty much coming to that (a walkout), whether the union is there or not. Um, I mean, the whole () department was... within a hair of walking out Monday... uh the Vice President pretty much cut down the shop supervisor in front of all of us...so...yeah... whell, pretty much hollerin' at us again and stuff. So I think everybody in the shop's lookin' for a job and pretty much out.*

Yeah... I don't, I don't know that the Presidents know that all, almost all the key people there in the shop, are lookin' to leave or will be gone in December. If they find out, things might change really quick... it's hard to say, Um, if he came down today, or tomorrow and ripped us a new one, I think pretty much the entire shop is gonna walk out and then if Joe (who has a critical skill position) doesn't walk out, he'll be out in a couple months... (he is) the only person that can really look at a print and really figure out how to cut the material and figure out how to bend it the right way, and I mean, he... he said he's gonna take early retirement in December, he said he's like, he's just gonna find a part time job doin' sumpin' else...*

Well I've also heard some rumor that if that happens (unionize and/or walkout), they'll just shut the place down. I don't know how true that is. Uh'd say that uh, in my initial interview there, they told me that they made 2-3 million dollars last year in profit, so...

Interestingly, in spite of and because of this absolute power, there is (still) an assumed faith in the owner/capitalist such that the blame is believed to rightly fall on those below him⁸⁴. In the following quote, note the way Mark insulates the presidents and owner from “their vice president” such that management is still at fault but the highest levels are not blamed – and therefore worker jobs less threatened. While elsewhere it is made clear that good jobs are hard to

⁸⁴ Though unrelated, there is a similar momentary discussion of police power without an accompanying critique of political power in the narrative.

find, here it is simply implied that the benevolence of the business owner is potentially contingent and that a degree of loyalty is not simply demanded but also owed.

And uh...suddenly the President and, two Presidents of, uh, companies apparently have caught wind of what's been going on and... they definitely heard about what happened last Monday and the owner got involved so...apparently they're supposed to have some meeting today, but... mmm... it's happened once already, so...I don't see them...canning, or greatly demoting their Vice President, so... but... Well, I mean I, I think the Presidents of the company have been doin', doin' whatever they have to do, whatever their responsibilities are... and I think the Vice President has pretty much insulated them from knowing anything that's been going on out there, which is obviously to his advantage...

Further, in the next portion of his discussion of the incident, a totem pole metaphor is used to re-position the vice president at the very bottom of the hierarchy without challenging the structure itself. Certainly the theme here is to rhetorically reverse power such that Mark is the one asking and *demanding* answers to hard questions before returning to a reality in which he and his peers are verbally abused. In fact, Mark goes on to suggest that this particular manager actually turns hard workers into “slackers” – an attack on the vice president’s hard work, skill, and thus his White masculine dignity – while protecting the workplace structure that ultimately oppresses, yet feeds them all.

So... He's (the VP) kinda made the mess, so... or he allowed the mess to happen. I hope that they um, you know they have a meeting tryin' to patch things up, so... I got quite a few questions and they better have a lot of real good answers if I'm gonna even think about stayin', so... it's like I told one of the guys I work with... I said, somebody like that [the VP who yelled at them] should not be in that kinda situation of authority. He should always and forever remain the low man on the totem pole... in whatever department he's in... he's just... he can't do it.

I think... I think... he has a-a way of... you know there's some people who are slackers and... others 're you know, always tryin' to... normally trying to do the best they can. I think he just... makes slackers. 'Cause there's no incentive to do... there's no incentive to bust your butt... why? Why bust your butt? Might as well take it easy all day'n... get yelled at either way.

And finally, a sentiment that accurately describes the attitude I heard in many conversations while in the field, which corresponds to the description of an anarchist sentiment embedded in the cultural norms of the region.

... I don't think it's ever a good idea to give people in general, an unlimited amount of power without some type of check...

Coping with alienation: Oppressor or partner?

In contrast to the impact of alienation and his employer's economic power over him, it is unsurprising that his experiences of White male-ness in Appalachia are less salient for Mark. When asked specifically about those experiences Mark provides an interesting response as he acknowledges these oppressions as both real and present. Though stereotypes suggest that working class/poor Whites are heavily invested in perpetuating the oppression of minority groups, Mark instead empathizes out of his own experience without assuming he understands. In contrast to assumptions about poor rural White men as racism's foot soldiers, his response is precisely the sort of self-reflexive awareness that can provide a foundation for building coalitions that challenge these structures.

Indeed, in the following portion of the narrative Mark describes that while he is not always "accepted;" he is able to "pass" and access the benefits of White supremacy and hetero-

patriarchy. In doing so he offers a nuanced reading of how the salience of our experiences sensitizes us in ways which obscure the experiences and oppression of others.

What does it mean for me to be White...? ... Is, 's that the question? Ahm... I guess here, it would be... ahm... I guess I'm in the majority, I'm pretty much... ah... not necessarily always accepted, but... I guarantee the majority will always be accepted, ahm... which I know that isn't the same as if ah... you're African American or Black around here ahm...

But, I- I mean that, that's still obvious that there's still racism and sexism, ahh... in the community, it's... I mean it's not as prevalent as it was, I think 10, 15, 20 years ago, I would imagine, but ah... it's still around. So... I, I would venture to guess that... around here it'd be hard to get away from racism... ahm... maybe not by the Ku Klux Klan (type) racism, but ah racism in general, I think it's pretty hard to not have that somewhere, if not all over the valley.

Following this invocation of “KKK-type” racism, I asked him to clarify how that is different than some other form of racism. While the “Freudian slip” in his response demonstrates how accustomed he is to being made to feel stupid (and perhaps a related sense of shared experience), Mark also describes how his peers might use racism and sexism to mitigate feelings of powerlessness, or to return a slight. Further, Mark’s use of the phrase “stepped out of line” to equate to feeling “disrespected” also suggests he and his peers are immersed in a very clear and threatening hierarchy and feel compelled to protect whatever normative structures offer them protection as well. Certainly, this is part of White supremacy as a social norm, yet it is a more nuanced relationship to collusion with oppressive systems in their deployment as defensive rather than purely offensive weapons. That is to say that if (raced, class, placed, etc.) economic oppression compels them to support and/or perpetuate racist acts that they do not endorse, there is also potential to expose this as the motivating tool and create class/economic solidarity around

this shared struggle(s) instead. Indeed, Mark closes this section by stating that economic/class exploitation is a shared experience as he continues on to talk about hetero-patriarchy.

...then you have... they're White, so they're automatically stupid... er, they're Black so they're automatically stupid, and we should... try to segregate them in some way, and if they resist at all, we beat 'em down... you know those 'er... Ahm... I would... I would say it depends on who you bump into... ahm... there, an' you know, I know people that it's every stereotype or more so, and then there's some that aren't that way (racist) at all, and then there's some in the middle that aren't that way until they feel like they've been disrespected or um...um.. you know, somebody stepped outta line in some... in some, some way... ahm... I'm not really sure... ah, I mean I'm sure that... you know, if – if class gets involved there's, there's a different... level of... dislike, or... well you know, whatever that might be...

Ahm... from what I've seen and noticed, I'd say that um, the class thing is pretty much seen by everybody, and um... in the shop... at least in the shop I work at, and I would say I, I would assume that would be across the board, ahm...

I probably get more... probably get more opportunities than gay males do at any rate... ahm... an, ahn that's not somethin' I have a good handle on, because I'm not in their shoes, uh... but, I have known, you know, between me... and let's say, my girlfriend who when we're's ⁸⁵, uhm, workin' at the same place... ahm, I walked in and did my interview and got the job, where she sent her resume in like 3 or 4 times and did an interview and then finally got the job, so...

As Mark continues with this example of how his experience of patriarchy differs from his girlfriend's, he also shares how he experienced sexual harassment by his female employer. This further demonstrates that understandings of oppressor and oppressed must be reflexively

⁸⁵ we were's

critiqued for collusion with oppressive norms – here patriarchal ideas of women as weak/submissive and de-sexed and men as over-sexed agents – and contextualized as these are forever shifting positions, a lesson not lost on Mark.

Well, I mean, I mean that case, I'm pretty sure that the boss that hired me, (who) was female, um I'm pretty positive she hired me, 'cause she thought I was attractive an'... I ah... (she) pretty much wanted to see where that would go⁸⁶... I think in that case, that's what was goin' on... which is still discriminating an' ya know affects yer gender, uhm...

ahm... yeah, I, I can't say that I've ever... thought about it that I can remember... oh, I – I'm sure that it'd be differ'nt, ahm... you know, you... there's not too many White males, Appalachian or not, you know... who are viewed as sexual objects by... you know all the... the majority of the females... it's, ya know, females normally have to put up with ahm... some lewd comments an'... things like that, but you know... most of White males don't have to deal with. Ahm... you know, stuff like she's not strong enough, you know, she's delicate so to speak... we're in charge, that kinda thing, um...

Mark summarizes by suggesting that while he empathizes, he also does not want to speak for an experience which is not his own. This is particularly notable as it contradicts and complicates the origins of the stereotypical White man who feels entitled to an opinion on lives and experiences about which they know nothing. In my own experience, those men are most often well-heeled, educated liberals whose paternalistic (White man's) burden, dripping in patriarchal imperialism, gets dropped on poor White people who fail the expectation of White supremacy. The narrative presents Mark as a potential partner in change who is reflexively and acutely aware of injustice – the daily “hit in the face” experience of many – rather than the rabid

⁸⁶ In a follow up conversation, he shared that in fact this preferential treatment extended beyond being hired, and when he directly refused her sexual advances his hours were reduced equivalent to being fired.

racist/sexist boogeyman who occupies the rural “out there.”

... ah, I mean, I'm sure there's a lot of things, that I wouldn't even think of or even know about... cause I haven't been... you know, bein' there in the situation... Since I'm neither, it's hard for me to say anything about... It, it's hard for me to, I guess speculate on somethin' that I don't really get hit with in the face with every day, that kinda deal...

Summary

At the close of the interview with Mark, I asked him two questions. First, what would he like to see changed, and second how would he summarize what he wanted to say, as voice is a central aspect of this thesis project. Mark's reply to the first question of change was stated such that it reads as if he simply calls for financial literacy or an end to tracking of working class students away from college and into trades. Yet “all that kinda stuff that nobody ever tells you about in high school” if “your parents are working class or below” is about more than knowing stocks from bonds. Like his entire strategy to survive and find or create a home, understanding the norms that delineate the normative positions in systems of oppression provides a means of moving within and between positions in order to avoid the worst of oppression and yet retain a located sense of self⁸⁷. This is reason for his (and others') study of norms in order to pass, and ultimately the window through which he finds hope.

...instead of when you're in high school you can go learn a trade, maybe you can take... ahm... like... classes on how to better... consider yer finances, better ways to manage it, ahm... and all that kinda stuff that nobody ever tells you about in high school, um... I – I don't even think in high school I got told how to balance a checkbook... that was somein' my parents did, and if your parents are working class or below, then they're not gonna

⁸⁷ For a much more extensive discussion of such a fluid strategy as resistance, see Sandoval's *Methodology of the oppressed* (2000).

know about stocks and bonds, so some of that kinda stuff... an, I – I think that would make a big difference...

Mark's response to my second question, to summarize himself in his own words, began with a chuckle which provides a rather bleak story a bit of hope.

Ahm... (chuckles)... ahm... let's see... who I am... ahm... I guess, male... working in Virginia... in, I would assume, a working class job, ahm... 'say family's probably the most important to me, ahm... I think for me, I've learnt to... distrust people, from, I guess late high school, throughout my working career, and that's mainly from supervisors and bosses I would say... um... ah I guess that's given me... the view that... if people can screw you fer a dollar, they'll do so... ahm... or, what, you know, if it benefits them, they'll screw you over... I – I guess that's how I'd answer that question...

Mark is clearly alienated and seems to indicate that everyone in similar conditions suffers also the anguish of Leiden. Yet while pained and clearly very aware of the weight multiple systems of domination carry with them, he summarizes his salient experience with undeniable and still persistent humanity. As we will see in the other narratives as well, though different each successful response to oppression must be pragmatic in their attempts to retain Wesen but do so in a way that is supported through the culture and thus fly under the radar. As such, his is an experience of apparent contradictions which are not at all. White and poor, from Appalachia but not Appalachian, hopeful and forlorn, he strives to understand this complex tension at the intersections of his and other's lives in order to survive; so must we all, together.

- Narrative 2: Protecting nature as home -

“Estranged labour reverses the relationship so that man, just because he is a conscious being makes his life activity, his *being* (Wesen), a mere means for his *existence*... (p328) It estranges him from his own body, from nature as it exists outside him, from his spiritual essence (Wesen), his *human* existence.” - Karl Marx (1992, p. 329)

“I feel like, the Shenandoah Valley as a whole is my home and I'm out to protect it. And I feel like there's a lot of people that feel that way.” - Luke

In this second narrative we hear from a 32-year-old I will call Luke, raised in a neighboring community just a few miles away. Considerably older, Luke has not only developed an understanding of the oppressive forces he navigates – particularly neoliberal capitalism – but also has experience forming and practicing his version of resistance. In the narrative that follows, economic oppression, the centering of private/individual interests, and regional stigma are like the weather – powerful and unpredictable, there is nothing to do but prepare for “nature’s crazy things.” As in the previous narrative, alienation simply *is*. Unlike Mark’s narrative however, there is a strategy here that goes beyond using “hard work” as a game to survive and maintain sanity.

Here Luke shares not just a strategy for survival but resistance that might heal the estrangement Marx describes in the quote above, while ensuring the protection of the natural environment and the community with whom he shares it. Nature may not be tame-able, yet for this very reason it is also in nature that the possibility of – and inspiration for – resistance can be found⁸⁸. Indeed, through the metaphor of nature as community commons, Luke leverages historical and cultural traditions as he also challenges alienation and the isolation produced by

⁸⁸ See also hooks, 2009

neoliberalism. As a result, his strategy has been not to leave the area, but to celebrate it. Further, because of this dedication to place, his empathetic response to similar struggles with poverty in urban communities has a profound limitation at the edge of his experience; how *does* one survive where there is no expanse of nature/commons to rely on as an alternative economic and spiritual system?

Yet Luke does not suggest that subsistence living is the answer to exploitative capitalism. To be sure, we are born into this system and cannot escape it because it is the structure of our society. Rather, Luke's example is to bend capitalism to serve his own needs sufficient to minimize Leiden and maximize his time away from work; or as Marx frames it, time he spends "at home" where he "feels himself" and is again whole (p. 326).

Indeed, as a small business owner, Luke is able not only to minimize the extent of abuse he is subject to – and thus exercise a *bit* of control over his alienation – but by adopting neoliberal language as an "entrepreneur," he also locates himself in a relatively safe and powerful position. By definition his chosen work is physically demanding and clearly not lazy (not giving up), and without a boss he alone owns and profits from his work – imperfect logic perhaps but a far more desirable experience than that of the previous narrative. Yet the masterpiece here is that in a right-to-work state like Virginia, as an "entrepreneur" he is automatically protected by political and social norms designed to defend the very forms of exploitation he is reacting against.

Given that his workplace is outside, he has also ensured a profound connection to the natural world. As the opening quote by Marx states, people are intrinsically part of nature, and by commodifying their own creative efforts, estranged labor "*estranges man from his own body, from nature as it exists outside him, from his spiritual essence, his human essence [Wesen].*"

Further, not only is a connection to nature an attempt to retain *Wesen*, but subsistence through stewardship of the land is a central historical and cultural theme in Appalachia. Thus, if both the land and skills to work *with* it are practiced and protected, subsistence will remain possible and the community and cultural pride that seems under threat will remain available into the future as well. To be sure, pride, skills, work, and land have underwritten generations of Appalachian survival.

While Luke calls himself an entrepreneur, he also shares that his greatest fears are that “development isn’t always for the good.” Moreover, as becomes clear, the harm referenced here is destruction of nature, the commons through which people can access it, and the respectful connection of care amongst the population, all of which is directly opposed by neoliberalism. Simply put, one can provide a safe home and community for friends, family, and neighbors alike if access to land is protected from outside economic, social, and political forces. Luke illuminates the freedom possible – even if limited within a capitalist system – if we re-imagine work not as the equivalent of labor (alienated by definition), but as creation *with* nature to meet needs (physical *and* spiritual) through a shared commons. In other words, hard work can also meet needs outside of capitalist oppression.

As a result, land able to provide hunting and fishing grounds, supply fruit and vegetable crops, and support livestock is not just about food; it is also about spiritual/human existence. hooks (2012) describes this as an experience with nature:

“There dominator culture (the system of imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy) could not wield absolute power. For in that world nature was more powerful. Nothing and no one could completely control nature. In childhood I experienced a connection between an unspoiled natural world and the human desire for freedom” (p 8).

Not only then is nature a means of living free from capitalism's oppression, but also it is a place where one can experience a broader freedom and connection to a power greater than the many oppressions orchestrated by human beings. Nature is thus spiritual.

Thus, Luke attempts to retain *Wesen* both through hard work derived dignity, but also the species-being/creation that Marx describes. The "home" noted by Marx and hooks is that which Luke has tried to carve out for himself – a sheltered place in which he (and his neighbors) can be himself for himself within the safety of a well-connected community. Where the first narrative only hinted at family as home, but largely consisted of mapping threats and surviving (constructing "hard work") long enough to create a life-sustaining strategy, this narrative describes a survival strategy that also builds and protects "home." Further, for him these are very present concerns about the ability to protect the natural world, one's quality of life, and self-reliance it provides.

Given that Luke has been working toward this idea of home for over a decade, his description of his "hard work" strategy to survive oppression is interwoven with his discussions of home. Unlike the previous narrative, here we begin with a presumption of the forms of alienation and oppression seen in Mark's narrative. Rather than describing Leiden, Luke relates his place-situated modes of survival and describes home; thus, location is critically important to him. This formulation of home is designed to retain *Wesen* through both creative and protective means, while fully grounded in familiar cultural norms. Though not altogether unique as a strategy, this is one individual's unique perspective. While I begin here with Luke's framing of work, readers should particularly focus on the metaphor of nature as a macro-system that includes people, community, and the broader natural world as a self-sustaining unit.

I: Situated Work

As in Mark's narrative, here hard work is again a veiled strategy of defiance signaling a refusal to submit to dehumanization, rather than a "bootstraps" endorsement of the American Dream. Indeed, as we see in Luke's critique of laziness, being a hard worker means that one has not given up but is still fighting to retain dignity. In fact, Luke describes his "entrepreneurship" as the very vehicle through which he maximizes his resistance; he has no boss to exploit him. Though less overt here, there is still certainly a "boss" in those who employ him. While he frames it as his choice, grounded in his sense of self, he has not in fact escaped alienation when working the same extreme hours, but rather insulated himself from the kind of overt abuses Mark described.

In the following quote Luke describes how hard work is the antidote to giving up on dignity and accepting oppression through laziness. From his perspective some of progress is about competitive consumerism and entitlement – privilege as he defines it – which breeds laziness-submission as threat to resisting oppression. This "outdated way of thinking" redeploys the language of hard work as a strategy to retain pride/dignity and a resistant spirit, even generations after Americans moved to metropolitan areas and away from rural life. Indeed, from this perspective referring to someone as a "worthless" worker is both a slight and recognition that they have surrendered Wesen to alienation.

I've owned my own company since I was 19 years old and... I've dealt with some of the hardest workers I've ever met and I've dealt with some of the most worthless workers I've ever met, ya know... Explaining to people that they have to show up to their job

every day at the same time... seems a bit silly at times, but I can't tell you how many times I've had to do it.

Ya know, I work 40, 50, 60, 70, 80 hours a week sometimes and that's just how I was raised and there's a lot of people in this area who, ya know, have a good work ethic... And I think, ya know, that is a positive aspect of where we are, ya know... it's a ... majority I would say, working class in this area, ya know... And as a whole I would say part of that um, not the close-mindedness is not a good thing, but part of that... outdated way of thinking has some positive aspects too in that, ya know, there is a lot of people out there that believe you got to work for what you got and that is deep in this area.

Luke's argument for hard work sets a culturally salient standard of resistance through dignity. Additionally, in the following quote he extends this to suggest that education and "advances in their lives, in their knowledge" are part of creating a home, but that dignity that can be gained through investments in ourselves which must be fought for as well. Before offering further cautions about giving up to laziness, Luke both speaks to the conditioning to stay busy as a personality trait, while again suggesting that while it was "how I was raised," maybe this is not a result of location after all.

Um ya know, I think there's a lot of people in this – in the Appalachia... that are willing to take initiative and ya know, the resources part is great here for providing people the education to, ya know, really make major advances in their lives, in their knowledge. However, ya know, I'm of the mindset that if you want it, you can get it, you just have to

go after it. I mean, you can't just sit idly by and wait for things to happen.

And ya know, my personal situation has been very much that, ya know, I just, I – I can't sit idly by. I – I've got to be doing something all the time and that's just my personality, and I don't know that – that really has much to do with what where I was brought up, ya know, or not... but at this point that's who I am and that's what I do. Does that make sense?

Consequences of giving up/submitting

In the following segment, Luke begins by offering a definition of privilege that echoes Mark's earlier critique of his bosses. Further, Luke explains that giving up can be embracing the stereotype of (entitled) poverty as a result of laziness, and/or allowing fear or shame to reduce one to a consumer. In short, a person cannot just settle for what is relegated to them, but rather must strive for a human existence. For Luke, retaining dignity and pride requires operating “outside of the box” and enjoying freedom of choice both at work and in activities that bolster his connection to the natural world. Moreover, the natural world offers a freedom of spirit not dampened by 40 hours a week of alienation and fear. Luke closes this caution with a reiteration that most people in the valley are hard working people with a commitment to fairness and family.

...I haven't lived what I would consider privilege. I mean I would, ya know, like to be able to be in my pajamas till 10 o'clock in the morning and go play golf in the afternoon and then come home and, ya know, start having my chef make dinner for me. That would

be privileged in my eyes, but that's not going to happen today...

...some of the forward thinkingness of our society... kind of puts hard work out of the picture. You don't... ya know, they're just like oh this is what I... where I want to end up and, ya know, along the way I'm going to play video games every day. Ya know, I didn't do that, I had to work for what I got. Mom, ya know, was – at the end of high school it was like ... well I think you're going to go get a job and go get a place to live, and I was like, alright then...

I found some of the hardest workers, ya know, great people that, that you would want to have. And most of them haven't worked for me... most of them are my friends that are, ya know, entrepreneurs of their own sort.... (and) have some sort of outside interest from their regular job... They're not... ya know, they're always looking to do something and not just settling for whatever comes along.

There aren't that many people in this area that see outside of their own little box, ya know... They're worried about, I got to work my 40 this week and get my paycheck and, ya know, this is where I'm going to get to. That's the majority of the population from what I can see, ya know... There is many cases of 30, 40 year olds that are still living at home with their parents, ya know... And everybody has got to do what they got to do... A lot of those people aren't supporting what they've got to do to survive, they're just kind of coasting by, um ya know?

But as a whole, I would say the majority of the people in the valley and in this area that I know are hard working, ya know, good willed people that have the right intentions... they work hard to support their family, and the work ethic as a whole in this area, ya know, I think is better than a lot of areas. Ya know, there is still going to be troubles with “kids these days,” haha.

Here Luke has further described hard working as connected to goodness and a sense of honor and mutual responsibility. Before turning to the context of values from which hard work emanates, Luke offers his thoughts on moving from being a hard worker to getting work itself; the difference between help finding work versus good ol’ boy networks seems clear, and yet not easily stated. As a communal support strategy, Luke makes it clear that reputation and mutual assistance are keys to getting work and are ultimately necessary. Luke struggles to find language, but ultimately defines solidarity against/through capitalism at the individual level versus system/policy-level corruption, in short, individual actions v/s system structure. Note that he repeats “good ol’ boy networking initially as I had stated it in the question, but then immediately restates it in his own terms.

Definitely a lot of good old boy networking. I mean... I guess I’m sort of involved in that network of the good old boy kind of thing because I do business with, like one of my... biggest helpers along the way as far as, ya know, getting me jobs and keeping the working relationship going is, ya know, my insurance agent who, we were in boys scouts together. So we go way, way back. And, ya know, he looks out for me and I look out for him. and that relationship works out really well. ya know

[But] that's on a different level...Corruption... is what that can end up leading to...Or conflict of interests, sort of things, there's a significant difference... ya know, when you get into county and city and state government things like that, the good old boy network is, ya know, a politician... gets, ya know, millions and millions of dollars worth-a government work for his buddy from childhood which at times could be harmless, ya know... but there's a lot of times I think that it doesn't work out that way.

Maybe, ya know, they are looking out for one another, but... when you are in the public sector you are not just... It's not just about you and the other person involved. You are a representative of a broad spectrum of folks and you're sometimes, they would be sometimes voicing the opinion of the public.

As Luke describes, the difference between his gaining work through his network is that of scale and speaking for others. Important here is his sense of honor and responsibility to the community he is part of and accountable to, in contrast to the exploitation and lack of either in the service of injustice.

In my personal dealings, ya know, ...at the end of the day when I go to sleep at night – I'm not doing anything shady or sketchy in my networking ... But ya know, when you have someone else out there that's getting paid by tax payer dollars as a representative to make decisions like that and use their networking, you know, ...they are not spending their own money, they are spending the public's money usually... You can't help but

wonder, well ya know... How on the up and up are they really. ...the decisions they make impact a broader, much broader spectrum of people, I guess, and that's how I look at it.

Building home

As the Appalachian literature states (see Edwards et al., 2006 and Jones & Brunner, 1994) and Luke describes below, hard work, honor, accountability, and mutual responsibility are drawn from community values, and heavily influenced by local Christian church teaching. Further, these are historical and cultural norms which ground work in these values and offer safety in community. Yet again Luke cautions us about progress bringing with it consumerism that promotes laziness as submission to capitalism and alienation.

Well I think some of the values here there is lot of, church is pretty deep in the history of the Valley... the church community has usually a pretty tight knit community and, ya know, they help one another sometimes, and most of the time for the good, and that's the idea. So some of those values I would say come from that environment, church⁸⁹. Ya know, you do right by other people and they'll do right by you, and you've got to work hard to get what you want, and, ya know, if you believe...

I personally, I'm a believer in karma and I feel like what you put out there, good... ya know, can only bring you good. What you put out there bad, more than likely is going to bring you bad. One way or another it's going to come back to you, and in a small community that sort of thing seems to happen in a more rapid pace because everybody

⁸⁹ The Protestant Work Ethic is notable here

knows everything. And you can't get away with so much for, for so long, ya know...

And I think the values, ya know, that personally that were instilled in me seemed to be pretty common across the board, at least with my generation and the generations before. I think some of the younger generations now are kind of, ya know, more technologically advanced... But, ya know, some of that I think leads to laziness, ya know...

While technological and economic progress might provide us with the newest must-have gadgets, Luke suggests that they are distractions from the pain of Leiden and designed to make place and connected community unimportant. Consumerism focuses us on things rather than people and makes it easy to just go buy it already produced – ideally on credit so you are even more beholden – rather than work for it and value the hand craftedness of your *creation*. In the contrasting memories of youth, Luke demonstrates the leveraging of teenage angst into disconnection where there is “nothing to do” and connection seems nosy. Perhaps most significant, Luke describes oppression as weather and the protection offered in the valley – with its beautiful landscape and history – as shelter, as home.

Ya know, when you are young you're like, oh this place is boring there is nothing to do, ...it's all, ya know, you got to work, there's no fun ...in this little podunk town... everybody knows your business or thinks they know your business... you can't really get away with much....

But now that I'm older I can appreciate that sense of community I see why that works and

why that's a good thing.... I look back and I'm like wow that was really silly and close-minded of me, but I was young – that's what kids do. And now I can't imagine, I mean we have an awesome like microclimate almost in the [Shenandoah] Valley, you know, and kind of protected from some of nature's crazy things. Um, ya know, the Valley⁹⁰ is a cool place; it's got the most beautiful history and landscape that you'll find.

Clearly the importance of place is clear in the preceding quote, but Luke's home is particularly created around family and friends. This corresponds to the value of connection personally and historically, where a shared bond of love and belonging unites family, friends, and community into a source of dignity. Moreover, this connection is a direct response to the neoliberal erosion of community in favor of individualism and privatization. The following quote from the narrative frames the cultural value of community as a critical part of an extended family; this is where the spiritual element of Wesen coalesces in this home-place. Not only is family important to him, but that structure is important to the area more generally:

"...a lot of focus in this area I think is put on family and closely knit family structure, Um, Ya know. I think it's extremely important that part of our area...

⁹⁰“The Valley” is the local description of the Shenandoah Valley, which passes through the eastern two-thirds of Augusta County. The central area of “the Valley” is where the two cities are – one, Staunton, the White collar county seat vast, and the other, Waynesboro, the blue collar (former) factory town. Therefore, the economic and political centers are in this central zone and are connected by the interstate system that provides access north and south through, and east out of, the Valley. As a result, “the Valley” also suggests a place at least in proximity to these small cities. By degree then, this phrase contrasts to the portions of the Valley that are remote (usually higher elevation) and the third of the county comprised of narrow system of ridges and valleys to the west.

So easy and normal is this bond that knowing me as a member of the community⁹¹, the associated affinity supersedes the distance created by an interview setting. This shift becomes clear when Luke notes that he has moved beyond a response to the initial (interview) question and into the space of chatting with a friend or neighbor. Additionally, at the end of the first paragraph below, Luke describes what young people “put their parents through” as a transition back to speaking of community norms. This suggests that part of the community’s role is to act as a family by keeping a watchful eye on the “kids” (and neighbors more generally) as Luke previously described. Further, the community norms of culture become a normative tool to guide young people away from the worst of consumerism and alienation. This further illustrates that retention of Wesen is important here not just for the worker and/or his family, but for the entire community; if permitted, alienation is collectively produced, one individual at a time. In short, here we glimpse Luke’s idea of what “home” should do.

Ya know, family is important. I feel like, that the older I get, ya know, the deeper that is with me. Um, ya know, especially now that I have my own child, I feel a different type of love and bond that I never understood before. I love my mom, but I didn’t know what it was like to love someone that you actually produced. So going back to things coming full circle, you kind of understand what you put your parents through and it’s kinda like, aw crap I kinda feel bad about that now because they really did love me.

Ya know, there is a lot of way back generations of families in this area that, ya know, still have family, huge family reunions, ya know... I mean that thing is, that sort of thing is

⁹¹ While in some settings, particularly during a period of participant observation, I was clearly a former insider, here the context has changed from observation to conversation; I am “in.”

not as common anymore as it used to be but it still happens, ya know... that kind of thing is cool to me.

What exactly were we talking about? I told six other stories that had nothing to do with your initial question... glad we got all that covered. Now you know. Haha.

Following his discussion of family, Luke gives another example of the home he values and builds in his community, when he describes his response to different views. Particularly when Luke says that the “great thing about being human” is self-determination, it is clear that he sees a correlation between freedom from a boss at work, and a freedom of spirit in life. Luke himself values open mindedness and mutual respect and has realized a community that does so as well.

... as far as other values that, I'm not personally deeply religious... I accept the church and the people that feel like that's their path and that's what they want to do. I don't, ya know, judge them or condemn them for that, ya know... I feel like that's the great thing about being human is you can kinda decide for yourself who you want to be or what you want to make your path in life and – and I feel that most of my friends would say the same thing, ya know... The people I'm around feel very similarly to that.

As suggested earlier when Luke first noted his entrepreneurial friends, this specific community of friends that he has found deeply values a life outside of work. For them, fun isn't experienced in isolation with TV or video games, but outside together. Not only is this for

enjoyment and camaraderie, however; celebrating the means through which needs are met *outside* of capitalism is resistance. Particularly with respect to hunting and fishing, practicing these life sustaining skills continues the heritage and traditions of family while working *with* the land and stewarding natural resources. As if noting lessons that he missed as young man and others still do not see, Luke offers suggestions for the “good clean fun” he enjoys in community of friends now.

I guess on the lighter side, ya know, there's a lot of people, ya know, my friends specifically like to have fun. Now their idea of fun is not going and playing a video game or watching TV. It's, ya know, going out, ya know, and hitting the lake and, ya know, going fishing or something like that. And ya know that kind of thing... Ya know, kind of goes back to appreciation... appreciation of just the area we're in and the resources we have; the mountains, the lakes, the rivers the, ya know, all that sort of stuff that's here for us to... hopefully preserve, and also take advantage of. And there's a lot of good clean fun and, and things to see and things to do in this area that when I was younger I didn't really see as that much of an advantage.

I couldn't imagine, ya know, any other way... That what's fun for me is going, ya know, I love to hunt, I love to fish, ya know, that sort of thing is almost heritage for me. I grew up in the woods and hunting and fishing and all that sort of stuff, and ya know, generations of my family are hunters and fishermen, I mean... and that kind of runs pretty deep with me... And – and my friends are mostly of the same mindset, ya know... They want to go be outside and enjoy what we have here to offer, ya know... And some of

that, ya know, can cost money, but there is a lot to do here that's just free... that we have to take advantage of and, um not everyone sees that.

Privilege? A White male experience and view of oppression

While often the term privilege is used to describe the advantages some receive from systems of oppression, because it emanates from the dualistic oppressor/oppressed frame of identity politics, this term dramatically over-simplifies. Previously Luke has described what privilege means to him, and here he expands on this in ways that embrace complexity and offer empathy, solidarity even. Clear that he doesn't know – and won't speak for – the urban experience of poverty⁹², he is also clear that he has compassion for that struggle. Far less clear than political rhetoric, Luke describes poverty in his area that “doesn't look like poverty.” Continuing, he suggests that a family might use food stamps, but they provide for themselves while maintaining dignity, and so they are fine – wealthy even. Given his previous statements about the importance of retaining Wesen through a relationship to the land and community, his inability to imagine a city environment without access to wide expanses of land is understandable; that is his entire strategy. Indeed this resonates strongly with the experiences of urban Appalachians who struggle to find a new mode of survival away from rural spaces⁹³.

Critically, here Luke says that growing up White and male in this particular setting makes him lucky, but that he wouldn't define himself as privileged. Privilege in his mind is clearly about wealth which insulates from oppression and Leiden. In fact, this echoes Marx:

...because in their [worker's] emancipation is contained universal human emancipation.

⁹² While his language adopts the dominant narrative created by White supremacist stereotypes that construct poverty as the “broken” poor communities of color, his meaning is antithetical to this political agenda.

⁹³ See hooks (2009), Jennings (1998), Kurtzman et al. (2012), and Russ (2010).

The reason for this universality is that the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are nothing but modifications and consequences of this relation.” (1992, p. 333)

While it rightly makes those of us committed to equity and justice uneasy to engage in any type of ranking or “oppression Olympics,” the point here is that while each system is intimately linked to the others, the primary foundation of oppression is capitalism⁹⁴. Indeed, this is precisely the common ground upon which the Young Patriots (urban Appalachians) joined with the Young Lords and Black Panther Party as a Rainbow Coalition in the 1960s; their project was to ease oppression through child and health care, education, and physical improvement of the community. Indeed, wealth *does* insulate from oppression.

From this perspective then, he might be lucky that he has social capital, but his widowed mother struggled to provide him a bit of the access he associates with privilege. Plainly stated, the context in which he is a White male hardly offers him a life of ease. This is a critical insight with regard to the language of privileged identity politics, as that view of privilege only works when a simplified checklist of identity takes precedence over an inherently more complicated intersectionally understood experience. For example, if the social constructions of race and gender are not static – meaning that we are not simply Black or White, male or female, but are defined as such relative to others similarly grouped – then “privilege” itself is contextually relative. In contrast, Luke is compassionate, complicated in his understanding, reflexive, and honest about his relative privilege over peers.

⁹⁴ Consider the historical roots of White supremacy in the United States, as a wedge between the growing population of servants meant to protect planter-elites’ feudalistic structure from rebellion.

What it's like to be a White male... Yeah I mean I see, since I've been here all my life I haven't experienced – ya know, you don't experience until you live in something, ya know... If you lived in like the ghetto in a big city and poverty everywhere, and bums on every corner, ya know, you live that life so you understand it a little more. I can be compassionate towards that sort of thing, and I do, I hate to see that sort of thing, but there just wasn't...

There is plenty of poor people here in our area, but they don't always act poor. You don't necessarily know they're poor, ya know, some people's idea of poor and rich is very, very different than others. Ya know, I have a family, my family is happy, healthy and we may have to use food stamps but we eat every week, ya know... some people may see that as being wealthy. And, ya know, in some aspects it is, but as far as, ya know, my experiences growing up in here as White male I feel like I was, am lucky. I wouldn't define myself as privileged.

I mean, I have been privileged, my mom provided a lot of things for me to be involved in... that not every kid got to because their parents couldn't afford it, ya know... And I appreciate that much more now as a grown up that I'm having to pay for and do these things for my own daughter and I'm like oh okay now this makes sense – how hard this really can be, ya know...

So... but as far as being a White male growing up, um, ya know, we are definitely primarily a White society, our school was majorly White populations. ...when you grow

up in that environment that's what you know. I wasn't, ya know, opposed to Black people or Hispanic people or anything like that in our schools, matter of fact, I was friends with the couple that went to our school, but it wasn't, ya know, there is a lot of close-mindedness towards that sort of thing, especially back then... I'm not the general population; I look at things a lot differently.

In the following he explains further what he means by not looking at things the same way – he follows his mother's lesson that as long as they earn it, he should respect others. This not only reflects the "Golden Rule" of Christian tradition; it also is a means to build and maintain the protection afforded as members of a community. This is very much in line with Luke's discussion of privilege, as well as his frustration with the bigotry that destroys community and ultimately also compromises collective safety. As Luke makes clear, this is no post-racial utopia, yet it does offer value insight into how coalitions are – and can be – formed in such a community. Notably, Luke ends his thought by again linking the protection of nature (our collective home) with human equity and community.

I have, ya know, a lot of homosexual customers and, ya know, some people are weird about that sort of thing, a lot of people are close-minded and weird about that sort of thing around here. I'm not, but I was raised in a sense that, ya know, you give everybody a chance... Until they give you a reason not to... But there is a tremendous amount of close-mindedness in this area, I mean people just don't... and that kind of goes back to it takes several years for things to work their way across the country – like, recycling and green technology and things like that, ya know...

Boundary work in the borderlands

Having raised the issue of how ideas travel geographically in response to various forces, I asked him about what he saw as differences across geographic space in the county. Luke begins with stereotype formed partly from his own experiences, which also illuminates some of the factors that might heighten the anger of young men experiencing economic futility. Luke then quickly suggests that this may be unfair and then explains why.

While there are powerful stereotypes here, perhaps what is most salient is that this segment of the narratives provides a description of the social boundaries constructed along this Appalachian border. While Augusta County is entirely surrounded to the south and west by politically Appalachian counties (which were once part of Augusta), the social border separates the Shenandoah Valley from the increasingly smaller, more remote valleys to the west. In the following, we see Luke describe a hillbilly-land less than ten miles “up the valley” (the road follows a river along the valley floor) from where he himself lives. Clearly, this is not about geography, but rather once again strategically making a claim to Wesen and insulating himself from oppression.

Yeah, well I feel like there are slight differences... I think the Craigsville, and kind of Deerfield areas⁹⁵ are certainly one of the more close-minded, not tolerant of... outside of comfortability, um... Areas there are... and that may just be my personal opinion. I'm sure there is plenty of people in Craigsville that would be offended to hear me say that...

⁹⁵ Very remote (and overtly more culturally Appalachian) communities in separate valleys in the western portion of the county, where the (market) economy is essentially dead except for the state prison, Dollar General, and the local grocery and those who can drive an hour or more to work in the Shenandoah Valley to the east.

but I would say that most of 'em would probably just whip my ass. And that's the – and that's the mindset... it's like yeah, I'd rather just beat you up than try to negotiate with you about something... You're Black, you're not cool, er whatever... I've been in prison 17 times, what are you going to do?

So, you know, that's – and that may be very close-minded of me come to think of it, for me to look at it like that. Um, but you know, just from my experiences growing up, most of the young people I dealt with were a little rougher around the edges from that sort of environment. So... that's what I have to go on.

In the preceding Luke attempts to create separation between characterizations of “mountain men” and the hard working farmer, who it seems does sustaining work “to live” through honor, in order to claim an honorable agrarian Appalachian self. In contrast, the convict – who he notably seems to assume is White – is perhaps simply too wild and lazy to do work, but would rather steal the means provided. This may perhaps also be based on the unfortunate side effects of the “War on Poverty”-derived stereotype that Appalachians have already relinquished dignity to political power in the form of public assistance and are “on the dole.” The only counterpoint offered is of Mennonites near the rural, yet factory (relatively middle class) town of Stuarts Draft, who are “better people” through a greater connection and dedication to stewardship of the land. Ultimately however, it seems to Luke that everyone in the area is struggling together as “country folks” and doing the best with what they are able to provide.

And I – I can see, you know, my... where I grew up, you know, it was more... I guess out

there it was kind of like more mountain man kind of mentality, and where I grew up was more farm kinda, sustaining work to live seeming mentality, um...

You know, in Stuarts Draft I really didn't see much difference in that, other than, ya know, maybe a little more of the Mennonite community there, which you know, tends to be a little... better people, you know... People that want to do right by the land sort of thing, you know, a lot more often, um...

But outside of that, you know, I didn't really see much differences in any of 'em. We're all country folks so to speak, and you know, it's – it's not a... We're all experiencing similar things with havin' to work for what you got and, you know... trying to find what – whatever it is to keep you occupied...sometimes good and sometimes bad.

Further, having provided a case-study in boundary work, Luke offers an even better understanding of where the material used to construct those stereotypes comes from as he explores his memories of a former schoolmate. This is further evidence of his self-aware/reflexive and honest desire to understand how inequity is constructed and perpetuated through partial experiences, in order to be used as a tool for every future context. Here we see examples of how received messages that dehumanize an already oppressed group become the easy justification for further ridicule. However, we also see how thin a veneer that is as Luke begins to think – not as a school mate, but as an adult – about what Lonnie's life may have been like to have made this child act out in ways that were then subsumed in stereotypes. Certainly his commitment to respecting others until they break the community trust is evident as he comes

to empathize with this person that his youthful memories characterize as dangerous.

*Lonnie Hicks**

Haha, he is like the epitome of Craigsville. Yeah, I have so many experiences to form an opinion on. So that, kinda is where that opinion is formed – from him. There are few others just like him, but he is pretty memorable. I can't imagine whether he ended up being an axe-murderer or he lives out in some cabin in the middle of nowhere and he... Or maybe he is like a businessman on Wall Street you can never know. I'm highly doubtful... but you never do know...

Notable at the end of this statement is Luke's early suggestion that either Lonnie became a complete failure (socially and economically at a minimum) and descended into a hillbilly horror movie script, or succeeded as a businessman on Wall Street. Clearly, in 2012 when this interview was conducted, Wall Street was as respected a monster as any axe murderer. Further, it is clear in the rest of his narrative that Luke is anything but a fan of Wall Street; but perhaps this is the point. The 12-year-old's memories of Lonnie suggest that as an adult he may well have become one or the other kind of monster, and stereotypes of vicious hillbillies offer plenty of support for his theory, no matter the accuracy. However, the adult in Luke begins to take over and think of Lonnie as another 12-year-old boy navigating an extremely poor home where it was consistently rumored he faced abuse.

I – I try harder and harder as I get older not to pass judgment on people. And ah, because it – because it sometimes, that sort of thing comes back to bite you – and the

older I get the more I understand that and, ya know, like oh I shouldn't have passed judgment. Ahm, but yeah, he definitely comes to mind when I think of the more close-minded type – not tolerant of those of different beliefs or views and he was ahm rough around the edges. So, yeah.

I think about him randomly every now and then like when I drive through Craigsville or something... I'd be like, I wonder, just... I would love to know, like what happened to him... And I've never run into anybody that really knows him. However, er well he hasn't come up in conversation with people that I remember from that time period.

Yeah that's a hard name to forget because he was an interesting fella, I mean he was a troublemaker, but I think there was something more to him than that.... he was not a happy camper... and that sucks to have-ta, and he didn't choose that life for himself, he was just a kid. I mean, and that's... you're a product of your raising. ...And if you get your ass kicked every day... chances are, that's how you're going to end up..., or you going to be angry all the time. Yeah, or well, I'm going to kick your ass... that's anywhere, that's not just specific to here.

Coming back to what he values and hopes community can provide, Luke offers a contrast with city life again; this time a goal stated as a cultural (stereotype) fact little different than that popular in country music⁹⁶.

⁹⁶ As an example see the classic “Country Folks Can Survive” by Hank Williams Jr.

Um, ya know, because it's a smaller tight knit community... I think people know more about one another's business... that sorta thing gets lost in a big city... you know, you can live a lifetime of having an abusive husband and nobody will ever know about it outside of your own little circle. And if you don't tell anybody nobody will know. Which a lot of times happens. And, you know, so I can see... you know, that's obviously not just this area but, you know, it's... yeah it's crazy to think what that fella may have ended up doin'.

Having referenced being lost or anonymous in a city, I asked Luke about the consistency of this mutual protection function of community. Particularly in reference to the western part of the county – but inclusive of smaller, more rural communities throughout – Luke concluded that this self-protective curiosity is indeed consistent.

Oh yeah, they wanna know whatch're doing if you're not... Who are you? Where you're from? Why are you here and, what do you – why are you talking to me? No it-it depends... it happens... I mean I'll go in the store in Vesuvius down there, ya know, um Gertie's Country Store, and have lunch sometimes... everybody knows me down there, ya know.

So I'll sit there and if somebody comes in, I usually know if they're not from around... and that's an area specifically where a lot of people pass through, that are tourists from the (Blue Ridge) Parkway. So, you know, I can't help but ask. 'Cause I'm always curious, 'cause ya never know... and so... Ya know, there's definitely plenty of that going

on there, 'cause the regulars that have lunch in there everyday'll be like, who... where are y'all from? And ya know, what are you doing here? So it-it does happen quite regularly... just like in any other areas but...

Community as strategy for protection

Thus, having described the experiences of oppression, strategies of survival, the importance of community to retaining dignity, and the suggestion that a tight-knit community is a defensive strategy; the question emerges; what is the threat? As Luke has already foreshadowed, those “bad things” of development unavoidably seem to “trickle over the mountain,” as he states in the following quote. Alienated labor is where it begins, but in neoliberal American, the exploitation of resources and people possible when one has considerable relative wealth over their neighbors promises ever-greater inequity. For a culture filled with descendants of servants and colonized indigenous people, increasing servitude in the form of consumption, credit, and alienated labor in order to ship profit out of their communities while land values are driven up, it should indeed feel like exploitation bordering on invasion⁹⁷.

So I see it as, most of this area is, ya know, what I would call lower middle class, ya know, there is not a whole lot of high paying jobs, there is not a tremendous amount of big money/ industry in this area. ... there are people that make, ya know, I guess would be considered upper class... and slowly it seems like a lot of the higher end or upper

⁹⁷ Given the settler-colonialism that produced European arrival in the mountains, this might seem a painful irony, and indeed throughout Appalachian studies there has been a pattern of re-presenting history such that early Appalachian pioneers become the “native” Appalachians. Yet particularly as the Shenandoah Valley was a shared hunting ground on the periphery of various groups’ territory, such a claim is more complicated still. Regardless, this is how Luke described his experience and understanding of his lineage in 2012.

*middle class people from across the mountain and Albemarle County... kind of trickle over the mountain because it's cheaper to live here*⁹⁸.

Ya know, so the, the um, environment is changing in that sense a little bit as far as the population, ya know... I run into people quite regularly that are from Charlottesville that live over here now and just commute to work because it's cheaper to live over here, ya know...

II: Alienation's refuge – the place where community and nature meet

To understand Luke's use of place in constructing nature as a home for community that must be protected, we must first understand the depth of his relationship to the area. In what follows, we learn more about Luke's background and familial connection to the place where he was raised and to which he feels responsible. Most notable, those deep ties and sense of hope result because family and community needs can be met through a respectful relationship with nature. To be sure this requires significant hard work, yet not only does this provide an escape from the reversal Marx described (see the first page of this narrative), but in concrete terms means that he and his community will not be dependent on – and cannot be destroyed by – (exploitative) capitalism so long as they have the land to provide an alternative. Notably, he suggests that in the city survival is much more tenuous.

⁹⁸ “Across the mountain” is local shorthand for the significantly wealthier Charlottesville area to the East, and never used to indicate anywhere to the west; it suggests money and access. It is understood as outside the mountains and distinctly Southern. Things from Charlottesville are often locally understood to be more sophisticated, yet the people are understood to be conniving, exploitative, and condescending elitists. The University of Virginia is a classic example, with a (learning) hospital that provides sophisticated medical services unavailable in the Valley, but an institution disliked for being elitist.

Well, I was born in Alexandria⁹⁹, lived there till I was about eight months old, really didn't know anything about the area, and my family moved to some family land in Vesuvius... Which is ya know a super small town like 200 people. And the main reason we ended up there was because it was family property and my parents had wanted to move to this area and get out of the city life, and my aunt was getting too old to take care of the property.

...the house that I grew up in, my parents bought in 1980 from my great aunt, with 200 acres of land...my great uncle, he had passed away when they sold that to my mom and dad um, it was getting too much for her to keep up with. Well his parents had actually built that house back in the late 1800s. He had started an iron, what they called the foundry there in Vesuvius. And so my family, that – that Foundry is actually how Vesuvius got named Vesuvius from what I've understood. Because of the smoke coming out of the mountains, the immigrants that moved to the area thought it looked like Mount Vesuvius.

Nonetheless my... great-great uncle, ya know, started in that community. I'm like the fourth generation with the fifth generation in my daughter that's, ya know, been involved on that land and actually got to enjoy it and use it and try to preserve it. Um, ya know, so at this point I'm extremely attached to it... from here on out it's ultimately going to be my responsibility...

⁹⁹ A city just across the Potomac River from Washington D.C. in Virginia, which predates the construction of the capitol. Here this is primarily used to denote that this was Northern Virginia – the (foreign) city.

And that's, ya know, that's kind of that... and my mom, ya know, it's just me and mom pretty much growing up, my dad died when I was three, so she is all I know... So I guess I have her to thank for that, it, ya know, certainly growing up in that kind of an area... that's the only home I know, yeah so I didn't have a whole lot of experiences outside of that... And well obviously being in that kind of an area, farming was pretty common so that was one of the first things I did as far as working. So I think that gave me an appreciation for what it took to make a dollar when you work that way, ya know...

I spent most of my time outside whether it be in the woods or on the farm or doing stuff like that and so I think that's had a huge effect on, ya know, who I'm and why I do what I do now and, ya know, the – the community kind of setting I grew up in.

I feel like, the Shenandoah Valley as a whole is my home and I'm out to protect it just and feel as connected to it as I could be – anything I think. And I feel like there's a lot of people that feel that way.

Thus, while this home is valuable monetarily, what matters is the personal connection not only to his family, but to the history of the community as well. The home he seeks to protect is the place of his childhood and primary connections, the place where he can bask in his mother's legacy and his father's spirit. This is where Luke's existence – his entire physical, spiritual, self – connects to his community and land/nature. In the following, note the switching between the beauty of nature and of community; it seems clear that to Luke, there is little distance between

them.

You know, we're a very narrow valley, so it kind of forces us to be a tight knit community... as compared to major metropolitan areas... I think there is a lot of value in that... People come through the valley all the time and they're like wow this is so amazing, we've never seen anything like this.

Um, ya know, and you take that for granted a lot of times because you don't, you can't really see the forest for the trees so to speak 'cause you're here – here in the midst of – midst of your hustle and bustle of everyday life and you don't – you don't think outside the box every day, all the time and how lucky you really are to have, ya know, this surrounding.

So, you know, I do feel a connection to more than just our family land, I... and feel like a lot of other people... I know a lot of other people do. Yeah, that's home... and it's something that... Nature is something that is very hard to recreate you know, this – this is like creeks and waterfalls and lakes and oceans and all that stuff, you know, has been here... before time... I – I mean you can't, I can't... I can't wrap my brain around millions of years, you know...

So to me that's something much bigger than I am and – and very, very deep like respect for that it is like wow, how – how this was created and then, you know, how long its withstood – withstood the test of time is pretty impressive to me. An' – and all the more

drives the point home that we need to do everything we can do to preserve what we've got...

While clearly Luke is speaking to the breadth and age of the ancient mountains that have surrounded him his entire life, he is also speaking of the community that “was created” in part by his family generations ago. This sense of responsibility, not just to his ancestors and community but also to the place in and with which they have all made life possible, is clear in the following as well.

....I'm of the mindset that they're not making any more. They're not making any more green space, they're not making any more wide open lakes and ponds and rivers and, ya know it's valuable, and it's only becoming more and more so. My personal connection growing up being in the woods and being outdoors and playing in the creeks and catching snakes and craw fish and frogs and all that sort of stuff...

...I can see a connection to anything like that but it's usually tied in with an experience that's memorable. You know, you've gone somewhere with someone and done this thing and so then you have a connection to... a connection is developed there partially because of the experience not just because of the land.

...we have Appalachian trail which countless people have hiked and, you know, had amazing experiences and memories and things like that through... You know, we have a lot of really beautiful protected national forest land that I hope always stays protected... I

think part of living here is accepting that as part of, you know, what – what this area is all about... there's not many places like that on earth.

Certainly Luke has provided us with a picture of how the natural surrounding, the particular socio-geographic location¹⁰⁰, and the community's inter-personal bonds provide a unique home – in both a literal and Marxian sense – that he deems critical to protect. In the following, Luke elaborates on this protection theme by connecting back to a previously stated concern about the impact of consumerism; exploitation of nature and people is corrosive and degrades everything. Borrowing Luke's language of nature, it is as if mansions are an invasive species (in his home), threatening to choke out the delicate balance that has provided survival for so many. Now a father, Luke has seen that home and refuge already eroded and fears that his might be the last generation to know its (relative) protection.

And so that's kind of come full circle for me in my life it's like okay, alright this is, I don't want to live in a neighborhood, and I don't like stoplights, I don't... (haha) I like cows out in the field next to my house, not a three story mansion.

Ya know, it's, my attachment to land is deep there, but I just think as a whole... they're not making anymore. We've only got so much green space and, ya know, it's a valuable commodity. It's something that is irreplaceable... or ya know very difficult to replace, I mean if you build a freakin' skyscraper, that footprint is probably never going to be

¹⁰⁰ The physical location and all the socially and historically constructed stereotypes, sub-culture, etc. of that particular place – which could be noticeably different than the next community a few miles away.

forest again, you know, that just isn't going to happen, you know...

So one thing I spend a lot of time secretly worrying about is what – what about, you know, 10 generations down the road what are – what are they going to have or not have if we make it to that point, you know...?

I just hope that... as things develop, we develop for the positive, not for the negative.

There is always going to be negativity in growth and development. I hope that it takes a positive spin and, you know, that's certainly something I spend a lot of my time worrying about and I guess that's how I'm connected to the land. (haha)

To be sure, Luke is hardly alone in this conception of people-place as home, as this is a common theme throughout Appalachian experience. Most notably, hooks (2009) and Jones (1994) articulate a similar bond to and between people and place, which describes a physical and spiritual refuge from struggle. Moreover, this meaning and experience of home reflects the situated and synergistic multiple relationships that constitute our lives. That is to say that the family and community relationships that are so profoundly important to Luke are inseparable from – and in fact are part of – a relationship to the physical place in which they were formed and lived. Indeed an intersectional understanding of a person's life should center the individual who is impacted, attempts to make sense of, and responds to the multitude of experiences that comprise life – including the place in which it all takes place. Certainly the crucible of alienated work, and the various stereotypes and exploitations that flow from the history of this place and people has provided ample cause for these to be particularly deep relationships.

Such an experience and understanding of home reflects how Marx (1994) described the place of home where one feels whole (Wesen). It is noteworthy that under capitalist conditions, home and the workplace are mutually exclusive as Wesen can only exist outside of work: “He (the worker) is at home when he is not working, and not at home when he is working. His labor is therefore not voluntary but forced, it is *forced labour*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need but a mere *means* to satisfy needs outside itself” (p. 326). Further,

capital is the objective manifestation of the fact that labour is man lost to himself. But the worker has the misfortune to be a living capital, and hence and capital with needs, which forfeits its interest and hence its existence every moment it is not working.... The worker produces capital and capital produces him, which means that he produces himself; man as a worker, as a commodity, is the product of this entire cycle. (p. 335)

In Luke’s narrative, there is clearly an understanding of the oppressive conditions many experience as alienated work (including all that emanates from such inequity), and yet we also see his attempts to claim his own work (and thus his capital) in strategically “entrepreneurial” ways. Even as he gains a degree of power over his commodified self, Luke also presents a profound focus on maintaining a means of living outside capitalism.

Moreover, Luke’s connection to and reverence for the natural world around him are the manifestations of a relationship of mutual care where he can find solace, fun, and the promise of escape from not only Leiden but the system that creates it through his own creative/productive means. To be sure, there is no escaping neoliberal capitalism in the 21st century, and yet by holding on to and maintaining traditions of the past, Luke not only survives, but thrives. Opening his classic introduction to Appalachian Values, venerated Appalachian native scholar Loyal Jones’s describes well the promise and peril found in such a “both/and” strategy:

We mountain people are the product of our history and the beliefs and outlook of our foreparents. We are a traditional people, and in our rural setting we valued the things of the past. More than most people, we avoided mainstream life and thus became self-reliant. We sought freedom from entanglements and cherished solitude. All of this was both our strength and our undoing. (p. 13)

Truly, as Fisher and Smith (2012) also caution with regard to culture, even the material which gives us hope and fortitude can become problematic if we romanticize it and/or create boundaries rather than supportive community. Indeed, Luke echoes their very sentiments that his home should be protected to nurture future generations with an “extroverted” – or open minded as Luke described it – attitude toward the wider world.

- Narrative 3: Celebrating culture -

“Life begins on the other side of despair.”
— Jean-Paul Sartre

In this final narrative we meet another 32-year-old I will call John*, who grew up in two locations physically closer to the two cities in the county but culturally further away. In particular, the high school he attended serves the majority of the western – and far more remote and, thus, considered more hillbilly/Appalachian¹⁰¹ – portions of the county. As in the previous narrative, here John takes socio-economic oppression as a given and spends the bulk of the conversation describing what is in fact a powerful resistance strategy. Where in Narrative 2 the strategy is to carve out and protect a haven within an oppressive system, here the strategy is to not only live, breathe, and even thrive within an oppressive structure, but to collectively *create* and celebrate an entirely separate cultural/life experience, a parallel world.

By immersing himself in the music and storytelling culture of the region, he has not only been able to create a means of creating income, but connected himself to a long history of community-produced resistance. Indeed, the kind of “home” described in the previous narrative, appears here as part of a complex network of relationships to people and place, connected to ever-larger communities. Individually and collectively, they are all designed to celebrate what is understood to be their history and current positionality. In so doing, individuals collectively push back on oppression together to the point that there comes a separate social and even economic space to navigate. Critically, here we also see in the narrative the kind of extroverted culture that one can take pride in, yet which does not become a boundary to enable isolationism.

¹⁰¹ As evidenced by the previous two narratives

As an example, at one point he describes the height of musical craftsmanship (cultural production) as being able to apply not only one's regional and personal "accent" to a classic song, but to bend it to the point where it *nearly* ceases to be the same. While clearly still connected, this skillful manipulation also creates maximum freedom of expression within the safety of community and belonging. Indeed, to a degree unmatched by any other in my experience, the interview – which I experienced as quite comfortable and warm – from which this narrative is taken, defies structure¹⁰². This approach and practice suggests a mode and experience similar to what bell hooks, in her book *Belonging: A culture of place* (2009), describes as a culture based on anarchy,

Folks who lived in the hills were committed to living free. Hillbilly folk chose to live above the law, believing in the right of each individual to determine the manner in which they would live their lives." Continuing hooks states, "Folks living in the hills believed that freedom meant self-determination. One might live with less, live in a makeshift shack, and yet feel empowered because the habits of being informing daily life were made according to one's own values and beliefs (p. 8).

How much more dignity might that freedom offer if one is able to create that very cultural space? Here, John suggests that the act of creating this musical/cultural space is not just about passing on cultural traditions – rather that is often reductive and fuels harmful stereotypes – but in fact creating a celebrated communal moment apart from the struggle of daily life.

In short, the following narrative is nearly entirely focused on the production and maintenance of Appalachian culture as a strategy to create a space of resistance from oppression. In Marxian terms, here *Wesen* is created to push back on *Leiden* to the point that there is an

¹⁰² I have done my best to impose structure by breaking the narrative up in ways that hopefully aid in reading, yet do not take away from his meaning.

enormous shelter from oppression, complete with community and history – an entire subculture. It is particularly in the creative component – whether music and/or storytelling and oral history made always together and passed on – that a unique freedom is found, precisely because it is collectively created in the moment and cannot be captured. To be sure, John distinguishes bluegrass – in contrast to mountain or old-time music – as having capitalized on this mode of cultural production. Yet as John notes, there is significant cultural connection and transmission even in recordings that are able to share the music that might only happen in person at festivals and music lessons otherwise.

All this is not to suggest that this is resistance only to economic oppression, nor is it a complete separation from the exploitative experience of capitalism; that is hardly the case. No matter the strategy, for as long as it exists, neoliberal capitalism's negative impacts can only be softened. However, having explored the previous two narratives it should be clear that this location within a culture of resistance retains a great deal more dignity and self-determination or authorship. Further, this narrative also more clearly illustrates aspects of how romanticizing a culture can be a resource for resistance and/or for reinforcing stereotypes, grounded in an economic racial history, about Appalachians as primitive. Yet, as John describes, by approaching this project with the great skill that comes from a "professional mindset," one can in fact destroy the stereotype while leveraging the pull of romance and belonging.

In what follows, I will present an introduction that will provide context, including the particular experiences and reflections on oppressions shared by John. Following will be a description of how his Wesen-through-culture is created through his skill and hard work at his craft. Lastly, in his own words, I will present how music – and to a lesser degree – cultural constructions themselves act as both a code or Rosetta Stone to understand and a conduit to

propagate this unique form of resistance. It should be noted that readers may feel that the narrative itself romanticizes aspects of the culture that perhaps should not be revised. I argue that this difference of understanding what is real and/or harmful is also present in related academic discussions, and there seems no conclusive “right” position. Moreover, a revisionary description has a strategic purpose – and this is no exception. Indeed, in this specific context, it is the power to revise and recreate that is here his strength and hope in the face of injustice.

I. Introduction – Background and location

Much as we have seen in the previous narratives, John describes himself first based on where he was born. However, quickly he distances himself from the city in which the hospital was located and connects to the particular (*very* small) communities and area (Shenandoah Valley¹⁰³) in which he was born, raised, and continues to be at home. Notably all this occurs before overtly identifying himself as Southern, suggesting that this is a strategic yet secondary claim.

*Ahm... Born and raised in ah, Waynesboro, Virginia. Ah, or at least born there and then grew up in the Mountain View*¹⁰⁴ area... and then ahm... my dad's family farm up here [west of Staunton]. We moved here... ah I guess my first year-a high school so it's, ya know, 14 or 15..um, an' then pretty much been right here on the hilltop, fer... that's since... I'm 32 now so that's a good long time, yeah.*

¹⁰³ This is particularly interesting as the Shenandoah Valley is not limited to Augusta County, but rather runs north-northeast and south-southwest across most of the state, including the West Virginia panhandle.

¹⁰⁴ Here, a very culturally Appalachian area in the foothills of the mountains, but relatively near town.

And love it here actually... an' prefer to live in the Shenandoah Valley. I travel quite a bit, but... ya know, I, this is where... So I sort of, you know, see how I was raised as very Southern... uh Methodist, [chuckles] ah, not that that really has much to do with anything, but I mean I'm sure it did shape a lot of things¹⁰⁵.

Economics of place: Class, race, and gender in a borderland

In the following, John describes the local economic and social setting and suggests some of the cultural responses to it. As a result we see clearly the strategies various communities have employed to support themselves: the importance of remaining an individual within the bounds of community, and the leveraging of stereotypes between communities that is used by some to position themselves as less of a target for oppression – perhaps even to benefit. This echoes the previous narratives, but also establishes a frame for considering the social and economic context in which his later description of strategy operates through geographic space.

In the following, note his description of the two county seat cities in relation to working class towns and rural, less affluent areas. Particularly the strategic embrace or rejection of the hillbilly stereotype is notable. In later discussion of work, we can see the separation between intellectual and Northern values of work versus physical and Southern values of work; this is a space that he exploits to create his own strategy of culturally important, musical (physical and intellectual) hard work.

¹⁰⁵ While not a focus of this thesis, his humorous claim, rejection, and immediate inclusion of his Methodist experience follows throughout in the constant presence of Christianity; this mirrors the previous narrative in some respects, as well as the broader Appalachian literature.

I think that Shenandoah Valley people, that we fancy ourselves a little bit more cultured, but may be not as much as we – we think.. Sherando... it seems in that area they almost shun it, they don't wanna – they say, ya know, we're not cultured at all..., ya know, they... almost embraced the whole hillbilly thing..

Here in... Staunton, ya know, it's a bit more white-collar. Here ...Staunton's gone the route of being artistically conscious and musically aware an' going the route an' I think a lot of it has to do with havin' a university in town an', ya know, trying to be that arty upscale kind of thing an' so what that's done is driven the land prices... um, to where people value their land a bit.

Where in Highland [County]¹⁰⁶ ya have some land owners that have a lot of land but haven't really figured how to capitalize on it just yet... or the draw's not there.

Whereas in-ah Rockbridge County, in Lexington area an' stuff like that you got ah, WLU¹⁰⁷ which is a huge draw, um an' VMI¹⁰⁸ ... they sorta have that same... sort of, ya know, let's make our small town into, ya know, a-a cultured city, so to speak... The level of education that people have has probably created some of those opportunities, an' changed them.

The Waynesboro area was very factory-driven for a long time with DuPont and... an'

¹⁰⁶ Politically Appalachian, and very remote county to the west along West Virginia line

¹⁰⁷ Washington and Lee University – known as a private school for the “gentry”

¹⁰⁸ Virginia Military Institute

[Stuarts] Draft is sort of like what Waynesboro was 20 years ago...

An' then in Sherando... Like I said there's a big push to keep it country an' that's what you're gonna see the most rebel flags, an' the funny ball, cow-ball things hanging from the tow bars, an' the big trucks, an' that type of thing. Ahm, I hate to say it, but like Cremora an' Sherando – they've gone what I'd call the Wal-Mart route... which is, ya know, ya work at Alcoa (factory), you know, ya-you put your 40 to 80 hours in, an', ya know, ya-you buy a big TV an', you know, that's.. ya watch the race – and nothing is wrong with any of those things...

But it's differ'nt, it's a different mythology... whereas, ya know, here I'm thinkin' how can I, ya know, finish up my music education thing an', ya know, not watch TV, ya know, that's pretty much like what I do when I want to go to sleep, ya know... for me it's always about what am I gonna create next, what am I creating... how am I fulfillin', ya know, th-the plan.

And to add to that... the figuring out poverty level an' economic class divisions in the Appalachian's is a very, very tricky endeavor... most of the guys that really have the money are the guys drivin' 1986 GMC pickup trucks that you would never even suspect...a lot of it has to do with land too, I think that's a big part of it...

Following this description of economic and class constructions, along with the challenge of identifying poverty, I asked him about his experiences and perspective on race and gender in

the area. As became more obvious later on, music was to be the language through which John approached these topics as well. Further, his hope in a more equitable world is through music. In the following John starts by giving a brief background on the African and Irish heritage of Old Time music, thus suggesting that through the music equity is possible.

Well, the first thing I would say that ahm, in music as you frequently find is ah, it is one of the true boundary...ah, you know, it breaks down a lot of those walls ahm... An' I can almost say that... race-wise... musically speaking, especially from the Old-Time perspective since a lot of this music is generated from, ya know ah, the Blacks ah an' Negro spirituals an' all that... there's not that much racism inherent in that part of the music.

But, ya know, I think it's great that there is starting to be a resurgence of Black musicians discovering their own roots, an' empowering themselves like that. An' learning hey, everybody thinks the banjo is this... hillbilly White instrument, but at the roots it's totally African-American. An' everything about the banjo is set up to play pentatonically just like African music.

Yeah an' so... whereas everything from the Irish culture... you'll notice fiddles and mandolins tune in fifths and that-that's just the intervals that they tune in. An' so it makes it easier to get those jig melodies an' some of that. Well the banjo is tuned in fourths, which is gonna give you a whole different sound, than with fifths.

Why they go together so great, has a lot to do with generations ago Irish an' Blacks gettin' together... both bein' very talented... bringin' their own music thing an' havin' that sort of, ya know, there's no use, ya know, "me lookin' down on you 'cause you're Black, 'cause of course we're both makin' comp'ny scrip," ya know, an' so... "We're off, let's play some music. I'll show you this tune, you show me that tune." An' like I said music is a bit different in that aspect of the color barriers, ah, getting broke down a lot.

Bela Fleck is a good example of that. Here is this geeky White dude from New York with like a Black funk band backin' 'im, ya know. An-an ya know... there was no marketing guy there going, "what we need is... three Black guys..." ya know, it-it's just... Music, when it happens an' it works... people, I've found myself guilty of it several times... playing with people an'... hangin' out with 'em later, an' be like I never even realized it, so an' so, 'cause I was just playin' music with 'em, an' not payin' attention to... physical things...

Continuing on, John addresses raced – or rather White supremacist¹⁰⁹ – notions of who is or could be poor which both cast communities of color as impoverished, while erasing White poverty. Interestingly, in the second paragraph below, he suggests that perhaps the progressive racial views locally are due to Staunton being an “artsy upscale” city, which seems to contrast with the tone of that prior characterization. It is worth noting that perhaps this shift is in response to stereotypes locally and those evoked by my presence as an “academic” researcher living on the (liberal) West Coast.

¹⁰⁹ Refer to the discussion of the impossibility of White poverty within White supremacist logic in chapter two

Now... music aside, if I wasn't a musician, an' looking at it from that, ah... then I definitely see a lot of ah, racism a-ahm, in its own weird way on both sides, ah... Where, and it's always based on the same thing, as you know, the assumptions an' ignorance is usually the main driving factor, ahm... Where people, where ya know, could, say by skin color who's rich an' poor, it's almost, like I was talking about, ya know, the older guy with the GMC pickup that ya wouldn't expect to be a millionaire, an' that goes both ways. There's also that old guy with no pickup that's definitely not...

I think what's becoming, which is a good situation, is that people of all races are being more empowered an' I don't think – especially in Staunton, in this area – like I, just from my own experience, ah, I think that with Mary Baldwin (College) here an' a lot of focus on the multi-cultural thing ah with ah, the Frontier Museum bein' in Staunton – an' they just opened their new exhibit with the African exhibit – yeah, it's really cool too; you should check it out – So I think that it – it's especially catching up here. Where we're starting to realize that hey, ya know, race isn't the defining issue, ahm...

This hope for racial harmony may seem overly simplistic at best, yet it is precisely the sort of “post-racial” reasoning offered as the ideal by White middle class liberals in college classrooms to National Public Radio. While the evidence is unclear, later John is clearly aware of racial inequity, which suggests that this post-racial framing was shaped by my presence and John's assumptions about how I might judge him.

Following this discussion of race, John turns to gender to share perspectives on women's

struggle for equity as well as the negative impacts of patriarchal masculine norms. Particularly this discussion about male socialization leads directly into the topics of hard work and of the high cost of individual rather than collective pride.

Gender I think, has... has pretty much, it's got ways to go I'm sure still, but I mean it's made great progress. Ahm... ya know, workin' an' going to Mary Baldwin¹¹⁰ of course, ya know, it's a female school so I definitely get to see... women rightfully empowered that, an' there sometimes I watch 'em work an' go, an' ya know, a guy couldn't do that. 'Cause they can – multi-task an' they have other, ya know, skills an' what I would just call a general tactfulness about how to approach things...

Whereas guys, especially around here... tend to be more forthright, less thoughtful an' more like, "Well I'm gonna get Billy Bob because he said this n' that." An' so you get a lot of the action, ya know, sometimes it's well-meant, hardworking action, like rah... "Just put your head down and work"... and, ya know, "quit bitchin'", ya know, kinda attitude, where ah from a female side of it, "well how else can we do this. Is this the right way that we've been doing it. Ya know, is there a better way."

Intersections: Hard-ass Republicans, with Socialist actions

John continues on talking about why men in the area feel a need to prove themselves through their hard work, even when it costs them. Further, this brings him to a conversation about why the political right has been able to gain a foothold among people who are communally

¹¹⁰ A historically all-women school where he teaches music

minded. Here in the beginning he wonders aloud how and why a conservative independence can co-exist with an agrarian mutually supportive tradition. Notably, John begins by citing the work ethic handed down to him, and connects this to an ancestor's eagerness to join Confederate forces and repel an invading Yankee army. Immediately thereafter, it seems that this answers the question for him – his family are happy to help someone in need, but there will be a price to pay if exploited. Precisely here is where the central importance of not giving in, of not submitting, returns as an answer to his question. Whether a result of war or simple subsistence on the frontier, everyone must pull their own weight for the community to survive, and to refuse or fail is to not only fail, but to harm everyone.

I wish I could give a really defined answer on... why, ya know, people act like that. I know in myself, from personal experience the work ethic thing... which is important to me... A lotta that was instilled by, not only my father but by my grandfather, my great grandfather, my great-great... When I'm reading back through my history, my great-great when he was 16, the Civil War was goin' on, he couldn't wait for Virginia to join the South so he moved to North Carolina so he could get into the 5th infantry quicker.

An' so... pretty much all the guys in my family have had this thing like, we're the nicest people, ya know, we'll help you out an' help you change a flat an' pick up hitchhikers an' give ya the shirt off our back... Or if you're outta hay an' ya need some... we're there. But there is a lot of fire an' brimstone involved with that work ethic...

It's ah, ya know, a good example was, ya know, my dad has worked all his life. He's up

at the crack of dawn, ya know, an' he works 'till the end of the day, an' I have a lot of that ethic in me too. It's like I just have to do that whether it's come out an' playing music... or working at the press, ya know... I feel like I have to earn my keep.

This last statement is not only true because he must work to earn a living, but White men are only citizens/valid when they provide – by definition they cannot be dependent. Particularly for men negotiating generational poverty, there is no rest when they must constantly somehow manage to provide; as Marx makes clear in his description of labor “power as impotence” (p. 327), there is no rest. As a result, while empathy is real it is also tempered by a desire for fairness and the desperation and/or fear in one’s own situation. Yet at the close of the following segment John defines a “good man” as one who never falters in aiding those who need help.

An' so I think part of that aggressive side comes from when somebody's... isn't, at least in our eyes, pullin' their own weight. Or they're gettin', oh “they don't even have a job and they can fill their-their 'frigerator up with groceries that the government provided for 'em”... An' so I think that generates this sort of like, response that's not necessarily that the person's fault that is on food stamps. But it generates this automatic thing, “well I worked all my life where I got... and they should too.”

I'm still one of those people to think that even if I was in a position that... maybe just too prideful to do it that route. I would work in McDonald's or something – else. An' so I think that's where, ya know... a lot of these guys that have that initial response, my dad bein' one of them... “aw that is the reason that they're like that is 'cause they're lazy, an'

if they'd get up an' go to work every day they would not have that problem..” ya know what I'm saying?

Underneath all that, ya know, abrasive, ya know, like right-wing “work ‘til you die” kinda thing, there is really a soft, ya know, giving Christian heart of, ya know, a good man that says one thing, but, ya know, when it comes to actual action would be like... ya know, I'll help you out, but will give you little bit of hell for it before I do...

In the following, John elaborates using his father as an example and presents the right-wing rhetoric as the desperate (economic) hope of those who have struggled in vain to claim the American Dream. In other words, due to structural limitations they will never work themselves into wealth, no matter how hard they work. Further, John suggests that the Right's rhetoric of victimhood connects with those feeling the bitterness of this trick in the midst of clear economic inequity.

Yet rather than individualistic competition, the reality his father and others practice is one of communal support, both because it is a necessity and a legacy. Notably, John initially refers to himself before re-stating that he would never tell his father that his actions do not align with his rhetoric. Certainly John has made it clear he has a similar work ethic, and while he does not share the same political beliefs, he seems to suggest that he also struggles to completely empathize with those who have given up.

Yeah, ya know, I use my dad as an example 'cause he is a good example, 'cause he is a typical... Southern... Republican... ya know, White male. An', ya know, like I said, he's

worked all his life an' he's a farmer, an' this and that... One thing I've noticed about him, an' I would never tell him this to my face – er to his face, is that yeah he is hard right-wing, like watches... aw who is the guy on Fox News that rails on everybody... well I guess they all do but, you know, the really Republican one... What's his name, ah... Bill ah... he listens to it every-everyday... an' agrees with everything he says...

But then, I'll see in his actions... ah whole – a socialist side... so as much as he's goin' "ah, Obama is a big socialist," ...an' "we gotta get somebody in there that' gonna get people workin' again," an' "work, work, work," but yet, in his own actions, I realize that the very thing that, ya know, he has demonized, he actually is at heart... which is a social person.

Again, in the following John moves from economic injustice to racial injustice, and similar to the previous discussion presents post-racial language. However, the last sentence is a bit confused as he suggests that the South has such a small population that one cannot be selective with friendship and discriminate against Black people – which is clearly not the case. This begs the question, does he really mean the South, or is he actually speaking about the significantly more White and rural *Appalachian* South? Either way, in the following paragraph John argues through his dad's prior rejection of segregation that though he may take common White supremacist stereotypes of poor Black men at face value, his dad is not a racist. Rather, he argues that the statement in question is yet another critique of submitting to oppression and not pulling one's weight rather than a racist statement.

An', ya know, one of the perfect examples is in the, ah... late 70s, I guess it was still up to then. I mean it's hard to believe that 50 years ago we were segregated... but my dad was a member of the Moose an' my dad has a couple of Black buddies, an' I do too. An' it's never really been a thing an', ya know, people joke about the token this an' that, but in the South, man, I mean, we don't have a big wide variety so, you know, if I like you I like you, I don't care.

An' my dad's the same way. But now he'll watch some show on CNN, an' be like "an' that's why they're in prison, because he's on drugs an' they don't work, an' all they do is lay around n' do drugs," ya know what I'm saying...

But yet he quit the Moose in the 70s because they were segregated. So he had – one of his buddies still to this day, one of his motorcycle riding buddies, is Black an' they wouldn't let them into the Moose. An' so my dad quit, which is very socialist – liberal even, kinda thing to do...

So, ya know, that's a good example of, ya know, on the surface is very hard stern like, "do drugs, don't work, go to jail, that's what you get" but on the inside... an' then in the actions it's more like, "oh, ya know, you got a problem, what can I do to help you," ya know.

In the following, John continues what Loyal Jones refers to as pioneer logic, which expects every member of the community to do their own work. There is a palpable tension here

between a commitment to community and mutual support, along with a desire that others not call on neighbors for assistance as that would cost very precious resources. Above, John has tried to make the case that this economic survival-driven expectation crosses racial boundaries, and while that may be hard to accept in an imperialist, White supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy, it does help us grasp how a deeper understanding of systemic impacts on neighbors of color might be particularly difficult. This is not to say that willful ignorance or even simple callousness does not exist in this context, yet if the cultural expectation is that each takes care of their own as a matter of pride, it would be a challenge to that pride to do any more than respect neighbors and respond if help is requested. More to the point, the deep self-reflection on the subtleties of how we impact others as context shifts is that much less likely when respect is demonstrated by communal isolation. Thus, the social conditioning here is to keep your nose out of others' business or insult them – a significant problem when what is needed is a complex understanding of both macro injustices and micro-aggressions¹¹¹.

Yeah, when you look at the actual things... er, some things he'll say or do, like ah, ya know, ah one of the farms down the road here didn't have such a good hay year, a couple years ago. An' so like he proportioned the hay out for 'em, you know, an' pretty much gave 'em like a barn full of hay. Very, again, socialist maneuver, like I got more than... so you have some.

So sometimes it doesn't match up with what... an' I think that's generally what has

¹¹¹ Brief, daily messages of well-intentioned members of the dominant culture designed to reinforce the inferiority of oppressed groups. Microaggressions are defined separately from overt oppression as the people perpetrating them are generally acting out subconscious scripts unaware of the structural and human impact.

happened is the White, ya know, Republican culture of the South, ya know, has these ideals but they actually act on ideals that, they're used to words... "oh you call it socialism, it must be bad. When, an' actually they have been practicing that forever.

Here again, John argues that in the South, Appalachians must appear to conform to the dominant language, while in practice may be quite different in response to local needs. As discussed in chapter 2, the Appalachian region particularly is purported to be the inner sanctum of White supremacy and racism, yet John describes a far more nuanced navigation of White supremacy and unmet economic needs. In fact, reminiscent of the difference between mountain counties and the broader South during the Civil War, it appears that John's father rejects racism (though, like most Americans, not necessarily subtle White supremacy) and offers a critique of laziness and submission identical to that delivered to any White man who might cease to struggle for dignity.

II. Constructing strategy: John's experience

Following this introduction to geography and some of the economic and social forces at play in the area however, we turn to John's own experience of this place. Notably, he immediately describes himself as Southern, yet names the culture/music as Appalachian – again situating himself in the region without overtly claiming it. Yet this strategic veiling of his self-identification becomes visible as he immediately challenges stereotypes related to his accent. In fact, as he describes being raised Southern Methodist with the caveat that this had little influence, we catch a glimpse of his motivation to counter the negative stereotypes of Southerners, and as we will see in his language – using the banjo as a representative image –

particularly Appalachian people and culture. Further, as John relates his study of Appalachian music and his finding that Bill Monroe¹¹² also hated the term hillbilly, we begin to see a mode of resistance emerge in collective Appalachian cultural production; in music.

Um... an' I sort of see myself as ah... Southern... someone to bring... One of my big pet peeves is ah, people assumin' that I'm not as educated or as intelligent because I talk slower, er I have an accent an' ah, I think that's probably one of the common, most common... ya know, stereotypes, ya know... An' there's plenty to go along playin' banjo too... Oh, you know... "banjo player, how do you tell if he's settin' level, ... drool comes out of both sides of his mouth," and just all kinds of really..., ya know, good ones.

Um, so th-there – there's a bit of that an' that's been actually, as I've learned more about music in my studies an' Appalachian Music in general. Um even Bill Monroe, ya know, born in Kentucky, he was – he hated the term Hillbilly too, an' that's why they always wore the suits. One they figured out that people who write the checks more, ya know tend to whip out the checkbook quicker if you wearin' a nice suit an' hat then if you show up in the bib overalls thing. So, um not that I dress in suits all the time, but I – I try to up-end that stereotype whenever I can, whether it's with my work, or my music or just daily relations, ya know.

In the preceding, John has offered a cultural/historical artifact that provides an example of success within the culture that benefits both the collective and individual, a critically

¹¹² Widely known as the creator of bluegrass music, which as John points out later, simply means he commercialized the musical form he was raised playing with his family.

important relationship as we will see a bit later. Moreover, we get an introductory glimpse of his dedication to becoming a master of the music – and inherently also the culture – as part of an overall campaign to counter hillbilly stereotypes.

Further, his work is itself a celebration of culture and a positive reclaiming of it, through performance and teaching as methods. Not only does this provide critical positivity, but this strategy claims and harnesses the creativity that Marx describes as central to *Leiden* when alienated, or *Wesen* when it is retained. Such a strategy also evokes Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed*, in that it is fluid, mobile, and adaptable so as not to be restrained; no wonder John later speaks of banjo masters' involvement in jazz. Here too, music the method precisely because it is culture made momentarily tangible and in constant re-creation/emergence.

In the following quote John gives some background on his introduction to music as a family value and tradition. As becomes even more clear later, though his father had little skill, he seems to have understood the potential for individual and cultural dignity intentionally positioning his son to benefit. Additionally, John notes his mother's home, suggesting that though this strategy for creating home/*Wesen* is entirely part of the local culture, it is also one which transcends a particular place and culture.

I got into music too at an early age an' it's always something that is sort of, um, just kept plugging away at... even I was 4 or 5 started playing. An' my dad is big into Bluegrass an' Country, an' my mom too, um... although she is from Cuba and so, I got a lot of influence in my whole artistic side really stems from my mom 'cause she can sing... an' although my dad does sing – let's say he fancies himself a singer... But he loved the music and he had his hopes for me, for to be a guitar player... so I started taking guitar

lessons about age six... an' kept taking 'em till... I was probably a Sophomore in High School when I got too rebellious, to take lessons anymore, fer guitar.

Work: (Constantly) Creating culture as strategy

In this next section, we hear more about the structure and values of John's strategy to resist Leiden. After a brief introduction to his mentor, whom we learn more about later, John describes when "everything sorta fell into place" and he began to understand what would become his strategy. The second and third paragraphs particularly describe the community connections that brought the music to life for him as a participatory experience. Further, the second paragraph feels interrupted by an illustration of the importance communal support and connection have through the story of his first banjo. Shortly after this discussion of what he loved about the "scene," he shifts to the importance of practice and suggests that his music is his "hard work."

I started taking lessons with Tony Trischka, on banjo and uh, that everything sorta fell into place. I used to go to uh Galax an' lot of the Bluegrass festivals around here... when I was a kid and sort of, uh... would sit there with my parents in lawn chairs doing the toe-tapping thing. Always loved the banjo players, that was m-my thing, but other than that I sort of, aw, this music's for old people...

An' then at about 16 – 17, I realized there is this whole other scene behind the festival where people were jammin' and makin' music with their instruments. An' I'm like, well that's..., my parents can sit and watch the show, I'm... and they were totally cool, very

supportive. I mean, my dad bought my first banjo, which ya know, I sold... but, to a student of mine that, ya know, deserved it, but ah... an' he still takes lesson from me so... an' he said he'd sell it back at that price, it was cool. But anyways, it was really supportive an' so I would go off and jam... and ah, really fell in love with that scene...

...once I realized that... it wasn't like a rock show where, ya know, ya see the band, you leave, an' that's it. This was, uh... you know, involvement in it an' that was the factors like I love playing music so much that I don't want to just go see a show. Granted, I enjoyed the show... but you know, I really love this whole idea that, man, I can meet a kid from, an' we really were just kids you know when I started about 13 when I was just starting... an' about 18 when I was competent enough to really, ya know, hang.

Interestingly, John follows this description of having been nurtured by this community, by noting the role he has come to play in the community through developing and sharing his musical skills. Further, the merging of his musical hard work with community building and cultural production has also provided some additional income. More to the point, it is in the shared material that must necessarily be constantly re-created to exist – and thus be shared – that the individual finds success. This is a critical insight, because as many have described about the culture, individual pride is derided as “gettin’ above your raisin,’” yet communal pride (family, community, etc) is vitally important.

Particularly in a neoliberal economic and social climate, this is individual value through community connectedness and success provides John a profoundly important personal resource with which to retain a bit of Wesen. Thus, a musician can and should use their skill to extend

creative expression and innovate from the foundational material, without becoming too prideful, failing to respect the history they are part of, thus defaming their roots and weakening – rather than strengthening – the community structure that offers refuge.

...Still... some of my oldest friends are music buddies I met at music festivals, an' we still see every year. Um, and we would all know the same tune because the repertoire is of course shared. And it'd be interesting to see what somebody had done with a particular song over the course of the year. Um, and really got into that aspect of it an'... didn't know at the time that that was going to be a livelihood of any sort, er, that it would pan into anything.

*Um, and when it – an' when it sort of did blossom into where a lot of people showing up at my house to play music... and uh, you know, here the band's – a lot of people think that it's some sort of, *The Hilltop Pickers**¹¹³ is like this brain child of mine when in actuality, it sorta grew, ya know, bigger than anything I had planned. It was just, we started out with some buddies that play, then next thing you know... this whole thing sort of steamrolled into what it is now...*

Um, an' that's basically how I developed into um, a music teacher, with the added benefit of pickin' an choosin' who I want to teach – in the beginning it was like, whoa I gotta do a lot of the electric guitar lessons because that's bread and butter, but now I'm really at a stage where I can, ya know, I can have a full roster of just banjo students and mandolin

¹¹³ His band, name changed for anonymity.

students, an' uh the Bluegrass and Old-Time musics and focus on that and that's been great... no more smoke on the water, [chuckles] 'less it's on banjo.

Particularly as he speaks about helping students learn the “method to the madness” of music/work, we also glimpse John’s commitment to helping others access the same strategy that has benefited so many others before. He is in effect participating, engaging, building, and passing on the cultural home that will validate him as a portion of his socio-economic needs are met. Rather than a complete victory over exploitative capitalism, it is only partial as he must do other (far more alienated) work, yet the home and resulting dignity he is able to maintain is critically important.

As becomes even more obvious later, this strategy has allowed him to navigate both stereotypes and economic struggle in a way that provides support and a buffer from those negative forces. Later he references the circular trap of consumerist conditioning that encourages the purchase of things to make us feel whole, yet can never deliver the meaning we seek. Clearly, he feels that he has found that meaning, and insulated himself a bit more from oppressive forces than what we have seen in the previous narratives. While he speaks of teaching students what is important in music, like the previous discussion of not giving up and working hard, this is about life.

But uh, so I-I stayed with it pretty good, and did it pretty hard I think... and that helps – helped me later, become a better teacher... to know what's important when it comes to playin' an instrument. And so that's why I tried to pass on to my students now as – uh, is a method to the madness of learnin' music and...

An' taking lessons I think, and learnin' as much as ya can was crucial too, but ah, th- there is no substitute for-fer p-playing, for practicing... er as I say, practice like you're going to play, that way when you're going to play you don't play like yer practicin' ... [chuckles] ... but there is all kinds'a nice little metaphors and stuff you can make with it.

Mentors: Learning and developing strategy

In the following section, John continues and we learn about his primary mentor, teacher, and friend, Tony Trischka¹¹⁴. This is the man who taught him that to be successful requires hard work, but that it must always come back to the connections to people – family especially – and helping others. It is in the following that we see more clearly how John learned and practices his strategy. Building on the previous discussion, he describes the hard work and dedication his musical strategy requires, but also shares that it brings him “more joy than ever,” again suggesting a different relationship to oppressive forces than in previous narratives. In fact, in a very culturally resonant way, his sense of hope becomes clear when he says that to believe you are good enough to no longer work/practice hard is to cut yourself off from learning.

This kind of self-investment – certainly to pursue an easier life, but also clearly for pleasure – requires hope and is therefore also intrinsically resistant to oppression. Moreover, John argues again that individual pride is a form of giving in and giving up on themselves and the importance and promise of communal pride. Indeed, near the end of this segment, he discusses what he later terms the “professional mindset” and dedication that makes someone

¹¹⁴ Names of John's mentors are not changed as it is important to note Trischka's and others' success and relative celebrity. Contributor names were changed to protect individuals sharing details of their lives in a very "small" social context.

great and allows them to “elevate” the status of both the culture and music.

In short, here John echoes the other narratives in arguing that in the struggle against oppression the individual can only realize personal pride and dignity through their family and communities; individual pride is submission to oppression. As a result, “gettin’ above your raisin’” is both insulting the community as not good enough, while also submitting to the forces that seek to oppress: it is selling out their community and themselves.

Ya know, an’ I think people are still surprised to learn that ah, that I practice a lot ya know, daily like... and play some of the same beginning level songs, ya know, that I was playing... when I was 13, as a kid and finding more joy in ‘em now that I ever have...

And so people... they’ll come in they go, “you’re playing Boil Them Cabbage Down?” That’s like the first song in the book, ya know. I was like “yeah, pretty much play that song every day, ya know, in one shape or another,” an’ they’re like, “well you don’t need to.” And I was like – “an’ when you start thinkin’ like that is when... you’ve just kind of cut yourself uh-uh off in a way, ya know. From learnin’.”

And who inspired me to do that, really, was ah Tony Trischka, a banjo player, um... famous in banjo player circles, and uh, he just produced Steve Martin’s album? Um, he – in fact he was responsible for both those albums, in fact one lesson he had a call an’ he’s like, “mind if I take this? Yeah, hey Steve. Oh I’m in a lesson” – he’s like, “yeah I’ll be back in New York on Sunday, yup an’ yeah, well I’ll see you then, and thanks Steve, see you later.” An’ he up an’ we’re continuing a lesson, an’ I’m like, “that was Steve Martin

wasn't it," an' he was like, "Yeah." I was like, "you are the man"...

In the following John elaborates that Trischka is highly successful, but is only so through his dedication to his music, family, and creating a supportive community that supports the next generation. Not only is there a lack of pretentiousness, but here we see his dedication to the music as a strategy to collectively challenge cultural stereotypes.

I would go take lessons from him, an' uh, whenever he was in the area... I would make sure that either help him out with the workshop or go to the workshop. That's how it started, he saw that I played a lot of different things, an' it's like, next time I'm in Baltimore would you mind backing me up on guitar while I do my workshop, an' of course I'm like, ahh yeah, of course.

And so we started hangin' out an' what I learned from him is this guy is, just like me ah... very devoted to his family an' home life... an'... he really takes the music seriously, and- and you know, to elevate the banjo and not be content with it bein' some hillbilly deliverance theme instrument

Almost every time I would hear him you know, when I just coming to the door or whatever, he'd be in there practicing John Hardy which is like the second song in the book. And I would just set¹¹⁵ outside the door and listen... an' you know, then there would be a point I'd be like he's been playing that for 20 minutes, I guess I'll knock ya

¹¹⁵ not a typo, this is a common word choice in the area

know.

An' then in some of the workshops too, ... everybody gets together, ya know, about noon, he comes out and teaches till about dinner time an', an' then everybody eats, and then he goes up to his room and from 5 to 9 or so he straight practices... and then he come down at 9 an' you know we'd give a little concert... an' I'm thinking, ya know, that's dedication, to his instrument...

Seeing other instrumentalists with that sort of dedication really help me say aight focus on whatchur' doin' an' not... Ahm, it really makes a difference when you know, you can read music an' ah... talk music in musical terms with other people. I'm approaching that with the professional mindset anyway, ya know – to try to get the most that I can get out of it. 'Cause that's my interest and its elevating the status of the music, the culture in general.

It goes back to what I was saying about people talking slow and people just assuming that this guy is probably fix my Chevy, but ya know, he probably ain't good for much else, ya know? I might, it's very possible that I know more about modern art than they do, which is sort of trivial pursuit-ish, but hey.

I, ya know, develop websites as far as my job, ya know, I don't [think] people would ever guess that if they were to meet me, other than I'm sort of geeky, but ya know, “but you write code?” Haha, do I? (as if to say “and how!”) [laughing] Ya know what I'm

saying... So that's pretty much growin' up an' how music has intersected with my life and that aspect of it. Yeah.

In the preceding quote, John notes for the first time that his full-time job is not music. However, here we also see why that job has everything to do with his desire to challenge stereotypes of people like him. This brings us full circle from alienated work and stereotypes to maintain inequality, through his humble yet professional (dedicated) pursuit of musical/cultural mastery. Clearly John sees the dedication Trischka embodies as the means through which he can more effectively share a collective pride in the music and culture that are his home.

As John notes at the very end of this quote, this is indeed where the personal meets the political. After this personal example of why challenging the stereotypes about the region, culture, and music is critical, John explains further here the means of doing so. In this context, it is to have such mastery of one's musical skill that one is able to play a traditional song in a way that goes beyond their own unique style¹¹⁶ but is *nearly* unrecognizable as the old tune. In fact then, greatness is to remain within the known, and therefore reproduce and teach cultural forms, yet in a way that provides freedom and progress.

This freedom within communal structure is a key insight because it exemplifies an anti-oppressive use of the distance between concrete experiences of a culture that is constructed and relative. As many Appalachian scholars have noted, Appalachia is an idea both real and imagined. Here, by valuing the most extreme innovation/freedom within that protective musical frame, a powerful sense of belonging is maintained. Thus, culture provides a secure and unchanging home, even as individuals – and the culture itself – adapts and moves forward in

¹¹⁶ Notably he later describes this as an “accent.”

response to new threats or opportunities.

Following such a clear articulation of their shared interest in “elevating” the status of the culture and the banjo, it is perhaps no longer ironic that Trischka is part of the “NY school” as we soon learn. Indeed, many of John’s local teachers have spent considerable time playing in places from Harlem to Japan. Echoing the call for “extroverted” regional pride/belonging, these are locations that break down simplistic notions of place, solidarity, and Southern-ness in the pursuit of a humanizing and thus powerful cultural project of self-determination, within community.

The same dynamic that defies stereotype is present also in his relationships with Mike Seeger (a Yankee), Larry Keel’s time playing music in Japan, and Rooster Riley’s jazz playing in New Orleans and Harlem. Worth noting as John discusses each of these men is that all three live in the politically Appalachian Rockbridge County to the south. Yet while there is a clear affinity for *local* music and story, the connections and cross-overs between regional and national purveyors of the culture remain central. Further, as evidenced by the recommendations of others to contact and extensive knowledge of the broader socio-cultural history, it is the knowledge of these connections that constitute at least a portion of John’s musical/cultural mastery.

The – one of the other big influences that I got to meet ahm, who lived in Lexington, was ah Mike Seeger, an’ ah he was a big influence for me too growing up but he used to camp beside me. He used to show me things on banjo all the time... an’ ah sorta took me under his wing an’ taught me a lot of things an’ I didn’t even know who he was then.

I-I mean I knew he was a good banjo player, but I didn’t know he was the Mike Seeger of

the New Lost City Ramblers who had done work with Alan Lomax an' discovered all these great, ya know, Appalachian singers¹¹⁷, ya know... An' then moved down here himself from, ah New York from a privileged family... an' a course Pete stayed on an' did his sort of folky thing... But Mike really came down an' learned the Appalachian styles like... an' then performed them. An' so by the end he wasn't just a historian, he was an interpreter of sorts and in the very end, a master of the Appalachian styles.

In the preceding, it should be noted that the definition of Seeger's "privilege" is again wealth and access, which seems to make his commitment to the music and culture particularly notable – even more valuable.

Strategy explained: Static fluidity

In the following portion of the narrative John expounds on the “progressive” qualities of politically Appalachian Rockbridge County’s Lexington and Buena Vista. While distinct from Augusta’s Staunton and Waynesboro, the similarities are considerable – and yet, the political/social lines are clear and active negotiation is not needed; thus music/cultural exploration is not the threat that it is in contested areas. This example provides a contrast against which John’s discussion of the varied locations within Augusta can be usefully compared. In Rockbridge, there is no claiming or distancing – the county simply *is* Appalachian.

Following this John provides several examples of Rockbridge County musicians he characterizes as “progressive,” and who influenced him most significantly. Common to each is that they have “gone the extra mile” beyond maintaining the traditions of their parents, often by

¹¹⁷ Together they catalogued the work of local masters throughout the mountains for the Library of Congress and worked to publicly recognize their accomplishments.

traveling outside the region to experience and learn other styles such as jazz and incorporate this into their music. More than what John calls “takin’ an older song an’ using the general basics of it, an’ make it into its own thing,” which he describes as “indicative of the Virginia style” (and brought Old Crow Medicine Show success, he notes); this is not simple innovation. Rather, it is...

...a little more homebrewed I’d like to say, (chuckles) an’ it has its own flavor that’s definitely Virginia.

I think Virginian style is ah, pretty simple style compared to like the Texas swinging stuff with the jazz chords. So ah, a lot of Virginian music, even though I got picks on here is sort of Clawhammer style... I think this section of Virginia... we tend to go fer simpler, not ‘cause it’s simpler and easier, but because we sort of find a-a real beauty in that kind of thing.

...tends to lean towards what we call the modal style... which means that it’s... instead of addressing this is definitely major, or definitely minor, we’re just going to leave that deciding note out an’ make it modal.

Here again we see John highlight the strategic benefits of blurring boundaries in order to both construct and protect home within a celebration of what seems a unified culture. While counter to common wisdom and certainly to rural stereotypes, John’s examples extend Mark’s similar call for “progress” to suggest culture should in fact be dynamic if it is to remain a place of celebration, rather than impotent despair. Again, this echoes Fisher and Smith (2012) and

Sandoval's (2000) articulations of responses to neoliberal globalization.

As one example, John offers the story of master musician, Larry Keel, who plays in a singular style that while true to the tradition handed down to him is still quite unique. However, Keel also left – in part – because the area felt like a prison, or rather that there was no opportunity to create a life of dignity and fulfillment for himself. This is a major cause of “brain drain,” which drives so many rural youth to take the education their home community has invested in them and escape to metropolitan areas, thus worsening the situation for their rural home.

In the Lexington area, an' the Buena Vista area, um whatchu will find is very, very progressive pickers. That ahm, ya know, they've been brought up in it too. Larry Keel, who lives in Buena Vista, an' it's him an' his wife that perform. An' Larry himself is interesting fella to talk to about Appalachian stuff.

What they've done with it is they've taken the old stuff that they've learned from, their teachers an' their parents an' stuff, an' they've really gone out of their way to go the extra mile. Like Larry went an' studied jazz... an' he actually pulled one of these moves that we all wish we did, but nobody ever had the cojones to do... When he was 16, his home life wasn't great, he felt stuck in Buena Vista... an' you know how it is growing up aroun' here, you really can get into that mode... if you don't like it here it's like it – seems like it's prison or something.

So when he was 16 he moved – always find this amazing – he moved to Japan, playin'

guitar at Disney World in the Tin Pan Alley an' consequently learned all this like Dixieland, Jazz an' Bebop licks on the guitar an' totally incorporated that into his, ya know, Virginia flat-picking guitar style, an' so now... like his playin's just out of this world.

Having presented the case of Larry Keel, John turns to another teacher of his who lives in the same area. Rooster Ruley, who passed away not long after this interview was conducted, serves as both a luminary for John, and as we see later, a cautionary tale. It is quite clear in the following that John has a great deal of respect for Ruley's musical skill, innovative method, and style. Yet perhaps what is most interesting is the image John later presents, of Ruley as the quintessential hillbilly with shotgun and jar of moonshine. Indeed, thanks to the internet, there are a variety of home recorded performances available that feature Ruley seeming every part the stereotype, far from what one might imagine of a New Orleans and Harlem jazz musician.

An' the particular guy I studied with, um Rooster Ruley... an' his wife actually is more of a historian 'an Rooster. Rooster is a great banjo player... very progressive too. He played in Bluegrass bands in Virginia forever an' then like in his late 40s went to New Orleans, an' – to learn jazz – an' ended up playing with some big jazz main guys an' then like went to New York an' played in like the Harlem jazz scene and stuff with banjo.

But banjo has been one of those instruments for, yeah it does Bluegrass well an' stuff, but it started out as minstrel instrument an' then made to swing to jazz in the 20s. An' um... in that way, ya know, it's not a rock guitar but it-it definitely can jump genre.

An' so I think eventually the good – the good Bluegrass players get interested in some of the out there licks.

While John will return to more of the lessons he learned from Ruley, at this point he seems to sum up the importance of Rockbridge County's old-time "scene" as "progressive" innovation of traditional music. Further, that "good" banjo players eventually embrace innovation as the ultimate in both musical and cultural mastery. As John describes it in another example,

Another family that's a very musical family up that way is the Knicely's. An' they've – they're influenced from their grandparents, their great grandparents played an' brought a lot of it an' with 'em, but what they've done is almost... I like to go back an' look at the history of tunes an' the origins. They've sorta taken it one step further an' seein' how far they can push it to where it's still the tune. An' ya know in the every bit of technical prowess that they have, ya know, an' they're really pushing the envelope

Further, while respectful of tradition, John admits that not everyone shares his view that a broad skill set and extroverted cultural attitude are key to collective cultural survival. Rather, John argues that the community norm is one of sharing and innovation and through a medium that *must* be perpetually re-created to exist. As a result, this innovating movement is central to perpetuating a culture of dignity and celebration that cannot be commodified, and then taken – perhaps even to be deployed as a tool of domination¹¹⁸. Moreover, this is part of John's

¹¹⁸ For an interesting parallel, see Hurt's discussion of music labels' power to reinscribe White

description of the western Appalachian style of Tennessee and Kentucky sounding like Nashville. As Marx clearly states, it is the existence (or in this case, the lack thereof) of private property that is the crisis of capitalism (p. 320). Further, in the following John foreshadows that there is not only considerable learning and sharing amongst the musical “schools” to drive innovation, but there is also structure to support it. In short, there is a kind of solidarity here across regions and musical forms.

An’ ah, ...there is some really staunch traditionalists too, you’re going to find that in every scene... they’ll be like this is Virginian version of Boil Them Cabbage Down (plays) you know an’ they do it just like, ya know ... it’s been done, that it was passed to them. Whereas me, I’ll be – I’ll start in a Virginia version, ya know, touch on to the Kentucky version, put a little bit of North Carolina version in there an’ ah, you know even you know try to get a lot of competition or Texas style in there if I can... er a New York school.

An’ then, in my own little way, consider myself you know a historian an’ a collector of these different styles. An’ ah, I think Virginia and North Carolina are the closest in styles as far as tellin’ em apart. Ahm, once you get Tennessee and Kentucky, an’ ah that side of Appalachia... ahm, the styles differ quite a bit.

An’ yeah, I mean, and this is just on the gourd banjo, if I break it down on the regl’r banjo you can really hear the difference. Ahm.... like I mentioned for the Kentucky an’

Tennessee area style they tend to be what's closest to popular Bluegrass today, an' I don't know if that's because of Nashville, or just, people's ears you know... there's no accounting for taste...

I definitely consider what I do to be, ya know, Blue Ridge Mountain, Shenandoah Valley style... playing, ahm... an' each area generally does... they have their own style too... even if it's sort of the same passage.

I mean Tony Trischka is from the New York school, Bela Fleck is from the New York school. An' yeah it's interesting, they come down here and learn our licks an' around here you shake a tree an' a fiddler or a banjo player's gonna fall out. An' then a lot of us, at least the progressive types like myself, head up that way to go learn it from Bela an' Tony, and to cop their licks.

Transmission: Structural support for the nebulous

In the following section John describes the perpetual sharing of the very musical innovation which protects the music and culture from becoming static and commodified. Through the informal structure of festivals, not only are musicians more effectively able to learn and create together – building community in the process – but they also maintain a common ownership that denies alienation a grip on their work. Further, this counter-oppressive experience drives the kind of solidarity that creates a broad community in which John is mentored by Trischka, and Ruley finds himself in the Harlem jazz scene. Precisely this is the experience that John attempted to describe previously when speaking of music's impact on

constructed differences such as race. However, John also offers a note of caution that while this structure is centrally important to some regions, it is not universally practiced. As a result, it is hardly surprising that what is also known as competition style is Texas style, which John also notes depends on purchased (commodified) recordings for sharing/community rather than festivals. Notably, when John refers to those who come to festivals, he describes their learning as consumption rather than a mutually constructed experience that allows for transmission of nuance.

When they're traveling North to South or vice versa from North Carolina to here an' back down we are really exchanging tunes. Like when I go to see my buddies down there at festivals, you know, we sit around an' we talk about new tunes, "oh yeah, I worked out Soldier's Joy in minor key."... An' so that's how they are evolving with us, whereas I think Texas style an' anything west of the Appalachia's gets evolved more from recordings as opposed to ...within their own little thing...

But as far as them listenin' to Virginian music an' modeling after that, is mostly done through records or when they come over for festivals. There's a lot more festivals from this area down to North Carolina an'... I mean, ya know, Kentucky an' Tennessee an' all those, they have a lot of great festivals too, but if you got an exhaustive listing I guess we by far... I mean this is just all summer. These'd be the things they would be consumin'.

An' so growing up... I wasn't realizing that, it was all just music... An' because we've done a lot of festivals an' I've traveled quite a bit... most of the songs I've learned, you

know... a piece that's somebody's given me like Tony... even then I pay attention to where it's from, but um... to know about the differences of music an' stuff is just not the same as hearin' it. When you're sitting right there across from the guy you tend to learn a lot more about the (plays)... different, ya know, nuances.

One thing I can say – it's very interesting and I can hear a tune played an' hear somebody play it and I can see – I can sometimes pinpoint it right to the specific person's version. Like oh, that's Ed Haley who was a Missouri fiddler that-that's, you know, his version of Old Joe Clark. Or I can hear something saying that's definitely North Carolina – Or that's this part of Virginia or the Galax part of Virginia's version 'a Shady Grove versus Kentucky version of Shady Grove.

Following this description of some of the nuance John might pick up, I suggested that it sounded like hearing the nuances that are markers of a particular accent. Here John uses music to connect the standardizing-deadening effect of commodification on a sense of place and communal pride. Thus, this leads him into a discussion of the connections between both musical and verbal accent and stereotypes; particularly of poor rural White people (see chapter 2) that re-emerged here when John discussed the communities around which hillbilly policing is centered.

It is and like, it almost... every song – ah well not all of 'em, but most of 'em have the cultural feel of the place that they're from ingrained in the song. An' once you can pick up on those subtleties ah-then it makes a lot of sense... there is a lot to learn there.

... then with the accents I think there is ah, definitely some stereotypes locally in just the Shenandoah Valley area, um an' most of them are completely unfounded once people get to know each other... an' I think within the Bluegrass an' Old-Time scene if you're from Craigsville, or if you're from Churchville or you're in Sherando when you get into the macro-cosm of Bluegrass then you're all considered Virginian musicians.

An' so the-the differences there are truly accent-wise an' ya know maybe somebody does a different verse or some like that but for the most part, ya know, people base you on your state, ya know, like, ah down the way there is a great, ya know, some Kentucky boys are playin' an' they're burnin' it up... or down that way, we got some more Carolina boys down there... know how to fiddle, ya know.

An' the same with Virginia too, I think Virginia gets a lot of good dues man... so does North Carolina. I think those are the two states that I... get the most frequent people from other states trying to get to the root of it going, ya know, how do ya do it Virginia 'cause that's the way we want to learn how to do it... which is interesting. That sort of always been... reviving itself. An' it's great that that tradition that keeps going too...

In the preceding segment, John argues that in the community and expertise of festival-driven music, place remains relevant, but also becomes relative. For example, those derided as hillbillies from Sherando or Craigsville can become simply Virginian through hard work and dedication to an Appalachian tradition, through which collective dignity can be maintained. In short, hard work offers escape, offers Wesen. The American Dream is a fiction, but John

suggests that perhaps the Appalachian Dream is very real. Or is it?

I've always said some of the best music is coming right from this area, as far as Lexington, ah an' Staunton, an' Churchville area... an' I'm not excluding Waynesboro, Sherando or any of those... Craigsville either, as just we have a little bit more population here an' the people tend to get together a little more here.

With kids it's tough, but when I didn't have so many (laughs), I would go to an old-time jam in Charlottesville on Monday nights, Marino's (Staunton) on Tuesday nights, Wednesdays I would go to Stuarts Draft an' play... Thursdays I would go to Charlottesville and Friday an' Saturday an' Sunday would be gig nights at different places. I started going to Marino's when I was 18... They've been doing Bluegrass jams every Tuesday night fer... this is like their 28th year. An' so talk about cutting your teeth on a particular cult— ya know, an area's version of stuff. This is, ya know, the place to get this area's version.

In the previous statement, what is most important to John is the vibrant community focused on pursuing extremes of innovation while staying true to tradition. Yet as John names the local communities and jam locations that produce the best music, he recognizes that those he names are similar in their distance from “hillbilly” locations. Without mention of their relative affluence and access, he describes the difference instead in terms of population and perhaps ease of travel. This inconsistency suggests that there may be gaps in his strategy that he is unwilling to consider, but rather – as he soon describes in regard to the music – he uses romanticism to

cover over those holes to avoid dissonance.

III. Culture: Transcendence or imperfect strategy?

In this last section, John offers his thoughts on the way in which music and culture produce belonging and dignity, a home where his work remains his very own. Indeed, as John has stated previously, the ability to be uniquely valuable within a community grounded in its own history and stories allows for creative, human self-hood (Wesen) within the safety of belonging. Further, as we see in the following, this cultural narrative allows for the gaps, in what inevitably is an imperfect strategy, to be covered over by romanticism when it is strategically useful. This sort of dynamic restructuring allows the cultural place itself to be relevant and relative, using the best of both to create a highly defensible home.

Yeah, oh yes. It definitely is. You can look through it (the music) and see, oh this song is definitely old Appalachian or... this is a takeoff on an old Appalachian song... or this is pertinent to social-economics of the culture now...I mean, there is a lot of things in Appalachian songs that make a lot of sense... ahm, of the – you know how people form opinions... an' a lot of that of course is just no more than myth and romanticism to aid the purpose of the song.

I think... ya know hearing the tunes an' having those melodies in your head an' growing up with 'em as an adult when you play it, there is a definite feeling of a sense of roots, being rooted... of nostalgia sure, an' then also a cultural stamp and even a personal stamp, ya know; a signature if you will...

The way that I play Old Joe Clark, which is one of the oldest melodies in existence, ahm... is the way that I do it or is the way that John Hartford plays it or Earl Scruggs, ya know, rest in peace, or Doc Watson approaches the tune. They each have their stamp, an' I think the goal is to have your stamp so people know it's you but within... the Appalachian stamp, and... even within that it can be divided into a lot of different, ya know...

As much belonging and personal validation as one might find through the culture and music, John also offers cautionary tales about the limits of this strategy. First, through the story of the “father (but not owner) of bluegrass,” John provides a warning about the dangers of personal pride when it comes at the expense of community. In the next he provides a more personal story demonstrating that no matter the strategy, there are limits when set against the ravages of generational and community-wide poverty and marginalization. Last, John tells a tale about an accomplished old-time duo who attempt to exploit a remote Virginia mountain community, only to find that perhaps the hillbillies aren't quite so dumb after all.

Owning music

In the following, John tells the story of Bill Monroe's creating bluegrass as a popular genre drawn from the old-time music he heard growing up. Here again, it was Monroe's dedication and hard work that resulted in his great success, yet it was when his personal pride led him to think that he had created the music itself that his success destroyed the joy he might have found in community. However, near the end John provides some back-story about Monroe that

clarifies why he was driven so hard, and explains John's statement that success is a paradox.

Old-Time... which is generally just a general term for music before 1946 when Bill Monroe created Bluegrass. He really popularized Old-Time... Well, later on... ya know, Bill was just furious at the fact of Ralph Stanley was putting out singles too. Ya know... he owned Bluegrass as far as Bill was concerned. Later on in his life he came to realize his folly and made up with Stanley and amongst the other guys that he had made mad.

I think it was Bill Keith, one of his banjo players in later years came up to 'him and said, "Bill... ya-you can't" he said, "You can't invent music." He said, "it was there." He says, "You-you stamped it, you've made it your own but ya-you didn't inven' it," an' ya know, an' which Bill says, ya know there is some truth in it, 'cause he had learned from his uncles and he had learned from hanging under the porch, listenin' to his family play...

Bill was cross-eyed and so he was really shy as a youngster so... he developed his style listening to, oh well you probably heard the song Uncle Pen...That's what the song is about his Uncle Pen – Pendivere who always came over an' played fiddle an' Bill would hide under the porch an' listen to him an' absorb those melodies playin' his little homemade mandolin.

An' then the other thing he would do is he'd walk way out to the hillside, in Rosine, Kentucky an' just holler at the top with his lungs working on his voice, and so... When Bill finally did achieve some success – he had a pretty good run of it at the time with the

Monroe Brothers – when they first got their first taste of success in the music world, which is almost a paradox in itself, Um, it was one of the first things, he had to get surgery to get his eye fixed.

Because again, Bill was all about the same thing... ya know we're not hillbillies, we're not, you know, these degenerate, and I mean an' fer – for his credit he knew, ya know, hundreds of old-time fiddle tunes. Ya know, just orally that he had picked up, I mean, he is one of those guys with this ear for the melodies...

Moonshine and Mountain music

In this next paragraph, John describes the connections between old-time music and moonshine production, including connection to place. Notably though, neither coping with or surviving poverty is mentioned as helping to create conditions in which people will make or drink it.

Just like there is different musical styles there is different types of Moonshine an' that kind of aspect to it – like in Franklin County they make the best moon – an' these Moonshine an' Bluegrass, Old-Time Music they run right hand-in-hand. Even from the very inception of prohibition. 'Cause what you had was these guys in the country, they had to sit an' watch the still the whole day nothing to do, but to play music and watch the still.

Dangers of booze and Bluegrass

As noted earlier, John has great respect for his teacher Rooster Ruley's musical skill and knowledge. Having played the banjo in old-time bands in Virginia for decades, he left and played with jazz bands in New Orleans and later in New York before returning home. Yet in the following it is clear that Ruley was an imperfect teacher, who struggled to remain open to the wider world. Though John does not offer reasons for this, he does share that this was personally sad for him, and provided both a warning and lesson about appreciating the joy in life.

[Sometimes] I'd go up an' have a lesson with Rooster... ahm, who was very avant-garde in his playing but could also do the traditional stuff. His – he'd be good to talk to, but he's also the kind of guy that'd greet you at the door with a gun an' a jar of moonshine an' be like, "you wanna talk 'bout what now?" Ya know what I'm saying...

An' there was quite a few of those, bunch of the lesson ...he'd be hammered. I mean, beyond hammered... Ya know, like, with this much liquor left in the bottle or whatever... ya know, "I'm not teaching you shit today..." ya know what I'm sayin'?

But he was, growin' up he was a personal hero, ya know, because it'd be like... he can play like fire an' ... every little second I'd be over there as a kid, ya know, just absorbing every lick that he did an' this an' that... It wasn't too much later, I's wow, he's good but ah, his affinity for the finer things in life, like ya know, Miller Lite or whatever is... He sort of digressed ya know... an' so that was, ya know, saw one of my heroes sorta fall from grace an' the warning signs of that looming there...

Charlie Poole

This last cautionary story begins with two accomplished musicians and stillmen who believe that they have a foolproof scheme for exploiting people, which will prove particularly effective in the mountains. Notably John calls this scheme “illustrative of the Southern economic bent,” but later says the story illustrates that “Southern people aren’t as dumb as you think they are.” This is yet another use of regional divisions to obscure his own location just before he references their use of “country justice.” Through this story, John notes the boundary work between lowlands and mountains and between similar states, though most importantly it seems to be a warning to himself and others that to assume your own superiority is taking your life in your hands – both figuratively and literally.

An’ so like if you look up the history of Charlie Poole an’ the North Carolina Ramblers, ahm, an’ their fiddler... Posey Poorer, Charlie an’ uh Posey, they worked as stillmen. An’ so he played banjo an’ the other guy played fiddle an’ so all day they had all this time workout all these songs. An’ jam away so to create their own thing.

They did something else interesting that I think is very – is sort of illustrative of the Southern, uh economic bent here if you will... which is they had these contests and what they would do is they send a third man out an’ he’d have some false notary kind of thing... The honorable, ‘course back then ya know if you want to be a judge or a doctor ya just put it in front of your name an’ there ya go...

An’ ah, so, you know, the Honorable Judge Willis would roll inta town an’ he’d put up

posters for banjo fiddle competition an' it'd be fi'dollars to enter an' first place would be, ya know, the pot. An' so he's there, from town to town he put these posters up.

An' then they'd have the festival an' Charlie an' Posey would show up, knowin' they were shoo-ins, 'cause they already knew the great Honorable Willis. An' so they'd play, they'd all split the pot an' they move on to the next town. And they had it timed where, ya know, the judge would show up about two weeks before and really work the town up an' really get them into a frenzy.

Well, they tried it in ah, Highland County... in McDowell I think, an' they had it all set up just like normal, it was just going to go jus' as planned... an' the people in Highland County, as ya know is very sheltered community, I mean ya get out there, you're an hour away from nearest anything... ya know, as the crow flies an' back then it was even more so, the journeys were even, ya know, more difficult.

An' so you had this community of people they listened to the people that played but they had their own favorites. An' so these two guys came down that were like not only were they Highland's favorite sons of the, ya know, picking contest, but they also just beat Charlie an' Posey outright, ya know... It was obvious they were better.

Well, the judge of course voted for the favor of Charlie an' Posey, an' Highland had a fit. An' I mean it was, it wasn't a lynching but-but it ended up with Charlie havin' a broken banjo, ya know, an' getting part of his ear shot off an' like part of his tooth.

Yeah, yeah like the bullet went in his mouth, an' like took off part of his ear an' like part of his tooth, he got really lucky then... Because they, the town caught on, which is a good example of Southern people aren't as dumb as you think they are... An' they look right, they looked right through it, they saw that they were all together an' so they proceeded to do some old country justice on these guys, an' get their money back, an' eventually succeeded.

But it made for great storytellin' 'cause Charlie is from the North Carolina School an' as I said before, the North Carolina School an' the Virginia School are really close together, um. An' a lot of it has to do with proximity, yeah, but also, it has to do with just the way the tunes traveled, I think.

Here again, it seems the main lesson shared is that while stereotypes suggest Appalachians are the deviants of *Deliverance*, through a commitment to one another and hard work, these hillbillies find dignity and pride through their collective success. In fact, the safety and sanity found in the celebration, embodiment, and sharing of one's' culture in contrast to an American mainstream that seeks to shame, oppress, and even kill, can and often does make the individual an even greater target. And yet there is little choice.

Conclusion

To be sure, the title of this thesis – *Unmarked and unheard: Voices of working class White men in an Appalachian borderland* – only suggests what these men present in the narratives. Particularly the mainstream stereotypes of this population have in effect denied them voice as a scapegoat to protect power. Certainly as these men have repeatedly described, stereotypes grounded in histories of domination are a source of pain and justifications for concrete oppression – and position these men in complex positions. Again, Billings’ call for study of work along with a caution about applying middle-class metropolitan norms to a very different socio-historical context are worth repeating. With respect to culture, this is particularly true as those local cultural forms are vehicles through which resistance happens. Yet there appears here a strategy common to those who struggle against oppression in this neoliberal era.

Where alienation and exploitation simply *are* – all consuming, everywhere, powerful, and unpredictable as the weather – the strategy must also allow resistance everywhere and nowhere at once. This static fluidity, as I have called it, is especially important as capitalism is the pin that holds the machinery of oppressions together, and yet to challenge imperialist, White supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy directly is to court destruction. To be sure, the men presented in the narratives do not have the luxury – the privilege – to *not* have to work, and thus struggle to survive their own oppressions. However, in their understanding and deployment of their own socially constructed meanings, they are able to suggest their alliance to systems of domination, while in fact experiencing solidarity with oppressed others. Such a dynamic strategy of resistance is therefore both present and powerful, and simultaneously a phantom.

The preceding narratives have presented a range of these strategies, from a youthful

emerging idea of his strategy to two increasingly sophisticated strategies for creating and maintaining a home through constructions of work. It should be noted that while Luke's individually constructed strategy lacks a structure that ensures sustainability and protection of the common access that makes his home possible, particularly the music festival "commons" described by John in the last narrative is provided by a well defined collective tradition that Luke lacks. Precisely this sort of well defined and taught structure that simultaneously celebrates the most extreme forms of innovation is invaluable to relieving the kind of fear for the future Luke describes; again hope lies in communities of mutual support.

Within such community contexts work can continue to sound like collusion with individualist competition and consumerism that dehumanize and subjugate while, in fact, be the very description of resistance. Particularly in this socio-historic location, using the American Dream as a frame in which to play Northern and Southern values of work off one another produces a space between in which Wesen can be fostered. That is to say that hard work that is constructed to exercise creativity, skill, dedication, honor, and respect is culturally legitimate self-determination in a context that seeks to reduce workers to robots. This in turn allows for such individual projects of self-determination to support communal Wesen without challenging structure and inviting destruction.

Stated simply, as we see in the last two narratives, these men are not part of a "brain drain" that would take them from home to find some sort of "progress" as defined by outsiders. Rather, they have stayed in their home and found that by celebrating the pre-industrial cultural values of Appalachian tradition, they are able to carve out a collective sanctuary for themselves and their family and friends (somewhat) outside of alienation. For example, by strategically using culture or stereotypes as cover they are able to reframe workers as superior to bosses,

farmers as good, and hillbilly threats as separate from Appalachian success. As a result, their strategies are both unique and also open for others to adapt as they need – further extending the community of mutual support and innovation that makes it all possible.

Such an individualized idea of “hard work” – i.e., farmer, musician, scholar – that reflects the “pull your own weight” ethos of self-determined resistance, is the practice of owning one’s existence and claiming Wesen. Further, it is enacted here as a matter of individual and community pride and survival (done in and through community) *with* nature, which provides both spiritual and personal freedom which cannot be commodified and destroyed. Additionally, given that success is always connected to family/community’s access and needs, pride must be communally derived, and the “commons” that provide access are maintained.

To be sure, for these men home is a socio-historical place where his work and his self/Wesen remains his own, for the benefit of himself, and those with whom he shares mutual support. Once a way of living is found in which one can celebrate their location in the world – indeed their very humanity – in spite of a lifetime of indoctrination suggesting that this only increases their inferiority (within oppression itself, as inferiority is the justification argument of oppression), there is little choice but embrace it to the fullest. This kind of self-acceptance-as-resistance may not make life pain free, in fact this invites greater abuse, but it is to own one’s life rather than be witness to its captivity. This sort of understanding of these (often stigmatized) men in particular, requires all of us to be fluid in our understanding as well as our own practice, while remaining true to the central principle of individual and collective equity.

While those who participate in and benefit from the status quo may see many actions of individuals responding to oppression as counter to their logic; indeed embracing and celebrating a region and culture that has been consistently shamed seems ludicrous. Yet this is the only

choice for someone who does not share a position of relative power enough to belong in the world of that (status quo) logic. This is the only choice to retain some measure of sanity, for if you cannot embrace your own existence you have already ceased to exist. In such a case logic is death and lunacy is life.

Thus, while the region has a history of exploitation, and significant structural challenges continue to make the American Dream a cruel fiction, the grinding despair that poverty produces may be tempered by Wesen created and retained in community. Indeed, this ability to retain the depths of self worth is a strategy that is not universally available and must be maintained, perpetuated, and protected for the good of those in Appalachia and beyond.

Complicating privilege and intersectionality

Appalachia has long played the role that the underclass plays for our economic system; they help keep wages low and shame for institutionalized poverty high. Rather than simply helping keep national “wages” low, however, Appalachia has been socially designated the repository for the toxic elements of “Whiteness” that once made the category “Caucasian” an impossibility. The same intra-White, class-infused racism, which is seen both in the 1896 “Unrestricted Immigration and Its Results – A possible Curiosity of the Twentieth Century, The Last Yankee,”¹¹⁹ and numerous contemporary media, most notably *Deliverance*, is used to divert meaningful critique of White-supremacy onto those with the least power. Indeed, this population has little power to change this system as they are subject to it as well. As Mason (2005) discusses, in contemporary America, “hillbilly” and other forms of derided Whiteness are used as a lightning rod for fused critiques of White supremacy and economic inequity, often joined by

¹¹⁹ See Jacobson, 1998

sexism, homophobia, and other forms of injustice. By rhetorically locating the source of these evils in those who in some senses benefit, yet still retain what Wray (2006) describes as the least social and political capital, the power structure of the nation can respond to inequality in a way that can never threaten the status quo. Particularly as Appalachia is built upon a history of marginalization and indeed domestic-colonization, the region offers an easy target.

Yet it is exactly for this reason the liberation of child wage-slaves in the so-called “third world,” American Indians on reservations, people of color in decaying inner cities such as Detroit, and poor Appalachian White men are linked. One can only ever be as free as the rest, because the “free” market’s exploitation is an equal opportunity employer. The challenge for those who would resist is to move beyond the politically correct politics of identity and understand that the differences among us are reason to celebrate, as they grant us all different vantage points in the world we experience. Moreover, it is this more comprehensive “view” that offers the ability to challenge the situation of each. Yet we must also come to embrace that we are at times oppressed, and at others oppressor; to do otherwise is submission.

In Appalachia, definitions of work constructed around ideals of morality and opportunity effectively trap the region in imperialist, White supremacist, patriarchal expectations that enlist these men as both participants in and victims of those systems. As Mason (2005) describes, the lingering spectre of eugenics is used to divert meaningful critique of White-supremacy, as well as sexism, homophobia, and other forms of injustice, onto those with the most-*least* power. To be clear, the point here is not to bemoan the state of White men in America – even, or especially, in Appalachia¹²⁰. However, Appalachian men do face a unique economic and class struggle to define a less contingent rural male Whiteness. Moreover, this unique view of systems of

¹²⁰ Certainly Willis’s (1977) classic, *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs* has described some of these oppressive dynamics in Britain.

domination and the social capital they enjoy can benefit coalition-based challenges to those systems. However first we must understand the historical and social contexts in which race, class, gender, and place are constructed and reconstructed as “Yankee,” “Southern,” or “hillbilly” in response to threats to and from power. Further, through these men’s struggle to navigate shame in order to stake a claim to self worth and pride, we are given a window into the experience of such symbolic group representations. *And* frankly, I’m not sure that anyone will care.

As I know that people continue to be harmed by those structures, and I see the tremendous potential for change that would benefit entire communities – if not regions – I am compelled to make the following goals of my (hard) work, and call on others to do the same.

1. Ensure that *all* people's stories are heard and valued, including those who have a great deal of social – and therefore potentially political – capital. In this case, White men.
2. Create spaces for the exploration of our own stories, interrogation of the social forces that delimit and shape our world experience, and strive to create examples of the personal liberation and true community that exists just beyond those strictures. Thus, the freedom to whole-heartedly, and without restraint, share our selves, joys and challenges, find validation *and* accountability with all those in the community – and thereby have solidarity in struggle.
3. Do my best to ensure that there might come a time when children won't ever have to learn how to negotiate shame, embarrassment, and the denial of self-love that comes with it... So that they never know anything but that they are valuable and loved.

Indeed, the coalitions formed between the Black Panthers, Young Lords, Young Patriots,

and Lewis and other Appalachian activists demonstrated that similarities in social location can offer a powerful unified response to exploitation. Certainly this thesis is but one small step toward theorizing how this might be replicated in the neoliberal world of the 21st century. Yet, such small steps can have far-reaching ramifications, just as my grandparents demonstrated by creating a loving home and community that extended beyond their own six kids, to include countless foster children, lots of children of color who escaped poverty in New York City for the summer on their farm, their Black neighbors across the road with whom they shared a table and lifetime of friendship, or the many struggling families they served as volunteers at a food pantry in their later years.

Indeed, together we can create justice in the parts of the world we touch. Change is possible; it starts with a critical awareness of power and a commitment to love our fellow human beings as ourselves. In an era in which our history and our contemporary lives are imagined as part of a cult(ure) of individualism¹²¹ that leaves a wake of human and environmental destruction, we must redouble our efforts to celebrate the strength that comes from our united differences as we work to undo the divisions we have been taught to embrace. This is certainly no easy task, and yet as my granddaddy knew, our very survival depends upon the connections and dedication we have to and with one another. He said as much in the truck as we drove to school that day.

¹²¹ See Callero, 2013

Appendix: Methodology

The following is a reflection on my experience as a researcher, born and raised Luxemburg-Mennonite, in an Appalachian-Southern transition space, educated in northern Virginia's D.C. suburbs and the Pacific Northwest, who returned attempting to build relationships and re-enter the community in order to investigate the forces that shaped and hurt me, along with so many others.

From the Heart (of Whiteness)

Because I am one among many who have known pain inflicted upon us for another's gain; yet I am also one among many who has the power to change that for others.

Before my words arrive, everyone knows significant portions of my experience – not in the particular, but rather the abstract. My body speaks: “Here before you stands a White man.” When my voice is heard, the nuances of my pronunciation suggest the source of this accent: certainly, but not quite, Southern. My words sound as if they’re chewing tobacco, not the smooth syrup of the Southern lowlands. Yet I can tell you that speaking about “Whiteness” with an accent readily identified as Southern presents at once two very real feelings. First is terror. Terror that I might in some way visit pain on someone – or myself, as the history of voices like mine speaking about “race” is not a pleasant one. However, the second feeling is one of great possibility as it is the challenge to “Whiteness” that offers a different future. These two feelings, as well as the rest of my story, offer an example of what many may call ally development (see Casey, 2010 and Edwards, 2006 for discussion of anti-violence models).

To be sure, working-class, White, Appalachian, and male describes me and most of those with whom I was raised. Further, this project seeks not only to ensure those voices are heard, but

in doing so also present the ways in which we are – and desire to become – partners in struggle, thus changing the culture of domination more rapidly. Because we have known the pain of inferiority, and especially because many of the systems that perpetuate such hierarchies claim us as beneficiaries and supporters, we have tremendous power to interrupt them by rejecting these systems. Even further, together we can usurp the forces that divide and conquer us all through shame, self-hatred, fear, and violence by rejecting what Foucault calls “the kind of individuality which has been imposed on us” (see Sandoval, p.164) and embracing what Sandoval in *Methodology of the Oppressed* calls “revolutionary love” – or what I was raised to know as Christian love, of a sort rarely practiced.

Certainly, no one should ever have to feel inferior, and the great irony is treating another as inferior infects you such that no one can feel whole so long as the cycle continues. As Sandoval (2000) quotes from Fanon’s discussion of the “Negro Problem” in *Black Skin, White Mask*, it is not a

...’problem of Negroes living among White men,’ but is, rather, the problem of ‘Negros exploited, enslaved, despised by a colonialist, capitalist society’ that is ‘*only accidentally White*’ – any race can utilize and inhabit the categories of supremacism. The race that does so creates a rhetoric-for-being that binds (in varying forms) *all* citizen-subjects. Such enslavement includes the White man in a White-man’s state, Fanon writes, for he has become ‘enslaved’ by his own expressions of ‘superiority.’ Thus, the speakers and the rhetoric of the dominant order must be transformed... (p. 129)

As described by Fanon, “Whiteness” is the trap that too often creates within the subjects of this study the schizophrenia Alice Walker described when she wrote, “[w]e are oppressor and oppressed... To attempt to function as only one when you are really two, or three, leads, I

believe, to psychic illness: ‘White’ people have shown us the madness of that” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 194). This is at the heart of Lilla Watson’s well known quote, “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

Moreover, the previous quote is critical to the aforementioned ally development, which is important to create systemic change. Given that White, working-class, Appalachian men have been socialized to experience their raced and gendered selves as their only hope of attaining social position, and thus personal value; they approach race and gender from a personal place. While any “moral” person will be concerned with the struggle of an “other,” meeting them in this same personal-validation space is critical to full investment in change that benefits all involved. In contrast, power resides in perpetuating the conviction that what benefits the othered raced or gendered group, produces the direct inversion for me; thus my personal validation is lessened. However, by “interrogating Whiteness” we cannot help but grapple with our relationships to both power and the pain of marginalization. Thus the powerful “WIIFM” – the “What’s in it for me” I learned working my way through college in sales is here what we all long for: validation and love.

Before I proceed, let me explain a bit more about myself, which might illuminate why I believe both voice and WIIFM are central to liberation. Coming from a family that I experienced as apathetic at best about higher education, I did not readily accept that my path would lead through college as this was not only an investment of finances (which is not insignificant in itself), but signified a profound departure from everything I knew and which was valued in my familial and social contexts. People like us do not go to college or move to the city, and doing both was to express that “I’m better than ya’ll” and thereby ostracize myself from

family and friends at home. Clearly this demonstrates a significant internalization of class and rural marginalization, which is then converted into an underdog pride that maintains this norm. Indeed, when I started college in the Washington, DC suburbs, my younger brothers (who have never gone to college) started referring to me as “Yankee,” though I never left the state. This was said as a somewhat comical slight, but in that area the term connotes both despicability and, when used in reference to a Southerner, implies treason. While my childhood dream of “escape” came true through great effort and courage, I can *never* go “home” again as I have crossed into a world apart from the solidarity that comes with rejecting the “elitism” of middle-class intellectualism. My escape was more complete than I had anticipated.

Now liberation might be an odd concept to return to here, yet it is important to note that the most profound experience of my college career was when I was introduced to the liberatory potential of feminist deconstructions of masculinity. In retrospect that liberation was so incredibly important to me because I had been seeking freedom from the constant pursuit of validation on terms that were defined by others and changed based on the (cultural) context. Note here that the structure that is defined for and by us simultaneously is the very structure of domination, both patriarchy and Whiteness in this case. Through feminist critiques of masculinity I found an intensely uncomfortable challenge to self-define, and thereby liberate, my gendered self. Simultaneously, and critically also for the first time, I was offered language and solidarity around my class experience. Later, I was challenged to consider how “othered” others might experience the parts of myself which profit from systems of inequality. Perhaps most importantly here, these readings helped me negotiate power and minimize my own pain. This in turn helped me approximate an understanding of how I, along with those “othered” around me, experienced power differently.

Although a White, heterosexual, former football player, raised working-poor in the Southern Appalachian Mountains of Virginia, the eldest of my European mother and Mennonite father's three sons, it is because my liberation also resides there that I call a college campus Women's Center "home." In addition, though I went to college with the intention of becoming an FBI agent, the experiences above led me to decide that sexual and intimate partner violence prevention and gender equity education was my calling. Both careers were predicated on ensuring that there would be less pain in the lives of people around me, and in my present work, the power of how I am perceived is sadly a powerful tool to offer other young men similar opportunities for liberation, and young women a safer world.

As alluded to at the outset, I am very aware that I present in a particular way and that as a result others ascribe certain qualities to me. Further, I learned early that I could insulate myself particularly because people will see me immediately as a White man but know only of my "place" if I speak and my class of origin if I describe it. Thus I can easily "pass" in a way others cannot. This is to say that while I did intentionally learn to minimize my accent so I could be seen as "intelligent", I have always had a degree of control. In fact, I have regularly used my accent to offer a challenge to those in power who are unable to see how this "good 'ol boy" in front of them could possibly advocate for "those people." I, and others like me, am afforded a powerful strategic location. Indeed, as a dear friend put it, I have the potential to be "a spy." We can be the resistance that is *not* recognized and, like a life-giving cancer within, corrupt the infrastructure of domination.

However, in order to make positive use of this, those like me must grapple with our own dialectical relationships with, in, and within power structures. Sandoval offers a description by citing Foucault's writings on "refusing fascism," or the ways in which the state's apparatus of

power “...categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him” (p 163). Sandoval continues,

Before the citizen-subject's birth into the social world, the intersections of race, culture, sex, gender, class and social powers are already locating in order to provide a particular space to hold that individual, to pattern the kind of subjectivity it will be permitted. From the moment of its birth, the citizen-subject becomes regulated, branded, and shaped, the first world ideological apparatus imbricated through its subjectivity in a novel, and, we might say, more total way than ever before. First world citizen-subjects take pride in their "freedom" of movement and speech, their activities trusted as "good citizens" – replicated the social order and its hierarchizations, usually without the necessary imposition of directly brutal state force.... (p. 164)

Therefore, in the places in which we reside in power, we are entrusted to perpetuate that power through our “freedom.” Yet it is exactly the opposite. This sense of self is exactly that which traps us, and our un-critical identification with that category – as White and/or male – reinforces the trap. Thus as James Baldwin said, “As long as you think you’re White, there’s no hope for you.” This is not a simplistic call for empathy. While clearly hierarchies of power negatively impact even those who benefit, and certainly those whom it seeks to eradicate from the social landscape, even empathy can stand in the way of resistance. If the dialectical relationship with power has not been grappled with, but the individual seeks to empathize with those “othered” from their beneficial subjective location, their efforts will be thwarted by the unavoidable shaping of their interaction in power.

If we are to assume that liberation implies an existing constraint, and that one's embrace of their subjectivity is a lock on the broader system, we must both accept our position and yet see the system as unnatural and harmful, rather than beneficial. Further, having self-reflectively accepted this contrast, the security we previously felt becomes experienced not as our true "natural" self, but rather the "straitjacket" Katz described (*Tough Guise, 1999*). Thus, owning the positionality given us, yet striving to exist outside those limits becomes our method of liberation and both withdraws our support from and weakens the infrastructure of power. It is at this juncture that empathy and coalition building might start to occur, but only because we wrestle with and embrace the dialectic of self within power.

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