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## PRODUCING POSSIBILITIES: ENVISIONING AND MEDIATING YOUTH, IDENTITIES, AND FUTURES IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA

Tammy Lynn Clemons

*University of Kentucky*, tammy.lynn.clemons@gmail.com

Author ORCID Identifier:

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6576-6304>

Digital Object Identifier: <https://doi.org/10.13023/etd.2021.197>

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### Recommended Citation

Clemons, Tammy Lynn, "PRODUCING POSSIBILITIES: ENVISIONING AND MEDIATING YOUTH, IDENTITIES, AND FUTURES IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA" (2021). *Theses and Dissertations--Anthropology*. 53.  
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Tammy Lynn Clemons, Student

Dr. Ann E. Kingsolver, Major Professor

Dr. Richard Jefferies, Director of Graduate Studies

PRODUCING POSSIBILITIES: ENVISIONING AND MEDIATING  
YOUTH, IDENTITIES, AND FUTURES IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Tammy Lynn Clemons  
Lexington, Kentucky  
Director: Dr. Ann E. Kingsolver, Professor of Anthropology  
Lexington, Kentucky  
2021

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<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6576-6304>

## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### PRODUCING POSSIBILITIES: ENVISIONING AND MEDIATING YOUTH, IDENTITIES, AND FUTURES IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA

This dissertation, based on anthropological research between 2015 and 2020, focuses on young people in different yet interconnected social contexts in Central Appalachia and how they envision, construct, and act upon possibilities for themselves and the region through multimodal cultural production processes like visual art, performance, and multisensory media. The research question focusing this project was: How do the social contexts of young Appalachians' engagement in media consumption and production practices shape the possibilities they envision for themselves, others, and their region? I found that the specific contexts were less important than the interconnected mentoring conversations across sites and generations (which can be measured in decades or a few years). Grounded in feminist activist ethnography and participatory praxis, method/ologies intentionally include research collaborators as knowledge producers, co-theorists, and scholar-activist-practitioners. My mixed-method approach included "observant participation" with young people and their "formerly young" mentors in key educational media programs and communities; semi-structured interviews; and selective digital ethnography and public multimodal youth cultural productions by research collaborators. This dissertation problematizes the category of "young Appalachians," often invoked in regional development conversations, pointing out how young people are differently situated in terms of identity and access, and including voices in the region that have been silenced in many contexts.

This multi-sited ethnography pays attention to gendered, generational, and racialized dynamics in different spaces for youth identity construction and cultural production in what began as three varied educational sites in West Virginia and East(ern) Kentucky. I developed the notion of "Meta'lachia" as the scope of "field sites" broadened beyond discreet locations and shifted to a more complex and often interconnected range of, and flows between, multi-layered social contexts and political ecological systems, processes, and pathways. Similarly, my "generational" perspective emerged to reflect intersections in media education and activism and the gendered expressions that occur in different spaces through intergenerational examples and support. My conceptual framework also draws on Affrilachian, Appalachian futuring, and LGBTQ\* theorizing by young Appalachians and contributes the notions of "trans-ing Appalachia" and



“intersectional sustainability” to discuss efforts for building and modeling solidarity across “Meta’lachian” meshworks.

Research collaborators show how youth is a flexible identity and space for intergenerational mentorship and activism and how “young people” are connected across space and time through shared histories (often the ones not told in dominant narratives), relationships, networks, built social environments, and knowledge production/sharing. They foster and support these meshworks, even with minimal resources, through agentive “make-do media” practices, the “doing of making,” and producing their own counterstorytelling about themselves and “Meta’lachia.” This dissertation contributes to anthropological and Appalachian Studies scholarship that uses ethnographic and mixed methodologies, including oral histories and visual storytelling, to bring gendered and minoritized voices to the fore and listen for more complex understandings and representations of the region.

KEYWORDS: Appalachia, youth, intergenerational, media education, social movements, sustainable development

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Tammy Lynn Clemons

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05/15/2021

Date

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YOUTH, IDENTITIES, AND FUTURES IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA

By  
Tammy Lynn Clemons

Dr. Ann E. Kingsolver  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Dissertation

Dr. Richard Jefferies  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Graduate Studies

05/15/2021  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

DEDICATION

To Ruby May Kidd Clemons (1925-2015)

I'm sorry it took "*so long*," Mamaw ...

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Through the study and praxis of feminist activist ethnography, I have learned again what I already knew to be true: no creative or research project is ever produced by a single person. Therefore, I am indebted to innumerable people who made me and this dissertation/cultural production possible. Without the support of key research collaborators, family and friends, academic and professional mentors and colleagues, and funding resources that contributed to my dissertation research, this “book” would not exist. This list is lengthy but not exhaustive, so apologies for having overlooked anyone on paper: you’re in my heart.

I owe so much to so many research collaborators in various “field sites” in South America, East(ern) Kentucky, and West Virginia who opened up their organizations, projects, homes, stories, and homes to this “formerly young” doctoral student and media maker. This dissertation is a tribute to all they shared with and taught me and the enormous gift of time and energy they contributed toward its completion. *Gracias a Pukañawi, especialmente Humberto Mancilla, y todos en Sucre, Bolivia* for broadening my lens during preliminary research to see youth media makers and activists as globally concerned and connected. For my dissertation research, I am boundlessly grateful to the primary sites of media education programs at the Appalachian Media Institute, High Rocks Educational Corporation, and Owsley County High School/Berea College Partners for Education for welcoming me as a collaborating teacher/learner in youth spaces.

First thanks to all the folks at Appalshop, AMI, and Roadside Theater in Letcher County, Kentucky who participated in interview projects and let me hang out at the Boone Youth Center. Thanks especially to formal research collaborators, Ada Smith,

Dustin Hall, Natasha Watts, Kate Fowler, Oakley Fugate, Elyssia Lowe, Oliver Baker, Mikie Burke, Willa Johnson, Brandon (Sun Eagle) Jent, Kyra Higgins, Shaylan Clark, Austin Rutherford, Devyn Creech, and Mimi Pickering. Thanks also to Tanya Turner, Ben Spangler, Lacy Hale, Donna Porterfield, and Amy Brooks for your hospitality and collaboration when I spent time in Whitesburg.

Hearty thanks to everyone at the High Rocks who welcomed me with open arms and jobs to complete when I first showed up as a volunteer, and who continued welcoming and working with me as a regular summer colleague for several years. Thanks to formal research collaborators Sarah Riley, Rae Garringer, Kris Arbuckle, Ellie Bell, Marlyn McClendon, Shelby Mack, Max Leyzorek, Caroline Ackerman, Mabel Eisenbeiss, and Nicole Hall as well as other campers, interns, AmeriCorps volunteers, and staff who also deepened my knowledge about the High Rocks experience and community over time: Hailey Hall, Stella McNeeley, Skylar Griffith, Gillian Snyder, Shayna Hammons, Brandy Clay, Tania Russell, Kacie Parsons, Yvette Robinson, Moniefia Maitland, Alice Beecher, Leah (Turgeon) Barbor, Emily Barrineau, Sarah “Liz” Kammeyer, Natalie Quist, Josie Martin, Devin Preston, Kayla Riley, Margaret Falleta, Renae Hall, Naomi and Mark Cohen, Karline Jensen, Kendra Taylor, Megan Lenherr, Britt Huerta, Brandon Richardson, Dana Cultlip, and Janet Swift. Special thanks to Sarah, Kayla, Leah, and Dana for opening up your hearts and homes to a sometimes-weary camp staffer and to Brandy for my first LOA and ongoing supportive encounters and encouragement each summer. Extra special thanks and admiration for the “Mother of High Rocks” Susan Burt, whose intrepid spirit and living legacy personally impacted and inspired me in addition to countless generations of young people.

Thanks to folks at Owsley County High School, Owsley County Action Team, and Partners for Education at Berea College for the opportunity to “observantly participate,” first as a volunteer and then as an official teaching artist, in school-based media projects. Special thanks to formal research collaborators in Owsley County: Frankie Jo Baldwin, JoAnne Richardson, Molly Turner, Glenn Baker, Stevie Nolan, and Logan Woodward; and Partners for Education: Natalie Gabbard, Sarah Campbell, Judy Sizemore, and Robert Martin. Thanks to Natalie, Sarah, and PFE support staff for everything you do to help put artmaking into the hands and hearts of Appalachian youth and to connect them with real-life artists as teachers, role models, and co-creators. Thanks also for bringing regional teaching artists together and providing valuable resources, support, and community. I am especially endeared and indebted to my friend and neighbor “Bobby B” and my dear friend and mentor “Miss Judy” for inviting me to help with projects and encouraging me to see myself as both a media artist and teaching artist. Equally heart-felt thanks to all the public-school students I was privileged to work with, listen to, and learn from through teaching artist residencies.

Thanks to several formal research collaborators from other “meta-sites” in Meta’lachia who shared some of their work and insights on arts and activism, media-making, regional development, creative place-making, and what it means to be young in the mountains: Ivy Brashear, Crystal Good, Nick Mullins, Cynthia Warner, Shaunna Scott, Kathryn Engle, Robert Gipe, Roy Silver, Alexia Ault, Joy Gritton, Stephen LaBoueff, end mass incarceration, and Sam Gleaves. I am also grateful for the contributions of Appalachian educators like Jessica Salfia and artists like Roger May who inspire and teach others through their living examples as regional leaders who chose to

stay in the region. Thanks also to several regional organizations and communities that served as important “meta-sites” of interaction and learning, including but not limited to the Appalachian Studies Association/Young Appalachian Leaders and Learners (Y’ALL), Brushy Fork Leadership Institute, Higher Ground/IG2BYITM, Hurricane Gap Theater Institute, Kentucky Arts Council, Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange, Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN), and the Appalachian Centers at Berea College, Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College, and the University of Kentucky. Thanks especially to the Stay Together Appalachian Youth (STAY) Project for being a grassroots model and regional headquarters for organizing young people who believe in and fight for their right to stay. I am grateful for the time and generosity of *all* formal and informal research collaborators throughout Meta’lachia for sharing their knowledge and experiences for this project.

While at UK, I received funding support from various sources that enabled me to spend time in different programs and communities for my multi-sited research. The UK Department of Anthropology provided funding support for preliminary research in Perú and Bolivia, including an O’Dear Award for Graduate Student Research in Latin America and a Susan Abbot-Jamieson Pre-Dissertation Research Fund Award. The UK Appalachian Center helped fund summer field research in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia with an Eller/Billings Summer Research Mini-Grant and multiple James S. Brown Graduate Student Awards for Research on Appalachia. I also received several fellowships, awards, and scholarships that helped provide vital tuition-relief during different phases of dissertation research and writing, including merit-based endowed fellowships from the UK Association of Emeriti Faculty and the UK Woman’s Club; a

UK Student Government Association Academic Excellence Scholarship for a Graduate Student; a Berea College Olive Ruth Russell Fellowship; and a Mensa Education & Research Foundation Galiley Scholarship.

As part of my dissertation research, I received a Scholarly Research Fellowship from the Kentucky Historical Society as well as funding support for an oral history project on “Youth Activism in Different Generations in Appalachia,” including a Project Grant and a Transcription Grant from the Kentucky Oral History Commission and a Martha Ross Memorial Prize from OHMAR (Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region). The UK Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History also provided equipment support, a partial match for interview transcriptions, and serves as the official archival repository for this oral history collection. Special thanks to Dr. Ann Kingsolver, Dr. Doug Boyd, Dr. Amanda Higgins, Sarah Schmitt, and Dr. Stephanie Lang for sharing knowledge, feedback, and support for the design and implementation of this project. Thanks also to Kopana Terry, Oral History Archivist at the Nunn Center, for helping process the collection and coordinating with Audio Transcription Center to provide quality expedited draft interview transcripts. Thanks to all the helpful folks at the Berea College Special Collections and Sound Archives and the UK Special Collections Research Center for archival research assistance. I am also grateful for travel support from the UK Graduate School, the Department of Anthropology, and the Appalachian Center for presenting my research at regional and national conferences as well as PFE scholarships for professional development workshops at the Brushy Fork Institute and Berea Festival of Learnshops. I am especially grateful to the Kentucky Foundation for Women for funding an audio



tribute to my paternal Mamaw Ruby May Kidd Clemons who taught me to always be a kid and whose wisdom and example inform my dissertation topic.

I literally would not be here without my family. I can never fully express how much my Mamaw Ruby and Papaw Howard Clemons mean(t) to me and how fortunate and grateful I am to have them as a constant source of unconditional love and support through so much of my life. They encouraged me and offered material support in my doctoral program, even though they really didn't understand (again) and did not live to see its completion. I am also grateful for my Dad Ivan Clemons and 'Nother Mother Carole Hall for their continued love and assistance through various stretches of fieldwork and family matters along the way. I will always appreciate the essential support my mother Gwen Clemons provided while studying at Harvard Divinity School, which made my doctoral study possible. Thanks to my Aunt Tracye Hill and my cousins Melinda Joseph-Dezarn and Karla Clemons for being steadfast sister-friends and fans of my nerdy aspirations, especially "My Linny" who was my home away from home at UK. I am also grateful for all my fur family past and present, especially Dewboy, Annabelle, Spot, Peachy, Baby Sass, and Limestone Girl. Last and never least, I owe *so much* love, gratitude, and happiness to my partner Timi Reedy, without whom there would be no "Dr. Tambone." Timi, thank you for being there for the long-haul through my many different stints in academia as well as for your endless optimism, support, flexibility, and interest, especially in this decade-long doctoral journey.

I am continually grateful for friends from childhood through "formerly young" adulthood whose influence and support helped encourage my identity and practice as a writer/scholar/activist/artist; Jessi (Shrout) Feltner whose creative journaling inspired me

to make my own; Amy (Wilson) Frazier, scholastic peer-mentor par excellence; Courtney (CoCo) Stonestreet for co-pioneering the independent women's studies major with me at Berea; Dr. Heather Brown and Roshan Kalantar for our infamous feminist friendship and activism at HDS, especially F.U. (Feminists United); and Dr. Deborah Thompson, Dr. Karen Rignall, and Dr. Cassie Patterson for your friendship and encouragement as peer-mentors as I navigated doctoral study as a *very* non-traditional student.

I owe much of my creative, academic, and professional development to several influential teachers and mentors who I also count as friends. Thanks to Chic Clemons who introduced me to “Jack Tales” and enthusiastically nurtured my talents as a storyteller and theater artist in middle school; Janet Johnson, an incredible “Teacher Who Made a Difference” by encouraging my literary talents; Dr. Peggy Rivage-Seul, Dr. Gordon McKinney, Dr. Barbara Wade, and Dr. Maria Lichtmann for undergraduate academic mentorship and enabling me to design and complete my independent major as the first Women's Studies graduate from Berea College; Carolyn Toll Oppenheim for offering sanctuary to country dykes in Cambridge and being our radical Jewish mother; Dr. Mary Daly and Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether for teaching us about ecofeminism and liberation theology; Dr. Ann Braude for being my unofficial advisor and scholarly mentor at HDS; fellow graduate student co-workers and all the folks at the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study from 1999-2001, especially Roshan, Bri Mason, Debbie Richards, Kathy Herrlich, Kathy Kraft, and Anne Englehart; Dr. Larry D. Shinn and Melissa Osborne for my hands-on professional and administrative education working in the President's Office at Berea College; Dr. Juliana McDonald and Dr. Hsain Ilahiane for your wisdom and support in

teaching undergraduate anthropology; Wanda Brooks, Pam Webb, Erin Norton, and Catherine Brereton for your care and support in helping so many graduate students navigate administrative minutiae in pursuit of academic study; Dr. Mary Hufford and Dr. Betsy Taylor for including me in the documentation of regional community-based research and discussions; and Dr. Natalie Underberg-Goode for serving as an entirely virtual “visual anthropology mentor” to a random doctoral student from another university who reached out with questions.

Thanks to Dr. Gloria Watkins for teaching me so much and for supporting my application to UK. I am deeply indebted to my doctoral advisor and committee chair (Dr. Ann Kingsolver), all the members of my doctoral committee (Dr. Mary Anglin, Dr. Carmen Martínez Novo, and Dr. Carol Mason), and outside reviewer (Dr. Kathryn Newfont) for providing rigorous feedback. I am especially grateful for the scholarly mentorship and endless wisdom, guidance, patience, flexibility, and loving kindness of Ann, without whom I could not have so stubbornly persisted and completed my doctoral degree. I am also forever grateful for her “Writing Group” of past and present advisees and the ongoing family of scholar-activists it supports: Dr. Mary Beth Schmid, Dr. Sasi Balasundaram, Dr. Victoria LeBeaux, Dr. Saakshi Joshi, Dr. Lilian Milanes, Dr. Karla M. Encalada Falconí, Dr. Takami Delisle, Dr. Mauri Systo, Dr. Jasper Waugh-Quasebarth, and Dr. Chhaya Kolavalli. Thanks for listening to me talk about my work over the years as well as reading and providing valuable constructive feedback on many conference abstracts, funding proposals, and draft chapters in progress. Thanks especially to MB for being my UK BFF from the moment we started together and becoming my kin. (Also, special thanks and hugs to HA for reading drafts and being a witness.)

I truly appreciate the folks who organize and implement the UK Dissertation Writing Camp, especially Morris Grubbs from the Graduate School and Ashley Sorrell from CELT, for their friendly encouragement and support through *several* camp sessions over the years. Thanks also to Xianlin Lin and Edward Lo, members of my check-in group from the May 2020 Writing Camp, who steadfastly continued weekly Zoom meetings to share writing goals, progress/updates, and virtual food appreciation. I am so fortunate to have made new friends in the middle of a pandemic. I am also grateful for the “Dissertation Success” program and Forum community and the virtual writing encouragement and strategies of Kerry Ann Rockquemore through UK’s institutional membership to the National Center for Faculty Diversity & Development; as well as Jan Allen, Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs at Cornell University, for generously sharing her time and knowledge with UK graduate students and inviting us to participate in the Cornell Winter Graduate Writing Boot Camp. These in-person and virtual communities of solidarity and support helped me begin, continue, and sometimes begin again a daily writing practice, and they reminded me that I was not the only person writing (and finishing) a dissertation during a pandemic.

Finally, humble gratitude to the Spring 2020 PSJ/SOC 386 ethnographic methods students at Berea College for valiantly enduring the mid-semester COVID-19 transition to remote learning and for teaching me (*again*) about the importance of “being there,” human vulnerability and persistence, and young people’s visions for a more just and sustainable world for *everyone*.

Portions of this dissertation appeared previously in Clemons (2020) “What *Does* it Mean to Be “Young” in the Mountains? Voices from the ‘Youth Activism in Different Generations in Appalachia’ Oral History Project,” published in the *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 118(1):19-66 (Special Issue on “Beyond the War on Poverty: New Perspectives on Appalachia since 1970” Kathryn Newfont, ed.), reprinted here with permission.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### Agencies/Organizations/Projects

Full Name	Abbreviation
Appalachian Media Institute	AMI
Appalachian Regional Commission	ARC
Appalachian Studies Association	ASA
Arts Connect Appalachian Youth	ACAY
Berea College Partners for Education	PFE
Booneville Entertainment Center	BEC
High Rocks Educational Corporation	HR
It's Good to Be Young in the Mountains	IG2BYITM
Kentuckians for the Commonwealth	KFTC
Kentucky Arts Council	KAC
Kentucky Educational Television	KET
Kentucky Foundation for Women	KFW
Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative	KVEC
National Endowment for the Arts	NEA
Our Creative Promise	OCP
Owsley County High School	OCHS
Owsley County Action Team	OCAT
Owsley County Public Library	OCPL
Owsley County Alliance for Recreation and Entertainment	OCARE
Peoples Rural Telephone Cooperative	PRTC
Shaping Our Appalachian Region	SOAR
Stay Together Appalachian Youth	STAY
Student Technology Leadership Program	STLP
Young Appalachian Leaders & Learners	Y'ALL

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: “IF YOU ASK US / WE HAVE A STORY”: YOUTH VOICES TALK BACK TO/ABOUT “APPALACHIA”

### 1.1 #IfYouAskUs @ASA



Figure 1 Still image of young people singing their original song, “If You Ask Us,” from live video stream of 2018 ASA keynote plenary, Cincinnati, Ohio, April 6, 2018 (rotated left 90 degrees by author from the original vertical video)

The entirely youth-focused, youth-led, and youth-presented keynote plenary, entitled “Truth to Power: Appalachian Youth Test the Boundaries and Bust the Seams!”, at the 2018 Appalachian Studies Association (ASA) conference was the first time the annual event exclusively featured young people as one of the main keynote presentations. The plenary was part of that year’s conference theme, which was “Re-stitching the Seams: Appalachia Beyond Its Borders.” The preliminary program noted that plenary organizers included young people from the Appalachian Media Institute (AMI) in Kentucky and High Rocks Educational Corporation (High Rocks) and Spring Mills High School in West Virginia, and described the presentation as “performance, film, literary readings, and presentation of research in an interactive format” (Appalachian Media

Institute, et al. 2018). The weather was cold and rainy that day, but there was warmth and anticipation for the keynote plenary in the second-floor grand ballroom of the fancy hotel in downtown Cincinnati where most of the conference sessions were scheduled. Ornate chandeliers hung from the tall ceilings of the large room, and a wide center aisle divided two large sections of seating each with about a dozen rows of chairs filled with approximately 200 ASA members, who were mostly young adults and “formerly young” adults, waiting for the keynote to begin. Near the end of the aisle, someone with a video camera was setting up to live-stream the presentation on the ASA Facebook page (Appalachian Studies Association 2018).

The complete group of presenters were more than 30 young people mostly from West Virginia with a couple from East(ern) Kentucky.<sup>1</sup> They were mostly high school students with a few others in their late teens or early twenties, and they were mixed-gendered with a majority of young women. The theme (and social media hashtag) #IfYouAskUs was the organizing framework through which these young people, alone and in small groups, shared original poetry, music, personal essays, film selections, and much-needed commentary in front of an audience of their teachers, mentors, and total strangers. Throughout the hour-long presentation, they talked about the natural beauty of their home region and shared some of the personal impacts of the coal mining, gender identity, the opioid crisis, education, natural disasters, and labor strikes.

Two young women wearing black t-shirts with a white outline of West Virginia with the single word “Home.” stepped up to the podium and began in unison, “Dear

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<sup>1</sup> Except where I am directly quoting someone or the name of an entity, I use the designation of “East(ern) Kentucky” as inclusive of “East Kentucky” and “Eastern Kentucky,” both colloquial phrases referring to the mountainous region of the state. I further discuss relevant observations and scholarship about this word choice in the section on naming practices in chapter 2 on methods.



Appalachia...” They took turns reading a letter from “Your Future” and declared that “The future is not a what but a who.” They challenged the “stigma” and stereotypes of high school students and called out the double standard of representation: “You tell us that we are the future, but then you put an age limit on contributors.” Then an AMI filmmaker shared the first five minutes of a 2017 film she co-produced called, *Dying Breed*, which was about the continued prevalence of black lung in the Appalachian coal fields and the lack of attention paid to its causes and its victims (Rose, et al. 2017).

This film clip was followed by a performance by about half of the young people of an original song, “If You Ask Us” that they had written during their rehearsal the night before. The song began with the chorus, which repeated throughout the song:

If you ask us  
We have a story  
If you ask us  
It’s worth hearing  
If you ask us  
We want a change  
And it’s gonna happen today

The verses described coming from different kinds of communities and repeated the entreaty, “Whatever you do / Please, please don’t destroy my home.” After a couple of verses, one of the performers invited the audience to participate in a call-and-response sing-along by singing the lines after the line, “If you ask us.” At the very end of the song, they sang the chorus once more a cappella with new words for the last few lines: “... we want to remind you / You’re never alone / ‘Cause Appalachia / This is our home.”

This song was followed by two more AMI film excerpts presented by a couple of young filmmakers. One piece from *Dos Patrias: Living Latino in Appalachia* (Jent, et al. 2015) highlighted the identities and experiences of Latino immigrants living in the

region. The other clip was from another film made the same summer called *Beyond Me*, which was about LGBTQ experiences in East(ern) Kentucky (Spangler, et al. 2015). Then two young women from Spring Mills stood up and confronted the issue of education. They talked about “education” versus “loving learning” and about the 2018 teacher strikes in West Virginia that took place in the month right before the conference. They expressed gratitude for their teachers as “respected family” and their “55 Strong” commitment and sacrifices during the state-wide strike, which was also “not a vacation” but a stressful time of makeshift education for students and their families. “My education was put on the back burner, because my teachers were put on the back burner.” Next was a young woman from High Rocks who continued the theme and critique of education. She described in detail the “educational trailer park” where her classes were temporarily housed in sub-par conditions during her senior year after her high school was destroyed by the devastating flooding in West Virginia in June 2016. She also talked about the controversial threat of school consolidation. She said that “We are the future. ...” and “Education needs equity” because of “the people who are most affected but least consulted when it comes to their own education.”

Four more young women from High Rocks shared their individual responses to #IfYouAskUs. One young woman talked about her feeling of “state pride” every time she hears the song, “Country Roads.” She also connected to the larger region’s social history and power by saying, “The solidarity we have as Appalachia is both terrifying and empowering. We, as states, have started revolutions.” Another young woman shared an essay about the flora and fauna and natural beauty of the state and said, “A healthy Appalachia means healthy Appalachians.” Another talked about the “good old days”

where everyone had what they needed and critiqued the “economic noose” of the “boom and bust” timber industry in her home community. She acknowledged that her family relied on food stamps and the food pantry to get by and then expressed hope by proclaiming that “I, us, we can be the change. We are the solution. We can make a change. Just ask us.” The young woman who followed shared her experience of being born addicted to opioids and watching her mother overdose more times than she can “count on both hands.” She called people to blame the drug companies “instead of pointing your fingers at the junkies,” and the audience erupted in whooping applause. She too expressed hope and determination, saying, “We are the children of addicts. We are the future. We are Appalachians, too.” Another young woman wanted to know “Who broke Appalachia? ... Did we allow the pharmaceutical giants to stuff their drugs down our throats and have the nerve to call it medicine? We lost the War on Poverty before the government gave it its name.” She declared, “Too often we find others writing our biographies, telling our stories. How do we show the world what they’re getting wrong about Appalachia, that we’re not some ‘Hillbilly Elegy.’” Several people broke into applause in response to Mabel’s allusion to the problematic memoir by the same name, which was also a moment of foreshadowing that was unbeknownst to anyone at the time (discussed more later). “We have to heal ourselves with medicine of our own making.”

A young woman from Spring Mills talked about moving from California to West Virginia, as an Asian American, and the region’s stereotype for lack of diversity. She talked about creating spaces where young people with different identities and backgrounds can “feel accepted,” know they are not alone, “have a home,” and want to stay in the region. Another young woman from Spring Mills shifted the presentation

format to an entertaining and informative interactive call and response referring to common stereotypes about Appalachia and to different representations of diverse identities in the room. Another AMI filmmaker presented an excerpt of one of his most recent of many film productions. *Not a Daughter* is an intimate biopic about a friend and fellow AMI alum who transitioned their gender identity, without familial support, while part of the summer program (Fugate 2016a).

After the film clip, three young people from Spring Hills stepped up to the mics reading aloud in unison, “If you ask us about Appalachia, we could tell you almost anything...” They shared their individual stories about their landscapes, lives, and families, and they closed by invoking and paying homage to West Virginia teachers. The students had asked why they stayed, they repeated their teachers’ response (all three in unison again): “For my family, for my community, for you.” At the end of the formal presentation, one of the many participants disclosed that “Most of us actually met as strangers yesterday” and chuckled. “From 6:30 ‘til midnight last night, we put on this entire show.” The audience cheered, applauded, and rose for a standing ovation. The youth plenary then invited audience participation, and they distributed index cards to the audience and invited them to write and share “any questions that you have for young people in Appalachia” using the cards and/or #IfYouAskUs on social media. One of the comments they got on a card was: “A lot of you talked about being the future, but you’re really the ‘now’ as well. You’re the leaders *now*. So never forget that, and your voice is so powerful. Thank you.” The young people also invited ongoing comments through the Twitter hashtag #IfYouAskUs.

These young people at the ASA conference defied the often-negative dominant media representations of Appalachian people, places, and their potential, and they represent the focus of this dissertation. I have investigated this question in my research between 2013 and 2020: *How do the social contexts of young Appalachians' engagement in media consumption and production practices shape the possibilities they envision for themselves, others, and their region?* This multi-sited ethnography (Hannerz 2003; Marcus 1995) pays attention to gendered, generational, and racialized dynamics in different spaces for youth identity construction and cultural production in and beyond three varied educational sites in West Virginia and East(ern) Kentucky: High Rocks Educational Corporation, a “girls only” transitioning to “young people”-focused non-profit organization (non-profit);<sup>2</sup> Appalachian Media Institute, a mixed-gender non-profit media program; and a mixed-gender public high school embedded, along with other Kentucky public schools, in arts education support networks that include non-profits and state and federal agencies. Thus, this project compares how young people in different social, geographic, and contexts in Appalachia use media and cultural productions to imagine and create futures for themselves and the region. I also discuss the role of non-profit spaces in Appalachia and how they support a specific strand of visions for the future that encourage inclusive identities and contest other visions that violently reject diverse identities in the region. From my perspective that evening in 2018, I had literally been waiting for years to witness this historic and moving performative presentation.<sup>3</sup> I

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<sup>2</sup> I use the terms “non-profit organization” or “non-profit,” which are more recognized regional reference instead of “non-governmental organization” or “NGO”, which are more commonly used in international development jargon.

<sup>3</sup> See archived presentation videos on the ASA Facebook page. The relevance and importance of this monumental keynote address would become more complex as youth representation and activism continued

had attended the ASA conference for more than a decade, and I had also spent the past few years doing fieldwork with a number of these same young people and their mentors in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia. It was exciting and rewarding to see the convergence of all these young people outside the bounds of their own educational programs and home communities.

This dissertation tells many stories: some that were already circulating, some consciously collected, some about the processes of story-gathering and storytelling, and many about how storytelling shapes who we are, what we think is possible, and where we belong. The preceding ethnographic vignette is illustrative of my dissertation research question and collaborators, two of my primary field sites and media education programs, public education, and meshworks (Harcourt 2003; Harcourt and Escobar 2002) of regional resources, efforts, and support for young people in Central Appalachia. This dissertation describes a cohort in a specific temporal context based on my years spent conducting participant observation, interviews, and collaborative projects with young people and their “formerly young” mentors in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia who are involved in arts education, critical literacies, and regional development visions and plans.

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throughout the 2018 ASA conference. As I will discuss later in Chapter 4, another momentous event involving spontaneous youth activism unfolded on the closing day of the 2018 ASA conference, which revolved around the controversial appearance of the author of *Hillbilly Elegy (HE)*. There were relational connections between some who participated in the plenary on Friday and the protest on Sunday, and one research collaborator participated in both. However, it is important to note that the direct action was not organized or enacted by the exact same group of young people who presented at the plenary. I discuss relevant details later and do not want to privilege this author, memoir, or situation over the future-world-making exercise of research collaborators.

## 1.2 Overview of Dissertation Research

Discussions about Appalachia's socio-economic and environmental landscapes have focused on development-related issues like youth unemployment and outmigration, changing demographics, difficult home and school environments, and most recently, the transition to a post-coal regional economy (Garringer 2017; Hansell 2016; Hansell 2018; Scott and McSpirit 2014; SOAR 2018; Spangler 2015; Watts 2018). Young people (including many young women, queer youth, and youth of color), are imagining, expressing, and organizing around alternative cultural and economic visions for the future of the region, themselves, and others (IG2BYITM 2015; Richards-Schuster and O'Doherty 2012; STAY n.d.; YALL n.d.-b). Many of them have critiqued the often negative and/or oversimplified narratives and representations of Appalachian residents and their potential in dominant forms of mainstream media (Billings, et al. 1999), which they define, consume, and produce quite diversely. Some of them also access and benefit from educational opportunities, support, as well as long-term histories and traditions of popular education and social/cultural organizing in the region and beyond. This dissertation also problematizes the category of "young Appalachians," pointing out how young people are differently situated, and including voices in the region that are not always heard. After discussing the larger regional contexts in which research collaborators reside and co-produce, I describe the primary research sites, programs, and populations in particular communities and counties in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia where I conducted fieldwork. Finally, I close with an outline and brief descriptions of subsequent dissertation chapters and appendices.

Young people themselves are targeted by outside organizations and state interventions and increasingly as marketing niches for corporate media and commodified

popular culture. They are *also* active agents who participate in these conversations and structures of regional development discourse as well as cultural producers who consume, remix, produce, etc., multisensory media in ways that can reproduce, challenge, transform mainstream notions of what is possible. In recent years and currently, there have been numerous regional conversations revisiting the War on Poverty, discussing possibilities for a “post-coal” economy and the opportunities and roles for young people in the Appalachian region. Many young people have made culturally- and technologically innovative contributions to these processes through their production of online social media campaigns, youth-focused development conversations, and place-based narratives in regional and national publications. It is important to document and understand how they access and create media, whose voices and perspectives are included or not, what young people themselves have to say about what it means to be young, and what is possible in the future, for whom.

Politically and economically, Central and Southern Appalachia have evolved as the archetypical geography that has typically been the focus of poverty alleviation and development programs because the region has historically “contained some of the poorest socio-economic conditions of any region in the country. It is one of the least developed in the United States in factors including agriculture, unemployment, housing, urbanization, poverty, economic diversity, and so on” (Gaventa and Lewis 1991:2). Both state-led and grassroots development efforts arose and evolved within the larger contexts of globalization and neoliberal capitalism and its “problematic assumptions ... about large-scale production, colossal technologies, and American leadership” (Reid and Taylor 2010:97).



This larger political economic context enables and constrains the lives and decisions of young Appalachians in different ways depending on their local social contexts and intersectional constructions of identity. For example, the prolonged global economic recession continues to affect unemployment rates in the U.S., and the total average unemployment rate for young people ages 16-24 in Kentucky and West Virginia was more than double the overall average of both states (Bureau of Labor 2014). In the primary counties where I conducted my research, unemployment rates have consistently remained higher than state averages. Poverty is also a gendered issue with women and children globally and in the U.S. more likely to live in poverty than men and more likely to suffer gendered violence at the hands of an intimate partner or someone else they know. Overall health indicators in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia reveal further inequities and varying degrees of marginalization among the counties that serve as the field sites for this study (County Health Rankings 2018).

Many young people face growing up in foster care or with grandparents and other extended family, sometimes as a result of violence, drug addiction, illness, or loss. As of November and December 2018, there were 6818 young people living in foster care in West Virginia and 9818 in foster care in Kentucky respectively (Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services 2018; West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Bureau of Family Services 2018). These issues are not unique to the Appalachian region (County Health Rankings 2018b), and they can silence people as well as demonstrate why anonymity is sometimes necessary for the safety of young people who are multiply marginalized and have limited opportunities for controlling their environments and representations. Digital storytelling is one way that young people

exercise their agency in decision-making and make their voices heard in situations where they may otherwise remain a nameless statistic.

Beyond basic educational access, practical and meaningful access to the means of cultural production through media technologies is a complex and ongoing issue for rural communities in Appalachia and elsewhere where a “digital divide” still exists (Banks 2012). Scott, et al. (2015:204) call for Appalachian Studies to address the continuing digital divide in which “technology often works to reproduce old forms of inequality and create new ones.” Access to taken-for-granted infrastructures like broadband internet can be expensive and “spotty in the mountains and other rural places throughout the region” (Scott, et al. 2015:204), and this divide additionally limits educational options “where some people cannot access any kind of education, others can only afford to enroll in online education, and only the most privileged get a high-quality residential education” (2015:204). In addition to examining class-related “digital divides” issues of critical access (to educational programs, technology, etc.), especially in rural communities, I pay attention to what access means both in terms of what Banks (2012) calls “meaningful access” in local contexts – the ability to shape content as well as simply receive it – in addition to what it means that hopes and dreams for a “brighter future” in the region are tied to current discourses about technology as a panacea for Appalachia’s post-coal possibilities. As Banks points out, equal access is not just about consumption but also about material, functional, experiential, critical, and transformative access to the technologies, resources, and critical literacy for producing content (Banks 2012:9-11).

Researching youth engagement in the construction of possibilities for the Appalachian region is important and timely because of the numerous ongoing

conversations revisiting the War on Poverty half a century after its initiation, facing the challenges of an ever-shifting economy, and the role of young people in shaping its future (Appalachian Regional Commission 2010; Appalachian Regional Commission 2014; Kiffmeyer, et al. 2013). Whether discussing “Appalachia’s Bright Future” (Kentuckians for the Commonwealth 2014), “Shaping Our Appalachian Region” (SOAR 2018), “building creative communities in the new economy” (Create WV n.d.) and “Our Future West Virginia” (OFWV 2019), there are numerous regional and state-wide planning processes and development initiatives that have included young people as active participants and that document and model possibilities “after coal” (Beaver and Hansell 2014; Hansell 2016; Hansell 2018; Hansell and Beaver 2018).

In response to regional development discussions and programs in Central Appalachia, there are several youth-led and youth-focused initiatives designed to highlight the perspective of young leaders who want to figure out how to stay in the region, such as the Y’ALL (Young Appalachian Leaders and Learners) Committee of the Appalachian Studies Association, the Stay Together Appalachian Youth (STAY) Project, and the “It’s Good to Be Young in the Mountains” conference in Harlan, Kentucky (Daniels 2014; IG2BYITM n.d.; It’s Good to Be Young in the Mountains 2015; Kingsolver 2014; Stay Together Appalachian Youth n.d.; Young Appalachian Leaders and Learners n.d.-b). This burgeoning movement continues working together to build grassroots knowledge, organizing capacity, and social networks in their local and regional communities of youth-led and youth-focused initiatives.

In her oral history interview, research collaborator and teaching artist colleague Judy Sizemore talked about “activism” as “activating” a sense and practice of

“questioning of the status quo, or the questioning of authority” and asking why things are the way they are and how they could be different. She said she sees her role as a facilitator helping young people ask these questions rather than telling them how to make decisions. “I think what’s been kind of interesting in the work that I do like in the schools is that, what I try to do is to bring up questions rather than to try to influence decisions or perspectives” (Sizemore 2018). In addition, her work as a community scholar documentarian and teacher reflects this active process of fostering curiosity, questioning, and creativity. Thus, I define “media activism” broadly as using media as a tool for questioning, communicating about, and/or organizing for social/environmental justice issues, which can also include addressing equity issues related to access to technical media skills and equipment.<sup>4</sup> While a sit-in organized by summer campers or students trying to organize a film or photography club at their high school are constrained within organizational/institutional contexts, their agency and direct action to affect change and to create spaces for mutual interest and knowledge-sharing represent forms of activism and power that are accessible to them *as youth* in the primary social spaces they occupy. That activism is also a part of the longer tradition and educational curricula in which some of them, like the High Rocks campers, were studying the labor movement in the Appalachian region and connecting with youth of color from more urban places in in the state through exchange collaborations.

During the period of my fieldwork in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia, the active enfranchisement and engagement of young people across a range of ages expanded

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<sup>4</sup> “Media activism and critical media studies have always addressed social justice issues. Activists work to redress perceived inequities in media access, policies, and representations, while critical media scholars combine teaching, research, and publication with advocacy for democratic media, institutions, and representational practices” (Jansen 2011:1).

as the national and global political landscapes continued shifting, bringing a new level of unpredictability and precarity to local communities. With the 2016 presidential election, transition, and subsequent support, much attention focused on the economic classes and opportunities in Appalachia, and “new” representations of Appalachia reproduced old stereotypes while young people continued refuting them. After years of regional conversations about Appalachian development and options for transitioning to a “post-coal” economy, the previous promise of new federal funding through Obama’s POWER+ (Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization) Plan (Appalachian Regional Commission 2015) became one uncertainty among many as federal budget cuts threaten to impair or eliminate institutions like the Appalachian Regional Commission, the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, and the Environmental Protection Agency (Bowley 2017; Estep 2017). Like many non-profit organizations in the region, Appalshop/AMI, High Rocks, and Berea College Partners for Education have received and relied upon some form of development-related funding from these and other federal programs for general operations and programming as well as cultural production activities and/or digital technology programs. Just of few of the funding sources I am most familiar with are the Appalachian Fund, Appalachian Regional Commission, Grow Appalachia, Kentucky Arts Council, Mountain Association, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, West Virginia Humanities Council, US Department of Agriculture, and US Department of Education. AMI and High Rocks also generate revenue through their own fundraisers of program-related memorabilia as well as operating some of their own mini-enterprises.

Before summarizing primary field sites and research collaborators, it is important to note that this dissertation is not intended as a comprehensive or definitive history of any of the non-profit organizations, schools, counties, or states discussed. Neither is it the first piece of scholarship that includes some of these organizations and programs as its main focus. In fact, people have conducted oral history projects, written dissertations, and published scholarly articles about these and other related regional organizations and networks (Keith, ed. 2015-2018; Charbonneau 2007; Charbonneau 2009; Garringer 2013a; Garringer 2013b; Goodman and Cocca 2014; Herdman 2014; Jent 2020; Mullinax 2012; Richards-Schuster and O'Doherty 2012; Schram 2005; Spatig and Amerikaner 2014; Terman 2009), including several research collaborators conducting metaethnography (Yiorgos 2006) of their home regions and communities; and the restricted interviews in the “Exploring the Legacies of Appalshop Oral History Project” could no doubt constitute a dissertation’s worth of data (2015-2018). While I draw from many of these sources, this is not a comprehensive literature review of this scholarship. Rather, I outline some of the basic history of the regional and local areas, development efforts, and media education programs as social contexts where young people have been actively involved in documentary media-making, self-representation, and activism for multiple decades. Furthermore, this background provides additional context for understanding the experiences and insights of the research collaborators whose voices comprise the remainder of the dissertation. This dissertation contributes to Appalachian Studies scholarship that uses ethnographic and mixed methodologies, including oral histories and visual storytelling, to bring gendered and minoritized voices to the fore and listen for more complex understandings and representations of the region (Bell 2008; Bell

2013; Catte 2018a; Catte, et al. 2018; Engle 2019; Enriquez 2021; Garringer 2017; Gray 2009; Gray 2018; Komara 2019; Laney 2018; Patterson 2015; Schmid 2018; Terman 2014; Wilkerson 2011; Wilkerson 2018). As I discuss more in-depth in Chapter 2, I also consider citing young theorists as part of my scholar-activism to emphasize research collaborators as knowledge producers.

### 1.3 Overview of Research Collaborators and Sites

In this section, I provide background information about research collaborators and the three primary “field sites” that served as my point of entry to media education programs, communities, and support networks for Appalachian youth that I interacted with and learned from: Appalachian Media Institute (AMI), High Rocks Educational Corporation, and Owsley County High School (OCHS)/Partners for Education (PFE) arts and humanities projects. I present them in order of their longevity, which also reflects the chronology of my awareness of and encounters with these programs and communities.<sup>5</sup> I am not trying to tell the definitive story of these people and places, because they tell their own quite often and well. Rather, I am situating the different educational spaces in their larger and layered contexts, the networks that connect them, and the local particularities that distinguish them.<sup>6</sup>

Research collaborators included young people who produce media and discuss possibilities for the future, as well as more mature (or “formerly young”) mentors, artists, and educators engaged in similar practices at that time of their lives. The primary age

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<sup>5</sup> I describe each of these primary programs and my engagement and “observant participation” with them and additional research collaborators in more detail in Chapter 3 on methodologies.

<sup>6</sup> It is also important to point out that this project is not a program/organizational evaluation or an institutional ethnography, but rather how various young people in different Appalachian communities must navigate multiple layers of social contexts.

range of formal research collaborators was, with a few exceptions, 18-78. I refer here to the following “age cohorts” (Bernard 2006:154) or “age sets” to define the generational range of the overall research population of young people, past and present, as they relate to some generally accepted notions about chronological age:

- Ages 13-18: High School Youth
- Ages 18-30: Young Adults
- Ages 31-50: Formerly Young Adults
- Ages 51 & Up: Formerly Young Elders

I engaged with young people who participate in structured educational settings in AMI; High Rocks; and Owsley County High School.<sup>7</sup> These formal institutions served as an entry point for working with young people because most of them attend school and some also have some level of access to non-profit programs as a result. Outside of family and extended kinship networks, public school systems and non-profit alternative educational programs serve as spaces where young people can develop social skills, relationships, identities, and personal aspirations.

Young people have relative levels of access to media technologies and education opportunities, which are both ubiquitous and conditionally available depending on one’s socioeconomic status and other factors, including primary language spoken. Formal media production programs within organized educational settings provided comparative contexts where access to production knowledge and technology is potentially more equitable than in non-profits that provide selective access and have very specific “alternative” development goals aimed at mitigating marginalization but which may also

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<sup>7</sup> All of these youth education organizations/institutions offer broader programming beyond the smaller-scale media education programs that serve as the primary focus of this dissertation.



contribute to it in some ways. Before describing each of the primary field sites in more detail, Table 1 offers briefly summarizes the media programs in these three locations.

Table 1 Primary Media Education Field Site Matrix <sup>8</sup>

	<b>Appalachian Media Institute Summer Media Institute</b>	<b>High Rocks Camp Steele Media Track</b>	<b>Owsley County High School Media Arts Residencies</b>
<b>Location</b>	Whitesburg, KY	Hillsboro, WV	Booneville, KY
<b>Primary Service Area</b>	Mostly East(ern) KY with some exceptions	Mostly 3-county service area in WV (Greenbrier, Pocahontas, and Nicholas) with some exceptions	Owsley County, KY
<b>Primary Service Population</b>	Usually mixed gendered, ages 14-22	“Girls” only camps ages 13-18, overall program transition to serve “youth (HR ages 5-35)	Mixed gender middle and high school students, ages ~ 12-18
<b>Longevity</b>	Since 1988	Since 1996	Since 2011
<b>Structure</b>	Primarily residential program with loose, informal, self-directed, primarily residential	Residential program with rigorous and diverse schedule of activities	School-based structured class schedule with loose enforcement
<b>Pedagogy</b>	Critical media literacy and technical media production	Critical media literacy and technical media production	Intermittent media arts instruction based on available funding/expertise
<b>Program Duration</b>	8 weeks in summer	2 weeks in summer	Variable length visiting artist residencies during school year (e.g., day-long, multi-day, multi-week, etc.)
<b>Year-Round Programming</b>	After-school media labs and photography workshops; AmeriCorps host; regional film screenings	After-school tutoring, workshops, field trips, fundraisers; Grow Appalachia site; AmeriCorps host	Grant-funded arts/media-based projects and related support; Berea College Partners for Education Promise Zone +; Kentucky Arts Council
<b>Physical Spaces</b>	Boone Youth Drop-In Center, the Casa (for SDI interns)	HR Academy/Camp, the Hub, Steele Studio, Intern House, Lewis Theater	OCHS, local non-profits: Owsley County Action Team; Booneville Entertainment Center; OC Public Library
<b>Fieldwork &amp; Interviews</b>	Summers 2013-2017 & Fall 2016	Summers 2013-2018	December 2015 & Intermittently Fall 2016-January 2020

<sup>8</sup> See Bernard 2006 for the usefulness of profile analysis (Bernard 2006:454) and proximity matrix (Bernard 2006:456) methods for documenting and analyzing some of the similarities and differences among the comparative social contexts of different program settings, local organizations, etc. This compilation of readily available information about relevant organizations, service populations, programs, and projects is clearly not exhaustive, but it was also the basis for more detailed documentation of key aspects of these programs over time.

### 1.3.1 Appalachian Media Institute



Figure 2 Cropped close-up of an AMI screen print design framed by masking tape found in the Boone Youth Drop-In Center, Whitesburg, Kentucky, June 9, 2015 (Photo by author and wooden frame cropped for emphasis on the design)

The Appalachian Media Institute (AMI) was founded in 1988 and focuses on helping “young people [in the Appalachian region] explore how media production skills can be used to ask, and begin to answer, critical questions about themselves and their communities” (Appalachian Media Institute n.d.). AMI is a project of Appalshop, which is a long-standing and renowned Appalachian cultural institution located in Whitesburg in the coalfields of Letcher County, Kentucky, that recently celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The non-profit organization works to “present stories that commercial media doesn’t tell, challenge stereotypes, support grassroots efforts to achieve justice and equity, and celebrate cultural diversity” (Appalshop n.d.), and their numerous programs and community resources include documentary film production, a community radio station (WMMT), a record label, regional multimedia archives, and a community theater company. Appalshop also serves local and regional youth through the Boone Youth

Drop-In Center and their 30-year-old Appalachian Media Institute (AMI), which “has provided opportunities for young people from across Central Appalachia to explore their home communities, address local issues, and become thoughtful, engaged citizens through the process of place-based media making” (Appalshop n.d.).

AMI offers an eight-week Summer Documentary Institute (SDI), which is a paid internship for Appalachian youth participants to learn “the technical aspects of video production in addition to how media affects public opinion and civic engagement,” which culminates in a 15-minute documentary about a community issue that is “most important to them” (Appalachian Media Institute n.d.). They also offer a Media Lab, which “is an after-school media production program for eastern Kentucky high school students” (Appalachian Media Institute n.d.). Ada Smith,<sup>9</sup> who grew up in Whitesburg and is an AMI alumna,<sup>10</sup> was co-director of AMI when I began preliminary fieldwork in 2013. “AMI works with young people from 14-22 in Southeast Kentucky mostly. We do have some young people from other Appalachian states, but we focus on the counties near us,” she said. “The whole idea is to bring in young people to pay them for their work and to really help them better understand and explore what’s happening in the region, what their thoughts and opinions are on the issues. And so we feel like the best way to do that is through media production” (Smith 2013). For over three decades, AMI has continued Appalshop’s founding legacy of training young media makers. AMI is a prolific and far-reaching program in its own right and “has intensively trained over 1,200 young people and supported the production of over 200 youth-made media pieces, ranging from

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<sup>9</sup> I foreground Ada’s voice and experience instead of centering her identity around her parents, Elizabeth Barret and Herb E. Smith, who are among Appalshop’s founding filmmakers.

<sup>10</sup> I use the term “alumna” throughout as a gender-neutral singular expression for former program participants in lieu of the gendered Latin “alumna/alumnus.”

profiles of Appalachian artisans, to regional identity, to studies of the economic, environmental and societal impacts of coal mining practices in the region” (Appalachian Media Institute n.d.).

Letcher County is located in the coalfields of East(ern) Kentucky on its border with Virginia. Its borders with other Kentucky counties include Knott and Perry to the northwest, Pike to the northeast, and Harlan to the southwest. Letcher is home to Lilley Cornett Woods old-growth forest, and Whitesburg is the county seat. Several other small communities in the county, like Jenkins, Fleming-Neon, and McRoberts where some research collaborators are from, originated as mining camps (Elbon 2018b; Komara 2019; Komara and Barton 2014). Like many neighboring mountain counties, its historic coal-mining economy has been long in decline and has depopulated since its peak population in 1940.<sup>11</sup> Letcher County was most famously depicted in Harry Caudill’s *The Night Comes to the Cumberlands* (Caudill 1963), and the county has been a recurring historic site of War on Poverty-era photojournalism and policy images (Batteau 1990b). Letcher County is still frequently referenced in popular media discussions about economic transitions in the region, and Appalshop filmmakers and multimedia makers continue producing counter-stories to mainstream narratives about the county and other Appalachian communities. The map of downtown Whitesburg in Figure 3 shows the location of the main Appalshop headquarters, the Boone Youth Drop-In Center where AMI is housed, and other nearby locations where research collaborators hung out.

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<sup>11</sup> Letcher County dropped from 40,592 residents in 1940 to 24,519 in 2010 (aggregate census data cited in Elbon 2018b). Harlan County, which lies southwest and shares many social, cultural, and economic connections including a strong coal-mining history, dropped from 75,275 in 1940 to 24,519 in 2010 (aggregate census data cited in Elbon 2018a).

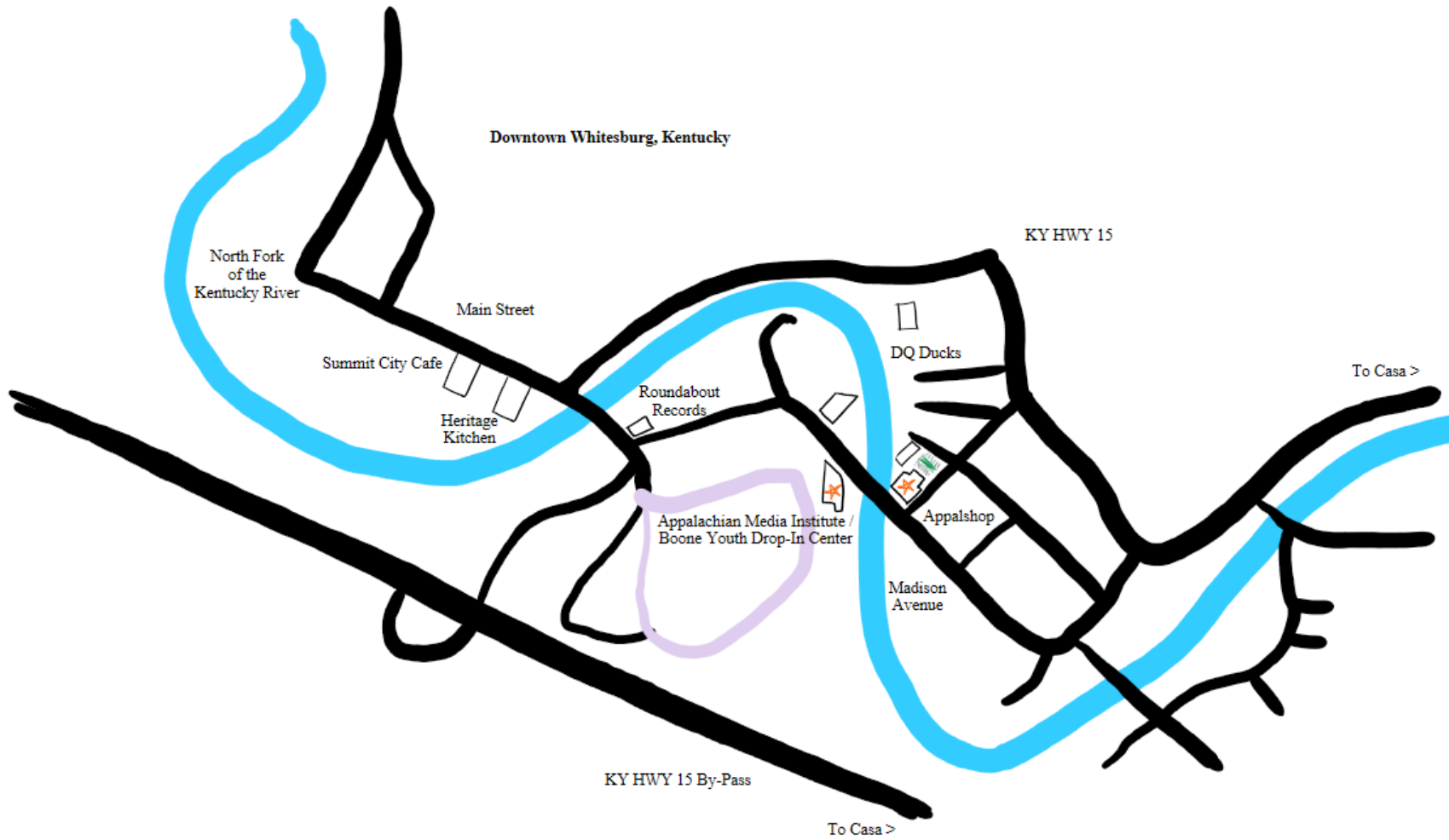


Figure 3 Downtown Whitesburg, Letcher County, Kentucky map (Drawing by author based on 2020 Google Map image)

### 1.3.2 High Rocks Educational Corporation



Figure 4 First place drawing by camper Maya Coleman for the annual High Rocks T-shirt design contest at the 2015 Camp Steele in Pocahontas County, West Virginia (Photo of T-shirt by author)

High Rocks Educational Corporation is a non-profit educational organization that was founded in 1996 and offers leadership development and alternative educational curricula for young women in West Virginia. High Rocks provides year-round programming, including after-school tutoring and art-based workshops, and college visits (High Rocks n.d.). The first time I visited High Rocks and formally met Sarah Riley, the Executive Director of High Rocks,<sup>12</sup> was when I began preliminary research in 2013. She

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<sup>12</sup> I foreground Sarah's voice instead of who her parents are. As I discuss later, her mother Susan Burt founded High Rocks, and her father Gibbs Kinderman was the founding fieldman for the Appalachian Volunteers in the 1960s and also founded a local community radio station. Sarah helped develop the High Rocks program with her mother when she returned home from college at Harvard.

said the organization's "flagship program is High Rocks Academy for Girls," which includes two two-week summer camps: New Beginnings for middle school girls and Camp Steele for high school girls.

Camp Steele, a two-week camp for high school girls, includes different curricula tracks for intensive courses, and "all the campers have to choose a specialty and they take a major track that they are in for five or six hours every day. .... and that's for 17 days. So it's basically the same ... scope as a college class that they're taking" (Riley 2013). Campers can rank what they want to major and minor in, such as media production, social movements, art and activism, and building construction (Hall and Cutright 2015). High Rocks has also partnered with local media and theater organizations for media projects. When I commented on these ongoing opportunities for young people to participate and have their voices heard, Sarah discussed the role of networking and the power of media in some of the High Rocks programming.

At times I think it's been stronger than at other times and I hope that is something that we can continue to make stronger. I think we've been wrestling with media and how to really engage kids in media. We've hired a lot of people who used to work at Appalshop or AMI and had some exchanges back and forth and in between there and that's something that has definitely informed that. .... we have community programs so we might, for example, run arts-based or math and science-based programs for elementary school kids or .... [One] year we had a media intensive with a group of teenagers who were hired to work on media and produce media around prescription drug abuse. And to kind of host and facilitate a community conversation with those media pieces and with their audience. That was pretty amazing. Really having events and opportunities elsewhere you are contributing to your community and .... in a leadership role. .... presenting to 3-400 people at a Martin Luther King rally about what your thoughts are about discrimination in real life and violence .... Service-learning sounds too small for what it is. .... So in our community program you will often find people who are part of High Rocks for Girls and they will often be showing up as leaders in those community programs. (Riley 2013)



Pocahontas County is one of the largest counties in West Virginia on its eastern border with Virginia. Unlike the state's numerous coalmining communities, its local economy is largely based on revenue from the Snowshoe ski resort, other outdoor recreation, forestry, and agriculture. The Hillsboro area where High Rocks Educational Corporation is based is a lush wide valley known as the "Little Levels" among mostly tight hollers and long windy roads, so it is especially conducive for farming. Hillsboro is most notably known as the birthplace of author and activist Pearl S. Buck. Among the three counties in the primary High Rocks service area, there are some socioeconomic distinctions between them in terms of access to different resources based on their local schools, communities, and economies. Pocahontas County was also home to a longtime white supremacist organization based nearby to High Rocks, and some racially-directed hate graffiti temporarily closed down a local café owned operated by a High Rocks alum whose husband is Jamaican (Eisenberg 2015). Alumni and participants rallied around the family with public demonstrations and declarations that "We are one." The map of the main High Rocks headquarters and the High Rocks Academy campground in Figure 5 on the next page illustrates the various facilities where residential classes and camp-life occur during the summer months of June and July.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> I have chosen not to reproduce a map of the main High Rocks headquarters/camp location that situates its geographical proximity to the aforementioned white supremacist compound.

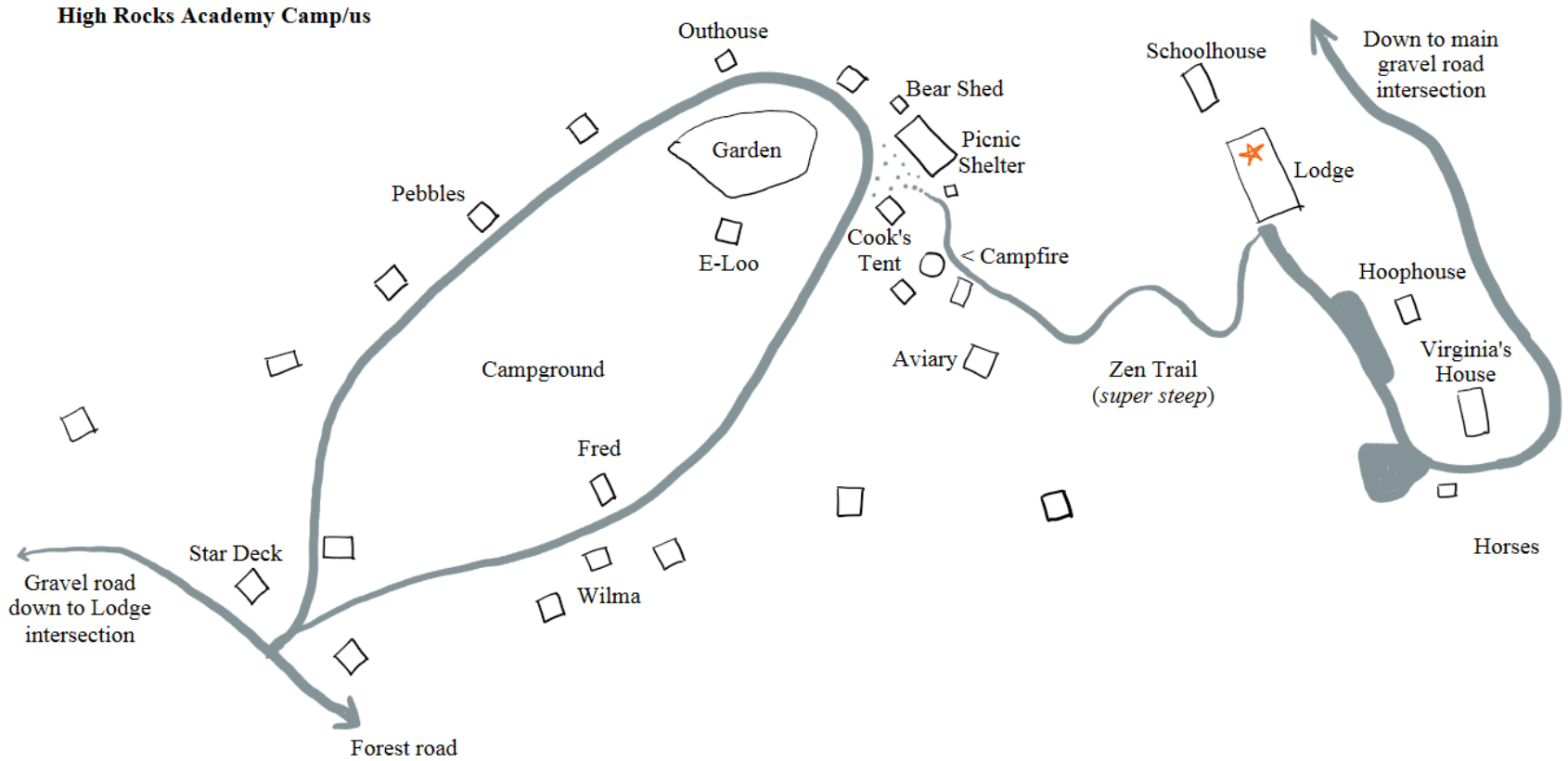


Figure 5 High Rocks campus/campground map, Pocahontas County, West Virginia (Drawing by author based on 2014/2017 Google Map images; campground elevation is significantly higher than the Lodge, Schoolhouse, etc.)

### 1.3.3 Owsley County High School / Partners for Education



Figure 6 Mural section outside Stevi Nolan’s classroom and band room, Owsley County High School, designed and facilitated by teaching artist Alfredo Escobar, October 3, 2017 (photo by author)

Owsley County High School is one of only two small public schools in the small town of Booneville in East(ern) Kentucky. The total student population for the entire Owsley County school district for the 2017-2018 school year was 682 students, and the total student population for the combined middle school and high school was 312.<sup>14</sup> According to most socioeconomic and other indicators, Owsley County, Kentucky is statistically the most marginalized county in Kentucky and one of the most economically marginalized in the ARC-designated region. It is one of the least populated counties, and

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<sup>14</sup> See the Kentucky Department of Education School Report Card searchable database for Owsley County and Owsley County High School (Kentucky Department of Education n.d.).

logging is one of its primary economic activities. Owsley County is relatively geographically isolated between the Appalachian foothills and the steeper mountains of East(ern) Kentucky with no direct access to major highways; however, as one of the most “economically distressed” ARC counties, it interacts directly with national and regional political economic processes. For example, it is included among the target counties for Berea College’s Partners for Education (PFE) outreach programs, including the federally funded Promise Neighborhood Initiative.

At the end of 2011, Berea College received the first rural planning grant from the US Department of Education Promise Neighborhood Initiative, which funded a five-year “cradle to career” program serving Jackson, Owsley, and Clay Counties in Eastern Kentucky (Gabbard 2017).<sup>15</sup> Stevi Nolan is the OCHS Arts and Humanities teacher and leads the school band (Terry and Anonymous OCHS Student 2017), and she grew up in Ashland, Kentucky, which was a much more urban school district with “music and art and computer classes” compared to the tiny rural school district where she teaches and her kids attend (Nolan 2018).

As far as .... the elementary [school] level, there’s not a lot of options, and then once they get over here [at the middle/high school] then they have options. .... We’re hoping to get choir back this year .... We didn’t get it this year, because there weren’t enough students that wanted to be involved. ... but we we’ve had it for the past two or three years. And then band of course, and my arts and humanities course, which I always like doing hands-on things. You know, we have the different ... sub-topics in our humanities, and ... the new one being film and photography. So we try to add and incorporate the media. It’s slow, because it’s new. And it was scary when you don’t know what you’re doing. And you know, ... I’ve learned a lot just in like one year. And then I’ve experimented some at home through the years like trying to make different slideshows and different videos .... So I’ve had a little bit of just playing in it. That’s helped me I think here with my teaching. (Nolan 2018)

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<sup>15</sup> See also press releases related to “Promise Neighborhood” on the Berea College website.

As I discuss more in-depth in Chapter 3, public schools in the region increasingly face underfunding or elimination of arts education, which further challenges teachers, schools, and outside organizations like PFE and the Kentucky Arts Council to piece together funding and programming that meet statewide curricular requirements.<sup>16</sup>

Through such programs and community-based efforts, young people have participated in and co-produced a series of community plays called *HomeSong* as well as some individual video projects focusing on particular social intervention issues like dating violence and drug use. Other than these grant-specific videos, there has been and is no current plan for a media-specific program at the public high school, and as I discuss in Chapter 4 on intergenerational meshworks, student-led efforts can be difficult to sustain. Over a decade ago the school received a grant to build a state-of-the-art (at the time) TV production studio and sound recording studio, but they never had anyone with relevant experience or responsibilities to really do anything with it. The school sold the TV studio equipment and other usable remnants from the original set-up, and Promise Neighborhood funded a new HD camera, boom mic, and tripod for the school, which the librarian/media specialist makes available through check-out. The state of Kentucky now includes media arts among arts and humanities educational standards and reporting requirements.

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<sup>16</sup> Owsley County was not included in later Promise Zone funding after the end of the original Promise Neighborhood grant because of its tiny population size, though PFE found ways to include it in “Promise Zone +” arts-related programming as I also further discuss further in Chapter 3.

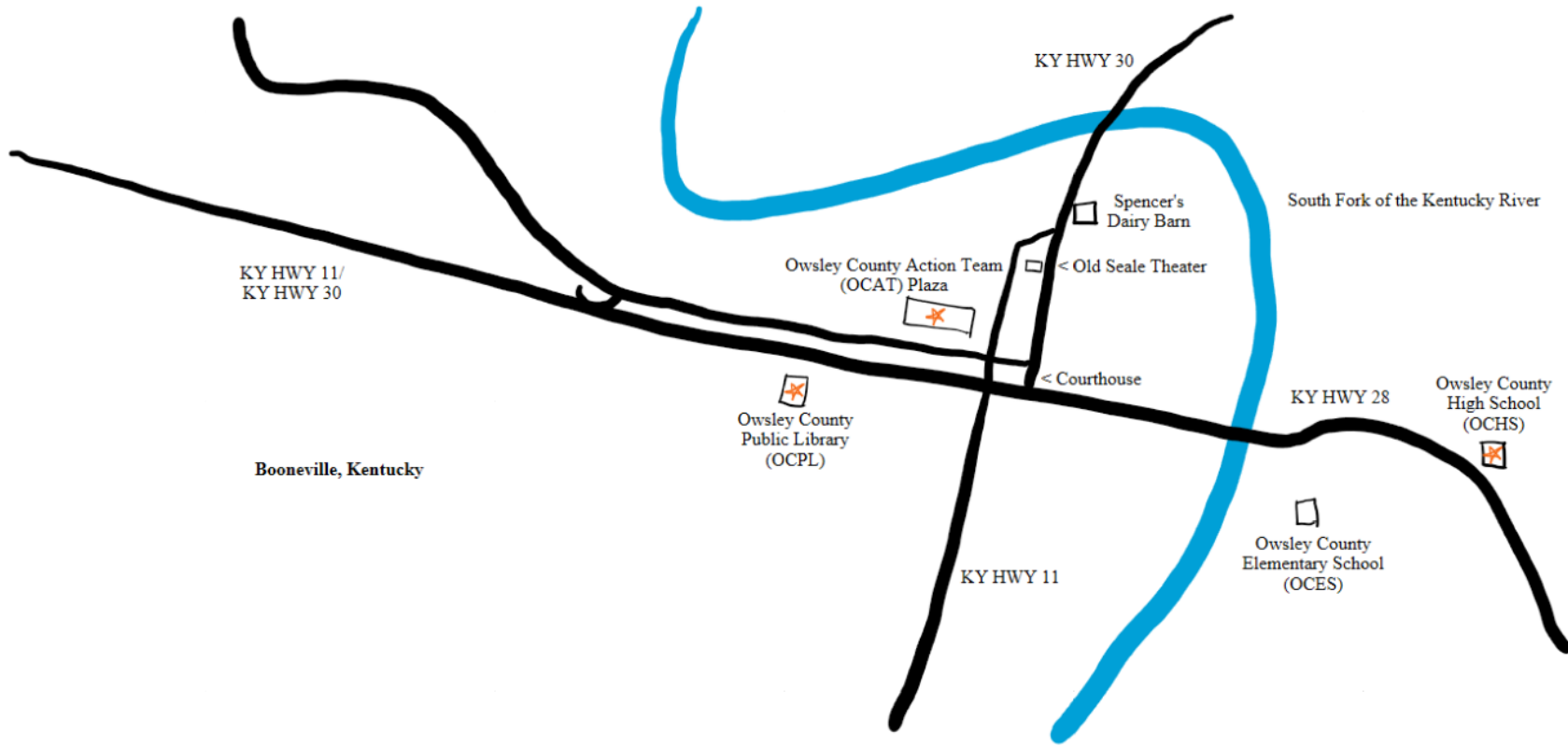


Figure 7 Booneville, Owsley County, Kentucky map (Drawing by author based on 2020 Google Map image)

Conducting multi-sited research in different local contexts of Central Appalachia enabled me to compare different models for youth media education, cultural production, leadership development, and mentorship. These media programs in non-profit and school settings were key in observing and talking with young people about their everyday cultural production practices, formal media production, and future possibilities. I also conducted participant observation in other local settings, such as stores, restaurants, public meetings, and performances, etc. Spending time in the broader communities and regional networks in which these programs are embedded gave me a further comparative understanding of how young people outside of the organizations engage in processes of cultural production. Furthermore, a likely “recurrent characteristic of multi-site ethnography” is that “site selections are to an extent made gradually and cumulatively, as new insights develop, as opportunities come into sight, and to some extent by chance” (Hannerz 2003:207).

Conducting multi-sited research in different local contexts of Central Appalachia facilitated a comparison of different models for youth media education, cultural production, leadership development, and mentorship. For example, High Rocks was a mostly girls-only program serving mostly rural areas in a highly remote summer camp setting and small-town youth centers in each of the three counties it serves; AMI is a mixed gender program in a small town that is the most urban experience some participants have ever had. Both programs are welcoming of fluid gender identities, and the AMI application specifically asks prospective interns what their preferred gender pronoun is, which for some is the first time they have ever been asked. In contrast, one content-specific grant-funded video project at OCHS called Safe Dates was supposed to

focus on dating violence but also facilitated some students coming out to the project leader and others, which challenged the readiness and resources of the teachers and collaborative partners to provide adequate support for students.

Table 2 on page 35 provides socioeconomic data for the primary field site counties in Central Appalachia. All the counties where field sites are located and most of the counties where research collaborators currently or previously lived are also in the ARC region (as are my home county and current residence).



Table 2: Socioeconomic Data Comparison of Appalachian Field Site Counties

	<b>Owsley County (KY)</b>	<b>Letcher County (KY)</b>	<b>Pocahontas County (WV)</b>	<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>Appalachian Kentucky</b>	<b>West Virginia (All Appalachian)</b>	<b>Appalachian Region</b>	<b>United States</b>
Population April 1, 2010	4,755	24,519	8,719	4,339,367	1,184,278	1,852,994	25,243,456	308,745,538
% Change 2000-2010	-2.1%	-3%	-4.5%	7.4%	2%	2.5%	6.8%	9.7%
Per Capita Income 2016	\$27,802	\$29,724	\$20,269	\$38,926	\$31,104	\$36,624	\$39,338	\$49,246
% of U.S. Avg. 2016	56.5%	60.4%	79%	63.2%	80.2%	74.4%	79.9%	100%
Unemployment Rate 2015-2016	9.4%	11.9%	6.6%	5%	7.3%	6%	5.6%	4.9%
Poverty Rate 2012-2016	37.1%	29.8%	18.6%	18.8%	25.9%	17.7%	16.7%	15.1%
% of U.S. Avg. 2012-2016	245.9%	197.5%	122.9%	124.5%	171.6%	117.4%	110.7%	100%
% High School Diploma or More 2012-2016	70.2%	75.1%	84.8%	84.6%	77.2%	85.3%	85.9%	87%
% of U.S. Avg. 2012-2016	80.7%	86.3%	97.4%	97.3%	88.7%	98.1%	98.8%	100.0%
% Bachelor's Degree or More 2012-2016	17.4%	11.2%	16.2%	22.7%	14.3%	19.6%	23.2%	30.3%
% of U.S. Avg. 2012-2016	57.5%	36.9%	53.5%	74.9%	47.3%	64.5%	76.4%	100.0%
ARC County Economic Status FY 2018	Distressed	Distressed	At-Risk	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Socioeconomic Data (2018)

As I discuss in Chapter 2, neither the dissertation “field sites” or research collaborators fit neatly into any boxes, tables, programs, demographics, time periods, or oversimplified notions of “Appalachia.” Similarly, while some portions of this document reflect the organizational and stylistic conventions of the “dissertation” genre, this dissertation also transcends and expands it as a multimedia cultural production that reflects and applies place-based documentary, storytelling, and production methods as well as some of the theoretical notions and critical commentary of research collaborators. There is the uneasy fit that anthropology/ethnography/feminist method/ologies have with more “objective” empiricist approaches to “social science,” and the way that some of the traditions I align myself with contest the disciplinary canon, assumptions, methods, practitioners, “research problems,” “research populations,” etc. My entire research topic, academic discipline, personal art and media-making, and professional and teaching career revolve around storytelling, and my dissertation “research data” includes scholarship, fieldwork, and other peoples’ cultural productions as the project elements. Therefore, this dissertation intentionally elevates the cultural/knowledge production of research collaborators as cite-worthy theory-makers and doctoral references.

#### 1.4 Outline of Dissertation Chapters

This dissertation is organized into thematic chapters that draw from and discuss different aspects of my guiding research question. Each chapter begins with a brief ethnographic vignette describing particular moments, places, processes, and research collaborators encountered while conducting fieldwork in different sites. These stories along with the voices of research collaborators and their creative productions represent several types of multilevel “interpretive portrayals” of contexts and concepts in various

sites as well as “lessons learned” and “major messages” throughout the dissertation (Piantanida and Garman 1999:133-139). Every chapter is ethnographic and includes research collaborators as co-theorists, knowledge producers, and scholar-activist-practitioners. Every chapter also includes visual imagery and multi-sensory narration that take the reader virtually into research sites and illustrate key concepts. While I organize theoretical and methodological discussions into separate chapters, both the dissertation research process and written product are grounded in feminist activist ethnography and participatory praxis (Anglin 1997; Anglin 2007; Harrison 2008; hooks 1984; Kingsolver 2009), which recognizes and models “the synthesis of theory and practice, emphasizing that they each inform and co-create the other” (Harrison 2016:172).

Following this introduction, the outline and content of dissertation chapters further develop and address aspects of the research question and thematic findings. Chapter 2 “Meta’lachian Mediacologies” defines key concepts and how they relate to the different aspects of my dissertation research context and query, and it situates my research within anthropological and interdisciplinary approaches related to youth, Appalachia, media education, political ecology, and cultural production. Chapter 3 “Documenting Communities” with “Respect for Myself ... Others ... and This Place”: Research Design and Method/ologies in Praxis” discusses my multimodal mixed-method research design, ethical approaches, and multi-sited fieldwork with young people and educators in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia. Chapter 4 “Meshworks of Intergenerational Mentorship, Youth Leadership Models, and Organizational Sustainability” compares efforts and needs to support intergenerational connection, leadership development, and succession as youth cohorts grow older and “age out” of

programs; how formal opportunities are offered and accessed (or not); and how young people see themselves in these roles in these settings and their communities.

Chapter 5 “Mediacologies of Meaningful Access: Social Contexts and Support for Youth Media Education and Production” discusses how multi-scale infrastructures and other material support such as built environments, transportation, information and communication technologies, enable media production as a form of identity development, self-expression, community-building, and professional development. Chapter 6 “‘We Kind of Have to Make Do With What We Can’: Make-Do Media Practices” highlights and discusses make-do media consumption and production practices within organizations and schools where I conducted fieldwork, projects, and interviews as well as among young people who seek and use make-do methods on their own. The concluding Chapter 7 “Furthering Appalachian Futurisms” revisits key themes and discussions of the overall dissertation and discusses future research and publication possibilities that draw from and expand on this work.

Following the dissertation conclusion are relevant appendices of supporting data and documentation related to research sites, collaborators, and youth cultural productions. Appendix 1 includes a table of public events and activities where I conducted “observant participation” in addition to the three primary media education sites. Appendix 2 includes the guiding interview questions for each of the three formal interview projects I conducted or assisted with as part of my dissertation research. Appendix 3 is a selected bibliography of cultural productions (with hyperlinks) that research collaborators produced and/or were involved with during the primary period of fieldwork.

## 1.5 Conclusion: Storytelling and Path-making

Most of the stories in this dissertation belong to the people who so graciously allowed me into their spaces, programs, and lives and shared their thoughts and experiences with me. My stories are about how I came to this work; navigating these different contexts and spaces; and listening to, watching, and sharing their stories. All of these stories connect to histories of representation, development, migration, and activism in the Appalachian region, and they also complicate them with alternative visions and practices for the present and future. Throughout this dissertation, I strive to incorporate and emphasize the voices of research collaborators and their commentary about their home communities, local histories, media representations, regional development, and experiences of current events, etc. at the time of fieldwork.

Driving on the road while conducting fieldwork and later when writing this dissertation, I thought about connections between multiple paths and places and processes of “making.” I followed and wore many paths for myself personally doing fieldwork, driving certain routes repeatedly over time, which intersect, overlap, and diverge the routes of research collaborators. Path-making and place-making as a process and product are part of the history and meshworks of the region where young people not only follow paths but also actively “make the road by walking (Freire and Horton 1990; Scott, et al. 2015b). Various routes, processes, people’s stories, and places are interwoven in what I came to understand as “Meta’lachia.” In the next chapter, I discuss the conceptual framework that constitutes the social contexts for youth consumption and production in the region.

## CHAPTER 2. META'LACHIAN MEDIACOLOGIES

### 2.1 Now Entering Meta'lachia



Figure 8 Exit sign for Meta, Kentucky off U.S. Highway 119, August 25, 2019 (Photo by author)

I fortuitously encountered this “Meta” road sign (Figure 8) as I was on my way home from a weekend contract job I had just left in Mingo County, West Virginia. I had taken notes for the Central Appalachian Folk and Traditional Arts (CAFTA) Project, which was “a comprehensive 15-month cultural study of traditional arts and practices in the 112 Appalachian counties of Ohio, Virginia, and West Virginia.”<sup>17</sup> As I drove down US Highway 119 in Pike County on the Kentucky side of the Tug Fork River, I reflected on the relevance of borders and edges to the CAFTA Project as well as my own research. Some fieldworkers had talked about working on the borders of counties and states in the

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<sup>17</sup> According to the original project site, CAFTA “is a project of Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation (MAAF) in cooperation with Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN)” and the “results of this study will inform the development of a new multi-state program designed to promote the understanding, recognition and practice of the diverse folk and traditional art practices present in Central Appalachia.”

project region where those lines are not really representative of the flow of people, cultures, artistic traditions, economic activities, ecosystems, or natural resources. Even the arbitrary exclusion of Kentucky and other states with counties inside “Central Appalachia” was based on the service area of the regional arts organization that commissioned the study (Hufford and Taylor 2020a; Hufford and Taylor 2020b). Less than 20 miles into my journey, I saw a series of exit signs for a small East(ern) Kentucky burg called, “Meta” (*meh-duh*) below the mountain skyline. I smiled with amusement and a sense of serendipity at their appearance as I simultaneously thought about and traversed within what I had for some time been thinking of as “Meta’lachia” on a road that also led south to Harlan and Letcher Counties where I had conducted some of my own fieldwork.

Central Appalachia is commonly configured and understood as a geographical subregion within the Appalachian mountain ranges as well as a socioeconomic designation within the geopolitical gaze and grasp of the Appalachian Regional Commission, which includes counties in Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and all of West Virginia (Appalachian Regional Commission 2019). The educational sites for my field research and the regional programming that I followed and/or participated in occurred primarily in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia and therefore in “Central Appalachia.” However, people who live, work, and learn in these places also belong to and are active in larger social contexts and constructs that can transcend their physical location and mobility through digital spaces and communities within and beyond the geographical confines of “Appalachia.” They are also engaged in intraregional discussions, collaborations, and migrations that occur in both physical and virtual spaces.

What began as multi-sited fieldwork of “being there ... and there ... and there!” (Hannerz 2003:202) in three primary field sites expanded to “follow the ...” (Marcus 1995) different people, practices, and communities to other multiple “theres” of Meta’lachia. As Hannerz notes, the multi-sited field is multi-local as well as “*translocal*, not to be confined within some single place” (Hannerz 2003:206). He goes on:

The sites are connected to another in such ways that the relationships between them are as important for this formulation as the relationships within them; the fields are not some mere collection of local units. One must establish the *translocal* and the interconnections between those and whatever local bundles of relationships which are also part of the study. (Hannerz 2003:206)

Traversing through multiple sites during fieldwork, I began thinking about these, often conscious, configurations of physical and virtual spaces, the paths and connections between them, and the relationships and actions they facilitate as “Meta’lachia” (used hereinafter without quotation marks) as a way to discuss the larger context of people, places, and practices that we think of as “Appalachian” and how multiple “Appalachias” are connected to one another and contained within the larger idea and place we call “Appalachia.”

Meta’lachia (*meh-duh-latch’-uh*) is etymologically a contraction of “Meta-Appalachia,” which is self-aware and self-referential, beyond the constraints/bounds of self or region, and representative of multiple processes and states of “transition” or flux.<sup>18</sup> Like the notion of “utopia,” Meta’lachia is both “no place” and potentially any and every place where imaginative futures and possibilities can manifest, if even for a day, overnight, weekend, camp, or semester. Research collaborators and other actors within and beyond the “region” move through and constitute Meta’lachia as they construct,

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<sup>18</sup> My use of “meta” connotes multiple meanings as both an adjective and prefix.



travel, and contest meshworks of communication, action, relationships, and praxis. “Appalachia” (or “Central Appalachia” for that matter) is not a static place on a map or set of unchanging cultural traditions but rather a dynamic interaction of people, ideas, political economies, and ecosystems. The notion of Meta’lachia helps foreground and illustrate the social contexts in which research collaborators are critiquing oppressive channels and behaviors, pushing boundaries, exploring edges, and forging intentional pathways where they are needed.

The conceptual framing of “Meta’lachia” enabled me to broaden the scope of “field sites,” which initially began as three media education programs in discreet locations and that shifted to a more complex and often interconnected range of social contexts.<sup>19</sup> These media education programs served as important hubs for interacting with young people and learning about how they teach, learn, consume, produce, critique, and remix media. Spending time in these places, my research approach shifted to include more generational discussions of youth and also made apparent/obvious the larger networks connecting and supporting them as a broader “meta-site” of relationships, interaction, intellectual engagement, cultural production, youth expression, dreams and plans for the region’s future, and intersectional analysis and social movements. Therefore, my fieldwork locations broadened as I followed some research collaborators’ migrational engagement with other events, programs, groups, and opportunities throughout the Meta’lachian region.<sup>20</sup> Following these circuits, some of my reciprocal

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<sup>19</sup> My early fieldwork experience migrating between, among, and with three primary field sites was eerily reminiscent of my childhood weekly migration to the multiple households (of my mother, father, and grandparents) that I called home.

<sup>20</sup> As I discuss in the next chapter, there are several overarching organizations, networks, and youth/justice traditions that serve as key meta-sites that connect these different geographic and social spaces.

activities included partnering with people on co-presentations; highlighting their work in other settings; and generating place-based media-related curricula, content, and lessons learned.

Meta'lachia is also "meta" because it is self-consciously and reflexively "Appalachian" as not only a personal or regional identity but as a scholarly construct (and deconstruct), political economic apparatus, counterstorytelling to mainstream narratives, and cultural production. The "invention of Appalachia" (Batteau 1990a), the eventual invention of Appalachian Studies (Brown, et al. 2003; Scott, et al. 2015b; Walls and Stephenson 1972), and the invention/self-realization of "Appalachian-ness" represent a particular experience and approach of educated young people and "formerly young" people who are harnessing and implementing knowledge and skills within the place(s) that Americans still prefer to disparage or recommend abandoning. As a regional identity, who/what is "Appalachia/n" is often hotly contested among self-identified insiders about who else is in/out. Meta'lachia is an all-inclusive notion that includes this contested space and claim to authenticity and the right of representation. The photo of the Meta, Kentucky exit is an apt visual representation of Meta'lachia as its geographic location is near the arbitrary and material borders between the states of West Virginia and Kentucky; Mingo and Pike Counties; and the river and highways that flow between and connect them and their people. Where others, especially tourists, may see and celebrate spectacle of a violent and irreconcilable feud (i.e., the Hatfields and McCoys), I see the brushing and blending of boundaries that defies the notion of a single, static "Appalachia" that is so susceptible to scrutiny and stereotypes.

The ethnographic focus of this project is on the possibilities that young people imagine, the self-making/world-making processes they use to imagine and express them, and how these relate to intersectional approaches, critical questions, and creative cultural productions about what is possible and for whom. This research is situated within the anthropology of youth (Chin 2001; Hirschfeld 2002; Montgomery 2009; Robbins 2008; Schwartzman 1976) and used a feminist interpretive and political economic approach (cf. Harrison 2007; Kingsolver 2011) to address the primary research question: *How do the social contexts of young Appalachians' engagement in media consumption and production practices shape the possibilities they envision for themselves, others, and their region?* This chapter focuses on the organizing concepts related to this guiding research question and unpacks the conceptual framework of Meta'lachian mediacologies, which constitute the multi-scale social contexts that connect and support young Appalachian media makers and their mentors. I begin by discussing the role of praxis in conducting research and co-theorizing conceptual frameworks. Then I name and define key concepts and how they relate to the different aspects of my research context and query and the chapter themes that arose through mixed-method field research. I also discuss several further notions that helped frame my interactions with and understanding of the different social contexts that young people traverse and live within.

## 2.2 Collaborative Interdisciplinary Praxis

As hooks (1984) points out, “From the onset, women’s liberation movement participants have struggled to unite theory and practice, to create a liberatory feminist praxis (defined by Paulo Freire as ‘action and reflection upon the world in order to transform it’)” (hooks 1984:113-114). Anthropology has similarly struggled with its past

and destructive dualisms with intersectional feminist calls to decolonize research practices and knowledge production. “According to my vision, an alternative and reconfigured anthropology must be grounded in praxis and, as a consequence, effectively bridge the gap, both conceptually and institutionally, between theory and practice. It must also have a historical consciousness and, hence, show love and respect to the ancestors ....” (Harrison 2008:295). Grounded in feminist activist ethnography and participatory praxis (Anglin 1997; Anglin 2007; Craven and Davis 2013; Harrison 2007; Harrison 2008; hooks 1984; Kingsolver 2009; Lamphere, et al. 2014), method/ologies intentionally include research collaborators as knowledge producers, co-theorists, and scholar-activist-practitioners. As Harrison (2016) observes:

The shift away from the conventional ethnographer/informant dichotomy, along with the interrelated subject/object and self/other asymmetries, enables anthropologists to perform an ethic of inquiry that induces less hierarchical relations of knowledge production with the building of theory integral to it.

There is more recognition now that subjects of ethnographic research are interlocutors that can talk back to anthropology and, in some instances, contribute to it by offering perspectives on the theory-making practices that formally-trained anthropologists are expected to undertake. (Harrison 2016:162)

I align my research topic and praxis with the “future anthropologies network .... community of practice” of “critical ethnographers” who “are stubbornly transdisciplinary and transnational”; “de-centre the human, embracing larger ecologies and technological entanglements”; and are playing “with futures that are plural, non-linear, cyclical, implausible and always unravelling” and an “Anthropology of the future” that “builds on traditions, reflects on pasts” (Pink and Salazar 2017:1-2). This “future anthropologies network” also “engage[s] with complexity and stay with differences and uncertainties” and “traverse the macro, mundane and minute and embrace the chaotic, multisensory,

performative and material dimensions of social life in the Anthropocene”; “foster[s] a politics of listening attuned to a diversity of voices and we tell stories that are imaginative, illustrative and informative; and “create[s] and design[s] a variety of materials and processes that are provocative, disruptive, adaptable and reflexive” (2017:2). Furthermore, this approach includes getting “our hands dirty” and the possibility that “We may be epistemologically filthy, improvisational and undisciplined. We may struggle, and fail and transform” (2017:2).

Like Woodson (2007), my praxis in conducting this dissertation research also bridges other conceptual and disciplinary divides in working on collaborative arts-based education and projects with young people and their mentors.

As a community-based artist and scholar, I have been struggling with both the theory and the practice of representation, ethics, and the Other. I am interested in exploring youth roles in culture, youth agency, and childhood as a performed social construct; I am also interested in questions relating to how we know about youth worlds and youth themselves, that is, epistemological and methodological questions that revolve around the study of youth. I consider my arts practice as an applied theory of the social construction of childhood and youth identity worked out in cooperation with youth themselves. Art created in this way directly addresses the fluid nature of identity as situated in space and time and through multiple languages and communicative structures. Art becomes a “research” methodology as well as a complex process and product of culture, space, time, and individual/community identity formations. (Woodson 2007:286)

Furthermore, Chin argues that children and young people are capable of anthropological research, have necessary contributions to make in knowledge production, and as “native anthropologists,” have an important role in unsettling hegemonic power separations of and relationships between children and adults, researched and researchers, students and teachers that further disenfranchise an already marginalized population (Balasundaram 2014; Chin 2007).

This study acknowledges young people (and “formerly young” people) as research collaborators and “co-theorizers” (Johnson, et al. 2012) whose stories, insights, and visual media can “show us something we are likely seeing through different lenses” (Luttrell, et al. 2011:204), and research confirms that many “are familiar with the same theoretical literature and are engaged in exploring similar social problems and cultural issues” and that “cultural producers are cultural mediators who record, represent, translate, analyze, and ... produce cultural critiques” (Mahon 2000:484). For example, when I interviewed High Rocks director Sarah Riley for a project on sources of inspiration for young women leaders in Appalachia as a research assistant, she expressed interest in what other young women were doing in the region and in developing stronger theoretical frameworks for understanding and building on the work that High Rocks does.

... as somebody who is walking in the world of leadership of young women in Appalachia everyday – there are – there is not nearly enough theoretical or academic studies about what that means. When I have to use two totally different sets of documents about place based studies and gender based studies, so I’m...I know this is sort of a small scale project, but I think it’s really important and I’m really glad that someone is spending some time thinking about it and come to some conclusions with a wider audience because I deal with a whole lot of young women everyday who are trying to figure out how to be a leader and part of that...You know High Rocks believes really deeply in a theory/practice learning cycle. And that theory is really important, and so is practice, and so is reflection in that process. And I feel like we have done a really good job as an organization of building the practice part and maybe we just need to stop practicing and write theory for a while. No...it’s kind of hard to stop... and I don’t want to do that either. But I basically think that’s what we have been doing a little bit by trying to formalize High Rocks as a learning model and...but that takes a lot more time. There are like, I’m sure hundreds of books to be written, and High Rocks, at least 17-25 books to be written about what’s happening here. (Riley 2013)

Riley also talked about the cycle of theory/practice as a pedagogical intentionality of High Rocks in a mini-plenary at the 2018 ASA conference (Riley and High Rocks Educational Corporation 2018).

This dissertation takes seriously Riley's call for more theories that could be useful in these spaces and in the work of young people and incorporates insights from the field, interviews, as well as research collaborators' published writing. It also reflects my commitment to feminist, participatory/collaborative, and ethical ethnographic method/ologies and building long-term relationships with research collaborators by observantly participating, co-theorizing, and reflecting with them in multiple social contexts. Riley emphasized this iterative process, or the cycle of thinking, doing, and reflecting, which also connects with pedagogical and research approaches such as service learning, community-based research, and participatory-action research (Brydon-Miller, et al. 2003; Chin, et al. 2015; Gubrium and Harper 2013; Schensul, et al. 2004; Silver 2012; Stoecker 2012; Strand 2000). Thus, the work they were doing in these sites represent not just practice, but also theory-making. For example, I observed research collaborators both talking about and trying to practice popular education and media literacy traditions, which draw from Freirean traditions and young people's and organizations' current and historical connections to the Highlander Center, alongside studying previous social movements in the region and also participating in those movements in accessible ways. That process of learning about, practicing, and reflecting manifested again and again. Therefore, this chapter and this dissertation are projects of co-producing ideas, stories, and knowledge through the interaction and praxis of their work, my research, and common spaces and visions (including a critical lens).

As I discuss more in-depth in Chapter 3 on ethics and methods, there are also critical limitations of collaborative participation as a researcher embedded as a media educator. At times, my role as formal staff, or just my status as an "adult" (sometimes the

oldest in the room in my 40s), limited young people's access, openness, agency, expression, collaborations, and solidarity. Through differential power relations and access in the field and as "author" of this dissertation, I directly influenced and shaped curricula, projects, and public discourse. It is further important to note that discourses of "theory" and "practice," and thus "praxis" as "theory/practice" can also alienate those it intends to include in settings without an educated majority or that view such discourse as "elitist." Many young people are educated (formally and otherwise) and conscious of their own intellectual, social, and labor histories in the Appalachian region, which they call upon when necessary to get the attention of older folks who were young people of earlier generations as well as to honor and build upon the knowledge production and practical skills of those who have come before. However, even though research collaborators occupy the relatively privileged perspective of having access to non-profit educational programs as well as some (or more) higher education, that does not mean that these are the only or primary places where learning is taking place or that all young people have access to them, as I discuss in Chapter 6 on make-do media practices.

Through this dissertation, I affirm that the work research collaborators do every day is a form of knowledge production, even when they sometimes struggle with owning their own expertise or naming themselves as media makers, activists, or scholars. I observantly participated in processes of knowledge production, applying those lessons in the field, and evaluation. The iterative process of co-theorizing coalesces various lessons learned, both observed and listened to, that unfolded across multiple spaces. Co-theorizing across Meta'lachia enabled a larger framing that was not simply specific to a



single organization or context but that elucidates the interplay between these different ideas and projects across space and time.

This project also incorporates and emphasizes feminist anthropology by exploring different gendered identities, expressions, and activism in the Appalachian region; by highlighting the voices, agency, and experiences of young women, queer youth, youth of color, and their mentors alongside other diverse and intersectional identities; and through direct participation and mentorship in youth leadership and media education programs and gatherings, including several that focus on young women and/or gender equity. These non-profit-sponsored spaces with variously gendered service populations alongside the setting of a small-scale public high school with external support from non-profits provide rich comparative contexts for how gender is expressed and experienced and what different dynamics these contexts make possible. Next, I discuss Meta'lachian Mediacologies as a conceptual framework for exploring the people, processes, and social contexts of media making, migration, mentorship, collaboration, and grassroots organizing that span across and interconnect Appalachian geographies.

### 2.3 Making Meta'lachian Mediacologies

As introduced in the opening story about driving along multiple Kentucky/West Virginia edges and borders and passing the sign for a small town called "Meta," the notion of Meta'lachia refers to multi-layered social contexts and political ecological systems, processes, and pathways. For the purposes of this dissertation, my understanding and working definition of "Meta'lachia" is a multi-sited strategic "glocality" (Harcourt 2003; Harcourt and Escobar 2002) and configuration(s) of ecologies, -scapes (Appadurai

1990; Maira 2005; Mallan, et al. 2010), communities, and meshworks (Escobar 2009; Harcourt and Escobar 2002; Kingsolver 2018) that is/are multivocal (Harrison 2011; Harrison 2016); multigenerational; multimedia (transmedia); multimodal (Chin 2017; Collins, et al. 2017; Kingsolver and Balasundaram 2018); and multisensory. Its multiple meta-sites include physical and cultural geographic and online/virtual spaces (e.g., organizations, networks, events, #hashtags, etc.) and places known as “Appalachia” as well as global mountain regions (Kingsolver and Balasundaram 2018) and other “ex-centric sites” (Harrison 2016). Meta’lachia is produced by and enables the trans-ing across and between borders and boundaries by individual and collective actors in its multi-meta-sites.

This section unpacks several key concepts and practices related to regional community economic development discourses and processes that frame many of the media education and youth leadership contexts that research collaborators live, learn, grow, and work in. Some refer to economic transitions and goals for non-extractive employment and ecological sustainability in the region, and some are common place-based notions of community economic development and artmaking in the region. Some are from broader regional conversations that field sites and research collaborators participate in and co-produce, and some are notions that I contribute to these conversations based on spending time in multi-sited mediacologies in Meta’lachia. Multiple processes of *envisioning* (imagining, planning) intersect with the overarching theme of “making” (shaping, constructing, moving) as both an agentive process and creative production that produce knowledge, identities, and concrete material

consequences recurs in this chapter and this dissertation, producing selves, media, places, spaces, paths, roads, cultures, worlds, possibilities, and futures.<sup>21</sup>

Meta'lachian mediacologies are constituted by political economic/ecological, generational, gendered, and racialized concepts, identities, and intersectional analyses both among research collaborators and within/across different social contexts and spaces that young people experience and occupy.<sup>22</sup> This framework also includes and facilitates the ex-centric theorizing and praxis of “Appalachian futurisms” and “intersectional sustainability,” which I further discuss among other relevant concepts in subsequent sections of this chapter.<sup>23</sup> In this section, I broadly define and unpack the notion of “*Appalachia*” as a place and a process that represent geological mountain ranges and ecosystems, a geopolitical site within the ARC region, and a regional/local context for place-based identities, pedagogies, and political economies/ecologies.<sup>24</sup> *Social contexts* represent physical and virtual spaces where young people are as well as social processes of education, leadership development, and mentorship in art, media, and technologies. They are geographical and spatial in terms of location, ecology, infrastructure, and they and facilitate relationships within physical spaces and places over time through material support of youth organizations networks, buildings, transportation, food, and digital

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<sup>21</sup> I acknowledge the contemporary notion of “maker” and related communities of practitioners engaged in innovation of digital technologies, which is not the particular focus of this dissertation. See Krebs’ (2019) *Making Experts: An Ethnographic Study of “Makers” in FabLabs in Japan*.

<sup>22</sup> In contrast to naming processes that highlight the voices and agency of research collaborators, I use the terms “gendered,” “racialized,” “classed,” and “minoritized” in reference to people’s identities and experiences to emphasize the processes of marginalization as enacted upon people rather than their expression of their own identities and analyses.

<sup>23</sup> “Meta'lachia” is not to be confused with what I think of as “Metallachia” (rhymes with the heavy metal band name, “Metallica”), which is another social context within Meta-Appalachia to be elaborated on elsewhere but alludes to the Appalachian punk, metal, and rock traditions of some youth in the region.

<sup>24</sup> STEM (Science, technology, engineering, math) and STEAM (STEM + “Art”) are also tied to development initiatives promoting “Silicon Holler” and coding, etc. as macro-economic opportunities for region.

connections. This dissertation examines social contexts different scales from global, national, regional, state, local communities, “non-profit industrial complex” (Rodríguez 2004), individual schools and organizations, and families (as they are variably defined).

The social construction of *young Appalachians* includes multiple temporal contexts, construction of self-identity, as well as external disciplinary “identities” of gendering, racialization, and other processes of minoritization. Media education is an important mediacology for youth practices of media/self/world-making, which makes it a useful conceptual framework for comparing the three primary field sites and social contexts as overlapping and distinctive Appalachias in Meta’lachia. Young people produce multimodal expressions in all places depending on varying access to opportunities, technologies, etc. as I discuss throughout this dissertation.

Youth identity construction, cultural production, and social agency occur within the context of both macro-level global processes, flows, and disjunctures (Appadurai 1990; Hall 1990) and micro-level daily social contexts in which young people live, imagine, and produce possibilities (Balasundaram 2014; Burns 2008; DeJaeghere and McCleary 2010; Guerrero and Tinker 2010; Kingsolver 2010; Richards-Schuster and O’Doherty 2012; Semuels 2015; Stornaiulo, et al. 2011; Vasuvedan 2014). Within the global political economy, young people participate in various fields of cultural production through which class “tastes” and aesthetics are constructed (Bourdieu 1993) as well as flows, exchanges, or scapes of people, natural resources, economic capital, information/technologies, and media productions, which constitute the “building blocks of .... imagined worlds” (Appadurai 1990:5).

Appadurai (1990) offers “mediascapes as one of five “-scapes” to understand the disjunctures in the “new global cultural economy” and “point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes ... [that are] inflected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as sub-national groupings and movements ... and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighbourhoods and families.” (1990:7) All of these interrelating –scapes apply to this study, but the concept of mediascapes is the most obviously relevant in terms of understanding the complex dynamics and flows within media ecologies. “Mediascapes refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations and film production studios), which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media” (Appadurai 1990:9).

“Youthscapes” (Maira 2002) and “iScapes” (Mallan 2010) can represent the particular physical and virtual transnational geographies that young people navigate as many of them face coming of age within regional and transnational migrational flows and living in new cultural geographies (Downe 2001b; Hess and Shandy 2008; Ludke and Obermiller 2014; Maira 2002; Mallan, et al. 2010; Vargas 2009). Subcultures of youth may have different notions, experiences, and aspirations for belonging (e.g., Demerath and Lynch 2008; Forman 2005), and depending on the relationship between young people’s intersectional identities and their senses of internal and structural belonging, students may experience different levels of alienation, ambivalence, hybridity, and belonging regarding whether and how to remain in the Appalachian region (Terman

2014). I also draw upon intersectional and postcolonial approaches to and critical questions about what is possible and for whom (Barr 2008; Coffman and Vannier 2018; Dillon 2012; Kingsolver 2010; Lempert 2012; Lempert 2014a; Smith 2016; Womack 2013).

In terms of everyday social contexts, much of the anthropological research with children and young people in Western contexts has occurred within formal institutional structures like schools, religious communities, and non-profit programs. Outside of the family, the socialization and enculturation of Western youth primarily occurs in public social spaces of the educational system where class and other identities are practiced and reinforced (Eckert 1989; Willis 1977), but can also be flexible, fluid, and co-constitutive of larger social movements (Foley 1994; Weis 1990). School systems can be places where certain normative expectations of discipline and conformity, capitalist values (Foley 1994); and entrepreneurial notions of success (Demerath and Lynch 2008) may be taught, reproduced, resisted, and reinterpreted. The local contexts of particular schools and neighborhoods significantly impact how students construct identities, how they define success, and what futures they have access to, especially in regard to gender, race, class, nationalities, etc. (DeJaeghere and McCleary 2010; Demerath and Lynch 2008; Dolby 2003; Ek 2009; Foley 2010; Forman 2005; Guerrero and Tinker 2010; Hicks 2004; Lutrell 1996; Sarroub 2005; Zine 2001).

Therefore, this study frames educational settings as an important social milieu in which young people construct possibilities and intersectional identities by comparing a public high school context with non-profit-sponsored place-based media literacy programs based on Freirean pedagogical models that consider literacy education among

marginalized communities a political act seeking imperative social justice (Bach 2010; Drotner 2008; Foley 2010; Freire 1970b; Kellner and Share 2005; López 2008; Vargas 2009). Recognizing that non-profits and state agencies have an interest in co-opting concepts of “empowerment” and “participation” (Fals Borda 1995; Sawyer 2009), this project also critically examines how processes of identity construction may occur both within and “against” such institutions that may rely on certain populations, social conditions, and social categories for their existence (Lutrell 1996; Martínez Novo 2004).

As researchers demonstrate through their own learning, peer-mentorship, resistance, etc., *Meta'lachia* illustrates/embodyes flows, edges, borders, and trans-ing that represent different but related interdisciplinary strands of thought and practice, and it demonstrates the dynamism between movement, connection, and stability that constitute the social contexts of young Appalachians' media consumption and production practices. It also embodies intersections of multiple Appalachian people, places, and possibilities and historical and present migration and “movements” in terms of people leaving and returning, intra-migration within the region, and people consciously deciding to move and remain (Ludke and Obermiller 2014; Obermiller and Wagner 2020; Smith 2016). While *Meta'lachia* emphasizes the complexity, multiplicity, and fluidity of identities, experiences, status, etc., it is important to recognize that the edge can be a metaphor for “othering” (Kingsolver 2011:6) and social stratification in the context of marginalized experiences within the community and also relates to insider/outsider and placing oneself (Kingsolver 2008; Kingsolver 2011).

“Transitions” are a persistent and pervasive theme throughout the region and conversations with and among young people in particular. As I discuss in this chapter and

throughout the dissertation, transitions and “trans-ing” as a process manifested in various social, ecological, political / economic, geographic, and cultural discourses and practices. Several young adults who are research collaborators involved in higher education or non-profits mentioned the phrase “just transition” or “post-coal” specifically and the role of countering exploitative and paternalizing development narratives and practices (Brashear 2017; Engle 2017; Martin 2017; Mullins 2017).<sup>25</sup> The non-profit organization Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC) defines the term “Just Transition as “an all-in, inclusive, and place-based process to build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative one.”

A Just Transition requires solutions that ensure the well-being of workers and communities; address racial, economic and gender injustice; protect our health, environment and climate; and create meaningful, good jobs and a thriving and sustainable economy. (Kentuckians for the Commonwealth 2019)

Research Collaborator Ivy Brasher talked about the Appalachian Transition Fellowship as a paid opportunity to support leadership and community development in the region.

MACED [Mountain Association for Community Economic Development]<sup>26</sup> doesn't actually lead it, but we do sponsor it through ... the Highlander Center in East Tennessee. But you know, MACED really wanted to be a part of this program, because we really believe in cultivating young leaders, for the future of the region, that's really a vital step, if we're going to make any sort of lasting, sustainable change that needs to happen. And then adjust way that we feel is important. But you know, ... providing young folks from the region with opportunities to contribute back to the region, and actually get paid for it is super rare. There just aren't that many opportunities available. And if they are available, it's you know, for free, or for very little pay. .... part of the gesture is paying

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<sup>25</sup> The global safety “toll of coal” (2007:73-76) and ecological devastation also connect the Appalachian region to global labor responses toward socioeconomic alternatives and a “just transition” away from coal mining (Moody 2007:92-94). Moody discusses issues of “sustainability” and the energy, ecological, and human costs of recycling (2007:5-7) in relation to globalized mining practices, which include not only multinational corporations but also “artisanal” small-scale mining and reclaiming often by indigenous mine workers (11), women, and children (80-87).

<sup>26</sup> In 2020, MACED dropped “Community Economic Development” from its name and changed it to just the “Mountain Association.”



people what they're worth, and making sure that they're making a living wage, so that they aren't, you know, scraping by doing this really hard, emotionally, and sometimes physically hard work, that really takes a toll. .... we gotta pay people for ... their talents and for their time, in a way that shows them that we respect them as a person. And then you know, the added bonus of getting to do work that they really care about, you know, these young folks aren't applying to be a Fellow unless they really care about contributing back to this region in some way. So being able to offer them these opportunities, and then say, "Hey, we're going to pay you a living wage to do this." That's really important. I mean, that's as important a part of "just transition" as creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem, or cleaning up the environment. You know, we got to invest in our people. And this is one way that we really feel like we're doing that. (Brashear 2017)

As I discuss in Chapter 4 on intergenerational meshworks, paid opportunities like the Appalachian Transition Fellowship and internships and other youth-focused positions at AMI and High Rocks are critical for providing access for young people and potential for long-term leadership succession and organizational sustainability.

Harcourt and Escobar (2002) describe meshworks as "[o]ppositional [or resistance] networks .... that connect social groups and movements with each other" and may likely "operate partially through, or at least by engaging with, dominant networks. .... the difference being that, as opposed to dominant networks, meshworks tend to be nonhierarchical and self-organizing" (2002:12). They go on:

Many of these networks and meshworks link together various sites that in the process become, or create, spaces that are neither local nor global but can be better understood as 'glocal'. .... Glocalities, the places and spaces produced by the linking together of various social movements in networks and meshworks of opposition, or by the connection of places to global processes, are therefore both strategic and descriptive, potentially oppressive and potentially transformative. (2002:13)

Drawing from Harcourt and Escobar's concept of meshworks, Kingsolver notes, "Place-based counter-capitalist meshworks do not have to have completely similar identities or goals to work together—just some strategically convergent interests" (Kingsolver 2018:27).

Meshworks also help constitute the idea, context, and place of Meta'lachia where there are numerous discrete organizations, funding sources, policies, etc. interacting with (and (ideally supporting) multiple people, places, and processes. More broadly, meshworks also represent “networks of networks” that share multiple nodes of connection and transcend binary notions of local and global, insider and outsider, here and there. The context of Meta'lachia is also embedded within global mountain regions (Kingsolver and Balasundaram 2018) and transnational meshworks, and people connect through and within meshworks beyond personal knowledge of their existence or their own participation in them. The notion of meshworks challenges some of the hierarchical structures that may be embedded within individual nonprofit organizations or institutions, or even the “nonprofit industrial complex” by evening out some of the information sharing and the resource sharing across time and space.

I understand “media and popular culture forms as both cultural product and social process” (Mahon 2000:468) and “imagination as a social practice” that can serve to discipline and control as well as enable “people to consider migration, resist state violence, seek social redress, and design new forms of civic association and collaboration, often across national boundaries” (Appadurai 1990:6). I likewise understand constructions of youth identities as dialectic processes in which young people are simultaneously constructed by the marketplace (Chin 2001; Holmes and Holmes 2002; Martin 2017) as passive consumers of commodified “kinderculture” (Robbins 2008), and construct themselves as agentive social actors who critique and analyze mainstream media productions and representations (Taft 2011; Torres, et al. 2013) and creatively “manipulate these products, often for purposes of resistance and political

expression that their producers may not have intended” (Mahon 2000:269). While hegemonic cultural productions can reproduce essentialist assumptions, stereotypes, and commodified representations of a people and place (e.g., Appalachia as white and rural) (Halfacree 2003; Kingsolver 2011; Smith 2015), “consumers” also have agency as cultural producers who actively construct media ecologies (Gray 2009; Herring 2008; López 2008) imagine, produce, and distribute their own artistic and expressive media through various genres, channels, and technologies.

Digital and online environments constitute an integrated social context in which young people expand their geospatial reach; carry out existing relationships explore new ones; and construct and broadcast their “unique” individual identities (Mallan, et al. 2010; Stornaiulo, et al. 2011). However, the symbolic and material relationships between concepts of youth and technology are also gendered, classed, and racialized and have embedded relationships of power (Bray 2007; Herring 2008) in which young people’s use of “technologies of the self” (Foucault 1988) is both enabled and constrained by commercial choices within neoliberal capitalism (Maguire and Stanway 2008). Therefore, I take seriously what young people themselves have to say about who they are, who they want to be, what they think is possible, and what challenges and opportunities they face in the process. I also listen to and integrate research collaborators’ own critical analysis of media practices and representations. As a result, this study challenges dominant discourses about youth identity and media use that essentialize, exoticize, and “other” young people and their relationships to technologies and privilege constructions of youth made by adults who also profit from them in the capitalist marketplace (Herring 2008).

The concept of “media ecology” can be helpful in discerning the interweaving “facts” and perceptions about marginalized communities. As an interdisciplinary field of study, “Media ecology looks into the matter of how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival. The word ecology implies the study of environments: their structure, content, and impact on people” (Neil Postman quoted in Media Ecology Association 1999–2021). Media ecology can refer to media as another environmental system in which people live and must survive. It also includes mutually constituting processes and relationships that occur between individuals, organizations, institutions, and discourses within the larger ecology of media production, consumption, distribution, reproduction, remixing, interpretation, deconstruction, and the real-life impacts that result from such engagement with media.

The “new media ecology” includes the challenge and opportunity of “superabundance of content” and facilitates the increasing active agency and participation of “producers/users” in the production and consumption of media technologies and messages (Cool 2014:171). Furthermore, “American youth are members of a generation born into a new media ecology where contact lists are crucial components of the everyday media experience” (Yapchaian 2008:79) that enable them to manage relationships that would otherwise be limited by their relative lack of independent physical/geographical mobility as young people (Yapchaian 2008).<sup>27</sup> However,

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<sup>27</sup> There are also generational modes of preferred communication in which young people tend to use email to communicate “with older people (aunts, uncles, teachers)” and instant messaging and texting to communicate with peers (Yapchaian 2008:80). I observed a version of this generational siloing of digital communication channels and preferences in the Appalachian Studies community, in which older generations communicate primarily (or entirely) via the Appalnet email list-serve and younger generations primarily or singularly use social networking sites and messaging apps.

socioeconomic factors can also limit levels of access to digital technologies, information, and social media, especially for youth in the Appalachia and the South (Gray 2009, Vargas 2009).

In relation to regional studies, media ecology can include how a region and its people are portrayed in the media, how they are influenced by it, as well as how they influence media through their own interpretations or “talking back” by creating their own. Blackburn (2014) examines the rhetorical strategies of tourism websites for two neighboring Appalachian counties in different northern states: New York and Pennsylvania; as well as another state website trying to distinguish such counties from “Appalachia.” Virtual representations and spaces such as public relations sites of geographically near but rhetorically distant counties illustrate multiple “Appalachias” that divergently contest and embrace identifying with the region. Other “examples of Appalachian e-rhetoric—or ... ‘[E]ppalachia’” (2014:215) include how different organizations, communities, and projects situate themselves in relation to history, the future, progress, development, different social/environmental issues, political and economic structures and processes.

Especially curious is how these two [E]ppalachias are narrated as worlds apart, while they are literally divided only by an invisible—yet celebrated—county/state line. They share the same cultural history and geographic proximity, but they present that history online with two very different rhetorical agendas. Moreover, both of these websites employ marketing strategies aimed directly at the tourism industry and in response to the same pressures of globalization that motivate the Public Policy Institute of New York State to issue a web-document encouraging its state to not become too Appalachian (i.e., poor). (2014:225)

[E]ppalachia is a space for self-definition (how we, or a consulting/marketing firm, want others to see us in distinction from how we actually see ourselves) and for self-determination (how well we commodify and market that image to others, presumably

outsiders, and how much money they spend as result). The notion of [E]ppalachia also illuminates how borders, edges, and transitions are forged and negotiated beyond physical geographies, how virtual geographies help constitute material experiences of places, and how the “edge” between is often a contested space but also one of creativity and a relative comfort with flux. As I discuss in Chapter 5 on material mediacologies, it is also important to consider the actual digital landscapes of particular communities and how much they vary between and among Appalachian counties in general because certain forms of communication and commercialization are not evenly available everywhere or to everyone within those places.

In response to powerful media representations of marginalized identities, counter-storytelling represents a method of inquiry and theory-building that arises from critical race theory (Delgado 1989), which is a common strategy for addressing racism in educational settings (Bell 2009; Bell and Roberts 2010; Fernández 2002) and decolonizing anthropology (Harrison 2016). Counter-storytelling is central to my approach here, and I understand media literacy as complex. For example, in their exploration of youth “cosmopolitanism” and navigation of diverse transnational selves and storytelling, Stornaiulo et al (2011) refer to a “21-century literacy” (2011:270) and “... submit that this new media literacy can be fostered through small but potentially significant moments of reaching out—what we are calling everyday cosmopolitanism” (2011:271). Drotner (2008) similarly points to a litany of nomenclatures for the ever-expanding categories of literacies, including “media literacy, information literacy, visual literacy, teleliteracy, metamedia literacy, computer literacy, digital literacy, internet literacy .... multimodal

literacies, others prefer multimedia literacy, while still others offer the concept of multimodal interactions” (2008:173).

Vargas (2009) invokes Freirean influences in critical media literacy and expanded notions of citizenship (2009:102-103). In relationship to Freire’s literacy campaigns, it is important to note their direct connection to voter registration efforts in Brazil as well as similar programs like the Citizenship Schools that Myles Horton and the Highlander Center spearheaded in the U.S. South (Graves and Horton 1979). Literacy can provide more than just technical skills of reading and writing (and by extension media production) because the process of popular education provides both the physical and intellectual space for discerning and challenging the status quo. This became very clear to me as I was doing fieldwork with young people in the 2016 US presidential electoral season. I agree with López (2008; 2011; 2012; 2020) that “media literacy” and “media ecology” should be more than “vogue pedagogy” need to consider sustainability as critical to this approach, which he refers to as “mediacology” (López 2008:3-4). The context of Meta’lachia focuses on the political ecology and media ecology of social contexts where multiple cultural notions of Appalachia as a place and people circulate and interact and where young people learn and practice media literacy and access intergenerational meshworks of support. As discussed in Chapter 5, material mediacologies further represent how the physical infrastructures (like buildings, transportation, internet) shape and support these social contexts and examine what does it literally mean to exist in these spaces. In the next section I discuss the anthropological and social construction of “youth” as a historically and culturally contingent category and experience that can be strategically deployed as well as transcended or “queered.”

## 2.4 Making “Youth”: The Anthropology/Art of Being Young

I understand youth as a cultural, rather than a biological or strictly chronological category for consideration, which includes a flexible range of age cohorts, temporal moments and alignments, and symbolic meanings (Bucholtz 2002; Durham 2000; Holmes and Holmes 2002; Ortner 1998; Stephens 1995). I also understand youth identities as constructed and performed among other fluid intersectional identities including but not limited to gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion (Anzaldúa 1987; Bucholtz 2002; Chhuon and Hudley 2010; Crenshaw 1991; Demerath and Lynch 2008; Fernandes 2013; Forman 2005; Gray 2009; Maira 2002; Rubenstein-Avila 2006; Sarroub 2005; Vargas 2009). By “young Appalachians,” I mean young people who are engaged in everyday cultural production practices and media education programs in different social contexts in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia. I understand educational settings as primary social milieu in which young people socialize, are socialized, learn “capitalist culture,” challenge and conform to authority, construct identities and possibilities for who and where they want to be (Eckert 1989; Foley 2010; Foley 1994; Levinson, et al. 1996; Weis 1990). I integrate an interpretive emphasis on what young people’s cultural productions mean to them (Geertz 1973) as well as a critical examination of their agency and constraint within the political economic context of global capitalism (Gibson-Graham and Ruccio 2001; Gunewardena and Kingsolver 2006; Harvey 2005; Kingsolver 2001; Kingsolver 2011; Stephens 1995; Wolf 1990), mediascapes and fields of cultural production (Appadurai 1990; Bourdieu 1993), development in Appalachia (Eller 2008), and local living conditions. Comparing how young people themselves construct youth as an identity among other intersectional



identities renders more visible the heterogeneity of “Appalachia” (Gray 2009; Terman 2014).

Because this dissertation includes comparative perspectives of present-day youth and reflections by the “formerly young” (Clemons 2020),<sup>28</sup> research collaborators comprise diverse generations of people of varied identities and geographic backgrounds. This broad age range encompasses young people who currently participate in or lead youth-focused programs in West Virginia and East(ern) Kentucky as well as founding cohorts of staff and students of relevant organizations and programs that have been around for several decades. I use both chronological (past and present) expressions of youth and metaphorical expressions of youth that represent a range of leadership and mentorship roles and relationships. While there is no universal concept or age-range that constitutes “childhood” or “youth,” focusing on particular age groups can facilitate comparisons across time as well as of cross-cultural contexts. Age sets represent not just biological age cohorts or groupings but also signify associated roles of intergenerational mentorship and support within particular social/temporal contexts. In terms of mainstream media and discourse, research collaborators represent a broad range of chronological generations including “Baby Boomers,” “Generation-Xers,” “Millennials,” and “Generation Z,” or “iGen,” of current youth. For the purposes of this dissertation, I loosely use age groupings from the Pew Research Center as a guideline for discussing different generational cohorts, illustrated in Figure 1.

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<sup>28</sup> Regarding the expertise of children on being young and the potential limits of the notion and experience and experience of who I refer to as “formerly young”, Chin asserts, “Children are not novices at everything, either. They are certainly the experts on being children; adults may be former children, but memories of past childhoods are a poor substitute for the actual experiences of current children” (Chin 2007:281).

<b>Generation</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Year of Birth</b>
Generation Z	7–22	1997–2012
Millennials	23–38	1981–1996
Generation X	39–54	1965–1980
Baby Boomers	55–73	1946–1964
Silent	74–91	1928–1945

Table 3 Generation Age in 2019 <sup>29</sup>

As discussed elsewhere on what it means to be young in Appalachia (Clemons 2020), these generational cohorts are arbitrary as oral history participants’ definitions of “young” both affirm and contest these age groupings and do not necessarily align with how oral history narrators identify themselves.<sup>30</sup> “Youth” is ultimately a dynamic social category and continuum that refers to multiple definitions, experiences, and strategic deployments of identity. Research collaborators subvert and produce “traditional” or

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<sup>29</sup> Figure 1 is adapted from the Pew Research Center’s infographic on “The Generations Defined” in “Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins” (Dimock 2019). The Pew Center definition of “Baby Boomers” spans 19 years because it is “the only generation officially designated by the U.S. Census Bureau, based on the famous surge in post-WWII births in 1946 and a significant decline in birthrates after 1964.” Dimock continues, “Unlike the Boomers, there are no comparably definitive thresholds by which later generational boundaries are defined. But for analytical purposes, we believe 1996 is a meaningful cutoff between Millennials and Gen Z for a number of reasons, including key political, economic and social factors that define the Millennial generation’s formative years.”

<sup>30</sup> In my conversations and observations, I noted that research collaborators articulated a generational difference among “Millennial” siblings, peers, etc. who were chronologically near in age but exhibited different relationships to technology. The notion of “Millennials 1.0” and “Millennials 2.0” occurred to me as a way to distinguish between these subtle sub-generational differences and their early temporal location being born before or after the actual turning of the Millennium. There are some passing references to these terms online without much elaboration on how they were defined. In response to a forum question posted in 2016: “30 somethings, do you consider yourself a Millennial?” one person said, “Personally I think that 1980 makes more sense than doing 1985-2000. Because the kids who were born in 1998 or later really are like Millennial 2.0” (see “Wedding Bee” forums regarding generational distinctions and affiliations). “Millennial 1.0 and 2.0” are not necessarily a commonly used parlance to articulate this distinction, which makes the borderland between a particular moment more visible and challenges some of the overarching political and economic power structures that typically name generations to reflect their own interests rather than those of the young people they purport to describe. This is a topic worthy of additional research and discussion in the future.

mainstream notions of youth and generational affiliation, both as a way to prioritize and support young people and as an active expression and continuous affiliation with youth not only as a cause but as an identity. Chapter 4 on intergenerational meshworks of the young and “formerly young” focuses on conceptualizing the meaning and practice of “youth” as a category for present and future leadership and support as explored through observant participation and the perspective of research collaborators and the programs that serve different cohorts of youth.

This dissertation disrupts dominant temporal constructions in which youth symbolically and materially represent paradoxical tensions of both possibilities and liabilities, hopes and fears, past and future. For example, development discourses in Appalachia and elsewhere have often infantilized “target communities” as frozen in a backward past and in need of education, remediation, and technological interventions of modernization (Reid and Taylor 2010); whereas the equation of youth with the future frequently minimizes or overshadows young people’s agency, civic engagement and impact in the present tense (Herring 2008; Holmes and Holmes 2002; Torres, et al. 2013). “Youth” encompasses varying chronological ranges and social expectations in different cultural contexts, and it is also a relative condition wherein childhood is not necessarily a privilege experienced the same way, if at all, by all young people (Stephens 1995), especially young women, trans youth, and youth of color who experience everyday gendered or racialized violence from a young age (Downe 2001b; Forman 2005). The concept of youth represents such a core organizing principle among several organizations and movements in the Appalachian region (i.e., Stay Together Appalachian Youth or STAY) (Daniels 2014; Kingsolver 2014; Scott, et al. 2015a), that some alumni and

former staff of this project's field sites expressed some puzzlement about what their impending 30<sup>th</sup> birthdays would actually mean for themselves and the organization in the future as they "aged out" of STAY's official cohort of "young people" ages 14-30 (personal communication).

I thus understand youth as an intergenerational experience wherein adults of all ages recall, draw upon, and dispense knowledge about their own experiences as young people in the past. Therefore, this project does not limit its population sample to present-day young people, but also includes "formerly young" people who were instrumental in social movements and community development efforts in the 1960s and 1970s (Charbonneau 2009; Herdman 2014; Kiffmeyer 2008; Schram 2005) as well as members of "Generation X" (Ortner 1998) and the "Millennial Generation" who are currently "aging out" of youth cohorts. By asking young (and "formerly young") people what it means to be young in different temporal moments and social contexts. I challenge assumptions about youth as a static identity or temporal alignment and explore how the conversation changes when we think about youth in the past, present, and future tenses. I also pay attention to the role and temporality of imagination as it relates to processes of reflecting on the past; envisioning what can/should be possible; and planning, embodying, and enacting possibilities for the present and future.

## 2.5 Making History: Historical Contexts of Appalachian Youth and Activism<sup>31</sup>

Historically, young people and the Appalachian region were (and still are) targeted for both economic and educational developmental interventions, often without

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<sup>31</sup> For more on the broader historical context of youth and activism in Appalachia see "What *Does* it Mean to Be "Young" in the Mountains? Voices from the 'Youth Activism in Different Generations in

being asked what they desire or think is possible or appropriate. Both are often subjected to misrepresentation and “bad press” that reinforce negative stereotypes and ignores or trivializes their strengths and potential (Billings, et al. 1999; Catte 2018a; Fisher 1993; Lilly and Todd n.d.). In Kentucky, mountain counties served as symbolic and stereotypical representations of Appalachian poverty in the media, federal funding, and programming for economic development. The notions of “youth” and “activism” usually connote the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the “hippie generation” that rebelled against social norms and “the establishment.”<sup>32</sup> In the Appalachian region, this iconic generation of young activists is often associated with the “Baby Boom” and War on Poverty efforts such as the Appalachian Volunteers (AV) and VISTA programs.<sup>33</sup> The emergence of the federally-funded War on Poverty and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) in the 1960s targeted Appalachia, and they expanded state-funded social programs in the region and provided essential support for basic survival when economic opportunities were increasingly scarce in the 1970s (Shannon 2006).<sup>34</sup>

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Appalachia’ Oral History Project” (Clemons 2020), which further delves into the past and present moments of praxis related to field sites and research collaborators. This section is an abbreviated excerpt of a section from that article, reprinted here with permission.

<sup>32</sup> It is important to note the longer history of reform efforts by young people in the Appalachian region, including late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century teachers and nurses. See Goan (2008); Whisnant (2009) Other important histories of activism in Appalachia include Gregg and Gamble (2007); Montrie (2003); Wilkerson (2018)

<sup>33</sup> Related oral history collections include interviews conducted with founders of regional non-governmental organizations, AVs, and participants in other federally-funded development programs who were young people in the 1960s during the inauguration of War on Poverty initiatives. Some of these collections include memories and perspectives from when participants were young people during important social movements and their reflections on their youth and activism during a particular time in West Virginia and Kentucky. See (1982; 1982-1983; 1985-1987; 1987-1993; 1996; 2014a); 2015-2018)

<sup>34</sup> For more information on the War on Poverty, see (Brauer 1982; Eller 2008; Kiffmeyer 2008; Perry 2011 (1972)) For additional background on Eastern Kentucky, the Nunn Center houses regionally relevant oral history collections such as the (1983-1993; 1999), and the Kentucky Historical Society has oral history collections about (1978; 1987-2001)

Influential political leaders like President John Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. challenged youth to take action and become involved in the Civil Rights Movement, including organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in youth activism and federal policy (Kiffmeyer 2008).<sup>35</sup> Some of the young people in the AV program were already interested or involved in Civil Rights movements, and as a result some participants intended to go to Mississippi to help register voters and learned they had more people signed up than they could handle, so they were instead given the alternative opportunity to go to a place called “Appalachia” (McGraw 1986). For example, Naomi Cohen said she decided, “‘I just want to get away from New York City and do something interesting.’ So that’s how I ended up in West Virginia” (Cohen 1982). This was a “time of change” in which “young Americans” or “baby boomers” were “overcome with self-confidence precipitated by the victory in World War II and the subsequent economic boom of the 1950s, truly believed that they could solve the nation’s social problems” (Kiffmeyer 2008). The context of their perspective included various privileges like college educations, new consumer products and technologies, and a booming economy amidst what Kiffmeyer critiques as “well-meaning” but sometimes “self-serving” community development efforts that sometimes fell short of addressing the real needs of the communities they meant to serve (Kiffmeyer 2008).

McGraw describes the young AVs’ suspicion of “the Feds” and the different ideas of development they espoused, noting that “it became clear that the terms ‘community development’ and ‘community action’ resonated differently for the college students who carried the concepts into the field than they did for the Congressmen and most of the

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<sup>35</sup> For more on 1960s youth activism related to civil rights, see (De Schweinitz 2009).

federal bureaucrats who composed the terms” (McGraw 1986). For the government, development was tied to business and industry, whereas for the AVs, it meant building relationships and navigating the politics and environment facing local communities. Interestingly, youthful suspicion of authority, their threat to established power structures, their tenacity to (come to and/or) stay in the region, and alternative visions of community and economic development are strong trends that continue among Baby Boomers through present-day generations of young people in the Appalachian region.

For example, the Highlander Research and Educational Center (Highlander Center) and ASA are both examples of key meta-sites that serve as important historical and contemporary hubs for meshworks and mediacologies (López 2008) in Meta'lachia. My fieldwork included time spent with research collaborators in the roving meta-site of ASA, and while I did not physically spend time at the Highlander Center during this time period, several people talked about its importance in their lives and supporting their continuing work. Both of these non-profit organizations, as well as other meta-sites, include strong traditions, training, and modeling of bridges and exchanges that have provided transformative experiences and built intersectional relationships for many of research collaborators. Through such meta-sites, they are connecting across difference and distance as well as sharing experiences, knowledge, and skills with one another.

The Highlander Education and Research Center (Highlander Center) is a popular education organization in New Market, Tennessee, that offers popular education workshops, trainings, and other gatherings as well as participatory research in support of grassroots communities (Highlander Research and Education Center n.d.). Originally founded in 1932, the Highlander Center represents an important linkage to longer

histories of labor and civil rights movements in the Appalachian region and South that continues to connect young people regionally, globally, and over time (Adams and Horton 1975; Freire and Horton 1990; Gaventa and Lewis 1991; Horton 2003; Horton, et al. 1998; Scott, et al. 2015b). In partnership with Appalshop and High Rocks, the Highlander Center is a “parent” organization for the STAY project, which specifically provides networks and spaces where young people ages 14-30 who want to remain in the region can discuss and strategize how to do so. More than 60 young people celebrated the STAY Project’s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the 2018 “STAY Summer Institute” and celebration gathering at the Highlander Center. Rae Garringer produced an hour-long episode of Mountain Talk on WMMT, which includes participants interviewing one another, and one of the opening comments is by a young person from Letcher County, saying, “Radical youth movements have always been here in Appalachia, and ... we’re still building that every day” (quoted in Garringer 2018a).

The meta-site of the ASA, which was also founded as an intentionally interdisciplinary endeavor by young people in the 1970s, is now re-focusing efforts on the engagement and leadership of young people in meaningful ways. In a similar vein as the discipline of anthropology, there is also a reflexive thread of the interdisciplinary scholarly tradition of Appalachian Studies that asks what and who this work serves and who is/should be doing this work (Scott, et al. 2015; Tice, et al. 1993). As illustrated by the vignette about the ASA plenary that opens this introductory chapter, young people within and alongside ASA are creating spaces and conversations from their own subjective perspective both with the institutional sanction and support of the organization but also in resistance to it. As Mullinax showed, youth media education programs and



community-based theatre can serve as a bridge between generations, community, and educational programs and organizations (Mullinax 2012). Therefore, an additional profile chapter [or section] further details the people and social contexts of media making, migration, mentorship, collaboration, and grassroots organizing that span across and interconnect Appalachian geographies.

The history of the Appalachian Studies Association (ASA) is one of young scholars, activists, artists, and other interdisciplinary practitioners resisting stereotypes; taking action against the economic and cultural extraction from and exploitation of Appalachian people and places; and researching alternative models for community and economic development in the region (Brown, et al. 2003; Gaventa 2002; Scott, et al. 2015b; Walls and Stephenson 1972).<sup>36</sup> ASA is not only an important example of youth activism and scholarship in the past tense, but it is also a very important site of present-day youth-driven discourse and change both within the organization and the larger region. The Y'ALL Committee of the ASA is another important youth-led effort that “seek[s] to facilitate connections and relationships between young people in Appalachia, provide opportunities for professional advancement and training, as well as encourage lifelong scholarship and activism in the region” (Young Appalachian Leaders and Learners n.d.-a). Y'ALL organizes social spaces, presentation panels and roundtables, workshops, “Meet & Eat” networking gatherings at the annual conference, and they maintain a steady social media presence on Facebook and Instagram throughout the year and during the conference.

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<sup>36</sup> Both Berea College and the University of Kentucky were instrumental institutions in the formation of ASA and the establishment of campus Appalachian centers.

It is important to note that the particular “historical moment” during which I conducted research was actually a lengthy time period comprising an avalanche of significant historical moments. As I discuss more in-depth in the methods chapter, keeping up in the moment included blog posts, more formal publications, and social media updates on direct actions that people were participating in and documenting, including the Standing Rock protest encampment, counter-protests to a white supremacist rally in Pike County, Kentucky, and labor strikes of teachers in West Virginia and coal miners in Harlan County. For example, young people posted photos of strikers in Harlan County when they were blocking the railroad, including several AMI alumni who were there helping document the action, and one of them also later re-posted some of this media as a personal reminder and call to their local and virtual community to stand in mutual solidarity for Black Lives Matter. The endless stream of both media and activism, as well as the integration of the two was often overwhelming to keep up with in the flurry of what was happening in the region, how young people were responding to it, and the saturation of media in general at any place and time. Similar to the notion of “interview fatigue” discussed in the methods chapter, the reality of “media fatigue” and the finite space of this dissertation limit the depth and detail pertaining to many relevant and interesting historical moments that occurred during the period of research.

## 2.6 Making Place and Making Space: Social Contexts of Regional Creative Assets, Media Education, and Youth Identities

Kingsolver (2018) notes that “place matters” and “place is a verb” (2018:23). “A place can be looked at through multiple scales of spatial and political jurisdiction, then, and also, of course, through multiple temporal scales” (2018:28). Within the context of “creative place-making,” Meta’lachia represents both the noun “place” and the active

verbs of “making” and “placing.” I draw from Harcourt and Escobar’s “notion of politics of place” and “the interplay between culture and power” (2002:11) in understanding how women (as well as young people and marginalized communities) are “actors in their own lives” who “are leading place-based activities, forming meshworks and defining glocalities” (2002:13). They also highlight “the importance of placing someone in their social and cultural location without artificially binding them to a fixed cultural or social identity” and how “[b]eing embedded in a particular location by no means suggests that the location is itself closed off to change,” but that it instead “allows for a more realistic and potentially progressive understanding of identity as dynamic and shifting” (2002:11). They also call for strategies of equity and solidarity in recognition of involuntary displacement of people from locations where they experienced belonging and attachment (Harcourt and Escobar 2002).

Kingsolver (Billings and Kingsolver 2018; Kingsolver 2011; Kingsolver 2018) also notes the importance of “placing” ourselves in relation to one another. “In part, we identify ourselves in relation to place in terms that we think the listener might understand, depending on how well he or she knows the regional and social landscapes” (Kingsolver 2011:13). Placing is not only used to help people make social connections and geographical associations, but it can also express power in placing individuals as “insiders” or “outsiders” and used to “legitimize or delegitimize arguments and claims to authority” (2011:15). Such power of placing means that “... it can sometimes take four generations or more to feel ‘at home’ or accepted as local in a community, but it can also be possible to ‘place’ an absolute stranger as somehow local” (2011:15).

Organizations and programs that I observed and participated in, as well as research collaborators within and without, actively seek to construct and distribute counterstorytelling narratives about their local and regional home communities, often framed within community development discourse as the idea and practice of “creative placemaking” (Markusen and Gadwa 2010; Markusen and Nicodemus 2014; Schupbach and Ball 2016). An NEA white paper defines the notion:

In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired. (Markusen and Gadwa 2010:3)

However, non-profit organizations and federally funded programs supported by agencies like the NEA, NEH, USDA, etc. are also part of the culture industry that continues to construct Appalachia in ways that draw from, perpetuate, and romanticize stereotypes and ensure the reproduction of interventionist policies, agencies, and programs that need these tropes to survive. Through these various interwoven social and political economic relationships, artists and craftspeople both participate in and contest such processes and productions as the “commodification of rurality” (Kingsolver 2011). Bureaucratic systems define what is “fundable” and marketable as “community economic development” or “place-based” artmaking/education and what counts as “folk and traditional arts” or “media arts”; meanwhile, federal agencies and programs like the ARC, NEA/NEH, AmeriCorps, and even PBS are integral to the maintenance and stability arts, media, and educational activities in the region.

One example of an inter-agency collaboration in support of integrating art and agriculture in local community development is a Creative Assets Inventory Workshop led

by folklorists Sarah Schmitt and Mark Brown from the Kentucky Arts Council (KAC) on August 31, 2016 at the Booneville Entertainment Center in Owsley County, Kentucky. This community workshop was the “first step” of getting to know artists and farmers in two Kentucky counties (Ohio and Owsley) “as part of a yearlong USDA-funded pilot project to merge the arts with local farmers markets” (Kentucky Arts Council 2016) called “Homegrown Handmade.” Schmitt commented that “creative placemaking” was a common buzzword in the region and pointed out that “folklore has always done this” and called it by different names.

Place-based development and pedagogies demonstrate the creative tensions and potentials for youth media education and production. “By creating and screening their own locally produced stories, youth in rural communities as well as in urban ones develop a greater connection and awareness that others are experiencing similar struggles, and through the process form more critically literate identities” (Goodman and Cocca 2014:215). However, research collaborators like Kate Fowler also critique the ideals of “community-based work” and “creative placemaking” and highlight the complexity of community collaboration and representation.

It’s interesting because when I was in school, one of my best friends Mark ... [who] does amazing youth work ... was always talking about social practice, and I was just like, “Ugh, this like really patronizing form of art,” and you know, basically having communities work as free laborers to represent your projects when you’re like a director. Like I had this really strong stance on community-based work where I’m like, “Communities make their own damn work, and we just have to like look at where it is and uplift it.” Like, we as directors don’t need to come in and be like, “*Now* you’re making work!” So it’s interesting because I had this statement for a long time where I was like, “I work by myself!” (laughs) Like, when I go and make films ... I go and I sleep on somebody’s couch for a long period. ... when I was working ... with Mack Wolford, who was part of the Bluefield snake-handling church, like I thought of it as being like this very independent thing. And I was collaborating with him, but I didn’t see it as this like community-engagement in a way. And ... I was really resistant to that title because I thought like, “You know, he’s doing his thing, he was here before I came. This work existed, and we’re collaborating in this way.” But ... it’s just been a slow period of me chiseling away at that feeling (laughs) and that kind of like discomfort. And

sometimes I still have it .... we've talked a lot at Appalshop, I've really ... had a lot of questions about the creative-placemaking work ... because it's been really directly linked to a lot of gentrification, in both rural and urban communities. And thinking about ... how we impact the economy here, what it looks like, and also that a lot of times when we're talking about representation, and we say like, "This isn't who we are!" What we're actually saying is like ... shaming another class of people or shaming poverty in a way. And also declassifying people in our community and saying, "That's not what we look like," and determining what it is that we look like then. So ... I still have a lot of questions about like what does it mean to work with a community, and who's the whole community, and what work was pre-existing? (Fowler 2016)

As a critique and counter-notion to "creative placemaking," the usage and practice of "creative placekeeping" represents "the active care and maintenance of a place and its social fabric by the people who live and work there. It is not just preserving buildings but keeping the cultural memories associated with a locale alive, while supporting the ability of local people to maintain their way of life as they choose. What does that look like in practice?" (Yu, et al. 2018). I first heard the term as a call for intersectional justice in response to "creative place-making" during a panel of local African American community artists and leaders at the 2018 KY RUX gathering in Covington, Kentucky (in the northern tip of the state across the river from Cincinnati). One of the speakers articulated "place-keeping" as maintaining what is special and meaningful to those who live there as a process of local grassroots community organizing. In contrast and complement to placemaking, placekeeping acknowledges the risks of imposed ideas of community and external forces like gentrification that endanger not only urban areas but also rural places and determine how they are packaged and sold.

Furthermore, the active practice of "keeping" places also acknowledges the precarity of social and material contexts, or "precarious placemaking" (Hinkson 2017), in which some research collaborators must adapt in order to sustain their "place" or find/make another one. "To see models of placemaking as spaces of transformative

possibility requires us to account for coexisting, qualitatively distinctive ways of relating to places” (Hinkson 2017:51). Through research collaborators voices and my “observant participation” as a field researcher, this dissertation also highlights processes of “precarious placemaking,” or the “making and unmaking of places” (Hinkson 2017:52), and “brings anthropological accounts of place and placemaking into dialogue with concepts of precarity and precariousness” (2017:50). Furthermore, placed and temporal precarity and crisis in field sites also resulted in ethnographic “listening on the edge” (Cave and Sloan 2014), as exemplified during the 2016 presidential election and raging forest fires when I was participating in a collaborative theater production and conducting interviews on youth media education and activism with young people in Letcher County (Clemons 2018c). “Listening on the edge” can address questions about people’s “attachment to place” (Rohland, et al. 2014) in response to crisis and “Why do people return to live in communities that have been devastated by and remain in vulnerable to disaster?” (2014:186). Similar to the experiences of people who had to choose whether to stay/return to their home communities after devastating natural disasters, listening on the edge also relates to the common rhetoric in mainstream American media and politics about people choosing to stay in the Appalachian region despite economic and ecological disparities and struggles, and the complexity of economic, emotional, family history, and property factors that sometimes drive people to stay in a place.

In addition to regional “creative placemaking” are more local processes of “space-making” wherein marginalized youth are “making space” for belonging in the face of adversity (Hudson 2020). Through media education programs and other place-based storytelling and community development networks in public schools and other

community settings, young people can access as well as make “the spaces of action and resistance and the language of media to speak up against and talk back to the seemingly hegemonic political rationality of neoliberalism” (Goodman and Cocca 2014:211).

Research collaborator Alexia Ault connected her work with local issues, place-based art, and community development projects through the SKCTC Appalachian Center in Harlan County, Kentucky, which provides important “third spaces” both physically and socially for students and the community.

My work isn’t necessarily political or activist, but it addresses a lot of social issues that our [Kentuckians for the Commonwealth] chapter is interested in too. Like the needle exchange, having .... safe spaces for young people, event spaces, LGBTQ rights in our community, these are all things that fit into my job in some ways. .... With *Higher Ground* [and storytelling] .... we’re doing a lot more creative place-making work right now. So we’re really interested in creating event spaces, kind of the “third spaces” is how we think of them. So you’ve got your work and your home, and you need a third space, somewhere that you can hang out and ... do those other things that you’re doing when you’re not sleeping or working. .... So that’s part of what we’re working on through my office right now. (Ault 2018) <sup>37</sup>

At the 2018 CAFTA Summit in Matewan, West Virginia, Crystal Good similarly talked about “third places” where people gather, create, and spend time “outside of work/school and home” as important sites for conducting fieldwork and highlighting less visible arts traditions and communities (Good 2018). “Third spaces” can also serve as important sites for “‘doing school’ in an informal learning environment” and “performing and/or constructing through talk that which comes to be counted as *school*” (Lester, et al. 2015:831).

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<sup>37</sup> Devyn Creech and Austin Rutherford, both AMI alumni and Higher Ground participants and former co-directors, both talked about their experiences in this space through their involvement with Higher Ground and the important relationships and community that resulted, which Devyn said, “changed my entire life” and “saved my life a hundred times” (see also more in-depth quotes in Clemons 2020; Creech 2018; Rutherford 2018).



Such “spaces of action” for critical literacy (Goodman and Cocca 2014) can also contribute to create agentic “space for youth voice” (Woodgate, et al. 2020). Notions of “youth voice” appeared in some field sites as a literal framework for youth education and leadership development (such as the High Rocks curricula guidance and the Owsley County High School “Youth Voice” committee), and more generally as an implied goal of youth media education programs/projects. Distinguishing between “creating space for youth voice” (Woodgate, et al. 2020) versus notions of “giving voice” to children and youth recognizes that young people already have voices and make choices for using them even as they are mediated through dialogue and power relations with adults and other age groups (Facca, et al. 2020; Woodgate, et al. 2020). In her work with LGBT youth, Berliner (2018) draws upon feminist critical pedagogy to challenge assumptions about “taken for granted” assumptions that notions like “*empowerment* and *voice*” and “youth digital media production and media participation” are “inherently empowering” and critique “how digital media use has been imagined as the antidote to queer bullying and suicidal ideation” and “the ways that discourses on student voice in fact may *limit* young people” (Berliner 2018:5-6, original emphasis).

There is similar pushback in the region on language like “empowerment” and “giving voice” as external forces rather than Appalachians/youth already as change agents with their own voices. “Conceptualizing research as *giving* youth voice negates their agency, characterizing them as in need of adult assistance in order to make their experiences validated and perspectives known.” (Woodgate, et al. 2020:1; original emphasis). However, it is important to note that “child voice in particular is almost always produced through intergenerational dialogue that includes members of other age

categories, including adults, and that we cannot readily dismiss factors that mediate child–adult interactions and relations such as power” (Facca, et al. 2020:9). Therefore, this dissertation focuses on “youth voice” by emphasizing their inherent agency and the content and meaning of their messages while acknowledging my (and other adults’) role in “creating space for youth voice” (Woodgate, et al. 2020) and mediating their voices through structured media programs and projects.

Processes of “creating spaces” for action and belonging include defining and making “safe spaces.” At a fundamental level, safe space can be as basic as a space where young people can safely express themselves and use their voices with openness, encouragement, and guidance. Creating and naming “safe spaces” as a social norm was common throughout my fieldwork, especially in non-profit settings, like AMI and High Rocks, and collaborative art-based workshops and productions that welcome fluid gender identities. Research collaborators also cited arts education and programming as a “safe space” for creative expression within public school settings.<sup>38</sup>

Through the iterative process of having conversations, listening, observing, notetaking, coalescing, and analyzing the gendered and generational dynamics, I developed what I call a “generational” perspective on media education and activism and the gendered expressions that occur in different spaces. Such “generational spaces” as AMI and High Rocks not only provide structural support of programs, but they also foster the engagement, support, and leadership of young women, queer youth, and youth of color, as well as “safe spaces” where diverse gendered (and other minoritized)

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<sup>38</sup> I have also navigated the complexity of trying to create “safe” or “safer” intergenerational spaces in co-founding Camp Happy Appalachee as “informal gathering welcomes all LGBTQ-identifying folks and allies in an inclusive, comfortable, and private environment” within the ASA.

identities can be supported. These gendered and generational perspectives and approaches intersect within regional organizations, partnerships, and meshworks, and generational identities become apparent, accessible, and embodied through intergenerational mentors who encourage and support creative exploration and expression where such resources may be generally lacking.<sup>39</sup> However, as I discuss in Chapter 4 on intergenerational meshworks and Chapter 5 on material mediacologies, access can be limited to “who you know,” so all young people who need such support and “safe spaces” do not always know about it, get in the door, or feel “safe.” Critical access to “safe spaces” not only relates to the different ways they are defined/practiced in relation to identities and agency to lead/choose but also their physical locations and proximity to non-supportive social forces that may endanger them. Furthermore, as I discuss in Chapter 4 on meshworks, young people push back and help define and shape these programs through formal and informal practices of agency and leadership.

## 2.7 Self-making and World-making: Imaginative Possibilities and Real Limitations

Through their voices, media, and relationships, this dissertation explores how young people engage in “the twin processes of selfmaking and worldmaking” (Stornaiuolo 2015:566) and imagining themselves “as activist-artists who collaboratively worked toward change within the global community” (2015:566). The processes of selfmaking and worldmaking, as they also relate to place-making, also illustrate how

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<sup>39</sup> It is important to note the historical context and critiques of “girls camps” as spaces for gender socialization and protectionism in the US, even as such summer residential programs can also provide alternative social spaces where girls can learn to be more independent and self-reliant and where temporary and unique homosocial communities can become embodied (Paris 2001). In fact, “Many girls were empowered by camp athletics and outdoor activities, lifelong friendships forged at camp, opportunities to lead other girls, and rituals of inversion that, while often serving to confirm the social order, offered new and occasionally transgressive possibilities for self-identification” Paris (2001:69).

“notions of identity and community are fluid and relative to the situation, context, and perhaps even the mood of the person whom you are asking” (Hudgins 2002:34); and that worldmaking is expanded and constrained in complex ways by the internet. Escobar (2009) discusses the possibilities for post-capitalist cultures through the potential for digital technologies cyberspace to enable autonomous collectivities creating, accessing, and contributing to multidirectional flows of information beyond geographical borders (2009:350). These potentials are vast as cyberspace serves “[a]s a space for inter-cultural exchange and for the construction of shared artistic and political strategies” through which people have “unprecedented opportunities to build shared visions with peoples from all over the world” (Escobar 2009:350). Therefore, it is important to ask critical questions about access where young people in different cultural contexts, both globally and within the U.S., may not have the same level of access to or familiarity with information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as computers, smartphones, internet access, etc. For example, in her study of LGBT youth in Kentucky, Gray (2009) learned how issues of access to information technology played out as particular limitations in some of these young peoples’ lives. “I came to appreciate how many youth did not have home internet access, could not use the internet as a tool or source of community at their local schools, and had not public access alternative” (Gray 2009:189). Chapter 5 on mediacologies explores critical access to internet, “third spaces,” and other structures of support for young people.

DeJaeghere & McCleary (2010) draw on Ong’s (Ong, et al. 1996) conceptual analysis of “self-making and being made occur in social settings, in a complex interplay of interests and power” (DeJaeghere and McCleary 2010:230), and they call “attention to

the social and cultural formation of identities in schools” (2010:228) in their study of “the conditions in which Mexican youth civic identities are formed and enacted in transnational spaces” (2010:230). Not only are “the desires and outcomes of schooling influenced by national and local policies and practices, including the community, teachers, administrators, and students” (2010:230), these processes of power and “‘self-making’ in the face of ‘being made’” (2010:231) impact young people’s daily lives and imaginative possibilities, especially those of marginalized youth.

A critical and unavoidable aspect of social contexts in the US are processes and histories of racialization, othering, erasures, silences, and “everyday violence” (Bourgois 2001) that harm individuals, relationships, and possibilities for practicing and expressing anti-racist equity and solidarity. The production of whiteness in contradistinction to the social construction of other “races” has long been a subject of anticolonial academic inquiry; however, it is taking on a more open existence and self-conscious acknowledgement through the public rise of white supremacist groups and ideologies as well as through whitened representations and reductions of “Appalachia” (Hartigan 2004; Smith 2004). As Mason points out, “since modernity and ‘civilization’ are racialized as Western and white, the dual function of the hillbilly is as much a matter of race as it is a marker of primitivism and poverty – and as much a matter of race as of gender and sexual transgressions” (Mason 2005:43). Even within the field of Appalachian studies, which was founded with a focus on dispelling regional stereotypes and producing more inclusive histories and representations:

race comes into focus primarily when the lens of scholarship is directed toward African Americans (and to a much lesser extent, other people of color) or topics directly associate the black experience (e.g., slavery, segregation). The implicit corollary is the absence of people of color, i.e., in contexts where the population is

all white, race is also absent, or at least far less relevant. This erasure of the racial content of whiteness perpetuates it as the normative and generic identity of Appalachians (only people of color are marked, not whites). (Smith 2004:42-43)

Furthermore, there are also constructive tensions between different self-identification and scholarship approaches within Appalachian Studies, characterized by the public debates between *Blacks in Appalachia* historian William Turner (Turner and Cabbell 2015) and “Affrilachian” author/poet Frank X Walker (Affrilachian Poets n.d.; Walker 2000), both of which are commonly committed to creating and sharing representations of more diverse and realistic narratives in contrast to the prevailing stereotypes of poor-rural-male-whiteness of the region. Critical analysis benefits both from contesting common stereotypes about the region through re-readings and re-tellings of Appalachian histories and representations of who is included and how as well as from harnessing the creative power and agency of individual and collective actors to consciously construct and claim their identities through various means, including cultural productions like poetry and literature. Positionalities of personal identities intersecting with intellectual locations in different disciplines, and what is at stake are questions of authenticity and questions of power and who gets to say what, to whom, and for what purpose. Both the Affrilachian poets’ collective (Affrilachian Poets n.d.) and the “Black in Appalachia” multimedia project (Black in Appalachia 2021) draw from these notions to expand further the voices and self-representation of Black people in the region.

Notions of belonging, othering, racialization, and naturalized whiteness can also be used to discipline and silence marginalized and minoritized people within Appalachian communities (Kingsolver 2011:116) and in representations of them (Mason 2011). The white elephant of race in the room is both more visible and less and less unspoken when

there is reluctance toward talking about whiteness by people who do not consider themselves white supremacists but still experience some privilege relative to the (previously unspoken) racialized identity that they/we bear. During my period of fieldwork and through writing this dissertation, there was a discernable shift toward what I have come to think of as “white-wing” politics within a majority of mainstream conservatives. Different local and state responses to issues were happening, including racialized police brutality and murder, the Charlottesville riot, and mass shootings in public schools, churches, and community spaces serving marginalized communities.

This time also included (includes) identity- and policy-related uncertainty and fallout, including: increasing visibility, vocalness, and violence of white supremacist individuals and organizations within mainstream media, on higher education campuses, and infiltrating into small rural communities; aggressive and often violent otherization of racialized, religious, and other minoritized differences in the 45<sup>th</sup> President’s ever problematic and inflammatory commentary, rhetoric, and policy recommendations; and as a result, increased divisiveness between the US and foreign leaders regarding immigration, human rights, diplomatic relations resources, trade agreements, and the military. Meanwhile, some white people in largely white areas want to do something but struggle to have frank conversations, take action where they are, or connect with broader solidarities (House 2021).

Mason offers useful definitions of “Whiteness” and “White Supremacism” based on her extensive research on the Kanawha County, West Virginia textbook controversy. She uses the terms “White” and “Whiteness” to “refer to how and why those involved [in the controversy] claimed, rejected, or ignored identification as members of the dominant

population of the area” (Mason 2009:194), noting that “academics have used “whiteness” as an analytical term helpful for determining the social conditions and historical changes in how we determine who in society is white” (Mason 2009:195). She defines “White Supremacist” as “[a]n ideological designation for those who believe in the biological, cultural, and/or spiritual purity of white people and take measures to promote the view of a white-dominated society as the natural order” (Mason 2009:195).

Mason (2009) and Buck (2001) both point to DuBois’ notion of the “psychological wage of whiteness” (Du Bois 1903 (1996)), which replaced the previous promise of material success and security associated with whiteness and reinforced by the ideology of white supremacy, by pitting working class white people against working class people of color, especially Black people (Buck 2001:57-59). Buck (2001) argues that particular historic economic and political processes in the US and Kentucky enabled the construction of whiteness as a privileged racial category with shifting boundaries of inclusion relative to material resources, demographic categories, etc. The construction of whiteness in the US “as a continuously evolving smokescreen” (Buck 2001:225) has been used strategically by elites to discourage solidarity across color lines among working class people in rural Central Kentucky. Buck contributes a valuable model for unearthing local histories, tracing their relationships to larger political economic processes, and providing a possible lens for building working class solidarity across racial and other differences. The next section discusses how notions of “Appalachian Futurisms” and “intersectional sustainability” contribute to conversations and efforts for building and modeling solidarity between white people and people of color and sustainability across Meta’lachian meshworks.



## 2.8 The Art of Making Do

One of my partner Timi's Mamaw's common sayings was "Use it up, wear it out, make do, or do without," which is one of our personal favorites because it encompasses much of our approach to place-based sustainability and community engagement. "Making do" does not have a single meaning but refers to a broad skill-set of doing the best with what you have, which could mean "fixing" something, finding an alternative solution, turning something into something else, asking for help, etc. The notion and practice of "making do," and corresponding imagery of "Mason jars," were a common theme throughout my research in Central Appalachia. For example, as the official note-taker at the second CAFTA summit, I participated in an interesting discussion about the linkages of "folk and traditional arts" and "making do," which is a broader regional saying in Appalachia and New England. Mary Hufford, one of the project directors and also a fieldworker, quoted the longer "making do" verse, and while I took notes, I thought about "Mamaws" and the young people I had been working with and the way that media production knowledge and education have continued both inside and outside formal programs of support. From a theoretical perspective, "making do" also represents a "non-consumer" citizen approach for not only frugality but also consciously not participating in mainstream forms of capitalist economic practices and identities (Gibson-Graham 1996; Gibson-Graham 2006).<sup>40</sup>

The Mason jar is emblematic of such anti/alternative capitalist practices and defiance of capitalist marginalization poverty-based and deficit-driven narratives about

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<sup>40</sup> See for example, "The Non-Consumer Advocate" blog (Wolk-Stanley 2020) and the corresponding private Facebook group. The banner image for both sites is a graphic with a robin's-egg-blue background and four lighter color blue canning jars, each bearing part of the saying "Use it up, wear it out, make do, or do without" across the front in all capital letters.

Appalachia by emphasizing people’s ability to sustain themselves and their communities through noncapitalist practices, social capital, etc. However, as in the practice of home-canning, “making do” is not merely an activity of “necessity” but also a creative and aesthetic process of “making” (Christensen 2015), which emphasizes what I would call the artistic “*doing of making*” (as an expression of creativity and a form of aesthetic design) that also challenges regional assumptions about rural and urban class and “tastes” (Bourdieu 1993).<sup>41</sup>

While “making do” cannot be reduced to an economic necessity, there is still a powerful economic relationship between regional art and making do, which is visible in the connection between place-based storytelling that craft more diverse and positive representations of the region and place-based development initiatives that promote and market local arts and culture as an economic strategy, as exemplified by the regional project of painting quilt squares on barns so tourists can drive the trail and identify particular quilt patterns (Kingsolver 2011). Indeed, these quilt squares on barns dot the landscape throughout my extensive fieldwork travel in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia as well as between my current home in Rockcastle County and my hometown in Montgomery County. Barn quilt paintings represent both the commodification of rurality as a development effort as well as my own cultural/familial ancestry through my paternal grandparents (quilt/Mamaw, barn/Papaw). However, these multimodal quilt pieces of “Appalachian culture” are not always benign and welcoming to all people, as my partner and I drove upon a Confederate barn quilt in Rockcastle County when my partner and I

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<sup>41</sup> There are multiple “Mason jar” narratives, and I follow a different strand from the haute cuisine co-optation that serves designer “moonshine” in Mason jars in very expensive urban restaurants, which commodifies Appalachia in another way.

were returning home from fieldwork. We stopped so I could document this example, but I choose not to reproduce the image for public consumption beyond its limited audience on a sparsely populated narrow, winding country road.

In the KAC Creative Asset Inventory Guide shared with participants, “Quilt barns/squares” were listed as an example of public art projects on the “Sample Cultural Assets Inventory.” Barn quilt projects also serve as a more extended example of documenting community assets and developing partnerships both with those with “obvious artistic significance” and other “latent creative resources just waiting to be tapped by a group of innovative and motivated organizers. For example: did you know many Kentucky communities with successful barn quilt programs partnered with their local energy cooperative to borrow the necessary equipment to hang the quilt squares?” (KAC 2016:6). This local partnership with the Jackson County-based People’s Rural Telephone Cooperative (PRTC) for arts-based as well as technology-based support for local community economic development was repeatedly demonstrated throughout my fieldwork in Owsley County.

As this example illustrates, making inventories of existing community networks, resources, and assets, arts-based and otherwise, is a process of “creative placemaking” as well as of “making do” with and documenting what is already present in a given community before implementing more complex partnerships and projects. It is also a process for local residents to see their home communities in new ways that they may take for granted because of their familiarity with it, which is also a form of make-do “metaethnography of popular folklore” (Yiorgos 2006) where “The ‘folk’ are striking back” and “controlling their self-representation,” and “reconfiguring themselves as

authoritative speaking subjects .... formerly seen as anthropological subjects” (2006:381). Furthermore, making do, whether we call it that or not, is a familiar notion in conducting ethnographic research. Anthropologists are adept at making do both from necessity of adapting to the situations and from a creative making process of developing “thick descriptions” of the place, time, and people we co-inhabit while conducting field work. Our access and application of make-do strategies in the field (as well as in school for graduate students) are also relative to our personal positionality and the resources and networks we have access to in a particular context.

Through these and other various field encounters with “making do,” I observed its intersections with artistic, economic, and regional development practices in Appalachia. I began to see “making do” as a meta-strategy of self-making, “homemaking,” and placemaking that is both an individual and collective practice that draws from and contributes to creativity, sustainability, social capital, and solidarity. In the context of youth media education, consumption, and production as I discuss more fully in Chapter 6, “making do” and “Mason jars” are also themes of regional storytelling and imagery, processes of creative adaptation, and practices of sharing knowledge and resources with others. Like barn quilts, Mason jars are recurrent images in Meta’lachie (and rural and displaced communities beyond), and as shown through several field-based photo essays, they invoke both common and contrasting symbolism/meanings in different settings and the interpretations of different research collaborators. Young Appalachians also devise means of using and accessing media in ways that cannot be taken away whether or not they are not actively plugged into organizations or infrastructures of connectivity.

“Making do” is one of the most important lessons and points of encouragement that I have gained over the years, both learning about its role and importance from research collaborators and emphasizing in my teaching that students can effectively and creatively produce compelling digital storytelling with whatever resources are available in their particular setting. Chapter 6 explores what I refer to as “make-do media” practices inside and outside different settings by educators and young people in the region, including a film and thesis by a young man from Harlan County bearing “MAKE/DO” as part of their titles and documenting practices of resilience in Eastern Kentucky (Edwards 2015). Through agentic practices of “making do” and the “doing of making,” young people take control of representations and contribute to counterstorytelling about themselves and Meta’lachia.

## 2.9 Appalachian Futurisms and Intersectional Sustainability

I began thinking about the notion of “Appalachian futurisms” through the rabbit hole of exploring and following the intersections of anthropological, feminist, and critical race theories and visual media (Lempert 2014a), which led me to the roots and iterations of Afrofuturism (Barr 2008; Coffman and Vannier 2018; Dery 1994; Womack 2013) and indigenous futurism (Dillon 2012; Dillon 2016; Medak-Saltzman 2017; Raheja 2017). Womack (2013) defines “Afrofuturism” as “an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation” (2013:9). Later, she goes on:

Whether through literature, visual arts, music, or grassroots organizing, Afrofuturists redefine culture and notions of blackness for today and the future. Both an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory, Afrofuturism combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs. In some cases, it’s a total reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques. (Womack 2013:9)

Dillon (2012) similarly articulates a decentering of predominant Western discourse and representations by centering indigenous peoples, narratives, processes, and power.

It might go without saying that all forms of indigenous futurisms are narratives of *biskaabiiyang*, an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of “returning to ourselves,” which involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world. This process is often called “decolonization,” and as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori) explains, it requires *changing* rather than *imitating* Eurowestern concepts. (Dillon 2012:10)

The “Imagining Indigenous Futurisms” Facebook group (Dillon and Lapensée 2012), which “is a space for artists, writers, filmmakers, designers, media makers, activists, and scholarly activists to share insights, exchange information, and highlight work on Indigenous Futurisms” (Dillon and Lapensée 2012), represents an active collaborative digital platform for sharing multimodal and multimedia productions and scholarship through written and filmic speculative fiction, video games, graphic design, podcasts, etc.<sup>42</sup>

Observations and of and participation in this group helped me further understand some of the linkages and distinctions between marginalized populations’ histories and struggles to self-imagine, -define, and -design futures that not only include them but center their agency and positionality in contrast to externally posited and imposed visions that exclude, marginalize, or appropriate and repackage them for mainstream consumption. “The imagination is a tool of resistance” (Womack 2013:24). Increasing digital multimedia Indigenous futurisms and “Steampunk” and Afrofuturist science fiction representations in popular media (i.e., Janelle Monae, *Black Panther*, etc.) and are shaping/being shaped by current political economic development on national and global

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<sup>42</sup> I joined the “Imagining Indigenous Futurisms” Facebook group in November 2015.

scales, which then tie to political / media ecologies and both visually and discursively disrupt normative assumptions about who can imagine/create the future and how those futures might differ. Resistance manifests in the act of imagining futures for peoples and communities that colonizing forces and systems actively attempted to annihilate, presumed extinct or doomed for extinction, unworthy of a future, or worthy only through assimilation, conversion, compromise, and submission (Mason 2018).

Afrofuturisms and indigenous futurisms provide relevant examples of self-imagination, -representation, -determination, and agency that paralleled anthropological explorations of the future in terms of place-based regional development in Kentucky and Appalachia and who and how people think about, design, plan for, implement, report on, and revise the future (Balasundaram 2014; Kingsolver 2010; Kingsolver 2011). In many ways and many places, young people of all ages are consciously and sometimes inadvertently working to decolonize knowledge production and cultural representations (Tuhiwai Smith 1999) about Appalachian people, places, and potential. <sup>43</sup> As I delved into futurisms from marginalized but imaginative perspectives over the course of my research, conversations and theorizing about the Appalachian region and future possibilities have become more formally addressed within the field of Appalachian studies as well as youth-led community development.

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<sup>43</sup> In Fall 2019, the West Virginia University (WVU) Humanities Center issued a call for “researchers and creative practitioners” to contribute to “Speculative Appalachian Futures,” a set of artistic exhibits and mini-conference.

The call for proposals directly invoked intersectional alliances and collective imaginings of who and what are possible beyond the standard narrative about the region and its people, including “Frank X. Walker’s ‘Affrilachia’ model” as well as notions of “Indigilachia,” “Mexilachia,” or “Islamolachia” and “@QueerAppalachia” (WVU Humanities Center 2019). Unfortunately, the event, which was scheduled for April 2-3, 2020 was cancelled due to the COVID-19 quarantine.

For example, Ada Smith (2016), a prominent youth leader, advocate, and research collaborator with lifelong ties to Appalshop and AMI, formalized the concept of “Appalachian Futurism” in the title of her brief article in the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*. She discusses the usefulness and limits of the “internal colony” framework, which helped her “as a young person .... to understand that my people, heritage, and culture were not the problem, and .... connected me to issues around racism, classism, and homophobia because of their structural nature” (2016:73). She challenged the way in which the idea of internal colonization “allowed Appalachians to be complacent in the further erasure of the Cherokee people as well as other indigenous people from this land. .... We neglect daily the true colonization that happened in the mountains and in this country” (2016:73).<sup>44</sup>

Smith does not use the term “Appalachian futurism” in the actual article or define it overtly, nor does she directly reference feminism or intersectionality, which she discusses elsewhere. However, she draws inspiration from Dery’s (1994) articulation of Afrofuturism and calls for Appalachians to “think about a way of working that is about possibility—using aesthetics, imagination, art, and risk as the foreground. We must encourage our young people and communities to visualize and enact a new Appalachia that, at its core, provides individual and collective agency toward opportunity and an improved region” (2016:74).<sup>45</sup> Catte (2017) ties different aspirational notions of

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<sup>44</sup> Smith draws upon Said’s critique of orientalism and dissects the four dominant theories noted by Appalachian scholars Lewis, Johnson, and Askens (1978): “culture of poverty, regional underdevelopment, internal colonialism, and center-periphery. ... none of these four actually gives us what we need. The first blames the people and culture, the second a lack of modernization, the third a ruling outside force, and the last blames the capitalist economic system” (2016:73).

<sup>45</sup> Similarly, a Tumblr blog entitled, “Appalachian futurism” mostly re-posts relevant digital media (accessed January 17, 2020). Interestingly, the previous blog title and link reference to “brightmountainfutures” (accessed November 26, 2018 and no longer available) resembled KFTC’s



Appalachian futures as counternarratives and development strategies that challenge persistent stereotypes about the region reinforced by the 2016 election.

In Appalachian community development lingo, post-coal strategic visioning is known as the “transition” or sometimes the “just transition,” to use the concept’s philanthropic brand name. Some individuals, particularly young Appalachians, have introduced the phrase “Appalachian futurism,” a tribute to Afrofuturism, as a way of imagining an Appalachia without coal. Whatever one chooses to call it, for every disgruntled, [45<sup>th</sup> President] supporting-coal miner in Appalachia that launched a dozen think pieces, you’ll find an individual taking tangible steps to be part of the solution for a sustainable, post-coal economy. Although it’s tempting [to] turn Appalachia into a symbol of America’s looming decline, the truth is that we’re much the same across regions. We’re attached to the same national and global markets and populated by a not insignificant number of individuals who placed their whiteness ahead of their regional or class loyalties during the last election. (Catte 2017)

Like Catte, I cite youth theorizing of “Appalachian futurism” in conversation with and juxtaposition to the “philanthropic brand name” of “just transition.”

The concept of “Appalachian Futurisms” is useful because it draws upon intersectional approaches to and critical questions about what is possible and for whom as well as creative cultural productions imagining postcolonial futures (Barr 2008; Kingsolver 2010; Lempert 2012; Lempert 2014b). It also situates young people as key actors in envisioning and creating futures who need access to representations and resources to choose to stay or go, or both. “Appalachian futurisms” also directly invokes a link to technology, whether presented as the socio-economic equalizer and savior for a post-coal region, discussed/deployed in everyday and targeted media productions, applied as both educational methods and content, or imaginatively expressed through science

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“Appalachia’s Bright Future” campaign (Kentuckians for the Commonwealth 2014). The unnamed author describes the “sideblog” as “A work in progress and a place for inspiration and contemplation ... by a white person inspired and challenged by visionary fiction, afrofuturism, black quantum futurism, indigenous futurism, and sci fi/speculative fiction in general. .... I identify as a Midwesterner and settler living in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains” (accessed January 17, 2020).

fiction or other narratives about possible futures. The notion challenges essentialism about marginalized communities as well as technological determinism that assumes all technological advances is good and benefits everyone equitably.

Appalachian people and communities literally cannot escape the impact of media ecologies that include mass scapegoating, ridicule, and paternalism in popular American consciousness and internalized simultaneous feelings of inferiority, humiliation, and defensiveness. Significantly, critical literacies and counterstorytelling media representations offer options for a region that people are supposed to despise and abandon role of educational access and applied theories of intersectionality, decolonization, critical race analysis, and critiques of capitalism that come with this privileged position within marginalized communities.

In her review of the book *Unwhite: Appalachia, Race, and Film*, McCommons (2020) cautions against the limits of this interpretive framework for racialized representations of the Appalachian region.

McCarroll's commitment to assessing race in portrayals of Appalachians is important and *Unwhite* provides a springboard for further analysis. Unfortunately, the view of Appalachia as a white region pervades the text and stymies the potential for a nuanced analysis of how race, class, and region function in film. McCarroll asserts that she uses the myth intentionally, but does not deal with the problems inherent in doing so. Additionally, when McCarroll argues that Appalachians are represented as "phenotypically white and hierarchically nonwhite," the implication is that (white) Appalachians should be depicted as occupying a superior position in relation to nonwhite groups in film. While McCarroll states that it is not her goal to equate the experiences of racial minorities with those of Appalachian whites, the titles of the first three chapters convey that message. Although McCarroll mentions Barbara Ellen Smith's warning against the portrayal of white Appalachians as racial minorities, she unfortunately does not heed Smith's advice. (McCommons 2020:216)

McCommons addresses some problematic aspects that also reflect some of the critical analysis and activist praxis of research collaborators as co-theorizers engage in, including

similar notions regarding equating Appalachian marginalization with racialized marginalization that I have heard Affrilachian/LatinX young people articulate/critique in some spaces.

As with most of the observations and lessons learned from my fieldwork and relationships along the way, I have come upon new ways of conceptualizing and thinking about some of my theory and practice, professional work and interests, and creative production for more than two decades. My thinking about “intersectional sustainability” evolved from my engagement with ecofeminism, liberation theologies, sustainability, social and environmental justice, grassroots community organizing, and media ecologies over time and across disciplines as well as in my personal life and activism (Clemons 2003; Clemons 2011; Ellis 2008; Reedy and Clemons 2016). This notion has worn different labels as I expanded, refined, and integrated different modes of knowledge production, community development, and practical and sociocultural expressions of sustainability. It further crystalized when thinking about research collaborators, meta-sites, and Appalachian futurisms because the notion of sustainability makes certain imagined futures possible through active praxis and processes.

At times, it has been difficult to find a home in different conversations and communities without sharing a common language and assumptions. Elsewhere, I have discussed how ecofeminism has been an important form of intersectional, place-based, sustainability praxis and activism for my partner and myself, and how we have worked to broaden “the sustainability conversation to emphasize what is commonly referred to the three-legged stool of ecological, economic, and social sustainability” in which “[a]ll three legs must be present to achieve holistic sustainability” (Clemons in Kingsolver &

Clemons 2013:12). I define “intersectional sustainability” as a conscious critical approach to the analysis, integration, and practice of the three “legs” of sustainability in which power is critiqued and questioned, marginalized stakeholders and voices are not only advocated for and included but actively participatory, and decolonization of knowledge production and practiced are modeled structurally, relationally, and individually. “Intersectional” emphasizes the interconnections and critical analysis that I always believed was inherent in ecofeminism, and when combined with “sustainability,” becomes inclusive of social, ecological, and economic “legs” of sustainability. Furthermore, intersectional sustainability considers broad intersectional social and cultural experiences that include (and sometimes blur) gendered, racialized, and other minoritized identities, as well as generational affiliations and place-based livelihoods and cultural forms. The notion of intersectional sustainability also relates in terms of young people’s sometimes sophisticated intersectional analysis of different issues and long-term possibilities. While their works fall into some broad categories, more directly, they still tackle different layers of issues that are part of their sustainable visions for the future. While “intersectional sustainability” is not the exact conceptual phrasing that research collaborators and other young people in Meta’lachia use, I believe it is still useful for understanding and referencing the larger combination of language and organizing frameworks that they talk about and use for integrating social and environmental justice issues on “just transition,” “post-coal economy,” intersectional feminism, feminist political ecology (Elmhirst 2011; Engle 2019), radical inclusion, and “Appalachian futurism[s]” (cited in Catte 2017; Smith 2016).

## CHAPTER 3. “DOCUMENTING COMMUNITIES” WITH “RESPECT FOR MYSELF .... OTHERS .... AND THIS PLACE”: RESEARCH ETHICS AND METHOD/OLOGIES IN PRAXIS

### 3.1 Naming and Representation on “Feminist Fridays”

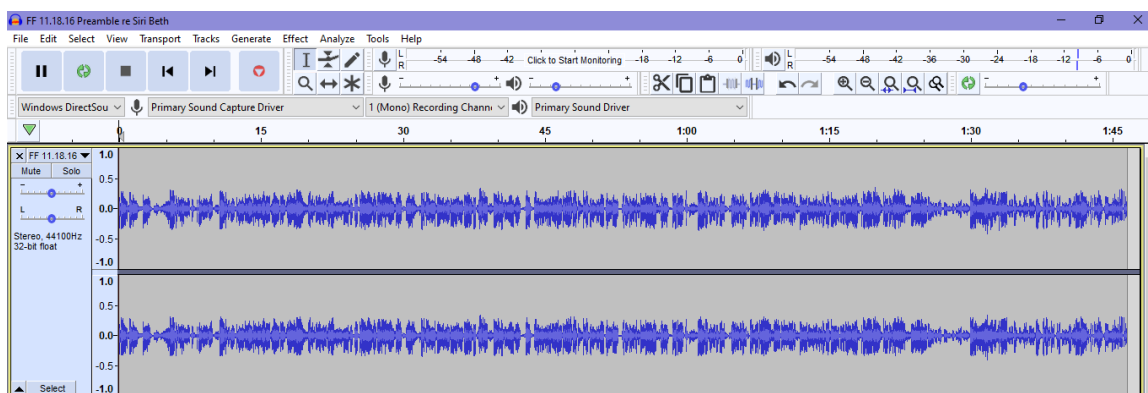


Figure 9 Visual representation of audio waves from “Feminist Friday” on WMMT, Whitesburg, Kentucky, November 18, 2016 (Excerpted audio file from previously available public digital content using Audacity open-source software with screen image by author)

As a feminist activist ethnographer, it is important to acknowledge my positionality as a researcher, how I came to this particular research project, and to “consider the ways in which our positioning is always situated and shapes our findings and the stories we tell” (Stuesse 2016:230). One public representation of this process in action was during a guest appearance on Tanya Turner’s weekly “Feminist Friday” radio show in 2016. She invited me when I spent a month participating in the AMI Fall Theater Lab in Whitesburg, Kentucky, and I joined Tanya (“DJ Aunt Bernice” on air) and her friend Sarah (“DJ Siri Beth”) in the WMMT community radio studio at Appalshop studio show-in-progress.

DJ Aunt Bernice (AB): So DJ Tambone [author’s nickname] yeah, thank you for being here with us.

DJ TB: Thanks for having me. I’m so excited about your show.

DJ AB: Yeah. Me too. It's fun. The new has not worn off, it's so fun. (Laughs) So you are "from off" as we like to say, right?

DJ TB: Right, right.

DJ AB: Yeah. You're not here in Whitesburg all the time, but we're so lucky to have you here now. Where are you visiting us from?

DJ TB: Actually, I live in Rockcastle County, Clear Creek, which is just about maybe 20 minutes south of Berea, but as I often say is almost another planet because after you cross that ridge out of Berea, it's just, it's a little bit of a different world. I'm originally from Camargo, which is the southeastern corner of Montgomery County.

DJ AB: Okay.

DJ TB: And then like my Mamaw and Papaw's family, on my dad's side, they're originally from Breathitt County and Pike County. And like my mom's family is originally from East Tennessee. .... So I've been coming to Whitesburg for like the past three summers visiting AMI, Appalachian Media Institute, and along with some other youth centered organizations in Central Appalachia as part of my doctoral research, so...

DJ AB: Cool. [DJ TB: Yeah.] So tell us about your doctoral degree....  
(From "Feminist Friday," November 18, 2016)

This excerpted transcript of a feminist radio show in East(ern) Kentucky aurally demonstrates methodological issues of naming, placing, representation, hospitality, and technology in the praxis of conducting fieldwork. Earlier in the show, Tanya, a feminist research collaborator, placed me as a fellow feminist and asked permission when she dubbed my on-air DJ moniker, which she was already familiar with outside the context of the show. She placed me outside the range of local listeners as "from off," which was also an invitation for me to place myself in relation to other people and their sense of the "local" (Kingsolver 2011; Kingsolver 2018). As I discuss in this chapter, my research ethics and methods included the ongoing iterative process of "placing" myself as well as

collaboratively placing and representing others through multimodal documentation and their own documentation and self-representations.

### 3.2 Research Methodologies and Ethics: Placing Myself and Collaborations

*“We perhaps can aspire to something that I think of as “participant making,” an approach to fieldwork, ethnography, and design that takes the ethnographic commitment to participant observation and all that this implies and melds it with a designerly investment in “making”—that is, the iterative process of manifesting ideas as things.”*  
(Chin 2017:543)

Between 2013-2019, my ethnographic and mixed-method approach included travelling and spending time with young people and their mentors in the programs and communities already mentioned in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia. My multi-sited fieldwork also included participation in public conversations about the arts, education, technology, regional development, just economic transition, and youth leadership in Appalachia. Other ethnographic methods I used included semi-structured interviews from three inter-related projects and supplemental remote/virtual fieldwork through selective digital ethnography, participant observation in initiatives by research collaborators, autoethnography (Okely and Callaway 1992), and analysis of primary sources including public multimodal cultural productions by research collaborators and archival research in regional repositories that include relevant oral history and other collections. Throughout this chapter, I choose selective examples of multimodal methods that connect to my research sites, collaborators, media consumption and production practices, and regional representations. Also, the sections on various research methods illustrate the flow into, out of, and across spaces over time, demonstrating the processes of “being there ... and there ... and there!” (Hannerz 2003:202) as well as “making do” with whatever tools available.

The research design for my comparative dissertation project included engaged, activist anthropology (Kingsolver 2009) and feminist and scholar-activist methodologies (Craven and Davis 2013; Davis 2013). My methodologies connect to my conceptual framework of Meta'lachian mediacologies and serve as an overarching guide for my approach and praxis. My research "follows" several "modes of construction" (Marcus 1995:105), including following the ... "people," "thing," "metaphor," "plot, story, or allegory," "life or biography," and "conflict" (106-110) in local and meta-sites. This approach of covering ground and talking with people in different modalities was necessitated by my research question and how people envision their region and themselves within it, and because they do so in person and virtually, I followed both kinds of routes in constituting "the field" for my project. In this chapter, I document my methods and activities in depth to demonstrate the flow of my fieldwork of "following" and my ethical engagement with parallel and participatory media practices and pedagogies.

As an Appalachian scholar-activist, I am more than a "circumstantial activist" through multi-site ethnography wherein "[t]he movement among sites (and levels of society) lends a character of activism to such an investigation" (Marcus 1995:113) as I am very much affiliated with many of the social movements, both academic and community-based, and pedagogical practices in which research collaborators are engaged. My overall feminist methodological approach included careful consideration of the power dynamics of research and the role of the researcher; integration of intersectional and decolonizing research and researchers; and collaborative, applied research design, implementation, and products and mutually beneficial co-production of



knowledge (Abu-Lughod 1988; Anglin 2007; Chin 2007; Craven and Davis 2013; Harrison 2007; Kingsolver 2008; Sprague 2005; Tuhiwai Smith 1999). My methodology also included a tapestry of paid work and volunteer opportunities, because I was also supporting myself through some of these opportunities in order to be able to conduct fieldwork.

Throughout my research, I have also drawn from place-based, participatory, and community-based research methodologies that are prevalent in Appalachian Studies, key educational programs and organizations in the region, and the praxis of most of research collaborators. As Anglin (1997) notes, “Practicing anthropologists extend and develop theory by applying anthropological concepts across the grain of practical experience and by allowing such settings to reflect back their own nuanced versions of social and cultural life” (Anglin 1997:33). Therefore, activist anthropology is a necessarily reflexive process through which I have continually examined my roles as a researcher and an activist in relationship to the people I work with and the issues that matter to them.

In terms of my personal positionality and my academic research in Appalachia, my “knowledge and commitments as an anthropologist” and “as a citizen or human” (Low & Merry 2010:S211) are greatly aligned with many of the regional discussions and efforts related to social, environmental, and economic justice. As a white, queer Appalachian woman from a rural working-class background, I have long been engaged in identity construction and place-making from the margins, including building an ecofeminist homestead with my partner, cultural organizing, and helping facilitate regional LGBTQ conversations. Therefore, I consider myself a feminist activist ethnographer in the sense that my work is positioned “in collaborative dialogue with

groups or organizations that are concerned about any number of issues, especially as they affect women's [and others'] marginalization" (Davis in Craven et al. 2013:26). As such, I have engaged with young people in spaces where they sometimes also learn and practice activist/organizing skills as well as participate in local and national causes and movements. I hope that my "observant participation" (Stuesse 2016) alongside young people and their "formerly young" mentors in their schools, organizations, programs, and projects has served as a form of reciprocity in support of their contributions to this research project.

Like the people and places I interacted with throughout my fieldwork, I occupy multiple intersectional identities, locales, and communities that sometimes overlap and sometimes contradict one another. I also live and move between many social and spatial borders and edges that mainstream media misunderstands, misrepresents, or outright maligns in favor of simple scapegoat narratives. Owning my "Appalachian-ness" is a process that I have wrestled with my entire life, and owning my identity as an anthropologist from the United States (US) and working in the US has been a similar feat of reconciling the best and worst of who and where I am (we are) from. I also share a love and practice of storytelling, cultural production, social and environmental activism, sustainable community development, and creative place-making/place-keeping.

I grew up in multiple households with multiple guardians that included my relatively young parents (I was born when my dad was 21 and my mom was a day shy of her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday) and my paternal grandparents who lived nearby. My parents divorced when I was in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and when I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, my mom purchased a mobile home and moved it behind my father's used car lot between the garage and my father's home

less than block away. My divorced parents were next door neighbors for almost 20 years. Even though my mom had full custody, I migrated between my parents' and grandparents' homes throughout my childhood from the age of 8 until I went to college when I was 18; my weekly migration pattern included spending Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday nights with my mom; Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights with my dad; and Saturday night and Sundays with my grandparents. and between my mother, father, and grandparents. My intergenerational experiences with my grandparents included spending every weekend with them, going to church with my Mamaw, and going to monthly American Legion meetings and various civic fundraisers. As an only child, then, I grew up in this intergenerational context in the small unincorporated community of Camargo in the southeast end of Montgomery County, "Gateway to the Mountains." The history, geography, and social stratification of Montgomery County represents an "edge community" adjacent to Kingsolver's home county, which she situates on the "edge between different ecological and economic zones (2011:5-6).

My intergenerational relationships with my extended family were fundamental to the development of my interests and engagement in storytelling, cultural production, and what it means to young. I have basically been a storyteller my entire life, and my engagement with media arts was an outgrowth of my love of writing, doodling, and watching movies, as well as my comfort with experimenting with different technologies and modes of storytelling. Because my parents were quite young when I was born, I grew up with their musical and pop cultural interests alongside my own, and my paternal Mamaw and Papaw encouraged and helped subsidize my performative interests, singing in church, etc. My Mamaw, who was a prolific songwriter, musician, and multi-talented

artist, always had cassette recording technology even before cassette tapes were more commonly used than 8-tracks (Clemons 2019).

As a “formerly young” adult in my mid-to-late-40s during the time span of my field research, I am a “digital native” from an earlier “Generation X” era who grew up alongside the development and proliferation of personal computing and digital communication and production technologies. I taught myself to “make do” with old typewriters and whatever limited computer equipment was available to me publicly. I eventually gained access to and participated in more formal training opportunities in filmmaking as an adult in my 30s, and I have continued my training in audio/visual methods and production through my academic coursework and pedagogy-related professional development opportunities on campus and beyond during graduate school. My identification as a “formerly young Gen X digital native” and my personal access to technologies, education, and means of multi-media cultural production at a particular time and place is significant because I grew up in a rural lower-middle-working-class family and community. While I was privileged in many ways, I also did not see myself represented in the media or many positive representations of my home state and mountain region. As a teenager, I definitely thought I would leave the region and never return, but through largely educational and artistic opportunities and mentorship, I accessed different possibilities for understanding and living here and ultimately have spent all but a couple of years of my life in Kentucky. Growing up in Appalachian Kentucky as a young person interested in performance and identity and returning to work with young people provided a depth of perspective on how social networks (through relationships and media) extend their reach in Meta'lachia.

Tanya Turner “placed” me for the WMMT listening audience when she introduced me on her “Feminist Friday” show by saying, “So you are ‘from off’ as we like to say, right?” Processes and politics of placing I encountered in fieldwork also include navigating hyperlocal physical terrains and verbal colloquialisms and accents. My positionality as both an insider and outsider in different spaces (sometimes as both simultaneously) made apparent some of the complexity of “transferrable” and “non-transferrable skills” for conducting “native anthropology” in multiple Appalachias.<sup>46</sup> For example, geographies were similar but distinctly mountainous, so even though I was familiar and comfortable with driving a stick shift and large vehicles like trucks and vans, navigating steep and curvy one-lane roads, and living rustically, I still encountered situations that reminded me that I was *not* home or always equipped to respond as effectively as I wanted.

In West Virginia, altitudes and roadways are far more challenging to traverse than even those in East(ern) Kentucky (Clemons and Reedy 2015), and people drive mostly four-wheel/all-wheel drive vehicles. There are *many* Subaru Outback station wagons, including in the High Rocks fleet and among staff vehicles, and there are also lots of vehicles marked “Farm Use” that do not require registration or insurance to operate on public roads. Ecologically, there are more abundant ramps (a leek-like wild plant that is eaten by many), and bear-sightings are an everyday occurrence with designated folks in the community who are called upon to respond depending on the level of imminent danger. Next to the High Rocks Picnic Shelter where most camp meals are shared is a

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<sup>46</sup> For more on cite on the complexity of being in layered roles doing ethnography at home, see “How Native is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?” (Narayan 1993).

“Bear Shed” where campers can store and lock up personal snacks they are not supposed to keep in their “pods” (cabins).

Researching and working in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia challenged some of my assumptions about common “Appalachian” cultural parlance and practices. For example, I was surprised to learn that no one knew what “nabs” (snacks) or pawpaws (a regional wild-crafted fruit) were when I was talking to members of the “wellness team” in the picnic shelter my first summer at High Rocks. About a week later, I talked to Yvette Robinson, a High Rocks alumni and fellow Berea College graduate, about such regional colloquialisms that differed, and she said the older generation would know pawpaws, but not younger people and that she knew because of her father and grandfather. I admitted that I assumed these were common Southern slang, and Yvette responded that West Virginians did not consider themselves as “Southern.” When I asked her what they considered themselves, she said, “West Virginians!” and that this statewide identity was more primary than any regional identity such as “Southern” or even “Appalachian.”

I noticed a couple of important colloquialisms that indicate relative insider/outsider status in the eastern region of Kentucky generally and in Whitesburg in particular. For example, people who work at Appalshop or have some knowledge of or relationship to it mostly refer to it as “*the* Appalshop.” Similarly, insiders who grew up within High Rocks refer to the organization as “*the* High Rocks.” I refer to both without the article “the” for brevity. I also noticed that the mountainous region of Kentucky is commonly referred to as “Eastern Kentucky” by many people in the state; however, during my time spent doing fieldwork in this part of the state, I noticed that most of the

people who live there refer to it as “East Kentucky,” which is more colloquially similar to the mountainous region known as “East Tennessee” that borders on the south. For example, when STAY co-founder Ada Smith described the group’s primary service region in Central Appalachia, she said “we work in all five states, West Virginia, East Kentucky, East Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, and Western North Carolina” (Smith 2013). Some businesses, organizations, and projects in the area also use “East Kentucky” in their names, including the East Kentucky Power Cooperative and the Appalshop/AMI project All Access EKY (formerly the East Kentucky Reproductive Health Project). In one case, Letcher County native Tanya Turner referred to her undergraduate alma mater as “East[ern] Kentucky University” when I was a guest on “Feminist Friday” (November 18, 2016). (Notably EKY is *not* really located geographically within the region represented in its name, though it serves many students from there.) Therefore, I use the designation of “East(ern)” as inclusive of both terms referring to the region except where I am directly quoting someone or the name of an entity.

People’s accents also represent a process of placing that can situate them inside or outside of different locally defined spaces, even within the Appalachian region. Crystal Wilkinson, an Appalachian poet from rural Casey County, Kentucky brings up her experience of class difference as a result of her experience attending EKY and being teased for her “country” accent (Wilkinson 1999). AMI film *Searching for an Appalachian Accent* similarly “explores the stigma attached to regional dialects from those both within the area, and outside” (Quillen and Caudill 2002). The accents inside the western border of West Virginia sounded less Southern to me, and I often felt like I was the most “country-talking” person in what was an even more rural and remote

location than I live. On the “Feminist Friday” program I referenced earlier, there was a conversation about the limitations of supposedly universal technologies like AI voice recognition.

People may also use visual representations to name and “place” themselves and others. My first summer volunteering at High Rocks, when some of the Camp Steele media majors were outside practicing with video cameras, one group documented cars in the main staff parking lot. They discovered that they could somewhat reliably discern which cars belong to whom based on the make of the vehicle, the license plate state, and bumper stickers on it. This exercise in reading representations of others was within the relatively small social context of a residential community where campers learned about the personal backgrounds and interests of one another as well as interns, AmeriCorps volunteers, and staff members. However, broader local and regional contexts are not always so easy to interpret or understand without individual connections to people. When my partner and I were conducting interviews in Harlan County in 2018, we chatted with a local couple at a restaurant in Cumberland, and the guy said that he was retired from the energy industry. He said that as soon as he retired, he removed the “Friends of Coal” license plate from his truck and implied that he was required to have it as an employee of an energy company. These examples underscore some of the limits of visual representation in contrast to assumptions about what one can know about people based on what is visible. It is not always possible to read people’s values or politics accurately based on the stickers on their car or license plate logo because it might not always be their choice (or even their own vehicle, for that matter).



I paid attention to the ethics of naming practices and their relationship to power within my field sites and relationships. I refer to both interview participants and the people I interacted with regularly throughout my fieldwork as “research collaborators” or collaborators (Anglin 1997; Kingsolver 2008; Stuesse 2016) to signify their role and agency as co-producers of knowledge (Stuesse 2016) in this project and as cultural producers, grassroots organizers, educators, and regional leaders in their own right. “Research collaborator” also represents my own positionality in participating not only in key anthropological conversations but also existing and ongoing discourse within the Appalachian region and scholarship in which research collaborators actively create and contribute to various commons of knowledge (Reid & Taylor 2010, Puckett et al. 2012, Kidd 2013, Boyer 2014, Daniels 2014, Hufford 2014, Nonini 2014, Taylor et al. 2014, Garringer 2015b, Johnson 2015, Spangler 2015). In certain instances, I refer to people as participants in relation to a specific interview project, media project, performance, meeting, or public event.

Recognizing the inherent power in processes of naming, I respect the agency of research collaborators to name themselves and share a critical lens for considering how institutionalized umbrella terms do not universally address the experiences or identities of everyone that might otherwise fall within them (Valentine 2007; Zavella 1997). As discussed in Chapter 2, I use both chronological age and generational affiliations, both as externally defined and self-identified to demonstrate the complexity of “youth” and intergenerational networks (see Clemons 2020 for a more detailed discussion of how research collaborators variously identify with and contest designations of “youth” and “generation”). In terms of racialized identifications, I use self-identified categories of

white, Black, African American, Affrilachian, Asian American, Appalasian, Native American, and “multi-ethnic and non-status Indigenous.” I use people’s preferred gender pronouns if expressed, and I also sometimes used gender neutral pronouns like they/them to refer to any gendered participant if there is a need to anonymize/generalize further. These naming practices are also modeled in several organizations and projects, including AMI, Highlander Center, High Rocks, STAY, and ASA/Y’ALL. I use the acronym “LGBTQ” as a broad term to refer to the range of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, queer, and questioning identities, experiences, and activisms. LGBTQ is a fairly standard configuration of the acronym that is used across different scholarship, organizations, communities, and institutions, though there are numerous variations on the theme.<sup>47</sup> While striving to identify people as they self-identify as much as possible, in terms of demographic representation of public spaces where I did not have access to those self-identifications, I summarize “who is at the table” with general approximations recognizing their limitations as reliable representations of others.

It is important to note that there is no shortage of place-based research and monikers that refer to rural and/or Appalachian LGBTQ identities, communities, and mediated cultural expressions. *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* (Gray 2009) was groundbreaking in highlighting queer youth in rural and/or Appalachian Kentucky and their agency in naming and making space for

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<sup>47</sup> For example, earlier iterations include GLBT/LGBT or GLTBQ, as well as extended and more inclusive of broad and specific identities like LGBTQ\* (used at the University of Kentucky), LGBTQ+, and LGBTQIAA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, ally) or LGBTQIA+. Given the increasing number and nuance of identities included under such a large umbrella, LGBTQ is a succinct and sufficiently inclusive formulation for the purposes of this dissertation. Questions and commentary about preferred acronym components and configurations in online spaces like the “Queer PhD” private Facebook group cannot be discussed in detail here. Suffice it to say that a variety of acronyms and opinions abound and are influenced by individual scholars’ disciplinary approaches, research topics, collaborators, as well as their personal positionalities.

themselves by using media to engage and create networks of support that challenge assumptions of what and where queer identities are. Some of the creative queer colloquialisms include “Queerbilly” (Detamore 2010), Ecosexuality (Stephens 2013), “Country Queers” (Garringer 2013a), “Fabulachian” (Gleaves & Hamblin cited in Garringer 2013b; Garringer 2017; Troutman 2017),<sup>48</sup> “Queer Mountaineers” (Terman 2014), “Queer Appalachia” (Detamore 2010; Queer Appalachia Collective 2015), as well as “Camp Happy Appalachee,” which is an inclusive space that I have helped construct at the annual ASA conference since 2011. Therefore, without espousing any one of these creative and descriptive terms that LGTBQ-identifying/Appalachian-identifying people have developed and used, I denote when research collaborators are discussing themselves or others in these terms; while I otherwise default to “LGBTQ,” I also recognize that, within the context of Meta’lachia, it also inclusive of these more specific notions.

Participants in the ethnographic interview project had the option of choosing whether or not they wanted to disclose their identities as well as the option to choose their own pseudonym (cf. Downe 2001a; Taft 2011:16) and/or to attribute their comments to young media makers generally. No one chose to hide their identity in any way, though some people expressed curiosity about why they would want to remain anonymous or what name they might choose in that case. Because oral history collections intentionally document various voices on a given topic, the names and identities of participants in this interview project are public, as will be the full transcriptions of their interviews. While everyone in all interview projects agreed to full disclosure of their identities and named attributions of their comments, I still exercise additional discretion and caution when they

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<sup>48</sup> “Fabulachian” as an early term has a somewhat contentious history that is beyond the scope of this project but worthy of further discussion in the future.

reference potentially sensitive topics or other individuals by name or relationship. When referring to research collaborators in the broader contexts of my field sites, I do not identify people by name unless their presence and participation are part of public discourse. While this practice cannot ensure absolute anonymity, it can buffer people from possible repercussions by not making every single quote identifiable (cf. Strange 2013 working locally and limited anonymity with both pseudonyms and nameless references).<sup>49</sup> Excerpts of interview transcripts that include and exchange between interviewer and interviewee includes initials to identify different speakers. Excerpts of narration transcripts from public media/cultural productions include parenthetical expressions and bracketed descriptions for visual material/audio transitions.<sup>50</sup>

### 3.2.1 Ethical Engagement, Listening, and Research with Young People

The active processes of asking questions and listening to different perspectives beyond our own are a core part of both anthropological inquiry and ethics (Kingsolver 2008:68). Asking questions is also a fundamental aspect of critical thinking, especially as it relates to the education, mentorship, and social engagement of young people in a media-saturated world, which research collaborator Judy Sizemore identified as a form of activism or “activating.” As an anthropologist conducting participant observation and ethnographic interviews (including a grant-funded oral history project), I followed and applied multiple and overlapping codes of ethics, some broad and some site-specific, throughout my research. I designed and implemented my research with consideration of

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<sup>49</sup> Conversely, I refrain from naming entities, citing directly, or including images that reproduce white supremacist representations, including the 45<sup>th</sup> president (Delisle 2021) and the author of *HE*, to use Crystal Good’s shorthand for referring to this all-too-well-known memoir (Good 2019b).

<sup>50</sup> See “Transcribing Tips: I’m Gonna Write This Just ‘Cause” (Boyd 2017) about oral history transcribing conventions and representing speech.

the guiding principles, ethics, and best practices of both the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and the Oral History Association (OHA).<sup>51</sup> Both sets of guidelines emphasize the collaborative nature of ethnographic/oral history relationships and documentation processes; honesty and openness in communication; mindfulness of power differentials; informed consent processes; and the protection, preservation, and accessibility of data and documentation.

Through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), I completed and continued to renew and keep current my certification for the Human Subjects Research Course (HSR) required for IRB approval. Because my research topic involves young people, community organizations, diverse gender identities, and digital technologies, I chose to complete non-required supplemental HSR modules on relevant topics such as Students in Research; Research with Persons who are Socially or Economically Disadvantaged; Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Human Research; Introduction to Community-Based Participatory Research; Introduction to Community-Engaged Research; Ethical and Practical Considerations in Community-Engaged Research; Mobile Apps and Human Subjects Research; and Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). I also completed non-required certification training courses in Responsible Conduct of Research for both Humanities and Social & Behavioral Science, including a supplemental module on Research, Ethics, and Society. In addition, I completed the CITI Information Privacy and Security course, which focuses on health-related data but includes relevant supplemental modules on protecting passwords and

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<sup>51</sup> See the AAA “Principles of Professional Responsibility” (American Anthropological Association 2012); and the OHA “Principles and Best Practices” (Oral History Association 2018).

identities; protecting computers and portable devices; and safer emailing, web browsing, and social networking.

Given the nature of my topic and the organizational missions of my primary field sites to educate and support young people, I observed and worked with youth who are vulnerable subjects due to their status as minors as well as young people who are legal adults. In public schools and organizational settings where I interacted with young people as a volunteer, teacher, and/or collaborator, I abided by their site-based ethical standards and protocols or “Codes of Conduct” for interacting with students as articulated verbally or in contractual agreements for my work as a formal volunteer or paid teaching artist/consultant. For example, the High Rocks Pledge serves as the organizational and community “honor code” by which program participants and staff alike are expected to abide, whether they publicly recite and ceremonially “take the pledge” or not.<sup>52</sup> For Partners for Education projects in general, all participants must read, initial, sign, and adhere to their “Code of Conduct,” which deals with issues of personal space/boundaries; digital communication and relationships; and mandated reporting related to the “development and protection of children, youth and vulnerable adults (‘protected persons’)” (2018 PFE Code of Conduct). The document further defines different

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<sup>52</sup> The original Pledge: “I \_\_\_\_\_ do solemnly swear to have respect for myself, respect for others, and respect for this place in order to uphold the traditions of loyalty, honesty, trust, acceptance and adventure founded by the girls who have come before me for I am now a Sister of the High Rocks!” The High Rocks “Best Practices” webpage (see About Us on website, High Rocks Educational Corporation n.d.) includes the complete Pledge, which is updated to reflect the organization’s broadening service population of young people: “founded by the girls (students) who have come before me, as I am now a sister (brother, member) of the High Rocks.”

categories of people who might work with or represent “protected persons” as well as the use of digital devices.<sup>53</sup>

In these settings, I also dealt with the ethics, safety, and privacy of children/students and defining the age set to which the federal policies apply. For example, federal laws like the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA), and Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) address different aspects of limiting and protecting the collection of, access to, and distribution of personal information of children and/or students in educational and/or online settings.<sup>54</sup> These laws require compliance from different mediating entities (i.e., parents, educators, schools, businesses) that engage with children and their personal data through various collection and communication media and documentation, and a couple of these laws (FERPA, PPRA) are tied to funding received through the US Department of Education.<sup>55</sup>

Most paperwork I directly worked with were IRB-approved consent forms for my own interview projects, but outside of such a formal oversight system designed to “protect human subjects,” organizational and project-based documentation typically includes some form of permission or release form that are used in different contexts. For example, Appalshop/AMI has their own releases for using photographic or video

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<sup>53</sup> As I discuss, I learned first-hand some of the complications in trying to help fairly represent the voice of someone in the foster system, and the protections that are in place for valid issues of ensuring safety and privacy that can also be a frustrating constraint for the young people who are impacted by them.

<sup>54</sup> See various government (i.e., “dot-gov”) websites that detail the institutional and familial rights and responsibilities outlined in the FERPA; COPPA; CIPA; and PPRA. I wrote an extended research-based reflection for the “Analysis of Federal Laws Associated with Student Privacy & Safety Online completed as Work Examples/Artifacts” for the Digital Promise “Evaluating Online Tools for Classroom Use” course.

<sup>55</sup> These laws define “children” and “students” or “pupils” within similar overlapping age groupings for protection and institutional compliance. For example, FERPA can apply to minors as well as “eligible students” over 18, COPPA applies to children under 13, CIPA applies to “minors,” and “The rights under PPRA transfer from the parents to a student who is 18 years old or an emancipated minor under state law.”

imagery, which I signed when I participated in their 2016 Youth Theater Lab. I also worked with project releases and school releases for grant-funded initiatives like Our Creative Promise and Arts Connect Appalachian Youth. Other releases related to more public interview projects like oral histories, which do not typically require IRB human subjects research approval, are more focused on copyright issues and ownership of/responsibility for the original materials and the standards by which accredited archival repositories are held accountable. Judy and I made recommendations in this regard in the KET Media Arts Toolkit on the “Documenting Communities” (Kentucky Educational Television 2018a). Data management would also be addressed in terms of the very vulnerability of digital data itself and risks for inappropriate, unapproved, manipulative use or appropriation by others outside of the context and intent of its documentarians/producers.

I chose not to conduct any formal interviews with minors, which would have appropriately required documentation of parental consent and participant assent forms (LeCompte 1999). Securing parental permission and complete documentation for the participation of minors would have been challenging in such youth-centered settings because, even with assistance from teachers or other adults working in an official capacity, I would mostly have relied on children to take both sets of forms home to their parents, have them fully and correctly completed, and return them in a timely fashion. While not insurmountable, the additional layer of paperwork required to include interview participants under 18 was not logistically necessary since my anthropological approach and the age range of research collaborators included a broader spectrum of young people, including the “formerly young.” Therefore, I applied for and received



Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for conducting ethnographic and oral history interviews only with research collaborators who were 18 and older.

When communicating about and conducting formal ethnographic and oral history interviews with research collaborators, I made a point to summarize the intention of the IRB protocols for informed consent to safe-guard human research subjects against real risks and possible exploitation through agreed-upon standards of review and protection. I also acknowledged outright that, while serving the important functions of communicating the research topic and process and protecting people in choosing whether and how to tell their stories, the formal language of the required consent form was not how we usually spoke with one another or would be talking together during the interview(s). Surprisingly, a couple of people found the history and purpose of IRBs and informed consent an interesting subtopic in itself, which is further reason to educate research collaborators however briefly about its benefits and limitations.

While institutionalized academic research processes like IRB approval are intended to help ensure the protection of potentially vulnerable participants and their identities through required or optional confidentiality and anonymity procedures (Vossoughi and Escudé 2016:54), I recognize that they may also reproduce the priorities of the powerful or silence young voices (Balasundaram 2014; Bradley 2007; Campbell and Lassiter 2015; Chin 2014). There are both limitations and benefits in defining youth as 18 and older. Because of my anthropological consideration of youth as a socially constructed category and set of experiences and insights that people continue to recall and draw upon, I was able to include a broad spectrum of ages among research collaborators that included current youth as well as “formerly young” people who still

draw from important experiences from their youth. The benefit of such wide inclusion is the comparative perspectives of different generations and what it means to be young in different times and places (Clemons 2020).

As Balasundaram argues, one critical limitation of not formally interviewing minors, who always matter but are not always heard, is that processes designed to protect children can also contribute to the erasure and silencing of their voices (Balasundaram 2014). He further calls for and demonstrates strategies of inclusion for children experiencing multiple marginalities. “While it is imperative to recognize children’s vulnerability in terms of power relations in social science research and to observe professional ethics regarding research on minors, I argue that their voices must be included in research as community members and that it our responsibility as ethnographers to find creative ways of doing so” (2014:39). I listened to the young people that I interacted with as a professional or volunteer teaching artist and media arts advocate, and I incorporate their voices by highlighting and discussing some of their publicly available digital stories, visual art, written works, and other cultural productions. This enabled me to include the concerns and projects of some of the minors in my field sites who otherwise would not have been heard. However, there are also special issues of representation for young people who are doubly marginalized as foster youth and must remain publicly anonymous in formal class projects, social media, and publications. For example, some research collaborators dealt with this directly, including a couple of single foster mothers who navigated these ethics as legal guardians as well as some students.

One talented young woman, who was an OCHS senior at the time, was actively involved with and played various support roles in several of her school’s projects for

“Our Creative Promise.” However, because she lived in a foster setting, she had to remain anonymous by law and was not able to be credited by name for any of the projects that she worked on. For one group project, classmates chose to interview this student about her nature photography and poetry. In her compelling commentary and poetry reading, she directly talks about being in the foster system, her forced namelessness, and how writing enables her to express herself. I helped produce the edited audio, which emphasizes her voice by focusing the interview narrative on her writing and following with her reading one of her poems, and the minimalist stationary background for the 3-minute video is a single photograph taken by the student that she mentioned as an example of her visual work. Through this digital story, she refused to remain voiceless and expressed her required anonymity as a constraint upon her identity, creativity, and even personhood (Anonymous OCHS Student, et al. 2017; see also Kentucky Educational Television 2018a:C23,C27).

In this way, public productions can represent the voices of minors and other vulnerable populations in limited but important ways when they cannot be included in more formal research activities. This strategy was not always effective, however, for example, when projects that inadvertently included images and names of youth in foster care could not be shared in public platforms because of legal “protections” that ultimately silenced their voices.

### 3.2.2 Interviewing Interviewers and “Interview Fatigue”

I was also mindful of issues related to access, ethics, and respect in selecting and requesting participation in formal interviews. For example, people in the Appalachian region are justifiably wary of outside documentarians because of the history of War on

Poverty photojournalism and ongoing disparagement and misrepresentation in mainstream media (Barret 2000; Beaver 2001). Similarly, because of the nature of media education and other modes of cultural production, many collaborators also have substantial experience in conducting interviews with others as well as being interviewed themselves. For example, some people demonstrate their knowledge of best interview practices by repeating the question in their answer as in the case of research collaborators who had participated in an interview for the *New York Times* earlier that same day. On the other hand, some people have developed interview burnout, even some research collaborators who willingly and enthusiastically participated, as illustrated in this excerpt from my fieldnotes after completing an interview with a research collaborator in Whitesburg: “She also talked about [a colleague who was a research collaborator I would interview a couple of weeks later] saying that she couldn’t sit down and have a beer at Summit City for three PhD students coming up to her wanting to interview her (“I just want to relax and drink a beer!”).”

I identified this challenge as a representation of “interview fatigue.” By design, one-on-one ethnographic interviews are intensive, personal, social, and formally documented narratives that demand mental and emotional energy from both parties. It is a giving of time and vulnerability and a justifiably exhausting endeavor. Issues of power and knowledge can further complicate interview access and content as well as trust in researchers. A sense of interview fatigue can arise from a sense of repetition or feeling that they have already been asked and answered numerous questions by the same or different researchers or agencies and can also affect participation (Scott, et al. 2006; Stjernborg 2017; Twyman, et al. 1999), and respondents may be tempted to provide “the

appropriate answers in order to dispose of the intruder.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, it is “extremely important . . . [to make research] intentions as clear as possible” (Twyman, et al. 1999:315).

In many sites in the Appalachian region, both in general and for this research in particular, many people are interviewed and/or interview others often. Researchers must be cognizant of these histories and limitations in our own methodologies when asking people to share their stories (yet again) for a purpose or project that usually serves the researcher more directly than the needs of the research collaborator or community. In the context of my own research, I constantly tried to make “my intentions as clear as possible”,<sup>57</sup> and I recognized interview fatigue as a risk of the interview method and medium and paid attention to interviews as a historic practice that connects both to the sites and individuals in the Appalachian region and the counterstorytelling traditions.

Therefore, I selectively engaged people who have been interviewed often, who I had already interviewed, or who expressed reservations about being interviewed again.

It is also important to acknowledge how research and documentation processes like interviews can (even inadvertently) reproduce uneven power relations and personal interests and how Indigenous intervention in “collaborative research” can reconfigure the

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<sup>56</sup> Scott et al. (2006) discuss the political economy/ecology of research landscape and challenges for development geography projects in Vietnam, including interview fatigue, which “can set in as local people tire of being approached and asked a multitude of questions” (Scott, et al. 2006:34). They link interview fatigue with strategizing among local people asking “for compensation for granting yet another interview” and identifying “project districts” for field research opportunities (2006:34). They also reference “montetised ‘project syndrome’” experienced by researchers when research funding is difficult to come by and people are working in economically impoverished communities where compensation is needed and desired (2006:34).

<sup>57</sup> There is sometimes a tendency among younger interviewees to seek and provide “appropriate answers” not as a means to “dispose of the intruder” (Twyman, et al. 1999:315), but rather out of habitual deference to an adult “authority” who they assume is looking for the “right answer” (cf. expectations for standardized assessment and seeking approval in public school settings). This is still another way in which power differentials between interviewer and interviewee as well as adults and youth can manifest despite best intentions.

notion of consent. For example, the “Manifesting Resistance: Conversations about Intergenerational Memory Work across ‘the Americas’” project in Canada illustrates how “a refusal stance is more complex than a simple withdrawal” (Aging Activisms 2018) (2020:2). The project became a site of “expressions of research ‘refusal’ .... by older Indigenous women participating in an intergenerational, cross-cultural, digital-storytelling research workshop” (2020:2), wherein they expressed concerns about reciprocity and referenced colonial histories of “being studied” as “the Other” (Olsen Williams and Mojica in Chazan and Baldwin 2020:7-8). Even research design that incorporates “feminist, decolonial, and queer approaches to storytelling methodology, and ... participatory media-making practices” (2020:3) are still subject to “the murky processes of informed refusal and relational consent” (Chazan and Baldwin 2020:3) in collective attempts to decolonize research, storytelling, and digital documentation processes.

When I interviewed my friend Black Bear for the YAA oral history project, he similarly “refused” to simply conform to the constraints of the formal questions framing the overall project. For example, at one point after a comment, he interjected “Let’s talk a little bit, make a transition,” so he could tell me about when he was first learning and selling pottery in New Mexico and the gallery gatekeeping he encountered that either ignored or undercompensated his work (LaBoueff 2018). Later, he verbally invoked the “Trickster” as the Native American archetype that he identified with and its relationship to power.

I relate the strongest to .... the Trickster because power fears that which gives voice to the people. Think of the joker and the king and queen; the joker is there and .... you can't do anything about them. They can make fun of the hierarchy, the king and the queen and everything else. But in native ways you have .... the raven or the crow, and for me the coyote. Coyote yellow eyes shining, and the coyote, some of the lessons that you learn is you never want to stand in front of a crowd because that's when you'll get shot. So, whenever you see some action you see the people all gathered around the action and everything and you'll see the coyote on the outside. The coyote will be watching the people gathered around, not the action itself. It's a way of survival but also a way of understanding behavior of humans, cultures, et cetera, like that. (LaBoueff 2018)

In this interaction, and all of my formal interviews with research collaborators, I emphasized the primacy of the stories they wanted to tell (or not) and their own definitions and understandings of media, representations, and research.

### 3.2.3 “Vulnerable Observant Participation”

It is important to acknowledge briefly that my participant observation experiences and fieldwork travel throughout my dissertation research also included significant circumstances in my personal life that sometimes made me a “vulnerable observer” (Behar 1997) due to health, anxiety (Fleischmann 2018), transportation challenges (see also Clemons 2013, 2017; see also Reedy and Clemons 2016:88), and technical issues (Reedy and Clemons 2016).<sup>58</sup> Such challenges are also representative of real and persistent access limitations to affordable, reliable, and suitable transportation as well as “digital divides” experienced by research collaborators, their families, and home communities. Another way in which I was a “vulnerable observant participant” during my fieldwork was my personal experience of estrangement, loss, and severe illness of family members. My Mamaw and Papaw who I grew up spending so much time with

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<sup>58</sup> In my initial communication about the possibility of visiting and volunteering with AMI via online contact form in 2014, I indicated that I did “not have email access at home over the summer” but “occasional access at my neighbor’s house” and included my home phone number.

both passed away, and I helped with their caregiving. In addition, my father who had been my Papaw's primary caregiver was diagnosed with and treated for leukemia, and my partner's mother passed away. I have also dealt with various mental and physical health challenges of my own along the way. Again, I mention these personal difficulties as an illustration of how, in some ways, they parallel a lot of the struggles that I see other people experiencing and hear them talking about. Even though my positionality is clearly privileged in a lot of ways, I am also aware that other people that I interact with also occupy different levels of privilege or different intersectional challenges. Therefore, my experiences with performing kin work, navigating privilege and marginality, and confronting challenges to physical and mental wellness have also provided another important lens for developing a deeper understanding of what the young people I have worked with must deal with in their own lives.

### 3.3 Research Methods and Sites

My multi-sited ethnographic and multimodal mixed methods included: participant observation in education programs, local communities, and regional events; ethnographic interviews and oral history interviews; multisensory documentation; digital ethnography; analysis of written and audiovisual cultural/media productions; archival research on relevant oral history collections and other historical context for field sites; demographic/census data for individual field sites and the Appalachian region; comparative profile analysis of individual organizations and programs over time; loose social mapping of research collaborators' interpersonal and organizational relationships; and coding and analysis of field notes and interview transcripts. In addition to multimodal research data and analysis, I actively engaged in curriculum development and



pedagogical practice in place-based media literacy and production. In the following sections, I discuss all these media consumption and production practices in more detail as they relate to both my research methods as well as research collaborators.<sup>59</sup>

Overall, there is a tremendous overlap and circulation of networks and meshworks that I found through this research, and young people, often as students, move back and forth between rural and urban contexts, which is reflected in their work and their social and marketing/fundraising efforts.<sup>60</sup> A conservative estimate for my fieldwork-related travel in Appalachia is at least 20,000 miles traversed and dozens of public events and meetings attended in addition to participant observation/observant participation in educational programs. Throughout my fieldwork, I circulated regionally between sites and other activities (both physically and digitally) where partnerships/intersections lie between/among AMI, High Rocks, Highlander Center, Berea College, the Appalachian Studies Association (ASA), the Kentucky Arts Council (KAC), etc. In addition to expected settings, I encountered people (and overlaps among field sites) in numerous other regional conversations. Therefore, I have crossed paths with most of these people again and again over the years in these various meta-sites.

Incorporating reflexive ethnographic methodologies, I engaged in an “activist fieldwork method” or “ ‘observant participation,’ in which ethnography’s cornerstone, participant observation, is inverted to emphasize one’s role as a participant in the processes under study” (Stuesse 2016:19).<sup>61</sup> My fieldwork approach was participatory,

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<sup>59</sup> For administrative organization of data collection generated from these various methods, I strategically used available digital tools for documentation and data management throughout my dissertation research.

<sup>60</sup> See for example, Jon Haywood’s chapter with Rich Kirby in (Billings and Kingsolver 2018).

<sup>61</sup> Stuesse uses “activist research” and “observant participation” (2016:16-21) as a framework for her commitment to “decolonizing anthropology” (2016:17, 229), and she rejects “the artificial divide between

not in a way that my project helped direct productions or vice versa, but rather in the sense of reciprocity, collaboration, and co-production of both processes and products. I engaged in “observant participation” in spaces where organizers, educators, youth, cultural producers, and regional leaders intersected rhetorically and relationally. Knowledge-sharing and co-production of knowledge was integral to my engagement in these different spaces through various roles. For example, I observed and participated in media programs, sometimes as a volunteer and sometimes as a staff member, independent contract consultant, or teaching artist; regional meetings as a researcher and engaged citizen; trainings/cultural productions as well as learning/networking opportunities as an active participant and contributor.

My fieldwork at AMI included visiting and volunteering for a week or so each summer, beginning in 2014, during different phases of their 8-week Summer Documentary Institute (SDI) to observe and engage with students. For example, the first summer I visited mid-way through when they were screening their audiovisual digital stories and selecting the topics for their final video documentaries and then returned to attend their public screening at the end of the summer. In Summer 2015, I stayed in Whitesburg and volunteered at AMI during the first full week of the SDI, and I continued interaction with AMI Interns via public Facebook updates throughout the rest of the summer. In Summer 2016, I visited mid-way through the SDI and stayed in the “Casa” with interns for the first time. I returned to Whitesburg a few months later to participate in the Fall Youth Theater Lab, which was a collaborative theater workshop facilitated by

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theory and practice” (2016:24). Thus she attempts to use and share power as a researcher on behalf of marginalized workers and struggle for dignity and fair, safe livelihoods, and she identifies her collaborators as partners in the collaborative production of theory and knowledge (2016:240).

AMI and Roadside Theater. Participants included several young people I already knew from their involvement in the AMI Summer Documentary Institute, and the Theater Lab culminated in a short original theater production and public performance called “What If There Was a Fire ...” in the Appalshop Theater (Roadside Theater 2017; Roadside Youth Theater Lab 2016).



Figure 10 Forest fires off the side of KY Highway 15 outside Whitesburg, Kentucky, Election Day, November 8, 2016 (Photo by author)

That month of fieldwork, interviews, and “listening on the edge” (Cave and Sloan 2014) in Whitesburg, Kentucky was right before, during, and after the 2016 presidential election, and at the same time, there were numerous forest fires in Letcher County as well as throughout Central and Southern Appalachia (see Figure 10 and Clemons 2018c for related photo essay). While I was there, I also attended several local events sponsored by

AMI and Appalshop, including a couple of community potlucks, a “Feminist Friday” concert organized by Tanya Turner, host of a weekly WMMT radio program by the same name, and a “Youth Assembly on a Just Economic Transition” organized by the STAY Project and the Kentucky Student Environmental Coalition (KSEC). In Summer 2017, I returned to Whitesburg for the start of the AMI Summer Documentary Institute, which coincided with Appalshop’s annual Seedtime on the Cumberland festival in early June. I had known about this important longstanding regional cultural festival for many years, but this was the first time I had ever attended. Unlike previous summers observing and participating in the AMI workshop curriculum, I mostly interacted with folks more socially at the festival where AMI interns were helping document as well as local hangouts and personal residences. Summer 2018 was the first year that I did not visit the AMI Summer Documentary Institute in action since I began my fieldwork, though I interviewed several research collaborators in Harlan and Letcher Counties later that summer.

In 2014, I spent about three weeks participating and observing during and after Camp Steele at High Rocks. I volunteered as an Assistant Teacher for the media class and helped with daily operations and multiple miscellaneous projects during camp, including photo and video documentation on behalf of the organization.<sup>62</sup> In 2015, I then spent five weeks in Hillsboro, West Virginia. I volunteered at High Rocks during the second week of the New Beginnings camp for middle school girls, and then I house-sat and fed pets and livestock for the director’s family during the two weeks between camps. Then at

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<sup>62</sup> One methodological challenge of conducting multi-site research was navigating simultaneous summer media programs in different states as field sites, which sometimes entailed making difficult choices about how to direct my time and attention.

Camp Steele, I worked on staff as the lead teacher for the media major and minor classes, and I taught the media track at Camp Steele again in Summer 2016. In Summer 2017, I taught “Creative Expressions” and served as Co-Master Teacher at High Rocks New Beginnings Camp, which was the only time I taught formally at this camp, and then I served as Master Teacher and taught the media track again at Camp Steele. In Summer 2018, I returned to High Rocks to teach media at Camp Steele for what would be the last summer during fieldwork.

In December 2015, I made a preliminary visit to Owsley County High School (OCHS) as a volunteer for development-funded media projects that my neighbor and fellow teaching artist was working on. I returned to Booneville in August 2016 to attend a “Creative Assets Inventory” workshop in Booneville that was facilitated by the Kentucky Arts Council with local community members. Then in September, my neighbor invited me to attend a Kentucky Promise Zone Education Working Group meeting organized by Berea College Partners for Education (PFE). These experiences helped me establish connections not only with OCHS, community members, and local organizations but also the larger work and network of schools, teachers, students, and teaching artists who are part of the PFE service area and on-site arts education initiatives. I became a regular participant of these roughly quarterly meetings throughout the rest of my fieldwork, and I continue attending PFE “teaching artist check-ins” through the present. I began returning to Owsley County regularly in December 2016 to volunteer with planning work that they had begun devising a fourth *HomeSong* theater production. This work connected me to both Owsley County High School and the Owsley County Action Team (OCAT) on the local level as well as to the broader work of community-based theater in the region. In

February 2017, I also started visiting the Owsley County Public Library (OCPL), where a key research collaborator worked at the time. As I discuss further in Chapter 5, OCPL was another important public community space like OCAT where I was able to observe intergenerational interactions and service functions.

In Fall 2017, I began working more extensively with Berea College Partners for Education on the Creative Asset Mapping Project, first as a regular volunteer at Owsley County High School and then more formally as a contract Media Arts Consultant and Teaching Artist assisting students and teachers with digital media collection, curation, instruction, and production of digital stories at selected East(ern) Kentucky high schools, including Owsley, Perry, and Whitley Counties. In Spring 2018, I began working more formally as an independent media arts consultant and teaching artist alongside Judy Sizemore, a prominent arts advocate, educator, writer, and folk documentarian in Kentucky. She invited me to help with “Our Creative Promise,” which culminated in a Creative Asset Symposium with participating students and teachers in Hazard, Kentucky. Judy also invited me to work alongside her as a consultant helping update the Kentucky Educational Television (KET) Media Arts Toolkit, which documents and features several of the “Our Creative Promise” student projects (Kentucky Educational Television 2018a; see the Curriculum Development section for more details). In Fall 2019, I completed media arts residencies with West Perry Elementary and Hazard Middle School as part of the ACAY project, which culminated in another closing youth summit with participating students and teachers in Corbin, Kentucky in November 2019 (Reynolds 2020). In December, I also completed another after-school graphic novel residency at BCHS in Berea. I participated in several in-person and online professional development

opportunities for teaching artists through PFE as well as online media production courses for K-12 teachers.

As a teaching artist with young people in different settings, I helped organize, lead, or tagged along on student field trips to several media-related tours/workshops. For example, as the High Rocks media teacher at Camp Steele, we took students to Charleston, West Virginia in 2016 to visit the Gazette-Mail newsroom, one of few that still prints and distributes its own newspapers, and to the West Virginia Public Broadcasting (WVPB) studios in 2017. In 2018, I took the students to visit the WVMR “Allegheny Mountain Radio” station in Pocahontas County, which was founded by Sarah Riley’s father and founding AV fieldman Gibbs Kinderman.



Figure 11 High Rocks campers and interns walking up to the WVPB building in Charleston, West Virginia for a media major field trip, July 25, 2017 (photo by author)



Through my fieldwork with arts-based education advocates and public school projects, I also engaged with youth media education opportunities at Kentucky Educational Television (KET) in Lexington, first as a volunteer/observer at a Media Lab workshop and studio tour with Owsley County High School students, then as an interviewer with a couple of research collaborators, and eventually as a teaching artist/consultant helping to assess KET's Media Arts Toolkit for K-12 teachers (Kentucky Educational Television 2018b).



Figure 12 OCHS students settling in at their first KET Media Lab workshop, Lexington, Kentucky, October 26, 2017 (photo by author)

Throughout the time I was conducting fieldwork, I also interacted with research collaborators formally and circumstantially in different regional venues such as the annual conferences such as the UK Graduate Appalachian Research Community (GARC)



Symposium and the Appalachian Studies Association conference (including the Y'ALL Meet & Eat from 2016-2018). I have also presented relevant research findings and youth productions in these and other regional conferences. I conducted observant participation in several regional meetings and events related to arts, education, technology, and economic transition and as well as a couple of community-based theater projects that are connected to research field sites and several research collaborators in East(ern) Kentucky. For example, I attended the 2015 “It’s Good to Be Young in the Mountains” (IG2BYITM) conference in Harlan, Kentucky; the 2016 “Big Ideas Fest for Appalachia: Education, Workforce, and Economic Development: Visionary Thinking and Doing” at Hazard Community and Technical College; a three-day Cultural Asset Mapping Track at the 2016 Brushy Fork Annual Institute at Berea College;<sup>63</sup> the 2017 Hurricane Gap Theater Institute at Pine Mountain Settlement School;<sup>64</sup> the 2018 Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange; and the 2018 SOAR Summit in Pikeville, Kentucky in August (SOAR 2018).

In Summer 2018, my partner and I also worked as research assistants (alongside Judy Sizemore) for a qualitative research project on “The Meaning of Community Safety in Appalachian Kentucky” conducted by Dr. Charlotte Gill of George Mason University. Therefore, my participant observation included observing, learning about, and helping document young people’s diverse experiences of community and safety (and sometimes

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<sup>63</sup> This special track was taught by the KAC and sponsored by PFE for to kick of their NEA-funded regional cultural asset mapping project in 10 Southeastern Kentucky counties (including both Letcher and Owsley Counties) “to map and promote features of the region’s culture and heritage” (Berea College 2016), which ultimately contributed to the “Our Creative Promise” inventory.

<sup>64</sup> Hurricane Gap is a regional collaboration that works with artists and communities to support the creation of theater productions based on their local stories and issues. The more than 30 participants included intergenerational community-based theater groups from East(ern) Kentucky, including *HomeSong* (Owsley County), *Higher Ground* (Harlan County), and *Monkey Dumplings* (Clay County). I also interacted with several research collaborators from Harlan, Letcher, Owsley, and Rockcastle Counties, five of whom I interviewed over the course of my dissertation research.

lack thereof) in different local contexts in East(ern) Kentucky where many of research collaborators also live, work, and learn. My observant participation also included intermittent contract work as a professional notetaker for a couple of relevant regional research studies in Central Appalachia in collaboration with Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN) (Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network 2020), including the renewed Appalachian Land Study research efforts led by LiKEN and the University of Kentucky Department of Community and Leadership Development and the Central Appalachian Folk and Traditional Arts (CAFTA) project led by LiKEN and MAAF. All of these were important and valuable regional conversations and social spaces where I interacted with numerous colleagues and research collaborators working community economic development, arts advocacy, and folk documentation in Central Appalachia.

As a feminist activist ethnographer, I engaged in observant participation that fostered and facilitated collaboration and reciprocity as much as possible, which included assisting with documentation and instruction as well as co-producing digital stories, curricula, screenings/presentations, theater performances, and a public oral history collection. Depending on the setting and timing, I actively participated in different roles, sometimes as a volunteer or public advocate and sometimes as a staff member or independent contract consultant, both in my primary field sites and the larger field of arts and media education. One example of volunteering with documentation is my first summer at High Rocks when I helped record, log, and transfer video footage of the last two days of Camp Steele and the annual Nettlefest community fundraiser on the closing day of camp.

My research methodology also included young people and their mentors as research collaborators in representing their identities and cultural productions in public venues, and I have collaborated with young people and media programs to screen youth-produced films in regional settings. For example, I helped collaborate with AMI and GARC to screen the 2015 films at the 2016 UK Appalachian Research Symposium; and I collaborated with High Rocks to organize a presentation on “Girls’ Media Education in West Virginia: Critical Media Literacy and Production” at the 2016 ASA Conference, which included a screening of the 2015 projects as well as discussion with the young women who produced them.

As I discuss in greater detail in the Curriculum Development section, I also contributed directly to media arts education in my formal professional roles as a teaching artist or consultant by building and facilitating curricula, meetings, and ongoing support for arts education, especially in the media arts. I also have engaged in ongoing knowledge- and resource-sharing and solidarity with research collaborators that includes sharing relevant articles, grants, and other resources; writing recommendation and nomination letters and reviewing draft materials for various applications people were working on; and organizing the annual LGBTQ reception at the Appalachian Studies Conference since 2011.<sup>65</sup>

Other forms of reciprocity in the field included giving rides to young people; buying meals, sharing snacks, or sharing receipt survey coupons for free McDonald’s

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<sup>65</sup> “A strong cohort of High Rocks staff and high school students (at least 10) attended, which confirmed that Camp Happy Appalachee is a valued space that provides a free healthy meal and important social support for queer and allied youth attending the conference.” (Quote from my 2019 follow-up report to the UK Appalachian Center, which has provided funding support for the event since 2013. The first event at the 2011 ASA conference at Eastern Kentucky University was funded by the Appalachian Community Fund LGBTQ Initiative.)

sandwiches with collaborators when I was able; house-sitting and once feeding people's livestock while they were on vacation; helping with upkeep in spaces where I had free lodging; volunteering as general support for public events and meetings; and once donating stipend support back to an organization because I was able. We also hosted research collaborators in our home on a couple of occasions when they were travelling through the area, and we once hosted a research collaborator from West Virginia during the Thanksgiving weekend when they were in their first year at Berea College. As described in the opening vignette for this chapter, another example of reciprocity was volunteering to help an Introduction to Appalachian Studies class with practice interviews.<sup>66</sup>

My ethnographic methods include 58 in-depth semi-structured interviews (Bernard 2006:212; Schensul, et al. 1999b:149-164) with 48 formal research collaborators with their informed consent (LeCompte 1999) from three intersecting IRB-approved ethnographic and oral history projects over time.<sup>67</sup> Interview participants included in past and present participants and staff at AMI and High Rocks, OCHS students/graduates and some of their teachers/mentors, regional civic leaders and arts education advocates as well as Appalachian studies scholars, artists, and cultural organizers. Through my extensive observant participation, I also engaged in informal interviews and conversations (Bernard 2006:211) with research collaborators and

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<sup>66</sup> For all my interview projects, I also offered to give people copies of the audio files and transcripts, though people expressed surprisingly little interest in receiving them (given the topical and programmatic focus on media in most contexts) and few offered direct feedback. I also shared relevant dissertation excerpts (including quotes, images, references, and citations) that included research collaborators directly and sometimes indirectly. Several people responded, and some offered feedback and minimal changes.

<sup>67</sup> I discuss more detailed methods for conducting interviews (notes, recordings, transcripts) in Section 1.6.12 Data Documentation and Management.

members of the broader local and regional communities that I documented in field notes and follow-up communications.

As a research assistant for my doctoral advisor, I conducted preliminary ethnographic interviews with young women leaders in Appalachia about their sources of inspiration in Summer 2013. All of these young women were in the process of “aging out” as a current youth generation while they continue to mentor young people in their native and found home communities and regional networks. Two of them were leaders at Appalshop/AMI and High Rocks, which would become field sites in my dissertation project. My main IRB-approved ethnographic research occurred between July 2015 and January 2020. I conducted interviews with 34 currently young and “formerly young” people in Kentucky and West Virginia (including cultural producers, educators/mentors, and organizers within and outside of non-profit organizations and public schools) who are or have been involved directly with one or more of my primary field sites or youth media education in the region more generally. The interviews explored the relationship between youth media education and civic engagement, how young people use visual and other media and storytelling, and possibilities of media for, about, and in the region.

As part of my commitment to public scholarship, I was also the PI for an IRB-approved oral history project on “Youth Activism in Different Generations in Appalachia” (Protocol 170648P4S), which documents intergenerational experiences of and reflections on youth, gender, civic engagement and activism, and regional development in several mountain counties of East(ern) Kentucky. As my dissertation research developed, I realized that “youth” itself as a space of social activism was an important topic I needed to focus on. This temporal dimension to my methodology and

the intergenerational oral history project was a way of learning more about youth and the different ways it is expressed and experienced in different times. From November 2017 to September 2018, I conducted oral history interviews with 20 Kentucky residents from different generations from present-day young people in their early 20s to “formerly young” people in their 70s. The guiding interview questions included opportunities to reflect on diversity, especially related to different gender and generational experiences in different times and places. This collection was funded by a 2017-2018 project grant and a 2018-2019 transcription grant from the Kentucky Oral History Commission, is archived at the University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History and will become publicly accessible in 2021 (see online project description with list of interviews and participants, 2018c).

Participants in both interview projects had the option of ending the interview at any time as well as an additional 48 hours after the interview to withdraw their consent to participate and request the destruction of the audio-recording. No one chose this option, though some interviews were partial and/or resumed at a later time because of logistical constraints (i.e., available time, accessible space, interruptions). In addition to the IRB consent form, oral history participants also signed a required release form for their oral history interview to be included in the Nunn Center. The release form transfers “all literary property rights, including copyright, to the University of Kentucky Libraries” but does not prohibit the research use of this material by the PI or the personal use of this material by the interview participant, who maintain their own rights to use their narrative. The release form also provides interview participants with options for “temporary restrictions on public access to [their] recorded interview (including the recorded

audio/video and subsequent transcripts of the interview)” for a designated period of time, and another required document for the filed audio-recordings covered issues like slander and “culturally insensitive language.”

Other ways I accessed and used interviews included recordings from others who interviewed me, archival oral histories, public edited interviews from student productions, and online audio productions and oral history projects. I also incorporate interview quotes from other scholarly work conducted by/with research collaborators in the region. In addition to contributing to public archives and scholarship with the YAA oral history project, I also plan to archive the interview recordings and transcripts of willing participants from the youth media education and activism project in a suitable repository at the University of Kentucky.

Among research collaborators who were formal interview participants, most interview participants were originally from Kentucky and West Virginia, at 65% (N=31) and 19% (N=9) respectively; and/or the Appalachian region in other states, including 6% (N=3) from Virginia, 2% (N=1) from Tennessee, and 2% from New Hampshire. Interview participants from outside the region included 2% (N=1) from New York, 2% from California, and 2% from Montana. About 63% of interview participants identified as cis-gendered females, about 27% as cis-gendered males, and 10% as trans-identifying (i.e., female-to-male, male-to-female, and non-binary). About a quarter of all interview participants identified as queer in some way (i.e., sexual orientation and/or gender identity).<sup>68</sup> Racialized identities of interview participants were 88% white (N=42), 6%

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<sup>68</sup> Several research collaborators, both formal and informal, identified as transgender in some (and sometimes multiple) way(s) during the period of fieldwork.

Black/African American/Appalachian (N=3), 4% (N=2) Native American or “multi-ethnic and non-status Indigenous,” and 2% Korean American/Appalachian (N=1).

The age range of participants at the time of their interviews was from 18-78, the mean age was about 34.5, and the median was about 29. About 8% were in their teens, about 8% in their twenties, about 25% in their thirties, about 4% in their forties, about 19% in their fifties, about 6% in their sixties, and about 6% in their seventies. Based on the ages of participants at the time of their interviews and the Pew Center for Research groupings of generational cohort by birth year, the majority of interview participants were Millennials (about 52%) with about 21% Generation Z (or iGen), about 19% Baby Boomers/Silent, and about 8% Generation X. Following is a visual representation of how oral history participants identify across generational affiliations outside their age cohorts that illustrates the arbitrariness and complexity of how generational labels apply (Clemons 2020).

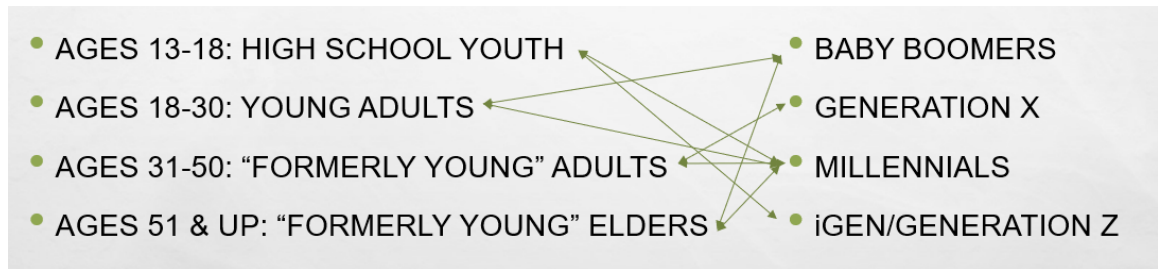


Figure 13 Age Cohorts and Generational Affiliations of Oral History Participants (Image by author)

Research collaborators have all been engaged in different forms of organizing in East(ern) Kentucky, West Virginia, and Meta'lachia. Interview participants have been involved in regional organizations and programs such as the Highlander Center, Appalachian Studies Association, *Higher Ground*, Appalshop (Appalachian Media Institute, WMMT), Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, AmeriCorps, as well as youth-



focused/youth-led efforts like the STAY Project and IG2BYITM networking events. Several of them have connections as either students or faculty to regional higher education institutions, such as Berea College (BC), Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), Morehead State University (MSU), Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College (SKCTC) and University of Kentucky (UK). Two of them have been both students and taught at UK. About a third have been participated in the Brushy Fork Annual Institute at Berea College and the UK Graduate Appalachian Research Community Annual Symposium. Through these organizations and other related groups and efforts, research collaborators are part of a substantial network of current youth leaders in the region who are trying to “stay anyway” (Daniels 2014) and their “formerly young” mentors who support them and have been involved in historical youth-led movements at local, regional, and national levels.<sup>69</sup> Thus, research collaborators maintain intentional relationships and networks locally as well as more geographically dispersed throughout the region via social media, professional organizations, and crossover in membership and mentorship. Many of them share geographical proximity, direct mentorship, and/or collaborative relationships with at least one other person, and most share additional connections with one another through other individuals and organizations.

Another important means of accessing and listening to young Appalachians and their social contexts is engaging with their everyday media consumption and production practices as well as their more formal cultural productions that serve as multimodal

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<sup>69</sup> McGraw’s oral history project and article about AVs who chose to stay in the region are prescient because they relate to continuing conversations about whether and how young people can stay and thrive in the Appalachian region (1982; McGraw 1986).

primary sources representing their own voices and viewpoints. I engaged with youth cultural productions in various ways through several roles as an informed viewer/audience, technical and content consultant, sometimes instructor/co-producer, “Appalachian agent” (Good 2018), etc. Many different people, including “formerly young” and peer mentors, serve in these overlapping and mediating roles, which means that our observant participation also leaves a collective imprint on youth productions, whether visibly evident in direct citation in video credits or through indirect influence about the production topic/approach.

Because the starting point for my fieldwork and interviews was media education sites, I focused especially on audiovisual or multisensory productions, such as film/video productions, photography projects, and radio broadcasts/audio podcasts; however, this quickly expanded to visual art, ‘zines, multimedia blogs, written articles/publications, community-based theatrical performances, social media, and other artistic productions in the public domain. For example, I attended multiple screenings of AMI films, including prior to my dissertation fieldwork, over the past couple of decades at Appalshop, ASA, IG2BYITM, Berea College, UK, etc.; and I have also watched and shared many AMI productions online as well (AMI’s Vimeo channel as “user3183821” includes for an extensive online catalog of their films). Similarly, I have shared High Rocks and Berea College Partners for Education media productions from their YouTube channels in various settings.

As I discuss in the section on Curriculum Development and Pedagogical Practice, I mentored the production of well over 100 youth media projects as a teaching artist and “production assistant” in both alternative education and public-school settings (i.e., High

Rocks, Our Creative Promise, Arts Connect Appalachian Youth, etc.). Other forms of participatory co-production included collaboration and support on creative assets and theater projects (i.e., AMI/Roadside Theater Lab, Hurricane Gap Theater Institute, *HomeSong*, etc.). I created a compendium to organize and annotate (primarily audiovisual, theater, cultural assets, etc.), also citations for written works, which also contributed to the profile analysis of media programs and social contexts over the period of fieldwork.<sup>70</sup> While I focused on cultural productions associated with my primary field sites and research collaborators, I also paid attention to other non-youth-produced cultural and media productions and their inclusion/representation of young people (or not).

The catalogs of productions of organizations and projects like Appalshop/AMI and High Rocks are extensive, and this dissertation only touches on selected examples primarily from the main time period of fieldwork from 2013-2019.<sup>71</sup> A full content analysis of all these examples would be an interesting project but is not the focus of this dissertation. Furthermore, the frequency, rapidity, and volume of youth cultural productions was often difficult to keep up with and sift through given increasing digital access and distribution.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, I incorporated content analysis (Bernard 2006; LeCompte and Schensul 1999) of relevant cultural productions within the overall range

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<sup>70</sup> See Appendix 4. Bibliography of Youth Cultural Productions, which includes selected examples from research collaborators in the primary field sites.

<sup>71</sup> Because of Appalshop's long media history, AMI is the most in-depth, intensive media education program with established curricula for evaluating and producing multimodal media (in addition to film), release protocols, paid internships, and peer educator positions. As a professional media organization, Appalshop also connects young people to multiple forms of documentation and media production through the WMMT community radio station, Roadside Theater, and partnerships with other youth-focused media-based organizations.

<sup>72</sup> In solidarity with research collaborators, I seek not to reproduce certain representations against which they are often counterstorytelling with their own stories (e.g., TV shows like *Buckwild* and the release of the film version of *HE*, etc.). For further analysis of those representations, see *Rural Reality: How Reality Television Portrayals of Appalachian People Impact Their View of Their Culture* (Brashear 2016), "The Politics of Hillbilly Horror" (Satterwhite 2017), and "Buckwild Mad Men" (Mason 2018).

of ethnographic materials collected throughout fieldwork in all field sites and resulting themes and issues related to the possibilities they envision for themselves and the region. I also include relevant examples of research collaborators' cultural productions throughout the dissertation. As I discuss in the next section, my documentation methods apply, reflect on, and analyze these same cultural practices.

### 3.3.1 Multisensory Documentation

At a “Walk Your Camera” workshop with well-known Appalachian photographer Roger May at the 2018 Visualizing Appalachia Symposium, May laid out various old and new film and digital cameras that he has collected over the years across a long table at the front of the room. He said, “The best camera is the one you have with you,” and that he now mostly uses his phone. May also talked about his ethical approach to “*make* pictures” instead of “take pictures” because too much was already “taken” from the region.<sup>73</sup> My multimedia audiovisual documentation approach and practices during fieldwork similarly reflect both of these notions of “making do” and “making vs. taking” (producing vs. capturing, creating vs. shooting) and included making photos, videos, audio field recordings or “soundscapes,” and audio and video voice notes to self in addition to interview recordings. As I discuss in this section, all these documentation media and formats helped me record observations, thoughts, and contextual information related to my research topic, collaborators, and field sites.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> He suggested photographers introduce themselves similarly: “Hi I’m \_\_\_\_\_, and I’m a photographer. Would you mind if I made a picture of you?” I asked if he used releases, which he said he did not but stays in touch with people.

<sup>74</sup> I discuss visual ethics, digital tools and methods for managing these different sources of documentation in the section on “Multimodal Data Management.”

In terms of visual documentation, my drawing practices in the field were mostly limited to some sketches of room layouts and demographic estimates, though I offered some decorative doodling (mostly colorful lettering of people's names) as a form of reciprocity for "Secret Sisters" at High Rocks camps. I only selectively produced photos and videos in different field sites, which depended on my access to digital technologies at any given time and place. I frequently volunteered to make photos on behalf of other individuals and groups in various settings when asked. In my own photos, I noticed a predominance of photos of road signs and roadways in my fieldwork because of how much time I spent traversing between places.

I mostly used video for recording "field notes .... as a reflexive partner" (Pettersen 2013:36) when equipment, time, and privacy allowed. Used alongside written field notes, "the two complement each other and added important contextual descriptions to the later analysis" (2013:36). I also used digital audio technology to record voice notes and soundscapes to inform/document my research. While video notes were more feasible and useful for extended reflections in the field, I frequently used voice notes en route or departing field sites for recording reflections or notes to myself for later follow-up. I also experimented with recording and producing soundscapes as a multisensory method and form of representation (Droumeva 2015) as a way to "experientially present various ethnographic moments of particular field sites, and ... provide some intimate context for these places" (Clemons 2016). As an unexpected contrast to soundscapes without visual representation, I recorded a visual panorama of the culminating view near the end of the High Rocks hike, which included a striking "soundless scape" of dozens of quiet tween-age campers and college-age interns who were resting behind me. Without this context,

their presence is impossible to discern auditorily despite their numbers and relative collective youth (see Figure 11 below).



Figure 14 Still image from video panorama of Hillsboro, West Virginia and the Allegheny Mountains from the High Rocks overlook on Hike Day at New Beginnings Camp, June 25, 2017 (Image and video by author)

In terms of my public production and intersection of multisensory documentation and digital ethnography, I have informally maintained a multimedia blog called “AnthroBone in the Field: Observations & Reflections by a Very Human Anthropologist,” where I have posted primarily academic and methodological resources since 2015. For example, I have compiled and written about several apps and other digital tools for research and writing to share these resources with other graduate students in anthropology and kindred disciplines (Clemons 2017; Clemons 2018a). However, I have only selectively posted field experiences and documentation out of “ethical and methodological prudence” (Fagerlid 2013:31) and respect for research collaborators and field sites. For example, I posted the abstract, presentation slides, and media elements of the multisensory postcard project, all of which I had presented publicly with permission

of relevant research collaborators. I exercised caution regarding the challenge and “question of how much information should be shared in such a public domain” (O’Grady 2013:33), both in terms of privacy of research collaborators as well as the risk of “prematurely go[ing] public with perspectives, descriptions and preliminary analyses” (Fagerlid 2013:31) from my dissertation research.

Some anthropologists have critiqued text-based ethnography and called for a continued focus on “being there” or a physical presence in local spaces (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009). I chose to become an anthropologist because I value the discipline’s ethnographic emphasis, and the majority of my dissertation fieldwork was engagement in participant observation with physical people in physical places. However:

... the increasing ubiquity of social media in societies throughout the world not only constitutes a new focus of comparative ethnographic research, but is also profoundly reshaping how ethnographic research is conducted. ... ethnography and social media should be considered as two sets of practices and artefacts that are themselves undergoing constant change and development ... [and] becoming increasingly bound in interaction with each other ... (Sinanan and McDonald 2017:179-180).

In my international experiences and conversations with international fellow students, I have learned to counter stereotypes of Global North/South digital divides and to bring those insights to more complex understandings of the digital divides experienced in many rural Appalachian communities, including some (but not all) research collaborators who have limited access to internet, computers, media technology, and support resources (Banks 2012). Despite continued constraints to access, more and more people, especially young people, are using digital technologies and spending time communicating through the internet and social media. Therefore, “being there” requires increasing attention to their interactions and their media consumption and production

practices where they are: online. While my research is informed by media anthropology and digital ethnography, it is not truly a digital ethnographic project in terms of its sole object of study, online ethnographic focus, or the scale of “big data” (Boellstorff, et al. 2012; Coleman 2010; de Waal Malefyt 2017; Snodgrass 2016; Wesch 2008). Rather, I used digital scapes as an extension of my relationships with collaborators and organizations and to stay informed about local contexts of individual sites (conversations, issues, projects, events, art/media) when I was not physically present. For example, I kept up with primary field sites and meta-sites such as AMI, High Rocks, the Holler, Our Future WV (formerly Our Children, Our Future), Partners for Education, STAY Project websites and e-newsletters as well as the APPALNET list-serve, which was founded in the late 1990s and I have belonged to since the early 2000s.

I spent a substantial amount of time reading articles, watching videos, and listening to audio productions by research collaborators and/or about their programs and communities. Local radio/media and social media/internet also frequently served as useful extensions of physical space even when I was locally on site. I listened to local community radio stations (WMMT 88.7 FM in East(ern) Kentucky and WVMR 91.9 FM in West Virginia) in my car when physically travelling to and within field sites, and I used streaming audio services to listen to these stations remotely when I was not there. I also selectively kept up with research sites and collaborators through social media, and I was conscious of the relational and research ethics of my decisions about using these digital tools/channels to communicate and gather data and solidify contacts. For example, I tried to abide by the general practice of not seeking Facebook friends (especially with anyone under 18) unless they chose to “friend” me and there were no organizational



protocols prohibiting it, and I decided to limit my social media interactions to Facebook despite numerous invitations to join Instagram.<sup>75</sup> There is also a formal restriction against teaching artists in public schools befriending students on social media (even if the student sends them the friend request) unless there is a pre-existing or additional social context for the relationship.

I strategically used Facebook in particular as an administrative tool for my research because of its general appeal and use by different generations despite their differences in how they use it (Gasser and Cortesi 2015) and its increasing reputation as a platform for older people (Cuthbertson 2018).<sup>76</sup> For example, I followed public Facebook pages of organizations such as ASA, AMI, High Rocks, Partners for Education, Queer Appalachia, STAY Project, UK GARC and Appalachian Center, etc., as well as public online campaigns and conversations (i.e., #IG2BYITM, #AppalachianLoveStory, #IfYouAskUs, etc.). I also observed and participated in private Facebook Groups of both academic and personal interest that included topical conversations and resources relevant to my research, such as the ASA Young Appalachian Leaders and Learners (Y'ALL), GLBTQ Appalachian Studies (for which I am also the moderator), Out in Appalachia, Queer PhD Network, and the aforementioned Imagining Indigenous Futurisms.<sup>77</sup> I also used Facebook Messenger to contact and make plans with some people, whether I was

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<sup>75</sup> New Year 2019, I finally decided to create a single-purpose Instagram account to post a weekly creative meme project as a public archive, but I intentionally did not tie it to my personal online identity, nor did I use it as a form of “social” media or communication.

<sup>76</sup> I also noticed some generational differences in the digital communication platforms used by the currently young and older folks through a different trend. Most notably, I observed contrasting and mostly isolated conversations on the Y'ALL Facebook Group (among currently young and “aging out” young folks) versus the APPALNET list-serve (among mostly “formerly young” people) during the flurry of follow-up discussion about the youth protest against the *HE* author at the 2018 ASA Conference.

<sup>77</sup> I cite only publicly available information gleaned from private group posts and comments.

Facebook friends with them or not, when that was a more reliable form of communication that they preferred.

As Boellstorff and colleagues point out, “Virtual worlds provide special affordances for certain types of data capture .... [the ease of which] can sometimes create the false impression that the methods .... such as taking fieldnotes based on participant observation, are unnecessary. .... as useful as digital records are, they cannot stand alone without the rigor of a detailed accounting of interactions in the field” (Boellstorff, et al. 2012:113). Furthermore, given the amount of continuous and “constant contact” through social media and other digital channels, it is difficult to “turn off” the fieldwork frame of mind, not to mention the navigate and make sense of the prolific-ness of research collaborators’ cultural productions as previously discussed.

In addition to participant observation and interviews, I also explored other primary (and secondary sources) of “local archival data” (Schensul et al. 1999b:203), such as local, state, and regional historical and demographic data that provided important context for understanding the geographic and social locations of the field sites. I compiled publicly available aggregate demographic census data, domestic violence rates, educational attainment, etc. for the contiguous Central Appalachian region, the states of West Virginia and Kentucky, the counties where the field sites are located, the primary counties that comprise their service areas, and other meta-sites (see data tables in the introduction). For example, I downloaded and compiled relevant demographic data from several useful sources that enabled county comparisons within and between states, such as the U.S. Census Bureau (United States Census Bureau), labor data (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020), County Health Rankings (County Health Rankings 2020), ARC

maps and data reports (Appalachian Regional Commission n.d.), school report cards (National Assessment of Educational Progress 2020), the *Coal Atlas* (Heinrich Böll Foundation and Friends of the Earth International 2015), and the *Kentucky Atlas & Gazetteer* (Elbon 2020).

Such data illuminate the political economy of the local areas and broader region; contextualize and situate the organizational field sites, their missions, service areas, and particular resources and constraints; and help further contextualize the daily lives and circumstances of my collaborators and their service populations in their homes, schools, and communities. However, while they provide valuable context, it is also important to recognize the limits of statistical data (sources, methods, and meanings) as I observed in a lively 2017 APPALNET discussion about their usefulness and representation when a member of the list-serve “condemned” the competitive and hierarchical framing of “rankings.”

I also spent time in both physical archives and online digital collections at the Kentucky Historical Society, the University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center, and the Berea College Special Collections and Sound Archives. This included a week-long residency in May 2017 at the Martin F. Schmidt Research Library in Frankfort, Kentucky where my archival research focused on intergenerational experiences of and reflections on youth, gender, race, civic engagement, livelihoods, and regional development in Letcher County and Owsley County in East(ern) Kentucky.<sup>78</sup> I examined archival secondary sources about both counties and focused on the historiography of various written “histories” as well as photographic visual

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<sup>78</sup> This archival residency was supported by a Scholarly Research Fellowship from the Kentucky Historical Society.

representations through the lenses of race and ethnicity, gender, youth, education, migration, and infrastructures. This archival research provided material engagement with print publications as well as historical context for fieldwork and interviews in Appalachian counties of East(ern) Kentucky, especially Letcher and Owsley Counties.

I also accessed some relevant oral history collections on site and digitally at Berea College and UK, which included audio recordings and some transcriptions of interviews conducted with founders of regional non-profit organizations, Appalachian Volunteers, and participants in other federally-funded development programs who were young people in the 1960s during the inauguration of War on Poverty initiatives (1982; 1985-1987; 1987-1993; Kiffmeyer 2008; Kiffmeyer 1998). Some of these collections include memories and perspectives from when participants were young people during important social movements and document a unique perspective of people reflecting on their youth and activism during a particular time in West Virginia and East(ern) Kentucky. For example, multiple collections include interviews with Naomi Weintraub Cohen and former AV fieldman and community radio found/producer Gibbs Kinderman who both have direct relationships with High Rocks Educational Corporation in Pocahontas County as well as other social movements and cultural organizing in the region. Gibbs is the father of High Rocks Director Sarah Riley, and for many years, Naomi has taught a construction class with her brother at Camp Steele. Additional local archival data included organizational literature, photo/video archives, and other visual media produced and posted digitally by both individual and institutional research collaborators (as discussed in the section on cultural productions).

I used social mapping of interpersonal and organizational relationships (Byrne 2017; Schensul, et al. 1999a) in order to understand how young people generate, access, and reproduce these social networks and how they in turn shape them. In order to learn this method, I completed a week-long Introduction to Social Network Analysis (SNA) training at the University of Kentucky LINKS Center in 2016. I used loose social mapping to document and visualize some of the different connections between and among individuals and groups, including familial and fictive kinship, organizational histories and partnerships, identity cohorts, and other support networks and relationships that they draw from and socially reproduce. My dissertation project does not constitute a formal social network analysis (Borgatti, et al. 2009); however, I used the general principles to derive a loose social map of different relationships and networks that help constitute young peoples' social contexts and help construct their possibilities.

### 3.3.2 Curriculum Development and Pedagogical Practice

As previously mentioned, my observant participation included “media education” as a social context where young people learn from/with peers and adults as well as a pedagogy and practice. Therefore, curriculum development and teaching were participatory methods through which I engaged in both active pedagogical research and applied learning-through-doing how to teach/mentor young people (primarily tweens through teens) in place-based media literacy and production. My level of participation and leadership varied in each social context. For example, I engaged primarily in observation and low-tech volunteering when I visited AMI during part of their Summer Documentary Institute from 2014-2017, and I participated as a more active collaborator and co-producer during my month-long residency as part of the AMI/Roadside Youth

Theater Lab in Fall 2016. I also volunteered at High Rocks during my first summer of fieldwork there in 2014 where I was dubbed a “Media Assistant Teacher” and participated actively, alongside the lead teacher and the AmeriCorps intern, in hands-on instruction and production throughout Camp Steele.

Through this preliminary research at AMI and High Rocks, I observed that both of these organizations’ media education programs have different approaches to applying similar pedagogies for critical media literacy and technical media production. I also researched and discussed the content and structure of their programs through readings about the AMI curriculum (Goodman and Cocca 2014; Richards-Schuster and O’Doherty 2012) and the High Rocks “Curriculum Writing Resources” and “Lesson Plan Format” (High Rocks Educational Corporation 2015) and through conversations with research collaborators. For example, I interviewed alumni of both AMI and High Rocks who were part of much earlier versions of the programs, and in one case, Natasha Watts, who was an early AMI intern, had become AMI director at the age of 19, and was an education doctoral student and community college instructor at the time of her interview, talked almost exclusively about visual learning and media pedagogy. Rae Garringer, who is from Pocahontas County, West Virginia, was a student in the first film class at High Rocks, which they said evolved from what was previously the program’s summer theater track.

One unanticipated aspect of this project was my growing immersion as a professional in media education. As a paid teaching artist, I engaged in curricular design and class instruction at High Rocks summer camps in West Virginia and in several Kentucky counties through Partners for Education (including Owsley County). When I

taught the Creative Expressions class at New Beginnings Camp in Summer 2017, I modified an existing curriculum created by a High Rocks alumni who had previously taught the course. Every summer, I also helped collect and archive curricula, course resources, and documentation of student work on the organization's servers. As a media teacher at High Rocks, I mentored and assisted with the production of dozens of digital storytelling projects and other artistic/media productions by young people. Being careful to protect their anonymity, I kept fieldnotes on the topics of these productions so that I could do a broader analysis of what the young media makers saw as important to represent about themselves and their region. Over this time, I also collaborated with different co-teachers with varying degrees of teaching, media production, and/or leadership experience and responsibilities, and I often collaborated on projects and pedagogy with teachers of other major/minor tracks.

My observant participation in teaching media arts expanded again through volunteering and then eventually working professionally as a juried media artist on the KAC and P4E teaching artist directories. From 2017-2019, I worked actively in several Kentucky public schools primarily through P4E. As a teaching artist for "Our Creative Promise," "Arts Connect Appalachian Youth," and one independent collaborative project, I completed nine media artist residencies at eight schools in five counties on more than 100 projects, including digital stories and poems, podcasts, and mini graphic novels. Both P4E projects also included collective "summits" where students and teachers from participating schools convened to share their projects with one another and engage in hands-on art-making workshops. My collaboration with Judy Sizemore on the KET Media Arts Toolkit documented class activities, student projects, and lessons learned

from engagement in “Our Creative Promise,” all of which are freely available for other teachers to use in their classrooms through the PBS LearningMedia platform (Kentucky Educational Television 2018a).

In addition to the required orientation workshops for juried teaching artists rosters, I also participated in free online media literacy professional development opportunities for K-12 teachers, all of which include submissions of lesson plans and/or other practical components.<sup>79</sup> For example, I have completed several multimodal media certifications through the KQED Teach platform, including Making Digital Comics; Understanding Copyright & Fair Use; Safety and Privacy in Participatory Culture; Podcasting with Youth Radio; Constructing Media Messages; and How to Manage & Assess Media Projects. I also participated in the PBS “Empowering Young Media Consumers & Creators” media literacy series of interactive webinars with live online chat with other educators, and I have completed 5 of 8 microcredentials required for the PBS/KQED Media Literacy Educator Certification through Digital Promise online courses. I have also maintained training and proficiency in certain media production technologies (i.e., Adobe Premiere, iMovie, Audacity, etc.) that I have taught and used for co-producing projects.

I contributed to media-related professional development for artists, teachers, and documentarians in a couple of ways. I designed and applied for a grant to offer a series of youth- and intergenerational-focused digital citizenship workshops for local artists in my East(ern) Kentucky field sites in Letcher and Owsley Counties. While this project was

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<sup>79</sup> Before and throughout my time as a UK graduate student, I have also participated in college-level teaching-related professional development activities at Berea College, UK, and elsewhere. I limit the methodological discussion in this section to youth-and media-specific professional development.



not funded or implemented, I later adapted this curriculum as an interactive workshop on “Digital Tools for Youth Media Education in Appalachia: Critical and Practical Approaches for Digital Humanities in Appalachian Studies” at the Visualizing Appalachia Symposium in Portsmouth, Ohio. Participants were mostly “formerly young” educators in related fields working with young people of various ages, and they contributed resources to the other free digital tools for digital citizenship, media education, and media production that I collected and shared at the workshop and online (Clemons 2018b). I was an invited presenter at one of the 2018 Community Scholar sessions offered by the Kentucky Arts Council at the Robert H. Williams Cultural Center where I discussed some of the different documentary projects I have been involved in as well as relevant resources in Kentucky to support such work.

As a consultant, I also contributed significantly to the updated KET Media Arts Toolkit (Kentucky Educational Television 2018b), as mentioned. The Educator Materials includes a new section on “Getting Started in Media Arts” (KET 2018b:5-6) in the Media Arts Facilitator Guide, and the Project examples include a section on “Digital Citizenship” for which I was the primary contributor (KET 2018b:C17-C19) and another on “Documenting Communities” that Judy Sizemore and I co-authored about the “Our Creative Promise” projects, which included project management tips and lessons learned (KET 2018b:C21-C28). For example, “making do with what you have” was a recurring lesson and emphasis in my own work as a teaching artist working with young people and organizations. I always included this notion in lesson planning and communicating encouragement for teachers and students, and Judy and I consciously addressed

technological disparities, both among different schools/school systems as well as among students, in the KET Media Arts Toolkit.

In all these physical and virtual settings, I have developed and adapted many experiential exercises, writing assignments, lesson plans, and media projects, and my work product as a teaching artist and media arts consultant includes curriculum development and project mentorship in place-based audiovisual digital storytelling, interviews and podcast production, and graphic novels. For example, for the KQED online podcast training, I created a podcast lesson plan based on the short audio piece I produced about my grandmother, and I modified it for a 3-day teaching artist residency helping four classes of 5<sup>th</sup>-grade social studies students produce 24 short podcast interviews with school administrators, teachers, staff, and students for the Arts Connect Appalachian Youth Project (West Perry Elementary School 5th Grade Social Studies, et al. 2019).<sup>80</sup>

Creating, collecting, and sharing knowledge and resources with others is part of my participatory pedagogical approach and my feminist activist methodologies. I have regularly created bibliographies and compilations of teaching materials, media production tools, and project examples. For example, when I was reviewing materials for the KET Media Arts Toolkit, I curated dozens of additional topical resources and created several publicly accessible custom folders on PBS LearningMedia that I have shared with other teachers.

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<sup>80</sup> I also engaged in some college-level curriculum development that relate to my dissertation topic and research methods but that were not part of my fieldwork. For example, in 2017 I submitted a TA proposal for teaching an APP 300 Topics in Appalachian Studies course on “Art and Activism in Appalachia” at UK (which was not selected). Most recently, I designed and taught a Special Topics Course on “Ethnographic Methods” as an Adjunct Lecturer in Peace and Social Justice (PSJ) Studies at Berea College, which counted toward the research methods requirement for the PSJ major.

### 3.3.3 Multimodal Data Management

Throughout my fieldwork, “making do” has been a theme in my field sites and research collaborators’ media practices,<sup>81</sup> and it likewise applies to my own methods of documentation and analysis, which included both analog and digital tools as well as miscellaneous multi-media documentation including digital photos, audio recordings, and videos. Other qualitative researchers have utilized readily available digital tools (Hahn 2008), such as Microsoft Office applications, that are typically available to university students and faculty to use for educational and academic work for free or at a discount. Such programs are useful for producing, archiving, organizing, and searching research data in various media formats and over time. I primarily used a combination of the Office Suite programs and other Microsoft apps along with Google Drive for managing my data collection, analysis, security, and back-up, all of which are part of the cloud storage agreements (Google 2018; Google 2019; Google 2020; Microsoft 2020) and software downloads available for University of Kentucky students or free to the general public. For my overall data management plan, my triple back-up system for digital documents includes storage on a secured password-protected computer with copies on a secured password-protected external hard drive and on the cloud through the University of Kentucky’s Google Drive and my personal secured password-protected UK G-Suite account.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> As I describe more in-depth later, “making do” with available or limited technologies and equipment at home or in the field is definitely not always a perfect strategy; however, it does provide a valuable lens for learning from experience, both “successes” and “failures,” as well as understanding similar limitations referenced by research collaborators.

<sup>82</sup> As I discuss in the section on “Vulnerable Participant Observation,” my back-up systems did not always fully succeed despite best efforts with available technologies.

My field notes methods for participant observation and interviews included a combination of handwritten notes and digital notes in the field. I was cautious about the potential intrusiveness of research and sense of surveillance that notetaking can invoke (Valentine 2007), which is especially important when working with vulnerable or potentially marginalized populations like young people, diverse gender and racial identities, and socio-economically challenged communities (Kingsolver 2010; Medak-Saltzman 2017; Winch, et al. 2016) in a world of increasing digital surveillance (Buckingham 2008; Couldry, et al. 2013; Hearne 2017; Mallan, et al. 2010). Therefore, I exercised discretion in discerning the appropriateness of the particular form and process of “notetaking” depending on the setting (Valentine 2007:216-217). I was also respectful in constructed spaces like “story circles” that may explicitly ask participants *not* to take notes during sharing of personal and sometimes private information (Roadside Theater 2010). In general, I used my laptop for notetaking in professional settings where others were using laptops similarly or where I was asked to serve as an official notetaker in either a volunteer or paid capacity.

In addition, I used digital tools like OneNote audio notes, voice memos, and/or voice recognition software on a mobile device, usually in transit or follow-up after leaving an interview or public event. I also scanned all my handwritten field notes, interview notes, and interview forms using the free Microsoft Office Lens mobile app. I transferred all of these materials onto my laptop and integrated them into digital notebooks and sections in Microsoft OneNote that I set up and used as an “electronic fieldwork diary” (Tam 2017) and “digital research notebook” (Fernandes and Barbeiro 2017) with sections for each field site/interview project, and pages for each set of

activity/interview details, audio file(s), related images, and field notes. I also used OneNote to organize and annotate online cultural productions by research collaborators. I used Microsoft Office Word documents and Excel spreadsheets to organize and code some qualitative data (Ose 2016) in conjunction with OneNote to take/sort notes, compile/organize interview and statistical data, and tag/search themes. Word documents and PDFs are also two of the most universally accessible ways to share text documents with other people, so I used Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat regularly.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Before using OneNote as my primary system for transcribing interviews and synching audio files with related text, I used Microsoft Word along with TranscribeSharp, a free transcription software developed by a dissertating graduate student (Whitaker 2015). Transcription of oral history interviews was outsourced to Audio Transcription Center and funded by a Kentucky Oral History Commission Transcription Grant and partial matching funds from the UK Nunn Center. For some interviews and video transcripts, I used online artificial intelligence (AI) transcription services, including Trint.com, Microsoft Video Indexer, and Otter.ai.com for producing initial drafts. I first ensured that the interview data met protocol standards before uploading audio/video files into the online editing app. This method still involved review and clean-up of the automated transcripts, but they were surprisingly accurate given some of the limitations of voice recognition software in correctly interpreting different accents.

## CHAPTER 4. MESHWORKS OF INTERGENERATIONAL MENTORSHIP, YOUTH LEADERSHIP, AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

### 4.1 Camp Steele Sit-in at High Rocks

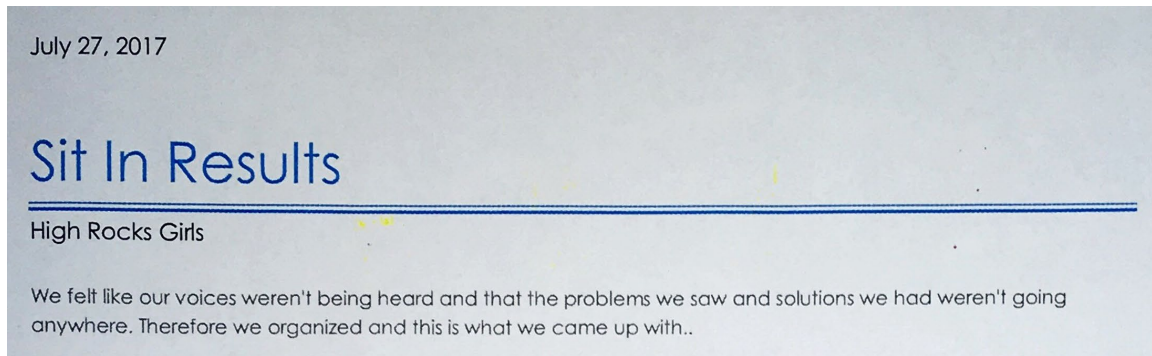


Figure 15 “Sit In Results” produced by High Rocks youth leaders, July 27, 2017 (document scanned and cropped by author)

It was near the end of July in 2017, and the morning was overcast and warm. it supposed to be the *last* “regular class day” of the two-week Camp Steele, which meant that the major tracks met for both morning and afternoon classes. Classes normally began at 8:15 a.m. after breakfast in the picnic shelter, but I was informed that the High Rocks Youth Advisory Board (YAB) leadership had organized a “sit-in” to boycott classes that day. Staff members watched as young women gathered around the picnic tables in the center field of the campground to discuss several concerns that they had about camp. As the media teacher and “Master Teacher” for camp that summer, I was concerned about having enough time to complete their short video productions for the closing day of camp that included public presentations of final projects from all the major classes. However, I also realized that this was an important opportunity and demonstration of campers’ agency and leadership role in the overall structure of camp life as well as a key art of High Rocks’ organizational history.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> I later learned that not all the campers understood the purpose of the sit-in or necessarily shared the depth of concern of the organizers, but most of them participated anyway.

I conferred with other staff members, including the two leaders of Girls Group, which is a daily scheduled “safe space” where campers can process their experiences, ask “awkward questions,” and otherwise talk openly about any topic without judgement. I let them know that I supported the protest in spirit, but that, for personal reasons, I would not be the most effective mentor to deal with the situation face-to-face that morning. They agreed to remain in the campground as the campers implemented their direct action and to touch base with them as needed. I thanked them and walked down the steep Zen Trail to the Lodge Library that served as the classroom for the media class, and I used the extra time that morning to catch up on scanning and compiling curricular materials and student work that would be included in the High Rocks digital archive for future reference.

The ultimate result of the protest was a list of requests that YAB leaders wanted to share with staff and administration during their daily meeting after lunch that afternoon. That afternoon, teachers, several staff members, the camp founder, and two YAB representatives met in the Lodge Library with the primary agenda focusing on the campers’ collective concerns. I usually facilitated the staff meetings (one of the responsibilities of the Master Teacher), but that day, I sat on the periphery, mostly listened, and deferred to the YAB members who facilitated much of the meeting. I knew both young women well as they had each majored in the media class one of the first two years that I came to Camp Steele, and I had also co-presented about the High Rocks media class with one of them along with some other campers and a former staff member at the 2016 Appalachian Studies Association Conference. However, this was the first time we had worked directly together as representatives of staff leadership and youth leadership.

They had summarized their concerns in two different handout formats with slightly different wording, one that was a numbered list of “Girls Requests” and another that was a colorful spreadsheet labeled “Sit In Results” with columns for “tasks” (concerns), “due date,” and “initials” for follow-up. The spreadsheet also included a short statement in the header: “We felt like our voices weren’t being heard and that the problems we saw and solutions we had weren’t going anywhere. Therefore we organized and this is what we came up with” (see Figure 15). They handed everyone copies of both documents and presented them for discussion.

Camp staff reviewed their concerns and asked for clarification about some. The 20+ unsorted issues they raised fell into several general categories, including (in order of the most to the least number of items): operations/facilities, scheduling, leadership, self-care, and non-camp issues. Some were relatively straightforward and simple to address while others required more complex solutions. For example, they requested supplies for some of the assigned jobs that girls performed after their evening meal, and they noted some repairs that were needed that might take more time. Some of their scheduling concerns were too late to make much of a difference so close to the end of camp, but we discussed how those changes came about as a result of some feedback about the previous two-week New Beginnings camp for younger girls the month before, for which both YAB members had served as Junior Counselors. They thought that some of the schedule adjustments were helpful, but they also confused and frustrated some Camp Steele participants who were not involved in the other camp. Staff noted that some of the most drastic changes also impacted them in unexpected and/or challenging ways, including the reduction of daily class time in comparison to previous years.



In terms of leadership-related issues, one camper specifically called for staff to follow the honor code, which is based on the High Rocks Pledge “to have respect for myself, respect for others, and respect for this place in order to uphold the traditions of loyalty, honesty, trust, acceptance and adventure founded by [those] who have come before me” (as discussed in Chapter 2 on research ethics and methods). The honor code issue likely arose from some of the expected tensions between staff and youth leadership and some challenging situations that occurred during camp. Staff agreed that everyone at camp should abide by the Pledge, and one of the media major video projects that summer even focused on the pledge’s history and meaning (Hall, et al. 2017).<sup>85</sup> The following excerpt from the beginning of the video features High Rocks alumni and then staff member (Operations Coordinator) Renae Hall describing the youth activist origin of the pledge.

[Guitar and piano music while image fades from black to a still image of the High Rocks Pledge painting on the outside of the Picnic Shelter, which is a faded turquoise blue with black cursive writing, and yellow stars and handprints in the corners, with opening titles]

[Renae seated on the back porch of the Schoolhouse, with a Nettlefest t-shirt cut into a tank top and a blue bandana tied as a do-rag on her head]: The second summer that High Rocks camp existed, they had new girls coming in and the older girls saw kind of like how the new girls were acting. And they were like, you know, “They’re kind of being brats. We’re being brats. We don’t know what to do or how to deal with it.”

[Cut to still photo of girls sitting on the grass and picnic table in the field (image from sit-in protest, including some students in the media track)]

Renae: And the High Rocks girls that summer sat down together and said, “Okay, like, we can’t just come up here and like run wild and be mean and expect to enjoy ourselves.

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<sup>85</sup> As noted in the methods chapter, the High Rocks Pledge serves as the “honor code” for conduct in programming spaces (and beyond, for some). This video is not currently publicly available, and I have quoted Renae Hall from my copy of the video with her permission. I publicly took the Pledge for the first time the previous summer.

[Cut to still close-up photo of three campers (two media majors)]

Renaë: So, we have to have some kind of a guideline to help us know how to behave.” And they said, you know, [Back to Renaë] “What do we want? What do we want people to get out of this experience? How do we want people to treat each other and themselves?” [Still image of a couple of past media majors and Renaë in the Lodge foyer] And they spent a lot of time that summer they sat down and they wrote that pledge. (Hall, et al. 2017)

Framing their direct action within the Pledge situated the protestors them as agentive recipients of and participants in a longer history and example of youth-led activism. Ultimately, camp staff and the founder agreed that their demands were not unreasonable and that the YAB members had presented them in a very well-organized and professional manner. The media class finished their projects with extra class time the next day, and they screened them on the closing day of camp at Nettlefest, which was the first year that the final class presentations for staff and families were part of the celebratory festival with local bands and food that was open to the broader community.

The following summer, I interviewed Nicole Hall, one of the key YAB members who organized the protest and whose sister was one of the campers who produced the video about the High Rocks Pledge. I asked her to tell me about the walkout that she helped stage, which I understood to be a part of the leadership role and the tradition of High Rocks in terms of how girls participate.

So yes. So [at High Rocks] we’re also taught like how to stand up for ourselves and how to keep this place in check because ... this place is ... ours also. So, it’s our responsibility to make sure it stays the way it should. And whenever those standards aren’t met, we have to fix it. So, whenever we had a walkout, it was because we felt like the communication at Camp Steele, I believe, was really just dropped. And we weren’t being heard, and we had a lot of concerns, small or large, they were, they were important to us. And we were trying to communicate them to other adults, and they were just like, “That’s not my job.” or “You should try someone else.” Or it was just like, really like dead-end, sort of just get-out-of-that-conversation answers that really weren’t showing us any results. So, we

secretly went around and “salted,” which is where you get other people riled up and ... get their attention, and we told them the place, the time ... [TC: “Salted,” did you say?] Yes. [TC: “Salted?”] Yeah, we were salting, and we told all the girls to, instead of going to their majors after breakfast, to walk out into the field by the picnic table, ‘cause it was a writing surface. And it was a group effort among the older girls because we had had a previous discussion about it, but whenever there’s way too many strong leadership roles, a lot of people butt heads. And it almost didn’t happen, to be honest, ‘cause a lot of people felt like it wasn’t theirs anymore. So, they stepped back and were like, “Okay, this is just yours now.” And I was like, “We’ve worked way too hard so far to just not make this happen.” So, we all went out there, well as many as we could get, and we tried to make sure everyone was unified.

And we just had a really fulfilling conversation, and we made a list on a whiteboard of issues we saw. And then we met with a couple of adults in the field, and we talked them through our demands and let them know that we needed to see some change because High Rocks wasn’t feeling the way it was supposed to. And the magic was lacking, and that was not okay. So, we needed to fix it. And these were some of the issues we needed to fix, and we were totally willing to sit down together and work on solutions and not just hand them a bunch of problems. But some of the issues we didn’t have the answers to right away and definitely needed to sit down and have another conversation. And ... it made the girls feel a lot better and more empowered, and this had happened previously in the history of High Rocks. .... I remember a story of a girl I really look up to, who booted the people in charge of Girls Group, which is like our safe space to talk about everything emotional and raw, she just booted them out, and they all just held their own Girls Group. Or she also led a talk with everyone because she felt that High Rocks was being disrespected and really got the point across to everybody. And it was just very motivational to see another girl like that, and I hope that I pass down that fire that she gave to me. (Hall 2018)

Nicole’s narrative of how they planned and implemented the protest represents several layers of leadership, learning, and mentorship at High Rocks that includes the formal structures of participation, spontaneous demonstrations of camper ownership, and modeling relationships and examples for others.

Membership on the YAB represents a tradition of acknowledging and supporting “young people as leaders” at High Rocks Educational Corporation, and it is actually a paid youth position within the organization “where participants have helped craft our programs and priorities” (see Leadership page of opportunities, High Rocks Educational

Corporation n.d.). During the rest of the year, YAB members attend board meetings and meet regularly with the High Rocks director and staff. So, the sit-in at Camp Steele represented not only an extension of active YAB leadership through summer programming, but also a long-term continuation of participants articulating and advocating for their needs and goals. While their direct action was in one sense disruptive of the camp schedule and curriculum, it demonstrates the core High Rocks mission to “educate, empower, and inspire young people in West Virginia” as well as the tradition of participants advancing their voices and agency in the organization by calling for and making change as issues and needs arise. Campers who major in the “social movements” track are also educated about the history of important movements in the region as well as practical activist and organizing strategies. In addition, these classes provide regional histories and background for understanding and responding to issues facing their local communities, like fracking, natural gas pipelines, mountaintop removal, “natural disasters,” etc.

At the end of another interview with Caroline Ackerman, a University of Kentucky freshman who had interned at High Rocks that summer, I asked if she wanted to add anything else that she thought was important about youth media education and activism in the Appalachian region. Like Nicole, she reiterated the importance of listening to youth voices as they practice agency.

I think just that they [young people] have so much more to say than people give them credit for. I think that was something we saw this summer is with the protest in the field. (Laughs) The stand-in on the wet grass (laughs), that when you teach youth how to, when you give them the tools to advocate for themselves, they’ll use them. And they’ll use them in a way that they feel is responsible and just. And I think that we underestimate young people’s ability to do that a lot. (Ackerman 2018)

Unfortunately, the theme of “underestimating” young people and not “giving them credit” is not uncommon, as other stories in this and other chapters attest, but young people and youth educators/advocates contest this repeatedly throughout this dissertation and through their work in the region.

This portrayal of protest and an unexpected day in camp life at High Rocks illustrates the context of student resistance and leadership that challenge the primacy and “authority” of adult voices who “talk too much” (Taft 2015), which is also a built-in part of the organization’s history and pedagogy. By the end of this particular camp, I was grateful for the energy and leadership of veteran campers at Camp Steele for modeling a direct action that I had only heard stories about previously and for the opportunity to stretch my own learning about sharing power. The campers also practiced manifesting the concrete implications of the High Rocks Pledge in terms of respect for self, “this place,” and others, which includes sufficient materials to work with and maintenance of physical structures, which I discuss further in the next chapter. The sit-in and Nicole’s explanation of how and why they organized the direct action demonstrate the protestors’ sense of ownership, agency, responsibility, and idealistic pragmatism.

Intergenerational mentorship networks within and across varied regional sites in Meta’lachia include long-term kinship and organizational relationships built by earlier cohorts of young people now serving younger generations who are maintaining, reshaping, and leading them. By highlighting the voices of young media makers and their “formerly young” and peer mentors in different educational and organizational settings in Central Appalachia, this chapter focuses on “youth” as a space of activism and

experience in different social contexts, and intergenerational mentorship and leadership succession as youth cohorts grow older and “age out” of programs.

#### 4.2 Comparison of Organizations, Programs, and Youth Leadership Models

*“It’s thanks to many of the young people who were there in 1969 that we’ve made it all the way to our 50th anniversary year” and announced the rededication of the Appalshop theater “in honor of some of Appalshop’s early leaders” and “their incredible contributions to our infrastructure, our arts & media programming, even our founding itself.” - Appalshop E-newsletter (November 2019)*

AMI, High Rocks, and the PFE arts-based programming in East(ern) Kentucky schools like OCHS, provide different social contexts and opportunities for place-based self-making and world-making through various media. This section compares summer media education programs in youth-driven non-profit organizations and public-school contexts. All three sites, as well as other schools and communities in Meta’lachia, are connected to storytelling practices of community-based theater/drama as both current performance projects as well as historical and dialectic relationships between theater and media-making projects. AMI and High Rocks both share long-term programs with familial history/leadership and share ties with the Highlander Center as founding partners of the STAY Project (Riley 2013; Smith 2013). Both AMI and High Rocks are driven by youth feedback and leadership to articulate and implement the kind of space and programming that they wanted or needed. They both offer paid internships and youth leadership positions, and both include extended residential programs and significant summer experiences that provide social contexts of practicing and modeling leadership and accountability.

In contrast to such residential programming at AMI and High Rocks, artist residencies bring media education and other arts programming to public-school students

where they are. In public school settings, students do not have access to the same level of critical media literacy or sustained engagement in a residential learning community. Instead, they participate in very short-term projects (two days, two weeks, two months, etc.), and sometimes several short-term arts residencies over a longer-term grant-funded period, facilitated by people like Judy Sizemore who have worked for *decades* to build relationships with state agencies, non-profit organizations, public school systems, teachers, and students.

AMI and High Rocks are both “generational” spaces where young people can imagine, witness, access, and produce fluid gender identities and other intersectional identity possibilities. During the period of fieldwork, I observed a somewhat inverse relationship and gradual shift of organizational gender identity in terms of the service population identified in the mission and programming. AMI as a mixed gender program shifted to include more feminist, female/femme-identifying, and trans-supporting focus, and High Rocks shifted from serving “girls” to “youth” more broadly in some programs. *Gender and sexuality* are also predominant themes of youth media productions at AMI and High Rocks where the social spaces are inclusive of diverse gender identities/experiences and sexual orientations by design (Adams and Griffith 2017; Blair, et al. 2004; Caldwell and Swinney 2011; Collier and Pratt 2018; Cummings and Clark 2018; Eisenbeiss, et al. 2014; Forren, et al. 2014; Fugate 2016a; Hall and Cutright 2015; Johnson, et al. 2018; Sealey and McCallister 2016; Spangler, et al. 2015). One of the 2017 AMI films, *It Goes Unspoken*, focuses on gendered roles and labor issues and the underseen and underappreciated impact of Appalachian women as the “backbone” and

“gatekeepers” in their communities (Adams and Griffith 2017), which I discuss more in-depth in Chapter 6 on make-do media.

The 2018 AMI Summer Documentary Institute was the first time the program focused specifically on reproductive justice issues through a multi-partnership supported project known as All Access EKY. The aim of the program is to use “a combination of education, storytelling, advocacy and community-organizing [to address] the root cause of unplanned pregnancy in Southeastern Kentucky” by helping provide young people with “access to and correct information about birth control and reproductive health care, as well as the opportunity to make their own decisions about their future” (All Access EKY n.d.). The projects that summer also intersected with rural transportation, access to healthcare, and LGBTQ communities (Johnson, et al. 2018) as well as sex education (Cummings and Clark 2018) and the common phenomenon of grandparents raising their grandchildren in the Appalachian region and whether and how they discussed sexuality, birth control, etc. (Collier and Pratt 2018).

Shaylan Clark, who co-produced and presented her first AMI film, *Dying Breed* (Rose, et al. 2017) at the 2018 ASA conference, participated in the All Access EKY SDI that summer. She contrasted her experience of the program as mixed gender and all “women” as well as the constraints of theme-based grant-funded programming compared to the more typical open-ended topic selection at AMI.

[T]his year [2018], we didn’t get to pick *whatever*. Because they [AMI] partnered with Bedsider, we had to tie our films back to the conversation of ... not just women’s health, but health in general, like reproductive health, and ... safe sex, and things like that. At the beginning, I was a little frustrated because I had all these ideas from last summer that I was like, “There’s this issue, and this issue, and this issue that we can tackle with the next film.” But I didn’t get as much freedom. But ... I’m kind of thankful in a way because it challenged me. It was like you have a topic, but you still have freedom. So, like, how do you use what



little freedom that you do have .... to raise awareness for this specific issue, although it's not the issue that I would've initially picked, it was an issue. So, after they told me that, I was a little on the fence about it, not knowing if I wanted to do it or not because it didn't give me all the freedom. But then when I looked at it as a challenge, I was like, "Yeah. 'Cause if I go as far with this as I want to, I know that there are gonna be times that I don't, I'm not completely in charge of the project. And so I need to learn how to work with what I have and still get my vision across, while with someone else's subject. (Clark 2018b)

I asked about the gender composition of the cohort, which I understood was mostly cis-gendered female identified participants.

[T]hat was kind of another issue that put me on the fence with it, was that it was, .... mostly females this time, and in the first AMI, I loved it because it was like guys and girls got a chance to come together and like learn new skills. And I felt like this time because it was mostly female, it took away an opportunity for guys in the area that wanted to do this. Because I had friends that were like, "Are you doing AMI?" And I couldn't, you know, tell, "Oh, you're a boy, you can't join." That just seemed kind of wrong to me. I felt like, to me, AMI included everyone. It gave all young people a chance to practice their skills, and show off their work, and learn more about media. (Coughs) So when it was ... more female-driven, I was a little... I was a little upset about it. It turned out good, and I love everyone that I worked with, but at the end of the day, like I still feel like guys should know this just as much as girls should. .... They should know more about [both media and] reproductive health. Even if it's focused more around women's reproductive health, guys still need that knowledge. So, like why not include them? ... I feel like there's a big argument about how men don't know about our bodies, but they want to control our bodies. And like here's this opportunity to bring young men in and teach them about our bodies, and about their bodies as well, but instead of doing that, we kind of close it off and made it like an "all-girls club," like girls learning about things that we already know.

Bedsider is an organization that focuses on ... reproductive health, and safe sex, ... and access to reproductive health things, and access to, uh, things that help young people have safe sex. .... it's a lot of focus on ... birth control, and things like that. Which is, I understand it's mostly for women, but I still feel like guys need to know about it. (Clark 2018b)

Unexpected loss of agency in picking topics and critique of limiting participants because reproductive health is not only an issue for cis-gendered young women. When I noted that Shaylan was in a unique position to compare different AMI experiences, she ultimately said that she was glad to have the challenge of both.

I loved both summers. I'm happy that this summer challenged me. And I'm happy that last summer gave me the freedom to kind of choose something that I'm passionate about. And this summer made me learn about something that I didn't really know much about and *become* passionate about it. So, both summers were really good. One was a little bit more of a challenge, but I'm extremely happy that I did it because it did. It showed me a lot. (Clark 2018b)

In contrast to these youth-driven organizations and media education programs based on critical media literacy, public schools do not offer in-depth education opportunities related to diverse gender identities or reproductive health. However, other opportunities can sometimes unexpectedly create space for different issues to arise. For example, OCHS participated in a series of content-specific grant-funded video projects called "Safe Dates" that was supposed to focus on dating violence.

So, we did a [video] project, it was called, "Safe Dates," and .... it was through Promise Neighborhood, and so there were other schools that had already done the project. But we were able to kind of adapt it to our students. It was a very small, like, limited cast. We literally worked five days, and on the fifth day we filmed from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 when the buses were leaving. We held the school buses like, "30 more seconds we're still filming!" It was crazy, but .... that play really focused on domestic violence, and it was all about .... teenage dating violence awareness. And so like, reaching out and showing students what, what is happening in, you know, maybe with their friends or at their school that they don't, maybe they don't recognize or they don't want to recognize, and kind of showing students an alley out of that. And so that's what .... "Safe Dates" was about. And ... I directed that, and .... we had a camera man that helped. And then we had outside help from people with Promise Neighborhood come, and we picked like a very selective cast of students, which was really interesting because we picked students that hadn't ever even been in a play or been on camera some of them, and so we just like really wanted people that had no experience and were just willing to try something. So that was a really interesting project, and they all got really devoted to it very quickly. Like, when we started, it was like, "How many of you have ever seen this happen, or know of this?" And all of them were like, "Yeah, well my friend's boyfriend is like this," or "I have a cousin who [clears throat] went through this." And so everybody was related to it somehow, which was really shocking, I guess, that so many people had ties back to domestic violence. And so I was glad that we were able to kind of highlight that in that film, and we ended up presenting that to every middle schooler in my school. (Baldwin 2016)

In addition to the crash-course in filmmaking and conscious inclusion of students with little previous experience, the project enabled young people to have more open conversations about intimate partner and gendered violence in their home community, and it also facilitated opportunities for Frankie Jo to serve as an intergenerational peer mentor to younger kids. Another research collaborator involved with the “Safe Dates” project said the media education and production process also facilitated some students’ expression of diverse gender identities to the project leader and others, which was an unanticipated outcome. The next year, the “Safe Dates” project allowed for more flexibility in the topics and scripts that students could pursue in their videos.

In their cultural productions during the period of fieldwork, young people participating in place-based media education programs deal with the common theme of Appalachia(ness) and have explored issues that challenge stereotypically homogenous depictions of the Appalachian region and essentializing notions of who Appalachians are and what they care about. While all place-based, themes of youth films produced in these different programs reflect the particular social contexts they were immersed in and the stories and resources they could access within and through those contexts. For example, AMI film themes vary each year depending on participants, and some AMI interns are more mobile and can drive to other counties or even bordering states during production. Some research collaborators from earlier cohorts of youth were educators, mentors, or “aging out” of youth programs at the time. Some of their productions included place-based topics focusing on the consequences of coal as labor and livelihood, like *Blood Stained Coal* (Pigman, et al. 2000) and *True Cost of Coal* (Johnson, et al. 2007), and

local youth identities, *My Friend Tommy* (Hamilton, et al. 2009) and *Youth Bored* (Spangler and Campbell 2002).

At High Rocks and schools, overall themes are usually defined by the organization/project, and all projects produced through media education programs are mediated through meshworks of institutions, power structures, and relative levels of adult authority/guidance. As discussed in previous chapters, youth voices and projects are mediated through adults, institutions, etc., which is still a constraint on youth agency and a potential limitation of these social contexts. Place-based digital stories at High Rocks are mostly confined to camp physical and social geography, and public-school projects are also mostly limited to participants and topics accessible within their school building/campus or family relationships at home.

Because of its accessibility, the genre and creation of “Where I’m From” poems is a common place-based storytelling exercise in Appalachian schools and other educational programs, which has enabled many children and young people to envision themselves and their place. Harlan County poet and 2015-2016 Kentucky Poet Laureate and literary meta-mentor George Ella Lyon credits her friend Jo Carson<sup>86</sup> as part of the inspiration for her well-known poem “Where I’m From.” Lyon developed lesson plans for helping others write their own poems, which she developed into a website.<sup>87</sup> Lyon’s encouraging

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<sup>86</sup> On her website, Lyon says that she drew from one of the poems in Carson’s poetry collection, *Stories I Ain’t Told Nobody Yet* (Carson 1989), which included a piece from the perspective of someone who wonders “when you get to be from a place” and who identifies as being “from Interstate 40” and “from the work my father did” (Lyon n.d.). Lyon wrote her poem later when she “decided to see what would happen if I made my own where-I’m-from lists” (Lyon n.d.). Carson is an often invisible or unspoken meta-mentor except within “theater for development” (Martin 2017) or community-based theater circles where she is considered a founding ancestor.

<sup>87</sup> When she became Poet Laureate, Lyon further expanded “Where I’m From” into a state-wide project with a goal of collecting poems from each of Kentucky’s 120 counties, and her efforts resulted in the collection and online curation of 731 poems from eighty-three counties (Lyon n.d.).

advice from the writing exercise makes this accessible even to students who do not think of themselves as writers: “Remember, you are the expert on you. No one else sees the world as you do; no one else has your material to draw on. You don’t have to know where to begin. Just start. Let it flow. Trust the work to find its own form” (Lyon n.d.). It can be as simple as a written exercise and as complex as an edited digital story incorporating multiple voices and images.<sup>88</sup> “Where I’m From” poems are a regular written exercise as part of the “Creative Expressions” curriculum at the two-week New Beginnings and other programming at High Rocks. There are a couple of published examples by High Rocks girls Shaylen Lafferty (2014:2) and Aurora Cutright (2014:15) in the Fall 2014 newsletter (2014b). The organization has a substantial library of “Where I’m From” poems written by High Rocks participants that is not currently available online but represents an important place-based writing tradition among campers and alumni over many years.

Another Kentucky-based and Appalachian-focused example of “Where I’m From” poems is on the “Our Creative Promise” website (Our Creative Promise 2018), some of which I assisted with as a teaching artist. For the “Our Creative Promise” creative asset mapping project, students from several schools produced personal or group versions of “Where I’m From” video poems about their lives and local communities, which are featured as “Youth Lens” perspectives on different county profile pages. For example, students from Hazard High School wrote a collective poem about their school

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<sup>88</sup> In addition to Lyon’s original poem and lesson plan on her “Where I’m From” website (Lyon n.d.), the Kentucky Arts Council website includes the collected submissions from participating Kentucky counties during Lyon’s time as Poet Laureate as well as some variations on the poem writing exercise (Kentucky Arts Council n.d.). Since her tenure as Poet Laureate of Kentucky, Lyon has joined with another writer and educator to expand it to a national level with the “I Am From” project, which invites people to submit multimedia representations of their versions of the poem as “a way to celebrate diversity at a time when our country is divided by hatred and fear” (Lyon and Landsman n.d.).

and town, which highlighted multicultural food and celebrations like “A Seat at the Table” and their school’s active support of homeless students and families (Hazard High School Students 2017). Digital stories from “Our Creative Promise” included interviews with peers, elders, family members, artists, and teachers in their communities in addition to several “Where I’m From” poems and other original works. Participants who attended the closing symposium for the project were honored to meet George Ella Lyon in person and listen to her read her original poem.

Other place-based themes of AMI, High Rocks, and PFE projects include different *generational* experiences and relationships between them (Williams, et al. 2014), including the importance of grandparents (Collier and Pratt 2018; Eisenbeiss, et al. 2014; Hall, et al. 2014; Hamblin 2017; Sealey and McCallister 2016; Spangler and Campbell 2002); local/organizational *histories* (Bell ; Caldwell, et al. 2014; Caldwell, et al. 2018; Coleman and Phillips 2016; Eisenbeiss, et al. 2014; Forren, et al. 2014; Hall and Neeley 2016; Hall, et al. 2017; Hall and Cutright 2015; Mullens and Snider 2018; Sealey and McCallister 2016; Spangler and Campbell 2002; Tucker, et al. 2017; Zuckett and Harbert 2015); local/regional community economic *development, livelihoods/labor*, including coal specifically among earlier AMI cohorts (Baum and Kiser 2017; Caldwell, et al. 2014; Hamilton and Dunn 2014; Hunter, et al. 2017; Johnson, et al. 2007; Lowe, et al. 2016; Napier, et al. 2017; Pigman, et al. 2000; Riley, et al. 2017; Rose, et al. 2017; Terry and Anonymous OCHS Student 2017; West Perry Elementary School 5th Grade Social Studies, et al. 2019); *environment and health* (reproductive, mental, etc.) (Adams and Griffith 2018; Bell ; Collier and Pratt 2018; Cummings and Clark 2018; Johnson, et al. 2018; Rose, et al. 2017); *art* (Baum and Kiser 2017; Bedel 2016; Cook, et al. 2018;

Fugate 2012; HCHS Students 2018; Knox Appalachian School, et al. 2019; Our Creative Promise 2018); and *racialized and minoritized* lives and discourse (Baker and Combs 2016; Cuniff, et al. 2015; Jent, et al. 2015).

From observations and conversations about “youth” and leadership over the years, I identified multiple progressive and sometimes overlapping roles that organizations and young people construct, access, and occupy through different social contexts. Some are official designations, titles, and/or paid opportunities within programs or organizations, and some are more amorphous (often unspoken) identities/practices embodied and enacted by research collaborators. AmeriCorps/VISTA positions, which are “volunteer” positions with stipends, are common in all sites and are tailored to the different program areas and needs of the local community or organization. Different structures and names of youth leadership roles sometimes use similar language or concepts but have certain meanings in different programs. For example, both public schools and High Rocks have “students,” but these educational settings differ in their level and type of formal compliance with federal and state educational standards and funding requirements. Similarly, both AMI and High Rocks have “interns,” but at AMI it refers to the paid participants in its Summer Documentary Institute, which includes high-school and college-age youth, as opposed to the more traditional undergraduate “interns” who receive academic credit for service-based positions, like the paid interns who help plan and operate the two High Rocks Academy summer camps. The notion of young people as “peer mentors” who teach and learn from one another is common, but this is also more formalized in specific sites, like the “Peer Trainers” at AMI who are often alumni of the

program and have a paid apprenticeship-type position assisting the primary educators for the Summer Documentary Institute.

High Rocks also offers several distinct paid youth leadership positions, which include “Junior Counselors” (“JCs”) at the two-week New Beginnings camp, one of the earliest employment opportunities for High Rocks participants (Terman 2009:77-78).<sup>89</sup> The 2014 “High Rocks Camp Manual” discusses the important role that JCs play in intergenerational mentorship, communication, and leadership in programming at New Beginnings camp. The High Rocks self-identified “best practices” include inside insight about impact of the early transition from camper to JC for high-school-age participants. This liminal experience of moving from and between different roles and leadership positions is a common process of “aging out” that I also encountered and documented in other settings (Clemons 2020:41-42) and discuss further in Section 4.4. As mentioned in the story about the High Rocks sit-in that introduced this chapter, membership on the “Youth Advisory Board” (YAB) is another paid leadership position on the progression of youth leadership. High Rocks “graduates” often return to serve in summer internships, AmeriCorps/VISTA positions, and/or eventually as professional staff.

Another common learning/leadership role that had different definitions in different Meta'lachian contexts was the notion of “apprentices.”<sup>90</sup> For example, the PFE Teaching Artist Directory is a juried roster of “both emerging and experienced artists in

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<sup>89</sup> The “Progression Through High Rocks” document (among several important guiding documents for participants and others serving in different leadership and educational roles at High Rocks), includes a year-by-year description of activities and “Community and Leadership” opportunities that young people can access through different stages of learning and service (see Curriculum page, High Rocks Educational Corporation n.d.).

<sup>90</sup> As a researcher, I was an ethnographic “apprentice” (cf. Anderson-Lazo 2016), and in many situations, simultaneously an apprentice and a mentor, a teacher and a learner, as demonstrated in the sit-in at High Rocks.



various disciplines (including visual, performing, literary, media and folk arts)” who are eligible for arts residencies in public schools in the PFE Promise Neighborhood/Zone service region in East(ern) Kentucky. The PFE payment tiers for teaching artists on the regional roster includes a “reasonable wage” that they should expect based on level of artistic/teaching experience/expertise and “wages from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for independent artists and performers and guidelines for Kentucky Arts Council teaching artist programs” (2020 PFE Teaching Artist Directory). The current PFE teaching artist categories are Master (new in 2020), Professional, Teaching Artist with Significant Experience, Teaching Artist with Experience, and Apprentice.

Formal arts-based grant-funded apprenticeships also support relationship-building and knowledge succession among independent artists who may not necessarily be embedded within other formal artistic or educational institutions. For example, the Kentucky Arts Council (KAC) offers a “Folk and Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Grant” that supports “the continuation of Kentucky’s living traditional arts by funding master artists to teach skills and practices vital to their cultural heritage to less experienced artists within their communities” (Kentucky Arts Council 2020a). In 2020, regional arts advocacy organization South Arts announced the creation of a new mentor/apprentice program as part of its “In These Mountains: Central Appalachian Folk Arts & Culture” (ITM) multi-component project. The ITM “Folk & Traditional Arts Cross-Border Mentor-Apprentice Program .... is specifically designed to support mentor artist and apprentice relationships that cross state borders” and serves ARC counties in Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia (South Arts 2020).

I also observed more informal examples of significant and enduring mentor/apprentice-type relationships that connect people over time, across organizations and sometimes space. Some of these relationships and “lineages” included multiple connections between AMI and High Rocks as well as Highlander, ASA, and other well-known regional institutions. Within the context of arts education in Kentucky public schools, teaching artists like Judy Sizemore are important mentors to many young people. For example, Natalie Gabbard is the Arts and Humanities Project Director for Berea College Partners for Education (PFE) and grew up in Jackson County, Kentucky. When I asked how she became interested in arts and humanities education and working with young people, she said:

.... I think I've always been interested ... in the arts, I didn't grow up with any kind of formal or education background, which didn't have opportunities for arts education, really, as a part of a standard public education system ... in Jackson County. What I did have were occasional visits from teaching artists like Judy Sizemore, who's still working in the arts and a close friend of mine and a colleague now. But I remember that she used to come to our classroom when I was in elementary school at Tyner, and she would do creative writing programming with us. And she also did some kind of afterschool program over at the Annville Institute, which I don't really understand how it operates now, some kind of summer camp type thing. But at the time, they were able to offer some after school programming, and we did pottery and some creative writing. And it wasn't something that happened all, year-round, it was just like, for a semester or something like them. So, she did that. And .... she is now always trying to get visiting artists and additional arts programming in the schools. She was still doing that, you know, ... when I was a kid. But I never had, like an art teacher until, in elementary school at all. When I got to middle school, we had visual arts instruction on like a nine-week rotation, once a year. And that's it. And then, when I got to high school, it was an elective. So as far as visual arts, I didn't really pursue that in high school, but I always appreciated like, the humanities, I would say. (Gabbard 2017)

Natalie returned to Kentucky after graduate school in California and started working for PFE, and she had to learn more about how arts education works in Kentucky, different arts disciplines, and “what is or isn't happening in our region.” Her connection to Judy

was an important source of mentorship and knowledge for Natalie personally as well as for the implementation of arts-related programming funded by the Promise Neighborhood grant. “I don’t know exactly how we would be doing right now if it weren’t for Judy Sizemore and her involvement from, you know, early on. I mean, she’s really a legend in arts education in our region. So she’s basically been a mentor for me” (Gabbard 2017). Natalie benefitted from Judy’s presence as the only source of arts education in elementary school, which she connects directly to her later professional relationship with her through PFE programming.

In my interactions with Natalie in arts education meetings and working as a teaching artist for PFE, I noticed that she acknowledges this personal mentorship connection at most public gatherings where she is introducing Judy as a presenter, co-facilitator, etc. In fact, Natalie concluded her support for a teaching award nomination on Judy’s behalf by emphasizing the continuing long-term impact of her intergenerational mentorship with students.

It has been my great privilege to work with Judy Sizemore as a professional colleague over the years, and I often attribute any success I’ve had as an arts administrator to Judy’s involvement and massive influence in our collective efforts to improve arts education opportunities in Appalachian Kentucky. The truth is, I likely would not be involved in this type of work at all if I had not been one of Judy’s young students some thirty years ago. Some of my earliest memories of self-expression and feelings of creative fulfillment are from Judy Sizemore’s artist residencies in my community as an elementary student in eastern Kentucky. As a teaching artist, Judy introduced me to arts experiences I did not have local access to otherwise and helped me to establish a foundation and appreciation for broader cultural awareness. My passion for the work I do now is rooted in those significant early arts experiences I had with Judy and the hope of providing those same types of empowering, transformative opportunities for current students in Appalachian Kentucky. The cyclical impact of Judy Sizemore’s teaching likely stretches further than she would acknowledge, though I expect there are now generations of Appalachian students (and ones to come) who know that their place and creativity are important because of the legendary work of Judy Sizemore. (Quoted with permission)

Hayley Bowling is a young person from Jackson County who was mentored by Judy and became a Chautauqua performer who researched and scripted the first-person story of Anna Mac Clarke, a “young African-American woman who volunteered with the Women’s Army Corps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor” (Bowling 2009:7).

At age 14, I saw a Kentucky Chautauqua performance for the first time. Hasan Davis played Angus Augustus Burleigh, a soldier in the United States Civil War. .... I didn’t know one person, acting alone, could conjure such emotion.

I saw him perform the same character again a few months later for a filming of the piece. As a friend of a friend, Hasan allowed me to give the introduction. Again he cried. And I felt even more of this soldier’s life seep into my being.

“You could do that,” said Judy Sizemore, outreach director for the Kentucky Arts Council, who had been my mentor since I was 9. She had let me tag along to both of Hasan’s performances.

“Yes, I could,” I said. “When I grow up.”

“You could do it *now*.”

....

At 16, I was accepted into the Chautauqua program and was able to begin the one-year preparation period of developing the information I had gathered into a living, breathing character of Kentucky history. (Bowling 2009:7)

Judy was Hayley’s source for learning about Chautauqua, and her encouraging support helped Hayley see herself as capable of living her dream in the present instead of the future.

As discussed in Chapter 2 and elsewhere (Clemons 2020), youth identities are not fixed to specific ages or time periods. Similarly, mentorship roles among and between youth and elders are on a continuum that align with differently aged “young” people,

“peers,” and “elders.”<sup>91</sup> For example, I discerned “young ‘elders’” who, like “peer mentors,” were the same or similar chronological age of their peers, but had significant leadership, teaching, and/or production experience that other young people looked up to. “Young ‘elders’” in field sites included formal roles like Peer Trainers at AMI, JCs and Interns at High Rocks, as well as young and “formerly young” adults serving in AmeriCorps/VISTA positions.

Oakley Fugate is one such significant figure in the fabric of AMI and the Boone Youth Drop-In Center in Whitesburg, and many younger kids, like the 5<sup>th</sup> graders I worked with on the West Perry Elementary podcasts for the ACAY project (WPE Students 2019), look up to older students, especially those who self-identify as artists. At High Rocks, “‘young’ elders” included young/adults like director Sarah Riley and Renae Hall, a High Rocks alumna and staff member at the time, whose chronological ages were between that of founder Susan Burt and the young people in the program, but they were the high-profile representation of the primary leadership of the overall organization and the summer camp experience. Similarly, people like Willa Johnson and Mikie Burke, who were fellow AMI alumni from the same cohort(s) and educators for the Summer Documentary Institute at the time, were “‘young’ elders” who had progressed through the program and remained in media-related professional positions in their home county. “Formerly young” adults like myself and “formerly young” elders like Judy Sizemore represent another level along both the chronological age range as well as of experience and expertise as teaching artists and collaborators with students and teachers in public

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<sup>91</sup> Cf. more formalized progressive age-sets and roles of junior warriors, senior warriors, junior elders, and finally senior elders “who make decisions for the group” within Maasai and Samburu traditions (Fay 2010a; Fay 2010b) and transgressions that “*queered* temporalities of ageing [sic]” (Meiu 2015, emphasis original).

schools and other settings. Likewise, Judy simultaneously mentors teaching artists like me as we learn and practice the art of mentoring students. Ultimately, young people must first access media education and leadership development opportunities like those offered by AMI, High Rocks, and PFE as I discuss in the next section.

#### 4.3 Access of Organizations, Programs, and Other Opportunities

The first level of access for public-school and non-profit educational programs is living within their service region and falling within their designated age range of the service population (see Table 1 for a comparative summary of the three primary field sites). In this section, I briefly discuss schools and primarily focus on how young people access non-profit media education programs like AMI and High Rocks (or not). Artist residencies and media projects offered and/or supported through third-party organizations like the Kentucky Arts Council and Berea College Partners for Education largely depend on the interest/initiative of individual teachers and, where available, site-based coordinators of grant-funded programs.

For grant-funded school-based projects offered through non-profit initiatives like PFE, student access depends on which counties fall within their East(ern) Kentucky service region and are included in specific grant-based programs; which teachers and teaching artists collaborate and in what subject area(s); what level of parental permission/release they can secure for their full participation and public acknowledgement for. Some teachers and teaching artists partner year after year, building long-term relationships and production output of creative student projects. Sometime students are lucky enough to continue encountering teaching artists like Judy Sizemore in different classrooms as they advance through grades. Otherwise, the teachers benefit

more from sustained collaborations with a teaching artist over time than most of the students in their classroom at a given moment, and young people do not necessarily see, understand, or appreciate the behind-the-scenes funding and programming support for arts education that grants and visiting teaching artists provide at the time.

For young people like Natalie and Haley, arts programming and teaching artists like Judy provide access to creative outlets, encouragement, and professional possibilities they would not have otherwise. However, school-based programming can sometimes also be exclusive in terms of who is selected to participate in limited opportunities, which is usually those who are already academically inclined and/or prominent student leaders. Also, networks of support like PFE (as well as AMI and High Rocks) are not visible and accessible to all young people who technically fall within their service region or age range (cf. OCHS graduates Frankie Jo Baldwin and Logan Woodward from the same county in this chapter).

When I asked how people became involved with non-profit education programs/projects, most participants learned about and accessed programs through direct or indirect social capital connecting them with these resources. Their reasons for participating range from family members, friends who participated, teachers, visitors to schools, to needing a job. Older youth learn about leadership positions through AmeriCorps/VISTA, service-learning networks, other regional media-production workshops, and even some DIY searching for internship opportunities in the region.

As previously discussed, the founding origins of AMI and High Rocks are through friends and family connections and a direct lineage of young people who began working with the nascent program and continued working in various capacities over the

years. For example, AMI alumn and peer trainer Oakley Fugate first learned about Appalshop through a family connection and then through AMI educators, one of whom was also an alumn, who came to his school.

[M]y cousin, William Johnson, was in one of the Appalshop's films in the '90s, *Fat[s] Monroe* with Ned Beatty? ... He played the little boy in the truck. .... So, like I got to watch that, .... [and] once I heard of AMI, you know, I was already making like, films. .... [O]bviously they know how to make stuff professionally, so I wanted to go there to learn like as much as I could. And then it like really helped me like come out of my shell, and .... I really don't never want to leave.

I was in my sixth period Fantasy Literature class, which was one of the two only classes in high school that I actually enjoyed. And two, two people from the Appalshop, Ben Spangler and Eagle Brosi, came in and so, and so I got an application, lost that one, went to the office and got another one, and turned it in. (Chuckles) (Fugate 2016b)

AMI alumn Mikie Burke said he learned about AMI from "My Friend Tommy" (Burke 2016), the name of his first AMI project about AMI alumn Tommy Anderson and features him singing a song about applying for the program in the closing credits (Hamilton, et al. 2009).

When I asked Ellie Bell why she chose to participate in the High Rocks program in general and the media track in particular, she said that her mom taught her about High Rocks and that she was basically "expected to go."

[I]n general, I decided to participate in High Rocks because I (pauses), in our community there's not a lot of like social things for kids to do. ... and my mom always brought me up teaching me about High Rocks because she's always been like a super-big advocate for High Rocks and like, girls liking each other and being friends with each other as teenagers. ... so, I kind of was expected to go, you know, like in that way, not that that was ever stated. ... so, I gave it a try, and ... I also watched a bunch of people that I really respect ... that are older than me do the High Rocks thing. So, I wanted to be like them, and I did it. ... and then the media track, there, it's funny that I chose the media track because there was like horse class to choose from, and .... I forget what other classes there were at that point. But I was really into media, I thought that that's what I wanted to do at that point, um, like filmmaking and things like that. So, I just wanted to get a taste of it and learn more about how to use the cameras I think and edit films.



Both family influence and also examples of older girls who she wanted to emulate.

Rae Garringer similarly “always wanted to go” because their sister went, and they hung around camp before they were eligible to participate formally.

[S]o my sister was in the first year that camp happened, along with Blair [Campbell] and lots of other folks. And ... my stepdad was working on the picnic shelter that summer. I was ten, and I went up there during camp, and to help him on the picnic shelter, theoretically, (laughs) but I was ten. So, I actually just got to hang out .... they used to have theatre classes every summer that Margaret Baker would do. So, I got to hang out all day, and do theatre classes and ride home late with Margaret, and I ... just loved it and really wanted to go. So, I guess three years later, was my first year. I always wanted to go, since I first heard about it, I was just like convinced I wanted to be there. So yeah, I went, I guess ‘99 was my first year ... and then was always .... a Junior Counselor, I don’t remember at this point how many times, but multiple times. And I was a college intern and taught at camps since. (Garringer 2015b)

Rae’s progression through different leadership roles at High Rocks is not uncommon but actually codified as part of the intentional design of the organizational structure and programming, as I discuss in greater detail later in this chapter.

For Mabel Eisenbeiss from neighboring Greenbrier County, she was drawn to High Rocks because she wanted “to be part of community of very strong women who would help support me and help me advance what I felt passionate in” (Eisenbeiss 2018). She also said that she felt more “at home” in Pocahontas County than her home county because “That’s where places like High Rocks and my friends live, and I spend a lot of my time during the summer up here, and I feel definitely more connected up here” (Eisenbeiss 2018).

Another common way that young people learned about and accessed AMI and High Rocks was through teachers and school recruiters. When I asked Kyra Higgins why she chose to participate in in AMI, she said:

Oh, that was, to be very honest, it was very coincidental. What had happened is the, I didn't know about it and I didn't remember ever hearing about it, but my art teacher [at Knott County Central High School] looked at me, and it was like getting close to that time where the applications were out and he's like, "There's is program I know about, and I think he'd be very interested in it and at this point I'd never mentioned like going to work with cameras or anything in the class. This was just a straight up you learn to draw techniques and then some coloring and things. But he's like, "I would like you look at this. See if you'd be interested." And I was like, "Sure." I looked I was like, "Oh this sounds kind of awesome! I was like, I like the way that it was set up and it seemed like a big opportunity. And at the time I didn't even know it was a paid internship. I just knew it was happening. I want to do this, so I'll fill out the application and that's where it began. And it's like I finally got into the interview. That's when I learned more about the program and what it was. Oh, what did I just scared myself into. It was a lot bigger than I thought. I was like but I'm still all for it. (Higgins 2017)

Several Harlan County youth who participated in AMI learned about it from Robert Gipe through their involvement with *Higher Ground* (Clark 2018a; Creech 2018; Rutherford 2018). His personal involvement and history with Appalshop and AMI, including active programming in East(ern) Kentucky schools in the 1990s, are well-documented (Gipe and Messer 1992; Mullinax 2012), and his legendary status among local youth was almost immediately established the first summer I visited AMI during the Summer Documentary Institute. After returning from lunch on my second day in Whitesburg, interns were hanging out in the open area of the Boone Building where there were couches, whiteboards, and shelves of AMI films and other Appalshop productions. Some were still working on their projects on computers, others were on their phones, one was on a laptop. It was really quiet for a while, and then there was a discussion about applying to AMI. Devyn Creech, who was from Harlan County, said she applied because of the recommendation from Robert Gipe and involvement in *Higher Ground*, "my gem." The lead educator that summer said, "Robert Gipe's coming over," and another intern asked, "Who's that?" He responded, "He's like the AMI Papaw." Robert showed up later

with the then current AMI director, who was also an AMI alumn, for the interns' screening of their digital story projects.

High Rocks alumn and then staff person Renae Hall talked about Susan Burt, the organization's charismatic founder, visiting her schools to recruit participants for summer camps and other programming (Sealey and McCallister 2016). Nicole Hall, who helped organize and lead the sit-in as a youth peer mentor the previous summer, had just graduated from Richwood High School in neighboring Nicholas County, West Virginia. She was preparing to "graduate" from High Rocks at the end of Camp Steele that summer when I asked her how she learned about High Rocks and why she chose to participate during an interview.

I was just in middle school. I was very uncomfortable with like myself .... and a few of my friends and I got together after, there was a presentation in our little library during lunch. And we decided that we would all sign up together, and out of the bunch, I am the last one that has been involved. .... And so without my friends, I probably wouldn't have had the courage back then to do that. And with the help of High Rocks, I've really blossomed and put myself in different .... classes and opportunities that I probably wouldn't have thought were options for me or I might have shied away from. Like, I joined our Career and Technical Center even though none of my friends were in it. It was also predominantly male. And then I ended up being the manager of our mock-company, and that was a really enlightening moment. And they [High Rocks] just showed me really how to be strong, and they took me on different trips to like colleges, so I figured out what I want to do with my future, or how the steps of getting there would be much easier, and how... It really got ingrained in my head that like college was an option, and I never didn't think that I was going to college after I got involved with High Rocks. And it is really odd to hear, especially in my area, people saying like a lot of youth do not believe they, that college is even an option because it's just been ingrained in my like, "I'm smart enough. I'm strong enough. I'm powerful enough. And I'm persistent enough to get through college." That is just really alien to hear, that a lot of people don't see that as an option for them. (Hall 2018)

When I asked if she remembered who presented at her school, she cited a recruiter, High Rocks alumn, and mutual who came to her school and later became a mentor to her through other roles in the organization.

I remember that one of them was this amazing woman named Yvette. [TC: Yvette!] Uh-huh. [TC: Yvette Robinson] Yes, and then I ended up getting to know her much, much, much more whenever I got involved in the youth center in Richwood, called Steele Studio, along with Kacie Parsons. And we, and the girls that I joined with were also involved in that crew, and it, they were just very good times. We had a lot of fun. We helped out our community quite a lot, and it was just a very nostalgic time for me. .... Others [who had participated in High Rocks] definitely presented it to me, and then once I got in it, it just sort of stuck. And I just kept coming back and coming back. And I've just kept growing, .... I feel like I'm still growing with that. As much as I am in High Rocks, but I'm also indebted to High Rocks for all they have done for me. So now especially, I'm working for it to help better it and help better these girls the way it did to me because I feel like, the most important aspect of High Rocks is the people and the bonds we make with them and the community we share. So that's something I definitely want to keep alive, and if some girl can make that connection with me, and I can make a connection with them, that we strengthen each other and make our lives better, then they'll keep coming back and keep meeting these people, and keep having these experiences and stay on a good track, and don't get down on themselves or depressed, or get sucked into, like, the drug epidemic, or the lack of jobs around here. And they'll just see that the world has possibilities, that if they work hard enough and are smart enough, they can find the right ways to maneuver it. (Hall 2018)

Nicole learned about High Rocks from other people who had gone through the program, which she accessed through her school and the “courage” to participate through relationships that helped her access other sustaining relationships through High Rocks. These experiences in turn helped Nicole develop the confidence to participate in more public speaking and leadership roles at High Rocks, her school, and even state-level educational forums. She also recognized the effort that access and giving back to such networks requires while avoiding common pitfalls of isolation and destruction.

While many young people connected with both AMI and High Rocks through school programming and recruitment, some research collaborators discussed how the

social contexts of organizations and programs like Appalshop/AMI and High Rocks are perceived by the broader communities and some of the stereotypes associated with outside perceptions of who they are and what they do (Burke 2016; Hall and Cutright 2015; Jent 2016; Johnson 2016). For example, Brandon Jent talked about how reception in local schools was not always welcoming.

I feel like when I was in high school there wasn't really very many opportunities. And a big, uh, complaint that I have about the education system here in general is that I feel like a lot of small-town politics get in the way of opportunities for kids. So, like with Appalshop, there's no in-between really in Letcher County ... or maybe even Eastern Kentucky in general. You either love them or hate them. Period. There's no like on-the-fence really ... for different reasons, for the same reasons, whatever. ... So, I think people hear AMI, they're like, "Oh, that's Appalshop, like no." .... I've not heard anyone at the school system say [that] .... But that's kind of ... the feeling. Like when they [Appalshop] go and recruit, and they won't let them .... hold an assembly and talk to the kids about this opportunity that could become like a job or a career path for them, that's sketchy. It's like, "Oh, you can leave the applications here. We'll get them to them." I'm like, "Hmm." (Jent 2016)

Former AMI Educators Richards-Schuster and O'Doherty (2012) discuss how the process of "empowerment and reimagining" through media literacy and media production "is not easy, and AMI interns report being targets of discrimination by those in power (for example, county government, school board, coal companies) or those who feel vulnerable to that power (for example, families, teachers) because of their alternative storytelling and ability to ask critical questions." They go on:

Interns struggle to maintain new ideas about themselves and the world while also being connected to their families and friends, who may not support their new ideas. As a result, they sometimes find that their new identity leads them to feel more like "outsiders" because they can see new possibilities that their peers, families, and communities do not see." (Richards-Schuster and O'Doherty 2012) (2012:87)

My first summer serving as lead media teacher in 2015, a team of two young women produced *The Real Camp Steele* (Hall and Cutright 2015) because they wanted to

tell a story that challenged assumptions and dispelled stereotypes that some people spread in the community and to show what really happens at camp. They specifically wanted to stretch the “seriousness” of the documentary genre by incorporating humor, so the video has two distinctive soundtracks and tones that they tied together to show what they thought people should really know about the place they called home for at least two weeks of the summer. The production highlights the young women’s voices and features their own representations of camp life.



Figure 16 Screen image from *The Real Camp Steele*, digital story produced in the 2015 Camp Steel Media Major Track (Hall and Cutright 2015)

Originally, media co-teacher Shelby Mack and I were worried about this team finishing their project by the end of camp because they had very little B-roll beyond their interview footage and only had a couple days left to edit. We sat down with the campers and told them that we liked their idea and asked what their main story was with a

beginning, middle, and end. They seemed confused by the question and frustrated by the planning process of mapping out exactly how they wanted to show and tell what really happens at camp, but once they got organized, they had a script outline with a clear vision that they made happen.<sup>92</sup> Three years later, I interviewed Nicole Hall, half of the media team pair who produced *The Real Camp Steele*, and I asked her about the video.

So, a few of my friends and I were together, and we wanted to really make a video ... that *showed* people what High Rocks was because there were some very negative stereotypes that were preventing girls from accessing ... all of the wonderful opportunities that High Rocks could provide. All because some people that didn't really understand or know what we did, just made assumptions and then spread it around via hearsay. So, we wanted to have something to show people that they would understand without us having to go (pauses) into like a verbal battle with others, like about what we love and everything. And it was just easier to show people, "Hey, this is what it is" ... We wanted it to be very informational, but also we tried to keep some points very fluffy and light and like playful, so it like kept your attention. Like I remember we added in behind the scenes, like, short blurbs of funny moments while we were videotaping all of the stuff at camp because we really wanted to show people that, "Yeah, we're educational, and yeah we can be serious and everything. But at the same time, we also have fun and bond and connect and make these relationships." And it's just a really diverse place to like, like education-wise. You don't just learn book smarts, you learn about the environment 'cause we're living in it. And you learn about just surviving in the woods, kind of. You learn about each other, you learn about yourself, and you learn like academically. It's just a very well-rounded (pauses) place to improve yourself. (Hall 2018)

As media-making mentors, Shelby and I worked with the students to create their vision of showing people "all of the wonderful opportunities that High Rocks could provide" without reproducing the "negative stereotypes" that they wanted to dispel.

Everyone who participates in AMI does not necessarily apply or participate because they have a singular passion for learning media production. Because the Summer Documentary Institute is "structured as [a] job... [and] participants are hired as interns

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<sup>92</sup> Regarding production quality, we recorded voiceover with a Sony ICD-PX312 digital audio recorder, and students recorded footage with a Mini-DV camera that I transferred from tapes to desktop PCs for editing via firewire. They/we used Adobe Premiere to edit their final video project.

and paid a stipend for their work” (Richards-Schuster and O’Doherty 2012:80), for some people AMI was primarily appealing as a summer job opportunity. When talking about how they first became involved, Kyra Higgins said, “at the time I didn’t even know it was a paid internship” while Dustin Hall who had just turned 18 said:

Well, first of all, it was *entirely* superficial and monetarily based. I’ll tell you this much: whenever you’re a young teenager or a teenager in general, or you know, 30, 50, 70, 90, you always want a little bit of money for something. And that was the incentive, it was incentivized with like a stipend. So I thought like, “Well, this is a fun way to make money.” I didn’t even think about the fact that it was media until I got there. .... so, it was really all about like, “Let me have this cash as a burgeoning young adult and see what I can do with it and do that sort of thing.” So I jumped into it headstrong with that mentality. (Hall 2016)

Similarly, when I asked Natasha Watts how she became involved in visual media production, she laughed and said, “Not by choice, honestly. I had to have a .... summer job, I think like a lot of young people who kind of grow up in a family who isn’t very affluent, so that I could buy things I wanted or needed for school” (Watts 2016).

She also had a “very encouraging teacher” who told her, “I think you should just do this, just try it”.

Well [she] had just said, you know, that this is an internship that’s happening, and they pay. And when we got there, they said .... “We’re going to pay you to make this stuff.” And at that time, I made \$600 every two weeks. I mean, that’s still a decent amount of money for students. They, we had a lot of snacks and stuff on board .... I still think for any sort of program, you need to give some sort of financial subsidy to students, especially in this area because that just kind of creates this reality that this can be employment. .... students here have to have employment. There’s a handful of students that I know, that even I work with now in my capacity as an instructor, that don’t ... get the opportunity not to work and go to school. The majority of people I grew up with worked and went to school. And I just think that’s the reality .... I mean where else do you get paid to make a movie (laughs) essentially, you know, when you’re like 15? I was like 16 at the time, but I mean I got *paid* to create media. And .... of course, you think you’re rich. .... (Watts 2016)



She directly went on to connect compensation to other aspects of supporting both young people's basic needs and creative aspirations.

[That] always was a push too, that if you even have to go down to six students, and that's all that you can take in the program, you *have* to pay them. .... the housing is important. And we've cut the housing in the past ... because of financials. The money is important, and just the set agenda of stabilization is important. Like the students *have* to know those things are in place because you can't always eliminate what's happening at home; but if there's food, there's money, there's shelter, that takes care of the majority of problems that I would say 70-80% of students in this area deal with. (Watts 2016)

Research collaborators commonly referred to accessibility to material and creative resources as an ongoing challenge for visual media production in Appalachia as well as for other opportunities for the region and young people. As Shaylan Clark noted, the challenge is "Lack of access to things, like I mean a lot of kids here don't have money for the equipment that it takes to make a short film. So, I feel like kids here have a lot of ideas and a lot of skill. But it's like lack of connection and lack of access to the materials that they would need to do this stuff and the lack of knowledge on how to do it" (Clark 2018b). She then talked about someone she helped get an internship as an extended example of what it takes to connect young people with even locally available or nearby resources:

People don't know him, and he doesn't know anyone that can get him in touch with someone else. So, if people got more connected and they had more access to materials and knowledge on how to do these things, .... I feel like these kids would do really big things and really big things have happened our community but they don't have it so they can't do it. .... Access is an issue. Connections is a really big issue. Transportation I feel like is a really big issue. If they're wanting to do anything that's like outside of Harlan, I feel like that would be extremely hard for kids to get to. So that's an issue. That's a hard one. Advertising it as to the programs out there are happening should be stronger. I feel like if kids knew about the opportunities that they would definitely go for them and they would thrive in them, but they don't know about this stuff. Like I've worked with Rob for years, and I've been in Harlan my whole life, and I didn't know AMI was a thing until 2017. The guy that I was helping out, he didn't know AMI was a thing

and he had taught himself everything he knows for years. He had watched the tutorials and practiced editing and I feel like if when he was younger if he had access to AMI or Mountain Tech Media or something like that, he would have thrived in it. And he probably would've went really far with it, and made connections, and have like things actually happen. But he didn't know about it and he didn't have a way to get there even if he didn't know about it. I mean he couldn't drive. So how is he going to get there? From Harlan to Whitesburg is a .... pretty nice leap for someone to make without a vehicle. So .... that's a big issue. (Clark 2018b)

In addition to having general knowledge about available programs and the ability to cross the county line from Harlan into Letcher County, which are adjacent and have strong interpersonal and intercultural ties, the personal connections required to access opportunities can enable or constrain access depending on who someone knows.

Natasha Watts commented on the legacy of past AMI director Maureen Mullinax in broadening and diversifying the population of young people that AMI serves.

Maureen was the first one to start taking on “problem children.” Before then, AMI was only set up for your top of, top of the peak students, those students who were making A's, students that were head of the class, but when Maureen came along, one, she started that whole curriculum building AMI, which had never been in place. .... she also started to take your not-so-ideal students. ... she wasn't taking only the students that teachers are like, “Oh, this student's the smartest one I've got.” .... I don't know where they are in present, but I continued in that, Rebecca [O'Doherty] continued that .... idea that you have to have a mix of your straight-A, teacher-loves-you student, your student that's sort of quiet, and then you need to take one or two of those ones who are gonna come in with their ankle bracelet on. 'Cause it's a gamble, but .... Creatively ... I think some of the best work came during those years. And that started with Maureen, and if you kind of look at the pattern of work .... that's come out of AMI, you can see the jump of story lines when Maureen comes along. .... you can see, I think, more of a deepened, there was more of a move to social justice then as well, but there was also to me just more of a density of creativity that was happening. (Watts 2016)

How “youth” and service populations are defined can affect eligibility and therefore accessibility for young people as they eventually transition or “age out” of programs or organizations. For example, both Willa Johnson and Brandon Jent were 22 when they were AMI interns, which is the oldest eligible age for participation in the

Summer Documentary Institute (Jent 2016; Johnson 2016). Willa first applied to AMI after high school and was not accepted. Then several family and personal issues shifted the course and literal direction of her life, and she left Letcher County for multiple years and later returned. When I interviewed her, she had worked as a media educator with AMI for several years, and she laughingly but honestly expressed her frustration that she did not know about the opportunity sooner.

I hadn't been connected to Appalshop at all. I grew up in the same county, but Appalshop, other than occasionally coming to our school for a workshop or a storytelling session, and to be frank, just showing up as the weird hippies with hairy legs, like we didn't know anything else about 'em. That was .... our only reference ... "Appal Heads are coming to school today to teach us about Greek mythology." .... and so I didn't realize what Appalshop was. I was 21 and just came home and was like a little mad! (Laughs) Like, "This has been here the whole time?" Like I was like feeling super alone .... that I had to move away, and .... this has been here. .... then I was driven. I was like crazy, I just wanted to be .... a filmmaker at Appalshop. That's all I wanted to do forever. (Johnson 2016)

Willa is now the Director of AMI. As someone who almost did not access this program, she has a perspective that may lend itself to learning about and addressing issues of access for different populations of young people.

When I asked AMI alumn Elyssia Lowe how people can learn media production, Appalshop/AMI was both near and far in proximity and reach. She laughed and said, "I don't know. Like I've lived two hours away from Appalshop my entire life and never knew it existed. And so, I can't tell you of any other programs that do this. I'm sure there are some. Just like we believe there's nothing here but there's always something here, but I don't know. It makes me sad. I wish I did" (Lowe 2016). Another research collaborator, Izzy Broomfield, knew about AMI but did not participate personally.<sup>93</sup> They learned

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<sup>93</sup> Since their ethnographic and oral history interviews, Izzy Broomfield legally changed their name to "end mass incarceration" ("emi") and transitioned to using she/her/hers pronouns. However, she agreed to be referred to her former name and pronoun for this dissertation because it represents her identity at the time.

production skills vicariously through local media-making peers growing up in Berea, including an AMI alumn who they admired. As an indirect descendant of AMI/Appalshop knowledge and mentorship, they later had a direct relationship via Appalshop's co-founding of the Mountain Tech Media collective where they worked at the time (Broomfield 2018b).

In terms of other youth leadership opportunities like internships and AmeriCorps positions, research collaborators learned about them in both formal and informal ways. For example, High Rocks has a longstanding relationship with Haverford College, which includes alternative breaks for service-learning project as well as a direct channel for summer interns to apply and serve there. Some interns from other colleges and universities learned about it through service-learning and career fairs or from other interns who had served there in the past, while others learned through more random means despite apparent ties. For example, even though Caroline Ackerman was an Appalachian studies minor at the time, she did not actually learn about High Rocks through this program but an online search for "summer internship teaching Appalachia" and an attitude that "I wanna go on an adventure this summer!" (Ackerman 2018). Where she did not have an existing personal connection to High Rocks, she established her own by researching intern opportunities in the region, submitting an application, and repeatedly cold calling (via email). For others not already affiliated with the organization who engage in short-term service/leadership positions, like Marlyn McClendon who was not previously an alumn or intern, more happenstance connections like AmeriCorps placements connected them to High Rocks (McClendon 2015). Shelby Mack first learned

about and visited High Rocks as a participant in the WKU Mountain Workshop, and she returned as a summer intern, then as AmeriCorps, and finally as staff (Mack 2015).

For the interview project on youth media education and activism, I asked the 34 participants about any other opportunities for learning media production that they were aware of in addition to whatever program(s) they were already involved in. Another four people who were involved in the youth oral history project had also been involved with AMI in the past (in addition to nine other oral history participants who I interviewed for both projects). There was some awareness of additional opportunities for learning media production (besides ones they were involved in), and my project and presence influenced their awareness at times. However, sometimes there was little surprisingly knowledge of local or regional media programs' existence or accessibility. Their responses included a range of regional and some national non-profit organizations and projects; some regional and national public media and broadcast media outlets and resources; and mostly regional colleges, universities, and public schools, and educational systems.

Almost half of the examples they offered were non-profit organizations or projects, and many focused on youth media education, youth in general, community-based theater, and the Appalachian region. Most people were familiar with Appalshop/AMI because of their own involvement or connections to other organizations and projects such as the AMI, High Rocks, and Highlander partnership supporting the STAY Project. There was some mutual awareness between High Rocks and AMI, but it was mostly one-way because Appalshop's is basically the renowned flagship example in the region. Rae Garringer had been personally involved with both organizations and the High Rocks media track; however, Kate Fowler, who was AMI director at the time, was

the only other person who mentioned High Rocks specifically as another opportunity for media education even if they were aware of the organization.

Regional non-profits included community-based theater organizations such as Appalshop's Roadside Theater, *Higher Ground*, Hurricane Gap Institute, and *Monkey Dumplins*, mentioned especially by people in Harlan and Owsley Counties. Regional media platforms included the Holler and FIREshare, and regional youth organizations included STAY and Y'ALL4ASA. Other local and regional non-profit organizations and projects included Alternate ROOTS, the Appalachian Transition Fellowship *Appalachian Voice* (independent media), Appalshop's Community Media Initiative, Art 180, Booneville Entertainment Center, Clear Creek Film Festival, Lexington Living Arts and Science Center, Highlander Education and Research Center, Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative (KVEC), Partners for Education, and Pittsburgh Filmmakers. Additional organizations outside the Appalachian region included the Center for Digital Storytelling (CA), Dance Theater Etc. (NY), Destination Imagination (international), Global Action Project (NY), National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC), and the New Orleans Video Access Center (NOVAC).

In East(ern) Kentucky, research collaborators involved with Appalshop/AMI consistently mentioned UPike (Burke 2016; Fugate 2016b; Hall 2016; Jent 2016; Watts 2016), KVEC (Burke 2016; Fowler 2016; Jent 2016; Johnson 2016; Watts 2016), the Holler (Burke 2016; Hall 2016; Jent 2016; Johnson 2016; Watts 2016), and FIREshare (Fowler 2016; Hall 2016; Johnson 2016), mostly likely the result of several direct connections with all of these organizations/projects because Natasha Watts' husband, Bruce Parsons, is a media instructor and producer at UPike who also helped found the

Holler and both Willa Johnson and Tanya Turner were working at KVEC at the time and facilitating and distributing youth productions through the Holler platform and FIREshare initiative. Bob Martin and Kate Fowler were similar because they have studied and taught in other places, so their lists included programs in other communities where they had worked as well as other regional and national resources beyond Kentucky or “Appalachia” (Fowler 2016; Martin 2017).

Colleges, university, and public schools were the next most frequently mentioned opportunities for learning media production, altogether representing about one-third of the overall examples. Most examples were schools or institutions in the region where students were current students or alumni, although Oakley Fugate more specifically and broadly referred to “film schools” as an opportunity for learning media production. In terms of higher education, Berea College was the most often mentioned (N=7) followed by the University of Pikeville (UPike N=5), West Virginia University (N=3), and Eastern Kentucky University (N=2). Other colleges and universities included Asbury College (KY), Georgetown College (KY), Morehead State University (KY), Hazard Community and Technical College (KY), Glenville (WV), Mary Baldwin (VA), Pace University (NY), Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY), Western Kentucky University, and the University of Kentucky. Several people also mentioned “high school,” and a couple mentioned their specific school, including Greenbrier East High School (WV) and Letcher County Central High School (KY). A couple of people mentioned the Kentucky Education Student Technology Leadership Program (STLP), and one mentioned the statewide KY Film Certification program.

Public media outlets and resources included Appalshop's community radio station WMMT, Kentucky Educational Television (KET), and PBS Newshour Student Reporting Labs. Someone also mentioned WYMT, the regional broadcast television station based in Hazard, Kentucky. People mentioned a couple of entrepreneurial media production collectives in Kentucky, including the Media Collaboratory in Lexington and Mountain Tech Media (MTM) in Corbin. Aside from Izzy Broomfield who worked there at the time, Shaylan Clark was the only person who mentioned MTM, for which Appalshop was a founding partner organization. Finally, research collaborator Nick Mullins mentioned online resources such as Lynda.com and YouTube for learning how to use digital audio/video editing software, "self-study" using books and documentaries on photography and filmmaking, "and just getting out there and doing it" (Mullins 2017).

As I discuss more in depth in Chapter 6, an important part of the process of making media through making do that young people rely on is the social capital of intergenerational meshworks that help support and sustain their efforts. High Rocks alumni Mabel Eisenbeiss talked about being "one of the pioneers" of a "very limited" program that she helped design at her high school in West Virginia, which provided a "video lab where we could film and have equipment and green screens .... So I really helped do that. Before that, there isn't really anywhere in Greenbrier County that I can think of that really offers like free opportunities" (Eisenbeiss 2018). In contrast to Mabel's experience at her high school and the High Rocks sit-in activism to challenge adults into listening and taking action, Logan Woodward's primary experience of activism was related to his attempt, and brief success, organizing a "Film Club" at OCHS.



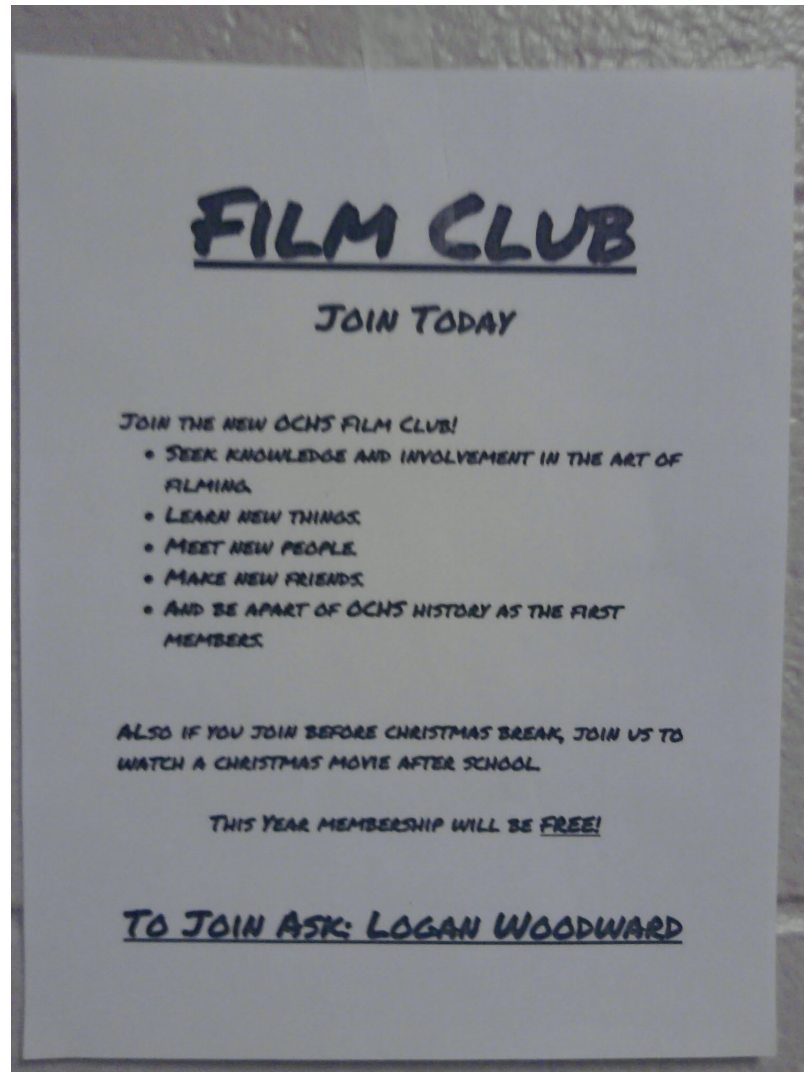


Figure 17 Film Club flyer in the hallway at Owsley County High School, December 12, 2016 (photo by author)

I had seen copies of Logan's flyers around OCHS hallways when I visited to help research collaborators Stevi Nolan, who teaches arts and humanities, and teaching artists Bob Martin and Judy Sizemore with different media projects over the years. When I interviewed JoAnne Richardson for the "Youth Activism in Different Generations in Appalachia" oral history project, I mentioned that I finally met Logan, and she said that he was really funny and had his own YouTube channel with parody songs and other

projects that he produced on his own. She got out her phone and played part of a couple videos, including a humorous piece that he did about moonshining during the prohibition.

I interacted with Logan a few more times after that, but it would be another couple of years before I was able to speak directly with him about his experience as the founder of the OCHS Film Club. I commented that he seemed to be producing a lot of videos on his own before opportunities for media projects came to his school system.

You know, I didn't think about it like that, but you got a point. .... up until I really started doing that, to my knowledge at least, it may have been just because I wasn't looking for them, I never really saw anything. And so actually, when I was about 16, or .... 17, I decided one day, I said, "You know, it'd be the coolest thing ever to have your own club in school." I was like, "They would let you make one." We could make our own rules, do whatever we wanted. But then I realized we couldn't just have a club to be a club. .... then I got to thinking deeper of how we really don't have any clubs in school. And so I started to think about the media perspective of that, and I actually went and made a club called the "Film Club." And that was a little era on its own. That was really the school project where .... once we come up with the idea ... we went to the principal told him about it. And he ... was on board, but he was like, "You have to have a [faculty] sponsor." At the time that was very hard because .... like I mentioned, our humor was very obscene, and to have your name attached to that in a School Board was very risky.

.... The point of the Film Club .... was so we could really produce videos better. .... we couldn't get cast members together all at once because it's a small county, but there's many roads going miles and miles in different directions. And we can't really pick everybody up so the thing was, everybody [who] was at school would just stay after school and do what we needed there, all the cast, everything. *But* we had to be heavily censored.

.... And we had to have a faculty member with us at all times, which in itself ended up becoming the main problem. We couldn't get a teacher to really stay after that wasn't sponsored in the club, right? Because the ones that were .... sponsoring the club were really the only ones that wanted to have other obligations to the rest have families and stuff, and they couldn't really do it. So, we were off and on with, like, week-long sponsors and stuff for like a couple of months, and .... we did end up hosting a Valentine's dance, brought in like \$300. .... But we never got to spend it. We never .... got to spend our money. And the money went back to a different club because the [Film] Club didn't have a

sponsor long enough. And we just couldn't get nobody to stay with us, so the Film Club rested. .... it lasted about a year and a half. (Woodward 2020)

Logan saw a need and did something about it; however, the obstacles to access included navigating school bureaucracy and transportation, constraining both their ability to produce what/how they wanted and the club's long-term viability without a consistent faculty sponsor. He still expressed gratitude and empathy for the level of support that OCHS arts and humanities teacher Stevi Nolan was able to offer.

Yeah, Miss Nolan really wanted to help us, but ... she had the band, she had the other band. She's got a lot on her plate. Miss Nolan's one of the best teachers over there. I'm really glad that I got to be in media and music with her. She's one that I feel like she really cares. She's got a passion. (Woodward 2020)

In an earlier interview with Stevi, she also mentioned the Film Club when I asked about other opportunities to learn media production, and she similarly commented on some of the challenges they faced despite their interest and skill.

This year, and last year, they have tried to have a [Film] Club. And last year, .... they met quite a few times. This year, they had trouble .... But we had somebody come in and talk to them and do .... a little learning session about how he did his films ... after school. And I wasn't their sponsor, though, they had different sponsor. And this year, she couldn't be their sponsor because of her scheduling. And so the sponsor this year really didn't do much with them. And the administration had just said, you know, "If you can't have a sponsor then we probably won't have the club." So, they've had to kind of disband. ... they're still kind of there, but they're not official, and they're just waiting for somebody to pick them up ... and be a sponsored club. But there's still .... a handful of kids that really like working in film and do it on their own. And, you know, anytime I can help them or give them something to do, and I told them when we present the Owl [sculpture] that I want them they're filming and interviewing. And so they know they have jobs coming (laughs) to them. And if I have to .... be an interim sponsor, I may have to. I can't really take them on full-time, but you know, just to get them going, maybe. .... I think a lot of the kids here, as far as opportunities, they make their own. I think that's the biggest thing .... we don't have a guitar class. A lot of these kids pick up guitar and either find somebody in their family or community to teach them or learn on their own by watching videos. You know, with art too, I mean we don't have an art class, you know, they just ... make do, and .... they really have a lot of talent, it's just ... they get through it on their own. And then once somebody *does* come and see that, I think they help them, but

it just takes them kind of digging in ... and wanting to do something and figuring it out. And then once they get to a point where I think they feel more confident about what they've done, then they might try to reach out or them I, you know, they can't teach themselves anymore past that, maybe they try to reach out. And so like, with the Film Club, I know they had made .... a lot of films on their own before they had the club, you know, or at least, you know, small things and still do on their own thought, I think that's the biggest thing here, compared to somewhere else, you know, they just do it, you know, for their benefit, and not because it's offered to them. (Nolan 2018)

Both Stevi and Logan mentioned the notion of making do as the main approach for young people in Owsley County who want to learn film production. As I discuss further in Chapter 6 on “make-do media,” such DIY strategies can provide and expand self-making and media-making opportunities with creative and innovative results, but it also has limitations. Even with a supportive teacher based in the arts, the OCHS Film Club could not maintain even short-term sustainability as a student organization. Existing demands of her position and constraints on Stevi's time prevented her from serving as their faculty sponsor, and turnover in this role prevented the development of sufficient faculty interest and availability to support the film club. In the next section, I discuss larger scale issues of organizational leadership development, succession, and sustainability and whether/how young people see themselves in these roles in these settings and their communities (Quiroz-Martinez, et al. 2005).

#### 4.4 Organizational Transitions and Sustainability

High Rocks Executive Director Sarah Riley talked about her parents as “first-generation Appalachians” who “both grew up in California” and came to West Virginia when they were young. She was born in West Virginia and grew up in Pocahontas County from the time she was three when her parents moved there. Both her parents are well-known icons in their own right, and at the time of her interview, Sarah was “still the

only kid from Pocahontas County to go to Harvard. I came back after my mom started the High Rocks; it had always been a dream of hers to start a school for girls. So there were a lot of us who volunteered and jumped in to see if we could make that dream possible” (Riley 2013) without relative role models for this work at the time. As Spatig and Amerikaner detail in their collaborative ethnography about the history and eventual demise of the “Girls Resiliency Program” in West Virginia (which bears a striking and eerie resemblance to High Rocks), organizational sustainability is a complex, difficult, and sometimes unattainable process and goal despite good people, great ideas, noble missions, and valiant efforts (Spatig and Amerikaner 2014).

A couple of High Rocks summer media projects have paid tribute to the women who made the summer camps and other programs possible over 20 years ago. For example, one project focused on the historic and deteriorating farm house that belonged to High Rocks’ founding benefactor who donated the land for the camp (Eisenbeiss, et al. 2014), and the other was about the one-room schoolhouse that HR girls helped build (Forren, et al. 2014). In 2016, a team of two young women produced “The Mother of High Rocks: A Susan Burt Tribute” in honor of the High Rocks founder’s retirement that summer (Sealey and McCallister 2016). The video tells the story of the person who befriended the benefactor and implemented her vision for “a place for young girls to learn valuable skills, have fun, and really be themselves” (Sealey and McCallister 2016). The narrative and images focused on Susan’s outgoing personality and her dedication to providing girls with educational opportunities that expand their minds, their creativity, and their gender roles. We screened the video for Susan and the public community at the annual Nettlefest fundraiser at the end of camp. Several generations of young women that

Susan has mentored over the past 20 years were present, including alumni who are now leaders or board members in the organization. This production represents the intergenerational mentorship, networking, and archival documentation of women and girls across a significant period of time.

A Movement Strategy Center report on issues of organizational sustainability and youth leadership in environmental justice movements, includes several references to Appalshop and its youth-based media arts programming in the section on “Innovative cultural work is a distinguishing feature of youth environmental justice organizing” (Quiroz-Martinez, et al. 2005:32), as well as in a section on “Environmental justice organizations and networks are struggling to support generational transitions.”

At Appalshop, based in Whitesburg, Kentucky, training youth to create media art around local issues develops young people’s knowledge of and engagement in issues of coal mining, the timber industry and water rights, while teaching them skills that enable them to stay in the area and make a living. As one of their organizers stated, “There are more artists than farmers in rural America.” (2005:41)

Overall findings of the report indicated that environmental justice and related organizations struggle to “support generational transitions” despite developing training for youth organizers (Quiroz-Martinez, et al. 2005:39). “As the first few generations of highly skilled young leaders emerge, organizations must figure out how to involve them as they age out of the “youth” category, however defined” (2005:39). Some of the “key needs” identified by organizers included “[p]rogram structures and curriculum to help young people plan their future”; “[s]upport for young people who are making the transition into new schools or employment”; [r]esources to support entry-level positions in grassroots organizations”; and “[s]tronger network-based programs to train young

people for positions in the movement as well as positions in other fields” (Quiroz-Martinez, et al. 2005:39)

The youth and young adult organizers in the environmental justice movement are doing the hard work of learning how to support both individual and generational transitions. This is grounded in a deep [39] concern for the sustainability of both the environmental justice movement and social justice movements in general. Their vision includes support for not just youth, but elders and adults to make healthy transitions within the movement; this holistic approach will ultimately help to create a strong, intergenerational movement.” (2005:39-40)

The report also highlighted the “challenges of transitioning out of the ‘youth’ category” and “the need to support young people as they transition to adulthood” (2005:40). It can also be challenging for their mentors “to support new youth organizers at the same time they are struggling to find outlets for their own leadership” because “elders also do not have many options for transitioning in the movement” (2005:40).

Organizational sustainability is also a challenge for organizations and “formerly young” leaders in Meta’lachia who are working toward or beyond retirement age. For example, when I asked if she had anything to add at the end of both interviews that I conducted with Molly Turner, she brought up the need for greater involvement and leadership of young people in community organizations like OCAT both times. The first time I asked if she wanted to add anything about development and Appalachia, involvement of young people, or the role of culture or media in that work, and she mentioned the loss of funding for the community-based play *Homesong* as the loss of one way “to bring them on board some.” She went on:

When I look around in the meetings that I go to, I’m a member of the Industrial Authority, and it’s older people. And I keep saying, “We need to be bringing some younger people in in here.” But I can’t get them to come to [Owsley County] Action Team meetings. When I sit look around, mostly it’s older people. And maybe that’s because they [young people] have so many things to do that they don’t have time. But sometimes I think they just don’t realize that if we want

things to change in this community .... we have to do it from within, and somebody's not going to come in and wave a magic wand and make it better. And it is a great place to live, other than that it is so hard for people to find employment. I've always felt perfectly safe here. (Turner 2017)

As a retired public-school teacher, she also emphasized the role of education and how she was fortunate to have that given expectation from her parents, which she noted all young people do not have.

Molly Turner reiterated the need for younger leadership in OCAT when I asked if she had additional comments at the end of her oral history interview.

Well, I think we have tried in different ways to involve young people in activities going on, and I mean countywide, and it's very hard. They may come to one meeting and then, you know, they're not there anymore. And maybe it's a time thing with them too ... because they are very busy today. But I think if we could somehow make them see that what their area, Owsley County or wherever it is, what it is--it's left up to them, that it, you know, it's theirs. They either make it, or it doesn't happen, you know? If they can see that, they might look at things differently. It seems like if people have ownership in something, if they had a sense of pride in this county, maybe they would do more, become more involved. But it's very hard. We've tried different things. I know when we worked on the park, for instance .... we got a group of young people together and said, "What do you want to see in the park?" And talked about that, and they came up with ideas. They actually presented to the fiscal cohort about the need for a skate park, and you know, they got some of those things, but they never got the bigger involvement. It was, once they got the skate park, that was it. If they got the basketball goals that they wanted, that was it. If they could see the bigger picture and see that, you know, we could make the place better if they took a part--for instance, we've got a historical society here that they have what's called Pioneer Village, and .... it really needs some work done by volunteers. Well, the [Owsley County] Historical Society are older. They're not able to do the work; it'd be so nice if some of the younger people would join them and help restore that. It could be a part of improving the economy some here. .... but see, they can't get it open because it's got .... some things that need to be repaired, and it needs to be kept mowed, and that kind of thing, and those guys are too old now to do it. And if they could get younger people involved, don't know how to do that. And it's not just that. It's coming out to meetings and expressing opinions and giving ideas, and not sitting back and saying, "They need to." .... if we could somehow get the idea, "We need to do this" into them, it would make a difference. (Turner 2017)



Molly said that OCAT participants are “older people for the most part,” and I asked whether young people mostly stayed in Owsley County after high school, went to college, or returned if they did go off to school.

well, some of the ones who go to college come back ... it kind of depends on what field they go into because there's not much here other than .... teaching, nursing, medical, to attract people back here for the most part. If somebody has a degree in computer science, unless they're teaching at the local high school, they're not going to get a position here. So, they really don't have that choice about coming back. What we have seen recently is we're getting a few people who are moving here simply because they have access to .... the internet and they can work at home. And they love ... the area. (Turner 2017)

I encountered similar conversations at the November 20, 2016 “Youth Assembly on a Just Economic Transition” at the Boone Youth Center. Teachers from both public schools and community colleges talked about the difficulty engaging young people in these larger conversations and actions, especially K-12 young people who are so underrepresented. Throughout my fieldwork and as my work as a teaching artist, I saw this in so many of the youth-oriented (and even youth-led) initiatives and efforts in the region. In multiple conversations with youth educators and mentors at other organizations, I listened to similar concerns about engaging with and passing their knowledge, skills, and storytelling on to younger folks, some of whom acknowledged they sometimes needed to change their approach.

When I asked Shaylan Clark what possibilities she imagined for the Appalachian region as a young person, she said:

I can see a lot happening. I feel like what needs to happen is people need to start communicating more and talking to each other. Right now, what I'm seeing is just these certain groups--like *Higher Ground* and [Kentuckians for the Commonwealth] .... and Appalshop. I see these little groups, you know? And they .... already have their groups, and they *know* what they're doing, and they *know* what they want to say, and they know .... how they want to say it. I feel like the public should be more involved. The actual community. Like, I mean, it's

great what these organizations do. It's amazing. But for, I feel like, an actual change to happen, I feel like the community needs to be involved a lot, and we all need to get on the same page. So, they feel like we're not speaking *for* them or speaking *at* them, but like, *with* them. I think there's a small gap there, where they know who we are and what we do and why we do it, but I want them to feel like they can do it too. Like we don't have to do it *for* them. (Clark 2018a)

Shaylan's commentary highlights how gaps in communication, access, power, and agency can persist even when "community-based" projects are available.

Organizational sustainability relies significantly on ownership and agency of participants, especially young people, served by programs and/or in the local community.

A lot of the people who went through the first [Appalachian Transition] fellowship are still in the region working in some capacity. And they may not be working in the ... same role that they were when they went through the fellowship. But a lot of them a significant, probably a majority of them are still in the region doing work, just transition work in the region. The second cohort, I'm not so sure, but there have been a lot of young folks who have gone through the program and then decided we're going to stay here that in that way, it's really similar to the VISTA program where there are a lot of people who come into the region and work as this as and then decide they want to stay and continue their work. (Brashear 2017)

As Nicole Hall said, she "kept coming back" to High Rocks when I asked her how she learned about it and why she decided to participate. She also found new ways of participating and supporting other participants through the process. Returning to a place over time and engaging in different roles and relationships throughout is helps make the path of organizational sustainability where young people can create and develop long-term skills and connections as well as be compensated for their time in some roles to enable volunteering in others.

#### 4.5 Intergenerational Interactions and Representations

Despite long-term meshworks of mentorship and support, some negative intergenerational assumptions about young people persist, and young people continue to

produce counterstorytelling representations of themselves. Crystal Good is a vital Affrilachian author, activist, social entrepreneur, and media mentor from West Virginia who has worked with young people and communities on numerous initiatives in the region (Affrilachian Poets n.d.). In a public panel presentation on intersectional feminisms in the region at the 2017 Appalachian Studies Association (ASA) conference, Good acknowledged that she does not personally identify as a feminist but as an Appalachian woman instead (Terman, et al. 2017). However, she is an outspoken advocate of the region and of women's voices and experiences. For example, her well-known poem, "Boom Boom" from her collection *Valley Girl* (Good 2012) "correlates strip-mining with women who strip-tease because of economic necessity.<sup>94</sup> As Good notes in the description of her online reading of the poem, "...sometimes the consequences of few employment options are more than we expected" (quoted in Clemons 2014).

Good has also used media activism in creative ways, such as a photo project with mentoring teen mothers in West Virginia to disrupt stereotypes about their lives.

I wanted them to be able to document their lives so that I could build a bridge between what a teen mother's life is like to these women that I was working with .... the girls got cameras and they documented their lives and then we did an art show where they could look at them and talk about it. My favorite moments were when there was a cluster of women .... looking at the picture of a mom who had all this money spread across a bed, you know all these dollar bills. And I'm listening to the conversation because they're thinking lots of different things about why does she have all this money spread across the bed? Why? You know there are many negative things that are a possibility in that picture. But I loved being able to slip up and ask them to read the description pointing out that this was a young mother who had saved all of her tip money. This was the day she was going to the auction to buy her [first] car with her \$500. (Good 2013)

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<sup>94</sup> Crystal Good's online reading of her well-known poem, "Boom Boom" is available on YouTube. She is working on an audio collection of the entire volume of *Valley Girl* poems.

The power of photography in this project lies both in the young women using cameras to tell their own stories and in what they camera cannot say without the context of their voices.

I also observed young people pushing back against narratives of their “lack” of concern, involvement, or leadership in community issues. Generational issues arose in another AMI production that transmogrified as a result. I was present when AMI interns from the 2016 cohort of the Summer Documentary Institute brainstormed documentary topics, and I observed (and in/directly participated in) a project shift from a profile of an older leader to a more diverse look at livelihoods in the region. The day after they brainstormed and selected topics, one group interviewed an important local and regional elder, which they subtitled “The Legend,” on their butcher-paper outline of team members and mentors for their project. I sat at a conference table nearby as they videorecorded the conversation, and I was struck by some of the interviewee’s comments about young people “not really doing anything” in terms of leadership and “trying to decide a direction,” which they found “sad” and “disappointing.” I was somewhat amused and miffed on behalf of the young filmmakers as well as Appalachian youth in general, many of whom I personally observed and learned from as exemplifying the *opposite* of this person’s sentiment. I intentionally decided to use my power as an adult to help them confront negative assumptions about young people; and I made a note to talk to the group later about the possible disconnect between what young people are actually doing, what older folks think about it, and the need for more intergenerational communication and interaction.

[B]efore I left the Boone Center today, I also talked to the group that’s doing the [local/regional elder] piece about some of my observations about what might be

the disconnect that he was saying that he wasn't really seeing young people doing leadership ... or doing anything other than seeming apathetic. I tried to challenge them to think critically about why that disconnect might exist and to give them some food for thought for their project as they go to Pittsburgh [for a youth media exchange field trip] this week. (Field Notes 07.06.16)

The next day, I interviewed Brandon Jent who said he might be interviewed for one of the intern films. I asked which one, and he said, "The [local/regional elder] piece which now *not* the [local/regional elder] piece but the community piece, or whatever it is."

Ultimately, the group produced *Go Your Own Way*, a film about "four artisans, artists and visionaries who are working to build an equitable and unique future for themselves in the hills of eastern Kentucky" (Lowe, et al. 2016), which included organic farmer Lora Smith, then *Higher Ground* director Robert Gipe, jewelry maker Jessalyn Bowman, and "prospective [music store] business owner" Thomas Anderson (also the star of "My Friend Tommy"). A few months later, organizers of the Just Economic Transition Youth Assembly held at the Boone Youth Center on November 20, 2016, showed *Go Your Own Way* at the beginning after introductions as an example of transition (Field Notes 11.20.16). The 2016 AMI cohort also screened all of their films at the 2017 ASA conference in Blacksburg, Virginia (ASA 03.11.17), and West Virginian author and educator Natalie Spyot collectively reviewed these films in the Spring 2017 issue of the *Journal of Appalachian Studies* (Spyot 2017).

The filmmakers also discussed their project and how the topic and the process of making it impacted how they see their home communities and region.<sup>95</sup>

Our film came from the ideas and experiences that this summer gave us. I applied for this internship to learn and to gain new perspectives of my home and that's exactly what I got. That, and so much more. I wanted to take part in creating a

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<sup>95</sup> These excerpted quotes are from a now-unavailable webpage about the film from an older defunct AMI URL ([ami.appalshop.org/go-your-own-way/](http://ami.appalshop.org/go-your-own-way/).)

film that inspired people– to love where they’re from and to understand that there are so many opportunities just outside of their door.

During my summer in Whitesburg, I learned so much about media production and my home and the people who inhabit it. I was gaining a new love for this place and I felt for the first time like I could be happy in my future here, even if I didn’t succeed in working at my dream job (Pixar). This film showcases some of the amazing people who taught me so much and who I believe will inspire others. I miss AMI and everyone who helped me grow over the summer. I’ve made lifelong friends and left with an extended family. (Elyssia Lowe)

Go Your Own Way was originally about a singular person, an elderly [person] who had already gone [their] own path and readily admits [they have] not much trail-blazing left to do. As you will see, there is not an old [person] in the finished piece. The method of conveying the meaning of the piece changed quite a bit; in truth, most aspects of the piece changed substantially during the brief, three-week production period. A profile piece quickly changed to a commentary on Appalachian youth and then transformed into a narrated story with a main character, for which there were multiple options. The end product can be described as none of the aforementioned, but does not fall short in capacity. This film, though my first, says volumes about the overwhelming energy in the region and identifies the most cumbersome obstacles faced when trying to capitalize on it. (Joshua Collier)

When I first started this summer I never thought it would turn out the way it did. I bonded more with people I didn’t know than the friends I already had here. Making this movie was eye opening to me. Telling the story of people who despite the loss of jobs, were able to pull through and stick to their roots and stay home. This is something that I now realize I want, and am able, to do. (Jaydon Tolliver)

Like young people learning place-based filmmaking in the Lea River Valley in East London, England, the process and product made their “eyes get bigger” (Blum-Ross 2013). They shifted the narrative from a single person’s perspective reflecting on the past to a collective story about different approaches towards present and future livelihoods for individual people, their families, and the regional more broadly. *Go Your Own Way* actually uses the original Fleetwood Mac song as its closing soundtrack, which is an apt commentary on how young people are breaking up with old narratives about who they are and what is possible for them and the region.

Sometimes young people in paid leadership positions like Interns and AmeriCorps volunteers may push back in different ways than program participants, strategically using their positionalities as staff, through and in resistance to available channels, to educate and advocate for change. For example, High Rocks Interns have to research, produce, and publicly present (to camp) projects for improving the organization and/or programming, which also includes a creative component. Presentation topics over the years sometimes related to their academic major, their class intern assignment, or often a strong personal interest they want to share with a public, educational, and site-specific audience. In Summer 2016, several interns and AmeriCorps co-presented as panelists who had volunteered for emergency flood relief in local communities in lieu of a conventional intern project. (Figure 18 visualizes the focus of High Rocks intern presentations as documented during the period of dissertation fieldwork.)

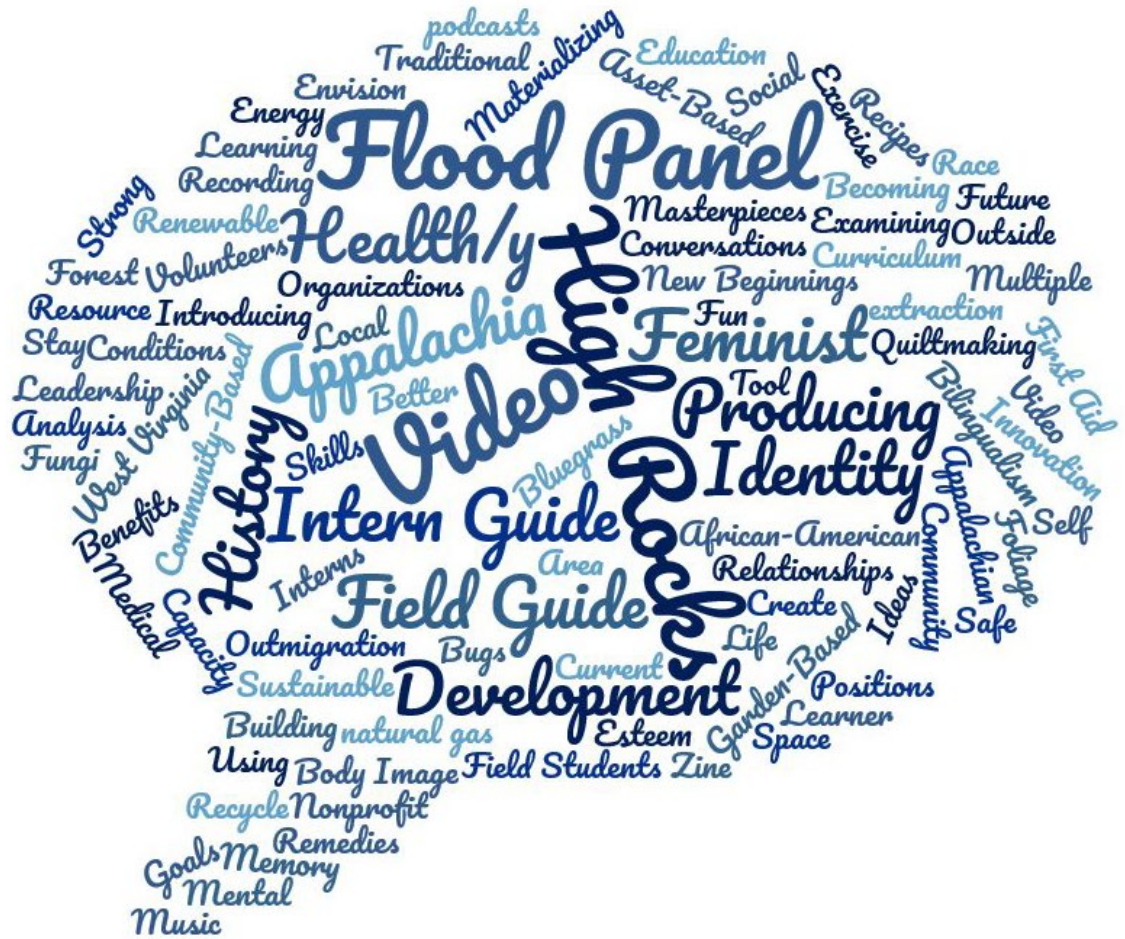


Figure 18 Word cloud of High Rocks intern project topics/titles from Summers 2014-2018 (Image generated by author from field notes)

Interns sometimes channeled their critiques and scholar-activist stances through their required research/creative projects, which is a built-in pedagogical design. For example, intern recommendations included teaching “real-life” skills like how to apply for jobs or find apartments; incorporating a more consciously feminist organizational identity and GLBTQ safe space and increasing its queer service population; and making space for “conversations about race.” These public presentations can be a mechanism for expressing frustrations or dissent internal to their group role as “interns” as well as an important “space for youth voice” for young women of color or marginalized youth more broadly, especially those working in intern, AmeriCorps, and staff positions, who



sometimes struggled with their minoritized positions in a predominantly white rural space, even one that was inclusive and progressive in so many ways.

Another moment of youth representation via participation in activism illustrates how youth agency manifests and “busts the seams” outside the confines of adult-facilitated programming and shifting the narrative in a particular space. It is important to mention that during my fieldwork, there was some generational tension as a result of youth-led activism against the cameo appearance of controversial *HE* author for a roundtable discussion on “Are We Losing a Generation? Poverty and the Opioid Crisis in Rural and Urban Appalachia,” on the last day of the 2018 ASA conference. Y’ALL also invited Elizabeth Catte, who notably responded to his book with her own entitled, *What You’re Getting Wrong About Appalachia* (Catte 2018b), to speak at their annual “Meet & Eat” event at the conference. Subsequent conversations continued online about how the young people responded to the *HE* author, how they were treated, and ASA’s response. Y’ALL, STAY, and the ASA Steering Committee all issued official statements; and one YAA oral history participant specifically brought up the situation; all of which are worthy of analysis and discussion. However, I do not want to privilege *HE*’s perspective here or dwell on the resulting disruption, controversy, and tension caused by his book, punditry, or personal appearance at the 2018 conference. With the recent publication of collected essays and artwork in *Appalachian Reckoning: A Region Responds to Hillbilly Elegy* (Harkins and McCarroll 2019), there is no shortage of critique and counternarrative to this romanticized and myopic memoir.<sup>96</sup> In fact, two YAA oral history interviewees

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<sup>96</sup> The editors include an extended reference to the *HE* author’s presence, youth protest, and the “problematic generational divide” that the incident supposedly “exposed” (Harkins & McCarroll 2018:12). While I did not attend the session, I observed, participated, and commented on various forms of youth

and other colleagues and research collaborators are contributors to this volume (Brashear 2019; Gipe 2019). Instead, I think it is most valuable and instructive to view the 2018 ASA conference (and continuing conversations afterward) as a dynamic representation of the way in which different generations, identities, and voices actively continue navigating difficult conversations about who is included and excluded and learning to communicate and listen across those differences.

#### 4.6 Conclusion: Meshworks for Media-Making Possibilities

As this chapter shows, for most research collaborators, different forms of social capital enable access to education and social contexts where they can produce their own stories and media representations. For those within (or connections to) the organizations, they can then learn about internally obvious and accessible channels for imagining and practicing leadership possibilities through paid positions. Similarly, connections are also important in school settings where students seemingly have access to the same knowledge and opportunities. Paid opportunities, intergenerational mentorship, and knowledge/leadership succession contribute to possibilities of long-term organizational sustainability. Through these intergenerational meshworks, research collaborators challenge assumptions about whether and how it is possible for young people to stay in the Appalachian region. When I asked Brandon Jent about the challenges and possibilities for visual media production in Appalachia, he mentioned first the potential to

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involvement and responses both before and during the “aftermath” that I will not elaborate on here. However, based on this inside knowledge, I contend that generational differences and similarities are more complex than represented in this short recap. The notion of a “generational divide” may be real and relevant here and in other cases, but it is also sometimes overstated, oversimplified, and misunderstood.

build on the “legacy” of Appalshop’s long-term demonstration that people can make their own media in the mountains *as a livelihood*.

I think there’s a ton of possibilities .... not just with place-based media-making, but also just media-making in general. ... and a lot of that I think is thanks to Appalshop because (pauses) they’re *doing* that. They’re ... how I got my foot in the door with media-making, they’re how a lot of youth were first exposed to it. .... I think that’ll happen for a long, long time, if not forever. I would hope forever. .... [W]e have people that went to the AMI program that now have their degrees in media-making or are working as professional media makers full-time .... (pauses) .... I think like that legacy helps, but I think (pauses) .... it *can* be done here. I think it’s just one part of, you know, the economic transition talk that I was talking about earlier. If that’s something that you want to see in your community, if the arts and if media-making and .... visual art and media is what you want to see in your community, let’s find a way to make it happen. ... and then work towards making that happen and making this like a center for that, which in a lot of ways it already is, again, thanks to Appalshop. (Jent 2016)

He then also brought up the challenge of limited access to that knowledge and example for some young people.

[O]ne of the challenges I talked about is like the education system. If we’re not making sure .... letting our kids know about (pauses) opportunities in visual art and media-making as like, a (pauses) potential career opportunity or as any sort of thing that you could be interested in act upon just in general, I think that is a challenge. (Jent 2016)

Making media as a livelihood in the Appalachian region is a double counterstorytelling practice in contesting stereotypes about the region in that people not only construct alternative narratives about where they are from, they also construct counternarratives about the types of work that are possible here. In the next chapter, I discuss the material mediacologies and infrastructures of support that enable young people to access (or not) youth media education programs, “third spaces” for connecting with others, and media-making (and art-making more generally) as a personal possibility in the region.

CHAPTER 5. MEDIACOLOGIES OF MEANINGFUL ACCESS: “BUILDING EDUCATION,” SOCIAL CONTEXTS, AND SUPPORT FOR YOUTH MEDIA PRODUCTION

5.1 Living at the Library: Intersections of Work, Home, and School in a Small Town

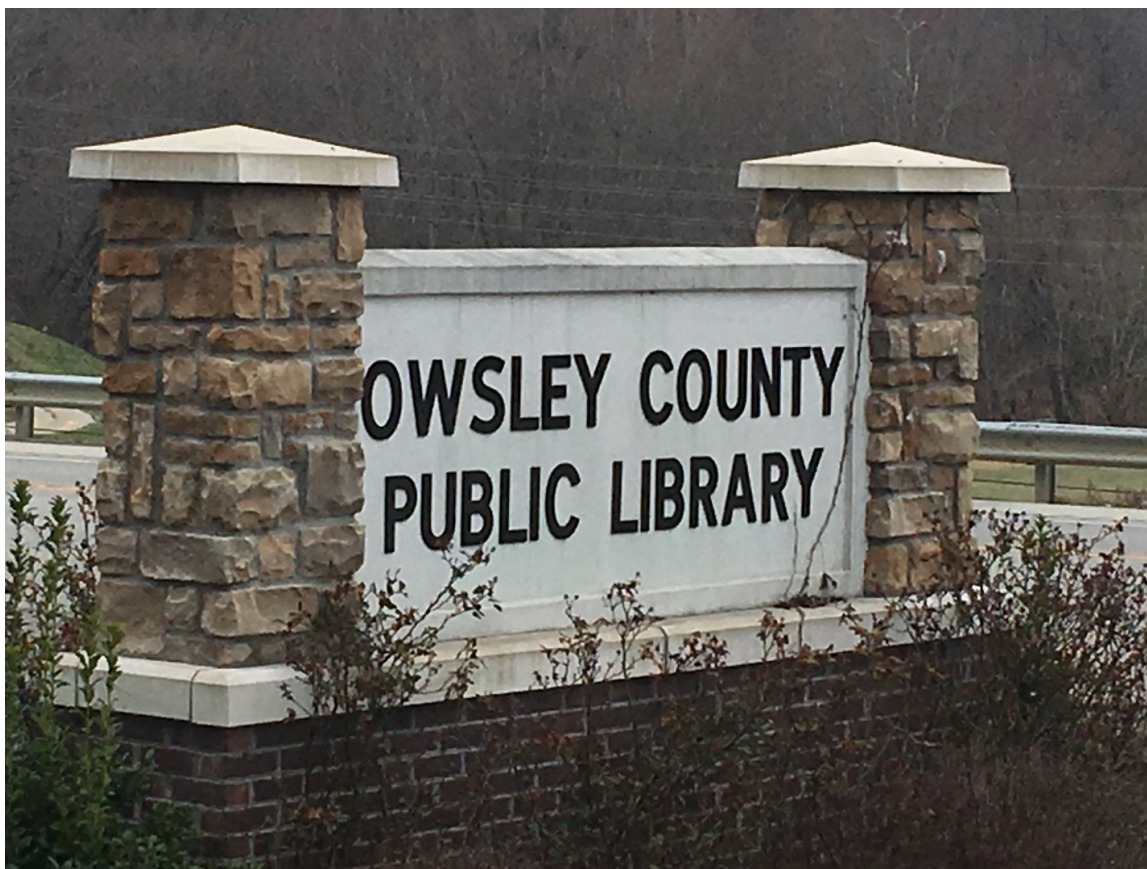


Figure 19 Owsley County Public Library entrance sign, Booneville, Kentucky, February 21, 2017 (Photo by author)

Owsley County Public Library (OCPL) in Booneville, Kentucky, where several research collaborators live and/or have worked or gone to school, is an important intergenerational community space supporting youth and the elderly by providing a physical shelter, public computer and internet access, technological support, and even childcare. In 2013 (FY), OCPL was ranked first “for book circulation .... with 11.38 books checked out for each of the county’s 4,722 residents .... nearly three times the statewide average of 4.26 library books checked out per person” and ranked second (per

capita) “for library attendance; book collection size; and number of internet-linked public computers” (data from a Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives statistical report cited in Cheves 2014). The first couple of times I visited OCPL in February 2017, I hung out with and interviewed research collaborator JoAnne Richardson who worked there at the time. I had known JoAnne about six months since we met at the Owsley County Creative Assets workshop, and we shared a mutual friend and theater collaborator who is also my neighbor. I had spent time at Owsley County High School, the Owsley County Action Team, and the Booneville Entertainment Center, all of which serve as important gathering places for youth learning, community leadership and development, and local entertainment. The public library sits to the right of a Dollar General store on Kentucky Highway 11 just before entering the center square of “downtown” Booneville. There are double doors facing the road, and there is another set of doors on the west end of the building next to the main entrance to the parking lot and the neighboring “Reading Garden” on the other side. I always parked and entered this side of the building, which also seemed to be more heavily used by others.

When I first visited in early February, JoAnne gave me a brief tour of the relatively new facility, which was completed in 2010. To the right just inside the side entrance, she pointed out the remodel-in-progress of a kids’ room with new shelves built by Kentucky Corrections and funded through the Promise Zone. Next to that were several long banners with photos and narratives about “Master Musicians” as part of a roving Kentucky Arts Council exhibit. Along the length of the rear of the building and a short section on the opposite side were desks with 13 public desktop computers with Microsoft Office installed. The road front entrance included an outer foyer where there were

restrooms and a water fountain, and just inside to the right was a community room for meetings (no charge) and parties (usually \$40 for 3 hours). On the other side of the main entrance was a small genealogy room with a glass wall and door, and JoAnne said that a lot of people from other places come to conduct research there. The library also had a new program for people to check out musical instruments like guitars (all of which were checked out), and banjos and mandolins (which were not as popular). JoAnne said that movies were the most popular checkout item in the library. The library provided public printing and photocopying at 25 cents per page, which I noted seemed a little expensive, and the main librarian said that it is free for students. The library also offers free Wi-Fi (with no password required) both inside and outside (during and after hours), and JoAnne also pointed out the U.S. Bicycle Route 76 camp for cyclists at the First Presbyterian Church across the road.<sup>97</sup>

When we broke for lunch, I picked up food from Spencer's Dairy Bar, a local drive-up restaurant, and came back to the library. While I waited for JoAnne to return, I joined the library director, another library worker, and JoAnne's mom who were eating in the community meeting room. They talked about some other library programs serving the community, including an after-school snack program provided by God's Pantry as well as a summer feeding program because some kids are at the public library all day. "Food is a big deal." There was also an upcoming KAC meeting at the library regarding the farmers' market and arts grant.

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<sup>97</sup> See the Kentucky Department of Transportation website for more information on the Kentucky leg of U.S. Bicycle Route 76.

After JoAnne returned, we sat down in an old diner booth in the youth area, and she continued assisting library patrons as needed while we talked. She spent a lot of time that afternoon trying to help an older man log in to his Facebook account on his laptop. He could not remember having an email address associated with it, so they could not send him a new password. He then brought her his entire notebook of passwords, and they still could not find the right information, so he planned to come back the next day and see if she could help him figure it out. JoAnne said that kind of troubleshooting happens quite frequently, and she talked about other local technology opportunities and challenges, including Google Chromebooks for 3rd-10th grade funded by a Promise Zone grant and a recent workshop about bullying hosted by the Parent Task Force. “Social media is extremely powerful,” she said, and she thought they should teach digital responsibility and “internetiquette” to help people with critical thinking and identifying “fake news.” I mentioned a grant opportunity for potential funding to support a digital citizenship workshop, and JoAnne said it would be great to offer multiple workshops with one focusing on young people and another one open to any age group.<sup>98</sup>

In addition to her work at the public library, JoAnne was very civically engaged in her daughter’s school and other community-based outreach efforts. She was involved in local and regional community theater projects, including *Homesong*, other local productions, and regional networks through the Hurricane Gap Institute. She also talked

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<sup>98</sup> Over the next month and with feedback and support of research collaborators in Owsley County and Letcher County, I worked on a curriculum design for a set of “digital citizenship” workshops and submitted a grant proposal for the Kentucky Foundation for Women (KFW) Arts Meet Activism program. While unsuccessful, developing this preliminary curriculum and actively collaborating with several people in two of my main field sites provided valuable information and connections that led to more sustained and in-depth conversations with them and others about multiple critical literacies in the context of digital media, especially as they relate to young people.

about her other involvement with Owsley County Alliance for Recreation and Entertainment (OCARE), including its Parent Task Force and community theatre project. She identified herself as the “lone liberal,” and her daughter was texting her as we were talking about Betsy DeVos’s controversial appointment as the Secretary of Education as a result of the Vice President’s tie-breaking vote.

While I was in the library, I witnessed a woman with a serious injury (whose boyfriend was there with her) assure the library staff it was an accident. I was struck by the casualness, candor, and relative calm with which everyone discussed this potential domestic violence incident. The couple was not really trying to avoid public visibility or disguise the laceration, and the woman did not seem particularly threatened that library staff were talking about it in front of her boyfriend. The staff also seemed to take this observation and conversation in stride as if it were simply a familiar routine among other library operations to call out and question someone’s home situation when necessary. Because I was a newcomer to the space, I did not inquire about the intimate details of this woman’s situation with the staff or actively pursue more information about their protocols for when and how to intervene in the lives of library users. However, upon later communication with JoAnne, she said she thought I should include this story “because it is really a part of the social norms here. Our openness about each other’s personal lives and how we give ourselves license to discuss other people’s personal lives.”<sup>99</sup>

When JoAnne returned to the library, she was wearing a humorous red T-shirt with goats from Hurricane Gap. We went to the small genealogy room next to the main

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<sup>99</sup> Problems like intimate partner violence can also become visible and therefore open for discussion (and potentially action) through media like the “Safe Dates” video project as OCHS graduate Frankie Jo Baldwin’s story in the last chapter showed.



desk where we could close the door and conduct her interview. She expanded on some of her previous commentary from a couple of weeks before, and she also talked about her original placement with the library through a work program.

When I first started working here in Owsley ... mainly I needed a job. And I thought, “Well, always want to be a librarian....” And I went through ... WIA [Workforce Investment Act Program] .... out of Jackson [in neighboring Breathitt County]. .... they hook you up with jobs. It’s kind of like the K-TAP program now, but you got paid. So, they would .... place you, and you would work there and learn .... skills .... I’ve worked my entire life, or my entire adulthood. I’ve never *not* had a job. So that time in there .... was two or three months of having to depend on food stamps, having to depend on K-TAP, and stuff that .... if my dad was alive, he would have been like, “You don’t get on *that!*” .... but it’s there for a reason. It’s there to help people when they need help. Some people decide to live on it, but I think that’s more because .... people are ... waiting for that perfect job to come. ... and the truth of the situation ... is that there *is* no perfect job. .... Sometimes jobs don’t make sense. ... like if you live here, it doesn’t make sense to go work at McDonald’s in Jackson because you’re not going to get paid ... by the time you drive and childcare and all that. .... \$7.50 an hour for a 45-minute drive for a 24-hour work week. I mean, that’s just ridiculous. (Richardson 2017)

In addition to the stigma attached to receiving public assistance and limited options otherwise, surveillance is another factor for compliance and completion of work programs.

It wasn’t just the ... being on food stamps and stuff. It was the having to report to them about stuff .... it wasn’t like I was giving them national secrets, but still ... me having to. I’m a grown-up. I don’t want to have to report to somebody, you know, that .... I made \$10 last week because I helped somebody write a paper. .... so, I got on that [WIA] program .... and they placed me at the library. And I’m like .... “This is where I wanted to be. I’ve always wanted to be a librarian.” .... And then I started to, on the side, help people with their schoolwork, who were going to college. And then I thought, “Why don’t *I* go back to college? Why *don’t* I go back to college?” You know, because I had went to college, I just didn’t finish. And I was like, “Why don’t I? *What?!* (Laughs).... AHA! I could go to school!” And so I ended up going to school while I worked. (Richardson 2017)

While reporting requirements for receiving public assistance felt over-reaching to her, JoAnne’s side gigs with students in addition to her part-time job placement at the library directly led not only to the realization that education was still a possibility for her but also

the completion of an associate degree and then a bachelor's degree in Human Services and Counseling.

Later in the afternoon, JoAnne's daughter and her boyfriend came to the library after school. In fact, several kids of different ages showed up, including another high school student I recognized who had participated in *HomeSong*. The main librarian's grandchildren came, and she talked about how the library serves as the default babysitter for a lot of kids. She said that for some kids, the library is just a better place for them to be after school. She also mentioned a woman who worked in Booneville but lived in Breathitt County and said her little boy comes there after school because he has nowhere else to go. Library staff observations manifested an important juxtaposition regarding the variable intertwined necessities of employment and childcare and whether/how people can cross county lines to secure them: JoAnne commenting about the non-compensation of driving to Breathitt to work a minimum wage job and the main librarian talking about a woman from there who could only make her job in Booneville work because her son could hang out at the public library after school.

This story illustrates the numerous complex social supports, access to information and communication, and physical sustenance that public libraries provide. OCPL is clearly an important intergenerational community space supporting youth and the elderly by providing a physical shelter, public computer and internet access, technological support, and even informal childcare. However, places like public libraries are vulnerable to fickle funding sources and political agendas as much as other institutions like public schools, post offices, and social services. Even in relatively positive circumstances like OCPL, the precarity of public libraries and the communities they serve also includes the

burden of serving a vast array of needs that more robust (now diminished or disappearing) social safety nets once provided. Libraries and other “third spaces” for informal learning (Ault 2018; Clemons 2020; Lester, et al. 2015) and the resources they provide help constitute the mediacologies of youth education, intergenerational relationships, technology, and possibilities for where and how to be in the world.

In Chapter 2 on the conceptual framework for this dissertation, I discussed the notion of mediacologies, which is useful for thinking about the connected physical and virtual spaces across Appalachia that young people make, use, and interact in for media production, mentoring, and telling their stories. I also discussed different forms of “access” and the need for “meaningful access” (Banks 2012), and the previous chapter further discussed meshworks of social capital and connection through which young people learn about and access media education, leadership development, and long-term organizational structures. Based on observant participation in multiple field sites like OCPL, OCHS, AMI, and High Rocks as well as formal and informal interviews and relevant cultural productions, this chapter explores how physical spaces, communication networks, and media practices provide crucial tools for young people constructing intersectional identities and future possibilities.

In addition to critical access to different programs and how they connect with, learn from, and support one another, material mediacologies provide meaningful access to systems of physical and virtual support that enable certain kinds of relationships, place-making, and cultural productions. Research collaborators commonly discussed how the social contexts for young Appalachians’ media production and consumption practices

are often limited by lacking, crumbling, or externally driven infrastructures in their local and regional communities.

There's so much hardship for that area .... I've watched southeastern Kentucky. .... they were it was always poverty. But now .... driving through, I would see roads being built, that they're bypassing the towns, they're bypassing everything that could bring, you know, tourism or whatever. And it seems like instead of helping the communities, they're making them more isolated in some ways. And I think that with, if we could finally get really good bandwidth, that people can actually, you know, take advantage of working from home and doing, and that they are starting to do that. They're starting to have programming, teach programming to the coal miners that lost their jobs, you know, they're bringing in those greenhouses, that could be a very good opportunity for people to have fresh food and know where it comes from. And maybe even, you know, trade, have more have more to sell. (Warner 2017)

Cynthia Warner shared these observations from her work travelling throughout several counties in East(ern) Kentucky that were in her service area when she was a multimedia education consultant for Kentucky Educational Television. She grew up in Nicholas County, Kentucky, which Kingsolver also shares as her home county and discusses the impact of being bypassed by highways on the cohesion and economic possibilities of small towns like Carlisle (Kingsolver 2011).

In field sites, there were several references to the importance of infrastructures (i.e., paychecks, housing, food, “stability” of safe spaces) in terms of supporting both young people's basic needs and creative aspirations. Research collaborator Ada Smith, an AMI alumn and former director from Whitesburg, Kentucky, noted:

There's a lot to be done. And we're the ones to do it. And so we are just getting off the ground. We've talked about public education. Juvenile justice. Clean water .... this is an infrastructure problem. We don't have sewer systems in the ways that we need them. And so as young people, if want to stay here and raise our families here, we have to talk about the infrastructure we need. And we have to push for it. ...to stay here, and be an active part of the community. (Smith as cited in Goodman and Cocca 2014:222)

Appalshop itself as a long-term non-profit organization with many communication and cultural programs, outlets, and networks constitutes a dense mediacology of support for local and regional young people. Through this foundation, AMI works to provide critical access for broad ranges of youth.

Intern cohorts include valedictorians, youth on parole, the shy and the outspoken, those from low-income and middle-class backgrounds, youth with learning and behavior disabilities, and those who are proven leaders. Ensuring access to the program for young people of all backgrounds means staff often must respond to problems interns face outside the program, working within informal and formal networks to secure resources such as transportation, shelter, food, clothing, and a safe place to discuss problems. (Richards-Schuster and O'Doherty 2012:80)

Shortly after being an AMI intern in the early 2000s, Natasha Watts became the program's youngest director at the age of 19, and she was a doctoral student in education and was also teaching visual communications at Hazard Community and Technical College at the time of our interview. As discussed in the previous chapter, she drew from the multiple lenses and experiences to illustrate the importance of acknowledging and addressing basic needs, like housing and paychecks, alongside educational programming.

In fact, the 2016, 2017, and 2018 calls for applications on the AMI website included as section on "Transportation and Housing" addressing what for many might be a prohibitive factor in participating:

Transportation will be provided for those with need, typically by Appalshop staff, but occasionally from other interns or services such as LKLP [Leslie, Knott, Letcher, Perry non-profit transportation service].<sup>100</sup> A *liability release* will be required of all accepted interns.

Interns living more than an hour away will be provided housing, with meals (excluding lunch) via the Appalshop Casa. An in-house supervisor will live on the

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<sup>100</sup> LKLP is a non-profit organization and Community Action Agency serving "the southeastern Kentucky counties of Leslie, Knott, Letcher, and Perry in the Kentucky River region" addressing housing, transportation, and other resource needs.

property for the entirety of this program. As this location is also considered Appalshop property, all AMI/Appalshop policies will apply.

As I discuss next, public schools provide important social and material support for children outside of home, and the acquisition and construction of built environments as “third spaces” for organizational programming enables youth engagement outside school and home and their co-creation of “spaces for action” and “youth voice” (Woodgate, et al. 2020).

## 5.2 Being There Together: Buildings as Social Contexts and Histories

Built environments and spaces serve various roles, functions, and meanings in different field sites that also relate to important local and regional histories of community economic development. The material media of brick-and-mortar buildings in all the social contexts I studied help provide and support safe social spaces in Meta'lachia as well as the possibilities of envisioning long-term prospects, projects, relationships, and rootedness through processes of place-making wherein “‘space’ becomes ‘place’ through lived experience” and foster affirming spaces of belonging (Blum-Ross 2013:92).

Public schools and other community settings can provide physical infrastructure and social and material sustenance in addition to home environments, and non-profit education programs may also rely on schools as interfaces with young people and connect them with organizational activities and resources (regarding the early days of AMI, see Gipe 2017; Gipe and Messer 1992). In Owsley County and many towns in the Appalachian region, public schools are important social spaces for youth and the local community, which I accessed as a volunteer and as a professional teaching artist through Berea College Partners for Education (PFE). Most of the Kentucky public schools that I visited and/or worked in have some form of gatekeeping for outside visitors, which

usually includes signing in and may also include school safety/security personnel or even an outdoor checkpoint. However, I was surprised by the very low level of security at one large school I visited, where I walked in an unlocked alternate entrance and wandered around until I found someone and asked where I needed to sign in. “Oh, you don’t need to sign in, but I can show you where the main office is.” Given the national context of school shootings and the normalization of active shooter drills in public schools, the relative “safety,” “security,” and surveillance of buildings and their impact on social and learning environments is largely out of students’ control or comprehension.

Depending on the size of the population and resources available, school buildings and curricula vary in the places where I worked as a visiting teaching artist and engaged with students and teachers to produce digital media projects. For example, OCHS does not have a formal theater program or space, but they have a large open space known as “Kids on Stage,” which is a pseudo-auditorium with a freestanding stage and stackable chairs in theater-style formation. Stevi Nolan, who teaches arts and humanities also has a double classroom with a bank of desktop computers and a band room with an old unused radio station studio that the school sold as a fundraiser.



Figure 20 Mural section outside Stevi Nolan’s classroom and band room, Owsley County High School, designed and facilitated by teaching artist Alfredo Escobar, October 3, 2017 (photo by author)

As part of the Arts Connect Appalachian Youth (ACAY) project, students in Mr. Davidson’s 5th-grade homeroom and social studies classes at West Perry Elementary (WPE) School in Hazard, Kentucky conducted interviews and recorded soundscapes and narration for a set of podcasts. One of these included an interview with the principal who emphasized their “beautiful” new building as an important support for the students and their learning (see also WPE Students 2019), which I learned was the result of consolidation of three different schools. Nicole Hall, who had just graduated from high school in West Virginia, more critically talked about school buildings and consolidation politics after the devastating and deadly flooding throughout the state in 2016.



[R]ight now our County is very torn in half because ... we come from a very prideful community, especially in our education and our backgrounds. And due to the flooding that happened, destroying Richwood High School and Middle School, and then Nicholas County Middle School, which are all torn down now, there's been a controversy about whether or not to consolidate. And there are two opposing sides filled with scandal, lawsuits, and corruption.... (Hall 2018)

I asked her how she felt about the consolidation issue even as a recent graduate.

I personally can see the pros and cons of both sides. I've been trying to stay very neutral .... in the campaign for it because I personally just graduated. I'd had, I did spend two years in the actual Richwood High School and then two years in the trailers. And that's what I graduated from. .... I've also visited the other high school, and I know that they have lots of issues, like the sewer lines in a lot of our schools are just not up to standard. And it would be beneficial, like structural-wise, and of course we'd have like a "super-school," it would have like, "An amazing band! And an amazing like sports team." But also there is a very like large difference economically between some of the students in both the [schools]. A lot of the .... poor community go to Richwood, but we have a quality education and the teachers really care about us. But I've heard that a lot of the .... more economically blessed children go to Nicholas County High School. .... a lot of their teachers aren't as invested in them. And it's a bit ... stricter, and it's a lot more about sports there. So I just would be worried about like the Richwood kids falling through the cracks. And I am a little bit invested in it just because of my younger sister's education where she's going to be a junior this year, and I hope they start to figure things out because there's been no headway for the last two years on decision-making. (Hall 2018)

The construction of "super-schools" impacts not only building quality, but the scale of schools also affects the quality of student learning and social environments. When I facilitated the podcast project in Perry County, Kentucky, students mediated their former and current school identities through processes of naming their teams at each table.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, public school contexts differ from residential spaces and "significant summer experiences" like AMI and High Rocks where they can experiment with who they are sometimes more openly. These non-profit "third spaces" are similar to public schools in that they rely on access to functional built environments to support youth social contexts. As a fifty-year-old organization,

Appalshop is an established, well-known institution in the local community and broader region, and the asymmetrical wood-sided building in downtown Whitesburg is a recognizable symbol of community-based media-making in the region. Herb E. Smith, one of its founding filmmakers, talked about the importance of the main Appalshop building on 91 Madison Avenue in an E-newsletter highlighting the 50th anniversary celebration. “Buying the building was a huge step. Put a million dollars into one of the biggest buildings in town, and people said, ‘Damn, they’re gonna be here permanently.’ .... For a lot of people, it was the building that made people think we meant it” (Smith quoted in November 2019 Appalshop E-newsletter).



Figure 21 Appalshop headquarters from the Boone Building across the bridge over the North Fork of the Kentucky River, Whitesburg, Kentucky, July 9, 2014 (photo by author)

The Appalshop headquarters represents a concrete level of visibility and permanence that has enabled regional media production and intergenerational mentorship to thrive for half a century. The Boone Building similarly facilitated different artmaking and community-building offerings for young people through early punk shows and later AMI programming and development into the Boone Youth Drop-In Center. The AMI residential Summer Documentary Institute occurs over two months of the summer and is currently housed primarily in the Boone Building for programming and the Casa for intern housing. However, the earlier days of the summer program took place in the Appalshop conference room and did not always include housing for participants. For example, Natasha Watts described her early residential experience at AMI without much affection.

[S]o I went to AMI that summer [of 2000], and I actually really loathed it my first summer. We actually stayed at the Super 8 in Whitesburg. It's now called the Whitesburg Motel, ... for six weeks, and we had to stay Monday through Friday. And at that time I'd never stayed away from home, and I think it's a real weird situation when you are staying at a hotel in your hometown, your very small hometown. (Watts 2016)

She went on to say that it also challenged her in positive ways such as having a black roommate from Mississippi through a youth organization partnership. Neither “had never been in the presence, so closely, of someone of a different race. And what was even more intriguing was that she and I both were living with our grandmothers ... being raised with our grandmothers being the head of the household” (Watts 2016).



Figure 22 Appalachian Media Institute, Boone Building, Whitesburg, Kentucky, June 9, 2015 (Photo by author)

Willa Johnson who was lead educator at the time of her interview talked about her first summer at AMI when she and Mikie Burke started together and Rebecca O’Doherty was the Director and Natasha Watts was the lead educator. “It was the summer of 2007, and it was before Boone Building hosted AMI. We were all in a conference room for the entire summer. So you get to be a close- knit community” (Johnson 2016). Mikie, who was also working with AMI at the time, similarly contrasted the pre-Boone/post-Boone days.

so *this* [Boone] building that we’re in *wasn’t* AMI’s at all. Like my first summer at AMI was in a little conference room at Appalshop. So we had to use like little bitty rooms at Appalshop to edit and all that stuff. And then the next year, we got *this* place. .... We [AMI] got this building in 2008. And things really changed. Slowly, but surely. The Boone’s really come to life at this point. .... we grew up coming to shows here. (Burke 2016)

The Boone building at 59 Madison Avenue is across the street and across the bridge from the main headquarters, and this space where “weird kids” and young people “grew up” now houses the AMI program and is an increasingly available space in contrast to more make-shift locations for youth programming.

Appalshop originally purchased the Boone Motor building in 2000, and they received funding support from NEA and Kentucky Department of Transportation grants to begin renovations on the building. “Originally built as a car dealership, and used later as a chair factory, the 9,000 sq. foot building is a well-known landmark in downtown Whitesburg” (Appalshop 2012). Early uses for the building included “as a [‘safe haven’ and] rock venue for local youth concerts” and related events known as “Youth Bored,” which “is the unifying name given to an underground music and youth culture movement [with punk roots] that has been active in rural eastern Kentucky since c. 2000” (Appalshop Archive 2020).<sup>101</sup> This space and the youth-organized punk “movement” was also the subject and title of an AMI documentary subtitled “Uniting Appalachian Youth” (Spangler and Campbell 2002), co-produced by Ben Spangler who was AMI co-director with Ada Smith the first summer I visited the program in 2014. AMI interns typically watch this film among other AMI films produced by previous cohorts, and several of the 2015 interns said that it was their favorite. It features footage of concerts

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<sup>101</sup> An archived page of the Appalshop website included a brief history of the Boone building, photos, and preliminary renovation plans as a long-term infrastructure project, which also includes a sparse page on “Youth Bored.” See also the “Youth Bored Archive” Facebook page and related collection in the Appalshop Archive, including the documentary and several digitized fliers.

and interviews with concert goers and organizers, including very young versions of various AMI staff at the time of my fieldwork.

Several research collaborators commented on the significance of the Boone Building related to the level of programming and support possibilities offered by AMI and other programs. Ada talked about the significance of that space and how it enabled long-term friendships to develop and supported alternative visions and options for what was possible for young people from the region.

.... a lot of my friend circle, we all got to know each other when we were like 13-14, and it was because we were having these punk shows in Eastern Kentucky. And so, across the street at the old Boone building, we had Youth Bored shows, and then there were also punk shows that would happen in Prestonsburg and Allen and Pikeville and Hazard, and you know, anywhere we could have them, we'd have them. Corbin, Kentucky, Manchester, and so we would drive like an hour-and-a-half to go to a punk show (laughs). And now we're all in our like early twenties or mid-twenties, and we've known each other forever. And it's been all these kids who've been like really weird in high school, we like didn't know anybody. Like you know, we were dying our hair, had piercings or like acting weird in high school, so like we weren't normal high school kids. And at the same time, they're starting some of the most amazing stuff I've ever seen. Like one of my housemates and good friends right now like has a record label, like I'm, "What?!" And then one of my other friends is actually, you know, gotten in a band that he's like touring nationally. I mean there's all this weird stuff, and then there's also people who are like starting bakeries, like someone decided to be a doctor, and yet we all used to go to these punk shows together. It's just like a very weird network, and yet I also think a lot of those kids have decided to stay in East Kentucky for some reason that I have lots of ideas about. And also I feel like they were very interested in this kind of being happy where we come from but also you know, pushing the boundaries of what it could be. (Smith 2013)

The Boone Building became and continued to develop as an important space for connecting many young people with one another over time. Mikie Burke's entire history of engagement with Appalshop and AMI is rooted in spending his formative years in the physical and social space of the Boone Building.

I always went to concerts here in this building. Like I found a newspaper article my aunt sent me that was like ....me and the guy Will Dodson, who put on the concerts in the building we're in right now. .... it was like me at the age of 12,

and it was like, “The youngest member of Youth Bored puts on his first concert this week.” .... So I’ve been in this building doing activities and stuff since I was 10, but I started like doing stuff at the age of 12 . . . like booking bands, contacting people, and doing stuff like that. I’m 26 now, and so I’ve been working extremely involved with AMI for the past 10 years. .... It’s been really, really good for me to have this space. .... it’s funny to walk around the building ‘cause ... there’s like a handprint on a door out here, this white handprint. .... I always see people talking about it and wondering what it is. .... I can remember distinctly being like 15, and my friend Eli having paint on his hand and putting it up there. And it’s just like there. .... this was our playground, you know. This building was my playground. I got to come here and ... watch movies, talk to people, meet new people, and then ... play music, which was ... the craziest thing for this area .... having punk bands and in these [big bay] windows while these people drive by. .... But yeah, I guess all that combined made me just stick around. (Burke 2016)

As Mikié’s experience (as one of many) vividly illustrates, there are multiple layers of memories and artworks inscribed on the building over many years, and they represent the meshworks of people’s lives and the shared spaces they co-create. These representations enable “aging out” and “formerly young” people to recall and relive earlier times when they were young people forging new identities and spaces for connecting.

Kate Fowler who was AMI director at the time talking about the magic of youth-led and community-supported social contexts that occur within a former garage space that still needed some help.

[T]he thing that I want to say that’s been really inspiring about being here is ... that like a physical building and a place that’s just like got really terrible concrete floors, (laughs) and it can be really dirty, can like really build a sense of community and identity into young people, and that they can take ownership over and connect to, and that leads to different forms of education and possibly like *higher* education, or if they don’t want to do that, other jobs, has been amazing! That, to me, this is like the center of community where young people are watched and looked over and cared for by their grandparents and by shop owners, and where young folks can make a film about a really taboo subject that people usually feel really uncomfortable talking about, and that those same community members will come like cheer and cry and like root them on at the end of the summer, even if it’s like uncomfortable or even if it shines the light on things that people don’t necessarily want to reveal about their own community, is incredibly powerful. And I’d also want to emphasize that I really do think that a lot of the community work that happens here, it’s kind of like unseen. That there are people

who are like there trying to raise the money to like sustain the spaces and make sure they exist, and make sure people are like trained and that the bus is being driven. But the things that I've seen the most that have been the most impactful are like when Oakley is the first person to .... properly gender somebody in a space when the adults aren't doing it. (Laughs) And when like, uh, you know, young people are given free food at the local restaurant because someone has just noticed that they haven't been eating for a few days. Like there's just a lot of like unseen grounding in the community, and if that community wasn't already strong and present, we could stand in this room all day and talk about place-based identity and heritage, and young people would never connect to it. But it's because all of these systems are working on a daily basis within their own community to kind of uplift them, and hold them, and keep them safe, that I think this program is able to succeed. And I don't think it would necessarily succeed in other places because maybe those systems are a little more diluted or a little bit more disconnected or decentralized. So, I think the community here is awesome. (Laughs) It's really, really awesome! .... everybody knows each other, and they really look after their young folks. And even if their young folks are calling them out on something, they're standing up and like cheering them on and letting them interview them year after year after year! (Laughs) So to me, that's my takeaway, is that this community is pretty awesome. (Laughs) (Fowler 2016)

Over time, Appalshop and AMI have broadened access for local and regional youth through the Boone Youth Drop-In Center, which opened more recently as a place for young people to hang out and make art three evenings a week. As Dustin Hall, an AMI alum and Boone regular described it, the “Boone Youth Drop-In Center .... through the Boone Building across the street where we do all of our work, is having us all do workshops and screenings and these things to help bring youth in to educate themselves, be educated with a safe space, learn about film, media, check out cameras, and photograph their own lives, and .... theater ....” (Hall 2016). I hung out there with AMI interns when I visited during summer programming, and when I participated in the Fall Theater Lab, I attended (or at least observe in passing) other youth-centered, youth-led activities that took place during the first few official weeks at the Boone Youth Drop-in Center. In 2016, I also stayed in the Casa during my summer visit to AMI and for the duration of my time participating in the Fall Theater Lab.





Figure 23 John Muir quote on the Appalshop Casa porch looking toward Pine Mountain, Whitesburg, Kentucky, November 4, 2016 (Photo by author)

The Casa is a two-story clapboard house owned by Appalshop, which is next to a small cemetery tucked into a protected corner at the end of a dead-end street off the bypass. It is close to downtown Whitesburg as the crow flies, but it is not exactly within walking distance of Appalshop because there is no continuous pedestrian pathway for safely traversing the distance on foot. Even though there is no direct connection between the two, AMI interns without their own transportation sometimes did so if they had no other options. There are some fast-food restaurants within nearby walking distance of the Casa, but again there are no real sidewalks except for the breakdown lanes on either side of the stretch of four-lane highway. While access to the Casa is more ideal than staying in a hotel or having no local housing options at all, it is still off-site from the primary

programming activities at the Boone Center and Appalshop. Not all eligible students stay in the Casa for various reasons and choose to commute daily to participate in instructional and production activities. Sometimes parents may not allow their kids to stay if they are still minors, and some older interns may have other outside jobs in other counties. For example, Devyn Creech commuted an hour one way from Harlan County when she was an AMI intern in 2014. These young people must negotiate daily transportation throughout the program.

During the summer program, a live-in summer Casa manager helps feed and oversee the AMI interns. Apparently, the same local woman did this for many years but then could not continue for personal reasons, so there was some transition occurring during my fieldwork. Overseeing multiple young people can be a big job in terms of setting boundaries and accountability, especially for peer educators who may be asked to help out. For example, one young woman who was an AMI intern and later a peer educator said that it can also be challenging to be “there [in the Casa] as basically a mediator” and exercise leadership and guidance in such an intimate space.

Similar to Appalshop/AMI, the property and buildings at High Rocks enable immersive residential programming, STEAM education, and leadership development for young people. Its history is tied specifically to a network of women founders and educators with a goal of supporting girls and young women. My first two summers at High Rocks, the themes of media major projects primarily focused on some physical structure at camp and how it related to its history and programs, partly to help the organization document them.

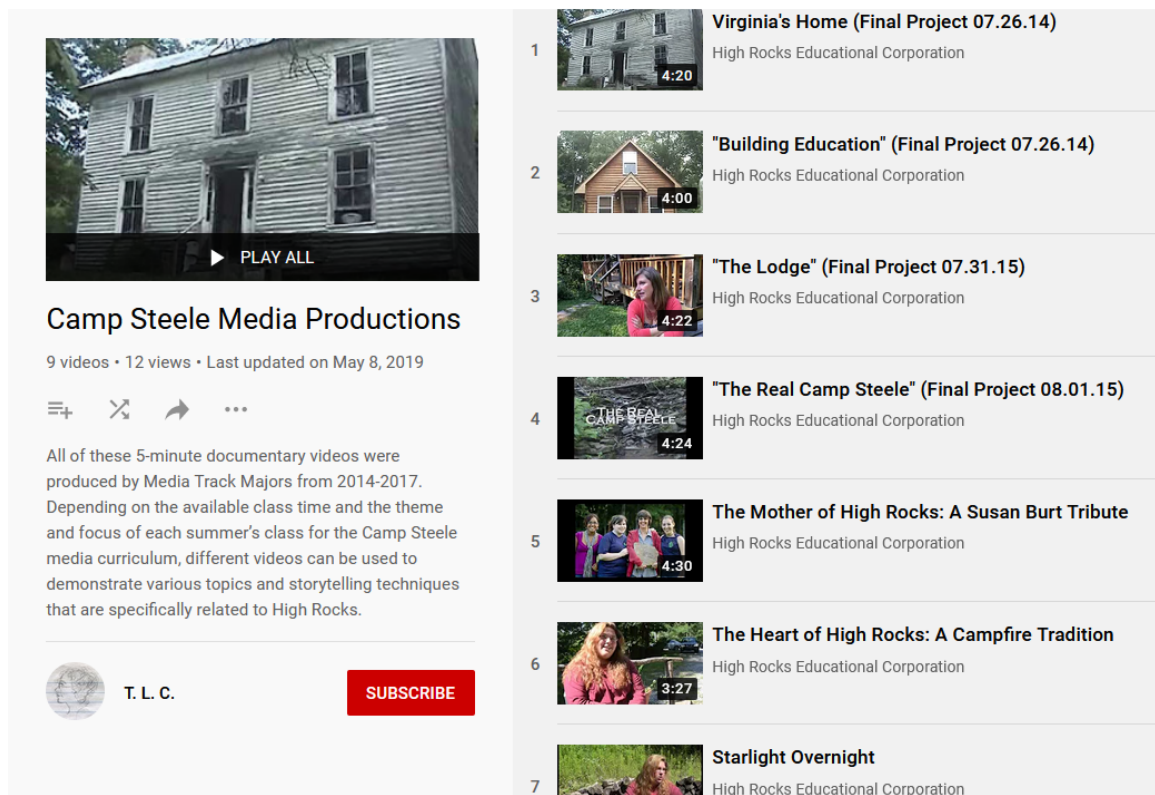


Figure 24 Partial screen image of YouTube playlist of High Rocks Camp Steele Media Track videos from 2014-2017 (Playlist and image by author)

As discussed in the previous chapter on intergenerational meshworks, founder Susan Burt's influence of going to girls' schools and having a dream of a camp (Eisenbeiss, et al. 2014; Sealey and McCallister 2016) along with the property from Virginia Steele provided the primary infrastructure to support the idea and help make it real. (See Figure 5 Camp/us map sketch on page 28.)

One of the 2015 projects was about the High Rocks Lodge that now serves as the main office building and "How the Lodge was damaged in the flood and remodeled" the previous winter (Zuckett and Harbert 2015).<sup>102</sup> High Rocks director Sarah Riley talked

<sup>102</sup> For "B-roll" still images, I helped scan archival photos from the early days of High Rocks and the construction of the Lodge as well as collect photos of flood damage.

about the need for a physical space for programs and how the main Lodge headquarters came to be in a 2016 Camp Steele media production.

What was it like before the lodge? It was incredibly crowded because what we did is that we had the very first camp, and then those girls started calling afterwards saying, “Hey, I have a math test.” “Hey, can I come over?” “Hey, I had a fight with my mom.” “Hey, I’m not sure about what to do with this thing.” “Hey, I have a math test.” “Do you know any Spanish?” and started coming to my mom and dad’s house, and that’s how the tutoring program was started. .... The lodge was originally used for ... the tutoring program and .... the two little offices on the far end of the building were our two offices. And the rest of it was for reunions and overnights and tutoring. .... So the Lodge gave us .... room to grow, and it gave all of the High Rocks girls a home that is theirs. (Sarah Riley quoted from video interview in Zuckett and Harbert 2015)

Construction of the High Rocks Lodge began in 1997 with funding support “to build a classroom” from a \$30,000 grant from an Episcopal ministry known as United Thank Offering.

And so we were going to build this classroom, and we had a prison crew that was here from Denmark Prison [Denmark Correctional Center and Jail, which is also in Pocahontas County outside of Hillsboro], just like the prisoners that clean up their roads for the Department of Highways. And the sheriff at the time was friends with Justice Workman. Margaret Workman was the first state Supreme Court justice for West Virginia who was a woman, and he talked to her about the High Rocks program, and she helped us get a prison crew that helped us clear the land and build the campground. And one of the prisoners on our crew was, had been a contractor before he went to jail and so he knew how to build things. (Sarah Riley quoted from video interview in Zuckett and Harbert 2015)

In addition to funding from a religious ministry, local and state networks of legislative and law-enforcement power helped organize the use of prison labor, which however skilled and seemingly benevolent the relationship, cannot be separated from the larger prison industrial complex and structural violence.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> The OCPL remodeling project using labor from Kentucky Corrections in the introductory story is another illustration that non-profit organizations and institutions serving the public good are embedded in larger political economic and carceral systems. As discussed later in this chapter and elsewhere,

Sarah later talked about the winter flooding and damage that occurred at the Lodge and its impact on the organization and programs.

Ugh, the flood! [Sarah smacks her head.] The flood happened this year, the terrible flood, and .... it was awful .... we had a lot of really cold weather this year, and we have another problem, which is that the Lodge is actually a war zone .... with *the squirrels*. So .... we've always had squirrels that would like sneak into the Lodge, but it's never been like it was this year, where literally the squirrels were chewing through metal to get back into the Lodge. So, we had a snap of super cold weather this winter, right, and the heating line on this end of the building right here on the second floor in a place where the evil squirrels had been, did not have enough insulation, and it froze because it was so cold for so many days. And then we had one day finally when it was like 50 degrees, and it was a Sunday and everything was snowed in, and those lines thawed. It had busted the lines, so when it thawed, it just started running, started flooding across the floor. And it flooded for two days before we found it.... So, it was over 5,000 gallons of water. It was like dumping a swimming pool in that office up there. So, it went all the way across the middle of the second floor. It rained, rained, rained into the library, and it rained, rained, rained through the library into the basement, and it ran through the floorboards across the ceiling, and it rained, rained, rained, rained in the dining room. (Sarah Riley quoted from video interview in Zuckett and Harbert 2015)

Furthermore, the remoteness of the High Rocks campus and already rugged roads to get there hindered repairs. "Well, we couldn't do anything else. We just had to .... shut down all of fundraising and programs" because the snow was so high at the time that "even when we discovered it that it was flooding, you couldn't drive up the road. So, we had to hike from the end of the road up to the Lodge." Sarah talked about removing the "soaking wet" mess "in the freezing cold" so "it could get aired out," and she expressed gratitude for Randy and Justin, local "contractors who come and fix stuff for us. But we all worked on it together trying to get all that stuff out of here, and just truckload after truckload after

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organizations and cultural productions in the region also include reflexive critiques of knowing or unwitting complicity/collusion with structural power and violence that reproduces the inequities and injustices in criminal justice and community development that they seek to ameliorate.

truckload of books to the landfill” (Sarah Riley quoted from video interview in Zuckett and Harbert 2015).

In addition to losing many purchased and gifted books housed in the Lodge Library, Devin Preston, High Rocks parent, mentor, and previous co-teacher with me, mentioned that all the computers in the were destroyed in the flood. The insurance covered their replacement, but not in time for camp that summer, so we had to transport a couple of computers from the Hub in Lewisburg to use as editing stations. The water damage could have posed a risk to the High Rocks archive of photos and other organizational documentation, which Shelby Mack, another research collaborator and co-teacher, happened to have at her home for digitizing when the flood occurred.

The history and development of camp structures at High Rocks Academy/Camp also includes the Camp Steele construction track as an important applied learning curriculum building program infrastructure over time. Therefore, summer construction projects become important parts of camp culture and history through these social and material relationships as well as through artistic media like murals that visually document the stories and imaginations of different cohorts of young people. For example, in the High Rocks alumni group on Facebook, someone called for members to share posts of murals on different buildings and people commenting on ones they worked on and when.

Construction and buildings at High Rocks is also frequent subject of media projects that help tell the story of the people, places, and practices that produce “the High Rocks.” For example, Kris Arbuckle’s Camp Steele video was about construction “but not.”

So about two or three years ago, I can’t remember exactly when ... I did this video here at High Rocks in my track. And we filmed the construction track here

at High Rocks, but it was not *about* construction? What my partner .... Kelsey Sue and I did with this video is that we turned it into kind of like a public service announcement. ... talking about belonging somewhere and feeling like an outcast and why High Rocks and construction ... we can use those analogies and how they make us feel and why we love what we do here because it makes us feel included. .... “This is what we went through, but this is why we’re here and what High Rocks makes us feel, and makes us feel strong and independent and proud. And we feel like we’re a part of something and we belong. We didn’t know that until then, and so like, can we show that construction class building a building with the girls that you’re staying with creates a sense of belonging, which they can .... take back to their school life and their everyday life after they leave camp. And they know they did something to help future High Rocks girls. But they’ve also created friendships and bonds that they know will last forever. And they know how to do something else, and (pauses) simple teamwork skills go from construction to everyday life. .... mainly what that video was about was (pauses) just connecting, finding a sense of belonging, and finding that strong independent woman inside of all of us. And knowing that, if somebody doesn’t accept us for who we are, then that’s okay because there are others that will, we just haven’t found them yet. And to always hold on and keep persevering ‘cause ... not everything goes right on the construction site, [TC laughs] and so not everything goes right in life. And so, it’s a really neat analogy that we were able to find in the video and just turn around, and it told a story. Kelsey Sue and I would talk about what our lives were like in school before we came to High Rocks, and then we came and it taught us that that isn’t *who* we are, that’s just something we’re going through to discover who we will *become*. And like, the platform for the construction, that’s not what it is. It’s not a platform, it’s the start of what it *will* become. And so we can’t dwell on what’s hard currently, but if we keep pushing, we keep building, we’ll end up with a masterpiece at some point. (Arbuckle 2015)

One of the 2014 projects, *Building Education* features one of the buildings at the campsite that girls in a previous summer construction class helped build. It also tells a story of young women’s empowerment and education as the building symbolizes the freedom of exploration and expression that High Rocks girls experience (Forren, et al. 2014).

In addition to the metaphoric and material importance of camp construction, High Rocks also has an intern house in Hillsboro where summer interns reside during their 2-month stay for New Beginnings and Camp Steele. High Rocks also has additional satellite youth spaces in neighboring counties, like the Hub (Lewisburg, Greenbrier County) and Steele Studio (Richwood, Nicholas County). The Hub serves as a

combination youth center and café where young people can work in paid positions and eat affordably. As I discuss in the conclusion, programs like the Hub became an important service for young people and the broader communities after the COVID quarantine.

At High Rocks, another part of the key infrastructure is food-related structures, projects, and curricula. Over the years, I met several people who served as AmeriCorps volunteers for their Grow Appalachia programming (for example, see Clemons and Reedy 2015), which includes on-site greenhouses and garden beds that help supplement the food supply for camps and other programming as well as community outreach in sustainable agriculture. As an alumni and former director of AMI, Natasha Watts casually offered a closing comment comparing the food at High Rocks where she once visited for a regional meeting. “Culturally [AMI & High Rocks] have a lot of ties, but they function differently to help that specific place and how that works. ... It is very different. I did love my breakfast there [at High Rocks] though, it was all like farm raised. ... We don’t have this at AMI! We’re getting like Little Caesar’s pizzas and hopin’ for the best” (Watts 2016).

As several research collaborators noted, food security is a fundamental infrastructure issue not only in these organizations and programs but throughout the Appalachian region. Brandon Jent discussed food issues and “all kinds of really cool stuff” that directly related to his VISTA work at the time with Grow Appalachia and the Letcher County farmers’ market “to bring more local fresh healthy food into the region ... by local folks growing it and then having access to it as a region” (Jent 2016). He also mentioned food-related projects connecting to health issues and economic development.



For example, the Appal Tree project offered cooking classes that “gave people resources ... and skills and the knowledge to like cook healthy food at home, and .... how to shop smart and how to like budget, and how to use everything that you have. .... they learned knife skills, they learned like how to use every part of a chicken for like five meals throughout the week.” He also talked about a “Farmacy” program in partnership with local health agency Mountain Comprehensive Health Corporation (MCHC) through which:

local doctors .... give out prescriptions for local fruit and vegetables for people with food-related diseases or illnesses. ... so like we have a lot of people with diabetes, or with high blood pressure, or ... whatever, that can get a certain amount of money from this program to spend at the farmers’ market to get produce that’s grown by local farmers. ... then they’re tracked, like their BMI and their blood pressure and stuff is tracked, I think weekly or monthly .... at MCHC and like to see what difference like access to (pauses) to fresh produce, local fresh produce has on these illnesses or problems. .... they’re starting a (pauses) commercial community kitchen called .... CANE, Inc. Community Agriculture and Nutritional Enterprises, Incorporated. .... at old Whitesburg high school .... campus, MCHC .... they’re giving the kitchen part of it, the big round part of the building, ... for it to be like a dining area. And .... they’re going to be able to do canning classes out of it, and people are going to be able to have their products, like packaged and available for resale ... by USDA standard. .... there’s so many opportunities that like could come from this, that like it could be a huge thing for like local growers and sellers in the region. Like people that .... want to sell their (pauses) salsa, or .... any sort of food item like they can have it like packaged and ready .... to like be put on a shelf somewhere. And that can be just done down the road, and not like, in I think Jackson might be the closest one to us? .... so not very close at all. (Jent 2016) <sup>104</sup>

Connecting people’s health/care to access to local agriculture/produce and utilizing an old school building to support food-based enterprises in the local community both model and provide material mediacaologies of support for food security in Meta’lachia.

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<sup>104</sup> See “CANE in Action” (Boles 2018).



Figure 25 Owsley County Action Team Plaza, Booneville, Kentucky, January 29, 2020  
(Photo by author)

Owsley County Action Team (OCAT) has been an important non-profit supporting community and economic development in the rural community since the 1990s, and OCAT has been instrumental in addressing local job creation and affordable housing issues as well as supporting community arts projects like the *HomeSong* series of community-based plays. Molly Turner grew up in Owsley County and worked for 27 years as a public educator in neighboring Perry County, and at the time she was the Executive Director of OCAT when I interviewed her. At the time, OCAT had three employees on their payroll, and two of those were funded through a Drug-Free Communities grant that prioritized substance abuse prevention activities among mostly teenagers (Turner 2017). OCAT Plaza serves as non-profit headquarters for the organization, which includes a community meeting space and a small Partners for Education (PFE) outreach office. OCAT Plaza also includes and provides infrastructure support for other non-profit agencies and employment opportunities in the community,

including the Booneville Entertainment Center (BEC) that shows films and stages community plays; Partnership Housing; a TeleWorks center that I discuss in a later section about internet connectivity; and a retail space (Family Dollar not pictured above).

JoAnne Richardson is a former AmeriCorps VISTA with PFE (in the OCAT office) who worked with high school students and parent engagement, and she is also a theater artist who participated in *HomeSong* productions and numerous other locally produced plays. JoAnne helped create the BEC as a member and then chair of OCARE, which screens Hollywood films, puts on community theatre productions, and spearheads the Booneville Theatre Project to revive and remodel the old Seale movie theatre. OCAT donated rent-free use of the BEC space to OCARE, which only had to pay utilities, but when OCARE purchased the Old Seale Theater in Booneville (Figure 26), they had to pay the monthly mortgage plus inspection and removal of asbestos (Richardson 2018).



Figure 26 Old Seale Theater and fundraising marquee “ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO MY OPENING NIGHT? I AM TOO! HELP MAKE IT HAPPEN FASTER-DONATE HERE!” Booneville, Kentucky, January 29, 2020 (Photo by author)

### 5.3 Getting There: Mobility, Transportation, and Roads/Highways

Organizations and institutions with stable physical infrastructures can offer and support young people using and developing them as their own spaces; however, this also means that young people also have to get there to access them. As Shaylan Clark said when discussing the challenges accessing media education programs/resources and other local/regional opportunities in Chapter 4, “Transportation .... is a really big issue. If they’re wanting to do anything that’s like outside of Harlan, I feel like that would be extremely hard for kids to get to. So that’s an issue. That’s a hard one.” In general, young people are more geographically limited in mobility because they do not drive/have control over their movements and social contexts beyond home and school (Yapchaian 2008). This section discusses transportation limitations and support systems for accessing art-based school programming, organizational programming, other creative and social outlets for young people, and job opportunities.

Schools and teachers face decreased funding for arts education as well as professional development support that teachers often seek to provide DIY arts education in their classrooms. For example, Judy Sizemore works with public school teachers doing professional development through venues like the Berea Learn Shops, which I attended a couple in 2019. She said there were just a handful of teachers that year compared to previous years that had maximum capacity (about 40 to 50 people) and that teachers did not have access to funding or transportation. Some schools may provide transportation reimbursement to teachers but in general they have to pay their own registration to participate in a Learnshop, which was over \$100 for one-day two-workshop series. She also commented on the quality of snacks offered because teachers often travel long distances and have to cover their own meals. She said the first year, the co-organizers

bought Little Debbie snack cakes, which remained uneaten, so she advocated for more nutritious, high-quality fare that year, which included various bagels and cream cheese options from Native Bagel (local restaurant owned by BC graduates), granola bars, fruit, water, juice, and coffee (personal communication).

Similarly, providing and accessing arts education can depend on external transportation funding because of decreasing school transportation budgets for field trips. State agencies like the Kentucky Arts Council (KAC) and non-profit organizations like Kentucky Educational Television (KET) offer funding support opportunities for arts education in schools, including grants specifically targeted toward transportation for arts-related activities like the KAC TranspARTation Grant (Kentucky Arts Council 2020b) and the KET transportation subsidy for their Media Lab workshops (Kentucky Educational Television 2020), as well as KET field consultants in places like Eastern Kentucky (Warner 2017).

While some schools can access arts-related transportation subsidies to off-set budget cuts and arts-related programming offered through programs like Berea College Partners for Education (PFE), infrastructure and geography can also limit safe affordable travel. PFE Arts Integration Coordinator Sarah Campbell talked about how infrastructure issues effect the logistical support for grant-funded student-produced creative assets projects like “Our Creative Promise.”

We’ve run into challenges, just coordinating the project that sort of brought up some issues in terms of access to technology and high-speed internet. Transportation, the huge distance between many of these schools and other resources, the amount of time it takes for an artist to get there to do a residency, or as a group in same old school and in Louisville that’s trying to spend \$1,000 for artists residences, might be able to get the artist to come to their school, every afternoon for an hour for a few weeks. Whereas trying to find an artist to travel all the way to Jenkins, from Lexington, or Louisville or even Berea, a whole day’s

taken up just in travel. So that budget goes really fast. It doesn't stretch in the same way. .... [T]here are many active artists in most of these counties. .... at times have to use artists that are on like the Kentucky Arts Council Teaching Artists roster. And there aren't many artists on the roster from this region. But there are artists there. So that's actually something we plan to work on is trying to get more of those artists on to the roster so that isn't as big of an issue in the future. (Campbell 2018)

Those transportation dollars literally do not spend the same in urban population-dense areas as they do in rural areas. Furthermore, encouraging local artists to teach their crafts in regional schools helps keep grant monies for these programs in the region.

Challenges and possibilities for visual media production in the Appalachian region include the geographical terrain and remoteness that can make travel difficult. Educators in Owsley County talked about this factor in providing access to educational and artistic opportunities. For example, Glenn Baker, who had been involved with *HomeSong* and led the Appalachian "Student Voice" team at the time, said:

Accessibility still .... 'cause we're fairly isolated ... that is a problem. Although it's getting better, you know, through Berea College's Promise Neighborhood and, and now through things that are happening in the Promise Zone, which, you know, is moving forward with the arts, accessibility is, is better than it has been. But that is still a concern. And transportation for our children is still a concern, you know, getting them to productions or to practices. That's, that's still a concern for us. But I think .... it's getting better, it's getting better. (Baker 2017)

When I asked OCHS teacher Stevi Nolan if she was aware of any other formal youth-oriented media education programs outside of the Film Club or Owsley County, she said:

I don't think I don't know of any close, I mean, probably not any of these kids could get to, you know, have to drive quite a ways to Lexington or Richmond or somewhere farther away. And you know that transportation's a huge problem. So not only, you know, the ... grants that Berea has, and the people coming in ... that's what these kids see, you know, and .... they don't see any, not much outside of Owsley. And, you know, when we take kids somewhere, that's a real treat for them. .... they've not been anywhere. When I take a group to Louisville, I mean, a lot of them haven't been out of Booneville or out of Owsley or .... just going places, it's eye-opening for them. So, you know, there's not a lot of opportunity. Especially ... for film and for media. I think that's even less than ...

the other arts. You know, I think there's a lot of bluegrass music and a lot of, you know, quilting, or, you know, different types of tactile arts, visual arts, and painting even here. But when you get into media, there's just not a whole lot. (Nolan 2018)

Access to transportation becomes a factor when there are limited resources available locally to support certain interests.

Transportation can also be challenging within local communities, and some organizational infrastructures includes built-in transportation support for young people to access programming, events, and art-making resources. As noted in the earlier AMI application excerpt, the local LKLP non-profit public transportation serving Leslie, Knott, Letcher, Perry Counties is one way that local young people can physically access Appalshop and AMI programming and employment opportunities. A couple of AMI/All Access EKY interns also produced a short public service announcement about the impact of transportation on access to reproductive health resources and services in Eastern Kentucky, citing limitations with LKLP (Adams and Griffith 2018).

THERE ARE MANY OBSTACLES THAT PREVENT  
WOMEN FROM OBTAINING ACCESS TO BIRTH  
CONTROL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE

IN RURAL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY,  
LIKE EASTERN KENTUCKY, THERE ARE  
LIMITED SOURCES OF TRANSPORTATION,  
RESTRICTING WOMEN'S ACCESS EVEN MORE

THERE ARE FEW PUBLIC  
TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS AVAILABLE  
IN EASTERN KENTUCKY, AND  
CERTAIN GUIDELINES MUST BE  
MET TO QUALIFY FOR THEM

TO QUALIFY FOR LKLP SERVICES, FOR EXAMPLE,  
PATIENTS MUST QUALIFY FOR MEDICAID  
AND HAVE NO OTHER FORM OF  
TRANSPORTATION WITHIN THEIR HOUSEHOLD

NOT ALL PATIENTS IN NEED OF  
HEALTH CARE MEET THESE  
STANDARDS

THIS LACK OF TRANSPORTATION HINDERS  
THE LIVES OF MANY IN EASTERN KENTUCKY,  
ESPECIALLY WHEN OBTAINING HEALTH CARE

WITH THREATENED CUTS TO MEDICAID AND  
SIMILAR SERVICES, TRANSPORTATION IS  
LIKELY TO BECOME MORE SCARCE THAN IT  
ALREADY IS; *WE MUST ACT NOW* (Adams and Griffith 2018)

When I interviewed High Rocks director Sarah Riley, I asked about transportation and accessibility issues and how the students get there physically and generally.

So, one of the things that we try to do is focus on intensive experience. I mean we're really focused on transformational education and what are transformational experiences. But it's, during the school year some of the kids can ride the bus here from one county to another county. They can ride to the county line, but the other one they can't ride at all because of course nobody lives there. We do a lot of carpools; you know we have some parents that can help with the carpools and some parents that say that they can't. And you know I take everyone at their word. But we definitely drive kids a lot. I think that's one thing that makes High Rocks a different kind of program from other kinds of programs we have. In the summertime we're in residential mode when a camp starts. And normally parents can get them here and pick them up at the end. But they don't, they're here for 17 days, they're here for a long time. (Riley 2013)

High Rocks has a fleet of vehicles used for daily operations and programming including camp fieldtrips, regional college visits, lobbying legislature, and local programming.

Remote geography is real in some places and can limit imaginative and practical possibilities for young people. For example, when I asked Kyra Higgins, who is from Knott County, Kentucky, about challenges for visual media production in Appalachia, she responded:

Some are like, "Oh it's an isolated area," but really when you think about it, it's not. We have so many exports and things and people traveling through and then *us* traveling through to other places. It's *not* isolated. I would say as far as



isolation goes, it's not necessarily "Oh, we're here, we're stuck in this time zone, and it must stay this way always," like some people like to think about it. The isolation is not that. So that's what I mean when I say it's not isolated, but it *is* isolated and certain like technical aspects because it's a mountainous region. There are certain roads and things that *can't* be built *because* of the region. And then there's also the aspect of there are areas that still struggle with telephone and internet companies and how to set that up so that it's more efficient. (Higgins 2017)

Kyra herself does not drive and carools with others to participate in different opportunities.<sup>105</sup> Rae Garringer who grew up very rurally in Pocahontas County, West Virginia, similarly commented on the "both/and" aspect of local and regional "isolation" where physical geography matters.

I think there's both sort of like a myth of Appalachian isolation and a real, reality of it. .... I mean that's been over-emphasized in negative way for a long time, that we're like so isolated and therefore so different and strange and backwards or whatever. But I also think that (laughs) there's just a reality of isolation that's different in the mountains than, say in rural Indiana where the roads are flat. (Garringer 2015b)

Brandon Jent talked about geography as a limitation for connecting with other young people when he was a kid.

I remember especially in late grade school that .... every weekend I wanted to go spend the night at somebody's house or have someone over at my house. And so definitely have an appreciation now as an adult for what my mom had to go through in order to make that happen, both in terms of transport and also in terms of keeping up a house and having people over and trusting other folks to let me stay at their house and teaching me to act right so that I could go stay at somebody else's house. But yeah, I'd say the closest friend that was to me, to Colson, was at least five, six, seven minutes down the road to upwards of fifteen to thirty minutes away. Starting around high school, I started going to a lot of local shows and was part of the music scene back in the emo ... days. .... [T]here were shows that were held in Whitesburg or in areas in Letcher County, some in Neon, some in Isom, but .... there would be shows I'd want to go to that were in Hazard [Perry County] or Pikeville [Pike County] or--I even remember going to a couple in Corbin [Knox, Whitley, Laurel tri-county], about an hour, hour-and-a-

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<sup>105</sup> While ridesharing can be an important practice of mutual aid, it is important to note that it can also be a predatory and exploitative practice when people charge marginalized people a lot of money for rides where other transportation options are limited (see Hudgins 2005).

half out [one way] .... That again my mom either had to take me to or, I didn't have a car in high school, so friends would take me with them. (Jent 2018)

Interestingly, Brandon retrospectively recognized the labor required for transporting kids to friends' houses or social activities outside of school. During my fieldwork, some of the young people I interacted with did not own or have access to vehicles, some did not drive at all, and those with cars often carpooled and offered rides to other young people. These informal ridesharing networks help young people make do with limited transportation resources in rural settings and access social spaces and activities beyond home and school.

Work-related travel is another often-challenging issue for rural communities and young people. According to 2014-2018 American Community Survey data from the US Census Bureau, the average commuting travel time to work is 23.3 minutes one way for Kentucky workers and 25.8 minutes for West Virginia workers, compared to the US average of 26.6 minutes (United States Census Bureau 2014-2018). However, as my researchers have discussed, the reality for many people in my field sites can be much different in terms of their level of mobility and the actual job opportunities that are available in their home communities. Distance can be a factor in employment and whether it is ultimately worthwhile to drive to another county for work as JoAnne Richardson pointed out in the opening vignette, which also assumes someone has access to reliable transportation in the first place.<sup>106</sup> The percentage of US workers (over 16 years old) who worked outside their county of residence was 27.8%, compared to 36.7% in the rural US. Similarly, percentages in rural Kentucky and West Virginia were higher

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<sup>106</sup> Only about 1% of Kentuckians and .8% of West Virginians use public transportation to get to work (United States Census Bureau 2014-2018).

than both states overall, with 32.6% in Kentucky and 33.5% in West Virginia working outside their home counties, compared to 42.8% in rural Kentucky and 39.5% in rural West Virginia (United States Census Bureau 2014-2018).

Molly Turner echoed JoAnne's comments about people having to drive a long way to work for little pay and TeleWorks enabling people to work remotely for companies like Apple for higher wages.

The jobs that these people are getting, some of them have been driving a long distance for the same amount of pay. And actually, some of the jobs they've been getting through this are much better than they would have if they drove say to London [in Laurel County], or someplace else. .... [A] lot of them have been doing that. There's companies like Apple. .... TeleConnect hires for Apple, and so does Concentric. And they'll start off at \$12.50 [an hour], and there's benefits. Plus, they get raises as time goes on. So those are much better than \$8.75-an-hour jobs they might get in London. (Turner 2017)

Physical roads and highways are a crucial form of infrastructure and connectivity in the Appalachian region, especially in rural areas where public transportation, bike lanes, and sidewalks are extremely limited or non-existent. Some of the roads I travelled regularly or seasonally included I-64 connecting Kentucky and West Virginia; US Highway 219 in West Virginia; US 80 (currently known as the "Hal Rogers" Parkway and formerly the Danie Boone Parkway) connecting East(ern) Kentucky (and Western Kentucky) with I-75; KY Highway 15 connecting the Parkway to Whitesburg; KY 119 through Letcher and Harlan Counties; US 421 to Jackson County, Kentucky; and KY Highways 30 and 11 to Owsley County.



Figure 27 US Highways 219 intersection of Seebert Road between Hillsboro and Mill Point in Pocahontas County, West Virginia, July 22, 2018 (photo by author)

All of these are roads that research collaborators also travel on a regular basis, in addition to other routes connecting them to family friends, school, work, entertainment, healthcare, etc. They sometimes told stories about their personal connections to local and regional roads. Both of Ivy Brashear’s “grandfathers worked [as “water boys”] for the WPA when they were building roads” in Perry County, Kentucky (Brashear 2013), and Sarah Riley’s father produces a local history project related to US 219 (Kinderman n.d.) that draws inspiration from the Federal Writers Project during the same era, which “they wrote the stories about the places all along 219 in the 1930s” (Riley 2013). When I participated in the Cultural Asset Mapping Track co-sponsored by PFE at the 2016 Brushy Fork Annual Institute, one of the participating community groups was the Route 7

Artisan Fellowship from Letcher County. Natalie Gabbard described them as “a unique group of folks” working in the visual arts, and “some of them have antique shops open up on that road. .... in general, they’re very interested in supporting any kind of arts opportunity in their community” (Gabbard 2017).

#### 5.4 Gigging There: Internet Access and Net Working



Figure 28 PRTC “Gig Country” billboard on US Highway 421 just across the Jackson County line in Morrill, Kentucky, June 1, 2018 (Photo by author and cropped for emphasis)

Access to ICTs and high-speed internet present both challenges and possibilities for youth media education and activism in Meta’lachia. Bob Martin talked about some of the possibilities for digital storytelling and youth regarding the “age of the internet” and “technological internet age” (Martin 2017). In Whitesburg, non-profits like Appalshop and Rural Strategies (and more specifically Mimi Pickering and Dee Davis) have worked on expanding rural regional broadband for years (Gregg 2011). While it is logical to think of digital networks as “virtual infrastructures,” they actually require great material resources, physical labor, and maintenance to sustain “virtual connectivity.” While there are distinctions in how young people occupy and use physical and virtual social spaces,

they are both dependent on how things fit and stay together in real time and space.

Several research collaborators confirmed that limited access to internet, computers, media technology, and support resources are a challenge in some parts of Appalachia (Banks 2012; Bell 2015; Garringer 2015; Jent 2016; Mack 2015; McClendon 2015). Izzy tied increased access to “corporately controlled internet” to issues of racial justice (Broomfield 2018b). Cynthia Warner said, “The challenge is delivery .... Lack of internet” (Warner 2017), and Nick Mullins said “high-speed ... is a big problem” (Mullins 2017).

This “digital divide” also distinguished different field sites in Central Appalachia: Pocahontas County, West Virginia and Owsley County, Kentucky, both of which are very small, remote, rural communities. Pocahontas County is a largely intentional “National Quiet Zone” because of the space telescope in Green Bank. Max Leyzorek talked about growing up in the “middle of nowhere” in Pocahontas County where “the internet’s not great” because of the “quiet zone,” and said “[I]t’s not an ideal place to practice digital stuff” (Leyzorek 2017). The government/military imposition of an internet/satellite/grid “quiet zone” is always planned for local residents, instead of listening to them, as Kingsolver has written about the ARC and infrastructure development, which is always for extraction and never for connection (Kingsolver 2015).

In contrast, Owsley County is a “Smart Rural Community,” which is a national designation through the local People’s Rural Telephone Cooperative (PRTC). This means that 95% of PRTC’s customers within its 542-square-mile service area have access to high-speed internet (NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association n.d.). PRTC is based in Jackson County and serves Jackson, Owsley, and is “beginning to expand a little into Lee

County” (Turner 2017), making these “Gig Country” counties and their “awesome internet” (Richardson 2017) an interesting exception to the general phenomenon of limited or poor internet connectivity in rural communities in Appalachia and elsewhere. As a result, Owsley County High School (OCHS) is also an exception to the more general lack of reliable internet in rural schools in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia. Whether intentional or not, the double-entendre of “gig” as independent contract labor and digital insourcing of contingent labor doubly emphasizes the precarity of working and workers in “Silicon Holler”-based economic development projects (Systo 2020).

Teleworks, which is next door to the OCAT office in the plaza building, is touted as “a Grassroots Partner of Shaping Our Appalachian Region, Inc. (SOAR)” (Richmond Register 2018b) and a successful model for expanding remote job opportunities in the region. The first time I interviewed OCAT Director Molly Turner, she said they had six people who worked physically on site “because they’re not able to work out of their home for some reason or the other. Or they’re just getting started and they’re not comfortable.” Space was limited to 24 cubicles, so the rest of the “128 people employed out of there .... we really encourage work at home. And we have, with People’s Rural Telephone [Cooperative], we have the best internet around, so there, they have the capability. .... That’s something you pay for in addition to your telephone bill” (Turner 2017).

PRTC was one of the community partner organizations that supported the local *Homesong* theater production series in Owsley County and posted videos of some of the performances on their local access television and YouTube channels. Natalie Gabbard helped support *HomeSong* as part of her work as Arts and Humanities Project Director

for PFE. She also grew up in neighboring Jackson County where her father is the head of PRTC, and she shared a slightly less optimistic view about the overall economic impact of high-speed internet compared to some of the people I talked to in Owsley County.

I think Owsley County and Jackson County, have a unique setup, where they have faster internet in those two counties than anywhere else in the state right now. And that's due, excuse me, to the work of PRTC, which my dad is the manager of that cooperative. And his organization sought to federal funding, stimulus money to do fiber optic cable to home residences in their service area, which really just includes Jackson and Clay, uh, Jackson and Owsley County. And they were sort of ahead of the game. And I think a lot of other places in Eastern Kentucky are envious of the access that they have in those two counties. And there was an art, I don't know if you saw the article that was published about the fiber to the homework that they've done in Jackson and Owsley, but the last bit of the fiber optic cable had to be put down with mules, like the furthest, most isolated parts of Jackson and Owsley Counties, they had to use mules to get it, which I just think is so funny is kind of antiquated way of doing anything by mule, but you know ... just how it is, I guess. But they couldn't get a truck down in there. .... so folks in those counties have, if they want it, you know, access to high-speed internet, in their home, in the schools in Owsley County, our Promise Neighborhood initiative funded Wi Fi on the school buses, because students had such a long commute to and from school. The administration thought, you know, maybe they would do their homework while they're in route. And I have no idea if that's actually what's happening but sounds good. I mean, at least they have that option, where if they're spending an hour and a half on a bus each way to [and from] school .... that's a long day. And they could be doing homework during that time. So I think, as far as having access to the internet, high- speed internet, I think ... that it has made some difference .... especially for our schools and local businesses .... library and whatnot. But that still doesn't mean that every child has a computer, or access to a computer in their school. That's not the case for every student in Jackson County. So, you know, having access to the internet is one thing, with them having an actual computer device is another. (Gabbard 2017)

These issues of access for children, both at school and home, are commonly encountered and worked around in the schools that Natalie works with through PFE. As previously discussed, resources may not always be visible and accessible to everyone in even small rural communities served by PRTC. For example, Logan Woodward was unaware that PRTC had a YouTube channel or that videos of some of the *HomeSong* performances were available there (Woodward 2020).



## 5.5 Navigating “Safe” Spaces

AMI and High Rocks both consciously (and perhaps sometimes cautiously) provide a “safe space” for the open expression of diverse gender identities without the fear of bullying or ostracization. “Often recognized by youth as a rare safe space for expressing nontraditional ideas about gender and sexuality, it is estimated that about 5 percent of youth in AMI are gay or in the process of coming out” (Richards-Schuster and O’Doherty 2012:79). My observations and interactions at both AMI and High Rocks confirmed a significant and visible representation of queer identities and orientations among young people in their programs than more mainstream settings (see Gray 2009).

“Appalshop has made space for young people to develop their passions through formal and informal programming since we got our start in 1969,” and as previously discussed, the Boone Building has long provided “safe haven” for local and regional youth in East(ern) Kentucky, and continues this tradition more formally as the “Boone Youth Drop-In and Safe Space” (see What We Do page, Appalshop n.d.). The High Rocks “Best Practices” clearly identifies “ALL HIGH ROCKS SPACES ARE DRAMA-FREE, DRUG-FREE, AND ROMANCE-FREE” (see Best Practices page, High Rocks Educational Corporation n.d.). As Nicole Hall previously discussed about how they organized for the sit-in at High Rocks, they began by connecting with other campers in the “safe space” of the daily “Girls Group.”

A couple of arts educators discussed how arts education in public schools and personal artmaking at home also provide spaces where young people can imagine, express, and create artwork and themselves. For example, Judy Sizemore talked about her work teaching art and media in public schools.

one of ... my favorite groups of students .... and teachers to work with ... is drama classes, even though, you know, that's not my background. .... [T]hey do have regional competitions, but they have a competition that's the most supportive and friendliest .... I don't know if it's like that everywhere, but certainly in eastern Kentucky, .... they're appreciative of each other, even though .... they want to win .... [S]o there's that aspect of it, but there's also there's a feeling in drama classes, and this is true and art classes in general, but maybe particularly in drama classes, ... it's a safe space .... where students feel free to be themselves to express themselves. And .... it's fun bringing that media aspect .... into the drama, .... just something as simple as, like having the kids like, last night, I was working with it with a school that was they were developing the play. And so what I had to do is write monologues as if they were their characters, .... [and they] chose to do it as ... diary entries, and some of them chose to do it as "I Am From" poems .... we videotaped, and then they watch their videotapes, and, and being able to see themselves from that side was ... really, I think, helpful. (Sizemore 2017)

Art and drama provide spaces for self-expression and creative collaboration, and media provide a way to review and reflect on their work from an angle outside of themselves.

As discussed in the previous chapter, George Ella Lyons' "Where I'm From" poem and her work developing it into writing exercises and lesson plans have significantly impacted the inclusive imagining of identities for young people.

Sarah Campbell who works with Partners for Education talked about art as a personal safe space when she was a child, which became an important part of her professional path working in arts education.

Although I was also very academically inclined in math and other areas. But for me, the arts were an expressive space, a safe space, it was something I could turn to in times of turmoil in my family life. .... I can see the benefit that was to me and how it could benefit other people, which is really what led me to arts education. Like I saw art as something that could sort of open doors for marginalized and disempowered people. (Campbell 2018)

When I asked Izzy Broomfield about the social and political contexts of their work, they brought up issues of "poverty and whiteness" as "big parts" of their "personal background" and why they "decided to come back to Kentucky" and continue working

on these issues after moving away and starting to learn more about “whiteness and race” and doing more “racial justice work specifically” (Broomfield 2018a).

When I asked Rae Garringer about the social and political contexts of their work, they talked about media-making as a means of representing a more complex range of voices and stories in the region.

I think the main things I’m doing these days are making radio here at WMMT, Appalshop, as the public affairs director, so, working on our weekly show *Mountain Talk* and our bi-weekly show *Mountain News*, and then *Country Queers*, trying to continue to gather stories but also think about sort of a cohesive sort of closing to some of those oral histories, as opposed to a never-ending nebulous process. And, so, in some ways, I think, those projects, while they’re different, are very similar in terms of the context of the work, right? Which is that, I think rural communities, and specifically in Appalachia, of course, are completely flattened and simplified into these homogenous spaces that fit sort of national needs, whether that’s national news needing to locate all the [45<sup>th</sup> President’s] supporters in a particular region that feels far away from those outlets, even though that’s specifically not true, or whether that’s you know, metropolitan queer spaces needing to see rural spaces as unsafe and unwelcoming and violent .... as the contradiction to the wonderful out-ness possible there, which--both of these stories clearly need a lot more nuance and complexity, right? When we think about what’s within queer spaces, like “safe space,” who are we talking about, right? And, so, so many histories of, I think queer organizing have been co-opted by whiteness to like--for this particular goal of safety for middle-to-upper-class white folks that continually like--folks of color, trans, and gender non-conforming people get sort of left behind. And, I think when we oversimplify rural spaces to like this very particular conservative, Christian, racist space, we just erase the existence, today, and throughout history, of people who don’t fit that, who have always been here, right? .... I think about the work I’m trying to do as both digging up alternative histories to the mainstream narratives we have, but also trying to just create stories that are slower and have room for nuance and contradiction, which is true in every one of our lives, no matter where we live. (Garringer 2018b)

Multiple histories and legacies can also impact how individual young people see themselves and interact with others in the region, as when Brandon Jent shared his struggle with reconciling conflicting identities.

my bloodline, my heritage is literally a product of war, is literally a product of colonization, is literally a product of conflict to the extent that [my indigeneity] is

even captive in some way by the whiteness of my skin are important things, not just in terms of how the social and political landscape applies to my actual physical place, but also .... inside of me .... [understanding] where the oppressed and the oppressor lives inside me and trying my best to learn from the mistakes that those oppressed parts have made historically, has been made personally in the ways that I have contributed to the oppression or the harm of others to learn from the mistakes that have been made so they're never repeated, from the past learning those in the present, so that they're not committed in the future and also learning from the experiences of the oppressed parts of me or the marginalized parts and to--I think it's important that I have that balance so that I know I have both the pain of being on the receiving end but also the accountability of having been an oppressor in some ways, as someone who does walk this world as [white-apparent and male-apparent] and all the things that entails. Yeah, basically just trying to learn where to stand up and where to step back, when to listen and when to speak, and to help contribute to things on as micro a level as my personal life to as macro a level as this society that I can stop harm from happening in whatever ways that I can. And so while Central Appalachia, for a lot of different reasons, has and always will have my heart and will always be the place where I want to focus, I do hope that I have the opportunity or that I make the opportunities to stop harm and to stop violence in whatever ways that I can happen on a national and on a cultural scale. And that's a tall order for this one feller. (Jent 2018)

Wrestling with different heritages and finding “safe space” within a single individual is difficult work and an essential part of the larger process of constructing external and collective safe spaces.

During my fieldwork, I had a conversation with another youth advocate/educator about how “safe space” is defined, and they indicated that that they thought IG2BYITM was a more inclusive space for diverse young people than the STAY Project. They said they make young people aware of STAY gatherings and encourage them to participate if it is the kind of space that they need personally. They see STAY as primarily a safe space for LGBTQ youth and youth of color, but not for more conservative young people or those who have not had the privilege of engaging in different conversations. For example, they said there was a need for more context when introducing people's preferred pronouns in settings where everyone does not have the background knowledge to

understand why it is done, why it is important, or the value systems that support it. I told them that I had some similar mixed feelings about the way in which inclusion is sometimes deployed in ways that lock out opposing viewpoints, and that such efforts need to be more honest about who is invited to the table, who the “safe space” is really for, and how groups with different ideologies can come together for the bigger work that needs to be done. Later, I reflected on how young people have access to different conversations and spaces in different sites like non-profit programs and public high schools and some of the limitations of “safe spaces” in all these settings.

Young people face different kinds of threats and have access to different conversations and spaces. Furthermore, access does not always feel like inclusion when confronting “exclusive” and disciplinary attitudes toward “inclusion.” For example, some “safe spaces” are not always consciously or pragmatically inclusive of Christian beliefs, which some research collaborators observed and discussed as a challenge. Also, racialized issues and identities are not always apparent or included in predominantly white spaces like some small rural communities and schools, and even seemingly “progressive” spaces of inclusive belonging where whiteness still prevails can be unwelcoming and *unsafe* spaces of racist interactions, microaggressions, and “everyday violence” (Bourgois 2001).

Crystal Good’s 100 Days in Appalachia post, “Appalachia’s White Inferiority Pushed My Trans, Black Daughter Out,” focuses on her teenage “daughter’s direct experiences of white supremacy in a so-called ‘safe space’ of the LGBTQ+ community” (Good 2019a). She quotes one of her daughter’s social media statements about racism she has faced in predominantly white progressive spaces in West Virginia.

Something that boggles my mind is how often racism in the LGBTQ+ community is looked over so often. People automatically assume that since a person is LGBTQ+ they can't be racist because they know the struggle of being a social minority and outcast. But in all actuality, it's a really big problem that's not really being fixed. When it comes to white people in the community, they are so quick to outcast and ostracize any POC. They look down on us as if we are not equals, but lesser than. It's truly disgusting to think that someone who knows the struggle of being looked down upon would be so quick to do the same. (Quoted in Good 2019)

Good extends the critique of "how the rules of 'safe spaces' could be applied" and declares, "I don't believe in safe spaces. I don't raise my daughter to expect them" (2019). Ultimately, her daughter has decided not to stay in West Virginia and to move to New York City because she feels more at home in a diverse urban area outside of the region (Good 2019a).

Even as some presumably progressive spaces do not feel "safe" for everyone, presumably neutral spaces like public roads are not always welcoming/safe spaces for all. Terman (2009) makes a brief reference to the presence of white supremacist symbols in her description of driving up Thompson Road on the way to the High Rocks headquarters.

Then you turn up the road, which quickly turns to gravel, and you notice small hunting cabins. You can see a confederate flag and the Nazi swastika hung up inside while blonde-headed toddlers play in the front yard. You take a left because if you took a right you would end up at the headquarters of the National Alliance, an established white supremacist organization. Instead, you climb up past a horse corral with a colorful mural of horses and West Virginia wildflowers declaring "Don't fence me in." You are at the High Rocks lodge, and there are probably some volunteers and junior counselors weed whacking outside. Inside, there are people making lunch, ordering supplies in the office, and working on a grant. (2009:1)

By the time I started going to High Rocks in 2014, I only saw confederate flags, but I recognized the vividly discordant visual-scapes of white supremacist imagery, rustic family homes, children playing, and a bustling non-profit organization that serves young

women and many queer youth with its programming. Aside from this descriptive vignette, Terman does not discuss in-depth the proximity and relevance of this conspicuous display of white supremacy in her overall discussion of High Rocks as a model for “rural feminist community development in Appalachia” (Terman 2009).

Mason includes a brief history of the National Alliance (NA)<sup>107</sup> and its role in shaping regional and national discourse about whiteness and “Appalachia” in her book, *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right: Conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County Textbook Controversy* (Mason 2009). NA was actually founded in 1974 by a white supremacist intellectual with a PhD who was from out West and had self-published tracts, racist fiction, and discussions on then still nascent online message boards.<sup>108</sup> A decade later he “bought 365 acres of farmland in Pocahontas County, West Virginia, with \$95,000 in cash” (2009:80), begging the question, “Why would a white supremacist move to West Virginia?” (2009:80). His motives presumably included the predominantly white demographics of the area, but Mason argues “there were more tactical reasons”

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<sup>107</sup> I am aware of the ironic play on the acronym “NA” as a synonym for “not applicable” as such organizations are all too influential and relevant in the current national and global moment. Furthermore, the organization’s name, which was originally “National Youth Alliance” before the NA founder renamed it, results in an innocuous moniker that could literally represent any group because its vagueness. Also, it stealthily blends with the names of other organizations that serve important media education or mental health advocacy, such as the aforementioned National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC) and National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), among other organizations serving legitimate communities and needs. Notably NAMAC dropped the “national” and changed its name in 2016 to the “Alliance for Media Arts and Culture, known as The ALLIANCE . . . a name that honors our history, is easier to pronounce correctly, not an acronym, and transcends geographical boundaries!” (Alliance for Media Arts and Culture 2020).

<sup>108</sup> The extensive multimedia folklife documentation and work product in the Michael and Carrie Nobel Kline Collection archived in Berea College Special Collections (BCA 0258) include oral history interviews, field recordings, music, and broadcast radio productions with people from the Appalachian region, especially West Virginia. Only recently in the dissertation writing process did I become aware that this collection also includes an interview with the NA founder among its “miscellaneous audio recordings . . . that are not included in any of the Klins’ specific documentation projects” (Series 33: Miscellaneous Audio Recordings, Box 73, Item 30: KK-CT-025-169). The description includes his full name, which I am intentionally not citing/reproducing here, along with the organization’s name, location, and telephone number for “24hr. phone message” contact. (See collection finding aid for more information.)

because the location is “strategically situated amid sheltering mountains and in proximity to the nation’s capital” (2009:80) and because Pocahontas County has a “natural network of underground caves and freshwater sources [that t]o Pierce’s mind, white revolutionary survivalists could utilize these resources as the race war progressed” (2009:81). NA’s founder also “espoused a pantheistic brand of white supremacy” that he called “cosmotheism”; furthermore, “[h]e won followers with his emphasis on narrative, on telling stories that shared an overall apocalyptic tone and promoted a kind of racial masculinity that transcended the ideological and class differences among various white supremacist factions” (2009:84).

Therefore, it is no wonder that High Rocks offers careful, explicit, and repetitive instructions about finding the right road before driving up the mountain. At the top of the High Rocks directions page on their website are words of warning in bold capital letters: **“DO NOT TRUST GPS or GOOGLE!”** Further down the page, the directions from nearby Mill Point (literally a wide place in the road with a steep hairpin curve and fork where US Highway 219 and Route 39 intersect), repeats additional warnings in capital letters for finding the correct country road. “Go past a gravel driveway on your right called Boyd Thompson Road. **DON’T TAKE IT!** Turn **RIGHT** on Thompson Road, a one lane, paved road” (see Directions page, High Rocks Educational Corporation n.d.).



Figure 29 Thompson Roads, Outside Hillsboro/Mill Point, West Virginia, July 27, 2018 (Photos by author and cropped for emphasis)



The directions continue with detailed instructions about continuing onto the gravel road when the pavement ends and the fork where the drive diverges to go left up to the Lodge where the main offices are, or right to follow the steep switchback curves and crossing two creeks up the mountain and another left-hand fork through a gate to the High Rocks Academy campground. “If you go too far, you’ll dead end at a locked gate to forest service land” (see Directions page, High Rocks Educational Corporation n.d.).

In general, I loved driving the web of gravel roads that led to and through the main office and the campground, and I mostly felt safe in all of these indoor and outdoor spaces. However, without going into details of what is not my story alone, I experienced my own nighttime run-in with NA on the road with a group of people on the second day of Camp Steele in 2017. As we headed down the steep and twisty gravel road in the dusk, we came across a man and woman in a Jeep stopped in the middle of a hairpin turn. They said they were looking for “The Compound,” which we all knew too well referred to the NA white supremacist compound one holler over off of Boyd Thompson Road and not Thompson Road. We assured them that this was not the gravel road they were looking and told them it was a non-profit organization, and they said, “Yeah, we know what High Rocks is.” We gave them directions, followed them down the rest of the hill, and waited at the bottom to make sure they were out of sight to before continuing up the drive to the Lodge. While the couple most likely accidentally wandered up the road to High Rocks and there were no additional sightings or interactions to my knowledge, the group in the truck viscerally ran into local tensions around race and identity in a mundane moment on a remote gravel road. Later we shared the incident and our concern with some other staff, but I did not personally live with the racialized threat from or full-time proximity to a

well-known white supremacist organization like minoritized friends and colleagues who lived there.

According to a 2015 Salon article by High Rocks alumn and freelance writer Emma Eisenberg, NA “has been largely defunct since 2009 .... and recently the compound has gone up for sale. Its official website asks all correspondence to be directed to an address in Laurel Bloomery, Tennessee” (Eisenberg 2015). Whether or not the organization continues to pose a direct threat to local minoritized people or allies, NA is an important and cautionary counterexample of how even a pagan back-to-the-land ideology, focus on the power of storytelling, and using DIY-publishing does not always represent the most idyllic, white-washed version of the people or place of “Appalachia.” In fact, several local people contest what they see as a more pervasive everyday forms of racialized violence toward people of color (Eisenberg 2015).

Later that same summer of 2017, I vicariously witnessed an act of vigilante undoing of material media on a rural highway in direct resistance to xenophobic mememaking. At the time nationally, there was considerable white backlash fueled by the recent presidential election, state-sanctioned violence against both documented and undocumented migrants by ICE, and counterstrategies of “Sanctuary Cities” as social and political refuges. Mill Point, West Virginia (unincorporated) is basically a long, wide hairpin turn in US Highway 219 at the intersection of Highway 39/55 that leads to the High Rocks campus, further into the Monongahela National Forest, and on to neighboring Nicholas County. There is a distinctive and historic old mill with signage outside the beginning of the curve, but otherwise there are not many other obvious landmarks indicating the locale other than identical green road signs with white reflective

lettering and borders on both roads from all three directions. One of these road signs became the site of divergent analog media activism enacted by an older local white man and a couple of Millennial-age young white men, one of whom was from West Virginia but not the local area and at least one visitor from elsewhere.

I did not personally see the professionally produced sign that matched the green and white design of the Mill Point road signage and appended it with the words, “A No Sanctuary City.” Locals I spoke with about it, including some who were involved in its removal, said they knew exactly who had posted the sign, which was photographed and reproduced on Facebook before it was removed and re-shared in local posts. I did not have personal access to these images and conversations except vicariously through friends who lived there. Someone sent me a copy of the image upon request, but again, I cannot ethically reproduce it without reproducing the harm it intended, with or without consent of all parties involved (which would be impossible anyway). This example of analog activism in the common space of a public highway represents different generations and ideological positioning of local and “outsider” white men, and the un-writing of violent rhetoric against non-white sojourners through Mill Point.

When I asked Kyra Higgins about social movements in the region, she brought up Affrilachian writing in relation to (in)visibility/erasure and writing as proof of existence. Kyra, who is from Knott County, Kentucky and identifies as Black and Christian, talked about her some of her own writing inspiration at an Affrilachian poetry reading at HCTC where she met Frank X Walker through the Robinson Scholars program, which provided examples of common experience solidarity in representing the region in its complexity. The poet was from Hazard and had gone to live in another city, and she wrote about

needing to leave and find other people who represented her experience and values.

Meanwhile, she commented on how Walker's experiences as a rural Kentuckian are questioned or invisible to the point of erasure.

[People] don't know what it's like to be in an area that most people consider extraordinarily racist. And .... one of the Kentucky poet laureates, the first African American poet laureate, come and speak here at Georgetown. And he was like, "I go places, and people don't even realize Kentucky has black people. They look at me like I'm a unicorn when I say I'm from Kentucky." So, I was like, "Oh, that's interesting. People don't even think I exist. And suddenly, by doing these things [like writing], that's another way that my voice is heard and I'm saying "No, I do exist."

....

I want to publish works. And I actually talked to Frank X Walker while he was here. And it's like the thing that I've encountered, as soon as you say a place that you're from, people are expecting a certain type of story. And it's like that's not necessarily my story. And because I am from this place, it still falls under the umbrella. But because they're looking for something so specific, it's like immediately .... "Oh, no, you're doing it wrong. You've got to talk about these things. Why aren't you having this in there?" So, I found that it's a very disturbing, but also kind of makes you be very aware of how other people feel .... and not one of the good ways, but simply ... they like to pigeonhole you .... because most people are expecting you to write about the hills and the mountains and the good values and all these things, and "on the front porch barefoot" stories. And it's like, "Actually, I'm writing about mental illness. I'm writing about racial encounters. I'm writing about pain and suffering." (Higgins 2018)

Kyra also talked about the "both/and" of racism and stereotypes in the region as well as the increased visibility and open acknowledgment of racism in the US where it was minimalized as "over-dramatizing." Kyra understands the parallel erasure of her own experience and identity and how she could use the literary medium to write her existence into acknowledgement that people can experience the "same" place or region in racialized ways that complicate normative tropes of Appalachian storytelling and representation (see, for example, Fickey 2010; Fickey 2014 on what gets supported as Appalachian art).

I read Kyra's insight as embodying and recognizing another form of "precarious placemaking" (Hinkson 2017) wherein the "making and unmaking of places" (2017:52) includes the social and physical mobility of people and both "the generalized condition of precariousness in human relations and historically specific precarity" (2017:56), with precarity defined "as the ontological disembedding of people from distinctively place-based associations" (2017:58). I asked about her process of becoming a writer and what that meant to her in terms of her social engagement.

I think writing for me is just very cathartic. And that's how I process things. And I don't usually write with the intention for it to be seen. And that's been something that's changed as of late, because most of the time I'm just writing to get the things out. I'm not expecting anybody to see this, to have any professional order, or specific things are thrown in there for allegory and hinting at these big issues. No, I'm just getting it out on paper. .... I have so many journals it's ridiculous. .... I walk around with notebooks and things. I'll just scribble immediately because .... part of it is like I have a bad memory. .... So, I try to write things down so that I could remember, at least have something that, like, flags a memory of, "Oh, this is what that was or why it was important." And I think the process for me .... as a kid I was introduced to stories I love and teachers making you do writing assignments. And it's like, "Oh, writing is a thing we have to do." (Higgins 2018)

By critically examining the stereotype of East(ern) Kentucky as automatically racist and white, Kyra exposes the misconceptions people have about particular locations, such as the urban/rural divide and how people want to place racism somewhere other than where they live. She also emphasizes and exemplifies the agency of self-representation as an act of resistance and existence in Appalachia.

Buildings, roads, and digital networks house and connect social contexts that also serve as literal media for visual storytelling and media arts documenting local and organizational cultures and histories as well dreams and paths for the present and future. In the next chapter on make-do media practices, I show, and research collaborators tell

how they access and produce meaningful media outside of formal media education programs and methods.

CHAPTER 6. “WE KIND OF HAVE TO MAKE DO WITH WHAT WE CAN”: MAKE-DO MEDIA PRACTICES IN META’LACHIA

6.1 “Poem 55”

take the  
hand-me-downs  
make do  
no culture of poverty  
claiming lives here  
we a people of plenty  
back then  
work hard  
know no hunger  
grow food  
sew clothing  
build shelter  
moonshine still  
wine from grape  
we a marooned  
mountain people  
backwoods souls  
we know to live on little  
to make a simple life  
away from manmade  
laws and boundaries  
spirit guides teach us  
offer always  
the promise  
of an eternal now

From *Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place* by bell hooks (2012:45)

6.2 Mamaws, Mason Jars, and Making Do in Meta’lachia

When I was growing up, my Mamaw had a small outdoor cinderblock building that my Papaw built for her to house garden tools and supplies on in the open right-side shed and to store Mason jars of homemade canned goods in the dark, closed-in left-side cellar. Back then, there were grapevines next to the cellar, a cherry tree behind it, and wild blackberry brambles all along the branch that ran along the length of my Mamaw’s

garden, the back yard, and past the garage and barn where there was a line of apple trees along a fence. My Papaw also built my Mamaw an indoor pantry shelf that included home-canned staples, and they had a giant deep freeze with other homegrown fruits and vegetables, including frozen strawberries that were my own special treat. Wherever I played inside or outside, there was preserved or fresh food to share during three regular meals or graze upon as I needed or wanted a snack. When I see Mason jars, I think of my grandparents: my Mamaw, her garden, her and my Papaw’s do-it-yourself attitudes and practices, and the importance of passed-down knowledge, resilience, and connection. Their house was a place where I was safe and fed (physically, emotionally, creatively, and spiritually) in a way that I would not fully understand or appreciate until I was a college student learning about the broader histories of “Appalachia” and my own families’ relationship to it culturally and spatially.



Figure 30 Cinderblock cellar and garden shed built by Howard Clemons for Ruby Clemons, October 5, 2019, just prior to the posthumous sale of their farm in Hope, Kentucky (photo by author)



While the practical use and visual representation of glass canning jars and their association with grandmothers and “making do” are neither unique to me, the Appalachian region, or rural communities (Christensen 2015), the notion of “making do with what you have” through the symbolic image of the Mason jar are commonly and proudly invoked as symbols of Appalachian cultures and traditions. This chapter focuses on “making do” and the “doing of making” as a form of youth agency situated within the larger contexts of affirming regional assets in representations within the overarching deficit narrative they are contesting. Throughout my dissertation research and my work as a teaching artist working with young people, educators, and advocates, “making do” was a recurring lesson and emphasis in my field sites and research collaborators’ media practices, and Mason jars likewise appeared in artistic productions in every site, as illustrated throughout this chapter. “Making do” with available or limited technologies and equipment at home or in educational settings is not always ideal or even sufficient, but it is an important lens for understanding some of the limitations people encounter, how they work around them, and how they learn from these practices and experiences.

This chapter showcases research collaborators’ creativity and ingenuity as well as the limitations of under-resourcing and under-support for what the young people are trying to do. Young people contest by making do for themselves and rejecting narratives that they cannot do what they want to do because of where they are. This chapter looks both at young people’s “make do” messaging for living in the region as well as “making do” as a process and a method, which research collaborators emphasize as a form of learning from and sharing knowledge with others and claiming their own expertise.

6.3 Mason Jars and Make-Do Media: Mediating Appalachian Resiliencies

6.3.1 Mason Jars and the “Magic of High Rocks”



Figure 31 First place drawing by Gillian Snyder for the High Rocks T-shirt design contest at the 2017 Camp Steele in Pocahontas County, West Virginia (Scanned by author and used with permission from artist of drawing)

As discussed in Chapter 5, access to healthy homegrown food is an important part of High Rocks programming, whether at camps, the Hub, or community outreach such as Grow Appalachia workshops on gardening and food preservation. High Rocks hosts a T-shirt design contest at Camp Steele each summer, and the selected drawing is screen-printed by a local business, given to every camper and staff member, and sold as a fundraiser at the closing Nettlefest celebration at the end of camp. The 2017 winning design by long-time camper Gillian Snyder featured a Mason jar holding a celestial night sky and rolling mountains inside and labeled with the words “High Rocks” and its core organizational motto: “educate - empower - inspire.”<sup>109</sup> Other drawing submissions similarly included images of stars, crescent moons, and mountains as well as flowers, trees, and campfires, which are all common physical features and visual representations of camp life.

Drawing is a common make-do artistic medium at High Rocks, both as part of formal programming and as a personal pastime, at a camp where digital technologies are intentionally limited for social and pedagogical reasons. In Gillian’s drawing, the Mason jar is a fitting receptacle for carrying the “magic of High Rocks” beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of camp, which campers and supporters can also materially take with them on T-shirts and car decals. I helped coordinate camper voting for the T-shirt designs that year and scanned copies of all submissions for the High Rocks digital archives, and this image is from Gillian’s original drawing (used with permission).

When I contacted Gillian about using the image I scanned of her drawing, she said, “The t-shirt contest has always been one of my favorite traditions at High Rocks.

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<sup>109</sup> Gillian was also among the High Rocks representatives who participated in the ASA youth plenary (2018a).

Getting to see the artwork you created represent a program you love is huge for a little girl” (personal communication, January 24, 2021). She also shared more “behind the scenes” information and “how High Rocks has helped me tap into my creative juices.” One of the campfire songs in the summer printout included in staff and campers’ High Rocks notebooks is “Swinging on a Star,” which Gillian said was the direct inspiration for her drawing.

The chorus sings about making wishes on a star and carrying moonbeams home in a jar. I always thought that verse was so beautiful. In my mind, the idea of catching moonbeams and keeping them with you in a jar to take back home is a perfect way to describe camp. I used that as inspiration for my mason jar artwork that was featured on the 2017 High Rocks t-shirt. I took home a lot of moonbeams that summer.

High Rocks decided to surprise the artist of the runner-up design, Lexi Ruckman who was a well-liked and respected graduating senior camper that summer, by screen-printing additional T-shirts with her drawing of the words “High Rocks” intertwined among flowers. Drawing as one of many common artistic media at High Rocks and custom T-shirts as a cultural production and community ritual represent material make-do media practices that foster creativity and forge connections between campers and their support network.

### 6.3.2 Making Do and Taken for Granted



Figure 32 Screen image from 2017 AMI Summer Documentary Institute film, *It Goes Unspoken*, by Hannah Adams and Skylar Griffith

That same summer, one of the films produced at the Summer Documentary Institute was *It Goes Unspoken* by AMI Interns and local high school students Hannah Adams and Skylar Griffith (Adams and Griffith 2017). The film focuses on women’s uncompensated and underappreciated labor, and one of the young filmmakers interviewed her own mother, who said, “Moms definitely don’t get a big credit for their work, and it’s kind of an everyday task, people just kind of overlook it” (cf. Di Leonardo 2008 regarding women's kinship work in the US). The still image for the online video is an image of an older woman wearing a “Kentucky” T-shirt, and her hands hold a Mason jar that she is filling with green beans, which invokes a grandmotherly practice of care and making do. Interestingly, the woman depicted in this B-roll image is not one of the primary interviewees. Her hands appear around halfway into the 10-minute film right

after an image of another woman's hands putting snap-on circuits into a box. The Mason jar image corresponds briefly with a transition to Tanya Turner, well-known and often-interviewed younger woman leader and then host of the "Feminist Friday" radio show, and she critiques how women's industriousness and resilience are also taken for granted.

[4:42 Tanya Turner (TT) voiceover (VO) begins with image of older woman's hands putting green beans in a Mason jar then switches to medium close-up of TT at 4:47]

TT: The narrative of women being at home and caretakers and homemakers is certainly still true, and they have to be. But women are equally in the workforce and carrying full-time jobs.

[4:54 Switch to footage of AuCo Lai cooking at a stove in Heritage Kitchen, a local restaurant in downtown Whitesburg]

TT: They are living dual realities (laughs), so they're doing ... half of their work is unpaid, and half of it is underpaid. So, women are perpetually trapped in a lot of toxic cycles, I think, because a lot of women are giving so much to their communities and aren't getting enough back.

[5:12 Switch to image of trees and water before VO ends at 5:14]

Paired with what may seem like a singularly comforting image to some, this commentary problematizes how women may often make do to an extreme degree while their contributions and sacrifices are also taken for granted. Another interviewee and the STEM leader for a regional educational organization, whose hands handling circuits were juxtaposed with the woman's hands with the Mason jar, resumes as voiceover narrator after Tanya Turner with the image of trees. The image switches to a medium close-up of her speaking, and she compares her belief in and desire for her own independence when she was growing up and how she thinks "that's changed now."

[5:20] Katrina Sloan (KS): I think girls and women know that we can be independent, we can do whatever we want. I think now .... the pendulum is sliding back to, "Okay, I'm a woman, I can *do* everything, but do I really *want* to do everything? And .... is it really important that ...

[5:38 Switch to image of older woman rinsing bowl of green beans in a stainless-steel sink]

KS: "... I'm a great housewife ..."

[5:40 Switch to mother and toddler daughter sitting on a porch blowing bubbles]

KS: "... a great mother ..."

[5:43 Switch back to medium close-up of KS]

KS: "... I'm great at my job .... you know, I'm climbing the corporate ladder?"  
And how do you balance all of the things that you want to do in life as a woman,  
(pauses) and should you have to? [5:53]

Whether women work at home, in paid jobs, or both, "making do" can be its own burden of expectation from others as well as from them(our)selves.



### 6.3.3 Mason Jars and Making Do in Meta'lachia

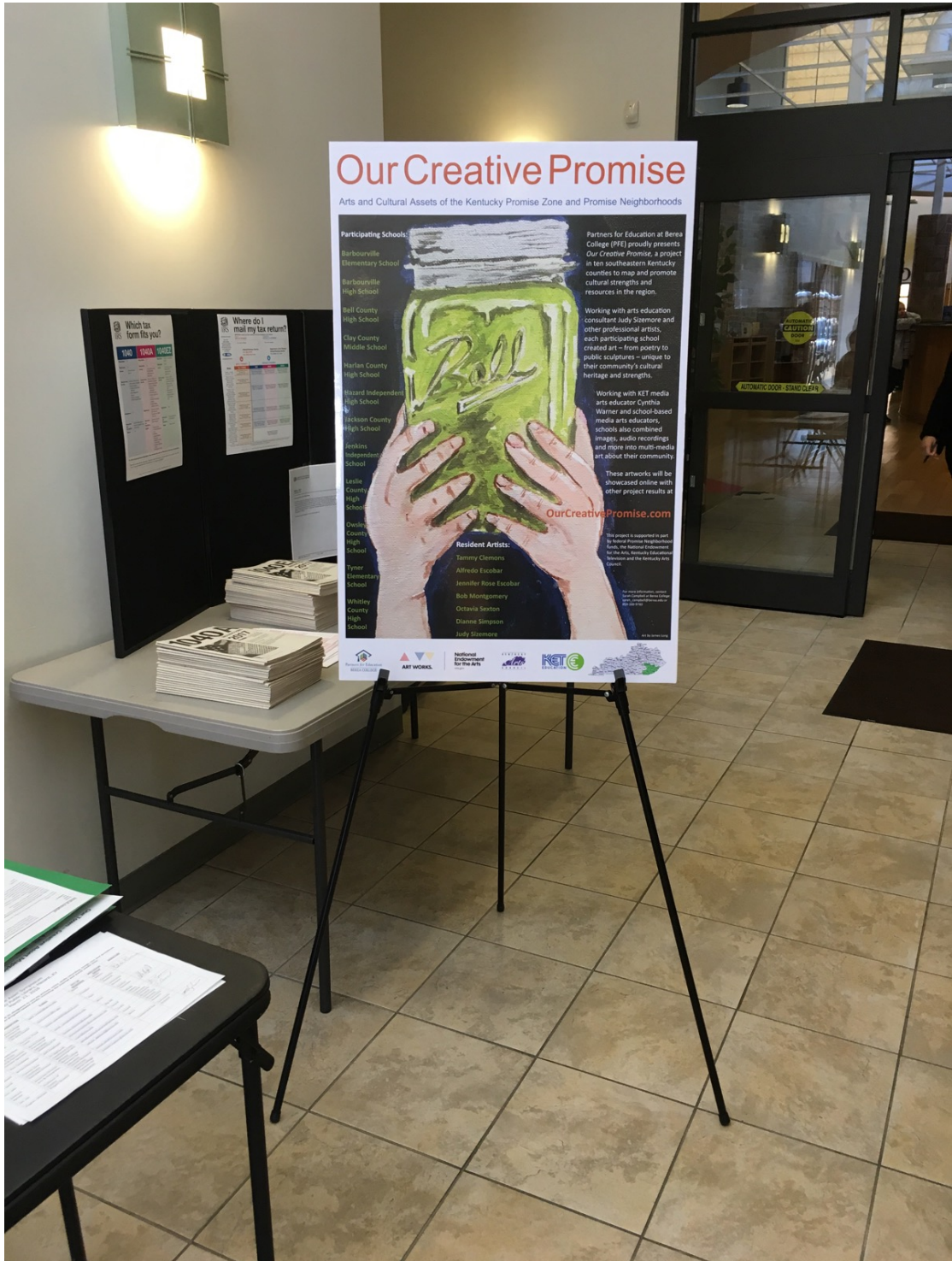


Figure 33 Poster easel with Mason jar painting, “Winter Grocery,” by Harlan County High School student James Long at the “Creative Asset Symposium” at the Perry County Public Library in Hazard, Kentucky, March 23, 2018 (Photo by author)



As discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5, Berea College Partners for Education coordinated an NEA-funded project called “Our Creative Promise” with several East(ern) Kentucky in 2017-2018. I worked as a teaching artist with four different schools, but mostly with Owsley County High School students, to work on digital storytelling projects about their home communities. All of the regional arts residencies and projects culminated in the gathering of participating students and teachers at a Creative Asset Symposium in Hazard, Kentucky.

When I arrived at the Perry County Public Library, the first thing I noticed in the lobby was the giant poster sitting on an easel next to the check-in table (see Fig. 32). The image of the Mason jar was a painting by Harlan County High School (HCHS) student James Long. To the left of the jar was a list of participating schools, and to the right was a description of the regional project with the URL for the online showcase that was still in development at the time. Below the jar and between the hands and wrists was a list of participating teaching artists, and at the very bottom were logos of project sponsors and partners, including the NEA Art Works program, Kentucky Arts, and Council Kentucky Educational Television.

One of the videos on the “Our Creative Promise” website includes interviews with several students who created paintings as part of the HCHS “Our Town, Our Home” fundraising project, one of whom is the creator of the painting featured on the symposium poster as well as promotional postcards. Another HCHS student Allison Cook introduces the overall painting project led by teaching artist Alfredo Escobar and its focus on showing “the hands of our community” and “the unique aspects of the people of Harlan County.” She concludes the introduction by saying, “From hands that canned to hands

that mined coal, Harlan is as vibrant as the artist who painted it” (Cook, et al. 2018).

Then James describes his painting as “representing the canning heritage here in Harlan County” and says his inspiration was his “Mamaw who has canned ever since she was little.” He continues:

[00:44 Image of James Long (JL) behind a newsroom type of desk with the image of his Ball jar painting from the “Our Town, Our Home” project projected behind him]

JL: She’s been raised in it, um, and I just watched as I’ve grown up, her canning and what it means. Back when she was a child, they didn’t have grocery stores; they couldn’t just run to the grocery store and grab like a can of green beans. If they needed green beans, during the summer they had to harvest as much as they could and can it and have it prepared for the winter so they could eat. [1:06] (Cook, et al. 2018)

James frames the meaning of his Mason jar painting in terms of the temporal experience of growing up (both “then” and “now”), and without using the words “making do,” he links variable access and ancestral seasonal practices of resilience. His reflection is also informed by the oral history interview he conducted with grandmother Newly Daniels as part of the overall project, in which she describes her canning method in detail (HCHS Students 2018). His painting and this interview are included with other paintings as well as other oral interviews and poems that Judy Sizemore assisted with. The personal importance of intergenerational relationships is also expressed and reiterated in another drawings and stories from participating artists (Cook, et al. 2018; HCHS Students 2018).

### 6.3.4 Mason Jars and Making a Marginal Living



Figure 34 Screen image from “The Shiners” trailer depicting a Mason jar in the drawing of a dramatic scene at the county fair

At the 2019 Arts Connect Appalachian Youth (ACAY) summit, 16 Owsley County High School (OCHS) students presented “a staged reading of Act I from their developing, youth-driven new play about the life of teens in Owsley County to other students throughout the region...” (OCHS Students 2020c). OCHS Arts & Humanities Stevi Nolan said they started thinking about the project at the first ACAY Summit at Buckhorn Lake in 2018. She said that students thought the previous *HomeSong* plays were not focused on “youth voice” and that they wanted to share their perspective of Owsley County. She and teaching artist Bob Martin worked with four classes to write the youth-written/produced play-in-progress called, *The Shiners*.

The narrator begins describing the opening scene where two brothers are talking after the funeral of their “Grandpa Greg” who was their primary guardian. “There is a jar of clear liquid in front of them. There is an awkward silence as neither are particularly

good at expressing their feelings. Finally, Ronald reaches behind his chair, lifts his guitar and starts picking out a song” (OCHS Students 2020c). The younger brother Cletus is a high school senior worried about his and his family’s further prospects, and he starts missing school to make moonshine with their alcoholic uncle. The multimodal play weaves music, poetry, and oration into the plot through the device of an “Owsley’s Got Talent” contest at the county fair in the concluding scene. For example, a young woman delivers a speech about being different and misunderstood with a “little bit of autism” and also that she “can also be sweet as apple pie moonshine.” Then there are a couple of “Where I’m From” poems written and read by different students, one of whom emphasizes familiar ancestral connections and make-do traditions.

I’m from granny’s chicken and dumplings on a chilly fall day.  
I am from hanging out with grandparents on every occasion I get.  
I am from watching mamaw quilt on a snow day.  
I am from going hunting with pawpaw, killing a buck with a bow. .... (OCHS Students 2020c)

After the read-through, OCHS invited the audience to participate in a “critical response” discussion about the work-in-progress. Another high school drama teacher and several speech and drama students from other schools said they liked it recognized and “knew” the characters and identified with some of the stories. One student said that she identified with struggles about leaving home and another about the loss of a grandfather. I said that I liked how they incorporated multiple voices and authors using different artforms, texts, and genres throughout the play and especially during the talent show. Audience members also said they thought the plot was believable, and one young woman commented that it was difficult and vulnerable, and they were doing it anyway. Another teacher from Owsley County said he identified with working three jobs when he was in school, and also mentioned the example of autism and how people who are “different”

are treated. He paralleled this to the way that Appalachian people are treated because they/we are perceived as “different” and prejudiced and how people can be a positive example in how they treat other people who are different. It seemed that the intention was to use this example as a “teachable moment” for extrapolating this lesson further to other experiences of difference and prejudice. However, it is important to note that intersectionality means that the relative stakes for racialized and other minoritized identities are much higher in terms of potential violence and the role of white supremacy overall in the U.S.

The subsequent spring, OCHS students continued their play development using online rehearsals upon the shift to non-traditional instruction (NTI) during the 2020 COVID-19 quarantine. The screen image is from a short trailer they produced for *The Shiners* using digital and paper drawings and audio recorded online with Zoom. The drawing depicts a dramatic scene at the county fair that includes the appearance of a Mason jar when a police officer catches Cletus selling moonshine with his uncle at their “lemonade” stand, and Cletus yells, “Reggie, what do we do?!” (OCHS Students 2020b). Throughout the plot of the youth-written and -produced play-in-progress, the Mason jar is associated with the young men’s recently deceased Grandpa and both the risk and economic necessity of carrying on the “family business” of clandestine moonshining.

### 6.3.5 Multimodal Mason Jars and Who is Making Do

These images chronologically document different fieldwork encounters and associations with Mason jars and “making do” through different youth media projects at High Rocks, AMI, Harlan County through Our Creative Promise, and Owsley County through ACAY. All are multimodal productions that include visual images in different media formats and in combination with multiple other artistic forms of expression. For example, material art/ifacts like T-shirts, decals, postcards, and Mason jars (real and emblematic) are forms of “make-do media” that one can wear, display, or carry as a container for continuing connections and relationships outside of community and family spaces. A symbolic similarity in the Mason jar images is how “making do,” like “homemaking,” can be a stereotypically gendered enterprise that is sometimes but not always positive. For example, in more than one case, “making do” is gendered like the “feminine” notion and practice of “homemaking” as illustrated by images of canning and discussions of women’s labor and the need for greater social valuing of their contributions. Whereas nefarious make-do livelihoods like moonshining are gendered as “masculine” activities that compete with the value and continuation of education and even the experience of youth in search of economic stability.

It is important to acknowledge that “making do” is also racialized because all of the artists of the Mason jar images that I encountered are white young people, and all of the representations of people included in these images are white. However, the “Our Town, Our Home” project in Harlan County also included a painting of a brown hand and white hand holding each other, entitled, “Appreciate All People” by HCHS student Payton Asher, that corresponds with an interview students conducted with Jimmy Fields who worked as a custodian at Harlan County High School (HCHS Students 2018). Thus,

this painting and bell hooks' Poem 55 helps situate these stories in the broader context of Meta'lachia that reasserts and reinserts the often overlooked, erased, and geographically displaced representations of black labor, voices, and images, especially from make-do narratives of resilience that sustain families and communities.



Figure 35 Screen image of painting, “Appreciate All People,” by Harlan County High School student Payton Asher in “Harlan County - Harlan: Our Town, Our Home”

As Kingsolver notes, “All of us learn from each other’s stories how to make do, when to speak up, what matters, and so much else, just as we learn from newspapers, books, television, radio, movies, billboards, the internet, and magazines in the grocery store line.” (Kingsolver 2011:1). These are just some of the “making do” messages conveyed by young people in different settings through visual and multisensory representations and contextual commentary, and the image of the Mason jar was one way they communicated this notion. Next, I will discuss some of their make-do media practices in programs and on their own that I observed, participated in, and/or heard from research collaborators.

#### 6.4 Make-Do Media Consumption and Production Practices and Projects

*“We kind of have to make do with what we can ... we had our own method, and the method kind of worked.” (Woodward 2020)*

In Chapters 4 and 5, I discussed how research collaborators access intergenerational meshworks and material mediacologies of support for formal media education programs and projects in Central Appalachia. The organizations and schools that offer such opportunities and support, as well as young people individually, all participate in adaptive media consumption and production practices that are situational to levels of access at a given time and place. Not only do different organizations/schools have access to different resources (i.e., computers, software, internet, cloud service, recording equipment, etc.), also not everyone in similar contexts have the same access, and even those with access supplement their knowledge and practice through DIY means of media education. In this context, “making do” represents a pedagogical philosophy, a production process, and a learning tool that affirm and support individual and collective aspirations and resilience.

This section discusses make-do media practices within organizations and schools and by young people themselves, followed by examples of how they share their knowledge and methods more broadly and some of their reflections on resilience. As these ethnographic examples illustrate, make-do media is not always or solely digital, and there are numerous analog forms of making do and a resurgent interest in consuming and producing “old school” media for practical and artistic purposes. As I discuss in the concluding chapter, the COVID-19 quarantine has accentuated this trend even more with limited mobility for supplies and limited access to the internet or digital technologies.



#### 6.4.1 Practical Approaches in Organizations and Schools

Through working directly as a media educator and co-producer at High Rocks and in East(ern) Kentucky schools, I learned (about and from), crafted, and practiced pedagogies of make-do production. These experiences helped shape my own teaching philosophy and methods and instilled a deeper understanding of the broader range of opportunities and limitations facing organizations, schools, and young people themselves on a daily basis.

Even the same organization can have different technologies, equipment, supplies, and technical expertise over time. For example, the High Rocks media track at Camp Steele originated as a theater/drama program and shifted to VHS production. From when I first arrived as a volunteer in 2014 and through 2015-2018 when I taught as camp staff member, the media class had differing access to cameras and training every year, depending on available summer staff, and funding. Each summer we set up the Lodge library as a makeshift classroom and production studio during Camp Steele, which also included bringing computers from the High Rocks HUB facility in Lewisburg and then purchasing/installing the Adobe Premiere editing software. The initial media program taught by founder Susan Burt started with VHS cameras, and there were a couple of MiniDV cameras the first couple of years when I came on board. One of these was a Sony HandyCam, which was the same model I used for several personal projects at home. When a trained photojournalist co-taught the class and served as a media-focused AmeriCorps volunteer for two years, she facilitated the purchase of Nikon digital cameras that were more similar to her personal equipment, which meant that she was able to provide detailed instruction on their use and on photography in general. There were also iPads that served as all-in-one cameras and editors for experimental shorts and

“trailers.” My last summer, a different AmeriCorps team teacher who was also professionally trained in photojournalism and film production, brought his professional camera equipment from his studio for students to use. Campers sometimes brought their prosumer cameras from home (rather than relying on smartphones) for use in class and throughout camp activities.<sup>110</sup>

Alongside this variability, we often used the make-do pedagogy of “editing in camera” (for recording sequential scenes in order without the need for editing software) in the Camp Steele media minor because of fewer class meetings and shorter class periods than the major track.<sup>111</sup> Sadly, this make-do approach failed one summer when a minor team produced a humorous and skillful virtual hike up the arduous “Zen Trail,” and someone accidentally erased their entire project before it was transferred from the digital memory card to one of the computers for back-up. (They were disappointed but were also good sports about it, and we still talk about its epic legacy as a lost masterpiece of minor track media-making.) Despite best practices for archiving student work and daily protocols for checking and copying photos and footage, the loss of time and hard work is inevitable at some point.

For an earlier media production, High Rocks alum Kris Arbuckle talked about using buckets, tools, etc. to create the rhythmic soundtrack for their video about the construction track because they did not have music available. Artistic media supplies and pedagogy intersect and intermingle in other ways at High Rocks because they are readily

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<sup>110</sup> Like Cool, “I use the term *prosumer*, a contraction of “professional” and “consumer,” to highlight the blurring of these boundaries in contemporary society” (Cool 2014)(173).

available for both educational and recreational purposes. More informally, campers are constantly creating in many forms of media and artistic expression, and they frequently share and exchange the products of the making throughout the camp experience and beyond. For example, “Secret Sisters” is a High Rocks camp tradition that, in a very rustic and mostly money-free environment, is a creative problem-solving process to come up with make-do ideas for making or negotiating for gifts when they cannot go shopping. Another tradition is making friendship bracelets on days off and throughout camp from the extensive collection of different colors of embroidery thread available. Media for making collages and journaling are also available in the classroom and beyond and are both common forms of make-do media in an otherwise “unplugged” environment.

The pedagogy of “making do” is sometimes the result of competing aims within curricular design, such as High Rocks camps as an intentionally “unplugged” space that also includes technology-based or -related educational programming. For example, my field notes from the day before campers arrived one summer included a conversation with Margaret Falleta, veteran intern and the Master Teacher that year who regularly taught an arts and activism track at Camp Steele.

Margaret arrived later. .... She needed to do some work on the computer, but we also talked about camp. .... We talked about the unplugged aspect of camp and the challenge of increasingly electrified courses and how they used to be at the campsite but are now mostly taking place at the Lodge and other buildings at the bottom of the hill. This also affects exercise time and motivation .... (07.15.16)

These challenges are commonly understood and discussed by camp staff, alumni, and organizational administrators, and I learned that mobile phones were previously not allowed at High Rocks to limit contact with the “outside world” (even though cell coverage is basically non-existent in the woods, campground, or organization facilities).

Later that fall while conducting fieldwork in Letcher County, I reflected further on this idea as a guest on Tanya' Turners "Feminist Fridays" program on WMMT.

At High Rocks, for example .... internet access is difficult. It's just not really widely available in my county. Cell phone access at the camp is nonexistent, which interestingly enough is kind of part of their curriculum. And so at High Rocks even though they have like a media production track, and even though a lot of the other classes use technology, the girls they are supposed to be unplugged while they're there. So their cell phones don't work. They're kind of removed from that social media environment .... [it is] also a way for them to think critically about it and use it in a way that is more intentional. And so a lot of the girls there say that, you know, being unplugged is hard. They really want to be able to text with their friends or check in with their families, but at the same time, they realize what they're able to do when they are unplugged and how they can use it in more conscientious ways when they go home.

Eventually, High Rocks allowed campers to have cellphones for collecting and sharing photos and playing music, but they are still not *technically* allowed to have Wi-Fi access.

However, campers inevitably *always* figure out the Wi-Fi password, which means the business manager has to change it at least a couple of times during both camps *every* summer. This recurring process of circumventing adult control over connectivity is another example of youth agency that demonstrates a creative attention between the *pedagogy* and the *practice* of youth voice and activism in High Rocks' organizational culture and leadership model. It is simultaneously amusing, frustrating, and inspiring to staff who still must maintain network security for the organization and support the unplugged pedagogy of summer camps.

I have perhaps learned the most about "make do media" on the practical, artistic, and region level working as a teaching artist in K-12 schools. On the macro level of state education standards, the "teaching artist gig economy" helps sustain the arts education curriculum development and programming in Kentucky public schools where full-time art-related teachers and classes are sometimes not funded at all. As contract workers,

teaching artists must first apply to juried rosters or directories that teachers and school administrators can use to connect and collaborate on potential projects. This application process includes several background checks (sometimes at the applicant's expense), submitting work samples, and sometimes an in-person interview. Juried teaching artists must also attend orientation/training workshops and complete additional paperwork. Also, acceptance means eligibility (but not a guarantee) for arts residencies that then entail additional paperwork, scheduling, preparation, invoicing (for untaxed income), and sometimes travel reports. Even with reimbursement of mileage, travel for multi-day residencies may also necessitate staying in a hotel when working a great distance from home (for example, Perry County is a two-hour trip one way from my house). This challenge relates both to the need for more teaching artists in East(ern) Kentucky as well as to larger transportation issues facing public schools regarding arts-related field trips.

In the context of make-do arts education, teaching artists work with and adapt to whatever technologies are available at each school and to what type of art/media projects (broadly defined including both digital and analog) are possible with the time and resources at hand. As mentioned in the curriculum development section of Chapter 2 on method/ologies, when I worked with Judy Sizemore on the “Our Creative Promise” project, we wrote about making do with whatever school resources were available in the KET Media Arts Toolkit.

There was much more disparity among schools than anticipated, not only in terms of the resources available, but also the state of repair/disrepair of the resources, who had access to them and when, and who knew how to use them.

....

Remember that whatever technology resources you have or don't have, you can develop and complete a worthwhile project. Working with technology can be—and almost certainly will be—frustrating.

....

Be sensitive to disparity of student experience with and access to digital technology. Some students have had access to and instruction in using technology all their lives, while others have not. In our digital society, students are sometimes embarrassed to admit that they are not tech-savvy or do not have access to digital devices. (Kentucky Educational Television 2018a:C22-C23)

For example, one of the schools we worked with had a fully equipped and sound-proofed professional recording studio whereas we helped students record audio on smartphones at most schools. Also, many schools have Chromebooks for all students, but even ubiquitous access can come with its own challenges with advertisements and compatibility issues, which I detailed in a reflection on a podcast project I helped with for the Arts Connect Appalachian Youth project.

In our contributions as well as other Kentucky project examples from students and teachers throughout the KET Media Arts Toolkit (Kentucky Educational Television 2018a), numerous hands-on activities, how-to instructions and tips, and corresponding videos and handout resources provide *free* access to a compendium of knowledge generated, documented, and collected from media professionals at KET as well as students, teachers, and teaching arts from Kentucky K-12 schools. For example, although she does not consider herself a “media artist,” Judy Sizemore helps students and teachers use a simple presentation program like PowerPoint for images and basic “video production” without a video camera or editing equipment. She also produces short projects for organizations she works with to document and share arts education curricula, activities, and outcomes more broadly.

Throughout my fieldwork and work as a teaching artist, I encountered and troubleshooted the practical implications of “making do” in classrooms and organizations, whatever equipment and technology are available. My teaching artist

profiles emphasize the make-do theme by offering several project possibilities using paper and/or digital media. For example, the “graphic novel” workshops I offered had analog and digital options in three different settings with different levels of engagement, which is not only a matter of making do with available supplies but also available time as someone coming in for a brief duration. For example, for the afterschool program at Berea Community School, the site coordinator had funding to purchase and distribute high-quality supplies (color pencils, magic markers, black drawing pens, blank journals, blank comic book templates, etc.) for each participant to take home with them. At other schools, we used whatever supplies were available in the classroom and whatever media individual students chose, though most selected paper-based projects. A couple of students used PowerPoint or some other program to create digital stories.

Willa Johnson talked about her work with KVEC and sharing media resources with kids in different schools and communities. She said:

[T]he breakdown in education anywhere, not just rural communities, is that we think it’s just behind those four walls. And that it doesn’t connect to our community. But it, so much of our community revolves around our schools. And so how do you tell that story to the people around you, not just your students, or your other teachers. So we want them to be able to tell their stories and share them and sort of break down that community/classroom divide. And so I work with these four teachers, but what’s been really fun is that I come in and work with their classes. And so I have had a group at .... Letcher County Central [High School], for two semesters now. I’ve started at the middle school in Letcher County. I work in Owsley County, and I’ll go to Pikeville Independent. And I take kids cameras, video cameras, photography cameras, audio gear, laptops. I’ve taken them iPads and stylus to sketch on the iPads, sketch up comic book designs. Really anything they want, and they choose. I go in and I don’t give them any guidance as to what they need to make, which is really scary to kids, turns out, to say, “Make whatever you want to make, and I’ll give you whatever you want to make it.”

....

And then I’ve also had kids who have done podcasts, which are really fun. And then, some have made videos. It’s really fun for me, and Tanya [Turner] too, to sort of break down that, tech world, is we call, “Tech Bros.” It’s very boy-

focused, it's very boy-driven. Boys, even younger boys sometimes throw out tech lingo around me like it's going to go over my head. And I .... want girls when we go into the classroom to feel like they're contributing just as much. And so one of the things I always talk about whenever I go to classrooms .... "How many people watch tutorials online to learn things?" And they all raise their hands. And I'm like, "How many people watch makeup tutorials?" And so like, the girls are kind of hesitant, and I'm like, "I watch 'em all the time!" .... so, we had some girls make makeup tutorials. But .... being able to break down, there are people, there are women and men who are making money from makeup tutorials on YouTube. Like it's an actual career now. .... it's not crazy for you to want to learn how to do the skills. (Johnson 2016)

Through her work providing digital resources like equipment and training in public schools through a regional non-profit, Willa offered open-ended project possibilities, which can also be intimidating to kids. She also used this opportunity to help kids challenge gendered assumptions about technology and who consumes and produces what (i.e., makeup tutorials and "Tech Bros").<sup>112</sup> Even though she was working actively in regional school systems at the time, she also challenges the notion that schools and classrooms are where education and learning must occur.

#### 6.4.2 DIY Youth Research Practices

In addition to formal media education opportunities, young people at different times engaged in their own make-do methods of media consumption and production. Research collaborators shared several stories about young people exercising agency in research of (sometimes surprising) topics of interest outside formal learning environments. When I asked Molly Turner about some of the differences between her generation and younger generations for the YAA oral history project, she shared a compelling anecdote about the way even elementary school kids initiate and conduct research on surprising topics.

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. Tanya Turner talking about learning new apps and technologies from the students she worked with. (Feminist Fridays radio program, November 18, 2016).



MT: Well, I think kids today are more outspoken. And of course, they have more access to information. I'm amazed at what, say, third and fourth graders--the information that they get through access to the internet. I remember about three weeks ago, I was with my great nephew and a friend of his, and they're both in third grade, maybe fourth. But they were discussing socialism, communism, democracy, and they knew the definitions and they knew .... what countries had what. And I know when I was in the third grade, I would have had no idea (laughs) about these kind of things. But they were really interested in it. They were discussing revolutions in different countries that had taken place, and why they took place .... and they had picked all this, or a big part of this up, I think, through watching YouTube. ....

TC: That is definitely very different than the assumptions we make about third or fourth graders and their knowledge about political systems. (laughs)

MT: I said, "You two guys need to discuss becoming president and vice president maybe." And then they got in a little bit of a controversy there because each one of them wanted to be president. (laughs) Neither wanted to be vice. (Turner 2018)

I asked where they lived, and she said that one lived in Owsley County and the other in Lexington, so they did not even go to the same school. She continued:

MT: But it kind of showed me that kids are learning so much from ... and there's people who say, "Oh, the internet's so bad because ..." And I agree, it can, and I think any parent should be conscious of what their child is doing; but at the same time, I think if you don't allow your child access, it's going to be behind.

TC: Um-hm. Um-hm. Well, and that's interesting too because if you think about like what you were saying about playing on your computer, or the way people talk about young people always playing on their phones, I mean, if you were to look at them ... you maybe would assume they were playing Pokémon GO instead of looking at, you know, these different definitions....

MT: And they'll do that. You can be talking to kids and say something that they want to know more about, and you'll see them with those phones looking [it] up. (Turner 2018)

A week later for the same oral history project, I met with Brandon Jent to resume and complete his interview. At the outset he wanted to discuss some topics that were on his mind since our previous meeting. He similarly contrasted his experience as a "Millennial" compared to his younger sister who he described as "Gen Z." He talked

about his sister learning about feminism online on her own whereas he did not encounter such histories and concepts until college.

.... when I was an undergrad here at [the University of Kentucky] .... it was my first exposure to feminism. I took a ... Gender & Women's Studies course on feminism. And I was learning all about this and being exposed to it for pretty much the first time in a formal .... academic setting in a classroom, while my youngest sister, Sydney was learning about it on Tumblr at the same time. And so I remember coming home and being surprised that she knew or could interact with, could navigate these different concepts that I was learning about in class and was really proud of her for being able to. .... I don't think she was necessarily .... seeking out feminist blogs or things like that .... but I think from interacting with that community, and Tumblr's known as being fairly leftist anyways .... I realized that she was learning this was just--it was kind of, like, in passing, talking about, like, "heteronormativity" and, like, the "hegemonic patriarchy," and things like that. These were ... words and concepts that she knew that I had ... just learned in college. Yeah, so even this notion of ... social media is popular education in a way, or having a little bit more access to, or being in some ways challenged to think about things just from interacting with people online. (Jent 2018)

By comparing social media to popular education, Jent situates youth agency in digital spaces within the historical context of more formal traditions in the Appalachian region, like the Highlander Center, and their larger connections to Freire and liberatory praxis and solidarity with the Global South (Adams and Horton 1975; Freire 1970b; Freire and Horton 1990; Graves and Horton 1979; Horton 2003; Horton, et al. 1998). This type of DIY political education also challenges assumptions about rurality and isolation from central political debates and venues, and BLM protests in Appalachian counties and the West Virginia teachers' strikes have further inspired other movements in Kentucky and other parts of the region.

For the youth media education and activism interview project, I spent time with several AMI alumni and/or current participants at the time. Independent research can also provide connections to artistic, cultural, and social histories and art/ifacts that young people have limited access to otherwise. For example, Dustin Hall talked about the "code

language” of Polari and interwove the campy parlance into his daily speech publicly and subversively.

Polari, of course, is the gay language of the 60s, used by Kenneth Williams, the famous comedian, as well as a slew of other, gay people that needed to do something to survive. So I’ve (laughs) kept it alive, and I bring it into my daily conversations. For instance, I’ll meet someone, and I’ll say, you know, “How *bona to vada* your *dolly* old *eek*,” which means “It’s nice to see your lovely face today.” That’s what that means. It’s simple, it’s breezy, you confuse the hell out of people, I love it.

....

Julian and Sandy, who brought Polari to the mainstream, would come onto British radio every day and say, “Oh how *bona to varda* your *dolly* old *eek*!” which is Polari, which was a secret language, which is *what* prevented them from being arrested. (Hall 2016)<sup>113</sup>

After this interview, I had to conduct some make-do research of my own to supplement my limited knowledge of Polari. I also noted this challenge in my field notes about a conversation I had following another interview with an AMI leader at the time. “She also asked how the interview with Dustin went, and I told her that I had to do some research on Polari so that I could transcribe it correctly!” She mentioned that he “developed his own coded language to protect himself” in school (Field Notes 11.02.16).

Dustin has an obvious and enthusiastic cultural and aesthetic interest in Polari, but he recognizes its origin and function as a necessary tool for survival and applied it socially to his own situation in public school settings. He also uses Polari in his everyday conversations as a way to tell stories and educate people about its origin and importance. The active practice of salvaging lost language is a way to acknowledge and document the past to imagine safe futures as a queer person in the region. Through speaking and

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<sup>113</sup> Dustin also talked about his Aunt Lucille who exposed him to art and film and to more diverse gender representations through some of her friends. “I’m going back to Polari. In the confines of Polari .... you can call perhaps an older like queenly man, ‘Aunt Nell.’ (Laughs) So I like to think of her as like, ‘Aunt Nell’ and like (laughs) her nephews” (Hall 2016). He directly connects his beloved family relationship with his aunt to the cultural history of gay men who preceded him.

speaking about Polari, Dustin is contributing to alternative histories and also directly applying its purpose to “avoid being arrested” in the context of his own high school and to confuse and evade bullies.

On the practical level of media-making, a couple of other AMI alumni emphasized the process of production and creative/career aspirations, both drawing inspiration from what they can learn from other people’s media productions and watching behind-the-scenes footage/documentaries, interviews with directors, etc. For example, Oakley Fugate is a recognized and respected young filmmaker not only in his local community but also regionally and nationally. He had already produced many projects on his own before he came to AMI and continued filmmaking as an intern, then as a peer trainer, as well as his personal pursuit of making horror films.

When I asked what he found useful or inspirational from popular media, he said, “.... [T]here’s always things I like that I’d like to try do my own interpretation of. That’s actually how I started, like watching like the horror franchise *Halloween*, was making my own like Michael Meyers movies.” He also said that he likes “Quotes .... styles, and interviews with like other popular directors .... I wanna learn a bit .... from everybody.” Oakley said that he watched “behind-the-scenes videos” for horror films where “you see ‘em laughing, you see all the crew .... hanging out together. And .... I just wanted to try my own hand like creating something like that” (Fugate 2016b). I asked him what he liked about horror films in particular, to which his response was surprisingly “make-do.”

.... like the scenery and just like how easy they are to make, ‘cause I’m also like a huge sci-fi fan, and a huge ... fantasy fan. But like where I’m really like picky like about my props, .... a couple ray-guns ... they’re like \$170 each. And I mean that’s for .... the quality one I would be .... happy with. And then you know, fantasy .... a lot of Medieval ... weaponry, .... to get them to like where they look

real, you know, to get like good props, you could easily find yourself .... well over \$100-\$200 in budget for just .... a few weapons. (Fugate 2016b)

Oakley loves watching and making horror films because it is his favorite film genre, but it is also a practical matter of producing a genre that can live up to his aesthetic standards for different types of films within low-budget constraints.

AMI alumn Elyssia Lowe similarly emphasized professional aspirations but with different skill sets and goals for media-related research. She was an art major in college at the time and said that she wanted to become a storyboard artist.

I love to draw. I always loved to draw. .... And then it went from that to like illustrator children's books because I started reading a lot in middle school like this would be a great job. And then and then it went from that to animator because I watched *Sleeping Beauty*, which is my favorite Disney movie, and they had behind-the-scenes, and how .... storyboard artists would watch this woman act it out, and they would draw her movements and then animate it ... It's a beautiful process. I was just like, "I want to do that." And it just got worse as I got older because now, I just watch YouTube videos on how people create these scenes and stuff.

....

What I find useful [from popular media] is that you have unlimited knowledge at your fingertips whether it be like really useless knowledge or just really informational .... But I love being able to get on the internet and finding things that I want to look for, and it helps a lot when you're learning as a student. I can learn about like artists and their collections and architecture and stuff so quickly than I would be able to reading a book; and visually seeing or watching a video that has been made particularly about that subject is light years better than having to read it, for me. (Lowe 2016)

Her aesthetic interest in Disney animation, in contrast to Oakley's interest in horror, represent an interesting (though not surprising) gendered difference in personal taste even as they share a similar modality for supplementing their media-making knowledge and skills. They both actively learn by gaining an inside peek or "behind-the-scenes" access to the social contexts of professional popular media makers beyond the prestigious and long history of Appalshop filmmakers in the region. Visual engagement with these and

other media like YouTube tutorials is also important for learning outside of and in addition to formal AMI training and higher education.

As these examples of make-do research show, young people's interests and motivations for using digital media for learning outside of formal contexts sometimes challenge assumptions for how and why they seek information and knowledge, whether researching political systems and social movements and discourses outside of formal educational settings (Jent 2018; Turner 2018); researching gay history and art for pleasure and for safety (Hall 2016); or researching and drawing inspiration from deeper views into the professional processes and producers of mainstream media productions (Fugate 2016b; Lowe 2016). As discussed elsewhere, learning about and sharing resources through social media can also be a form of media activism and DIY mental health care and mutual support for young people (see insights from oral history participants Broomfield, Higgins, LaBoeuff, and Rutherford in Clemons 2020).

#### 6.4.3 DIY Youth Production Practices

“Do it yourself” media is pretty commonplace in a time of digital device and social media proliferation. So young people are active “prod-users,” or producers and users (McWilliam and Dawson 2008; Olsson and Svensson 2012) of these technologies on their own outside of school or alternative education settings. As previously mentioned in Chapter 3 on method/ologies, professional photographer Roger May said that he mostly uses his phone and “The best camera is the one you have with you” during his “Walk Your Camera” workshop at the 2018 Visualizing Appalachia Conference. His show-and-tell collection of cameras included different sizes, technologies, and time periods, and he said that his first camera was a Kodak 110 that his mom got him from

collecting cereal box tops, which is its own economic form of “making do.” In terms of both photography and video, several people talked about their “first camera” when describing how they first became interested in visual art or media production, and they also discussed their longer-term access to and histories with different and/or better cameras over time as part of their learning process and progression and as technologies and image qualities improved. They also talked about associations they make with different media technology and formats.

Kate Fowler, who was AMI Director at the time (and I later learned had previously worked with Roger May), said that she became interested in photography when her mom took her to an exhibit where she learned about a woman photographer who went on a “road trip” with her best friend. Because of her interest, her mom bought her old cameras everywhere she went.

.... my mom took me to see a female photographer from National Geographic speak at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg. And I was like 11 years old or 10 years old, and I just remember the woman talking about how she .... and her best friend were photographers together, and they had a Jeep, and they would drive across, like, the country, and they would go to different continents, and it just sounded like an amazing road trip (laughs) with her best friend! I remember saying to my friend, like this, “Alright, this what we’re going to do. We’re going to be journalists, and we’re going to meet people, and we’re going to travel around, and we’re going to drive around in a Jeep.” And it just became kind of a mantra for a long time, and that first year ... after we went to it, I told my mom, like, “This is what I want to do.” And she started buying me cameras every Christmas. More and more cameras every single Christmas, and she’d go to estate sales, and she’d find me like 25 cameras. And some of them would be like an old Brownie or like an old 4x5, and other ones would be like a 35mm from the 70s. So I amassed this huge camera collection. .... it was just my forever mantra after that: I was going to be a photographer. (Laughs) .... after dropping out of school, um, ‘cause the town that we grew up, my brothers and I all dropped out at the same time, and it was just a really racist small town. Really bad experience growing up in this school, very military and .... we did *not* fit in at all. And so we all three left at the same time, and I wanted to go to school for photography, but I had no like credentials (laughs) to go to college at all. So I took the GED and my ACTs, and then I went to culinary school. And then I transferred from this like

technical college into Virginia Commonwealth University for photography. .... I double-majored in photography and filmmaking. (Fowler 2016)

These early cameras and a make-do secondary education were the basis for more formal training and professional experience in visual media. Kate also later used these skills, and her experiences as a dissenting young white person in a racist town, to produce a film project about the confederate flag and a peaceful counterprotest to a KKK rally in South Carolina as a way to confront racial injustice.

Marlyn McClendon, a High Rocks intern alumna and staff person at the time, said that she always had access to a camera but not much formal training.

[S]ince high school, I was always interested in photography. I always had a camera. I took a photography class, and bought a camera, and always did it as a hobby. I think for me, being able to capture things ... in picture-format (laughs) that can convey emotion or describe a scene, or something like that ... always just appealed to me. I was just always attracted to that, and so I always wanted to try to ... mimic that and be able to tell a story or tell something through pictures. I don't know. Just something that ... I especially get lost in, and I never really found any sort of like passion or anything. But the camera and the picture-taking was something I could always get lost in and do it for hours and just like always want to like carry my camera around.

.....

I think because of insecurity and because of lack of ... what I thought you had to have, like that professional kind of experience of a hundred photography classes and all these different kind of things, I've kind of held myself back. But then, you know over the past couple years, I've just kind of been trying it, and just doing it anyway and kind of making those mistakes and going for it.

By “doing it anyway,” Marlyn disempowers assumptions about what counts as expertise and exercises her agency to decide that she can choose photography as a medium of expression and tell stories that are meaningful not only to her but also broader local and regional audiences. “Going for it” and “doing it anyway” is a make-do practice of producing her own expertise. As I discuss later, Marlyn’s public Appalachian Instagram feed is how and where she shares her photography and stories with broader audiences.



Like young people's DIY political education, Marlyn's approach to make-do media education with the resources at hand also relates to Freirean notions of equity in knowledge production (Freire 1970a; Freire 1970b; Freire 2005).

Ellie Bell, a camper alumn and another AmeriCorps at the time, also had access to cameras through her father's interest in photography, and she became interested in visual art and/or media production.

I've always ... had a little art streak, you know, everyone does I think if you just let it happen. ... but my dad is really into photography. He's always had like the latest camera. Like I remember when digital cameras came out, and that's when I really started to get into it because ... you can take as many pictures as you want and really learn how to be a photographer without spending extra money to develop your stuff and store it. .... I think like in 7<sup>th</sup> grade I got [my own digital] camera. .... before I got a camera, I would get out the big video camera, like the one that, like, you know, I could barely lift (laughs).

We discussed what kind it was, and she said it had "small tapes" but could not remember if it was maybe a Hi-8 cassette, "which unfortunately I don't have access to now because of the disconnect in like VHS technology and that camera." .... I have the small tapes. .... you put it into the big VHS tape .... [which] is broken, so I can't watch the videos." Even as someone who was in her mid-twenties at the time, Ellie was still aware of and vulnerable to the potential loss of access to older media productions as recording technologies and formats change over time. In contrast, the shareability of YouTube and her High Rocks production led to a related job with a local non-profit in her home county that she cared about. The lost work, produced when self-documentation was less prolific and perhaps more self-conscious, was recorded on fragile, transient, and even uncertain media. The technological erasure eliminates access to earlier work as people learn and grow as media makers and therefore does not allow people to revisit, recontextualize, or remix their earlier work.

Several research collaborators discussed “iPhone photography” relative to issues of increased access and both the possibilities and perceptions of production quality and expertise with such a ubiquitous high-resolution device in contrast to “real photography” and using a “real camera” in media education spaces where they had access. For example, when I asked Brandon Jent how he became interested in visual art and media, he said:

.... I originally *wasn't*. .... Like it never came up, it wasn't something I thought like, “Wow, I really want to do this” at first .... [AMI] introduced me to media and visual arts in a way that like I didn't think I'd be interested in, but now I am. I'm now really interested in photography, and ... I do a lot of like smartphone photography, iPhone photography. .... I'm wanting to buy like my own camera, and try to like, (pauses) practice more, figure more stuff out. (Jent 2016)

Later, he brought up the issue of camera access and image quality in his own work.

I'm wanting a DSLR, but my iPhone's doing pretty decent right now. Instagram is the place where I just dump all of it. (Laughs) .... I still think like, there's value in that, and that's something that could be someone's first step into media making, or it could be like, that could be it for them .... there are people on Instagram that ... make a living off of pictures they take with their smartphone .... that's not the norm, but (laughs) ... that's, you know, something. .... I still am always obsessed with composition, and exposure, and color, and light, and depth, and all the things that I learned through AMI. .... it's ruined taking a picture for me forever because if like one thing is off for me, I'm like, “No, I'm not using it. I'm not gonna post that to my really important Instagram page!” [Both laugh] .... I've taken a lot of really cool pictures and a lot of things that I look back and am like, “Yeah, I'm actually proud of that, and that's really cool that that was like just from an iPhone.” ... I've done that. I did an iPhone documentary, like I was talking about earlier, my 3-minute, weird point-of-view piece, where I just sang and [smudged with] sage. (Jent 2016)

Brandon said that he wants a professional camera because of its advanced possibilities, but he makes do with his iPhone and AMI training to produce meaningful media about a ritual that is sacred to him. As I discuss more in-depth in a later sub-section on sharing knowledge and resources with others, several people talked about Instagram as a way to connect and communicate with friends as well as an outlet for creative expression and sharing their perspectives of and visions for the world.

Mabel Eisenbeiss (aka “Mabel Moon”), who was a High Rocks camper getting ready to graduate at the time, similarly talked about exposure to more sophisticated equipment and professional production quality in contrast to “iPhone photography.”

ME: (Wistfully) “*My first camera.*” So the first camera I really knew how to use was .... a very cheap little camera from Walmart that didn’t, I couldn’t do much with it. It captured like the color ... but it wasn’t very well-focused. ... But I found a beautiful 35mm film camera at a thrift shop couple years ago, and I’ve been slowly trying to teach myself like about aperture, and f-stop, and ISO, and all that through film. I think that by starting with film up, and I get it .... I will learn really the make-up of what makes the photo or what makes film.

TC: Do you use your phone a lot, too?

ME: I do. Yeah, but I feel like there’s like there’s a [stigma], and there’s this new thing called “iPhone photography” where .... everyone thinks that they’re a photographer and then they have their iPhone, which is true because you have that camera in your hand all the time, and you’re constantly capturing ... moments and sharing them. Yeah.

I asked if she felt like having a “real camera” (or a camera that is not a phone) were different.

I definitely think it gives you a different like eye for things. There is like a [stigma] ... for “iPhone photography.” It’s like, “Oh,” (in the photography world), “Oh, you took that? Oh .... you took that photo? What, did you take it on your *iPhone?*” (Eisenbeiss 2018)

I then asked if she meant in terms of the quality and the expertise related to that device.

Yeah. I definitely think with phones, people are appreciating photographers less, like the “photographer” as a career. I think that people are more likely to take photos themselves than try to get them professionally ... taken. .... And that’s something like I don’t even think about, like, “I carry a camera on my phone all the time” until you brought it up. (Eisenbeiss 2018)

Mabel links her observation of how people think they can do it all themselves because they have a camera in their phone to a diminishing valuing of expertise of people who are trained to use more advanced equipment and techniques. Also, the idea of the phone as a camera was an afterthought because she was focused on learning and practicing more

advanced photography terminology, technology, and skills that support more professional possibilities.

Natasha Watts, AMI alumni and former director, brought up some limitations she observes from her position teaching media at Hazard Community and Technical College and her doctoral research on visual learning.

Well, what I think is hard is the accessibility gives false sense of what you can do. .... accessibility is like a double-edged sword .... and YouTube as well is like, “Just because you can put a video on YouTube doesn’t mean it’s good.” .... I think the thing that Appalshop will always do well and should always stick to in AMI is that they know how to develop stories and people. And that is really lacking in the world right now in content. I mean, you can find anything you want to on YouTube .... people aren’t going to watch something that they can’t understand in a sort of a chronological order. And so, I think that’s what’s really frustrating is that they’re like, “Well, I know how to do this shot. I’ve got this camera, I’ve got this thing.” You can go buy a \$7000 camera, I mean, that’s not going to get you where you need. You know? And so I think that that sort of, to me, what’s really frustrating is that it’s about taking the time to develop something [that’s] got a story .... having the latest equipment, having a desire is just not enough ....

I think that there’s so much out there. You know when I was in AMI, I got a hold of cameras. ... not a lot of people were getting to use .... high-grade camera like that. You couldn’t shoot a great image, but you can take a cell phone now and shoot high-quality video. So I think .... it’s a saturated market. .... again, I go back to, “You’ve got to be a good storyteller,” which that is culturally rooted here so we should excel at that. And that’s what you gotta be, you got to make an effective message. And so, in a saturated market .... I think that’s a leverage that we have that we’re not really diving into as much ... that I *try*. .... you can go on YouTube or Vimeo and spend *days* going through stuff. (Watts 2016)

From Natasha’s perspective, one of the challenges of popular media is that DIY access does not mean people are good at visual storytelling and production. Also, while training matters for professional access to opportunities, make-do media results not from the best technologies or technical training alone: storytelling matters, “place matters,” and meaningful access with whatever tools are available matters.

Nicole “Nickel” Hall, who was a graduating High Rocks camper and a YAB leader at the time, said that her sister took High Rocks workshops and the Camp Steele media major, but she also taught herself and produced her own videos even more extensively at home outside of formal programming.

.... media is in our lives daily, especially in this age. So you take pictures of just about everything ‘cause you have your smart device with you just about all the time. And if you see anything that you just like, “Hm, that’s really appealing.” I definitely take pictures on that, and my sister’s very passionate about media, so I get a lot of that through her. Like she even bought her own editing software, and has a green screen. And she makes some really wild pictures, and .... I’m exposed to a lot of her artwork. Like she was playing with it, and she made a picture of like herself floating somehow. I don’t even know how she did it, and it was just really like mind-boggling. So she’s really into that, and I’m mostly there just to watch that. And she also had a YouTube channel that she would make funny videos with her best friend. .... Like I remember .... her and her best friend, they went through this crocheting phase? So they literally had just a few videos of them just having like “real talks,” put in those air quotes, and crocheting in like various places. Like maybe they were sitting on a bench at Wal-Mart crocheting and, you know, just talking at’cha, and maybe they were in McDonald’s, you never know. They were just sort of crocheting in public places. .... they just came up with wild things. Or she would make like artsy pictures and video .... she just did this one random one that she started out on her YouTube channel, and it was of like a montage of just different like water sounds and stuff at home. And it was just really artsy and, of course it was my home, too, so I was like, “Cute.” So she’s my main ... go-to person on everything media. (Hall 2018)

Despite the prevalence of devices, Nicole’s sister still developed a more advanced interest and production output. While she was not at camp that summer, she was always recognizable for bringing and using her own Nikon camera. She took the media major more than once when I taught it, and I also engaged her as an “expert” to assist and support other students by sharing her knowledge and experience in the class.

AMI alumni and filmmaking aficionado Oakley Fugate began making his own DIY media productions with a modest first camera he bought before he became involved

with AMI. When I asked how he became interested in visual art or media production, he said:

Well, it started as I developed nerve damage in my right hand, which impaired my ability to write and draw, so you know, for a while, I always wanted to create stuff but had no means of doing so. So one day I was shopping at a Dollar Store, and I found a video camera for \$20 that recorded 10 whole seconds of video. So ... I got that, and I just fell in love 'cause, you know, from there I was able to create, I could use that to tell my story. (Fugate 2016b)

Whereas for some young people, drawing may be a more accessible medium, digital media became a make-do form of creation when Oakley could no longer draw, and the Dollar Store camera was a make-do device to begin recording and creating his own pre-AMI content. As I discuss more later, these humble beginnings have led to a prolific and impressive filmmaking careers for someone who was in his early twenties at the time.

Make-do media production for some young people is a combination of program access and more advanced learning and productions based on their interest and initiative. However, for others DIY is the primary mode. AMI alum and ongoing participant/mentor Oakley Fugate started first with "... home movies and then shooting my own ... fictional things. And you know .... aside from firsthand experience, I really wouldn't call it like any prior filmmaking experience. Just 'cause it was me and like I had no one else to learn from but myself." (Fugate 2016b).<sup>114</sup> Logan Woodward was similarly self-taught and self-motivated in first learning to set up camera angles and how to record and edit good footage. He also went from drawing homemade comics inspired by his favorite childhood movie, *Tremors*, to making homemade videos using his iPhone, which was his first camera.

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<sup>114</sup> As discussed previously, Oakley is modest about his identity and production as a "filmmaker" in contrast to everyone else who knows and admires him and/or is familiar with his work.

When I was 13, I was starting seventh grade and Middle School over here .... I got my first iPhone, and you know, at the time YouTube and stuff was big, which YouTube now is like television was back then. Like .... kids my age and especially kids younger, like they don't watch TV anymore. .... all their .... role models and stuff are on YouTube now, and especially because ... it shows their day-to-day life. So .... I wanted to put my life out there. I was like, "So that's cool." So I took my phone and ... I just started making videos. I would prop it up, I'd record me playing a game or something. .... I would take it to school, and that was where I was, where a lot of like my favorite stuff would happen, just like recording the day-to-day stuff at school. ... (Woodward 2020)

One of his first videos was about making cookies, and he began posting some videos on YouTube. Like Oakley, Logan became well-known locally for his DIY video productions, though for his "crass humor" (rather than "slasher films"). However, unlike Oakley who became involved with AMI and has continued participating in various levels since, Logan's make-do media education remained the primary way that he learned and practiced production as well as eventually teaching others some media basics.

Logan's Film Club worked on some school video projects, and I asked if they worked as a film crew or trainers.

Well .... I wouldn't even really call it training because it was just really showing them how to hold the cameras, but they didn't really know how to do that because they haven't really taught it there [at the high school]. So I realized as I was going, that I kind of was teaching them. (Woodward 2020)

I asked if he learned things like composition from doing projects on his own or maybe YouTube videos.

Hands-on experience. [TC: Just figuring it out.] Yeah, just literally .... I would just like go outside take a take a video, just like a still video just looking around the outside, like a tree flowing in the wind or something. Then I would just take it in there and practicing how I could put it together and what I could do to it. It just come naturally. .... whenever we would film stuff, we wouldn't film it at like, "We're going to do this scene here, and then this thing right after it." We would do it all in chronological order, like start as when we would start and then finish is when we would finish. Like we never wrote scripts. We always said, "This is what you're going to say when he does this." It was more of improv acting .... just ... going with the flow, and you would know how to say your line. It usually

just ended up working. And even if they were stumbling lines .... and like really awkward, wouldn't know what to say, it would work because we weren't trying to be serious, right? So it ended up .... working to our benefit. (Woodward 2020)

Later, I returned to his about learning on his own and then helping other people learn on school projects, then I asked what other opportunities he was aware of for young people to learn media production in the local area or in the region.

Well, let me think. I know at the high school, there's really not many options, especially now. In the county? None, to my knowledge, really, unless you want to count the Booneville Entertainment Center as a movie theater, but I doubt that counts. As far as around here, the community colleges and the news stations, that's it, to my knowledge. There could be more. I wouldn't take my word as gospel. But there's really not much around here, so we kind of have to make do with what we can. Well, I think that's why people liked a lot of this stuff we make because we weren't really trained, but we had our own method, and the method kind of worked. (Woodward 2020)

The make-do quality of their DIY productions as part of the appeal for their local audience.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Logan created an afterschool Film Club but could not sustain it long-term because “making do” was more difficult in the confines of a school-sanctioned club and without a consistent faculty sponsor to support it. Interestingly, Logan did not really mention any of the other school-based projects through Berea College Partners for Education that I have kept up with or been involved with over the years as significant learning or production experiences. I brought up the KET Media Lab that I tagged along with his OCHS class with Ms. Nolan, and he did not recall that field trip until I mentioned it. Unlike most people I interviewed in Owsley County, he was not involved in *HomeSong*. While there are substantial connections between theater and media (Baker 2017; Baldwin 2016; Martin 2017; Richardson 2017; Turner 2017), some projects are not accessible or meaningful to everyone in the same way.



Make-do media consumption and production practices are a common creative and adaptive method for navigating available (or visible) opportunities for learning and practicing DIY media-making, advancing skills, and exploring professional possibilities. First cameras are a common way that young people (and the “formerly young”) developed and expanded their interest in visual art and media production. Regardless of “professional” status and equipment, program access, or formal training, young people encounter creative tensions between make-do methods and professional development in media production. As I discuss later, DIY oral history projects and interviews like “Country Queers” also constitute and apply make-do media practices. Trans-ing Analog and Digital

Another adaptive make-do media practice is how young people (and “formerly young”) engage in a complex and dynamic form of media archaeology in the studying, collection, and relationships with different media technologies. For example, I previously discussed research collaborators’ make-do engagement with old cameras and old video formats. Their broader interest in “vintage” analog media formats is again a way of trans-ing assumptions about youth media consumption and production as “digital” versus “analog.” There are many examples across sites that challenge assumptions about what young people are interested in or pursue as their artistic and activist passions and media, including the resurgence of old-school media formats from my own childhood. As I discuss in this sub-section, I encountered make-do media such as instant printed Polaroid photos, mixed media collages, paper ‘zines, vinyl records, quilted “crankies,” and revolutionary whiteboards. All of these practices also occur in both formal/informal spaces, currently and “formerly young,” and contribute to intersectional sustainability and

diverse mediacologies by trans-ing analog and digital storytelling. They also show there is not one singular way of engaging in make-do media archaeology.

For example, every summer I went to High Rocks, Mabel always brought a light pink Instax mini camera that was a popular form of “old school” DIY material documentation of camp memories on roughly 2X3-inch instant “Polaroid” photos. This medium also makes a poignant and emotional cameo appearance at the end of a 2015 High Rocks media production “The Real Camp Steele” (discussed in Chapter 5), which features Mabel in her straw gardening hat pointing the camera at the video camera and snapping an instant photo in a moment of meta-documentation. I imagine that neither the device or the film cartridges were cheap, but she was always generous with sharing the tiny photos with campers and staff as keepsakes. Instant photos were not a pervasive media everywhere I went, but they were a ubiquitous presence over time at High Rocks that also connect to Mabel’s ongoing interest in photography and media-making as a research collaborator.

Collages are a classic reuse and “remixing” of analog materials, usually magazines and other print material, around a theme. One of the consistent aspects of social culture and activity at High Rocks is that campers are encouraged and given the tools for producing through a variety of media, which includes a lot of drawing and writing, and there is always a box of old magazines and other images and paper materials to make collages. Collage-making is frequently included in the Creative Expressions class at the New Beginnings camp as well as the Arts and Activism curriculum at Camp Steele, and they showcased these among other personal artwork by setting up public exhibits at the end of camp. Campers pretty much have free reign with a wide range of art

supplies, so they make collages outside of class, and this is an accessible medium to replicate at home with minimal supplies.<sup>115</sup>

Collages were a common occurrence at the Boone Youth Center, and once there was a collage workshop as part of AMI's 2016 Dialogue Lab 2027 collaboration with visiting artist Sean Starowitz. The overall multi-day "D-Lab" workshop "explored [participants'] desired futures for the region in the year 2027 .... [and] envisioned new uses for abandoned mine sites, drafted new ways of thinking through community engagement and created new businesses & venues to celebrate the strong cultural assets already present"; and the collaging part of the project also incorporated "Appalshop Archive's immensely powerful collection of regional archival photographs to build new narratives with the tools and visual language of the past" (Starowitz 2016). Through the physical remixing of old images of the region, including War on Poverty photos, participants actively made something new out of something old by producing their own stories from existing media.<sup>116</sup> That same night after observing some of this workshop, I also encountered some interesting examples of DIY collages produced by research collaborators during an interview at someone's home. Oliver Baker, an AMI alumni and fellow Theater Lab participant that fall, showed me the various collages that he and his friends had made to decorate their apartment together. Most were typical

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<sup>115</sup> Collage-making is also a traditional practice for organizational and summer staff to express their personal sentiments to campers when they "graduate" from High Rocks at their last Camp Steele (with "photo collages of their time at High Rocks") (quotes from 2014 High Rocks Camp manual). Upon completing New Beginnings, campers are also each gifted with framed collages (with "a picture of the girl with 'because' reasons that she has become a High Rocks girl" written anonymously by individual staff members). It is important to distinguish these outside media representations of student strengths and growth from those of self-documentation and self-representation, which are the primary curricular and artistic practice at High Rocks.

<sup>116</sup> AMI alumni and media maven Oakley Fugate publicly posted some of his personal photos of this event on Facebook.

paper/paperboard media, but then he pointed out their remix of a large presidential campaign banner that they had appropriated, which they rearranged from “TRUMP IS OK” to “RUM SPITS OK” and strung across their living room. Collaging was an important messaging medium that Oliver wanted to share with me in relation to our interview conversation and some of the issues that he was concerned with at the time, including the recent presidential election and resulting polarization.

Print media was another analog format I encountered in multiple sites, particularly a return to producing and sharing hand-made paper ‘zines, but also documenting and distributing them digitally. “Zine” is shortened from “fanzine,” which is a contraction of “fan magazine,” and ‘zines are “self-published periodicals ... understood generously” as they may only comprise a “single issue” or one-off project (Lovata 2008:324). Without digging too deep into paper zines’ long and contested history, their most recent heyday was in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of increased access to photo copiers that made serial self-publication more accessible and affordable (Lovata 2008). While self-published content subsequently flourished with expanded access to the internet, the analog format of assembling and reproducing art and commentary on paper ‘zines persists as a very youth-centered genre. Senechal (2011) wrestles with the “zine teacher’s dilemma” that represents “the paradox of the pedagogical project” of “teaching” zine-making, a medium that “in contrast to schooling, is based on a redistribution of authority (the authority to publish)” (2011:158). Furthermore, zine-making in educational settings, especially in public schools, constrains the both the medium and the youth voices/agency it is supposed to channel. “So the paradox of teaching zine-making is, simply put, when you make a zine because your teacher told you to, then maybe it’s not a zine at all”

(Senechal 2011:158). Senechal ultimately recommends shifting “from uncertainty to acceptance” to “embrace the paradox and move forward” (2011:158); and “while some might argue that creating an official outlet for these forms of publication is an act of co-opting,” the student publication “created a space of freedom within the traditional school context ....” (Senechal 2011:158-159).

When time and appropriate, I have shared examples of ‘zines collected from High Rocks and elsewhere as inspiration for what students might broadly consider for “graphic novel” projects in some of my arts residencies. Some ‘zines at High Rocks were collaborative class projects and some were individual intern projects. All campers at Camp Steele complete a final project for their major classes (and some minor classes). For example, the 2017 “Food Revolution” track produced a ‘zine with nutrition information, artwork and poetry about sustainable agriculture and veganism, critiques of industrial agriculture, field trip photos from a local farmers’ market, reflections from a visit to a young couple’s nearby farm, and even a food/farm-related word search.

In 2018, the “Mountain Movements” class produced a multimodal ‘zine called “Recipe for Resistance” for their final project, which included essays, poetry, organizing how-to tips, artwork, addressing environmental, racial justice, anti-pipeline, and labor issues. For example, one young woman of color wrote an essay about white privilege and prejudice as a “fluid hate,” and a young white woman talked about going to Standing Rock with her dad in solidarity opposition to the pipeline. There was a hand-drawn map showing the “native lands” of West Virginia, and various forms of commentary about pipelines, including a page of haikus. The class also wrote and published alternative lyrics to Hazel Dickens’ “Fire in the Hole” that “Dedicated to all the brave folks in

WV+VA fighting the MVP [Mountain Valley Pipeline],” which they also performed *acapella* at the public Nettlefest celebration on the closing day of camp. Ashton Webb, High Rocks alumn and summer media intern contributed a fiber needlework with rainbow-colored fists joining one another with the words “RURAL RESISTANCE” in black letters.



Figure 36 High Rocks Alumn & 2018 Media Intern Ashton Webb’s Hand-stitched “RURAL RESISTANCE” contribution to 2018 Mountain Movements “Recipe for Resistance” Zine (Scanned by author and used with permission of artist)

The campers in the Mountain Movements class all selected and organized the content, and when trying to duplicate and digitize content on the photocopier became too unwieldy, I volunteered to help their instructor and the creative directors scan images of completed contributions for digital assembly. Teachers and students are always careful to publicly preface their work as their own and *not* a formal stance of the organization, which represents another dynamic tension between youth/student activism and the

infrastructure that supports their learning, agency, and creative productions. For example, the students shared the giant anti-pipeline banners with their families before the public event, but they did not display them at Nettlefest.

As a mode of media-making, ‘zines present new possibilities for producing and sharing artwork and issues that they care about. For example, Mabel Eisenbeiss was co-creative director for the Mountain Movements ‘zine project and is a prolific poet and essayist. When I asked if she was working on any projects with her own cameras, Mabel talked about limited access to technology as an obstacle, but she also mentioned her personal interest in ‘zine-making as a make-do method for producing meaningful content.

So I don’t have access on my own, to cameras and software. I want to be able to have access, but of course, all these things cost money. .... Visually, like on paper .... I want to make a ‘zine. .... I don’t know .... what the topic’s going to be, but it’s gonna be something around resistance in Appalachia. (Eisenbeiss 2018)

I asked if she was producing a DIY ‘zine herself or the Mountain Movements project.

She said, “I’m doing it on my own. .... But I want to incorporate other people’s art and writings into it. .... Merge them” (Eisenbeiss 2018). When I asked about the issues she wanted to cover, she said:

I want to talk about, obviously, the pipelines. But maybe put some history in there about .... West Virginia’s ... labor, strike history, and our .... [recent] strikes like the 55 Strong. I want to put something in there, because .... I was at Charlottesville.... so there was two rallies, and I was in between them. And I talked to some activists there. That really affected me. So I want to put something in there about fighting white supremacy, something about solidarity economies, and trying to fight back against capitalism. (Eisenbeiss 2018)

Mabel wanted to further research and apply the knowledge she gained in the Mountain Movements class, and production experience with a group made producing her own ‘zine with other collaborators and the materials she had access to seem possible as a form of self-publishing outside the scope of a formal program.

High Rocks summer intern projects, which require a public research presentation and a creative element, frequently include some type of print media like an informational guide or pamphlet. A couple of summers when I was at Camp Steele, intern projects by High Rocks alumni incorporated a 'zine format for presenting practical field guide knowledge about the campground: *Fun Guide to Fungi* (Leyzorek 2016) and *Bugs of the High Rocks* (Webb 2018). Max Leyzorek, a High Rocks alumn and summer intern one year, was an avid mushroom hunter and always spent time educating others about mushrooms found during camps. Max is also an artist who draws anime, so the intern project *Fun Guide to Fungi* was no surprise to anyone who knew him. When I asked Max about what he found useful or inspiring from popular media, he brought up learning that “there’s actually a whole process of how shows get made” and realizing the range of artist contributors who participate. This led to the topic mushrooms in relation to his artistic aspirations.

There’s just one project that I really want to do. And it sounds a bit silly but. At some point my life I want to make a mushroom book like all by myself. .... take the .... photographs myself, draw some illustrations, all that kind of stuff, and .... write the thing. And granted it’s gonna be a huge project, but it’s something I really want to do. Like a reference. .... There’s a lot of like mushroom identification books out there, and I’d like to make one too based on what I know. And I know it’s because it sounds kind of off topic, but I draw mushrooms sometimes, and I know a lot about them. (Leyzorek 2017)

I commented that he was also using art as an educational tool to illustrate concepts, and he responded, “And that is that is one huge definite goal for what I want to do in my art in general.” His deep interest in mushrooms stemmed from growing up rurally and foraging for food, but the creative and scientific interest in representing and researching mushrooms also became a professional possibility through the production of a small-scale 'zine and gaining knowledge about broader production processes and professions.



In AMI, and Whitesburg more generally, I encountered an active ‘zine culture. There were zine-making workshops at the Boone Youth Center and racks of home-made zines at the Roundabout Music Company at the Whitesburg Main Street intersection just a couple of blocks away from the Boone Youth Center and the Appalshop headquarters. A couple of Roundabout owners are AMI alumni and former director Ben Spangler and his wife Lacy Hale, a multi-talented local visual artist who has also worked for AMI. It was a frequent stop among AMI interns throughout the summer, and I always stopped by when I was there. One of my personal Roundabout purchases was a paper ‘zine entitled, “Radical Mycology,” and Alice Beecher, who taught the Mountain Movements class that summer, also brought zines to share with her students, and when I stayed with her when she lived in Knott County, she also had several new ones she had collected, including one by a young man in prison.<sup>117</sup>

The creative asset listing for Roundabout on the “Our Creative Promise” inventory for Letcher County says “Sells new and used music, instruments, equipment, and supplies. Hosts live music performances” (see spreadsheet on Resources page, Our Creative Promise 2018). However, they are perhaps most well-known for buying and selling vinyl records, which is yet another analog media that is making (another) comeback. Last fall, Roundabout posted a link to a video on WYMT news about vinyl sales surpassing CD sales that year on their public Facebook page. Reporter Katey Cook interviewed Lacy Hale for a short piece about the “resurgence” of vinyl records and how “it is bringing generations together” (Cook 2019). Lacy talked about kids coming in as well as a diverse range of music that includes punk and metal, which is an important part

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<sup>117</sup> For more on the historical context of DIY activist publishing through the Appalachian Movement Press in West Virginia in the 1970s, see Slifer (2017; 2021).

of local youth history and culture at the Boone Building and in Whitesburg (as discussed in Chapter 5). Vinyl is also an important and enduring part of Appalshop's history through its June Appal record label founded in 1974. June Appal continues producing vinyl pressings of records, and their website indicates that their catalog of near 100 albums "are available in digital, CD, cassette tape, and LP formats" (see What We Do page, Appalshop n.d.).

"Crankies" are another analog medium of using scrolling images, or an older form of "moving pictures," for storytelling that I learned to make when I was a kid. I made cardboard and paper versions in middle and high school with a Converse shoe box, taped sheets of paper, and empty paper towel rolls to wind the paper around. As an only child, I could entertain myself for hours drawing panels and recording narration on cassette tapes. In the Appalachian region and traditional music community, Anna & Elizabeth are a recognized duo who make crankies out of quilted images as visual narration of songs both during live performances and digitized as music videos on their YouTube channel. One of their websites talks about their use of crankies among a range of multimodal musical instruments and forms of knowledge, including:

.... all the creative tools they can think of: storytelling, research, fiddle, banjo, guitar, ballads, puppets, poetry, and moving scrolls called 'crankies'. .... They are trying to engage themselves and their audience with traditional art in all the forms it can take—from canning to woodcuts, quilting to singing, to better express the rich stories this region has to share. (2020)

They have travelled with their crankies of old ballads for performances and workshops in many places, including the Berea College Appalachian Center and the former Clear Creek Festival in my home neighborhood where I saw them perform for the second time.

In the context of media arts education in public schools, I again encountered “crankies” through working with Judy Sizemore as a teaching artist and consultant. She was working on support materials for a new KET collection about interactive arts installations and did not want to limit it to video and thought “it would be great to do something about crankies” (Judy Sizemore, personal communication, December 29, 2017). She shared one example from the PBS LearningMedia site, which was an older recording of “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” that they updated with a video of “shadow puppets and a crankie—a long illustrated scroll, which has been used as a method of storytelling since the 19th century” (see KET content on PBS LearningMedia, Public Broadcasting Service n.d.).

Crankies are a multimodal way of configuring storytelling media that combine different “old” artforms and representations (Himes 2019) while also sharing and distributing those productions through digital means like YouTube videos and spin-off projects by other folks sharing the DIY how-to knowledge, skills, and resources for creating one’s own. This is a “thing” well beyond the confines of “Appalachia” or “old-timey” artistic traditions! One woman was inspired by Anna and Elizabeth and others to start performing “fiddle tunes” with homemade crankies, and she “became intrigued with the history of this forgotten art form .... [also] known as moving panoramas” (Truman 2020). Her “Crankie Factory” website also includes various tutorials, a directory of “cranksters,” and several videos of crankies produced by different people. Crankies, using whatever simple or complex materials (or recording equipment) are available, are clearly an accessible make-do media for all ages.

Because I spent so much time in educational, non-profit, and community organizing spaces,<sup>118</sup> I became increasingly aware of and intrigued by whiteboards as an important yet perhaps overlooked analog medium as a form of “make-do pedagogy and protest” for the production, documentation, representation, and preservation of knowledge. I encountered whiteboards (and their paper analog cousins: flipcharts, which are not as fleeting) in classrooms, workshops, and meetings throughout my fieldwork. For example, as described in Chapter 4 on mediacologies, the Boone Youth Center where AMI conducts programming is mostly a big open space where tables, chairs, couches, whiteboards, flipcharts, and butcher paper can be moved and reconfigured. The large panoramic whiteboard helps center and transform the casual lounge furniture around it into an educational space. As discussed in Chapter 2 on method/ologies, scanning paper documents and whiteboard content were important practices for my overall data collection and multimodal documentation of observant-participant fieldwork.

As it relates to my personal pedagogy, I first developed the habit of photographing classroom whiteboards as a TA at UK when students reviewed material for exam study prep together or did small group work that they shared with the entire class. I then continued use of this in media education settings where I volunteered and/or worked; first as a criterion of the High Rocks curriculum template of “documenting student work,” which I chose to photograph the small easel whiteboard that we used daily for the media major and minor tracks. For example, I address this pedagogical practice in

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<sup>118</sup> This was also true before my doctoral coursework and research as well. While autoethnographic headnotes are helpful, my anthropological training and research helped me see and understand them differently.

the most recent Camp Steele media curriculum that I submitted the last summer I worked there in 2018.

Student selection and production of final projects will include facilitated brainstorming and decision-making processes that enable students to make choices and implement plans within a structured assignment. Documentation of student-produced knowledge through any such brainstorming on whiteboards should be collected for both the major and minor tracks.

These documents eventually became part of the formal High Rocks archive of camp curricula, photos, and other documents for both camps every summer as well as the more extended organizational archive for year-round programming, fundraisers, etc. However, we also used these images during class to review previous discussions and work.

I similarly used and documented whiteboards in media arts residencies and programs in public schools where grant-funded projects also require documentation of student work for reporting how money was used in the designated service area. The ongoing pragmatic result of this practice is that students and teachers can also revisit and revise this material with printouts or full-screen projections while generating new whiteboard content. Most importantly, it documents the intellectual labor that students perform when they are engaged actively in class discussion, brainstorming, decision-making, and collaboration. Digital documentation transforms the ephemeral quality of whiteboards as erasable surfaces into archivable moments of learning.

At High Rocks, I also observed young people using whiteboards as an analog alternative social media because campers are technically supposed to be “unplugged” during camp except for class-related research, projects, or other targeted use of technology (i.e., media track). For example, in one of my voice field notes from my last summer of fieldwork, I commented on “the use of whiteboards,” especially one that I saw every day outside our classroom on the back porch of the Lodge:

.... this year, there was ... a whiteboard easel on the back porch outside of the library door, and every day it would have some like question for people to answer, or a drawing that people could add to, or just different interactive kind of uses for a whiteboard. .... interesting to see that in terms of this analog social media format, where people would post the question and .... poll ... other people at camp using a whiteboard. And then also thinking back about the use of whiteboards at AMI, and just in educational settings in general, the way that we use them in the media class and then also the way in which these tools are mostly very temporary unless you're an archive nerd ... like me and are taking images of whiteboards to record the, what they generate and what people generate upon them. They're fleeting, they otherwise don't really get recorded other than in people's memories, or ... in this very in-the-moment, temporal experience. (Field Notes 07.28.18)<sup>119</sup>

Over the years, there were many official and spontaneous camp communications via whiteboards, but this seemed like a more organized (and somewhat anonymized) effort to create a daily participatory whiteboard “feed.”

As previously detailed in the introductory story about youth activism for Chapter 4 on intergenerational meshworks, the social context of High Rocks also makes space for subversive actions to change or improve social and programming priorities, as when Nicole Hall described how they organized and implemented the protest and “made a list on a whiteboard of issues” (Hall 2018). They used this analog organizing tool in a literal field to encourage and recruit younger campers to take ownership of the space, articulate issues, and take action. They also directly applied practical methods and skills from High Rocks leadership development as well as that summer’s “Social Movements” class.

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<sup>119</sup> This nearby whiteboard as a low-tech camp communication medium would have been a fascinating documentary project to photograph its ongoing development throughout each day of camp, but this was far beyond the scope and capability of my dissertation research.

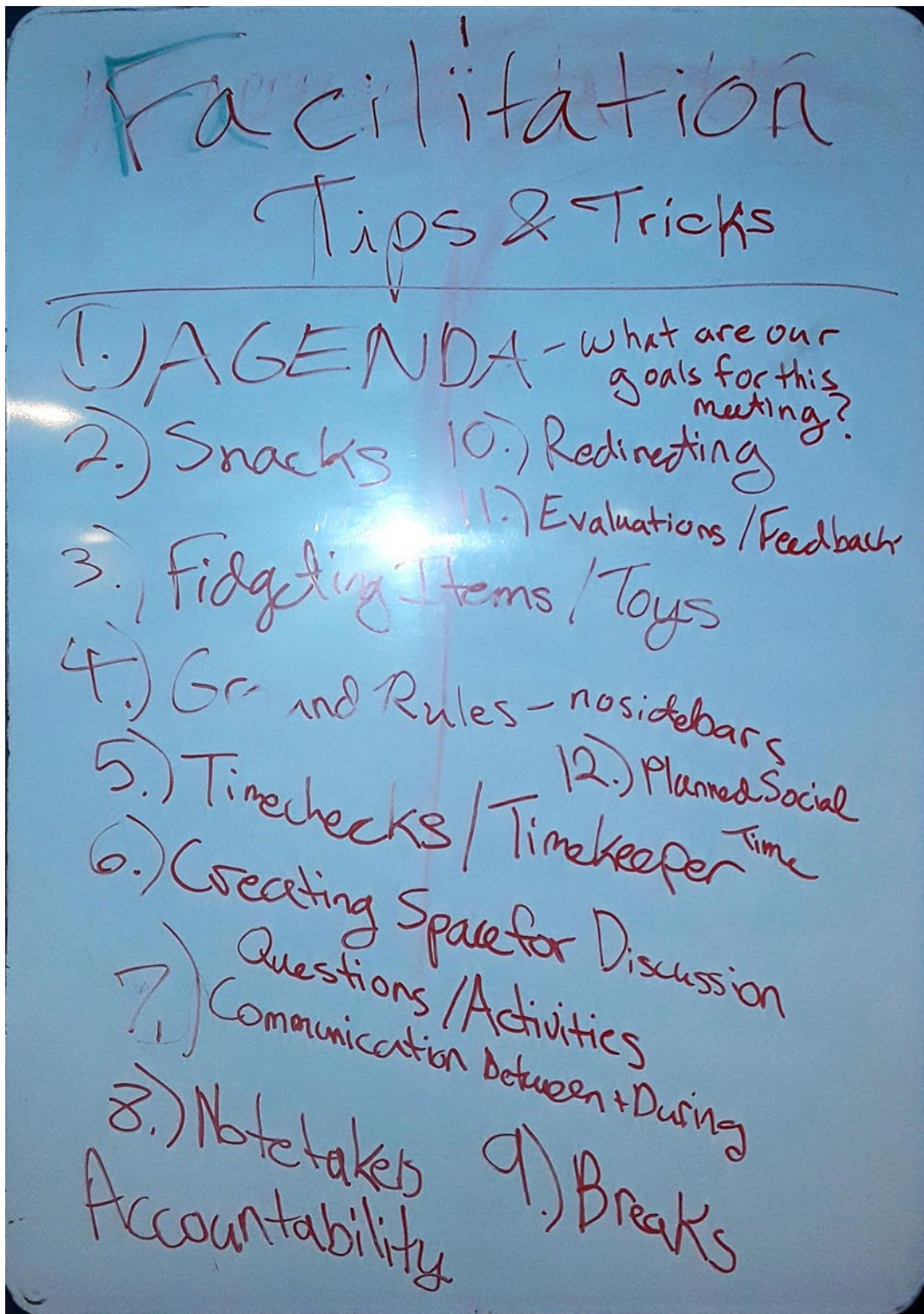


Figure 37 Whiteboard of “Facilitation Tips & Tricks” from the Camp Steele Mountain Movements class taught by Alice Beecher and Brandon Richardson (Photo by author, July 18, 2018)<sup>120</sup>

From working with young people and educators, I observed and applied whiteboard communication as an agentic and iterative practice that can foster creative and collaborative learning and production processes.

Both the formal educational and the grassroots application of whiteboard knowledge production demonstrate the intersections of analog and digital mediascapes that transgress the limitations of a single notion of “social media” or static representation of written text. Digital media and communication are documented as a “permanent record,” but they are also always changing, being added to, revised, remixed, rehashed, reinterpreted. Analog media like “temporary” whiteboards are a flexible, adaptive way to document knowledge and information in the moment that can also be digitized, read/transcribed by AI, archived, and disseminated. In youth media education settings as well as organizations and movements, trans-ing analog/digital media such as whiteboards are valuable make-do documents that support and facilitate both knowledge and action.

#### 6.4.4 Multimodal, Transmedia, and Multisensory Projects

In addition to some of these practical approaches for media-based projects inside and outside of formal programming, make-do media examples include meta practices of self-conscious self-documentation. One research collaborator, Rae Garringer, produces an ambitious and important multimedia oral history project called “Country Queers” with DIY beginnings (Garringer 2013a), which they worked on for a couple of years before seeking more formal training in a graduate program in American Studies/Folklore. Rae is

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<sup>120</sup> With permission, I included this basic outline of familiar “Facilitation Tips & Tricks” in Figure 37 as a resource in the appendix of the updated media curriculum. I also shared it with a few people afterward as a resource that I also found succinctly relevant for the basics of teaching and facilitating a classroom as a collaborative space.



a High Rocks alumn who had also participated in camp media projects as a younger person but still did not identify as “a media maker” at the time.

[T]he funny thing is that I don’t really think of myself as a media maker ... that much. (Laughs) .... “Country Queers” really for me started as like, I felt really isolated, I felt really frustrated that like I knew that .... through the STAY Project, through Southerners on New Ground .... [there] were other queer people in rural places. Like why was I not seeing them, hearing them? You know what I mean? Like here, on a local level ... we’re so isolated from each other .... that’s more how it started, and then the media side of things (laughs), I feel like I’m in over my head and don’t really know what I’m doing. So and I also feel like I’m a little bit of a Luddite and ... lived without internet for three years, and have never been on social media. So in some ways it’s funny to talk about media .... some people are really immersed in it or whatever. And I have tried to not be for a long time even though I’m doing this project. .... “Country Queers” is definitely ongoing, I call it a multimedia documentary project, but I also feel like I have a lot to learn about .... documentary work and media making and ... I have a lot of ideas and questions about how to best present the material going forward. (Garringer 2015b)

The struggle “to stay in the loving arms of our mountains” (Garringer 2015a) was a central tension between choosing to produce a project about queer people in rural spaces while living remotely and deciding to leave, even temporarily, to access relevant and useful educational resources.

I feel like the best way I could figure out to like expand this project that I’ve started, from very much ... isolated (laughing) up in the mountains of Appalachia, was to ... go to a program out of the region to get the support that I feel like I need. Right? And I’m sure I could’ve pieced it together in different ways here, but in terms of like, they’re gonna *pay* me (laughs) to go to school to focus on the project .... I couldn’t have figured that out. I would’ve had to continue ... working a super-intense, draining social work job in the public schools on top of trying to do it in my free time and ... trying to not be out at work. .... for the point I’m at in my life now, like in terms of ... financial considerations and whatever ... I feel like I *do* have to leave to get the time to focus on the project and the financial support, and also ... the educational opportunity ... the resources. And that’s super frustrating to me (laughs). (Garringer 2015b)

Rae's DIY approach for creating "Country Queers" resembles a "community scholar" model <sup>121</sup> of folk ethnography (Yiorgos 2006) driven by the necessity of engaging with and documenting the experiences of other rural queer people, which then led to the need for learning and engaging more deeply with the methods and tools for continuing and expanding the project. Subsequently after earning their MA, Rae further developed their professional portfolio producing regular audio segments for WMMT for three years at Appalshop. They are also a longtime author/contributor and editor for *Scalawag*, an online magazine "that illuminates dissent, unsettles dominant narratives, pursues justice and liberation, and stands in solidarity with marginalized people and communities in the South" and "reimagines the roots and futures of the place we call home" (Scalawag n.d.).

Jason Edwards is a young filmmaker from Harlan County who produced a transmedia storytelling project called "MAKE/DO" that is partial inspiration for the title of this chapter. The multiple media comprising this project incorporate multimodal storytelling across platforms and audiences and focus on themes of resilience, economic transition, agency, and collaboration. Two pieces of this project were a large wood and sheet metal sculpture spelling out "MAKE/DO" in three-foot letters and an accompanying documentary film about its collaborative creation, both of which were shared at the 2015 IG2BYITM conference in Harlan. I have not interacted with Jason personally, but we share many common regional connections and the same public space at least once at IG2BYITM.

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. Judy Sizemore as Kentucky's first "community scholar" as a DIY folklorist who connected with state agency support and networks to conduct projects and create a new training program for local documentarians.



Figure 38 “MAKE/DO” recycled sculpture at IG2BYITM conference in Harlan, Kentucky, August 15, 2015

While I did not get a chance to view the documentary when he screened it at the 2015 IG2BYITM conference, I later learned that this project included another component of this project was Jason’s EKU undergraduate honors thesis on “Learning to MAKE/DO in the Mountains: A Look at Social Change in the Coal Fields” (Edwards 2015). This project includes “an asset map of Harlan” in relation to “an emerging art scene that is growing out of the decline of coal jobs” as well as a discussion of the documentary filmmaking process and “how other places around the country and world have dealt with the decline of a major revenue source and how, or if, they have been able to reinvent themselves” (Edwards 2015). He also discusses the influence of Robert Gipe and the *Higher Ground* project as an arts-based approach for attracting tourists to Harlan County

as well as other “projects in the works to change the current coal based production economy to a new creative economy” (2015:7).<sup>122</sup>

Through multimodal messaging inscribed on various material and digital media, Edwards’ multifaceted approach contributes to the meanings, methods, and analysis of “making do” in Meta’lachia. For example, a t-shirt fundraiser featured the words “MAKE/DO” in all capitals in faded white letters on the front, and an inspirational quote from collaborating artist Jimmy DiResta emphasizing the agency of doing: “JUST BEGIN. STOP TALKING ABOUT IT AND START MAKING IT.” The fundraising website expands the proposed premise of the documentary series to include facilitating apprenticeship-type relationships between “a novice artist/creator with a mentor who is making a living at their profession. We feel creativity is an important part of a well lived life and being able to present an artist/creator doing their passion and spreading the message of creativity is an important message and cause.”<sup>123</sup> This overall project demonstrates several multimodal and collaborative approaches to creative imagining and placemaking that draws on and applies the enduring theme of “making do” creates something “new” from something “old.”

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<sup>122</sup> Edwards also cites a 2014 “art and youth forum,” hosted by Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College (SKCTC), “to help showcase the talent of the youth in this region of Appalachia and begin the important discussion of what happens after coal” (2015:8). This included collaborative connections to Tom Hansell’s Welsh/Appalachian comparison of transitioning coal economies in his then documentary-in-progress *After Coal* (Hansell 2016). The second half of the paper focuses on describing the project purpose and the production process of his film MAKE/DO, which included partnerships with Robert Gipe at SKCTC and Jimmy DiResta, a friend and “notable trash artist from New York” (Edwards 2015:9) who led the sculpture workshop documented in the film. There is also a 1.5-minute trailer, and other related online media about the project, including a T-shirt fundraiser (Edwards n.d.). Edwards’ project also demonstrates the creative and mutually beneficial potential of crossing state lines to collaborate with and learn from other multimodal artists.

<sup>123</sup> This fundraising cause also included “a portion of money raised will go to DiResta’s new maker space project in upstate New York” (Edwards n.d.). However, it is unclear as the continuation of this project beyond the initial pilot.

#### 6.4.5 Sharing Resources with Others in Digital and Physical Spaces and Exchanges

This final sub-section discusses some of the ways in which young people and educators share their work and resources with others. For example, social media hashtags are one of the simplest low-cost ways to brand and crowdsource a conversation in collaboration with others who share a kindred perspective. As shown in previous ethnographic descriptions of the 2015 IG2BYITM conference and the 2018 youth plenary at the 2018 Appalachian Studies Association Conference, etc., hashtags are an important form of digital make-do media for young people in the region. Using hashtags such as #AppalachianLoveStory, #IG2BYITM, #YALLASA, and #JustAskUs, these youth-driven initiatives also incorporate and produce alternative images and counternarratives as part of their outreach and efforts to challenge stereotypical representations of Appalachia in mainstream media.

Hashtags serve as organizing digital realms for *hashing out* thoughts or images in response to particular issues of importance or calls for collective participation. However, while there is organizational power in wielding a hashtag, it is also freely accessible by anyone to reinterpret or remix to share different messages or engage other audiences. For example, the hashtags that Roger May encouraged participants to use when posting their photos from his “Walk Your Camera” workshop at the 2018 Visualizing Appalachian Conference included #tellofyourstory, #DigitalAppalachia, and #LookingAtAppalachia, all of which were intended to support specific projects but could technically be used by anyone.

Similarly, young people use common social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram to post and share their work with others. One striking example

was Marlyn McClendon who called herself a “new media maker” and regularly posts photographs to her popular “Appalasian” Instagram account.

I’ve been wanting to really (pauses) make (pauses) a specific project. And I’m going to, I’m getting to it. But right now, it’s just pictures of my everyday life .... it might just be something that’s beautiful that I want to share with people. It might just be (pauses) a friend or somebody who’s really touched my life in some sort of way, and so I want to like show them ... (pauses) but normally it’s just like my everyday thing. So it’s just me in the garden, or me processing food, or on a float trip, or I don’t know, helping (pauses) bale hay, [TC laughs] helping anything. I don’t know, just any moment of my life .... it’s pretty (pauses) basic. (Laughs) (McClendon 2015)

When I asked how people engage with her posts, she paused, then said:

Well, I don’t know. ... some people have wanted to buy *kim chee* from me [Both laugh] after I posted those pictures. .... (pauses) ... sometimes it’s cool, like recently I did a little, just a picture of my boyfriend’s mother, who is a midwife and just a really, just really badass woman. And I really respect her, and she’s an inspiration to me. And so I did a picture of her and did a little blurb underneath it. And a *lot* of people commented on it and how much they appreciated her and how they agreed with me. So that was really cool. I think that that’s one (pauses) project that I would like to do is like the women in West Virginia that inspire me and their stories. .... those are the comments that I usually get, if they’re just of somebody, or (laughs) *kim chee* .... I mean people tell me that they’re beautiful, but I don’t know. (McClendon 2015)

Marlyn’s ongoing documentation of people practicing sustainable living was meaningful to her personally, but it also resonated with other people within and beyond her rural West Virginia community. She also said that she was in the cue for contributing to Roger May’s project and had “been trying to take some pictures for that” (McClendon 2015).

The following summer I told her about the Y’ALL Instagram account and that they were looking for people to take it over.

Crowd-sourced projects like “Looking at Appalachia,” 100 Days in Appalachia, and the Y’ALL Instagram account are relevant regional projects that not only inspire research collaborators but also invite them to participate as contributors. For example,

two other research collaborators who were affiliated with High Rocks in some way mentioned Roger May's "Looking at Appalachia" project as an example of visual media that is useful, inspirational, or offers possibilities for visual media production in Appalachia. Even though they are not a social media user, Rae Garringer mentioned the collaborative approach as an inspiring form of popular media.

Instagram is like an interesting thing to me, which I'm not on and don't have a smartphone, but like, it's kind of fascinating. .... Roger May's "Looking at Appalachia" project, and ... having different people take over that Instagram account different weeks is like such an interesting way to .... view the world, or the region .... (Garringer 2015b)

The "Looking at Appalachia" project attempts "to explore the diversity of Appalachia and establish a visual counter point .... fifty years after the declaration of the War on Poverty," and the format is an online "crowdsourced image archive .... as a reference that is defined by its people as opposed to political legislation" (May n.d.).

Shelby Mack, who was in High Rocks AmeriCorps at the time, mentioned the project when I asked about challenges for visual media production in Appalachia. As someone who did not grow up in the Appalachian region, she emphasized the importance of prioritizing and supporting "a lot of good media coming *out of* Appalachia" already instead of outside representations.

I think that ... one of the challenges is that the voice of outsiders is stronger than the voice of insiders in terms of media coming from Appalachia, and I just (pauses) hope that can change. I really do. Because there's *so* many talented people here .... like that "Looking at Appalachia" project, *that's so cool!* I want more of that! I want more of those types of things to be happening. .... I think there's some challenges. But then .... in terms of challenging in teaching kids .... like I was saying, there's just really not that many opportunities for them to learn those things. .... if I didn't take photography at the community center when I was in high school .... probably never would've done it. And so, if they don't have those opportunities .... in school, and they don't really have out-of-school programs to do those things, then .... there's not going to be as much of a (pauses) interest in it I feel like. (Mack 2015)

Crowdsourced projects are another avenue for media makers with different levels of experience and access to equipment to submit and share their work as part of a larger collective of producers, including well-known professional photographers and filmmakers, that can reach broader even audiences.

In terms of sharing their work and resources through in-person interactions in physical spaces, I have previously discussed public screenings of youth productions through different educational and community organizations in the region in addition to online collections of videos, interviews, and other projects produced by young people. I have also discussed IG2BYITM and the STAY Project as examples of coordinated collective gatherings for facilitating skill-sharing on a wide range of issues among diversely represented young Appalachians. However, young people also share and offer hands-on opportunities for gaining media experience and exposure through participation in one another's productions.

AMI film *An Elaborate Dream* features AMI alum Oakley Fugate. The beginning of the video includes a glimpse of his first video camera that could record "15 seconds of video." Later there is an amusing multisensory example of how Oakley shares his learning and production process as a respected young filmmaker who casts local youth in his horror productions, which I was familiar with from fieldwork. Fellow AMI alumni and Peer Mentor, Destiny Caldwell, saying, "The *first* time I died in one of Oakley's movies, he stabbed me to death in the cemetery next to the Casa where the AMI kids stay" (Baum and Kiser 2017). The cemetery as a make-do location of convenience also



demonstrates Oakley's overall motivation for making horror films, which is its low-budget accessibility.

Free public workshops for young people at places like AMI and High Rocks provide hands-on educational opportunities in different aspects of DIY media-making such as photography, lighting, and audio recording in addition to others previously mentioned. However, workshops can also provide professional opportunities for public school teachers and teaching artists for expanding their toolkit for make-do arts education. For example, Judy Sizemore frequently offers professional development workshops/trainings for teaching artists and K-12 teachers, especially in designing curricula/lesson plans with and for other educators. Some are required teaching artist orientations and others for Kentucky teachers more broadly. These paid workshops often include some scholarships for increased access and transportation support for teachers travelling long distances. The Media Arts Toolkit is only one example of Judy's consulting contributions for arts-based educational materials and activities for KET, and she is well-known as someone who actively advocates for and models sharing resources and knowledge as widely as possible. Another relevant example of curriculum sharing is the ongoing archive of materials at High Rocks, which documents organizational memory and provides a foundational reference for different people who may teach or facilitate over time. Existing examples of High Rocks curricula and lesson plans from other instructors were instrumental in my own planning and teaching as well as my understanding of the overall pedagogical approach of the organization.

Finally, several AMI participants, alumni, and staff said that they had participated in some formal exchange opportunities within the region and beyond that were important

ways of sharing media-making knowledge and mentoring other young people. For example, Natasha Watts talked about how her experience with an Indonesian exchange continues to be meaningful through the virtual connection of Facebook.

When I was at AMI, we did multiple exchanges .... through the Asian Society, we went to Indonesia .... and I still have those Indonesians on my Facebook. .... had that exchange happened before we had Facebook, would I still see the visuals from these people and what they're creating? No. .... and that's free. That platform is free, and if I don't have internet at home, if I can get to a local library, I can still do that. .... in media and in visuals, just the fact that there is a learning curve to be had, but the accessibility is there for a lot of stuff. (Watts 2016)

Willa Johnson said that she also participated in this “artist exchange with Indonesia” and cooked for them when they came to Kentucky (Johnson 2016). Others talked about an exchange with young people in Zuni, New Mexico where AMI staff (Burke 2016) took participants to help teach media-making skills “Not on a grand scale. We gave them like small tools, the rudiments, to go out and like do this” (Hall 2016). Many research collaborators, colleagues, and friends (including myself) have also participated in the Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange, which was co-founded by Appalshop and is an annual cohort of people from all over the state of Kentucky for three intensive networking and leadership development weekends. While these exchanges are formally sponsored opportunities, they consciously reach across difference and distance to share knowledge and resources beyond a local geographic community.

## 6.5 Conclusion: Making Do, Making Media, Making Selves, and Making Home

As shown in the introductory photo essays and throughout this chapter, young people's media practices are situated within multiple layers of social, educational, regional, and artistic relationships and systems. Making do is more than about getting by, even though it is often an effective means for doing so. When making do is not enough or

even when creativity simply overflows, making change is another adaptive strategy pervasive throughout regional counternarratives. Despite several people's disclaimers about their own status as a "media-maker," "media artist," "photographer," or "filmmaker," make-do media practices produce active agents who mediate important conversations and representations about the region, its people, and what youth can do here. Also, making do is not only about making something new from something old, but is also actively trans-es the distinction between the two as well as rigid distinctions in general (hooks 2014; House 2014). In the next and concluding chapter, I close with a reflection on the themes of previous chapters and also address future possibilities for youth media education research, reflection, and practice.

## CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION: FURTHERING APPALACHIAN FUTURISMS

### 7.1 Meta'lachian Meshworks of Connection



Figure 39 and Figure 40 Flyers and donations of needed supplies for “West Virginia Flood Relief” in the Boone Youth Drop-In Center during the AMI Summer Documentary Institute, Whitesburg Kentucky, July 6, 2016 (Photos by author)

Young people in Central Appalachia continue experiencing and confronting media misrepresentations, political economic inequalities, and racialized and gendered disparities. This dissertation has asked: *How do the social contexts of young Appalachians' engagement in media consumption and production practices shape the possibilities they envision for themselves, others, and their region?* The themes and processes related to this research question and lessons learned from field sites and research collaborators all took on greater meaning and urgency during the writing of these chapters, including the critical importance of intergenerational meshworks, physical places, “safe spaces,” and “making do” through practical and creative means. AMI, High Rocks, and OCHS/PFE are all valuable social contexts for place-based youth media consumption and production practices in the region, and they are distinct but also overlap in some of their missions and methods. Through my “observant participation,” interviews with research collaborators, and additional research on and in these and other relevant social contexts in Appalachia, I thought of “Meta’lachia” as a useful notion for expressing the complexity of multiple sites and communities that help constitute and contribute to processes of making and maintaining selves, places, and worlds in the region. On the broadest scale, interwoven meshworks of people, programs, places, and political ecologies comprise the Meta’lachian mediacologies that connect young people to media and art-related programs, educational opportunities, mentors, and one another beyond geographical or temporal boundaries.

One of the biggest lessons of this dissertation are these meshworks, or interconnections of histories, relationships, networks, built social environments, and knowledge production/sharing and how much people feel connected, want to be

connected, and foster and support these meshworks, even with minimal resources. These place-based interactions occur across Meta'lachia, in a place that is repeatedly told that it simply should *not* be or it should not be as it *is*. Young people continue reclaiming representations not only through not “pretty pictures” and stories, but also through *stubborn persistence*. Unlike the notion of “resilience” that has already been co-opted and romanticized, the stubbornness of these relationships and networks to persist, despite stereotype threat and limited resources, asserts that it may not always be the easiest or most favorite method, but they will do it anyway, and do so with care and for/with one another. Whether they are organizing flood or fire relief in their home communities or across state lines, or organizing multiple mutual aid networks in the middle of a pandemic, they not only *see* themselves as connected, but they *embody* these connections through a sense of collective responsibility within a Meta'lachian meshworks and “commons.” Rather than simply deferring their own or others’ needs to the future, they are assessing needs and taking care of people in the present. As a culmination of this research, I want to share these stories across field sites and keep fostering those connections, whether they have never met before or have collaborated for years together. I want them to be able to read, view, and listen to each other’s stories and to inspire and learn from one another because they are already teaching and learning in these smaller spaces. I want them to understand that they are not alone; they do not have to do it by themselves; and they have an enormous network to draw from that includes people they may not even know yet.

As I discussed in chapter 4, “youth” is a flexible identity and space for intergenerational mentorship and activism, and “young people” and the organizations

they access (and sometimes become embedded within) are connected across space and time through shared histories, relationships, and storytelling practices and the larger context of regional identities and futures. The social capital of intergenerational relationships, roles, and collaborations between the young and the “formerly young” mediate social and professional possibilities in place-based contexts in young people’s local and regional communities. Seeing examples of other alumni returning in different paid youth leadership positions build bridges between “participants” and “staff” and enable young people to see themselves in those or similar roles. In turn, envisioning and accessing these concrete possibilities also contribute to organizational sustainability where young people feel empowered to push back within the structures of programs as participants and to “come back” as volunteers, interns, staff, and even board members.

Their documentation and storytelling about themselves, the region, and local and organizational histories make space for them to imagine and apply “coming back” as well as choosing to “STAY” and contribute to “creative placekeeping” (Yu, et al. 2018). Willa Johnson, who participated as an “aging out” youth in AMI and was among the first cohort of Appalachian Transition Fellows, returned not only to her home community but also to AMI and All Access EKY, and a number of other organizations and programs in the region. Nicole Hall has pursued “classes and opportunities” that she “probably wouldn’t have thought were options” or “might have shied away from” because of the confidence and leadership skills she gained at High Rocks; and just as she “kept coming back,” she sees herself as “indebted” to make connections with other participants so they can mutually “strengthen each other and make [their] lives better” and younger cohorts will also “keep coming back” and “see that the world has possibilities” (Hall 2018).

As discussed in Chapter 5, different built and social environments support media education and identity construction in local and regional contexts, and these spaces as *spaces* are just as important to young people as the programming they house because they ensure there is someplace to *be* and *return* to. The COVID-19 pandemic exemplifies the importance of “being there” in physical spaces and social contexts, which young Appalachians have made clear, through this project of documenting their views, is as vital as digital spaces to their self-making and world-making. The shelter, and often food, they provide through programming and informal interactions support the physical well-being of young people as they build relationships and learn how to produce meaningful media. Access to technologies like equipment and connective networks also facilitates access to additional professional possibilities. Dedicated “third spaces” can serve specific areas of interest, as AMI is primarily media-oriented and connected to cultural organizing. Spaces like public schools provide open access for greater numbers of young people overall; however, they may also have more limited teachers, time, and resources.

In addition to the significance of the physical spaces and how people access them is the creation of “safe,” inclusive, and accepting spaces for identity expression and exploration. The first level is the safe space that schools or “third spaces” like public libraries provide children who may have no other reliable place where they are physically and socially cared for. Then there is the “safe space” that encouragement and access to art and creative expression provide as Sarah Campbell and Judy Sizemore talked about such opportunities in public schools (Campbell 2018; Sizemore 2017). Then there are layers of “safe” or “safer” space where different types of “difference” are welcomed and modeled, especially “third spaces” outside of formal education or public-school systems.



“Generational” spaces through non-profits like AMI and High Rocks where they can explore identities, meet others, and learn social histories enable the in-depth gender and intersectional work that young people are doing with mentors and on their own. For example, many AMI and High Rocks participants and alumni serve on the STAY Steering Committee or otherwise participate in STAY gatherings and other programming and resources. Relatedly, prominent examples of feminist/gender activism and storytelling in the region include the *Country Queers* project produced by research collaborator Rae Garringer as well as the 2018 AMI summer film productions on reproductive health in partnership with All Access EKY.<sup>124</sup> As several research collaborators discussed in Chapter 5, even self-defined “safe spaces” are not always wholly inclusive of or accessible to all young people, as Crystal Good’s Black trans daughter articulated about predominantly white LGBTQ spaces, and some public spaces like local roads may not be universally safe for all travelers.

Despite varying levels of access to programming, infrastructure supports and connections, and social capital, research collaborators “make do” alongside and outside of formal media education and production opportunities through self-directed research and media-making. Making do can include forms of economic necessity and self-sufficiency, as represented by some of the Mason jar media examples in Chapter 6, and public institutions and non-profit organizations must also sometimes rely on such stop-gap strategies. “Make-do media” includes DIY practices like the young people conducting online research on political systems or learning media production through YouTube tutorials. However, sometimes “making do” is not always enough to gain fully

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<sup>124</sup> See also “Forget Abortion: What Women in Appalachian Kentucky Really Want” (Ravitz 2017).

the social and material resources that young people in the same small town maybe technically have access to. For example, Logan Woodward had to rely mostly on his personal motivation, creativity, and resourcefulness to learn and produce media in contrast to the institutional constraints and ultimate unsustainability of a school-sponsored “Film Club.” He continued making media on his own, but he was not able to create the space for learning and teaching each other and connecting to the social capital of being sponsored by the school administration.

For more marginalized youth like the anonymous OCHS student in foster care in Chapter 3 and those in *Taking Flight Mountain* who close this chapter, making do can mean resisting by making the most of their nameless and faceless media self-representations imposed by legal “protections.” Furthermore, just because young people, Appalachians, or people in general are ingenious in making do with limited resources, it can also be labor-intensive and exhausting as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown. Sufficient resources and infrastructures of support can enable more unfettered imagining and making where less time and energy is spent making do and more on other processes of making. Therefore, research collaborators called for greater access to resources, programs, and creative placemaking. However, the important lesson is that “making do” (and the “doing of making”), as a past practice and a future possibility, is *agentive* in the face of limited access to resources. Furthermore, even if Logan Woodward in Owsley County, Kentucky does not know Mabel Eisenbeiss in West Virginia, they are connected through meshworks of support systems as well as through their own initiative, agency, and make-do media practices.

As a multi-site of meshworks and mediacologies, Meta'lachia also includes the aspirational praxis of Appalachian futurisms and intersectional sustainability where there is a past, present, and future for all generations of young people in the region. Young people often see themselves, the region, and their place in it as flexible geographies and identities in relation to the static, oversimplified stereotypes of "Appalachia," and they think and move across borders of county and state lines (cf. Kingsolver 2014; Kingsolver 2017; Kingsolver 2011). Research collaborators identified a range of intersectional issues that they care about and/or work on, including environmental issues (i.e., natural gas fracking, "global warming," local food, watersheds); social/human rights (i.e., diversity, Latino experiences, Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ issues, feminist/women's issues, "empowering teenage girls"); youth development, identity, and safe space; bullying and teen dating violence; and education (e.g., different settings, pedagogical models, student populations, etc.). They also envisioned possibilities for sustainable futures that include jobs outside the economic limits of coal mining or the healthcare industry, including community-based "theater for development," place-based media-making, sustainable agriculture, inclusive spaces for queer identities, constructed families and homes.

Just as seeing young people return in leadership positions, young artists and media makers can see people doing that work in the region and therefore see it as a real livelihood possibility for themselves. As Brandon Jent noted, "thanks to Appalshop," which continues making media and exposing young people to media-making, some "people that went to the AMI program ... now have their degrees in media-making or are working as professional media makers full-time. .... that legacy helps .... it *can* be done here" (Jent 2016). For example, *An Elaborate Dream* (Baum and Kiser 2017) is a biopic

film about AMI filmmaker and research collaborator Oakley Fugate, who is a well-known and celebrated photographer, filmmaker, and living role model who represents the *real* possibility that young people can become (and stay) media makers in the region. The “elaborate dream” is not only an homage to Oakley and his prolific creativity but also a metaphor for his pursuit and achievement of something others may see only as fantasy.

Having visible role models in arts and media is also tempered by socioeconomic precarities facing local and regional communities, and research collaborators commonly talked about the need for both positive placemaking and storytelling as well as realistic representations of problems that need addressing in Appalachia. Both OCP and ACAY projects included student interviews with teachers and administrators from their schools as well as different artists from their local communities. When asked about their career choices, these adults were pretty consistently (and often humorously) honest about realistic options and endeavors regarding education, artmaking, and livelihoods. For example, a couple of artists interviewed by OCHS students for OCP talked about hobbies versus income or jobs. When students asked jewelry maker Bonnie Cornett if she made jewelry “for a living,” she responded, “I *do* make it for a living. .... However, I suggest that you go to college first and get an education because this is a sideline thing. As an artist, they have a term ‘starving artist’ for a reason because you don’t make a lot off your art” (Hunter, et al. 2017). Painter Betty Gabbard, interviewed by her grandson, similarly discussed her “folk art ... about mountains and hills and horses and everything that goes into Central Kentucky” in the context of its limited economic potential, which she said provided supplemental income but not a “living off of it” (Gross, et al. 2017). Similarly, school teachers, administrators, or support staff who were interview participants in the

podcasts produced by West Perry Elementary 5<sup>th</sup> graders for the ACAY project also responded with often blunt honesty to the students' questions about their vocations as particular livelihood options (WPE Students 2019).<sup>125</sup>

Sarah Campbell had a birds-eye view of student-produced creative assets projects for "Our Creative Promise" as a kind of "executive producer" who was one of the only people who had seen *all* the projects. She talked about some of the broad (and sometimes difficult) issues that she saw come through these different stories and media.

With that project, specifically, we asked students to think about what the strengths of their community are. ... what arts organizations, or individuals exist in their communities? What do they care about? What describes where they're from? And .... an issue of how do we see ourselves, and how do we want to present ourselves to others? And at times, that was kind of a (pauses) really tough question to work around for some students because there's a lot of negatives in how they see themselves, and a lot of, you know, negatives, in terms of real challenges that they're facing. There was a group of students in Jenkins [in Letcher County], who wrote individual poetry that address things like domestic violence, and substance abuse, and infrastructure issues, potholes in the school parking lot, which is ... not small. But when that's what you see everywhere, and ... sort of nothing as well maintained, you take that as sort of a reflection ... of your community. So they brought up a lot of that stuff .... in their poems, and the teacher wound up having them work together to make a group poem that might be a little more positive. And then even some of that seeped into the group poem. But they were saying, despite all of this, like, "We are hopeful, we are creative. We have our families, and our love, and our dedication, and we have natural beauty around us." So there was .... a real desire to sort of tell and create a different story for the future. .... and I really appreciated that the extent to which they wanted to make sure that that still came out. .... [T]hey didn't want to sweep things under the rug or look at things with rose-colored glasses. Yeah, they wanted to say like, "Well, this is who we are. This is hearing people shout at each other at night when we go home and try to do our homework. Because this is our reality." (Campbell 2018)

Like the young people presenting the keynote ASA plenary that introduced this dissertation, the collective "Where I'm From" poem (Jenkins Independent School Students 2017) represents a common balance of "precarious placemaking" (Hinkson

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<sup>125</sup> Fewer of the WPE podcast projects are released publicly, which limits the direct quotes I can ethically use to support this claim.

2017) and representing the real struggles facing young people in the Appalachian region alongside the recognition of real assets and the creative hope of envisioning possible positive futures. It also represents a common balancing act of mediating student voices and agency through school systems, structures, and discipline that are constrained by standardized educational and funding requirements.

In all these different social contexts, young people also look to the past for inspiring and instructive histories and examples of building solidarity across difference, advocating for just labor and livelihoods, and creating works of arts that tell the region's stories and struggles. They also want to leave knowledge and resources for other generations of young people to access and draw from in the future. For example, young people at High Rocks produced projects, both for the organization and for themselves, documenting the founders, facilities, and traditions "founded by [those] who have come before" them. Beyond existing organizational missions and structures, young people also see media as a way to connect histories of communities over time and space. When I asked research collaborators what film they would make if they could make anything they wanted, both Rae Garringer and Dustin Hall talked about making films about queer history, both on a local and broader scale. Rae said they would make a film about a cisgendered woman who lived as a married man in Cass, West Virginia during the logging boom in the early 1900s (Garringer 2015b). Dustin, who found and used Polari to connect to other generations and histories of queer experience and representation, said, "I've always loved the idea of .... having like a historical series of like documentary films about queer history." Then he said, "...[T]his is a little soap-boxy," and he critiqued the "gay, white agenda" that he identified as "white college-educated men (pauses) that

think that they're leading the torch and the future of being queer" (Hall 2016). As a young gay white man, he still did not see this as representing the experiences and histories of other queer people, including Appalachians. He had just turned 18 and talked about the need for educating "the children" about those who came before.

I just want people to like recognize the fact (laughs) that we as queer people were not born today, we did not invent being gay, we did not do it. It was here long before us. .... I just want people to know history, and like know your icons, and know the people that paved the way for you. .... I do think like the biggest one [dream film project] would be like a queer history documentary series. It needs to happen. Maybe I'll do it one day! (Laughs) Maybe it's *my* job to educate the children. (Hall 2016)

Dustin challenged white-cis-male representations of who matters and who did what in the past, and he called for more queer history education for other young people in the region, to whom he affectionately referred as "queerlings" in this interview and other settings.

AMI alumn and former director Ben Spangler described the post-coal economic possibilities in Central Appalachia as a "historical moment of terrifying liberation" of simultaneous "opportunity" and "necessity to write a different future for themselves" (Spangler 2015). Ultimately, both currently young and "formerly young" research collaborators imagined, articulated, artistically represented, and modeled a more inclusive present and possibilities for the future that expand sustainable economic opportunities, social and environmental justice, and intergenerational and marginalized solidarities. These calls for inclusive Appalachian futurisms and intersectional sustainability that recognizes the true diversity and complexity of many places and people are directed both in response to dominant narratives about the region as well as reflexively onto their/our own communities. For example, Shaylan Clark asserted the need for expanding not only technical access but also meaningful access, voices, and ownership of community

storytelling outside of existing groups that already “*know* what they’re doing” and “what they want to say” so that “the actual community” feels “like we’re not speaking *for* them or speaking *at* them, but ... *with* them” (Clark 2018a).

As noted in Chapter 2 on methods, the different regional nomenclatures for LGBTQ communities would be interesting to explore more in depth and why people ascribe to certain ways of naming and identifying (cf. Valentine 2007). Several research collaborators, both formal and informal, identified as transgender in some (and sometimes multiple) way(s) during the period of fieldwork. There is room for more in-depth conversations and co-theorizing with trans youth in East(ern) Kentucky and West Virginia, and other Appalachian communities about their identities, experiences, needs, and supports as well as constructive critical discussions about how, and by whom, queerness is defined and inclusive through scholarship, activism, and relationships. Because there are existing conversations and spaces around LGBTQ young people in the region (such as STAY), I would like to support their metaethnography of trans youth as a collaborator in intersectional grassroots organizing and media-making rather than presume to “conduct research” on their behalf or that of the “academy” in the future.

As discussed in Chapter 2, several research collaborators and colleagues mentioned the just transition movement as a post-coal economic alternative to coal that often emphasizes technology-based jobs like coding and teleworking in Appalachia. In the field, I had some conversations with research collaborators and other researchers about how “just transition” can also be romanticized as a “technological panacea” for the region. For example, when I visited the “Feminist Friday” radio show on WMMT, I mentioned my concern about technology as a prevalent buzz word in terms of economic



transition and alternatives for the region and the relative silence about the human and environmental cost of digital technologies not only a regional level but also a global level. While there is discussion about coal, other extractive industries, and their long-term what role in the Appalachian region, I brought up other global mining and finite resources that go into producing digital technologies and into recycling electronic waste that are also extremely dangerous and exploitative, especially of women and children living in poverty (cf. Moody 2007, also cited in the "just transition" discussion in Chapter 2).

I admitted I did not have a solution but that I could not ignore this challenge to creative solutions, managing a truly "just" transition, and the human labor and health cost for people working outside of the Appalachian Mountains. DJ Aunt Bernice (Tanya Turner) brought up some of the difficulties, class implications, and transformative potential of young people as consumers of technology. As early adopters of new technologies, young people are not only consumers but also co-educators of their self-taught knowledge in educational settings where other technologies are promoted. Later she connected this activist potential to the educational power of consumers critically examining our use of technology and other products to shift worldviews. Building on open, public conversations like this "Feminist Friday" example as well as Scott and Engle's forthcoming edited volume on the "just transition," I also hope to contribute to ongoing discussions about critically acknowledging and reckoning with the fact that digital technologies represent a global extractive industry that largely burdens already marginalized populations and what that entails for a truly just and ethical transition in Appalachia.

In terms of other future work, another possible contribution of this dissertation research could be developing a holistic critical media production curriculum for young people that incorporates different elements and disciplines of engagement, documentation, critique, production, and collaboration. I am committed to mentoring/supporting youth in the region and continually reflecting on the ethical and methodological approaches and implications of conducting ethnographic research and media education/collaboration with young people who are often marginalized in multiple ways. Based on what I have learned about both formal and informal intergenerational mentoring through this project, I believe intergenerational connections/role models between young people and with “formerly young” people can help foster enduring relationships of creative, educational collaboration across disciplines and geographies in Meta’lachia.

## 7.2 COVID-19, the Precarity of “Being There,” and the Viralness of “Making Do”

In March 2020, COVID-19 abruptly shifted the methods, goals, and outcomes of education at all levels, making it an enormous collective and individual experiment in testing the potential and limits of “making do” in its infinite forms. The COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine disrupted employment, education, and in-person social networks, and “making do” in a crisis can be difficult even for students who are already adept with adapting to limited and varying access to resources. The pandemic continues at the time of this writing, and it seems that this “moment” is best described as the “un-times” because an unlimited number of adjectives prefixed with un- can easily and adequately describe these “un\_\_\_\_\_ times” (e.g., uncertain, unprecedented, unpredictable, unusual, unbelievable, and un- and un-). There is also so much *undoing* of

the world as we know it, some for better (i.e., exposing and dismantling racist systems and material culture) and some, it seems, for worse (i.e., blatant defense of white supremacist histories and traumatic legacies). This is why it is so important to provide and protect spaces where young people can not only imagine futures better than the present, but also actively and creatively engage in self-making and world-making toward materializing other possibilities.

When the quarantine began, I was teaching an undergraduate ethnographic methods class at Berea College where Tuesday, March 10, 2020 was the day that “being there” broke.<sup>126</sup> Like many teachers and scholars, I share critiques of the “business of COVID-19,” marketing clichés of “togetherness,” and “maintaining productivity” in “this time of uncertainty” that has been the continuing “current moment” for over a year now. In light of remote classrooms, jobs, graduate school, etc., there was/is both a heightened lack of access for and marginalization of people who are already vulnerable (i.e., children, elderly, low-income families, minoritized people, imprisoned populations, ad infinitum). Some students in the Berea class also expressed this critique, and in response to one student’s acute distress about trying to forge a “productive” school routine amidst a global crisis, I shared the “Adapting to Disaster” guest posts by Dr. Aisha Ahmad from the blog “The Professor is In” (by Karen Kelsky) on the “remote check-in” channel for the entire class. Ahmad shared her insights and practical tips from the perspective of

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<sup>126</sup> Many Berea students are first-generation students. Of first-year students from 2015-2017, which is roughly when many students in my class would have been freshman or transfer students, 62% were first generation college students all three years (2019-2020 Berea College Fact Book). However, despite their often multiply marginalized backgrounds, Berea students graduate with minimal student debt because of the no-tuition policy, and after the campus COVID closure, the College still paid all students for their labor positions for the remainder of the semester even though most could not actually continue working in those roles in person or virtually. Like other college students across the US, many eligible Berea students also received CARES Act support, and the College also provided other grants “for all students who do not qualify for federal funds” (Berea College 2020b).

having “lived and worked in disaster conditions around the world” and “experience with both the challenges and opportunities that crises create” (Ahmad 2020a; Ahmad 2020b).<sup>127</sup>

As in-person gatherings and spaces dwindled, multiple regional institutions announced oral history projects documenting COVID-19 experiences in Appalachia and elsewhere.<sup>128</sup> Meanwhile, I continued keeping up with research collaborators and field sites via e-newsletter, social media posts, and some personal communication. Whereas my use of digital ethnography during my primary fieldwork was as a supplemental window and archive, virtual spaces became the primary mode of communication and social interaction through which I engaged with my students, other educators, and academic colleagues (Boellstorff, et al. 2012). This inverse world where “being there” is no longer advisable became the norm for many (though not all) people, which demonstrated how crucial it is to the fabric of human connection and action.

While neoliberal institutions and traditions have used COVID-19 as yet another economic trend to exploit, the pandemic has stretched even the most frugal of households. However, certain aspects of the quarantine, such as staying home, stockpiling staples, living intergenerationally, growing gardens, etc., are already part of Appalachian cultural fabric of extended families, ingenuity, and making do that the rest of the country is “discovering” as wise strategies and practices that working class and

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<sup>127</sup> See Aisha Ahmad’s guest posts, “Adapting To Disaster, Episode 1: Security” and “Adapting To Disaster, Episode 2: Teaching in Transition,” on Karen Kelsky’s *The Professor is In* blog (Ahmad 2020a; Ahmad 2020b).

<sup>128</sup> See for example, the Foxfire COVID-19 Oral History Project in selected Appalachian states (Foxfire 2020); the Berea College Special Collections and Archives project “Bereans and COVID-19 Initiative” documenting experiences of students, faculty, staff, and alumni (Berea College 2020a); the University of Kentucky Libraries project “In This Together: Documenting COVID-19 in the Commonwealth” (University of Kentucky 2020); and the Vermont Folklife Center Listening in Place Project (Vermont Folklife Center 2020).

people living in “economic poverty” already know. “Making do” with the resources at hand can result in great creative effect as well as the strengthen both home-based and virtual connections as people sort out issues and identities in “this time of uncertainty.” The low-budget, from-home, on-their-phones, make-do media productions by young people and other research collaborators now situates them as leaders in this area since now that *everyone* is learning to make media this way. Also, analog make-do media (also promoted digitally) offer hope, encouragement, and gratitude at a “distance” during the pandemic. Self-defined painter, muralist, and printmaker Lacy Hale taped some free hand-printed greeting cards on the door of Roundabout Records in Whitesburg, which included cornbread in cast iron and a Mason jar as an oldie-but-goodie print. She also posted images of these analog activities on her “Art by Lacy Hale” public Facebook page and Instagram, which extends their accessibility to audiences in other places in Meta’lachia who may identify with and draw comfort from her regional artwork.



Figure 41 Screen image of @artbylacyhale Facebook post of free regional greeting cards on the door of Roundabout Records in Whitesburg Kentucky April 21, 2020



Figure 42 Screen image of @artbylacyhale Instagram post of close-up of hand-printed Mason jar greeting card, April 22, 2020 (by Lacy Hale)

### 7.3 Research Collaborator and Field Site Updates

Following school closures and the shift to remote learning, cancellation or postponement of other educational institutions and events quickly “dominoed” around the world. For the Appalachian region, this included the much-anticipated 2020 ASA conference hosted by the University of Kentucky, which would have featured a visual exhibit from research collaborator and AMI alumn Dustin Hall in partial celebration of

Appalshop's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary (#appalshop50th). This milestone featured prominently in the final conference program, with numerous plenary sessions, panels, and roundtable discussions that focused on or included Appalshop's past and present accomplishments over the years. Among these presenters were many Appalshop staff and affiliates, including several research collaborators who I interviewed during my fieldwork; and one roundtable, "Education Through Community Sharing & Learning; Appalshop at 50," would have focused on AMI and WMMT. Appalshop also sponsored pronoun stickers that would have been available to conference attendees at the registration table. High Rocks Educational Corporation was listed among the exhibitors in the ASA 2020 program but did not appear in any of the formal conference sessions.<sup>129</sup>

Appalshop held its Seedtime on the Cumberland virtually for the first time in 2020, and the online concert featured archive footage of historical performances by iconic figures (Appalshop 2020). The High Rocks Hub continued feeding people, but the organization cancelled both in-person summer camps. AMI and High Rocks both offered virtual versions of their programming, offering supplies for pick-up/delivery and online gatherings. For example, the High Rocks "Camp Comes to You" (CCY) delivered learning materials, snacks, and provided alternative summer programming online (see the High Rocks Facebook page). The AMI Summer Documentary Institute continued virtually and produced a series of podcasts about the pandemic called, "A Mask on the Mountains," (Appalachian Media Institute 2020).<sup>130</sup> The STAY Summer Institute also gathered virtually in 2020 (Stay Together Appalachian Youth 2020). PFE helped teaching

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<sup>129</sup> For details, see the final program for the 2020 ASA conference on the Appalachian Studies Association website.

<sup>130</sup> The renown Letcher County-based Worker's Party Podcast folks and their response to the pandemic were also feature in the *Bitter Southerner* (Brown 2020).

artists shift to virtual residencies, and OCHS completed their remotely produced feature-length version of their collaborative theater/media production *The Shiners* (OCHS Students 2020a).

PFE requested needs and resources for arts education, facilitated conversations, and shared resources, and they offered virtual check-in opportunities about every other month for teaching artists to catch up, ask questions, share resources, and plan for possible virtual opportunities. State organizations like KAC, KFW offered special funding and support for artists/teaching artists. As usual, Judy Sizemore was ready to help coordinate resource-sharing while working remotely to finish some of her own interview/research projects. Berea LearnShops continued that summer with a more limited offering focusing primarily on an online teacher professional development workshop series, including the “HeARTS Virtual Literacy Learnshop Academy” with George Ella Lyon and Judy Sizemore that I participated in. Again, Judy shared additional resources for social and emotional learning and trauma aware teaching with all Learnshop participants using cloud-based folders.

At the time of finishing this dissertation, I read about and/or heard from several research collaborators who shared updates since I interviewed and/or spent time with them. Some research collaborators involved in higher education and ASA shifted in their respective teaching and leadership positions. For example, Robert Gipe stopped teaching and “went part time” at SKCTC “[o]nly consulting with new Higher Ground staff. We got a whopper grant and hired three new folk. One is Brandon Jent an AMI alum” and others were involved in the 2019 production of *Higher Ground 8: Perfect Buckets*. Robert also recently published, *Pop*, the third in his acclaimed series of young adult novels set in



the Appalachian region. Oral history participant Shaunna Scott “stopped being editor of the JAS in Jan 2020” and “started phased retirement July 1, 2020.” She is currently “co-editing a book with Kathryn Engle on the quest for a just transition in Appalachia.”

Joy Gritton, another oral history participant and arts educator, reported that the COVID-19 pandemic “shut down the after school program” she coordinated with service-learning programming help from Morehead students. She went on:

I did not see how we could safely continue (all volunteers, including myself, were high risk seniors, and the children were definitely not used to the regimentation required by safety procedures); moreover, with schools virtual and children not attending in person. there was no bus transportation for the kids to our program. I’m not sure if it will continue in the future after the pandemic subsides. With my move to Berea I will no longer be able to coordinate it. I did so for eight years—a long ride! I often wonder how those children are faring with online learning. Some were definitely not in safe homes and many would have been left alone at home with no supervision—if their caretakers did not lose their jobs. I fear they have fallen further behind in school studies and for a few I genuinely worry about their safety. I guess one positive is that for those who were being bullied and ridiculed at school at least they had a reprieve from that abuse. Covid has of course laid bare all of our societal ills and I’m not confident there is a national will to address them. From their social media posts most of the people I worked with in the ... community remain loyal to [the 45<sup>th</sup> president], and ridicule of the “liberals” is pervasive. Initiatives such as raising the minimum wage, which might help many of these children, will not find support as long as it comes from the progressive camp. I see similar divides, of course, in Berea, but am committed to continue working on these issues. I would be lying if I said it isn’t discouraging and disheartening.

Research collaborators involved with AMI when I was conducting fieldwork have also shifted roles within the organization and within the region. Former AMI director Natasha Watts earned her doctorate in 2018 (Watts 2018) and is now the Assistant Director of Online Learning at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. Willa Johnson transitioned from lead educator at AMI to its current director. Previous director Kate Fowler was “[b]ack in my home city of Richmond, Virginia after giving birth to my now

2.5 year old toddler .... I work at a feminist community print shop here in Richmond called Studio Two Three.”

AMI alumn Brandon Sun Eagle Jent finished his MALTT degree from the University of Kentucky in May 2020 and is “now an Instructor of Appalachian Studies at Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College and one of the Creative Directors of Higher Ground in Harlan, KY.” Kyra Higgins said:

Through my theatre work at Georgetown I realized I had a desire to act, direct, and make plays that come from community specific experiences and that involve those communities in the process. I have been blessed enough to be connected with AppalShop’s new Director of Roadside Theatre, Becca Finney. We’re currently in the process of making a play about the tension between convention and innovation in the local areas here in Southeast and East Kentucky. I have also been working with AppalShop’s Director of Appalachian Media Institute, Willa Johnson, and in partnership with MediaJustice to start some work on informing folks about the COVID vaccine and debunking myths surrounding it and bringing awareness to the amount of disinformation (groups purposefully putting false info out there to further their political or cultural real influence) and misinformation (info that is false being shared often originating from the false info being made and spread by larger entities).

High Rocks alumn Rae Garringer quit their job at Appalshop after three years and “spent May through August producing Season One of the [*Country Queers*] podcast through Kickstarter funding from January 2020.” They “spent September 2020-April 2021 on a contract reporting gig making radio stories about the carceral state in eKY through funding from the Vera Institute of Justice and FAKY [Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky]” and received “an unexpected Southern Power Fund award in late 2020 that will allow me to spend the rest of 2021 working on CQ full time!” Most recently, Rae “[b]ought a trailer and moved home to southern WV in [February] 2021.”

In Owsley County, research collaborator JoAnne Richardson shared several significant changes in all aspects of her life since my field research.

I left that job [with Middle KY Community Action as a Youth Career Advisor] in March to begin my employment with Mountain Comprehensive Health Corporation (MCHC) in Owsley as the Behavioral Health Case Manager. I have been tasked with getting our behavioral health services here in Owsley beginning with Community Outreach. This was the week before the CoVid-19 shutdown so I have been stressed trying to find new ways to connect and build resources that I will be able to offer my patients. I have also been working for the census part time, and this week I officially started my Masters classes. This job has been a blessing and I love it so much but it has definitely required me to step up my game. A challenge for sure. I feel like I have a gazillion things going and when I first started I was having to drive back and forth to Whitesburg for additional training so that was exhausting as well.

Our theater project has been horribly hurt by this CoVid-19. We had to close the doors on our movies and plays, and we have been unable to open back up. That was our main source of funding which paid our mortgage on the old theater and allowed us operating expenses at the BEC [Booneville Entertainment Center]. We have tried several different ways to make money including drive-in movies and other fundraising ideas and have had no success. Sue and I have had to come out of pocket to pay the mortgage and that is not something either of us can afford. Also, Molly Turner retired from the [Owsley County] Action Team and she was donating the space for the BEC, and now it is up in the air if we will even be able to continue to use that space. Sadly, we were right in the middle of practicing our new play before everything closed down. We also failed to get the Brownfield CleanUp Grant for a second time, but we did score a lot higher this year so that is something. We have applied for several different grants but have been unsuccessful. But we keep trying.

OCHS graduate Frankie Jo Baldwin “graduated from Berea College with a major in Spanish in May 2020,” and “started teaching Spanish at Summit Christian Academy in August 2020.” Both she and PFE teaching artist Bob Martin also reported working on the 2019-2020 OCHS production of *The Shiners* that Bob described as a “youth-driven virtual community story project” (OCHS Students 2020a).

Research collaborators at PFE also experienced transitions in different projects and their personal lives. Sarah Campbell said, “I feel like almost a different person from when you interviewed me in my first year of working at PFE! I think I was still pregnant with [my son]! I was quite new to working in Appalachia and still had so much to learn

(and still do).” Fellow PFE teaching artists Bob Martin, Judy Sizemore, and I are also serving as artist mentors for the Appalachian Teaching Artist Fellowship (ATAF) through Berea College Partners for Education (PFE) and funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. ATAF provides “professional development for artists from our rural Appalachian service area through local workshops and mentorship in place-based arts integration,” and as ATAF mentors, we are collaborating directly with teaching artist fellows to develop and implement “practicum experiences via [arts] residencies in Kentucky Promise Zone schools.”

#### 7.4 Continued Social, Ethnographic, and Pedagogical Implications of the “Un-Times” of COVID-19

Like most teachers at all levels, in mid-March 2020, I immediately had to shift to NTI or “remote learning” in a virtual classroom. I experienced this through my direct adjunct role at Berea College in the spring and then connecting virtually with others via Partners for Education and others over the summer. Feedback from the Berea students repeatedly confirmed that the loss of “being there” in person was an ongoing challenge for them academically and emotionally. Meanwhile, suddenly having to teach ethnographic research methods remotely, I looked for trustworthy and effective tools for them to complete their interview assignment by the end of the semester. Remote learning and interviews intensified and complicated existing challenges, such as ensuring sufficient understanding and respect for power, ethics, and vulnerable populations in the class; and emphasizing information privacy and security, both analog and digital, but especially online platforms where personal data are digitally vulnerable.

In addition to first-hand educational experience with the transition, I also participated in virtual experiences and conversations about remote learning and equitable

access with K-12 and college educators and youth advocates. Many educators and students of all ages were (and, at the time of writing, are) looking for at-home learning/creating activities and resources, and organizations and teachers began compiling and sharing remote educational resources for communities and K-12 schools in the state, region, and national level. In many of the virtual social contexts that I have participated in since mid-March 2020, people discussed the pros and cons, risks and benefits, social limitations and potentials, and learning outcomes of various NTI approaches. A common theme in these discussions is students' varying access to learning materials, digital equipment connectivity, and safe supportive social environments that enable them to learn and interact freely.

As discussed in several PFE virtual check-ins, OCHS is an exceptional example of NTI because they have Chromebooks and high-quality PRTC internet service in Owsley County, which many schools, especially in rural communities, do not have. *The Shiners* production is also exemplary because of their use of remote learning as a space for translating a play script originally meant for live performance into a digital media production using Zoom, etc. At one virtual check-in, I shared some of our first-hand experiences transitioning to remote learning at Berea College and addressing student technological challenges and needs through a wider range of communication options. Combining a couple of synchronous (real-time) chats with asynchronous channels to share updates or resources was critical for the ethnographic methods students. I also mentioned how phones were preferable alternatives for some students, and the group also discussed the importance of the US Postal Service in mailing paper-based learning materials and other resources to students and families without internet access. As we

offer and model certain media production best practices in virtual spaces like Zoom, it is important for educators to remember that, like technological and materials access, all students do not have the same level of agency or control over the aesthetics, mechanics, or social dynamics of their physical environments. All students do not have the privilege of representing or “performing” themselves or the intimate spaces of their homes in “the best light.”

Teaching production principles and skills are increasingly valuable and necessary in media-centric contexts with students, especially when working formally on performance- or media-based projects. However, the audiovisual devices they have access to may not have a high-resolution camera or a high-quality microphone for recording. For some students, their smartphone may be the only “computer” they own or have access to as their primary means of downloading and reading course material. Their family may have a single device they have to share, or they can maybe use it in a single designated location that is not visually ideal. They and/or their families may also be sensitive to exposing their home environment to the scrutiny of outsiders and may prefer their images to remain obscure. Awareness of and empathy for different class-based and other disparities some students must navigate are essential even as we teach and encourage best media practices and high production quality when possible. Students’ virtual environments and selves are embedded in the very concrete realities they must live in every day, and some are more visibly vulnerable and constrained in their self-representation than others. Also, some teaching artists face housing or technological issues that limit their availability or reliably producing the same quality of work they would in person, and it can be difficult for them to speak up in settings where full-time or

retired educators and administrators have the luxury of not relying on such contract labor for survival.<sup>131</sup>

Furthermore, critical attention to racial disparities, violence, silencing, and minoritizing in the US in the present moment is a crucial component of an overall critical literacies approach to media education and production. Escalations of racial hatred and violence in the midst of the pandemic, such as the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor by police, armed right-wing retaliation against protestors, the storming of the Capital on January 6, 2021, and the mass shooting of Asian Americans in Georgia on March 16, 2021, continue and exemplify this troubling trend over the past two decades.<sup>132</sup> The “democratization” of social media clearly demonstrates how social issues and movements using it to mobilize are not limited to progressive causes (Atkinson and Berg 2012; Carroll and Hackett 2006:3). Social media platforms are also an effective means for uncritically circulating racist memes and other stereotypical and violent representations without acknowledging or engaging with their full historical context. It is increasingly effortless for even “well-meaning” white people to reproduce the rhetoric, tactics, and violence of white supremacist movements because of the mainstreaming of such ideologies and organizing on social media like Facebook and Twitter. Perhaps less blatantly, defensive memes about “white heritage” problematically reproduce this coded phrase for “White Supremacy” as a seemingly neutral celebration of another form of

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<sup>131</sup> I previously shared some of these reflections in conversations with others over the spring and summer, including COVID-related resources for teaching and conducting research. These issues arose in several virtual meetings and other online publications and discussions with K-12 and college-level educators, mental health professionals, and youth advocates.

<sup>132</sup> A litany of countless names and atrocities from the duration of my fieldwork alone, not to mention 2020-21, would be as long as this dissertation.

diversity instead of the violent reaction against it. Thus, social media is a complex platform for anti-racist social change.

Among relevant institutional name changes in 2020 is the renaming of the 47-year-old *Appalachian Heritage* journal (housed at Berea College) to *Appalachian Review*. In response to some confusion and even hostility about the meaning of the phrase “Appalachian heritage” and who is ultimately included in histories and visions of the region, editor Jason Howard harkens to the Berea College commitment to interracial education and its motto, “God hath made of one blood all peoples of the earth.”

In response to our social media posts, including some promoting work we have published by writers of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community, we have seen an alarming increase in comments that are derogatory, racist, xenophobic, homophobic, transphobic, and misogynist in nature.

....

We want to be crystal clear in our values. We celebrate an Appalachia that is inclusive and welcoming—where Black lives matter, where the LGBTQ+ community, people of color, and immigrants have a place at the literary table. We want to publish even more work reflecting those voices and experiences, which have always been integral to Appalachia, and to remember that we are, indeed, one blood. (*Appalachian Review* 2020)

Social media and its management as a space for promotional outreach or constructive discussion shifted the emphasis and content of conversations to the degree that a publication shed its name to disassociate from it.

PFE is explicitly having conversations about equity as a department and as individual programs serving East(ern) Kentucky schools and communities. They have also increased attentiveness and emphasis in teaching artist check-ins and workshops that serving Appalachia and the “kinship of all people” (i.e., awareness of “diversity in the region” that is “not all white”) are the basis of what it means “to be on the PFE roster” as a representative of the College’s mission, Great Commitments, and code of conduct. At



the annual teaching artist training (via Zoom) in July, Natalie Gabbard reminded participants that Berea was “founded by radicals” and the PFE mission is that “all Appalachian students succeed.” She also said PFE is working to recruit more artists of color and increase the number young people as professional role models on the roster. The institutional leverage of Berea College as “the first interracial college of the South” serves as an impetus to generate a common language and set expectations for addressing racial violence and equity in spaces that are often, but not always, all white participants. KET/PBS continue to offer new and relevant online informational and educational resources for educators and students on COVID-19, anti-racism, and media production, and KET is now offering Virtual Media Lab workshops for Kentucky schools in lieu of their in-person programming. There are also new expressions of solidarity such as the “Rednecks for Black Lives” Facebook group, etc.

This dissertation has asked and addressed how different social contexts and media practices impact young peoples’ means and methods of self-making and world-making through multimodal storytelling in Meta’lachia. It also highlights research collaborators as co-theorizers and analyzes youth cultural productions from primary field sites and how they narrate and illustrate their own visions for who they are and want to be. Arts-based educational programs and place-based storytelling provide important social relationships and infrastructures that support young people in other aspects of their well-being and engagement. In closing, the following story from marginalized youth in Appalachia illustrates how they express their right to exist in the present through a multimodal project that they also use to connect with, care for, and encourage the young people who will come after them in the future.

7.5 Taking Flight Mountain: Hidden Voices from “Arts Connect Appalachian Youth”



Figure 43 Tote bag from the second Arts Connect Appalachian Youth (ACAY) Summit, Corbin, Kentucky, November 8, 2019 (photo by author)

It was a chilly Friday in early November 2019, and over 150 participants from six East(ern) Kentucky schools gathered at the Corbin Center where Berea College Partners for Education (PFE) was hosting the second ACAY summit. Everyone present that day

received a program and tote bag with the words “Arts Connect Appalachian Youth” in large blue letters when they signed in (Figure 43), and the building bustled with energy as students and teachers gathering in the main ballroom for the plenary introduction. After a round of singalong songs led by musician, songwriter, teaching artist, and Owsley County native Taylor Dye, the PFE arts and humanities team, Natalie Gabbard and Sarah Campbell, and Judy Sizemore, the lead teaching artist for the regular ACAY project briefly introduced the day’s agenda, telling the young people, “You all are the leaders in Appalachia for your generations.”

Throughout the day, students, teachers, and teaching artists shared presentations and projects produced by several other schools in the ACAY project. However, I want to focus on the voices of a creative group of students who were invited to attend but could not be there to share their work, participate in art-making activities, or enjoy the free catered lunch from Panera that day. Their stories are mediated through commentary from co-teachers who led the project and presented on their behalf at the event, as well as on-screen narration and voiceover transcript of a video about the project, which I include in its entirety so these unnamed young people can tell their own stories as much as possible. I emphasize their voices over those of physical summit attendees here because of their multiply marginalized positionalities. Like the anonymous OCHS student poet, they must remain nameless and faceless by law for their “protection,” but also because their transience prevented them from participating across the entire 18-month ACAY program.

The absent students were from Knox Appalachian School (grades 5-12), which is on-site at the Appalachian Children’s Home, a “Licensed Adolescent Treatment Facility and Foster Care Placing Agency” in Knox County (ACH 2020). The residential and

educational programs serve young people “ ‘in the system’ [who] come here when their parents lose custody to the state or when they need a soft place to land after being in detention” (Miller 2019). Demographically, few of the students are from the region, and there is a larger proportion of black youth compared to Knox County or the mountain region in general.<sup>133</sup> Therefore, the students at the Knox Appalachian School and Children’s Home represent an important youth population that is not always seen or heard in the region.

Knox Appalachian School participated in the opening ACAY Summit at Buckhorn Lake the previous November in 2018, which included nearly 200 students and their teachers from regional public schools from Harlan, Knox, Leslie, Owsley, and Perry Counties. Knox Appalachian School has limited funding and resources for offering elective or extracurricular options for students beyond the “core curriculum,” so the first ACAY summit and site-based art project were important social and creative opportunities for students who “have many struggles” and minimal or no parental support (Miller 2019:6). After the summit, the school’s head teacher said, “We didn’t know what to expect .... but all of them enjoyed it and had an experience they wouldn’t have had otherwise. It’s a way for kids to succeed. Not everybody’s good at school, but for some

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<sup>133</sup> For example in 2018, Knox County’s population was 95.7% white, 1.3% Black, and 1.2% Hispanic (County Health Rankings 2018a) compared to 84% white, 15.7% Black, and 8.2% Hispanic in Kentucky overall and 94.4% white, 5.6% Black, 1.9%, and 1.8% Hispanic in Appalachian Kentucky (arc.gov). According to 2017-2018 school-reported data, “the total minority enrollment is 25%” with 10% Black students, 10% Hispanic, 4% “Two or More Races,” and 2% Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander; and “45% of students are economically disadvantaged” with a total gender make-up of 22% female and 78% male (US News & World Report 2020). Racialized and gendered identity categories for data are those articulated by the ranking sites cited.

kids, art is their outlet, and they can have success at that. That's what we're trying to do: find something they can be successful at" (Miller 2019:6).

For the arts residencies at the Knox Appalachian School following the first ACAY summit, Judy Sizemore, and Bob Montgomery, and Bob Martin were the primary collaborating teaching artists on the multimodal projects with the students. At the second summit, Judy told the audience that the students could not come to the final gathering, but they produced an important project, which incorporated creative writing, blacksmithing, and media arts. She read an example from the poetry project and then showed the "merging art forms" in the video production about the project called, *Taking Flight Mountain* (Knox Appalachian School, et al. 2019). Bob Martin and Blair Johnson, a mutual friend and fellow media-maker in Baltimore, produced the digital story integrating the students voices with different aspects of the project. The collaborative multimodal art project and culminating video production, represented in the proceeding image and complete transcript, document the material and metaphorical journey in search of self and home.



Figure 44 Screen image of metal bird sculpture from *Taking Flight Mountain*, digital story by and about Knox Appalachian School in collaboration with PFE teaching artists (Knox Appalachian School, et al. 2019)

[Light acoustic guitar music]

[Opening titles in white all capital letters with a black background]

TAKING FLIGHT MOUNTAIN  
A PROJECT OF PARTNERS FOR EDUCATION AT BEREA COLLEGE AND  
THE KNOX APPALACHIAN SCHOOL

[On-screen narrative text about project in white letters appears with a darkened image of bird silhouettes against a cloudy sky]

... At the end of Hidden Valley, some of the young birds flew helter-skelter into the headwinds, but most turned north, sweeping up along the long ridge of Taking Flight Mountain, and the blacksmith nodded. That was good.

The blacksmith asked the Guardian Birds if he could set up a forge on the banks of the river and bring some of his friends. The Guardians made a space for his forge and for his friends at the picnic spot, just where the river rounded a gentle curve. They brought the young birds to visit the blacksmith in his outdoor shop each day.

[Music continues with the soundscape of hammering metal and muffled voices in the background]

Soon the valley was ringing with the music of hammering joined with birdsong. The young birds sculpted and painted; they shared their stories and wrote poetry; they drew and painted and surprised even themselves with their artistry. They worked with one of the blacksmith's friends to write a book of poems and with another friend to create a video documentary. And they worked with the blacksmith to create a sculpture that will last forever, a sculpture of two mountains and a valley between - with birds of every shape and color, their instant of gliding, swooping, soaring, spiraling motion recorded in hammered steel.

[Image fades to footage of blacksmith teaching artist Bob Montgomery (BM) on the left and literary teaching artist Judy Sizemore (JS) on the right]

[Music fades, Begin voiceover (VO)]

BM: The original inspiration came from when we were at Buckhorn [at the first ACAY summit], and some of these kids were amazed that, when the Corps of Engineers dammed up the Middle Fork of the Kentucky River, they flooded the local community. And so when we were there and the kids were discussing that, they were really amazed –

[Cut to footage of blacksmithing station with embers burning]

– that you could lose your home completely, that it could go away. And in our kind of little, in our interviews or the story circles and stuff with these kids, obviously *home* is a *huge* deal –

[Footage of tongs pulling a glowing red metal bird shape out of the embers and putting it on top of an anvil where arms/hands take turns beating hammers down on the metal shapes]

– because when we said, “Where do you want to go? Where would you like to be right now?” (mainly because it was freezing cold), a bunch of them said, “I wanna be home. I would like to be home.” So the idea of your home, as one of the guys said, “washing away” is something that’s really unfortunately very poignant and relevant. So that’s the reason we built this –

[Closeup of student hands holding an unfinished metal bird]

– I built this landscape, so we’ll have a permanent –

[Closeup of hands holding the bird against a large skeletal frame for the sculpture project]

– place here that these birds that these kids make have a permanent place that, as one student said, “*will* never wash away.”

[Cut to footage of JS talking to unseen students]

JS: And some of these students, you know, they really, their home *has* washed away in one sense or another. You know, several have mentioned that they they've been homeless –

[Close up of hands rubbing metal bird with a cloth followed by closeup of students' hands with notebooks on a table]

– for portions of their life. Several of them, they're, you know, they don't have any living relative that –

[Closeup of more hammering metal birds]

– could take them back, and several of them have living relatives that are, are –

[Closeup of students' arms/hands painting birds]

– incarcerated or abusive for various reasons. A lot of these kids move from one placement to another and don't really have a sense of home, or a sense of place, or a sense of community. –

[Medium footage of BM and JS together]

And I feel like this school works really hard –

[Montage of closeup still images of different hands with painted birds]

– to try to create that sense of community for them while they're here, and that we're trying to add to that, –

[Overhead pan of picnic shelter with JS, BM, and students sitting with their backs to the camera with the large metal frame in the center of the circle on the concrete floor]

– and to strengthen it with that idea of having a permanent presence.

[“Slideshow” of collages of still images from workshops, closeups of painted birds in hands, and different stages of in the production process]

Student 1: This is the Appalachian Children's Home. It's a place where boys that have gotten, or g-, and girls that have got into a little bit of trouble, or have nowhere to go, or something like that. Or is in foster care and in between foster homes and is just trying to find a place for them. Things like that, that's what this is a place where they would go.



Student 2: We're basically in the hills in a beautiful place, and I understand that this place is here to help kids, like the Appalachian Children's Home.

Student 3: Basically, like a home for people who never had one.

Student 4: The project is that the mountain, that we're making with the birds, is something that could never get washed away. So I think that's the reason why you all are here, is to put an impact on our lives that can't be washed away.

Student 5: You know, I like the nature outside. I love sitting on my front porch at home and just watching the birds fly around, listening to the sound and stuff, peaceful.

Student Poet (SP) 1: Singing, talking, loving, all three connect like a macaw standing out.

SP 2: Strength, love, grace, passion, energy, and companionship all like a hummingbird. I picked a hummingbird because it reminds me of the traits I have.

SP 3: "Adam and Family that I Care and Love For." Me: smart, pretty, caring, loving, watching like a swan that has beauty, elegance, and grace. Sweet.

SP 4: Phoenix. Beautiful, red, flaming, surviving, vanishing. When it dies, it comes back in a flaming ball blazing.

SP 5: Strength, wisdom, spiritual, rising, watching, hunting like an eagle flying high, diving down.

SP 6: Hawk. Fly high, stay strong, and fly in the wind.

SP 7: I chose a song sparrow, which is, I find real interesting, 'cause like not a lot of birds sit there and sing or whatever. It just seems cool to sit there all day and do one thing that you like the most. The title is "Sing a Song," by me. Song sparrow. Brown, white, beautiful, amazing, like no other.

SP 8: Swan, elegant, beautiful, gliding, resting, gleaming, like a memory never fades. Precious.

SP 9: The title is "Heavenly Protector." I chose a thunderbird. Brown, black, long, gleaming, humming, like a visitor from heaven to protect us. Honor.

SP 10: I chose a phoenix, dark red, burning, rising, flying, like a bonfire in the night. Immortal.

SP 11: My poem is called, “All-Seeing Owl.” Owls. Camouflage, stealthy, observing, waiting, like a hunter studying its prey before it attacks. Wise.

SP 12: “Made of Gold.” Hawk. Brave like a man who takes a bullet, white like an angel sent from heaven. They are fearless and never need a weapon, mortal weapon.

SP 13: We cardinals are brave. We cardinals are love. Whoever need love, cardinals give hugs.

SP 14: “For the Soldiers.” Eagle. Majestic, courageous, snatching, hunting, wandering, searching for wisdom and freedom and honor.

SP 15: “My Future Boyfriend.” Handsome, smart, compassionate, caring, calm, like a peacock’s strut that is known as his knowledge. Forever.

SP 16: Beautiful, forever young, rising, lifting, soaring, like a sparrow that brings hope. Feisty.

SP 17: Me. Adventurous, maternal, journeying, diving, descending, like a swallow protecting the souls of the Dead.

SP 18: Mystery, knowledge, truth, what’s to know, multiple personalities. –

[Cut to footage of BM and another man lifting from a truck the finished sculpture with the painted birds affixed to the metal frame, walking it over to a picnic table, and placing it on top]

SP 18: – Who is it? Tell me, who?

SP 19: Majestic, lark, beauty, spiritualism, dawn, good fortune, great opportunities, like the liberty of a citizen.

SP 20: Survival, mythical, blood red –

[Cut to still image of several bird silhouettes from below the sculpture frame with a blue sky and white clouds, and a single bright sun beam in the upper right corner]

SP 20: – fighting, rising, and living, like a phoenix flying from the ashes and following the circle of life. Determined.

SP 21: Music. Making music, healing others, singing, just like a song sparrow. Band boy.

SP 22: We're an owl. We're wise, dangerous, watching, rising, swooping like an owl, a harbinger of death.

SP 23: Hawk. Like a hawk swooping down to protect its honor. Like a hawk soaring through the big blue sky.

SP 24: Thunderbird. Big, colorful, swimming, gliding, protecting, like honor, valor, nobility, and dominance from another place of freedom.

SP 25: Cardinals. Bright red, brings soft, beautiful, melody in and the winter. Hope.

SP 26: Sister. Black plumage, diving, flapping, and flying like a raven that I protect. Emotional.

SP 27: Like a pair of eagles flying on the wind.

SP 28: "Live in Paradise." Me. Beautiful, elegant, moving, ascending, journeying, like a bird of paradise that is full of elegance. Memorable.

[Still image of bird silhouettes fades to a darkened background as on-screen narration resumes in white letters as voiceover continues]

Student: The kids in the future get to see that it ain't all about being not wanted or troubled, that you can have a little fun.

[On-screen narration]

...The blacksmith is back on his mountain, but the sculpture will always be there in Hidden Valley, wound round with memories of pain and loss, transition and growth, and flight into the freedom of the open sky on wings made strong by love, grace, courage, and determination.

[Music / end titles] (Knox Appalachian School, et al. 2019)

After the video was over, Judy and Bob said they put the metal sculpture in the middle of the lake at the school, where new kids would come to the 8-month program and then move on.

I had already watched the video when PFE posted it on their "Our Creative Promise" YouTube channel the summer before the summit. I emailed Judy to say how inspiring it was, and she said, "It was an amazing experience." (Personal communication,

July 5, 2019). So, I was looking forward to hearing from the students at the closing ACAY summit only to learn they could not attend. Ultimately, they did not receive the meal, the swag, the peer feedback, or the opportunity to provide their own feedback through the final evaluation survey, missing out on a key opportunity to learn from others' productions and to see and experience the responses to their work in person.

When I shared a draft of this story about the summit and video transcript with Judy, she thanked me “for including their voices” and provided additional context behind the on-screen narration that metaphorically frames the young “birds” collective perspectives and artwork:

I really wish I had recorded the conversation when they came up with the name “Taking Flight Mountain.” Their first thought was to call it the “Valley of Orphans” (“Because that is what we are.”) But then they decided they wanted something that would express how the school gave them possibilities while recognizing that not all of them would make it to “Taking Flight Mountain.” They also wanted to include their vision of the residency and especially of Bob. The story at the beginning of the video was my best effort to incorporate all that they said during that discussion. (Personal communication, November 20, 2020)

While the group discussion about naming themselves and the significance of the residency experience was not recorded, Judy helped them gather and organize the elements of their collective story for the on-screen narration that bookends the video about the project.

I also shared this story with Natalie Gabbard and Sarah Campbell, and they agreed that it “offers a clear, insightful description of the situation.” However, they said that they wished they “had handled a few things differently” in terms of KAS students and not receiving “materials distributed at the event or [completing] the student survey.” They also expressed regret about “not following up with the KAS administrators to see what might have been possible in terms of sharing those items with the KAS participants

and collecting their feedback.” Fortunately, the video about the students’ culminating project is posted on the PFE YouTube channel where they can access and share their voices and creations with their peers, families, and broader audiences.

*Taking Flight Mountain* is an important multimodal, multisensory, multimedia project that incorporated discussion, collaborative project management, personal poems, blacksmithing, painting, interviews, and audiovisual documentation. While the discussion about the artistic metaphor they chose and processes they used are articulated by/mediated through Judy and Bob, they are mindful of their role in representing the students’ voices and concerns accurately and ethically. In collaboration with the media artists, they also found ways to visually represent the students without disclosing their identities but making visible some of their diversity. The students’ collective creative writing frames and tells the story about Knox Appalachian School, themselves, their creative mentors, and their collaborative art-making project(s). The students’ poems and the circling birds they crafted assert their belief in their own strength, beauty, resilience, talent, humanity, intelligence, independence, tenacity, and creativity. The digital story serves as the public record of their “protected” voices as multiply marginalized youth and the bird sculpture serves as the “permanent home” for their metaphorical and material “bird” selves in “Hidden Valley.”

Like the residential programs and “brick and mortar” community spaces discussed in Chapter 5, this “home away from home” and the presence of resident artists and collective art-making practice constitute material mediologies of support for multiply marginalized young people. The ACAY project at the Knox Appalachian School “put an impact on our lives that can’t be washed away” and made space for “having fun” despite

the students' "struggles," "troubles," and external labels that too often define their experiences, identities, and potentials. It is also a gift and a message of hope to "the kids in the future get to see that it ain't all about being not wanted" or without a "home," and thus contribute to intergenerational meshworks within a transient space. *Taking Flight Mountain* represents a form of "precarious placemaking" (Hinkson 2017) that attempts to disrupt the precarity of impermanence where experiences and meanings make/unmake a sense of place each time students rotate in and out of this temporary social/emotional, educational, and geographical home. *Taking Flight Mountain* is also a powerful bookend to the ASA plenary presentation that introduced the dissertation because it represents a talented group of young people's voices and stories that were highly mediated to the point of their physical absence from the summit as well as their facelessness and namelessness, in the name of protection, in the video production about the multimodal art project.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. TIMELINE OF SELECTED PUBLIC EVENTS/PROJECT ACTIVITIES

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Location</b>
3/23/2013	ASA Conference	Boone, NC
11/6/2013	AMI Film Screening (University of Kentucky)	Lexington, KY
March 2014	ASA Conference	Huntington, WV
8/14-16/2015	IG2BYITM Conference	Harlan, KY
March 2016	ASA Conference	Shepherdstown, WV
8/31/2016	Creative Assets Inventory Workshop	Booneville, KY
9/8/2016	Berea College Partners for Education Kentucky Promise Zone Education Working Group	Berea, KY
9/16/2016	Big Ideas Fest for Appalachia: Education, Workforce, and Economic Development: Visionary Thinking and Doing	Hazard, KY
9/21-23/2016	Brushy Fork Annual Institute Cultural Asset Mapping Track	Berea, KY
10/5/2016	Berea College Making a Difference in the World - Recruiting & Networking Event	Berea, KY
Fall 2016	AMI/Roadside Youth Theater Lab	Whitesburg, KY
11/4/2016	Feminist Friday concert	Whitesburg, KY
11/9/2016	AMI Thanksgiving Potluck	Whitesburg, KY
11/18/2016	WMMT Feminist Friday guest	Whitesburg, KY
11/20/2016	Youth Assembly on a Just Economic Transition	Whitesburg, KY
12/5/2016	<i>HomeSong</i> 4 Planning Meeting	Booneville, KY
12/12/2016	<i>HomeSong</i> 4 Planning Meeting	Booneville, KY
2/7/2017	OCPL & OCHS Visit	Booneville, KY
3/16/2017	Dinner on the Grounds with the Klines (Berea College)	Berea, KY
March 2017	ASA Conference	Blacksburg, VA
Early June 2017	Seedtime on the Cumberland Festival	Whitesburg, KY

8/26/2017	Appalachian Land Study retreat	Lexington, KY
9/12/2017	Promise Zone Arts Education Working Group	Berea, KY
9/27/2017	Appalachian Land Study Retreat Notetaker	Pipestem, WV
10/3/2017	OCHS Creative Assets Volunteer	Booneville
10/18/2017	Creative Assets/KET Meeting	Lexington, KY
10/26/2017	KET Media Lab Workshop for OCHS Students	Lexington, KY
11/11/2017	Berea College Partners for Education Creative Asset Mapping Project Volunteer, Media Arts Consultant, Teaching Artist at Whitley County High School	Williamsburg, KY
November 2017	Hurricane Gap Theater Institute	Pine Mountain Settlement School, KY
12/1/2017	Berea College Partners for Education Creative Asset Mapping Project Volunteer, Media Arts Consultant, Teaching Artist at Hazard High School	Hazard, KY
12/5/2017	OCHS Creative Assets Volunteer	Booneville, KY
12/6/2017	OCP Media Team at KET	Lexington, KY
12/11/2017	Berea College Partners for Education Creative Asset Mapping Project Volunteer, Media Arts Consultant, Teaching Artist at Whitley County High School	Williamsburg, KY
12/12/2017	Berea College Partners for Education Creative Asset Mapping Project Volunteer, Media Arts Consultant, Teaching Artist at OCHS	Booneville, KY
1/19/2018	Promise Zone Arts Education Working Group	Berea, KY
3/3/2018	GARC Symposium	Lexington, KY
3/23/2018	Creative Asset Symposium	Hazard, KY
3/26/3018	Promise Zone Arts Education Working Group	Berea, KY
3/28/2018	Co-Creating the Future of Work in Kentucky: The Power of Narrative for Imagining Sustainable Solutions	Lexington, KY
April 4, 2018	W+GRA Summit at UNCC	Charlotte, NC
April 5-7, 2018	ASA Conference	Cincinnati, OH



4/13/2018	Visualizing Appalachia Symposium	Portsmouth, OH
4/26/2018	Promise Zone Arts Education Working Group	Berea, KY
5/2018	Rural Women's Studies Association	Athens, OH
6/19/2018	Promise Zone Arts Education Working Group	Berea, KY
6/29/2018	Partners for Ed Teaching Artist Meeting	Hazard, KY
8/7/2018	Kentucky Arts Council Teaching Artist Orientation/Training	Frankfort, KY
8/30-31/2018	SOAR Summit	Pikeville, KY
9/7/2018	Promise Zone Arts Education Working Group	Harlan, KY
11/1/2018	Arts Connect Youth Summit 1	Buckhorn Lake, KY
Summer 2019	Learnshops with Judy Sizemore	Berea, KY
Spring 2019	Berea Community School Graphic Novel Workshop	Berea, KY
	Model Laboratory School Graphic Novel Residency	Richmond, KY
Fall 2019	West Perry Elementary School Podcast Residency	Hazard, KY
	Hazard Middle School Graphic Novel Residency	Hazard, KY
	Berea Community School Graphic Novel Workshop	Berea, KY
11/8/2019	Arts Connect Youth Summit 2	Corbin, KY

## APPENDIX 2. ETHNOGRAPHIC AND ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES

### Appendix 2.A. “Young Women Leaders in Central Appalachia” Interview Guide (Research Assistant for Principal Investigator Dr. Ann Kingsolver)

1. What sources of inspiration do you draw on in your leadership?
2. What sources of support do you find useful as a young leader?
3. What do you hope for the next generation in this region?

### Appendix 2.B. “Youth Media Education and Activism in Central Appalachia” Interview Guide (Principal Investigator for IRB #43702)

1. Describe the community where you come from.
2. How did you become interested in visual art and/or media production?
3. Why did you choose to participate in [the relevant program]?
4. What other opportunities for learning media production are you aware of?
5. Do you have previous visual art/media experience?
6. What do you find useful or inspirational from popular media?
7. What do you find challenging from popular media?
8. What kind of possibilities do visual art and media offer?
9. What kinds of issues do you care about and/or work on?
10. Are you actively involved in visual art and media production now?
11. If so, what issues do you tend to address in your projects? If not, why not?
12. How has your work in community changed over time?
13. What are the challenges and possibilities for visual media production in Appalachia?
14. If you could make a movie about anything you wanted, what would it be?

Appendix 2.C. “Youth Activism in Different Generations in Appalachia” Interview Guide (Principal Investigator for IRB #44122)

1. How do you define the word “young”?
2. What youth generation do/did you identify with?
3. Where are you growing up/did you grow up?
4. What was/is it like to be a young person where you grew up?
5. What was/is it like to be a young person during the time you grew/are growing up?
6. What was/is it like to be a young wo/man when and where you grew up?
7. How do/did you make your voice heard as a young person?
8. What social movements or other forms of civic engagement have you been involved in and how did you learn about them?
9. What influenced you or inspired you to be an activist?
10. What ongoing relationships with individuals or organizations have been important to your activism?
11. What are/were social and political contexts of your work?
12. What possibilities do/did you imagine for yourself as a young person?
13. What possibilities do/did you imagine for the Appalachian region as a young person?
14. What do you think it means to be young today?
15. What do you think it meant to be young in the past (general or a particular generation)?
16. What are some of the similarities between your generation and older/younger generations?
17. What are some of the differences between your generation and older/younger generations?

## APPENDIX 3. BIBLIOGRAPHY OF YOUTH CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS IN FIELD SITES

### Media Education Program/Project Platforms

- AMI Vimeo Channel: <https://vimeo.com/user3183821>
- AMI/All Access EKY YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvjoqUj6OkEsGYwTeemKkQQ>
- All Access EKY Project: <https://www.allaccesseky.org>
- High Rocks YouTube Channel (1): <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtJ84XGvjvo06fmaVu1YOQg>
- High Rocks YouTube Channel (2): <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrsLL4Mz1UCybHM86agPkZA>
- Berea College Partners for Education “Our Creative Promise” Project: <https://ourcreativepromise.com/>
- Berea College Partners for Education “Our Creative Promise” YouTube Channel [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzcq3tokFNvF\\_yhZrNmEPFQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzcq3tokFNvF_yhZrNmEPFQ)

### Selected Media Education/Performance Projects (2013-2020)

#### 2013

- Owsley County/Partners for Education
  - *HomeSong* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJJsZqISLzQ>

#### 2014

- AMI
  - *A Little Town in the Mountains* <https://vimeo.com/102956028>
  - *We Were Soldiers* <https://vimeo.com/102956745>
  - *Skate to Escape* <https://vimeo.com/102939147>
  - *A Foot in the Door* <https://vimeo.com/102775358>
- High Rocks
  - *Virginia’s Home* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHDgHR4OBH8>
  - *Building Education* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuLkwzJAdgY>
- Owsley County/Partners for Education
  - *HomeSong II* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7A284tN9f1g>

#### 2015

- AMI
  - *Dos Patrias: Living Latino in Appalachia* <https://vimeo.com/137858618>
  - *Beyond Me* <https://vimeo.com/136844612>
  - *Pickin’ & Screamin’* <https://vimeo.com/136770426>
- High Rocks
  - *The Lodge* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTUiwaWfiqc>
  - *The Real Camp Steele* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elw2ovvCJPg>
- Owsley County/Partners for Education
  - *HomeSong III* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IoNKY8EDbAg>

## 2016

- AMI
  - Justice for All <https://vimeo.com/178019304>
  - Not a Daughter <https://vimeo.com/178723672>
  - Go Your Own Way <https://vimeo.com/177720697>
  - My Kind of Music <https://vimeo.com/178014263>
- High Rocks
  - *The Heart of High Rocks: A Campfire Tradition* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfXQ04saZTU>
  - *Starlight Overnight* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vy258CUCt10>
  - *The Mother of High Rocks: A Susan Burt Tribute* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3xUmdAxrw4>
- OC
  - *It Can Get Better* <https://vimeo.com/233860814> [Correct year?]

## 2017

- AMI
  - *Dying Breed* <https://vimeo.com/228241566>
  - *An Elaborate Dream* <https://vimeo.com/228264986>
  - *It Goes Unspoken* <https://vimeo.com/228423190>
- High Rocks
  - *The Outsiders* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hu-Xld07nZA>
  - *The Pledge* (Not online)
  - *Renae & Charlie's Wedding* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Suuw-9th0EQ>
- Owsley County/Partners for Education
  - *Homesong IV* Discussions Only (2016-2017)

## 2018

- AMI
  - *Times Have Changed* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkITIB\\_04zU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkITIB_04zU)
  - *Muddy Waters* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTrLJSZGlhA>
  - *I Know My Body* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pw\\_aV9RniuU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pw_aV9RniuU)
- High Rocks
  - *High Rocks Interns* (Not online)
  - *The Reel Stuff* (Not online)
  - *Recipe for Resistance* [Mountain Movements 'Zine]
- OCHS/PFE "Our Creative Promise"
  - Owl Sculpture <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3Lc6CJharw>
  - Anonymous Student Poet <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r26YalsIP0M>
  - Principal Davidson [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcTYht\\_ursA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcTYht_ursA)
  - Teacher Stevi Nolan <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfJyHTHKE0A>
  - Teacher Monty Hill <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJHLM18ehN0>
  - Artist Lukas de Saint-Clair <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ap2CzLVtKV5>

- Musician Jarrad Eversole  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4snFFGyLhvY&t=56s>
- Jewelry Maker Bonnie Cornett  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvRQqOliHk>
- Painter Betty Gabbard <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWWn3se5n3U>
- Other PFE “Our Creative Promise”
  - Harlan: Our Town, Our Home  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nq\\_25DoViQk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nq_25DoViQk)
  - Harlan County - HCHS Art Students Reflect on Painting Project - YouTube  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhKjVZp9sC0>
  - Jackson County - Poem by Jadya Fields - YouTube  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dK4Fh75JP6g>
  - Jackson County – Photographs and Original Music by JCHS Students  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHd1c18wWzg>
  - Perry County - Where I’m From poem and photography by Hazard High School Students [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBUGSY36\\_gc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBUGSY36_gc)
  - WCHS Rock Band - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkeZh4KI0Kc>
  - Poem by WCHS Student Hannah Hamblin - YouTube  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udnkQkxdA5g>

## 2019

- AMI
  - *The Fallout* <https://vimeo.com/350505517>
- High Rocks
  - *Penny for One’s Thoughts*  
[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=2373820466277779&id=287882925342982&\\_tn\\_=%2As](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=2373820466277779&id=287882925342982&_tn_=%2As)
- Partners for Education “Arts Connect Appalachian Youth”
  - *Taking Flight Mountain* (Appalachian Children’s Home)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZCwjVB31Nc&t=10s>
  - West Perry Elementary Students Create Podcasts with Media Artist Tammy Clemons [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iIeTUS\\_vblk&t=53s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iIeTUS_vblk&t=53s)
  - Hazard Middle School Students Create Mini Graphic Novels with Tammy Clemons
  - Summit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rSQLpRUBAY&t=190s>
  - “The Shiners” - Owsley County Reading  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRKqmg9YrG0>

## 2020

- AMI
  - *A Mask on the Mountains* (Podcasts)  
<https://soundcloud.com/amaskonthemountains>
- OCHS/Partners for Education
  - *The Shiners* (Feature-length production)  
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Womack, Ytasha

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Woodson, Stephani Etheridge

2007 *Performing Youth Agency and the Production of Knowledge in Community-Based Theater*. *In* *Methodological Issues in Critical Youth Studies*. A.L. Best, ed. Pp. 284-303. New York and London: New York University Press.

Woodward, Logan

2020 *Youth Media Education and Activism in Central Appalachia*. *In* University of Kentucky. T. Clemons, ed. Owsley County Public Library, Booneville (Owsley County), Kentucky.

WPE Students

2019 *West Perry Elementary Students Create Podcasts with Media Artist Tammy Clemons*. 11:52 min. Berea College Partners for Education,. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rSQLpRUBAY>

WVU Humanities Center

2019 *Speculative Appalachian Futures Mini-conference Call for Papers*. <https://humanitiescenter.wvu.edu/call-for-papers>

Yapchaian, Matthew

2008 *Contact Lists and Youth*. *EPIC*:79-85.

Yiorgos, Anagnostou

2006 *Metaethnography in the Age of "Popular Folklore"*. *The Journal of American Folklore* 119(474):381-412.

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Young Appalachian Leaders and Learners

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<http://appalachianstudies.org/members/committees/yall.php>

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n.d.-b Young Appalachian Leaders and Learners (Y'ALL) Committee of the Appalachian Studies Association.

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Yu, Betty, Dave Lowenstein, and Roberto Bedoya

2018 Creative Placemaking, Placekeeping, and Cultural Strategies to Resist Displacement. *In* Citizen Artist Salon: U.S. Department of Arts and Culture.

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Zine, Jasmin

2001 Muslim Youth in Canadian Schools: Education and the Politics of Religious Identity. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 32(4):399-423.

Zuckett, Katz, and Grace Harbert dirs.

2015 The Lodge. 4:21 min. Hillsboro, West Virginia.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTUiwaWfiqc>

## VITA

### EDUCATION

PhD in Cultural Anthropology, University of Kentucky, 2021 (expected).

MA in Cultural Anthropology, University of Kentucky, 2016.

Graduate Certificate in Gender & Women's Studies, University of Kentucky, 2014.

MTS (Master of Theological Studies) concentrating in World Religions and Women's Studies, Harvard Divinity School, 2001.

BA in Women's Studies (independent major), Spanish minor, Berea College, 1999.

### PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

Independent Teaching Artist for Berea College Partners for Education (November 2018-Present)

Berea College Adjunct Lecturer of Peace & Social Justice (January-May 2020)

Independent Media Arts Consultant for Kentucky Educational Television Media Arts Toolkit Prototype (January-December 2018)

Independent Media Arts Consultant/Teaching Artist for Berea College Partners for Education Creative Asset Mapping Project (December 2017)

Administrative support for Appalachian Land Study meeting (August 2017)

High Rocks Educational Corporation New Beginnings Creative Expressions Teacher (June 2017)

High Rocks Educational Corporation Camp Steele Media Teacher (July-August 2015-2018)

Administrative support for Appalachian Land Study meeting (September 2016)

University of Kentucky Department of Anthropology Teaching Assistant (August 2012-May 2013, Spring 2014, August 2014-December 2014)

University of Kentucky Appalachian Center Teaching Assistant (August-December 2013)

Executive Assistant to the President of Berea College (July 2011-August 2012)

Berea College Center for International Education Administrative Assistant (November 2010- July 2011)

Bluegrass Community & Technical College (BCTC) Adjunct Faculty Member (Fall 2010)

Alternate ROOTS Annual Meeting Green Team Coordinator (Summer 2010)  
Independent Sustainability Consultant for Federation of Appalachian Housing Enterprises (Fall 2009)  
Berea College Sustainability Coordinator (December 2005-June 2009)  
Executive Assistant to the President of Berea College (September 2001-January 2006)  
Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America Manuscript Desk Worker (September 1999-June 2001)  
Berea College Women's Studies Office Assistant \* (September 1997-May 1999)  
Berea College Women's Studies Teaching Assistant \* (September -December 1997, January-May 1999)  
Kentucky Governor's Scholars Program Resident Assistant (Summer 1994)  
Elementary Spanish Teacher \* (September 1991-May 1992, September 1993-May 1994)

Note: All positions with an asterisk (\*) denote Berea College Work Study/labor positions.

#### SCHOLASTIC & PROFESSIONAL HONORS

2020 Kentucky Oral History Commission Preservation Grant (in partnership with Berea College Special Collections and Appalachia—Science in the Public Interest)  
2019 OHMAR (Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region) Martha Ross Memorial Prize  
2019 Kentucky Oral History Commission Transcription Grant  
2019 Kentucky Foundation for Women Artist Enrichment Grant  
2018 Juried member, Berea College Partners for Education Teaching Artist Directory  
2018 Juried member, Kentucky Arts Council Teaching Artist Directory  
2018 Mensa Education & Research Foundation Galiley Scholarship  
2018 Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange Cohort  
2018 University of Kentucky Student Government Association Academic Excellence Scholarship for a Graduate Student  
2017 Kentucky Historical Society Scholarly Research Fellowship  
2017 Kentucky Oral History Commission Project Grant  
2017 Berea College Olive Ruth Russell Fellowship



2017 University of Kentucky James S. Brown Graduate Student Award for Research on Appalachia

2017 University of Kentucky Woman's Club Endowed Fellowship

2016 University of Kentucky James S. Brown Graduate Student Award for Research on Appalachia

2016 University of Kentucky Association of Emeriti Faculty Endowed Fellowship

2015 University of Kentucky Eller/Billings Summer Research Mini-Grant

2014 University of Kentucky James S. Brown Graduate Student Award for Research on Appalachia

2013 University of Kentucky Susan Abbot-Jamieson Pre-Dissertation Research Fund Award

2013 University of Kentucky O'Dear Award for Graduate Student Research in Latin America

2010 Kentucky Historical Society Family Research Fellowship

2010 Alternate ROOTS Artistic Assistance Grant

2009 Kentucky Foundation for Women Artist Enrichment Grant

2009 Appalachian Sound Archives Fellowship

2004 Berea College Faculty Fellowship in Service-Learning

1999 Kentucky Student Employee of the Year

1999 Berea College Student Employee of the Year

1999 Berea College Paul Vernon Kreider, Jr. Book Award

1999 Berea College Dr. William Taylor Center Memorial Award

1999 Berea College Weatherford-Hammond Appalachian Prize

1999 Berea College Eva Nell Whitaker Alley Award

1999 Berea College Hutchinson Fund Grant

1998 Berea College Women's Studies Departmental Labor Award

1994 Kentucky Colonel

1991 Vassar Book Award

1991 Sandy B. Nininger Award (Key Club)

1991 Key Club Scholarship

1991 Rotary Club Foreign Language Award  
1991 Spanish National Honor Society  
1991 Beta Club  
1990 Montgomery County High School Salute to Excellence  
1990 Kentucky Governor's Scholar  
1990 Kentucky Girls State

#### PROFESSIONAL PUBLICATIONS

Clemons, Tammy

2020 What *Does* it Mean to Be “Young” in the Mountains? Voices from the “Youth Activism in Different Generations in Appalachia’ Oral History Project.” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 118(1):19-66. Special Issue on “Beyond the War on Poverty: New Perspectives on Appalachia since 1970.” Kathryn Newfont, ed.

Clemons, Tammy L.

2014 Film Review of *Goodbye Gauley Mountain: An Ecossexual Love Story*. *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 20(1):91-93.

Reedy, Timi and Tammy Clemons

2016 Audiovisualizing Family History: An Autoethnography of a Digital Documentary. *Visual Ethnography* 5(2):79-105. Special Issue on “Exploring Digital Ethnography through Embodied Perspective, Role-Playing and Community Participation and Design.” Natalie Underberg-Goode, ed.

*Reviews Forthcoming:*

Digital Resource Review of “Picturing Milwaukee / Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures.” *Journal of American Folklore*.

Media Review of “100 Days in Appalachia.” *Journal of Appalachian Studies*.

Tammy Lynn Clemons