Intimacy and Family Among Single, Working-Class Women:
A Focus on Rural Appalachia

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ABSTRACT

With people living longer and coming into old age with more diverse relational experiences than previous cohorts (e.g., divorce, cohabitation), researchers anticipate that the so-called baby boomers will be more interested in pursuing romantic relationships in later life than their predecessors. On the other hand, we know that the experience of aging varies among people on the basis of their social locations (e.g., racial, gender, class). As central Appalachia is a place characterized by persistent poverty, I interviewed single, midlife White women from a community in West Virginia (N=11) to investigate (a) their experiences with family life and (b) their expectations for romantic relationships in later life. I used grounded theory methodology to develop a theory of intimacy and family life in central Appalachia. I found that the women who were more integrated into their families of origin had little or no interest in romantic relationships, regardless of their past relationship history. Women who perceived their childhoods as traumatic were less integrated into their families of origin and had a weaker sense of place, but had more interest in finding a romantic partner in later life. I concluded for those with a strong sense of place the importance of the family of origin persisted through midlife and into old age.

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education, but I appreciate that they loved me anyway. That is their greatest strength—they love in spite of short-comings. Other family—siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents—were with me throughout this project, as they are in everyday life. I grieve for more time with you all.

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Table of Contents

Appendix F: Continuity Table

List of Figures

List of Tables

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO KEY IDEAS

Social Problems and Discourse

Historically, Appalachia has been a problem area for the American government. In the early days of European settlement it was the wild, western frontier where Native American nations (Timberlake, 1765/1996) and "lazy" Whites (Byrd, 1728/1996) lived on the fringes of White civilization. Other writers described the beautiful landscapes and emphasized the fertility and industry of the region. In the early 19th century Anne Newport Royall, for instance, described her travels to eastern Tennessee saying that "flour, Indian corn, Irish potatoes, whiskey, bacon, cider, apples, […] onions, and great quantities of plank, scantling, and other timber" (1826/1996; p. 23) were common exports from the area, though trade routes were difficult to maneuver due to the mountainous terrain. These strands found in early writings have persisted in conceptualizations of Appalachia: that Appalachian peoples are different from other Americans; that poverty is associated with a lazy temperament; that the region is rich in natural and recreational resources; and that the region is deficient in terms of modernization.

Similar to 20th century texts written by privileged academics from the region (e.g., Caudill, 1963) or by outsiders working in the region (e.g., Weller, 1966), these early accounts were sometimes sympathetic and other times belittling, yet always emphasizing the region as problematic (Lewis & Billings, 2010). One commonly cited ethnographic account of the region, Harry Caudill's sympathetic *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* (1963), helped spur legislation supporting the government's War on Poverty (1964) with his emphasis on the ways in which industrialization, in particular the coal industry, had devastated the region. Caudill's work endorses a colonial model of Appalachia (Walls & Billings, 1977/1991), where wealthy outsiders have extracted resources from the region and capitalized on the cheap labor of local people;

whereas Weller's *Yesterday's People* (1966) endorses a subculture of poverty model (Walls &

Billings), where cultural values such as a disregard for formal education, is the cause of poverty

rather than industrialization and modernization.

 The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, I want to move beyond a discussion of the

causes of poverty in the region. Recently scholars investigating social processes from a variety of

paradigms contend that a more complex, nuanced perspective is needed to understand social

problems. For instance feminists speak of intersectionality (Collins, 1990), emphasizing the

"interlocking, overlapping, and mutually constructing" (Allen, Lloyd, & Few, 2009, p. 13)

systems of oppression and privilege such as race, class, and gender—meaning that it is

impossible to point to any one of these systems as the cause of social problems. Similarly,

scholars investigating late life (e.g., Dannefer, 2003; Ferraro, 2009) argue that observed

inequities in old age are the result of cumulative disadvantage (or advantage) over the life course,

rather than one factor or another. Finally, Gergen (2009) prefers the term *confluence* rather than

causality to explain "why people behave as they do" (p. 49), contending that predictor variables

used by many social scientists "are notoriously weak, for example, in predicting adult behavior

from early childhood events" (p. 58) for any particular adult. For example, scholars investigating

resiliency—the ability of individuals and families to overcome adversity—point out that

impoverished conditions in childhood do put people at risk for family instability and economic

insecurity in adulthood; they also note that "resiliency can be developed at any point in the life

course" and that many people who were poor as children have "satisfying jobs [and] stable

marriages" in adulthood (Seccombe, 2002, p. 387).

 Thus, instead of asking a cause and effect question I will move to a discussion of the

strengths and challenges in rural Appalachia given the on-going presence of the coal industry,

the legacies of War on Poverty, and possibly unique cultural processes structuring family life. A

widely cited strength of rural Appalachian culture, or weakness depending on one's perspective,

is family life (Lewis & Billings, 2010), the literature about which I will discuss in detail in

Chapter 2. Family life is typically kin-based and communal (Duff, 2005; Fitchen, 1981; Plaut,

1983). This brings me to the second purpose of this study. I want to understand how people

living in what some have called a "culture in transition" (Photiadis & Schwarzwell, 1970 quoted

in Lewis & Billings, 2010) experience family life in the 21st century, specifically single midlife

women. Given that scholarship in Appalachian studies is largely disconnected from family

science scholarship, this is a gap in research I hope to help fill. In the following sections I will

briefly describe my theoretical framework and key concepts, and give an overview of my study;

full discussions are in Chapters 2 (literature), 3 (method), and 4 (findings).

Theoretical Framework

Constructionist perspectives, originating from symbolic interactionist or post-structural

theories, presume that people's attitudes and behaviors are socially constructed (Gergen, 2003).

The extent to which people have control over constructing their own attitudes and behaviors has

been debated among scholars (McDowell & Fang, 2007; Risman, 2004). At one extreme, those

who are more structurally-oriented feel that structural conditions, such as class or gender, are

deterministic and individuals have very little agency in their own lives (Risman); on the other

end, those who are more constructionist-oriented contend that people can be agentic and resist

structural constraints (e.g., Bulter, 1990). A fundamental difference in assumptions creates the

extremes on this continuum. Structuralists, such as critical theorists influenced by Marxism,

assume that the social structure can be changed and take a revolutionary approach (Risman).

Constructionists, especially post-structuralists, believe that social structure cannot be radically

changed, only resisted through the conscious actions of individuals (Foucault, 1984). Butler's

classic text on the performative nature of gender (i.e, doing gender) is a good example of an

extreme post-structuralist approach. Most scholars take less extreme positions by working for

structural change, while recognizing that individuals can exercise agency by playing with

internalized cultural norms (De Reus, Few, & Bloom, 2005; Ferree, 2010; Lather, 2007;

Risman). I take this middle perspective. In addition to constructionist and feminist theories, I will

take a life course perspective. A life course perspective adds to these theories in that it helps keep

me focused on the "long view" of individuals' lives. It allows me to simultaneous hold key

events from a person's life history (turning points) as well as their intersection with others as I

attempt to make meaning about family processes from their storied selves.

<center>**Key Concepts**</center>

Discourse and Intimacy

People define and talk about experience with the language of cultural norms, which are

often contradictory (Foucault, 1978; Swidler, 2001). Holstein and Gubrium (2000) discuss two

ways in which discourse is made manifest in people's lives. They say, "The everyday technology

of self-construction stands at the junction of discursive practice and discourse-in-practice " (p.

103). Discursive practice refers to picking and choosing which part of lived experience to tell.

Language cannot hold all experience so people must choose which experiences are most salient.

Discourse-in-practice refers to drawing on cultural grand narratives to make sense of experience

and is the means by which people decide or not what experiences are most important. In short,

not only do people combine various discourses to explain their lives, but also choose which parts

of their lives to share (Swidler). People use discourse, for example, to construct their intimate

selves.

Intimacy refers to feelings of closeness or connectedness with others (Blieszner, 2006; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Notably, some social gerontologists (Cooney & Dunne, 2001; Connidis, 2006; Connidis 2010) conceptualize intimacy as romantic relationships with the rationale that for most people "intimacy" typically connotes romantic ties. While I respect this position, I use a broader conceptualization of intimacy, as is reflected in the 2001 special issue of *Generations* entitled Intimacy and Aging. Here intimate ties emerge from many types of relationships including romantic and sexual relationships (Blando, 2001; Huyck, 2001; Zarit, 2001; Zeiss & Kasl-Godley, 2001), family relationships (Bedford & Avioli, 2001; Fingerman, 2001; Roberto, 2001), paid care workers and friends (Blando; Blieszner, 2001; Piercy, 2001; Roberto), deceased loved ones (Troll, 2001), spiritual relationships (Ramsey, 2001), pets (Suthers-McCabe, 2001), and relationships with media (Roberts, 2001). Related to this broad conceptualization of intimacy, according to researchers in social psychology (Brewer & Gardner), intimate needs may be experienced at three levels of one's self: the collective self (e.g., one's relationship with particular groups such as other Appalachian women), the relational self (e.g., one's relationship with significant others such as a spouse or friend), and the personal self (e.g., one's relationship to one's own self). How aging individuals use discourse determines the degree to which particular relationships meet intimate needs.

For example, imagine that a woman in her early sixties loses her favorite sister, after being widowed 10 years earlier. This woman is very shy, has few friendly acquaintances, and only two living relatives, another sister and brother who live several states away with their respective families. She never had children and recently retired from a clerical position at the local bank. Because she was shy and worked long hours, she did not develop close relationships with many people in her community. In fact, she got close to both her husband and best friend at

work. Most people in her community are deeply religious and community events have a decidedly Christian feel. Despite having grown up in a "Christian home," she has never been religious and feels that the religion practiced by most of her community offends some of her most deeply held values. Not only does she grieve the loss of her best friend, but feels certain that she will face the rest of her life alone. Her siblings moved away many years ago, are deeply invested in the lives of their children and grandchildren, and rarely visit. Her financial situation allows her to visit them a few times a year. She has tried to sell her home in order to move closer to her siblings; however her home needs major repairs and she can find no buyers in her rural community.

This woman feels alone because of loss in her social network, and may be at risk for chronic loneliness and depression (Cacioppo, Hughes, Waite, Hawkley, & Thisted, 2006). Depending on her self-construct—her salient, or most important, identities—her social isolation may or may not lead to serious mental health problems. She may deeply value time alone, reading, tending to her flowers, and learning computer software that allows her to enhance her photography skills. She may see these changes as her opportunity to finally become the artistic hermit she always wanted to be, but could not be when she was younger and had to work full time. On the other hand, she may see her social isolation as evidence of her low self-worth and be unable to stem her feelings of isolation. How she sees these changes depends on the discourses she uses to construct herself. Though she is likely to have multiple, conflicting discourses emerge at different points in time, those she chooses most often will determine how she handles the loss in her social network.

A major factor in the life of the woman described above is her shy disposition. She may have always felt challenged in feeling a deep social connection with others and the world in

general because she never felt known. Even her husband and best friend were frustrated by her extreme social discomfort. Thus she may have always felt different, always an outsider to those who seemingly spoke to one another with ease. Conversely, she may have understood that her shyness was only the extreme of a continuum that all people feel. She may have recognized that even though her best friend and husband could be frustrated with her, they too felt intense social anxiety and shyness on occasion and were not that much different from herself. Likewise, even though she does not wish to spend time with others in her community, she may believe that they are well-intentioned and that everyone has to find his or her own path in the world. In this way, she may feel a deep sense of connection with others and be able to cope successfully with feelings of isolation when they arise. Thus, the discourses she uses, the stories she tells herself to make sense of or interpret her experience, will affect how she ages in her social context.

Family and Pure Relationship

For the last 100 years or more, scholars and policy makers have been concerned with the ways in which broad cultural and economic changes have changed social ties and family life (Adams, 2007; Cherlin, 2009; Coontz, 2005). Typically, social authorities problematize perceived changes and individuals' (in)ability to cope with them (Adams). Some claim that one supposedly new problem, social isolation, is produced by an increasingly postmodern society where communities and families are disintegrating. In this view the formal protection of the rights of individuals, along with economic pressures, undermine voluntary social obligations to others (Hochschild, 2003). Particular groups of people such as children and old people, and social institutions such as marriage (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007), are made vulnerable in a world where people are isolated from one another. While scholarship based on these premises may reveal social problems, it often neglects a more holistic, historical

perspective of social change and social isolation. For example, the oldest family members, especially women, historically have been vulnerable when family members did not or could not fulfill voluntary obligations. They had little legal or economic protection unless they had the financial and social capital to draw up contracts that ensured their care through old age (Haber, 2006). Though there were no doubt many families who had affectionate or obligatory bonds, as is true today (Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002), a reliance on family connections for all needs has always been risky.

Theory that problematizes family diversity (e.g., Amato, 2004) implicitly suggests there is some kind of authentic connection that can only be reached through the practice of obligatory, long-term relationships. In this view, there is only one pathway to intimacy via biological families and close-knit communities, with other pathways inevitably leading to social isolation, loneliness, and depression. Central in the discourse of social isolation is a critique of what Giddens (1992) calls the emergence of the *pure relationship*. The pure relationship is one that operates only insofar as it is beneficial to both members of a couple: Long-term commitment, though ideal, is neither primary nor expected (Giddens). The desire for a pure relationship within marriage leads to high rates of divorce some argue (e.g., Amato, 2004; Coontz, 2005). Though it is tempting to see the discourse of the pure relationship as the only salient discourse regarding relationships in American culture, as Amato and Coontz suggest, it is only one of many (Allan, 2008).

There are discourses also about normative family obligations and affections, discourses shaped by various religious and cultural traditions; in short there are multiplicities of residual and emergent discourses, or scripts, from which people recite, negotiate, change, combine, or react against (Gagnon, 2004). One oft cited combination of discourses among some young, unmarried,

low-income people is that of the pure relationship and the sanctity of marriage (Cherlin, 2004).

Gibson-Davis, Edin, and McLanahan (2005) found that among their sample of unmarried new

parents, marriage was so highly valued as the site in which to practice pure relating that few felt

prepared to marry and did not connect readiness for marriage with readiness for parenthood.

Indeed, amongst young American people, across the economic spectrum, marriage seems to be

of great importance: Most young people expect to marry and expect to marry for life, in contrast

to what one might expect from the discourse of the pure relationship (Cherlin, 2009). Coontz

(2005) uses historical data to show how these two discourses, the pure relationship and life-long

marriage, are intertwined at least for the present as we live in a pro-marriage society which

confers legal and social status to heterosexual, married couples. Moreover, Coontz gives a more

nuanced perspective when she says that these discourses of life-long marriage and pure

relationship are inherently incompatible and explains persistent divorce rates, rather than

individualism values versus family values (Amato, 2004). What is different in her account, as

opposed to Amato, is the idea that though people may divorce, most people do not go in to

marriage or work towards a pure relationship with the idea that divorce or separation will be a

possible outcome. Rather, investing in the discourse of the pure relationship may set up

unrealistic expectations for interpersonal relationships and investing in the discourse of life-long

marriage may lead to feelings of failure when the pure relationship has run its course (Coontz).

Another less discussed combination of discourses is that of independence and pure

relationship. Though problematized amongst young people—especially young mothers who

value their independence yet want intimacy with others—not all groups who use this discourse

are seen as threatening the social fabric. Most older people, for example, desire independence in

family and romantic relationships. Uhlenberg and Cheuk (2008) using data from the

Longitudinal Study on Aging found that socioeconomic status predicted use of formal

caregiving, suggesting that many contemporary older people want to maintain independence

from family care. This finding goes beyond simply wanting to avoid undue burden on loved

ones, but is emblematic of a deeper cultural value. For example, the emergence of living apart

together relationships also reflects the high value that older people put on independence, as well

as the idea of a pure relationship. In living apart together a couple agrees to be partners, usually

monogamous, but maintain separate residences and finances. Although it is unknown how

common these relationships are among older adults in the US, partly because they are difficult to

distinguish from traditional dating relationships in survey research, findings from the General

Social Survey from the 1990s suggest that it is a growing relationship form (Cherlin, 2010).

Some have posited that living apart together is most like Giddens' conception of the pure

relationship in that the focus is on intimacy rather than familial or financial obligations

(Connidis, 2010). However, I argue that the pure relationship discourse is always already

interlocked with other discourses depending on life course stage and life course history. The

growing trend of living apart together is not a result of only the pure relationship discourse, but

reflects the salience of a discourse of independence, as well as discourses around prior family

obligations (i.e., keeping households and finances separate to protect children's inheritance).

Overview of Study

Problem

Close, satisfying relationships are important to the well-being of individuals (Ashida &

Heaney, 2008; Bookwala, 2005; Cacioppo et al., 2002; Dupre & Meadows, 2007; Tiikkainen &

Heikkinen, 2005). Though scholars are making clear the pathways between intimacy and well-

being, the processes that determine the pathways are less understood (Blieszner, 2006). For

example, scholars know that personality factors may mediate the ways in which one experiences relational challenges (Huston & Melz, 2004), yet I posit that we are unsure of how discourse produced from recent social changes may impact the ways in which individuals both perceive, form, and maintain close relationships and identities into old age. For example, midlife women in rural Appalachia are likely to be involved in many different kinds of relationships, each with their own particular cultural and personal discourses, as they move into their seventh decade (Stewart & Torges, 2006). They are likely to have relationships with their parents, children, partners, friends of either gender, siblings, grandchildren, and possibly grandparents (Blieszner & Roberto, 2006). How and to what extent discourses about independence, pure relationships, and so-called family values affect people's perception of their relationships may be an important process of self-construction that influences whether or not people feel satisfied with their close relationships. That is, relationships that are perceived as the most important, such as obligatory family relationships, may or may not be those that provide the most satisfaction compared to, for example, friendships.

Using the logic of snowball sampling (Patton, 1990), I focused on single women from a rural Appalachian community under the assumption that they may be more intentional and reflective about their intimate and family processes precisely because they do not currently have a romantic partner. Snowball sampling "is an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases" (Patton, p. 237) and is a version of purposeful sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton). In Heaven's Gate, West Virginia, a small, Central Appalachian community, I began by advertising my study in local businesses and asking community members to spread word of my study. As news of my study spread, that I wanted to talk to single women between the ages of 50 and 64, my sample snowballed.

Research Questions

Given the purposes of this research described above, I chose to do a qualitative study "concerned with process and meaning rather than cause and effect" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 160) which guided the kinds of specific research questions I asked. Using an integrative theoretical framework which combined concepts from life course perspective, symbolic interactionism, and feminism, my initial research questions were:

1.   What discourses do single, midlife, working class women use to "story" their intimate selves? How do they conceptualize intimate relationships?

2.   In what ways might those who are transitioning into old age negotiate conflicting narratives about family, intimacy, and aging?

3.   How do larger cultural narratives intersect with the social locations of aging, single, working class women to shape their decision to form new romantic relationships in later life?

These questions changed somewhat as I began interviewing women and discovered, for instance, that narratives about family, intimacy, and aging rarely conflicted for most of the women. However, these three general areas guided my study design and analysis.

Scope of the Study

Since marriage and family life is highly valued in rural Appalachian regions (Bryant, 1983; Cherlin, 2009; Drake, 2001; Fitchen, 1981; Mather, 2004), I examined how single women use discourses about family and intimacy to shape their sense of self. On the one hand, I thought the women might find a lot of satisfaction from their extended kin relationships; on the other hand, they may have felt isolated if most other women in their social network were married and consumed with nuclear family life. Similarly, as I discuss in the next chapter, since these women

were brought up during enormous cultural shifts in the region, I wondered if they might have

more so-called modern expectations for their intimate lives, seeking romantic partners with

whom they share a deep friendship (Giddens, 1992).

As detailed in Chapter Three, I used a grounded theory design to collect and analyze life

course histories of working class, midlife women ($N = 11$). Life course histories allowed me to

gain a more in-depth understanding of how discourse about cumulative advantages and

disadvantages have shaped relationships across individual life histories. In order to reach

appropriate participants I used purposive, snowball sampling: participants were single (i.e.,

never-married, divorced, widowed) women between the ages of 50 and 64. Participants were

recruited through advertisements, community flyers, and word of mouth from an economically

"distressed" region in West Virginia; given that the demographic racial profile of this rural

region is overwhelming White (>98%), it is not surprising that all women who volunteered for

the study were White. I used a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol and analyzed data

using theoretical sampling and the constant comparative method, an interpretation of grounded

theory methods common to qualitative designs (Charmaz, 2006). The coding strategy included

open coding and focused coding (Charmaz) which led to the construction of a mid-level

substantive grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) about the intimate lives of White, single,

working-class, midlife women in Central Appalachia. Theorizing to create a substantive theory is

one goal in grounded theory development; it refers to development of a theory that is closely

connected to and emergent from only the data (Glaser & Strauss).

I found that a number of confluent factors were important for how the women constructed

their intimate selves including (a) the extent to which the women's fathers were abusive in

childhood, (b) strong mothers, (c) their embeddedness in kin networks, (d) attachment to place,

(e) economic insecurity in adulthood, (f) beliefs about personal autonomy, and (g) gender ideologies. Typically these factors—these discourses in practice and discursive practices—worked together, intersecting to create their intimate lives. Consistent with another goal of grounded theory development, in the last chapter I use the substantive theory in conjunction with socio-historical data and earlier research on intimacy to develop a *formal* theory of intimate and family ties in Central Appalachia. Formal grounded theories take into account the data, yet extend beyond it, typically building on prior theorizing and earlier research findings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Reflexive Statement

I come to this project as a privileged academic outsider and an insider who grew up with few class privileges in a coal field region of West Virginia. In some ways I am similar to Harry Caudill who was from the region he wrote about. And like him, my work is a product of both the region and academic discourse. Though his work is generally sympathetic to the poor people he writes about, for the most part he has internalized progressive-era values which normalize White, middle-class culture. My academic training is more reflexive than Caudill's, but I, too, am at least one removal from the people about whom I write, with a different mixture of confluent factors creating the persona writing this text. First, I have not lived in the coal field region during any of my adult life. Secondly, though I am deeply critical of White, middle-class culture, it is *that* lifestyle I have chosen to live. In this dissertation I will question who gets to define "poverty," however, personally I struggle to make sense of class stratifications precisely because it feels good to have nice things. I certainly do not want to live a life that others define as "impoverished." bell hooks, an African American, Appalachian, and feminist writer, also speaks of these issues in her book *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (2000a). Though she describes

mistreatment while a college student at UC Berkeley from White women and other African American women from well-to-do families, and alienation from her family back home in Kentucky, one of the most poignant accounts for me is when she describes the pain she experienced when she saw beautiful dresses in store windows that she could not afford. A basic fact of life in a capitalist culture is that almost everything becomes a commodity to be bought and sold, even the experience of wearing a lovely dress. It is painful to never or rarely have the money to afford such luxuries. It is this pain that I try to keep fore-grounded as I write from an academic perspective.

Like hooks, I struggle to make sense of my positionality as someone who is now privileged enough to be able to criticize, indeed make a respectable living from, critiquing White, middle-class culture. The criticism is as much subject to commodification as Disney and McDonalds. Efforts to resist the commodification are found only through selfless giving and love (hooks, 2000b), which are ironically, often taught in religious movements whose accoutraments too often eventually become cultural commodities (e.g., yoga classes and accessories, or best-selling evangelical texts). Thus, I find myself caught in a double-bind of having become a critic of the missionary, do-gooder outsider, as well as performing a missionary role, i.e., writing this text in the name of "helping my people," families in Appalachia.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

An Integrated Theoretical Perspective

I used an integrative theoretical framework to investigate meanings of family and intimacy among single, midlife White women from rural Appalachia. Since theories emerge from particular disciplines rooted in particular ways of knowing, an interdisciplinary framework moves past the limitations of any individual framework (Katz, Lowenstein, Phillips, & Daatland, 2005; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; MacDermid, Roy, & Zvonkovic, 2005; Syed, 2010). In addition to compensating for each other's limitations, integrating theoretical positions has the potential to change and strengthen particular theories. For instance, Bass (2009) outlines the debates among social gerontologists, between critical and postmodern scholars, arguing that a strength among the two perspectives is that they speak to one another and are sharpened by the discourse. As I will show below, the theories I have chosen are particularly well-suited for integration as they are broad enough to assimilate other perspectives, and have a history of doing so.

Life course theory, symbolic interactionism, and feminist theories all have emerged from social-philosophical and social-scientific movements in the United States. Life course theory evolves from the developmental sciences and is notable for accounting for time (Bengtson & Allen, 1993); symbolic interactionism emerged from American pragmatism and explains identity development and meaning making (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Stryker, 1968); feminist theories in the U.S. developed from women's liberation and civil rights movements and explain power differentials in relationships (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1984; Risman, 2004). These three perspectives remain relevant theories precisely because they are adaptable to understanding changing social circumstances, as well as changing disciplinary agendas. Moreover, the specific

contributions from each of the three theories are important in understanding intimacy and family ties in context.

I have constructed a model integrating concepts from these three theories [Figure 1]. The model is composed of three nested triangles; each triangle is made up of one concept from each of the three theories. Because I am investigating intimacy, I have named each of the three nested triangles with an intimacy related term according to Brewer and Gardner's (1996) 3-level conceptualization of the intimate self (i.e., collective, relational, and personal). Others have used tri-part conceptualizations of the self to study the different ways in which one can feel lonely or socially isolated (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; de Jong Gierveld, van Tilburg, & Dykstra, 2006). Thus, these more complex models resist the tendency to conceptualize intimacy process only as interpersonal processes, which I will discuss below when I review the literature on intimacy.

In my model, the outermost triangle, *Collective Intimacy,* is most distal and represents *intersectionality* (feminism), *cohort time* (life course), and *discourse in practice* (symbolic interactionism). This lens reveals the influence of larger cultural norms and historic changes. In the middle triangle—*Relational Intimacy*—*interpersonal power relations* (feminism), *generation time* (life course), and *significant others* (symbolic interactionism) is represented, which focuses on one's place within and among families and social networks. Finally, the innermost triangle, *Personal Intimacy,* represents *internalized discourse* (feminism), *individual time* (life course), and *discursive practice* (symbolic interactionism). This triangle focuses on the ways in which particular individuals operate within cohort and generational time and make sense of that experience. As shown by the dotted lines in the figure, each layer of the self interacts with the others. Based on these theoretical concepts I contend that the three intimate selves are interdependent and that intimate development is recursive as these layers interact over time.

Figure 1: A model of the Intimate Self

Intersecti onality
(Feminist)

Interpersonal
Power
Relations
(Feminist)

Internalized
Discourse
(Feminist)

Individual   Discursive
Time (LC)   Practice (SI)

Family Time (LC)   Significant Others (SI)

Cohort Time (LC)   Discourse in Practice (SI)

Levels of Intimacy-Related Processes
- The Outer Blue Triangle: Most Distal Processes
  - (Influence of Normative Climate- "Fitting In")
- The Middle Green Triangle: Mid-level Processes
  - (Influence of Interpersonal Needs Being Met or Not)
- The Inner Red Triangle: Most Proximal Processes
  - (Individual Emotional Temperament-Satisfaction with Self)

The dotted lines demarcating the inner and middle levels represent the recursive and interdependent nature of intimate selves.

After I have explained each of these theoretical concepts, I will examine relevant empirical literature on the basis of how studies contribute to a more distal, middle, or proximal understanding of intimacy.

Concepts Related to Collective Intimacy

  Intersectionality. Bass (2009) lists feminist theory as one of many critical theories arising from Marxist critiques, but as Allen and Walker (2009) point out, feminisms are varied in disciplinary and methodological focus, though most have a social justice aim (Mertens, 2003; Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). When applied to the family and intimate experiences of aging women—and integrated with life course and symbolic interactionist theories —I feel that it is important to use those iterations of feminist theory arising from gerontology and feminist family studies (Allen, Lloyd, & Few, 2009). From this point onward, when I use the term *feminist theory* I am using a specific perspective rooted in these disciplines.

  In gerontology, Estes (2005) posits that aging is a gendered issue, especially given that older women are a larger share of the aging population (see also Calasanti & Slevin, 2006). Based on this social fact she lists four assumptions guiding her understanding of how feminist theories intersect with gerontology. Feminist theory holds that the (a) experiences of women are *socially constructed*, (b) lived experiences and problems of older women are *structurally conditioned*, (c) older women's lives are shaped by *cumulative advantage and disadvantage*, and that (d) scholars should use an *intersectionality approach* (Collins, 1990) to understanding the feminization of poverty among older women. Likewise in family studies, Osmond and Thorne (1993) claim that feminist theories need to be at the center of theorizing about families since women traditionally have been connected with and restricted to family. Though in studies of aging it is important to recognize the salience of women, an intersectional approach recognizes that not all men, nor any particular man over his life course, necessarily benefits in equal ways from male privilege. Feminist gerontologist Calasanti (2004), for example, moves beyond a

focus on women and discusses the ways in which aging men are also marginalized as they confront gender norms that value youthful, able-bodied masculinity.

Intersectionality has emerged as a major concept used to explain the heterogeneity of experience and inequities among women (Collins, 1990; Estes, 2005). Intersectionality "is the negotiation of a *politics of location*" (De Reus, Few, & Bloom, 2005, p. 449); that is, it is a non-essentializing standpoint perspective that moves beyond the identity politics debate. For example, two people identifying with the same racial and gender categories may have very different histories with class, education, and/or sexuality. This concept from feminist theory adds to life course and symbolic interactionist theories below. Life course explicitly accounts for cohort (social) and generational (familial) differences, but a perspective on how power differentials operate among and within cohorts and families is needed. For example, though people may share particular historical (e.g., war), family (e.g., divorce), and personal events (e.g., the transition to motherhood), how they are experienced will largely be dependent on their particular social locations. Stewart and Torges (2006) note, for example, that when recounting assassinations of political leaders White Americans mention the deaths of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X far less often than do African Americans (p. 27). Moreover, one could imagine that within different African American and White American communities, how these deaths were experienced might have been very different. Some African American women, for example, may have felt more ambivalence about the deaths of these leaders if they felt marginalized as women in the civil rights movement (e.g., see hooks, 1984).

Cohort time. In life course perspective, cohort time refers to the shared time of particular birth cohorts (Bengtson, Elder, & Putney, 2005). For example, in the U.S., the baby boomers are the cohort born roughly between 1946 and 1964 and precipitated, or at least lived through, large

social changes (Stewart & Torges, 2006). The oldest of these midlife Americans likely

experienced and had to find their selves in opposing discourses. In the period between the early

1960s and the mid-1980s old and new discourses became salient as battles were fought over

sexual, racial, and gender relations (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988/1997). For example, older

discourses about appropriate social relations, such as the expectation that White women should

be stay-at-home mothers, may have become more visible when these discourses were contested,

i.e., because they were contested there were rising backlash movements that made such discourse

more visible (Adams, 2007). How any particular person situated themselves in these discourses

depended not only on their social locations, but also on which baby boom sub-cohort they

belong. The leading cohort, born roughly between 1946 and 1955, spent their childhood and

adolescent years under a spirit of optimism, prosperity, and social change; whereas the trailing

cohort, born between 1956 and 1964, came to adolescence with a conservative Republican

government and a declining economy (Stewart & Torges). Of course, there is much

heterogeneity among midlife people of either sub-cohort depending on social location: Optimism

and prosperity likely characterized the lives of people with gender, race, sexuality, or class

privilege more so than those subordinated by discrimination which as reinforced by legal and

moral authorities. For example, it is likely that any sense of national optimism and prosperity

was ambivalent at best for Southern African Americans living with racial segregation, or young,

unwed pregnant women, or poor people in Appalachia.

Discourse in practice. As with cohort time, discourse in practice is a more distal

influence on individuals and refers to the language people use to make sense of their daily lives

(Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Importantly, discourse in practice is something that happens all the

time. That is, from a symbolic interactionist perspective (and post-structuralist, see Foucault,

1978) a fundamental assumption about human beings is that we are always already social (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; Stryker, 1959) and that human society is constructed through and by language (Sprey, 2009). From these assumptions it follows that when people communicate they must use particular language, or shared discourses (Stryker), to make connection with one another. Related to cohort time, I propose that the language American women in midlife use to explain their experience in close relationships will be influenced by discourses emerging from mid to late twentieth-century social changes. These discourses may be contradictory and competing. For instance, as I discuss below, there are several discourses about love and family, with some emphasizing feelings and romance, others emphasizing practical concerns, others psychological needs, and so on (Swidler, 2001).

Concepts Related to Relational Intimacy

In many ways concepts related to Relational Intimacy are the most difficult to explain and define because they overlap with concepts from Collective Intimacy (outer triangle) and Personal Intimacy (inner triangle). For instance, in regards to the life course concepts, all the different "times" tend to be closely related for people in terms of major life transitions, such as leaving the family of origin, having children, retiring from work and so on. Though there is certainly variation in how and when people experience these normative turning points, one can safely assume that by age 60 the vast majority of people from a particular cohort will no longer be rearing their biological, young children. Likewise, in regards to feminist concepts, we can assume that observed variations will be dependent to a large extent on one's social position (intersectionality). For example, a young women who does not go to college likely experiences the transition to parenthood earlier than a young college-educated woman. Intersectionality also plays a role in the experience of interpersonal power relations and significant others. One's

social position may largely determine who significant others are and how they are perceived based on gender, race, age, and class. Thus, it may be useful to think of the Relational level as emerging from the connections between the Collective and Personal levels. The Relational level is where social structural process and intrapersonal processes are made manifest as individuals attempt to relate to one another (Gergen, 2009). Moreover, this relating (the dotted lines in Figure 1) feeds back into the structural and intrapersonal selves.

Interpersonal power relations. By the term interpersonal power relations I am referring to the ways in which people assert, negotiate, share, and resist power relations in their interpersonal, close relationships. Close relationships may include those with family of origin, romantic partners, children, friends, and neighbors; these are the significant others discussed in more detail below. Power relations thus emerge from the interaction of people with differential social locations (Collective Intimacy) and conceptions of self (Personal Intimacy). For example, researchers investigating desire within long term marriages found that wives cultivate sexual feelings within themselves because they believe both that their husbands, as men, need sex and that sexual activity is beneficial to their married life (Elliot & Umberson, 2008). Thus, these women performed emotional work (i.e., cultivating their own sexual desire) to manage their own feelings regarding sex in relation to their husbands. What is important here is that this was not simply an issue about husbands wanting more sex and wives wanting less. At play was prevailing discourses about the importance of sexual activity for maintaining marital quality which more often than not privileged the husband's desire for sexual activity (there was one case where the wife wanted sex more than the husband; Elliot & Umberson). I use this study as an example of the complex ways in which one's social position can affect interpersonal

relationships through power differentials which privilege men and women who conform to proscribed gendered behaviors.

Generation time. With whom individuals interact and create meaning depends on their place within families. Generation time, sometimes called family time, refers to the generational position one has in relation to other family members (Bengtson & Allen, 1993). In some studies employing the life course perspective, generation, rather than family role such as "wife," is operationalized for clarity. For example, in a study that uses data from four generations from a particular family, using the family role as a descriptor becomes increasingly ambiguous as one moves into analyzing the older generations where they may play multiple roles (Allen, 1994).

Significant others. Symbolic interactionism posits that the self is socially constructed of multiple, fluid identities: selves then emerge from interactions between one human being and various others (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Significant others are those with whom individuals interact and who have considerable influence on the construction of self. Connecting back to life course perspective, *linked lives* (Bengtson & Allen, 1993) can be conceptualized as including selves and significant others shaping identities, and thus, shaping the life course. Some significant others, and hence, some identities are more important to individuals than others. Stryker (1968) refers to this as the hierarchy of *identity salience*. Identity salience is how people organize competing identities in different contexts. Because identities are typically associated with roles one plays (such as partner, friend, grandparent) role salience becomes an important corollary.

Again, connecting back to life course theory's concept of family time, we can understand that identity salience no doubt changes over time and in different inter-relational contexts. Likewise, roles are highly scripted according to shared norms as Gagnon theorized in his

conceptualization of social scripts (1974/2004). That is, people perform in expected ways in particular situations. Going back to the study (Elliot & Umberson, 2008) on how wives cultivated their own sexual desire, I argue that for these people, being a wife was a salient identity for these women. Therefore, they tried to follow the "script" of being a good wife. In other family circumstances, such as giving care to a dying parent, being a daughter may become a more salient identity and performing desire may take a back seat to performing emotional work related to being a caregiving daughter. In either case, the basic expectations (scripts) regarding the emotional work is understood between parties. It would be considered inappropriate, for example, if wives and daughters performed care tasks, such as having sex with a husband or fixing a meal for a parent, without some sense of positive regard or affection for the other person. In fact, it is when this emotional component is inconsistent with scripted norms that people tend to seek psychological help (Miller, 1976). Too often in gendered relations such a mismatch is the result of structural conditions and discourse where women are expected to find satisfaction in family care work, even at the expense of their own needs and desires (Miller; Walker, 2009). For example, Dressel and Clark (1990) found that not only do women tend to minimize the importance of mundane tasks (e.g., unloading the dishwasher) as family care work, but also experience ambivalence (i.e., both positive and negative feelings) around providing care for others.

Concepts Related to Personal Intimacy

Internalized discourse. It is with this concept that feminist theory and symbolic interactionism closely converge. Internalized discourse (feminism) and discursive practice (symbolic interactionism), which I describe below, are closely related. Internalized discourses are those scripts (Gagnon, 1974/2004) or cultural repertoires (Swidler, 2001) which are most

meaningful for a person. Importantly however, these internalized discourses are not simply

benign scripts, but have consequences for people's life choices (Calasanti & Slevin, 2006; Kraus,

2004). For instance, if someone has internalized a discourse which they cannot enact, then it is

likely to negatively affect their sense of self. If a unmarried woman has internalized two

discourses—(a) sex outside of marriage is wrong and (b) sex is necessary to sustain romantic

relationships, which are the most important and fulfilling kind of relationships—she will likely

experience a conflict in her sense of self when she attempts to form a new romantic relationship.

Depending on her partner's internalized discourse they may decide to "take it slow" and have an

"old fashioned chaste courtship," or to get married before they really know one another so that

they are not tempted to engage in premarital sex. Or if he feels premarital sex is not wrong, she

may go against this internalized discourse because she feels that she must in order to maintain

the relationship, yet feel guilty about their behavior. Moreover she may encounter social sanction

as well for following any one of these internalized discourses. If she has sex, others may see her

as immoral; if she does not, others may see her as not fulfilling her man's needs; if they marry

quickly, others may see her as impulsive and unwise. Conversely, others may interpret these

behaviors positively if they hold more liberatory or sentimental attitudes about sexuality.

Individual time. A person's history and experience will likely play a role in how they

cope with internalized discourses, as well as how others interpret their behavior. Individual time,

or ontological time (Bengtson & Allen, 1993), concerns the developmental uniqueness of any

given person. Although people are situated in the context of larger social structures and cultural

discourse, they have unique personalities and lived experience that account for variation within

cohorts and families even when taking social locations into consideration. This individual time

explains how siblings in any given family can have very different accounts of the same family events depending on their personalities and their developmental status (Connidis, 2010).

Discursive practice. Recall that above I described how selves and significant others shape life courses. The way in which this is done is through discursive practice, or the process of picking and choosing which experiences are most meaningful in self-construction (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). On the one hand, individuals use larger discourses from culture to make sense of their experience; on the other hand, they engage in discursive practice to interpret their experience. I posit that internalized discourse (feminist theory) can be conceptualized as a link between these two processes. All discourses are not equally salient to any given individual, therefore it is the internalized discourses which help people pick and choose which experiences are most meaningful. It is important to understand that although these processes (internalized discourse, discourse in practice, and discursive practice) are presented separately for conceptual clarity, in everyday life they are interlinked so that larger discourses often shape the experiences to which people pay attention (Holstein & Gubrium). For instance, in the example above, the issue of concern is the appropriateness of sexual behavior outside of marriage; however, it is only of concern because of discourses around the issue (i.e., moral discourses around sex outside of marriage). In a different, more socially liberal context, the rightness or wrongness about sexual behavior may be less important than how a new romantic relationship will affect ties with the woman's adult children.

Review of the Literature Related to the Three Levels of the Intimate Self

Now that I have defined the concepts which emerge from my theoretical framework for investigating intimacy among older, single women in Appalachia, I will review relevant empirical and theoretical literature to contextualize my study. The organization of the following

section will mirror that of the theoretical section. I will begin by looking at more distal processes, particularly Central Appalachian culture, and end with more proximal processes, particularly conceptualizations of and research on the self. In between I will focus on interpersonal intimacy processes.

More Distal Processes: Place, Class, & Race

Appalachia, as defined by the federal Appalachian Regional Commission [ARC], consists of 410 counties in 13 states that are marked by their mountainous geography and history of economic problems (Figure 2). Rural Appalachia is marked by persistent poverty: at least 20% of households fall below the poverty line in the most poor counties (ARC, 2000). These poor counties typically are found in the coal fields of rural, Central Appalachia such as southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, eastern Tennessee, and southwestern Virginia, and are predominantly White. West Virginia, the only state that is Appalachian within all its borders, has the greatest income gap in the United States and the state's poor are among the poorest people in the country (Ewan, 2006). Although there are heated debates about the importance of mining industry for the state's economy, Walmart has been the largest employer in West Virginia for more than a decade (Ewan; Workforce West Virginia, 2009), signaling a shift from an industrial economy to a service economy in the region.

Economics. The region has historically been characterized as a "problem" area (Raitz & Ulack, 1984), from early local color "travel" writers to the development of the ARC in the 1963. For example, historians of early White Appalachian culture describe a "capital-poor form of agriculture which emphasized leisure time and family ties, and substituted land for capital and labor" (Eller, 1991, p.29). As these ideas about Appalachia persisted, the ARC was developed as ammunition for the federal government's "War on Poverty," which was declared by President

Kennedy, but came into fruition as one of President Johnson's Great Society programs (Naples, 1998) in 1965 with the Appalachian Redevelopment Act (Wood, 2005). The Appalachian Volunteers [AVs] was one of the first programs funded in the War on Poverty, and had the purpose of "integrating" Appalachia's rural poor into mainstream middle-class America (Kiffmeyer, 2008).

The central Appalachian coalfields has been the face of Appalachian poverty and remains so today, with the monies from the War on Poverty having little effect on the region (Black, Mather, & Sanders, 2007; Holt, 2007; Mather, 2004; Tickamyer & Tickamyer, 1987; Wood, 2005). First, beginning in the 1980s with a market-oriented federal government, the ARC has operated with 10% or less of budgets from the late 1960s and 1970s (Wood). Though the picture for the region has improved in general since the first two decades of the establishment of the ARC, analyses have shown that economic growth occurred primarily in Southern Appalachia due to the growth in southern cities such as Atlanta, Georgia and Asheville, North Carolina (Black et al.; Haaga, 2004; Lichter, Garratt, Marshall, & Cardella, 2005; Wood). The Northern Appalachian region lags behind the Southern region, but fares better than the Central region, and is more typical of other rural areas in the U.S. (Wood). Also, analyses of the 2000 census data have shown that the aging of Appalachia is concentrated largely in Northern Appalachia because of internal migration of young people to urban areas or Southern Appalachia (Lichter et al.). Thus, the economic development in some parts of the region mask continuing economic problems in Central Appalachia (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2008; Wood).

In addition to decreased federal monies coming into the region, Central Appalachia is more rural than either the northern or southern Appalachian regions and has the least access to

Figure 2: Appalachia as defined by the ARC
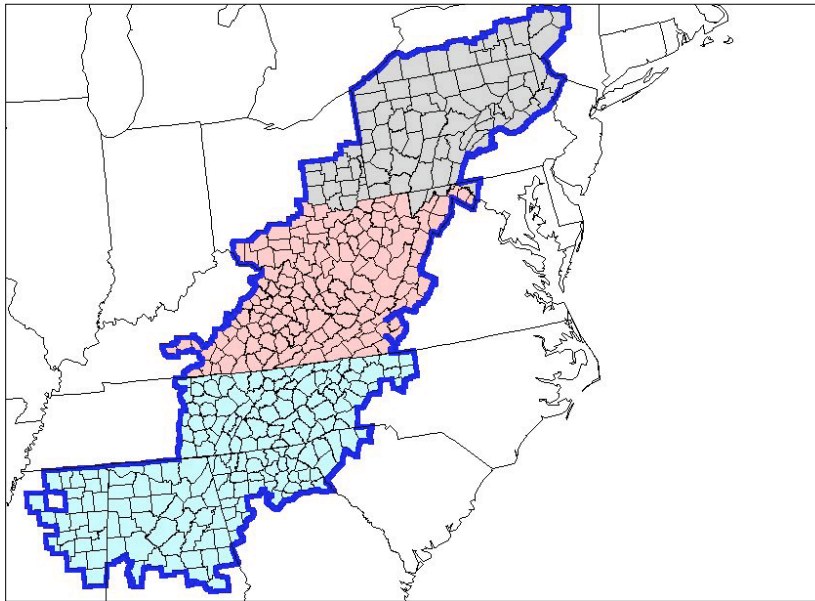
Northern Appalachia denoted by grey counties.
Central Appalachia denoted by pink counties.
Southern Appalachia denoted by light blue counties.
From Wood, 2005.

urban centers of all other rural regions in the continental United States (Wood). Evidence

suggests that such isolation, and the resultant lack of economic diversity, may put people at risk

for poverty and poor health. For instance, compared to urban women from both within

Appalachia and outside of Appalachia, and non-Appalachian rural women, rural Appalachian

women are more likely to be poor, older, less educated, and uninsured, and more likely to report

poorer health and health behaviors (Amonkar & Madhavan, 2002). Moreover, unlike other

impoverished rural and urban regions, being White and married are not protective factors against

poverty in Central Appalachia (Amonkar & Madhavan; Tickamyer & Tickamyer, 1987; Wood),

suggesting there are "broad based economic problems beyond the effects of family structure [i.e.,

single mother headed households] and racial disparities" (Mather, 2004, p. 37). Thus, my focus

on Central Appalachian midlife White women (with a variety of marital trajectories) calls

attention to the intersection of class and helps resist racialized conceptualizations of poverty

which place the burden of impoverishment in America on unmarried African American mothers

(hooks, 2000). The emphasis is on the intersection of socioeconomic class and place.

Though Central Appalachia has been consistently labeled as distressed, there have been

some fluctuations, notably in the 1970s with the boom in the coal industry due to OPEC oil

embargos, and initial development monies from the ARC (Black et al., 2007; Wood, 2005). In

many studies (i.e., Black et al.; Holt, 2007; Mather, 2004; Tickamyer & Tickamyer, 1987;

Wood), poverty is based on a three-part composite measure of economic distress at the county

level (i.e., poverty rate, unemployment rate, relative per capita income). Standard of living

measures offer a more nuanced picture of Central Appalachia. Black and colleagues investigated

changes in standards of living from 1960-2000 using data on housing variables such as rates of

home ownership, mobiles homes, home values, indoor plumbing, energy sources, and number of

rooms per house. They found that home ownership in Central Appalachia had increased since

1960 and was higher (76%) than the Appalachian region in general (73%) and the U.S. as a

whole (66%). Part of this is related to the unavailability of rental housing in rural areas (Black et

al.). Also, they found that the increase in home ownership related to the increase in mobile

homes. Compared to Appalachia overall (14%) and the U.S. (6%), mobile homes account for a

much higher percentage, nearly 25%, of homes in Central Appalachia. Although in terms of

space, plumbing, and heating mobile homes are better than what many of them replaced, the

depreciation of mobile homes complicates a picture of an increased standard of living.

Despite these different measures of poverty, none take into account intra-regional

variations in poverty or local class stratifications, much less do they offer subjective appraisals of

"impoverishment" or "standards of living" from people in Central Appalachia. By questioning

who defines poverty or acceptable living conditions (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990; Precourt, 1983), I do not mean to minimize the importance of understanding the ways in which impoverished conditions in Central Appalachia structure the opportunities and resources available to people living there. However, problematizing ways of living that are not normative in middle-class White America (e.g., living without indoor plumbing) can hurt just as much as it can help. As I show below preconceived notions about impoverished people have dominated much research on Central Appalachian people.

Family life. The absence of the perspective of the people being studied is characteristic of anthropological research on families and Appalachian culture. However, this research does explicate variation in status within communities. For instance, Bryant (1983) using anthropological, ethnographic data from the mid-1970s contends that rural Appalachian people are not exactly familistic, but more genealogical in worldview. She says that people in her study, a rural Appalachian community in Kentucky, were proud to be kin, yet they tended to identify with only one of the prominent family names in the community. Married people were an exception as they sometimes identified with and were identified by both their family of origin and the kin network in to which they married (Bryant, 1983). Based on this genealogical worldview, Bryant found that these prominent families had associated traits, or reputations, on which people built their personal identity. Also, territoriality, or place, is as important as legal relatedness for identity (see also Duff, 2005). For instance, Bryant's investigation showed that over the course of time, the prominent family name associated with a particular territory changed when (once) prominent families shrank and other families related to them emerged as a prominent name. The concept of a genealogical worldview is similar to Plaut's (1983) finding that land was "a carrier of social history and relationships" (p. 275).

Also using anthropological data from the 1960s and 1970s, Fitchen (1981) examined family ties, in particular marital ties, in a rural Appalachian community. She described as a major feature of the household an open-door policy or an "elasticity of the household" (p. 315), saying that while the nuclear family was the central unit of the household, various other family members (e.g., cousins, aunts, uncles) might move in and out of the home as circumstances warranted. Similar to a powerful scene in James Still's Appalachian novel, *River of Earth* (1940), where a woman has to secretly burn down the house in order to get relatives to move on, Fitchen said that it was taboo to turn a relative away no matter how strained family resources might be. Related, she found that "marital disruption" was not uncommon, and described marital relationships in terms of unhealthy codependency, which she used to explain short cycles of fighting, separating, and starting over again, as well as a long-run cycle of adjustment. Couples said they stayed together because they wanted a stable home for their children and feared losing their children (Fitchen, 1981). Fitchen claimed that parents were emotionally dependent on children and for women the role of mother was more important than that of wife. Moreover, there was no "launching" of children, as the families were place-oriented (Bryant, 1983; Duff, 2005; Plaut, 1983). Using a psychological perspective to explain family problems, Fitchen said that both multiple unresolved emotional problems with other family members (e.g., [grand]parents), and unsuccessful role fulfillment, led to violence in the home. She noted that those people who had some other "active, non-family social role" (p. 321) tended to function better. Of course, there were few opportunities in such a rural, depressed areas. Though Fitchen is biased towards middle-class ideologies of the family, i.e., she prioritizes the relational dynamics of the nuclear family rather than kin networks, her study, like Bryant's, reveals some unique patterns among rural Appalachian families.

Unfortunately, Fitchen reads these patterns, such as the open-door policy, in an exclusively negative light. Though such cultural practices may strain family resources at times, this practice could also function as a strength for extended kin networks when individuals within the family fall on hard times. Also, there is likely variation among family members in the extent to which an open door is practiced. I can imagine, and know from personal experience, that not all doors are open equally wide in general, and especially to particular family members. For example in the fictionalized account cited above, the woman had to burn the house down because her husband had a more open policy than she did. Because of her lack of overt power within the household, she resorted to burning the house down to get the unwanted relatives to move on. Her open-door policy was decidedly less open than her husband's. Although a fictionalized account, it is not difficult to suppose that such conflicts between cultural norms, interpersonal dynamics, and personal preferences arise in real life. Likewise, there is likely complexity involved in the so-called emotional dependency which Fitchen describes between marital partners. Rather than seeing these relationships in terms of enmeshment (she does not use this term, but seems one step away from it in her descriptions), it might be that couples and families have deep, loving bonds, and that individuals in such relationships value the bond over their sense of individuality. Moreover, times of conflict could be interpreted as a negotiation of the desires of the individual(s) and the best interests of the family as a group. I do not mean to depoliticize family conflict here, or minimize the likelihood of long-term abusive relationships, but to point out that family conflict and abuse of power within interpersonal relationships are not unique to Appalachian families; nor are bonds of deep attachment to family members. Despite this critique, it does seem as if the concept of family may be more broad among rural Appalachian people, i.e., inclusive of kin relations beyond nuclear ties.

For example, Friedl's (1983) work on rural Appalachian migrants to urban areas confirm the high value placed on the extended kin network for family identity. Studying health care delivery to Appalachians who moved to urban areas in the 1970s, Friedl found several cultural issues that made healthcare delivery problematic: (a) Appalachian migrants made frequent visits home to the mountains, and would commonly delay treatment until they were home to visit their family doctor, (b) people did not seem to value preventative screening and services, and (c) people lived in neighborhoods made up of people from back home which reinforced their norms for health care practices.

Though these studies are dated they show some interesting patterns that may be of relevance in studying midlife rural Appalachian women who were coming of age when these studies were undertaken. I was unable to find more contemporary work in this vein (e.g., family relationships), no doubt due to critiques of this anthropological work as Appalachian studies began to be populated more by scholars influenced by discourses coming out of the civil rights and women's movements which questioned dominant ways of knowing (Eller, 1991). That is, there was a shift in scholarship, and really the birth of Appalachian studies, as scholars began to do socio-historical and political analyses of the region (Eller) so that many of the leading scholars in Appalachian studies are no longer anthropologists, but historians (e.g., Ronald Lewis, Ronald Eller), political scientists (e.g., Stephen Fisher), and feminist sociologists (e.g., Barbara Ellen Smith) who promote an Appalachian studies that challenges stereotypes of an impoverished region and a peculiar people. For example, the Ohio University Press published a series of books in the 2000s on ethnicity and gender in Appalachia which more often than not featured stories on urban Appalachia (e.g., Engelhardt, 2005), and to my knowledge published only one book, a creative non-fiction book, *Loving Mountains, Loving Men* (Mann, 2005) that

dealt specifically with issues of rurality. Mann's book challenged stereotypes of homogeneity of rural culture in that the author is a gay man raised in a middle-class family which valued formal education, and developed his sexual identity while an adolescent living in his hometown in West Virginia.

Though these books are valuable in that they feature the diversity of the Appalachian region and eschew a simplified Appalachian identity politics, as a person from rural Central Appalachia I am concerned about the unintended consequences of reframing Appalachian studies in a way that may mask ongoing problems in rural Central Appalachia. For example, at a recent Appalachian Studies conference (2007) a panel of scholars, including some named above, discussed Appalachian identity politics. What was implicit in the talks of those who critiqued an identity politics was that adopting an Appalachian identity might somehow align oneself with the political Right which would be used to strengthen a backlash against the social gains of the last 40 years, particularly racist and anti-immigration political agendas (Smith, 2006). Though I certainly understand this concern, as Fisher pointed out at the conference, for many of his students in Appalachian Studies at Emory and Henry College located in the Southern Appalachian portion of Virginia, developing an Appalachian identity politics has allowed many people to stand up against other forms of social injustice including racism and sexism within the region, environmental degradation, and so forth. In a similar vein, I hope that contemporary family research in Appalachia will raise awareness about the diversity, strengths, and challenges of Appalachian families, rather than pathologizing or promoting some monolithic "Appalachian family."

Class, place, and theories of Appalachia. The previous sections have concerned the topics of economics and family life. Implicitly guiding that empirical work are assumptions

about this particular geographical place—Appalachia. All theories of Appalachia attempt to explain why Appalachia is culturally different from other parts of America. As Appalachian studies began to take root as a discipline, theorists began to articulate and critique theories of Appalachian poverty in particular (Eller, 1991; Lewis, 1999). Walls and Billings (1977) describe three models that have been used to explain Appalachian culture: subculture of poverty (e.g., a maladaptive culture), regional (under)development (e.g., the model under which the ARC operates), and colonial model (e.g., outside interests control too large a share of regional resources). Walls and Billings critique each explanation, and propose a comprehensive theory saying a model of Appalachia needs to address (a) cultural adaptation, (b) technical development, and (c) a redistribution of power. They say that key to understanding Appalachian culture is to recognize it as neither impoverished (e.g., subculture model), nor peasant (e.g., colonial and development models), but that the culture is "modern individualist" (Walls & Billings, p. 52). This proposition is similar to Keefe's more recent (2008) assertion that modernity takes many forms and that to conceptualize Appalachia as pre-modern, or a victim of modernity, is misguided. Rather, scholars need to resist simplistic notions of "modernity" and Appalachia, to look at the ways in which the region produces alternative modernities from that of so-called mainstream America (Keefe).

Similar to this theorizing, Precourt (1983) questions who defines poverty, saying it is an issue only in a consumer culture. Likewise, Batteau (1983) says, "The rise in living standards creates one of the most subtle and pervasive forms of dependence in Appalachia today" (p. 155). This means that the expectation that Appalachia should be integrated into mainstream America has meant that conspicuous consumption has been integrated into Appalachia, creating a new sense of shame for those who cannot compete (Batteau). That is, people who cannot afford to

purchase expensive consumer goods may feel a sense of low self worth. Batteau's study showed that structural changes at the community level, such as the erasure of community schools and school consolidation, reinforces this new sense of shame when children of very different economic worlds come together. For example, rural children may not be able to afford name brand clothing, and rural families may be unable to afford and/or not have access to technological luxuries such as high speed internet access or cellular phone service. Rural, poor Appalachians, then, are "a dependent class at the bottom of several hierarchies of dependence" (Batteau, p. 164).

Thus, one can speculate that there are two socio-cultural systems at work in rural Appalachia: (a) traditional values preferences, yet not an isolated, traditional culture, and (b) a culture that "incorporates the world both before and after" modernization (Plaut, 1983, p. 269). Similar to Batteau's discussion of class stratifications (see also Duff, 2005), Plaut argues that "interests and opportunities are no longer determined by community and kin but by their position in larger economic machines" (p. 269). Batteau argues then that class stratification means different degrees of choices. In addition to this focus on class, a few Appalachian scholars (e.g., Duff, 2005; hooks, 2000a; Smith, 2006) have pointed out that ethnic and racial minorities living in rural areas, especially Mexican American and African American families who have moved to the region for work, may also have to cope with deep-seated and blatant discrimination from Whites of all classes. For example, segregated housing and communities may have gone unchallenged in rural areas (hooks, 2000a); and White landowners may be unwilling to sell parcels of "family land" to any perceived outsider, thus limiting the choices of minority groups living in the region.

Although one can make the argument that among rural, White Appalachian people there is a preference for a so-called traditional value system, like others, Ewan (2006), in a historical accounting of coal mine strikes in West Virginia, rejects earlier conceptualizations of Appalachian culture as passive. He contends that scholarship describing resistances to the control of powerful outsiders, such as labor movements in the coal fields, is in direct opposition to ethnographic portrayals of rural Appalachians as passive, dysfunctional, and backwards. Historically and currently, "in West Virginia it is widely acknowledged that coal interests control both the governorship and the legislature" (p. 154). Nevertheless, Ewan emphasized that most press coverage of the 1976 anti-injunction strike in West Virginia was pro-company and portrayed striking miners as "irrational, superstitious, and violent" (p. 159), suggesting that some scholarship and popular stereotypes have functioned to serve the interests of "King Coal."

Though not situated in rural Appalachia, Sherman's (2009) study on Golden Valley, a rural, isolated post-timbering community in northern California, provided some insight in conceptualizing rural culture. Sherman argued that residents in her study used moral discourses as a coping mechanism to deal with large structural and cultural changes in their community due to the loss of the timber industry. Moral discourses around work and family values produced moral capital, which in turn stratified the community along moral lines, so that people who held any job and maintained their property were morally superior, and had more community standing, than those who did not work, or keep a neat home.

While this work is important for helping to understand a dimension of culture in rural, White America, Sherman does not take a life course approach and, as is a classic problem for many researchers, she is an outsider (e.g., place, class, history) of the culture she studies. For instance, she begins the book describing the social history of the community she studies. She

said that many people in the community had deep roots, and it was common for some people to talk about Native American ancestors; this rootedness was a way of explaining why people stayed in the community despite the poor economy (pp. 41-46). Later, she talks about the fact that many families left the region with the demise of the timber industry, which made very poor families more visible in the community. The families that moved away were described by her participants as "good" families, because they worked (pp. 135-137). As an insider of a rural region where most people have strong ties to the region, I kept asking who these "good" families were that moved away? Did they, too, have deep roots in the community? Or were they relative newcomers who could easily pack up and leave in search of work elsewhere? If family is conceptualized in terms of extended kin networks as Sherman suggests (p. 45), and "family" is an important cultural moral discourse that tied people to the community, why did some families leave? Sherman's focus on nuclear families with children, perhaps revealing her own beliefs about and definitions of family, obscured the relationship between families who stayed and those who left.

This idea of *getting out* guides another important study on rural White culture in central Illinois. Family scholars MacTavish and Salamon (2006) investigated pathways of development among young people living in a rural trailer park. The authors describe the rural trailer park as a context of poverty, and want to understand how some youth are resilient, while others are not. MacTavish and Salamon found that those youth who adopt middle-class values and hobbies were on "flourishing" (p. 167) pathways of development and hence resilient, while those who were more rooted in place, and identified more with trailer park life, were on either "static" or "floundering" pathways (p. 167). Although MacTavish and Salamon work hard to resist pathologizing, for example focusing on how floundering youth have trouble in school, the

researchers said little to address why floundering youth did not identify with and adopt the middle-class values of townspeople living outside the trailer park (e.g., wearing expensive, "name-brand clothing," p. 170). Particularly with those youth whose developmental pathways were categorized as static, it seems presumptuous to imply that the life chances of these youth were more limited because they did not adopt middle-class cultural values of the teachers and researchers.

To be fair, in their implications section MacTavish and Salamon envision trailer park communities as potential sites of cultural richness, but the overall message is that in order to be resilient, one must value middle-class notions of success and emulate them. Moreover, as with Sherman's study, the question of extended kin networks goes unanswered; the presence of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins are virtually invisible in MacTavish and Salamon's study. If a strength of rural culture is embeddedness within supportive kin networks, it would be useful to understand how larger family processes beyond the nuclear family shape developmental pathways.

Mid-Level Processes: Relational Interaction

Though I began to describe family processes above, which may be more appropriate in this section, that literature mostly came from dated anthropological studies. Thus, it highlights cultural patterns which may be cohort related. I will use the next section, then, to discuss more contemporary discourses and ideas about close relationships.

Intimacy is a fuzzy concept about which there is much debate (Hook, Gerstein, Detterich, & Gridley, 2003; Walker & Thompson, 1983). Generally it is conceptualized as *feelings of closeness* with different pathways leading to intimacy. Psychologists and social psychologists typically conceptualize intimacy as a psychosocial process. For instance, Prager

and Roberts (2004) posit that it is important to understand intimacy as a combination of *intimate interaction* and *intimate relationships*. Interactional intimacy involves verbal, nonverbal, and sexual exchanges. Intimate interaction involves self-revealing behavior, positive involvement, and shared understandings. Moreover, intimate interactions provide the basic building blocks for relational intimacy—shared, accumulated understandings of the other—moderated by extensiveness of interactions and accurate perceptions of shared interactions. Interpreted through symbolic interactionist and life course perspectives, it is clear that significant others over the life course contribute to the self that is shared and changed by new intimate interactions. Likewise, feminist theory posits that intimate selves are also determined by cultural and social contexts.

A key social and cultural context for intimacy processes is gender. Gender itself has been widely argued in some feminist circles as a social process, or performance (e.g., Butler, 1990; Risman, 2004). Gender is a social process in that it is both performative and socially situated (Allen & Walker, 2009; De Reus et al., 2005; Jackson, 2007). Though gender is a social process, it is so partly through normative scripts about social location that provide interpretations of bodily experience. For example, Fehr (2004) outlined the gendered debate about pathways to intimacy: scholars agree that women rely on *self-disclosure* to develop intimate relationships. However, they disagree on how men experience intimacy (Fehr). Some say that men experience less capacity for intimacy because they do not self-disclose as much as women do, though men report that it is important to them. Others claim that men rely on *shared experiences* to develop and maintain intimacy in a relationship; indeed these scholars take the approach that women and men have separate but equal intimacy styles. Still others put forth that men use both self-disclosure and shared experiences as pathways to intimacy (Fehr; Hook et al., 2003). Using Jean Baker Miller's (1976) landmark text in feminist psychology, *Toward a Psychology of Women,* it

is useful to consider that these gendered ways of doing intimate relating should not be divorced from the context in which they occur. Miller, for instance, contends that women's psychological development is profoundly relational as a result of being part of a subordinate group (i.e., women). She says that, in developmental terms, men are encouraged to develop a sense of self disconnected from close others, whereas women are encouraged to be hypersensitive and aware of the needs of others so that they can one day be attentive wives and mothers. Thus, individual men and women acting through these discourses, and other discourses which may be contradictory, will likely vary in how they relate to close others.

Guided by a gender-difference debate, Fehr (2004) examined gendered pathways to intimacy in same sex friendships. Her studies showed that prototypes of intimate relationships determined how people measured their same-sex friendships. Relationship prototypes speak to interpersonal, gendered scripts. That is, cultural narratives about how the self should be in relationships leads to how people interpret their experiences as being intimate or not. Though Fehr does not discuss the politics of intimacy, from a feminist perspective, I posit that the scripts people use to interpret their experience are not benign discourses, but rather place people within power dynamics (Miller 1976; Stryker, 1987). In the context of how people "do" intimacy for example, the belief that women share talk and men share activities can be used to hide real power differentials that undermine intimacy in heterosexual relationships. A woman "sharing her feelings" might be describing how she wants her husband to take up more housework and child care. These issues are not just about talk. Rather they are politicized experiences that devalue wives' time, autonomy, and ultimately personhood (Doucet, 2001; Johnson & Johnson, 2008; Zipp, Prohaska, & Bemiller, 2004).

Moving back to social-psychological perspectives of intimacy, another important facet is that it is a process of incorporating the *other in self* (Aron, Mashek, & Aron, 2004), or *self-in-relation* (Miller, 1976; Surrey, 1991). In this model the resources, perspectives, and identities of significant others are to some degree incorporated into the conception of self. However, other scholars have warned of the dangers of the loss of self in the other, such as the development of depression in women when the "give and take" of intimate interaction between two people is unbalanced (Kaplan, 1991). Likewise, Prager and Roberts (2004) have pointed to the need for intimacy regulation. Intimacy regulation involves moving in and out of intimate interactions with a partner, from closeness to separateness. Two challenges of intimacy regulation are that each partners' needs for autonomy and closeness must be met; also regulation must allow for partners to protect themselves from the potential to be hurt in emotional relationships (Miller, 1976; Surrey, 1991). Similarly, although not feminist, Schnarch's (1991) intimacy paradigm—intimacy as a developmental task in adulthood—is centered on regulation. The *gridlock* is a key concept in Schnarch's developmental model: gridlock is when a couple becomes locked in a destructive pattern of relating. The gridlock signals that intimacy is breaking down because each partner has reached a crisis in self-development. Because of issues in their families of origin, former relationships, or beliefs about the body or sexuality, partners have reached a threshold in their ability to intimately relate. In order to move past this block, each person in the couple must resolve this crisis, this sexual crucible. Similar to regulation, the primary task of the sexual crucible is to self-soothe and differentiate from the other. What often prevents people from differentiating is what Schnarch calls the fusion-delusion. In this scenario, the need for intimacy, the need to be known and loved, has been replaced with a need for continual validation from

one's partner. Resolving the crucible means relying on and reconstructing the self independent of the other so that individuals have a self from which they may intimately relate.

Going back to self-construction from a symbolic interactionist perspective, it is important to remember that part of self-construction is discourse-in-practice (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Building on that, some feminists contend that because we live in a culture of multiple, competing, and often contradictory discourses, this can create problems in interpersonal relationships (Connidis, 2006). Moreover, some discourses are made more visible, and are more valued, than others. The evolutionary, gendered discourse about sex drive or desire, and its role in explaining problems in heterosexual relationships (Buss, 1994), is repeated ad nauseam in American media (e.g., men need sex all the time, but women just want to talk, or just want men's economic resources). It is a privileged, scientific discourse that silences other potential explanations of why men and women report different levels of sexual desire, though there is more within-gender variation than between-gender variation (e.g., Vohs & Baumeister, 2004).

For example, others using an evolutionary perspective have developed a model of sociosexual orientation. This model explains variation in desire without an uncritical reliance on gender stereotypes. "Sociosexuality refers to individual differences in willingness to engage in sexual relations without closeness, commitment, or other indicators of emotional bonding" (Simpson & Gangestad, 1992, p. 33). It is measured on a continuum from unrestricted to restricted on the sociosexual orientation inventory named for Kinsey's categorization of sexual expression (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953; Simpson, Wilson, & Winterheld, 2004). When thinking about this model in the context of self-construction, there are few positive discourses for people with sociosexual orientations on the ends of the continuums. Indeed, being too unrestricted, as well as too restricted, is routinely pathologized, especially among women.

When individuals are not able to reconcile dominant cultural narratives about sexuality with a positive sense of sexual selfhood, it could result in intrapsychic distress, and social isolation. For example, if an older, heterosexual man had a unrestricted orientation and could not find a partner willing to be intimate with him because he did not practice sexual monogamy, he may be subject to loneliness and feeling deeply misunderstood. In fact, he could have tried and failed over and over again through the course of his life to maintain committed relationships in order to live up to expectations of sexual fidelity. On the other hand, his most salient identity could be that he is a grandfather, and he does not feel isolated because of his "bad luck" with women. Thus, depending on social location, life course history, and other discourses used in self-construction, people will have different intimate expectations, opportunities, and experiences.

Understanding intimate relating, or relational interaction, through an integrative perspective, I theorize that cohort norms intersect with identity salience. For example, if, following the death of a spouse, people want to engage in new relationships, they must renegotiate their identity. The degree to which an individual is invested in an identity that followed a clear, conventional trajectory over the life course may influence whether or not they will form a new relationship. As an illustration, Stevens (2004) quotes a 69-year-old participant who discussed the difference between his relationship with his former spouse, whom he met when he was 22, and his current partner, whom he had recently met and planned to marry. He claimed that he and his current partner had to work out some "emotional issues" before they agreed to marry. He said they both valued their own space and independence, and that he in particular missed his dead spouse. Yet he and his new partner loved each other and wanted to make a commitment so they decided to live apart together. One way of reading this working out of emotional issues according to symbolic interactionism is that this man had to establish some

sort of congruency among his multiple selves. The decision of he and his partner to live apart

together allowed him to integrate these selves (Carr & Utz, 2004; Karlsson & Borell, 2004).

When people feel less freedom to engage in such less-traditional relationship forms, perhaps

because such forms are less scripted, marginalized, and seem more at risk for failure, some

people, particularly older women, may adopt a sense of self that precludes the desire to engage in

romantic relationships.

Most Proximal Processes: The Social Construction of Self

What is selfhood? Using an integrative theoretical framework—life course perspective,

symbolic interactionist, and feminist—I propose that the self is fluid, multiple, and contextual—

and essentially relational (Gergen, 2009; Miller, 1976). According to this framework, during

their life course, individuals use discursive practice (picking and choosing which parts of their

experience to acknowledge based on identity salience) to manage internalized discourses.

Scholars influenced by symbolic interactionism, in particular, have been able to conceptualize

the micro-processes of self-development. First, a symbolic interactionist perspective assumes

that a characteristic of being human is that people are self-aware. Additionally, as noted above,

scholars using symbolic interactionism assume that the self is produced through social

interaction (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993); that is, there is no *apriori* essential self. It is not that

biological processes are not also active, but that they are simultaneously, always already social.

A person might be born with a vagina and ovaries, for instance, but the female body is

interpreted to produce a "woman" who is expected to act in socially appropriate ways. From the

assumption that the self is always social, it then follows that the self must be continually self-

reflexive in order to make sense of on-going, possibly conflicting social interactions over the life

course.

Jackson (2007) uses the concept of self-surveillance from post-structural theories and combines it with symbolic interactionism's reflexive self in order to explain how self-reflexivity (discurvise practice) becomes the process though which individuals watch themselves in order to tell a congruent self-story. Likewise, Holstein and Gubrium (2000) also draw upon symbolic interactionism to discuss how people make sense of the multiple selves produced from various social interactions. For them the self is both subject and object, that is, the self experiences (subject) and interprets the experience (object). Understanding the difference between experience, and the social interpretation of experience, is key to unlocking the intimate and aging self. Sneed and Whitbourne (2005), using findings from empirical research in developmental psychology, propose that as people age they use both accommodative and assimilative coping strategies to deal with threats to salient identities. Identity assimilation "refers to the interpretation of identity-salient experiences in terms of previously established cognitive and affective schemas about the self" (Sneed & Whitbourne, p.382); whereas identity accommodation "is the process of changing identity in response to new experiences that are discrepant with existing self-schemas" (Sneed & Whitbourne, p.383). In their research, Sneed and Whitbourne have found that those people who use a mix of identity assimilation and identity accommodation have higher self esteem in late life than those who rely more on one strategy as opposed to the other. Though I will not operationalize these terms, I point to them to show that the ways in which researchers can conceptualize self-construction are multiple, and that regardless of discipline and academic training, several researchers have drawn similar conclusions about the self. That is, the self is continuously constructed across the life course as people interact with one another and encounter structural, cultural, and biological changes.

I want to emphasize one more point about the nature of self. We are simultaneously "a 'being-in-relationship'" and a person "being-*within*-relationship" (Miller, 1991, p. 21; emphasis added): that is, I posit that we are simultaneously *being* and *doing*. This concept is illustrated in my earlier work with Karen Roberto (McCann & Roberto, in press) in which we investigated how older rural women with chronic health conditions constructed their close relationships. We found that the older women built their self-concept (being) and constructed relationships (doing) with significant others by navigating a mix of structural (e.g., age-based policies), cultural (e.g., normative expectations regarding living arrangements), biological (e.g., health of self and others), and symbolic processes (e.g., interpersonal processes such as communication, and personal processes such as self-perceptions) which differentially made them more or less agentic in having relationships with others. For example, one woman was relatively privileged economically; she was well-educated and had never married or had children. She had the means to engage in healthy behaviors (e.g., could afford a nutritious diet & private trainer) and in expensive activities with friends and family members such as traveling. Looking at one process, here the structural, might lead one to see this woman as only privileged and highly agentic. However in hearing her larger story we saw that the intersection of other processes also made this woman feel somewhat challenged in constructing her relationships because she did not have normative scripts to follow. For example, when her best friend re-married and did not wish to travel with her as often this woman questioned her own expectations about the friendship. This woman spent considerable time, energy, and money facilitating relationships, and indicated that she sometimes struggled in trying to understand where she fit in other people's lives (e.g., when trying to explain the changes in her friendship). Thus we articulated a two-dimensional model of relational systems to explain how these women conceptualized themselves (being) and interacted

with others (doing), in both instances engaging all processes (e.g., biological, structural, cultural, and symbolic).

Agency. Miller's concept of being-within-relationship, or what I call *relational interaction*, the doing, demands a discussion of agency. Agency is the degree to which individuals can act on their desires within their socio-cultural context (Lloyd, Emery, & Klatt, 2009). Acknowledging the multiple constraints around choice, Ferree (2010) states: "Actors do not make truly free choices, but they do express individual agency through the cultural values, political projects, and personal intentions they embrace (or resist)," (p.7). I would add to this that the discourses to which people have access, and the discourses which are more or less valued in particular social contexts, further constrain people's choices. For example, another older woman in our study (McCann & Roberto, 2010) got divorced and consciously limited her social activities as a younger woman because she feared for her reputation as a single mother in a small community. She had internalized the discourse that being in an in-tact marriage to the biological father of her children was the correct way to be relationally, and had also internalized ideas about the potential social sanctions if she was not "careful" in her actions. In one sense she had a choice in the activities she took part in that no one was physically restraining her—she mentioned that as a younger woman all her free time outside of paid work was spent mothering—however, using discursive practice she felt that there might be serious social consequences if she did not actively seek to protect her reputation since she was a divorced mother.

Applying My Integrated Theoretical Framework

In sum, the intimate self is complex, unstable across time and in different contexts, yet has some degree of continuity as people construct their intimate selves through salient

discourses. As I move into the next sections of describing this research, I want to point out that although I used grounded theory methods to collect and analyze data, the guiding methodology emerged from my integrated theory as well as grounded theory. For example, consistent with all three theories, I conducted in-depth, life course history interviews with midlife women from Central Appalachia. Throughout analysis, I focus on the three levels of the intimate self, and in the presentation of findings I tell the women's collective story, while emphasizing variation and complexity among the women, and within their own life course experience. Thus, this integrative theory is also my methodology.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Overview

Recalling my research questions, understanding how working class midlife White women construct family and intimacy, I used a qualitative, grounded theory design. As many researchers have discussed, grounded theory methods and the three theories that I use are a natural fit for one another because of the attention paid to language and meaning at the analysis stage of grounded theory (Bengtson & Allen, 1993; Charmaz, 2006; LaRossa, 2005). In fact, the development of grounded theory methodology grew out of symbolic interactionist theory, in particular (Charmaz; Hallberg, 2006; LaRossa). In that way, my use of grounded theory is both as a guiding methodology and as particular analytic method. That is, similar to the idea of secondary data analysis in quantitative research, scholars can use grounded theory methods to analyze textual data collected via another methodology (e.g., mixed methods; Roberto & McCann, 2011). Given the theories I used to guide this study, I employed grounded theory methodology throughout the process.

Some researchers in the social sciences contend that a good qualitative research design should establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002) which I will define below. Although other scholars contend that these criteria are not congruent under an interpretive, or constructionist, paradigm (e.g., theories such as feminism and symbolic interactionism; Charmaz, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), I have chosen to use them as a guide in designing my study because they are widely recognized among the broader scientific community, and make sense to other scholars unfamiliar with qualitative research. Also, on a practical level, considering them at the design stage of this project meant

that I was mindful that eventually I would report the findings of this project and, thus, would be

in conversation with other scholars. These criteria provide a common language to discuss my

design decisions and findings with others. In that sense, they are congruent with the idea of

usefulness, another criteria embraced by those who operate from an interpretive paradigm. For

example, Charmaz describes an alternative four criteria for evaluating grounded theory studies:

credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness (pp. 182-183). Regardless of the paradigm

readers come from, I want this research to be useful to researchers working for and with

Appalachian populations—even if it is only one way in which they sensitize themselves to issues

in the region. I discuss these evaluative criteria below in relation to my research design.

Researchers can establish credibility through prolonged engagement and triangulation of

the data. Triangulation refers to using multiple "data sources and analytical perspectives"

(Patton, 2002, p.93) to enhance credibility. The criteria for credibility was met in this study by

conducting in-depth, intensive interviews. Researchers using intensive interviewing techniques

ask participants to both *describe* and *reflect* upon their experiences (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 25-27).

An example from one of my interviews is when I asked a participant to describe her mother. She

told me that her mother got married at 15-years-old, commenting, "Back then that was when the

girls actually had sense; nowadays they ain't got a lick of sense." Instead of glossing over this

comment and asking the participant to continue to describe her mother's life history, I followed

up on her remark, and asked the participant to tell me why she believed that girls today do not

have sense. Her response was a lengthy paragraph which revealed her perceptions about a

woman's duty, a man's duty, and the meaning of doing family. Importantly, her reflection also

hinted at an internal conflict that surfaced over and over again during the course of her interview.

Thus, using this technique I was able to ask the women to go beyond description, and to make

meaning or theorize about their own experience and beliefs. It did not take the place of my own theorizing, but rather gave me a deeper understanding of their meaning-making process as I undertook analysis.

Another way that I established credibility was by practicing reflexivity. As I am from the Appalachian region, and a scholar of the history of Appalachia, I take both an emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspective, enhancing the credibility of the research, and also addressing Charmaz's criteria of originality and resonance. As noted in the literature review, in the past most scholars of Appalachian studies have been outsiders to the region, or occasionally class-privileged insiders. Although I am becoming more and more middle-class and privileged due to my education, I grew up in upwardly mobile, yet very rural, working-class homes, and certainly experienced moments of poverty. My immediate families (i.e., my biological parents are divorced) were often on the edge financially, and though not "on Welfare," sometimes needed public assistance from programs such as WIC (provides financial support for buying nutritious food for Women, Infants, & Children), or the free and reduced-price school lunch program. Thus, I am, and even more so my parents are, very similar in terms of background to the women I interviewed. Finally, I triangulated the data through reading local news stories that focused on family and close relationships—using these cultural cues to lend credibility to my interpretation of salient discourses of participants. A reflexive piece exploring my emic and etic perspectives and an analysis of the Goodman County Daily conclude this chapter.

I established transferability, or the ability to make inferences about specific populations, through the use of a purposive, snowball sample. That is, rather than aiming to establish generalizability to larger populations of single, aging women, I investigated the experience of White, working class, single, aging women from Central Appalachia to theorize about the ways

in which they experience family and intimacy. I can transfer the theory I build while investigating other populations in Central Appalachia. Thus, this theory can act as a sensitizing concept, or "point of departure" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 17), on which other research can build, and even change. Dependable results can be established through the use of an audit trail. My audit trail includes documentation of the research process such as participant recruitment materials (Appendix A), the interview protocol materials (Appendix B), a description of saturation (Appendix C), my finalized coding scheme (Appendix D), and analytic memos (Appendix E). Finally, to meet the criteria for confirmability, I used, again, triangulation; also I included the parts of my audit trail mentioned above to make my research process more transparent to other researchers.

Next, I will begin describing my sample and data collection. Please note that I have changed the women's names, the name of the region from which the sample came, and some minor details of the women's stories to protect their privacy. Data presented in the sample demographic table [Table 1] were not changed as I felt these were potentially crucial details in understanding the women's experience. Heaven's Gate and Goodman County, West Virginia are the fictitious names of the rural community and county where I collected data.

Sampling Strategy

As described above, I used purposive sampling to recruit women from a rural, working-class community in the Appalachian region (N = 11). Eligibility criteria were that participants must be (a) between 50 and 64 years old, (b) single, (c) working class, (d) born and currently living in an Appalachian county. Local newspapers and widely posted fliers were used to advertise for participants [Appendix A]. Also, news of the study was spread word of mouth.

When potential participants emailed or called me I asked them to complete a demographic

questionnaire [Appendix B]. Sometimes participants completed the demographic questionnaire at

Table 1: Sample Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Current Marital Status	Employment Status	Place Status
Barb	63	Widowed	Home Maker	Husband's Family of Origin
Cathy	53	Divorced	Disabled	Her Family of Origin
Darla	57	Never Married	Disabled	Her Family of Origin
Eva	53	Legally Separated	Full Time Employed	Husband's Family of Origin
Gwen	64	Widowed	Retired	Her Family of Origin
Ivy	58	Never Married	Caregiver	Her Family of Origin
Jackie	60	Divorced	Retired	Her Family of Origin
Karla	57	Widowed	Disabled	Rents
Lisa	59	Widowed	Full Time Employed	Her Family of Origin
Mary	62	Divorced	Full Time Employed	Rents
Nancy	56	Widowed	Full Time Employed	Her Family of Origin

the beginning of their interview (after they signed the consent form); typically these were people

who were contacted by gatekeepers notifying potential participants of the study. If participants

were eligible and interested in doing an interview, I made arrangements to meet in a location

convenient for them, typically their home. Prior to the beginning of the interview I asked

participants to read and sign a consent form, making sure that I went over it point by point when

I gave it to them in case they were unable to read [Appendix B]. Then I used a semi-structured,

open-ended interview protocol [Appendix B] designed to elicit people to share their stories about

their close relationships. Participants were thanked for their time with a $20 Wal-mart gift card.

My sample was made up of single, working class midlife White women between the ages of 50 and 64 (I attempted to recruit both men and women, and did not exclude anyone on the basis of race). I focused on single people because, based on literature cited above, this group of people may be particularly intentional and reflective about their close relationships (McCann & Roberto, 2010). Because having a stable marriage and children is normative in White, rural Appalachian communities (Drake, 2001), I posit that those without such ties (lifelong, childfree singles), or disrupted ties (divorced and widowed people), will do family in ways that are more visible than, and in conversation with, those who are currently married.

In August 2009 I hung fliers at gas stations, grocery stores, and other places of business in the four Virginia counties I had proposed to recruit participants (i.e., Bland, Giles, Montgomery, and Tazewell) [AppendixA]. At that time, I also placed an ad in Bluefield Daily Telegraph which circulates in both Virginia and West Virginia (Bluefield, VA/WV is a border town), and in particular to residents in Bland, Giles, and Tazewell counties. Finally, I spread news of my study via word of mouth to people in the community and people at Virginia Tech who had connections in the local community. The ads asked people who were born between 1946 and 1955 and who were single to share their story for a study on family relationships.

I received no calls from the fliers. I received two calls from interested people who had seen the newspaper ad, both women; only one agreed to be interviewed. The other woman, who lived in West Virginia but was legally a resident of Virginia, said that a $20 gift card was not worth her time for a face-to-face interview. Using word of mouth, one man told a mutual acquaintance that he was interested, but he did not respond to a phone call or email. Upon further inquiry I discovered that he cohabited and considered himself married so I did not follow up with this contact beyond the initial phone call and email to which he did not respond. Additionally,

one woman was reportedly interested who was told about the study, but never called the number on the flier. Most people I asked to spread the word said they did not know any single people in the age range who were also life-long residents of the county and working class.

In September, with permission from my committee and IRB approval, I expanded the sampling area to any Appalachian county (as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission) and slightly expanded the age range to include anyone between the ages of 50 and 64. I continued to spread word about the study, including to contacts in three communities in West Virginia (Goodman County; along the I-64 corridor; Mercer County). Two of the contacts (from the I-64 corridor & in Mercer Co.) said they knew of single women, but not men, in their communities that they could inform about the study; but upon further inquiry the women they knew had college degrees and were employed in professional trades (teaching; higher levels of nursing).

The third West Virginia community, Heaven's Gate, in which I had contacts yielded six interviews during the first trip I made (September 2009). News about the study was spread via word of mouth at local stores and churches by community gatekeepers, such as store clerks. Typically gatekeepers are people in a community who are well-known and trusted by others in the community, or in a position of power, and thus have access to the populations who might be reluctant to respond to a flier (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Although the gatekeepers I contacted were not necessarily in positions of power within the community, they were well-known and had reputations of respectability within the community. I was introduced to these gatekeepers through mutual contacts, typically over the phone. With the help of some of these community members, the sample began to snowball. For example, one older store clerk who was well-known and liked in the community said she had two single friends who would be interested. I

interviewed one of her friends and the other did not wish to participate. However, the friend of the clerk whom I interviewed said she had a relative who lived nearby and she informed the relative about the study. I was able to interview her the next day. Other people were interested in participating in the study and I returned to interview them.

When I returned to Heaven's Gate (early October 2009), I decided to focus on recruiting men because of the seven interviews I had at that point, only one was with a man. Again, I went out into the community to the grocery stores and convenience marts to spread the word. I also went to the home of a community gatekeeper and asked him if he knew of anybody who would be interested. Most people I spoke with said that older, single men in their community had drug addictions or were long time alcoholics, and these contacts were reluctant to spread the word about the study to these single men. The gatekeeper I met with called several people to verify age and marital status. Most people he thought of were not eligible to participate, usually because they had remarried or were cohabitating. Only two men he called were eligible and willing to participate. One man who was called said that he would help out, but could not be reached afterward to schedule an interview. The gatekeeper suggested that the man probably did not want to say "no" but really did not want to participate. The other man who was called scheduled an interview, and we talked the next day. Notably, this interview was very short and the man was reluctant to share personal information. According to experienced qualitative researchers, my difficulties in reaching men is common because being interviewed, especially by a young woman, may be threatening to some men's masculine sense of self (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2003). Before I came back to Virginia, this same male gatekeeper helped me to create a list of women who might be eligible, to whom he could spread the word (some were women who had expressed interest in September).

When I came back to Virginia (October 2009) I focused my attention for the next two weeks on Floyd county, Virginia where I had a contact. My contact did not know of any single people in the age range, but suggested that I place an ad in a local newspaper, The Floyd Press, that she believed had a large readership among middle-aged and older people. The advertisement came out in the Floyd Press in mid-October and one woman called as a result of the advertisment. Although this woman had a college degree, during the screening interview she revealed that she was had lived in Floyd county almost her whole life, as had her family. I scheduled an interview with her for early November and discussed with my chair whether I should interview her in full given her education. We decided that given the complicated nature of "class," and given preliminary findings from the interviews I had already conducted regarding reasons women seek educational training, it might be worthwhile to interview this woman. I had no more interest from Floyd county. The newspaper ad ran Thursday through Sunday in the print edition and for one month in the on-line edition.

After meeting with my chair, we decided to concentrate on getting as many interviews as possible from Heaven's Gate, West Virginia women since I had difficulty recruiting participants of either gender in Virginia, and men in West Virginia. When I went back to Heaven's Gate in late October I interviewed an additional six women. Other women were identified but were ineligible (typically because they were too young or too old) or did not wish to participate. Of the 17 women in the West Virginia region who were identified as potential participants (and met eligibility criteria), 11 (65% response rate) were interviewed. Although I was focused on women from Heaven's Gate, I continued to give flyers to colleagues at Virginia Tech who had contacts with local community members in hopes of getting more Virginia women through February

2010. One flyer was hung at the Marriage and Family Therapy Center by a colleague. I received no interest in the study through these flyers or contacts.

I believe there are two primary reasons I was able to recruit a relatively high number of women from a particular West Virginia community. First, women are more likely to participate in research, especially in a research project that asks participants to reflect upon close, personal relationships (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2003). As part of my grounded theory approach, I added a question to the interview protocol where I asked women why they believed men were reluctant to participate in the study. All the women who were asked this question said they believed that men were not comfortable talking about personal matters. In addition to the gender factor, I have reason to believe that "place" mattered in my ability to recruit participants from West Virginia. Although I did not know personally the people I interviewed, they all knew my family name, as there are some well-known residents of the larger region to whom I am related. For instance, when I first sat down with some women they told me a short story about someone in my kin network. Even in Virginia, one of the women I interviewed told me that she had decided to participate when she saw my last name in the newspaper advertisement. She knew a McCann family in Bland County, Virginia, and thought that I might be kin to them. Because of these indicators, and research which says that rural Appalachian populations place a high value on kin networks (Batteau, 1980; Beaver, 1986; Bryant, 1983; Fitchen, 1981; Friedl, 1983; Jones, 1977), I believe that my embeddedness in the region (e.g., having a common last name) contributed to my ability to recruit participants in certain communities.

In total I interviewed 15 people. Because of limited cases of men (n = 2) and from women in Virginia (n = 2), I focused my analysis on the 11 women from West Virginia.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Analysis During Data Collection

I began analysis during data collection using theoretical sampling. Charmaz (2006) defines theoretical sampling in grounded theory as the process of "seeking pertinent data to develop your emerging theory" until theoretical categories are "saturated" with data and nothing new emerges in subsequent interviews (p. 96). I describe the process of saturation in detail in Appendix C, but will provide a general description here of my procedures during data collection.

As noted earlier, I asked the women to complete a demographic questionnaire and followed an interview schedule with open-ended questions (Appendix B) based on my research questions and sensitizing concepts from my theoretical perspective. With the interview schedule I asked participants to share their life course histories, focusing on close relationships. I asked participants first to describe their family lives as a child. Then, usually, I asked about the relationships with the person or people with whom they felt the closest. I followed this same pattern for adolescence, early adulthood, and so forth. I asked the women if their ideas about relationships, both familial and romantic, had changed over their lives. I also asked the women to reflect upon other meaningful parts of their lives in addition to relationships. Finally, I asked the women about their future expectations regarding romantic relationships. Although I asked these questions with all participants, the probes and follow-up questions changed somewhat as I developed a theory about family and intimacy in Appalachia.

Interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants, with the exception of one interview which took place in a gatekeeper's home because the participant did not want to disturb her daughter who worked night shifts and slept during the day. For the most part, the women lived by themselves or with a somewhat financially-dependent adult child; one woman was a caregiver for her parents and lived with them. The women all lived in rural locations,

though some residences were more rural than others—some lived in more diversely populated areas (i.e., neighbors were not part of their extended kin network), others lived on family property surrounded by the homes of immediate and extended kin. In four interviews family members came into the room while the women were talking, but these participants seemed no less or no more forthcoming in describing or reflecting upon their histories. Interestingly, in these four cases the younger visitor stayed inside the doorway until the woman had finished answering a question, and then explained the reason for their visit when the woman gave the younger person her attention. Occasionally a visitor stayed for a while to listen and once attempted to join the conversation.

In addition to adding new probes and follow up questions to my interview protocol, I began writing theoretical memos (Appendix E) to help guide my thinking and theory building. I wanted to keep an openness towards the data, so I chose to wait to begin coding, but used my memos to steer my theoretical sampling. Even when I added probes and follow up questions to the interview protocol, I was careful to ask the same questions as I did of the first women so that each interview helped me build theoretically or were confirmatory cases. I stopped interviewing when my theory development reached the point that I would need to go beyond the experience of single midlife women to produce new insights.

Data Analysis After Data Collection

When I reached saturation with the interviews (described in Appendix C), I began open coding using an iterative process. I began by reading through my process notes (i.e., short notes I made to myself after interviews and during transcription) and memos, then made a list of possible codes while I finished transcribing the interviews verbatim and verifying them. Next, I re-read all transcripts, jotting down more possible codes. I then typed up my notes and began

creating a coding scheme, organizing codes into seven categories: Family of Origin, Romantic Relationships, Perceptions of Social Life, Self-Perceptions, Religious Life, Talking Class, and Place. I coded all interviews, using *Atlas ti*, with this coding scheme. After coding, I looked at quotes under individual codes and combined some codes to make sure all quotes within a code were analytically similar: this is the constant comparative process. After combining some codes, and reflecting upon the data with my advisor, it became necessary to reorganize categories in order to streamline my coding scheme. For example, concerning codes, I had three codes that dealt with employment issues (family employment, work stories, and perceptions of work). I combined these employment-related codes, creating one code. I reorganized many categories into codes: I collapsed the four codes under the category Religious Life into one code, for instance. The final coding scheme [Appendix D] had three categories: Family of Origin (7 codes), Romantic Relationships (5 codes), and Social Structural (11 codes).

Next I looked at the most saturated and salient codes, and began to think of them in terms of process and structure. Some codes, such as "place," cut across processes, such as the code "describing childhood" or "storying mom." Seeking to understand how these codes fit together, I began to write the storyline of the women's experience, going back to my theoretical memos from the data collection phase. This storyline is the bulk of my findings presented in the next chapter, and was a simultaneous axial and selective coding process according to LaRossa's (2005) grounded theory method, or focused coding according to Charmaz (2006). Based on this storyline, particularly the variations of experience within the story, I present a theory of family and intimacy among working-class single women in Central Appalachia.

Triangulation

Though I draw on the 11 interviews with single midlife women from West Virginia in my presentation of the findings, I present two other sources of data to triangulate my findings. I chose the local newspaper because I assume it has the potential of being both a direct and indirect media influence. Since it is widely available in the community and region, and presumably widely read, I assume that the values therein are held by the women by some extent, or represent a context in which women with differing values experience their everyday lives. Most importantly however, reading this newspaper with an analytic eye helped me to be cognizant of the ways that seemingly insignificant comments from women might be data to be further explored (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 39-40). Similar, my reflexive piece at the end of this chapter helped to keep me aware of ways in which my own experiential data were enriching or blocking analytic insights.

Analysis of Local Newspaper

During every visit I made to Heaven's Gate in the fall of 2009, I read the local newspaper, The Goodman County Daily, to get a feel for what was happening in the community and surrounding areas. Additionally, I asked one of my contacts in Heaven's Gate who was a subscriber to the paper to save copies for me from May 2, 2010 through June 20, 2010. The following is a descriptive content analysis of themes I found in the paper. Given my familiarity with the paper I feel comfortable asserting that these themes I describe are common and repeating topics in the newspaper. For clarification, I focused my attention on special interest, historical, and lifestyle-types articles. Other more prominent stories or sections of the paper that I skimmed but did not analyze were pieces related to sports (typically local high schools), politics (locally, regionally, and nationally—often from an explicitly Republican Party viewpoint), crime

(especially drug-related arrests), and mining (typically stories about accidents and controversies over permits for mountain top removal strip-mining).

As a newspaper analysis is not the focus of this project, I do not provide a count of the themes. Instead, similar to the beginning coding strategy for the interviews, I kept process notes while I read through the newspapers and categorized the notes.

Theme 1: "Pioneering" days. In a variety of contexts, there were several stories referring to a pioneer lifestyle. Sometimes these stories were related to a literal "Pioneer Day" at a local school or church where members of those particular communities dressed in 19th century pioneer costumes and ate home-cooked food (i.e., overall jeans for men; bonnet and long skirt for women). Similar to these stories, there were a few articles on projects in the region related to preserving history. The most prominent story which ran over the course of a few days was where a 19th century cabin was being relocated to a state park so that it could be preserved.

Theme 2: Rebuilding community. Although I had forgotten this fact of life about living in southern West Virginia, the newspaper reminded me that flooding, and recovery from flooding, is one event that can be counted on to inspire people to help one another. Perhaps because it was springtime, a time of frequent flooding, there were several stories about flooding. Stories, and related pictures, largely described or showed the destruction caused by flood waters, or rebuilding and relief efforts. In particular pictures of rebuilding and relief efforts portrayed individuals or groups of people working, such as one series of pictures showing (primarily) men unloading trucks with supplies and arranging them nearby for distribution.

Theme 3: Coming home. Although less noticeable than other kinds of stories, there was a consistent theme related to the idea of coming home, or moving back to the region. One story was about a middle-age man who had moved to California when he graduated high school and

had recently decided to move back to Goodman County. He said that he had liked his life in

California, but in his later years wanted the slow pace and friendly spirit of people back home.

Similar to stories about Pioneer Days, some people wrote special columns about life while they

were growing up in West Virginia—very similar experiences to the childhoods my participants

described. One man who no longer lived in West Virginia, but missed home, was writing the

piece in honor of his mother for Mother's Day—conflating his childhood, his mother, and rural

West Virginia.

A comment on gender. After doing this analysis I realized that most of these stories

featured men. While reading the papers I did not notice an absence of women, so I reviewed the

newspapers to see if women were indeed absent and I had just failed to see it at first. They were

not. In fact, women were prominent in society pages in graduation announcements, as well as

with men in wedding and engagement announcements. They were also often featured in stories

about health (especially articles on women's health and reports about particular health care

facilities). Also, young women were prominent in the sports pages as many local schools have

competitive softball teams, and a few local young women have earned sports scholarships.

Women of all ages, especially mothers, were frequently the subject of special birthday wishes or

memorials purchased by family members.

"Outsider Within" Reflexivity

Since I first present the "story" of the women's experience, I will do my reflexive

practice in the form of my story, using my interview protocol as a guide. I decided to use my

interview protocol because I have tried to write my story in the past, but never know where to

begin. I cannot find the beginning of my story. Does it begin with my parents who married too

young? Does it begin with my grandparents? Perhaps the story of my mom's abusive father who

was himself abused and abandoned as a child? Or with my mom's mother who says she got

married at 12-years-old because she was traded for a shotgun? Or with my daddy's people who

were town folk and involved in politics and had aspirations for growing the local economy? Or

do I begin with early European immigrants, who fled from poverty and European civilization to

make a life in the western frontier, sometimes marrying one of the local Cherokee people? Or do

I begin with the mountains which hold me too tight and suffocate me with beauty? Since I do not

know where I begin, I will start simply by describing my family life when I was a child.

The first time that I learned to sacrifice everything for romantic love. I was the first

child to young parents. Mommy was 18 years old and daddy was 21 years old when I was born;

they had married two years earlier. Before daddy built our house when I was 4 years old, we

lived with his parents', upstairs in the attic space with the angled ceiling. At some point we

moved into a small trailer on my grandparents' property with my new baby brother, and then to

the new house down the road. My mommy's people were from a different county, but they had

moved around West Virginia and even to Detroit, so her daddy could find work. She met my

daddy during one of those movings. Her three sisters married around the same time: one sister

married my dad's brother; another sister married my dad's cousin; and the other sister married

some other local boy.

Like most people, I do not remember much from those days. I have foggy memories of

playing with my cousins who lived nearby, camping at Myrtle Beach, walking to the church

house, and watching my mommy clean her new house. My daddy was a coal miner at the time

and, like other men, worked long hours. He also was part of the volunteer fire department and

spent his free time there, out visiting family, or fishing. My parents spent time with another

couple, too, who had children one year older than me and my brother, respectively. The husband

in this couple was my dad's best friend and second cousin, and would soon become my step-father.

When I was 6-years-old, my mom and soon-to-be step-dad, took me, my brother, and my step-siblings to Canada. I will not go into all the reasons they went to Canada, but will say that they both felt trapped in bad marriages (my step-father's wife had left him), and fell in love with each other. They wanted to go someplace where they could start over and build a new family.

Coming home to a doubled life. My mom and step-dad did not stay in Canada, but moved back home. My dad had custody of my brother and me, and he soon married my step-mom, who was only 21 years old. After the drama, life went on. My dads went to work, and my moms did the dishes—although my step-mom went to work as well. More kids came along. My dad had custody of me and my brother (the one with whom I shared the same parents), but all in all I probably spent equal time in both homes. Moreover, I spent a lot of time with my paternal grandparents, and cousins, aunts, and uncles. I had a wide network of kinfolk who helped buffer the trauma of having a fractured nuclear family of origin. Also, the caring my step-parents demonstrated towards me and my siblings reduced my feelings of jealousy and abandonment. One of the most important things they showed me was understanding when my biological parents had disagreements or anger towards one another—which lessened over time. My step-parents ability to step outside the situation and see the larger picture helped me cope when my biological parents occasionally made unkind or hurtful comments about each other.

I was very fortunate in that all my parents made a concerted effort to be peaceful for the sake of the children. Even with relative peace, because I spent significant amounts of time in both households, I developed a doubled sense of self. At my dad's house I was the oldest child and experienced more conflict with those parents, usually because my dad was so strict. At my

mom's house, my step-sister was the oldest child and I was more of a middle child. I developed the ability to "go along to get along." Here, rather than overt conflict with my parents, I experienced painful longing for time with my mother who was usually engaged in care work for our many other family members, including aging relatives. I do not believe my parent-related issues were any different than what other children cope with, regardless of family structure; it is more that I often felt like a different person depending on where I was staying. It was only when I spent time in church, or with my grandparents and cousins, that I felt a sense of wholeness and integrated these experiences into my sense of self.

Learning home. One of the most painful experiences of my adult life has been struggling with feelings of emotional abandonment and punishment from my parents because I left home. Despite the best efforts of my parents, I never felt that I fit in with others in my family or home town. First, when my parents re-married other people, they set up new households. My mom moved into my step-dad's house; and my dad and step-mom built a new house together. This loss of place, I later realized, affected me deeply. Also, I liked to read and go to church when most kids my age were excited about developments in video games and the latest in popular music. To further isolate me from my peers, my parents could not afford to buy me clothes that the popular kids wore, and I was rarely allowed to spend time with friends who were not cousins. For all these reasons I took the first opportunity to leave my hometown. Soon after my high school graduation, I moved with an aunt who was near my age to a small town an hour north of my parents.

I took a job as a clerk in a grocery store, and was soon engaged to a young man who stopped in every evening to buy cigarettes. He and I married within 6 months of meeting each other, and 10 months later we separated because we fought continuously. One major problem

was that he quit working soon after we married and the resulting financial difficulties were very stressful. At one point I worked three jobs so that we could make the minimum payments on credit card debt he incurred before I met him. When we separated, he assumed I would move back home. He moved back in with his parents; I did not.

At this point I decided to take college classes and learn to drive. I soon met my second husband (less than one month after the separation from my first husband), and we too married 6 months after meeting each other. He was very nice, yet traditional, so I decided to quit school and worked part time as a clerk in an antique mall. About a year into this marriage I realized that I was very unhappy. Although I thought I could have the traditional kind of life my paternal grandparents embodied, I was miserable spending so much time at home. Between school and a full time sales job, my husband was usually busy. Also my mother was strangely unsupportive of this marriage. She rarely said anything negative, but more or less dropped out of my life. My second husband's family was upper middle class, and not originally from West Virginia. Mom noticed this, and that my husband was working towards a masters degree, and commented occasionally that I had married into a wealthy family. I believe that she felt that I was alienating myself from my family.

My mom's support changed when I left my second husband and moved to Blacksburg to pursue a romantic relationship with an old friend who was attending graduate school at Virginia Tech. Almost everyone in my life thought I was making a horribly wrong decision, especially my dad who was outraged by what he perceived as my immoral actions. My mother, who remembered the lack of support she felt when she left my dad, helped me move and gave me lots of emotional support, marking a change in our closeness.

The relationship I moved to Blacksburg to pursue quickly deteriorated, but this man's influence and appreciation of formal education convinced me to give school another try. After two failed marriages, I felt that a so-called traditional marital arrangement was not my fate and I had better learn to support myself financially. I fell in love with school, yet continued to feel at odds with my family-of-origin and hometown. For example, while I suffered a very long crisis of faith after taking some classes in religious studies, my parents became more dogmatically religious in their Christian faith. I felt a gulf widening between our worlds. Also, when I complained about school, usually about minor things such as having to write a paper on a topic I was not interested in, my parents actually encouraged me to quit school and move back home. My parents said that if I lived closer they could help me more and see me more. While I was sympathetic with their position—it was expensive for them to visit me—it was frustrating to feel that they did not take my educational pursuits seriously, especially when I was an undergraduate. To be fair, many young people back home begin college, but never finish.

All the while feeling disconnected from my family on many levels, I also had major difficulty establishing close relationships with new people in Blacksburg. First, I was a few years older and had far more life experience than most of my peers as an undergraduate. Secondly, most of my peers came from upper middle-class, suburban backgrounds. Their lifestyle seemed foreign to me. They usually only worked if they wanted "extra" money because their parents paid for their educational and basic living expenses. Also, my West Virginia accent was frequently commented upon, with several people telling me they had to "translate" my speech. While others thought it was funny and harmless to tease me about being from West Virginia, I ultimately experienced such comments as a practice in shaming. In addition to personal comments, I also experienced pain when people made "redneck" jokes, or made demeaning

comments about people who lived in southwest Virginia, a rural area similar to my hometown, or about uneducated people in general. Although no one said such things about me or my family in particular, these comments revealed deep class biases against working-class and rural people—and were often uttered by the very same people who claimed to value diversity. It was during my first years as a graduate student when I began reading feminist theory, especially Black feminist theory, that I could begin to make sense of these experiences. Because I grew up around overt racism, I assumed that people who talked positively about diversity, and were "politically correct," actually felt the way they spoke. Learning that people could have unintentional, unexamined prejudices helped me to understand both my own ambivalences towards my family-of-origin and my sense of self, and the prejudices of my well-meaning peers.

It was through these educational experiences, especially, that have helped me to make my way back home again. For the 11 years I have lived in Virginia I continued to visit my families several times a year, but I have only begun to feel at home in the last few years. It has been a gradual and on-going process of coming to understand myself and my family-of-origin. Evidence of the gradual nature of this process is that I have continued to make colossally bad choices in trying to find a romantic partner. Nevertheless, because of my growing acceptance and understanding of myself and family I am able to weather the storms when the promise of long-lasting love and companionship dies. As a way to heal I have committed myself to the serious study of love and intimacy, and it is partly out of this personal interest that this project arises.

The next chapters tell the story of my findings of the intensive interviews I conducted in West Virginia and presents theorizing regarding these women's desire for new romantic relationships in mid-life. As with my family-of-origin, I feel a special kinship with these women, yet feel an alienation from them as our paths have diverged from our common beginning.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present descriptive findings from which I will draw when I propose a

grounded theory in the concluding chapter. I have presented them as a kind of life story, rather

than by themes. Keeping in mind my theoretical frame, in much the same way I structured the

interview protocol, I begin with their earliest childhood experiences, then move to discussing

their romantic ties in adulthood, and end the story with a description of their current life. This

life story represents Personal Intimacy, the inner triangle. As mentioned in the last chapter,

throughout this descriptive analysis, I also call attention to the ways in which structural factors—

especially gender, class, and place—shaped the women's intimate life histories. These structural

factors represent Collective Intimacy, the outer triangle. Finally, congruent with positing that the

processes related to Relational Intimacy (i.e., middle triangle: interpersonal power relations,

family time, and significant others) emerge from the intersection of the more distal and proximal

processes, I present in the next chapter a theoretical model which explains the factors that single,

working class mid-life women in Central Appalachia use when making familial and intimacy

choices.

Describing Childhood: "Growing up, it was hard, but it was good."

Using retrospective language all the women compared their childhood with their

perception of contemporary life in rural Appalachia. The most prominent theme in these

accounts of childhood concerned living conditions. Almost all 11 participants (n = 9) spoke of

their childhood as being "full of love" and all said that their childhoods were full of work. Barb's

comment is typical of other women's general description of their childhood: "There was eight of

us in the family. We lived in a six room house. And it was kind of full, but it was full of love too,

you know. We enjoyed each other very much." The two women who did not use idealized

discourse to describe their childhood had particularly abusive fathers, and stories of abuse dominated portrayals of their childhood, which will be discussed below. Most women gave rich descriptions of a rural childhood mostly disconnected from a cash economy. Though they might have moved a few times during childhood because of their father's work, home was consistently family land that the families always returned to and where more than half (n = 7) of the women currently lived. Consistent with ethnographic data on rural Appalachia, these families depended heavily on sustenance farming to provide most of the families' resources (Eller, 1991).

"During The Week, The Work Came First."

The women described family life in terms of everyday life and of seasons and special time. This seasonal family time was strongly connected with family work. Jackie described special family times which she emulates in her own way:

Because it was just, it was just one big play at our house. There were chores to be done, yes. But when your chores were done, you entertained your friends. And at that time kids liked to get out and hike. Our mother was a great believer in outside fires, after dark. She'd build a bon fire and we might not have but just a few marshmellows, but you always had something to cook over that fire. And she had a big cast iron kettle and I remember her making that full of soup. And they would be so many kids there, you get a good bowl of soup but there was no seconds to go back for. And she always fed everybody. If you left our house hungry or thirsty, it was your fault. Because you was always offered something, *as we do now*. I always offer something to eat or drink to anybody that comes in. No matter who comes through. At that time there'd be a lot of people walking. They wasn't exactly homeless, but they were always on the move. And

no matter who it was, she would always feed them. And give them something to drink.

[*emphasis added*]

As is evident in Jackie's description, working the land was the dominant way families spent their time, and special family time was what happened after work was finished.

Similarly Barb said, "We worked during the day and then on the weekends, especially, we could get out and enjoy one another and have company and visit each other." Here the women described the ways in which class and place intersected to shape their fathers' employment, and their families' leisure time. Participants did not discuss vacations, and rarely mentioned outings that required discretionary money, rather, time spent not working around the home was used to maintain and strengthen relationships with extended kin. As did Jackie, Nancy said, "My mom and dad fed everybody that come in. My mom cooked three meals a day, ever day. They was always kids [siblings and cousins] around us all the time." Several women pointed out that things children today take for granted, such as store bought snacks and entertainment, were non-existent. Ivy noted, "back then there was no extra activities." Related, Karla who had moved away from her rural family during childhood, recalled visits where she noticed that her country cousins felt grateful to be treated to a soda pop after a long day's work weeding the family garden, echoing other women's description of store-bought food as a rare treat.

Perhaps because they worked so hard to produce food, family time was frequently connected with food ways. For example, Cathy and others described how their families always tried to move back to the homeplace in the spring if they had been gone working or for school so that they could plant their gardens. Early winter was a time remembered when families would come together to help each other slaughter hogs. Jackie said:

We had like a smoke house of a thing they called it. But's it mostly a storage area. And
she [mom] kept her canned stuff and meat. In the winter Daddy would butcher a hog.
And he would salt that down, the hams and shoulders, and cure that. So we called that the
smoke house.

Even though in their interviews the women often discussed the farms using language that
denoted that their fathers owned the property, they also revealed that mothers and children were
responsible for both inside and outside household labor. For instance, later Jackie continues:

Mommy done a lot of work outside. We had the wood fire places, wood and coal fire
places. We cooked on a wood cook stove. And I remember standing on a box, like a
wooden box, cooking, and the skillets were so heavy, the cast iron skillets were so heavy
I couldn't lift them. So I'd scoot them to a cool surface on the stove and take the food out.
And mom, daddy had cattle. He had hogs, he had mules. And daddy worked [in the
mines]; he'd leave before daylight and come in after dark. Well our mom done all that
[the farming]. She done that gardening, she took care of all the animals. She milked the
cow.

Jackie's descriptions of her mother's role in household labor was typical when the father's
worked for pay in that the women routinely took responsibility for running the family farm.

In addition to food ways, religious gatherings also contributed to special family time. One
type of religious gathering, generally referred to as *dinner on the ground*, is similar to an all day
church picnic. Many families use them as an opportunity to have a family reunion. Cathy
remembered her experience with one type of dinner on the ground, *decoration day*, a common
tradition in rural Appalachian culture similar to Memorial Day where people meet at their family
graveyard. She said:

When dad finally got his first vehicle then we could all get in and go to meeting on the

ground. And we used to go back here to the graveyard [pointing to the hill behind her

home]. Why we'd start out early in the morning. It didn't seem like that far back then, but

you ride out through there [now] and it's a long ways. I think it's about 10 mile. And

we'd make our own decorations, flowers and stuff, to put on the graves.

In addition to special occasions, regular attendance at church services were described by many

participants. For example, Darla said:

That's the only place we was allowed to go was to church when we was teenagers. If we

got the house cleaned up, and the clothes washed, floors mopped, we could go to church,

or Sunday School, which was very seldom. Unless it was a church social or something

like that, you went, but other than that you was home.

Another woman, Lisa, described how her family had prayer meetings at their family's home. As

shown, the lack of money shaped the women's childhood experiences. Also their dependent

position within the family meant that they had little autonomy in how they spent their time.

Though many women talked about the playing outdoors, where and with whom they spent their

time was extremely limited.

Family Dynamics

In terms of family structure, the women described family stability even under extremely

adverse conditions. Ivy's description of her family life was typical in that she emphasized family

stability in addition to relative poverty.

We grew up poor and there were five of us [children] in the family, and mom kept all of

us here underneath her wing as long as she could. My mom and dad come from a steady

environment. There was no divorces in between or anything. And they stayed together

and raised their kids and put us all through high school. My sisters went to business

school. Both of them are married. Both my brothers are married. We struggled... my dad

was a coal miner and we struggled financially, but we always had enough to survive.

Implicit in these types of descriptions (e.g., "steady environment") are comparisons with

contemporary culture where the women perceived that younger generations did not take marriage

seriously and had been spoiled by too much affluence. Jackie used this discourse, for instance, to

explain why her youngest daughter did not have a good work ethic, saying that she "spoilt her

rotten." This comparison was used too when women talked about divorce. Even among some

women who discussed parents who separated, they were quick to point out that their parents did

not divorce and continued to support one another. For instance, both Darla and Eva's parents

separated during the women's childhood, but lived next to one another and never became

involved with other people. They both noted that their parents routinely helped one another with

household labor.

Surprisingly, grandparent relationships did not play an idealized family role in the stories

for most participants. As noted, most participants lived on large tracts of family land and when I

asked about their grandparents, participants said they were around, but only one spoke of

fondness towards her grandparents. Even Jackie who talked about the food ways her

grandmothers taught her said, "They were just grandparents that grew up in a rough time,"

implying that life had hardened her grandparents. Two women, Cathy and Mary, told stories

about their grandparents being abusive or defending their abusive fathers' behavior. For instance,

Cathy said that she stuttered as a child, but that once her grandfather whipped her until she talked

without stuttering and she never has since. Lisa was an exception in that she spent a lot of time

and had a close, affectionate relationship with her maternal grandparents. Whether the others felt

affection for their grandparents or not, they were a part of family life and held symbolic importance to the women.

As I emphasized in the passage from Jackie above, women frequently prioritized "family" over any individual members. When I asked her if she was close to anyone in particular, for example, Barb said, "We kind of just all were together so no certain one. Just whoever was around, that's who we was with." Likewise Nancy said, "I guess I was close with all of them," pointing out that she was part of a large family that spent a lot of time together. Barb's comment is telling in that people might feel close with individuals because they spent time together, yet still primarily identify with the family as a whole. For instance, Cathy told stories about feeling close to this cousin because they walked to school together, or that cousin with whom she shared secrets, or her younger siblings because she helped mother them, or her aunts and uncles because they sat on the porch together and gossiped. Though she did not say, "I felt close to all of them," like some women, her many stories with varied family members demonstrated her deep connection to all of them. In the language of life course theory or symbolic interactionism, there were multiple linked lives and significant others whose significance rested on family identity rooted in place (Bryant, 1983). Thus I theorize that their sense of self was rooted in the family as a whole. This explains why another woman, Eva, was somewhat challenged in adulthood because she felt the pull of her family of origin who all lived in a rural Appalachian county out of state, but she felt obligated to live in the same community as her adult children whose father was a native to Heaven's Gate. Intimate ties, then, tended to be multiple, rather than focused on only one person in the family.

Storying Mom

If any one person was described as being an especially close person in childhood, it was almost always "mommy." Lisa was typical in her description of her mother:

Mother, she was our glue. That's her picture up there. […S]he loved her children and she loved her family. I have half brothers and sisters that are older than me. And mother's first husband [died when she was 32 and had four little children]. And she, her mom and dad moved down here, right here in 1949. And in 19 [participant pauses], after she moved down here, she met my dad. And they married in 1950. And then he built that house and they moved here. We were not allowed to fight when we were children. [S]he said, When I have children, I am not going to let them fight. They are not going to fuss and quarrel. And, buddy, we didn't. Oh my gosh, mother ruled. When she said your full name, Oh, yeah, you knew your time had come. When she said, Lisa Ann, oh my gosh, you knew you was in trouble. And we did mind. The boys were like that too. Boys minded just like we did. I mean, we minded mother.

Because mothers were responsible for so much family labor, all four women who were oldest daughters described themselves in terms of lieutenant mom, as "the baby sitter" and "the go between" emphasizing that their particular duties involved helping with childcare and cooking. It was common for women who were not the oldest to comment on how they had a special relationship with their oldest sisters. Eva said, "My older sister was there for me. Of course, she was, she's 5 years older than me so she'd do for me when my mom couldn't."

Several of the women had lost their mothers at the time of the interviews, which changed family dynamics somewhat. All but two women, Eva and Mary, mourned the loss of their mothers in family life. Cathy described a lost family ritual:

We always had what they called a hen session. All my sisters and my mom always got

together and set at the kitchen table and we'd talk our marital problems out. And it didn't

go no further but the kitchen table. Whatever you had to talk about, that's what we talked

about. It stayed in the family.

Conversely, Lisa mentioned that she had become closer to her father after her mother's death.

These kinds of maternal descriptions suggest that mothers in these families may act as mediators

of other family relationships.

Storying Dad

Only one woman, Gwen, said that she felt closer to her father in childhood than her

mother. I theorize that this was because, unlike other participants' fathers, this man included her

in his routines, much like mothers did in other families. She said, "He always had time for me."

Moreover, Gwen mentioned that she had never been interested in homemaking chores, and was

different from her mother and sisters in that respect. She described a special time with her dad:

One of my favorite things was on weekends when he would wake me up before dawn

when it was still frosty outside saying, come on let's go, so of course I'd get up and go.

And we'd take his dogs out and he'd take his gun out which he never fired, and we'd go

up in the hills and he let his dogs run and we'd spend the day together. And then when it

started getting dark he'd call his dogs in and we'd go home. And he had a blacksmith

[where he crafted iron tools and horseshoes] which I loved to go out in.

This woman was atypical in that she did not discuss her father's employment patterns. Most

discussions about fathers were discussions about their employment.

Frequently women began the stories of their childhood experience with descriptions of

their fathers' employment. For example, Darla said:

Dad, he worked for the timber [company] over in here. That was probably back in the

50s, late 50s. And they were 4 of us, well 5 of us [at the time], I think it was in the early

60s. And we didn't have what a lot of kids have. If we got something sweet, mom baked

it or cooked it or whatever. It wasn't running to the store cause there was no money, and

there was no food stamps. We raised what we canned and ate. What dad could afford.

Typically these stories were structured by their fathers' employment because where the family

lived was often related to the work he did. For example, as was common for rural Appalachian

families in the 1960s (Drake, 2001; Friedl, 1983) at one point Darla's family moved to Ohio for

work in the city. Likewise, Cathy's family did not move out of state, but she said that once the

schools consolidated, closing their one-room community school, her daddy would move them

out of the holler in the winter so that the children could go to school and he could find some

temporary work, and then he would move them back in the spring so that they could plant a

garden. "Home" was always the same place, but where these families lived might be somewhere

else close to their fathers' place of work.

Even for the two women who had abusive fathers, employment seems to have played a

key role. The two women who had abusive fathers were an exception to how the women storied

their childhood. These two women had qualitatively different accounts of their childhood and

neither idealized any part of their upbringing. These women's fathers were abusive in different

ways. Mary described her father as an alcoholic who did not work:

Well, my mom and dad got married at a really young age and there were six of us

children. And our dad worked as a coal miner for a little while and he got injured really

bad. And then he couldn't do coal mine work anymore. And then we were very poor,

very, very poor. And my dad was an alcoholic. We just had a rough life growing up. We

didn't get to do a lot of things that other kids got to do. Like going to ballgames or

carnivals that was at school, or anything like that. He was real strict on us.

Later Mary further described her father's abuse of the family:

He wasn't good to work. He was a salesman and he'd get drunk and leave with the

vehicles and then they'd go hunting him and fire him and hire him back and stuff. He was

very good when he was sober but when he was drunk it was a totally different person.

And he beat our mom really bad. And she's had to leave home. We all had to leave in the

middle of the night. We had to run. We slept in the church house floor down there on the

bank many a night. Dad couldn't find us. It was not a good life to live. We ran barefooted

in the snow.

As a result of this shared experience, Mary says that she and her siblings were and are very close

and that their mother "is [their] rock," with all the siblings being very involved in the mother's

caregiving.

When asked to describe her childhood Karla said, "[My mother] married my step-father

when I was two. I was two years old. I don't know what my really young life was, but when I

was 13 he started molesting me." She said that, like the other women, she was born in an

extended kin network. Different from other women, her mother was unwed, having gotten

pregnant with Karla as the result of a rape. Karla said that her mother was forced to have sex

when she went on a date while out of state visiting cousins. Karla's mother returned home. When

Karla was two her mother met a man and married him, moving to a more urban region of the

state where Karla spent most of her childhood. Of her mother Karla said:

I never did tell her because she was always sick. My little sister, she died when she was

three. And my mom never was the same after that. So I thought, Why would I tell her.

Because she's an uneducated woman. What would she do? That's all she's ever known was him. And then you know... So I never really told her anything about it.

Further, Karla noted that alcohol was a factor in their family life, saying:

And he would come home drunk and she'd say, Go to bed. You kids be quiet now and go to bed. Be real quiet. And I'm like, Mom, don't let him be mean to you. And he used to get down in the basement and say, I'm setting this house on fire. I'm going to blow this hot water tank up and kill you all. And I'm like, Mom! And she'd say, Shhh, he'll pass out, just be quiet. And I'm thinking, No. As I got older I thought, God, why did you stay with him.

Karla had a difficult time making friends as a child because of her step-father. She said:

I never really made friends that much because he moved us so many times. I mean we never stayed. We was probably in 3 to 4 different schools in a years time. And I hated school. I still have nightmares about school believe it or not. I think its where I hated it so bad because it seems like every time I turned around we'd have to be going to another school and be introduced you know. And he was an ole beat. He beat people out of money. He was a very good carpenter, I'll have to say that for him, as far as building houses and stuff. But you know how you get the first part of your money down, and you get the last part when you finished. He'd get the first part down then we'd skip town.

Variations in the Meaning of "Place" in Childhood

Karla is a special case in this study in that she is from the region, and currently lives there, but had a very different childhood experience. Thus, she is both an insider and outsider in the community. Though her very negative childhood experiences were only a piece of cumulative disadvantage, it was an important early experience that Karla struggled with even in

midlife as she experienced a religious conversion, or turning point, and felt that she needed to sincerely forgive her step-father. As I will discuss below, the women's religious beliefs were a source of strength for most women, including both Mary and Karla, but could also cause conflicts as the women attempted to construct their intimate selves and spiritual selves.

Interestingly, Karla visited her cousins in the country and she described scenes similar to other women in this study. She talked of being shocked that her cousins had to do heavy farm labor and that they did not have running water. She recalled:

Well, that's how they lived I guess, but ... And I remember they used to bath in these wash tubs. [My aunt would] pour the water for them and bath them, one right after another, and she told me one day, she said, You can get in next. And I was like, No way. I'm not getting in that tub of dirty water. She said, Well, I'm not boiling no more water. And I'm like, I'm not getting in there; I'll wash off. I'd rather wash off cause I couldn't imagine that. Cause we did have bath tubs and stuff. But they didn't have nothing like that.

In some ways similar to Karla, Mary's rootedness in a home place was disrupted when her father became unemployed and addicted to alcohol. Thus I posit that these two women did not experience an intergenerational transmission of sense of place.

Despite problems in her childhood, Cathy's comments sums up the feelings of many women, and illustrates how connection to "place" was also a protective discourse women used— a discourse valued and transmitted by their parents, and likely by others in their kin network. For example, with Cathy, although she describes moving frequently in childhood, she was "raised" in one place. She said:

When you're raised up in a rural area, back in the hollers, where it's all family, and you

raised your own food, your chickens, your... I mean, it was a good life. You didn't have

these automobiles and stuff to run up and down these roads. And these 4-wheelers trying

to run over top of you. And motor cycles. Everybody walked to everybody's house. If

somebody come down the road walking and you wasn't busy that day, you'd go to talking

to them and walking down the road. And the next thing you'd know you stop at

somebody else's house and start talking. It was a good life, a hard life, a really hard life,

but a good life. I enjoyed it. With all I been through I enjoyed it.

Similarly, when I asked Nancy to describe her life between high school and marriage, she said

that she lived with her brother out of state for four years, but it was never home. When I asked

her why she decided to move back after four years she said, "I never permanently moved. I just

went out to help him and then after they got bigger and I got tired of staying... I just headed back

home." It seems that a sense of place was developed in childhood, and depended on the salience

of place in the parents' identity.

Transitions to Adulthood

Birth order seemed to have some repercussions for how the women entered adulthood in

terms of education. Darla, an oldest daughter, explained why she quit school in the 8th grade:

"my mother and father they only had a 3rd grade education. So... and plus [mom] had [10] kids

and if anything happened I'd baby sit. Stay home and baby sit; get behind. And I turned 16, and I

was in 8th grade I think, and I quit." Cathy, who was also the oldest daughter in her family, told

a similar story. Both of these women got their GED, and took college-level vocational classes.

Two other women who were younger daughters, Ivy and Nancy, graduated from high school

when they were 16-years-old because they began their education going to the community schools with their older siblings when they were four.

Though some women told stories about school, rarely did they voluntarily talk about it or name it as a sight of facilitating important relationships. Three women quit school and no women married their high school sweetheart. In fact, most women were not allowed to date while in school, and when they did it was typically a young man a few years older who was introduced when the women were seniors in high school or a few years afterward. For example, Lisa met her husband when she was invited to a picnic while a senior in high school. She described how her parents moderated her social life.

> Lisa: But like I said, dating was considered, he came to the house. That was it. And my husband was eight years older than me and he would not go out with me until my mother and dad said it was ok, because he was so much older. He said, If they say I can't go out with you I won't cause you gotta make sure it's ok with them.
>
> Brandy: Did you ever have any conflicts with guys because […] your parents were strict, was that ever an issue?
>
> Lisa: Yes, it was with the one right before I met my husband. That's the reason he quit seeing me. That was a bad one. I liked him well. He wanted to marry me and all this stuff. And I was only 17. Goodness gracious. And thank God I didn't marry him; he's a real nothing. My mother and dad knew what they was doing on that one stick I'll tell you. I didn't understand at the time, but boy I do now. But they let me go wherever I wanted to go with my husband.

Lisa's experience was typical in that her parents were very strict. She was not typical in that she was not employed between high school and her first serious romantic relationship. For most

other women their first serious romantic relationship usually led to marriage. Thus, although

birth order may have affected women's educational experience to some extent, gendered

expectations regarding transitions to marriage became more salient as these working class, rural

women reached maturity.

Describing Romantic Relationships

Typically the women graduated high school, worked and dated their first husbands, then

got married and took up roles as wives and mothers. Of course, Ivy and Darla did not undergo

the transition to marriage. Ivy discovered before marriage that her long-term boyfriend was

unfaithful and she could not trust another man; Darla discovered that a health condition

prevented her from carrying a child, which sent her into a deep depression, as she wanted her

boyfriend at the time to find someone else who could give him a family. Thus, regardless of the

exact nature of their transition to marriage, or not, all the women used very traditional gendered

discourses to describe their romantic lives and expectations as young women.

"It was his duty to get out and work."

These gendered expectations about work and family life were evident among all

participants. Even those who worked for pay or sought education, framed their choices in terms

of normative gender discourses. For instance, Barb and her husband decided that she should get a

B.A. in education when a family they knew had to move out of state because the husband died

and the wife could not find work locally. Of her education Barb said, "I'm kind of from the old

school so you know. So I've got the degree. If I ever needed it I could use it. But it's worked out

that I didn't have to." For Barb and her husband, a mother's work was at home first, and only

outside the home if extreme circumstances, such as death, prevented a husband from providing

for the wife and children financially. Lisa, who was also widowed, used similar language to describe her entrance into paid work saying:

> My husband wasn't able to work anymore. He just wasn't able to work. He had TB of the bone as a child. And then TB came back in his lungs in the 70s and he just was not able to work anymore. So in 1982 I went to nursing school. And I had to learn to drive to go to school. To go to school you had to drive. I had never had no desire to drive. I'd drive dad's car up and down through this little town. This was a dirt road then. And we'd drive up and down through there. But to get, to say that I went for a learner's permit. No, never did. So it was a big beginning for me, 32[-years-old], and learning to drive. Going to school. And I've never worked either... never. Never worked.

When I asked her how her husband felt about her working for pay, Jackie was similar to Lisa in that she obtained permission from her husband, but that both members of the couple understood it was necessary for the family's financial well-being for the women to take work outside the home.

All of the women, even the two widowed women who had relatively calm marital lives, described gendered experiences in which women made sacrifices in order to keep domestic peace. Cathy described her first of a series of troubled marriages, emphasizing that she had been playing her gendered role appropriately:

> And I always got up, got breakfast, got him off to work, you know. I thought I had it going until I seen the true side of him and that's when things didn't go right he'd beat the heck out of you. And then you know you see people doing it all the time, cause you live, you're never out of the holler, you don't live out of the holler, you... that's the way you see people do stuff. So one night he got mad, let's see, he'd went to a bar and this guy come in

and hit him and broke his nose. And then he come home and beats me up. And that was

it, I didn't want to have anything else to do with him. So I called, I remember I told him

to leave and then I called my mom and them and filed for divorce papers and got a

divorce from him then. And then mom and them all wanted me to get back in with him.

Cathy remarried this man, and when he began beating her again, she left him for good.

Alcoholism was detrimental in other marriages as well. Similar to Cathy, Jackie, who was

divorced, was clear that she had kept her end of the gendered marital bargain. She said:

I was married 29 and a half years. Alcohol played a big part in it. I was always called the

good mom. I took my children to church and taught them what was right and what was

wrong. He wasn't a mean person by any standards. He was a hard worker. But he let this

alcohol overrule his life. I mean it took his life over completely. He got to where he

wouldn't work. The last three or four years we were together, he didn't work. And he

lived for Wednesday night and the weekends. He had his friends and I didn't approved of

the drinking, the gambling, and the places they went. So I didn't go.

Eventually Jackie's husband had an affair with another woman which precipitated a divorce. In

many ways, the overwhelming theme in these marriage stories are the women's perception of

met or failed gender expectations. Even among the women who had normative, satisfying

marriages, only rarely did they discuss romance, friendship, or intimacy with their partners,

rather they referred to the ways in which they and their husbands performed their gender roles

within particular marriages.

 "I don't know why women ever did knock it: That was a good life when you had a good

husband."

For the women who described conflicted perceptions of their experience in romantic relationships, they had to reconcile gendered scripts about the way marriage should be with their own experience with men. The women expressed a belief in a gendered marital bargain where women gave up power within the relationship in exchange for protection and financial support from men. Rather than critiquing the institution of marriage, or at least a traditional gender roles arrangement, these women used a discourse of choice to explain their marital histories—as opposed to their educational and work histories where they were more likely to discuss how relationships with others (e.g., father's or husband's employment) determined those experiences. Mary, whose father was an alcoholic and abusive, was especially illustrative of this discourse of choice when she said:

> You know, sometimes I feel like I want to go back to [the fact that my father was an alcoholic to explain why I've been married many times]. But in my heart, I feel like as we grow older we have choices we make and we can't blame it back on them. I mean I have my own mind and my own spirit and why blame daddy and mommy. You know, I still remember what we went through as children, but I'm grown; I'm an adult. Maybe it does stem back some way or the other, but I don't want to think that. I mean I just think we have choices to make and I've just made some bad choices. I've always wanted, I guess, better than what I grew up with and seems like when I got married, I always married the losers. People that didn't want anything. People that didn't care if they had anything and stuff. And I've always just wanted more. So I don't know.

Similar to theorizing that states that rural Appalachian people are highly individualistic, Mary and others resisted using discourses that connected individual choices with larger relational (e.g.,

familial) and structural (e.g., gender) systems to explain their problems. Rather, they relied on discourses of choice.

Likewise Jackie said, "The way mommy raised us, you spoiled your husbands." Recall that although Jackie claimed to have spoiled her husband, nevertheless, he abandoned their family, first with alcohol dependency, and then through relationships with other women. Similar to the way that Mary used a discourse of choice above, no women, including Jackie, used a discourse related to problems with the local economy (e.g., limited employment opportunities) or gender to explain their conflicted relationships. That is, no one discussed the fact that because they were women they had a subordinate position in their romantic relationships, or that both they and their husbands did stressful, and possibly dangerous or unsatisfying work, to help explain relational problems. The closest anyone came to critiquing gender relations, rather than the choices of individual men, was Darla when she reflected upon one of the reasons why she never married. She said: "I thought about getting married, but I've worked with men, and socialized with men, and went out with men. They got a poor attitude with women." Other women, and Darla too at different points in the interview, accounted for their "bad" men's behavior by employing a rhetoric of autonomy and choice. For them, the men in their life made poor decisions and did not hold up their end of the gendered marital bargain.

Sources of Meaning Developed in Adulthood

Two aspects of women's identity that were important sources of strength and meaning were mothering and spirituality. They were not uncomplicated areas for all women but they were consistent threads of discourse the women pulled on to describe meaningful parts of their adult life. Thus I argue that mothering and spirituality are key aspects of the women's Relational Intimacy which are facilitated by a strong sense of place.

Mothering

All of the participants, except the two never-married women, had their own biological children. And one woman, Jackie, had adopted another child when she discovered that she could have no more than one biological child. Most notably, the women who divorced when their children were young and were single mothers, described how important being a good mother was for their sense of self, despite having little autonomy, time, or money. Cathy said:

> When I first was married, [my husband] wouldn't take me down at mom's or dad's because he didn't want me to go around my family. So at Christmas I bought my son a red wagon; I put pillows in there and put him on it and would walk to dad's. That was about 6 miles. I always left early enough to get back home, to fix supper before he got in. So I was used to walking; I've walked all my life.… But I always made sure that my kids always had food on the table, and a roof over their head, and clothes on their backs. That was one thing that I learnt growing up that I took with me.… And I don't know how I done it, but I did it. I was only drawing $206 a month with my two kids. But I paid my rent, my electric, you know things I had to have out of that. And then I'd go to the store once a month.

Cathy also mentioned that she always kept a little garden to supplement their store bought food. Jackie told similar stories about being a single mother who had to provide as good a life as possible for her children, describing how she did everything possible to facilitate a close relationship between her daughters and ex-husband when his second wife refused to let the daughters visit her home.

Although Karla questioned her abilities as a responsible mother to her own children, more than once she described herself as too kindhearted. Thus, it is no surprise that Karla's

biggest mothering mistake was that she regretted that she ever permitted her son to live with his father, as in hindsight, she saw it as the first step towards his later troubles with drug addiction and repeated dealings with law enforcement. It was not that she was mean or neglectful, but she saw herself as being too permissive at times.

After finding out that her former partner had fathered a child with another woman, Eva said that it hurt her sense of self as a mother and affected how she felt about him. For a while after their separation she had held out hope that they would reunite. Then she found out that another woman was pregnant by him:

> But after that, I can't say that I don't care about his well being, but after that, well... it changed. She took something I wanted; cause I wanted more. Even though I came from a bigger family, I wanted more. He didn't want to; I wanted another one but he didn't want to. So, for him, the day after Christmas I had surgery not to have any more.

Although Eva reported conflicted relationships with her two adult children, she found meaning in her relationships with two women who were much younger than her, and for whom she served as a kind of mother. Conversely, Gwen reported being close to her two adult daughters and grandchildren, but also said that she enjoyed a close friendship with a young woman with whom she had worked. Describing how they became close Gwen said:

> We worked together for a long time and then she quit work and while I, I'm quite a few years older than her, and I was working with her when her mother died, and then she, a few years later her dad died, and she called me mom for a long time. And we're still close.

Barb had a similar experience where she volunteered at her grandchildren's elementary school saying that she was the experienced "mamaw" giving advice to the other, younger mothers who

also volunteered. Thus, consistent with Miller's (1976) feminist theorizing which posits that women are reared to experience meaning through mutually nurturing relationships, the women sometimes constructed meaningful relationships through mothering others, even if they were not biologically or legally their children.

Similarly, both Ivy and Darla who were never married and did not have children of their own, discussed feeling conflicted about not having their own children, and their efforts at mothering activity. Darla explained how she had a difficult time dealing with the pain of not being able to fulfill the normative mother role. She said:

> And that was a.... cause I always wanted kids, always.... everybody tells me I raised this bunch around here. But they ain't done that well. But... what am I saying.... I always wanted kids and I went through a bad, bad realization of not having kids. And I drank, took up smoking when I was 30. I never did smoke cigarettes until I was 30. [I guess I] needed a crutch. And, well, to make a long story short I ain't had kids.

Ivy, too, expressed some bitterness over "not paying her debt to society," because she chose not to get married and have children. She said others in the community sometimes acted as if she had not "paid her dues" as a woman. Nevertheless, as Darla mentions in the passage above, both these women mothered others in their kin networks though the children they "raised" were nieces and nephews. Ivy described heavy involvement in the lives of her nieces and nephews, saying that when they were younger she drove them to school, and that she takes every opportunity to "spoil" them, such as giving them gifts, something she feels permitted to do in her role as an aunt.

Spirituality and Conversion Experiences

A major turning point for more than half the women (n = 7) was a religious conversion experience in midlife, and one woman had a conversion experience as a teenager. Religious faith and a personal relationship with God was very important in these women's lives. Even for three of the women who did not describe a conversion experience, they said they were "believers." Jackie was especially descriptive about her conversion experience:

I'll tell you what. I didn't know what it was. I couldn't eat; I couldn't sleep; I was happy nowhere I went, content nowhere I went. And they were having revival at Little Goodman Branch Church, […and] somebody invited me to come to church and I went that night. And that preacher preached and I grabbed the back of the seat and I hung on for dear life. Well, the next night I went. When they made that altar call I was the first one down the aisle. And it was a good decision. It really was. It took some of the friends away, a couple, but they were, they were not bad people, but used language that I didn't appreciate. And didn't understand I had made [a change]. And that decision was the best decision I ever made, was to humble myself, and it made me a stronger, better person. It really does. Cause things don't get too bad to pray. And you're never alone. You always have someone to talk to and rely on.

This idea of talking to God, of "having a friend in Jesus," as the old hymn goes, was a source of comfort for many women.

Being an insider to Christian religious culture in Appalachia, and having experienced conversion as a teenager, I know that the uncomfortable feelings people describe before "going to the altar" and "getting saved" are called being "under conviction." And while this experience was very important and personal for the women who experienced it, the descriptive language that Jackie used is a common discourse used in Christian churches in the Appalachian region

(Sovine, 1983). Going through a process of conviction is almost a rite of passage for those who eventually become Christians or "join the church," though the process varies somewhat according to denomination.

This period of being "under conviction" explains how Appalachian religious practices are both emotional and rational. Though "getting saved" (praying at the altar), might be an intensely emotional experience for some, the period of conviction is usually the time when people feel the call of God and decide whether or not they are able to, as Eva put it, "walk the path," or make a full commitment to a Christian lifestyle. To an outsider, it may seem that this is only an emotional moment, especially when other Christians talk about services being "filled with spirit." Karla described such an emotional experience, but said that she had begun to make lifestyle changes and attend church services with various family members before "getting saved" during a revival. Moreover, Karla had recently had her conversion experience—as opposed to the other women who had their experiences earlier in life—and she talked about her ongoing struggle to live a Christian life which included developing a personal relationship with God, and making sense of the Bible.

Similar to Karla and Eva who talked about the challenges of leading a Christian life, Mary who had been a Christian many years, said that sometimes her faith waned, but that it was a part of being a Christian. She said that lately she had not been attending church like she should but said:

> Yeah I still pray to God; I still believe in God. I don't feel like I backslid on God. I just feel like I'm not where I need to be. And I think my Christianity and stuff, I just don't know how people live without it. But I think sometimes we get to where we question God

about things and I find myself doing it sometimes. And I know a lot of its probably pity, you know, but I guess we all do it.

Thus, a personal relationship with God was a key part of many women's identity.

Only one woman used a very different discourse to describe her religious sense of self. Gwen said:

I believe that if you are good in your heart and you treat people the way that you should and you're honest and sincere and, um, that you, I don't know what I'm trying to say, but I don't think you have to follow any specific religion. It's more important just to be a good person.

Her statements are counter to the discourse many in her community endorse. Even people such as Nancy who said that she was not saved, but that she knew she needed to be, generally shared the same belief system as the women who had undergone conversion experiences. Bringing in Sherman's (2009) articulation of "moral capital," I argue that Nancy was someone who had plenty of moral capital. She was widowed from her first and only husband; she was a respected mother; and she was known to be a good worker. The gatekeeper who introduced us repeatedly described her as "good person" who worked hard. Nevertheless, Nancy endorsed the prevailing Christian discourse which teaches that being a "good person" is not enough for salvation.

In sum, despite the women's history with close, romantic relationships, mothering and spirituality served as sources of strength for the women's sense of self in adulthood. As discussed below in the context of future projections, integration into their family of origin was another source of resilience for many women.

Romantic Forecasts

"They Don't Care Who They Sleep With"

The women followed different routes to a "single" status—never-married, widowed, and divorced—but all had, at best, ambivalent experiences with men in their lives. It is not surprising then that only one woman, Mary, said she was interested in finding a partner. Three other women, Karla, Gwen, and Eva, socialized with other women where they sometimes met men, but said they had no interest in getting remarried, and did not actively try to attract men as did their younger friends. The other seven women said they had no interest in finding a romantic partner, stating that they were satisfied with their family. When I asked her why she was not interested in dating, Lisa was typical when she explained:

> Well, for one thing, you know, as far as relationships with men, there's not any really any decent, good men anymore, you know. They all think women are alike. The single men that are out there, they don't think of women with morals and stuff. They just think they're wild and they're not! So I don't fool with them. I mean, they're just... like I say, I don't ever say "Never," I might meet somebody next week and might like them. But I've never asked the Lord for anybody.

When Ivy made a similar comment I asked her to elaborate. She said that men "want to more or less experience marriage before they actually get to know you." These women were not necessarily overtly negative about sexuality, but discussed their perceptions that men wanted to rush things sexually. Nancy said dating never crosses her mind as no one in her family dates after divorce or widowhood, and Gwen said she was not interested in dating because men her age "seem old."

Related, some women said they felt conflicted about dating because of their religious beliefs. The women had little expectation that they would find a "godly man." Eva explained why she broke up with one man she dated:

But the reason we split up was I had gotten back in to church and I told him that, you know, the reason I don't go to church now is that you don't live a double standard life. To me, sleeping with somebody's wrong and I know God forgives us but it's a sin to repeat a sin. So when I told him that I was in church we just split. And then I helped him out financially and he stuck me. And I ended up having to file bankruptcy back then.

Mary, who was bothered that she had been married multiple times said:

But one thing I always said I would never, ever live with anybody. And I guess I've always been a Christian for years and years and years... but I said the way I feel now, I think it's better to live with somebody then to just up and marry them.

Interestingly, seeing happy couples in church sometimes caused Karla to reflect on finding a partner. She said:

Sometimes when I'm at church I'm thinking, Everybody's setting there together. It would be nice to have somebody sitting beside me. But then I think of all the aggravation that goes with it. I mean, it would be nice to have somebody to go to dinner with or go on trips or do stuff with. But then you have to deal with the other part of it too, and it's really not even worth it to me. And then who knows, I might find a godly man. (laughs). And I might have a wonderful life, what's left, you know.

"If Someone Else Came Into the Picture it Could Change Things Drastically"

Although Karla was not actively seeking a romantic partner because she perceived it to be too messy and challenging to a godly life. She differed from Cathy who said she felt that the romance part of her life was over. Cathy explained how she coped with feelings of loneliness when they arose:

And all I have to do, I think about being lonely and you know sometimes cry and all that. Cause you know you ain't got nobody to hold you or nothing like that, and then I go over to [my brother's] house [where they constantly bicker and fight], or go to the other one's house, and nope, changed my mind. Don't have to worry about that no more.

Similarly, Barb reflected the sentiments of many women when she said:

I'm satisfied with being me, with who I am. And the life I have now, yeah. Uh, no, no one else. The way I feel right now, that's the way it would be. No, not a chance. But, things may change, you never know. But the way I feel now, no. It would be no one. Just me and the family, me, my kids, and grandkids. I'm happy that way.

Jackie explained that in addition to valuing her independent life where she had "good work and a good income," she had already found her one true love, her ex-husband. She said, "I think I haven't really dated, or wanted to date anybody, I knew there was nobody I could care for like I cared for him. And it wouldn't have been fair to anyone else to offer just part of your heart." When I asked her if there had ever been any possibility of she and her ex-husband reuniting she said: No, but "about 7 or 8 years before he [died], he quit drinking. And he become the person I knew. But he was never the person I could trust... I thought, 'You done it once, and you'll do it again.'"

"I Think of the Financial Reasons"

Like Jackie who noted that she had a good income and did not necessarily need a man, others commented on finances when discussing dating in midlife. Darla said, "If one came in there with a big rich pocket book" she might say yes, but like others, she said she was not looking and did not expect romance to find her. Similarly Eva explained how her long-time legal separation complicated her dating life, saying of her husband. "Well, he paid my car insurance,

that was part of the legal separation, and I'm on his health insurance. And my big thing was I

didn't really find anybody else I wanted." Later the issue of money came up again when talking

about finding a partner. She said:

> So still yet, to me, if I was to marry somebody else it would be for long term. Not just
>
> because I wanted a companion. It would be because I loved him and needed him and
>
> could spend the rest of my life with him happy. And then, sometimes too, with me, it's
>
> love, but at my age I feel that financially somebody should be there for me too. I mean
>
> even though I work, it's like his money's my money too.

Eva discussed money concerns in relation to dating more than other women, but she was

particularly financially vulnerable under the terms of her separation agreement. She was

basically homeless because she had agreed to give the house that she had lived in for years to her

husband since it was on his family property, and she felt that it would not be right for her to take

away his heritage. Moreover, if Eva remarried she stood to lose Social Security benefits

associated with her husband. Under federal law, women (widowed and divorced) who have been

married ten years or more to a male worker are entitled to a social security benefit based on his

contributions equivalent to the length of their marriage. If women remarry, they are not eligible

for these benefits as these benefits are based on a woman's relation to a man, rather than an

entitlement based on her labor in the home. Eva had worked for pay most of her adult life,

however, most of these jobs did not provide a so-called "family wage" associated with

traditionally masculine jobs, and she would not have comparable Social Security benefits as

would her ex-husband.

Though other women did not explicitly discuss money, those who did are consistent with

findings above that women's expectations for marriage include a man who can amply provide for

his family. I theorize that when the women were young, they simply followed the family structural pattern of their parents, endorsing traditional gender roles. Though the women still used that discourse in describing men, and problems of the younger generation, their financial vulnerability caused them to highlight these issues in later life using a discourse of risk.

Findings Summary

The women interviewed for this study began life in very similar circumstances. They were born in rural areas in the central Appalachian coalfields. As the women grew older their life courses began to diverge. For example, many of the women reported moving during childhood as their fathers tried to find work, but most of these families moved back to West Virginia. An exception was Karla who spent the majority of her childhood in an urban region when her mother got married and moved permanently. Despite these experiences with urban living, most women described a very rural childhood in which most modern conveniences such as indoor plumbing, paved highways, and supermarkets did not exist. For the most part, these women idealized their rural childhoods. During childhood, the women also experienced major changes in their lifestyle related to resources brought into the region because of the War on Poverty in the late 1960s and 1970s. Major highways were built, and people in the region became increasingly dependent on a cash economy.

Moreover, as the girls became women they had diverse educational and marital experiences. Two women were involved in serious dating relationships but never married nor had biological children. Other women married and divorced, sometimes many times. And still others remained married to one man until he died and were widows. Likewise, some women quit high school, but obtained their GED. Others finished high school, and some went to business or

technical schools. Many of the women worked for pay before they became mothers, if they became mothers.

At midlife the women were converging in their experiences. All of the women were without romantic partners, and most had no interest in pursuing a romantic relationship. Most were no longer in the workforce. Many had a religious conversion experience. In the next chapter I will theorize about the way in which a sense of place influences these women's romantic choices. Although there is much diversity of experience in terms of romantic relationships in adulthood, this does not seem to be the most salient factor determining whether or not the women were interested in developing new romantic relationships in midlife and beyond. Rather, as I will explain in the next chapter, the women's relationships with their families-of-origin, via their sense of connection to place, is more important than previous romantic experience.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

In this study I have investigated how single, working class, midlife White women in Central Appalachia describe their intimate selves using three research questions addressed below. I presented the "story" of these women's experiences in the findings section and now interpret their stories in the context of my research questions. Then I connected my findings back to theory and research on Appalachia, intimacy, and the self. I present a grounded theory about their desire for new romantic relationships in late life (Table 2), and propose a formal theory about intimacy and family life in Central Appalachia. Finally I discuss the practical implications and limitations of this research project, as well as directions for future research. Table 3 (Appendix F) shows how my purpose, research questions, coding scheme, findings, and theoretical concepts relate to one another.

Research Questions

What Discourses Do Single, Midlife, Working Class Women Use to "Story" Their Intimate Selves? How Do They Conceptualize Intimate Relationships?

Because I wanted to investigate the strengths and challenges of family life in Appalachia, I focused this study on single White women who did not have employment histories in middle-class occupations. I did not exclude anyone from participation in the study on the basis of gender or race category, and had hoped to be able to do within and between group analysis. However, because I could not recruit a larger, more diverse pool of participants, my analysis focused on White women from Heaven's Gate, West Virginia. My rationale in focusing on single midlife people to investigate family life was that aging people who are not currently partnered may be more intentional and reflective about their family life because they are unmarried. That is, I assumed that married people may automatically conceptualize "family" as nuclear family

(i.e., partner, biological children), whereas I assumed that single people would have a broader conceptualization of family. However, based on my findings, I would now theorize that people who are partnered and also highly integrated into their own family of origin or their partner's, will conceptualize their family and intimate relationships beyond their nuclear family.

Thus the discourses the women in this study used to conceptualize their intimate selves depended on the extent to which they were integrated into their families of origin. Keeping in mind my theoretical framework, and using Gergen's concept of confluent factors, I propose that integration into one's family of origin is multidimensional. Most important is the concept of place. Families of origin must be located in a particular place, family-owned land, where the family has been located for multiple generations. This concept of place is similar to, yet distinct from the ways in which some African American feminists use the concept of "homeplace." Collins (2000) theorizes that in the United States "home" represents family, and that "homes represent idealized, privatized spaces where members can feel at ease," (p. 161) yet in reality they are places of hierarchy (e.g., wives and children are subordinate to husbands and parents on the basis of gender and age categories, respectively, in most traditional families). bell hooks (2009) echoes this conceptualization when she writes about her experiences growing up in Appalachian Kentucky. One key theme of these conceptualizations of homeplace is that African Americans have had to develop a sense of homeplace in the context of slavery, and then institutional segregation. Obviously, White Appalachians do not share a history of slavery and discrimination that African Americans anywhere in the United States have experienced. In fact, in rural places such as Central Appalachia even the poorest White people were often taught that they were superior to African Americans (hooks, 2009) as was evidenced by the structure of the

early twentieth century coal towns where African Americans were segregated and lived in the poorest of the housing within the coal camps.

Bringing in the idea of intersectionality, the concept of place intersects with race and class in that both families and individuals need access to a family place, a place to call home. That is, not everyone who enjoys being in a particular place (e.g., the mountains) has the resources to access it, even among Whites. Gender also intersects with these other categories in a slightly different way: as highly integrated women got older they were less likely to seek out romantic relationships (i.e., additions to their family) because doing so required too much emotional and domestic work (Hochschild, 2003), reflecting hierarchy within the families where as wives they would be required to be subservient to their husbands (Collins, 2000). Because they were women, and valued discourses around traditional gender roles, pursuing new romantic relationships would require too much time and attention away from other family relationships. Gender did not seem to influence, one way or another, participants' access to family land in that they had their homes there. Thus, gender intersected with marital status and was relational as well as structural.

In addition to place, another important factor in conceptualizing integration into family of origin was the women's perception of their childhood experience. The women who had more conflicted and traumatic experiences in childhood tended to be less integrated into their families of origin and more interested in pursuing romantic relationships in later life. Conversely, those who had described their childhood with idealized discourse described having little or no openness towards romantic possibilities. Related, the close physical proximity of an extended kin network, which may or may not include children and grandchildren, was another factor in the women's rootedness in place and integration into their families of origin.

How Do Midlife Single Appalachian Women Negotiate Conflicting Narratives about Family, Intimacy, And Aging?

It was important to focus on the experiences of aging, midlife women because I wanted to capture people who had the greatest variety of experience—thus my focus on midlife Appalachian people who had experienced tremendous changes over the course of their lives. They were born (late 1940s to early 1960s) into a rural world where families depended on intermittent employment and farming for their livelihood; most people did not have indoor plumbing; and children attended one or two room community schools. As they came of age, resources from the War on Poverty, as well as from a boom in the coal mining industry, changed their world dramatically. Roads and new consolidated schools were built, and mass market culture slowly infiltrated the region. Thus I assumed that people who had come of age having to navigate these changes would have a unique viewpoint because they had experienced so many structural changes that influenced family life.

In regards to the question related to how midlife women navigated conflicting discourses, a common thread in the findings was the women's reliance on a discourse of individual choice. For example, concerning their relationship problems, most of the time the women blamed individual men with whom they were involved rather than institutionalized sexism, larger economic troubles, or even individual mental or physical health problems. For example, Mary talked about how her first husband's intermittent employment was responsible for their divorce, rather than economic policies or poor working conditions. Likewise, Jackie described her former husband's preference for drinking, rather than working, as the main contributing factor in their divorce, rather than his possible mental health problems. Karla struggled with conflicting discourses of individual agency and limitations due to health problems when exploring why her

mother did not stop her stepfather's sexual abuse. She said it was difficult for her to understand why her mother would not stand up to her stepfather, yet Karla typically ended these discussions by explaining that her mother suffered from mental and physical health problems.

In regards to how they saw themselves as aging women in the context of family and intimate relationships, generally the women did not see a conflict between aging and romance. Here their gender roles mattered more, especially for the women with the most normative experiences. For instance, those women who were widowed such as Nancy, Lisa, and Barb said they had little or no interest in finding a new romantic partner. Implicit in their reasons for not wanting a partner was that being a woman in a romantic relationship demanded emotional and domestic work (Hochschild, 2003) which would detract from other family obligations such as helping with grandchildren. Aging did not come up as an issue except that most women reported feeling wiser about relationships as they got older and had more experience in relationships with family members. Also, the women still mothered, but were developing more salient identities as grandmothers or great aunts rather than mothers. Those women whose children and grandchildren lived nearby said their children would not object if they wanted to date, but the women, themselves, felt that a new romantic relationship would be disruptive.

Also intersecting with gender was religiosity. All women who had dated or were dating talked about the conflict between their religious values and dating in the modern world. For Mary, negotiating the conflict meant that she got married over and over again, because she believed living together was a sin. Similarly, Eva said she was deeply religious, but did not "walk the walk" because it was impossible to both date and live a Christian life. In terms of their beliefs about gender, these women did not blame individual men, but rather employed discourses of gender difference (i.e., it is natural for men to want sex outside of marriage).

How Do Larger Cultural Narratives Intersect with the Social Locations of Aging Single Working Class Women to Shape Their Decision to Form New Romantic Relationships in Later Life?

The final research question that helped me understand how women experienced family life in rural Appalachia in the 21st century was specific to single women's desire for romantic, presumably sexual relationships. I found that the degree to which the women were integrated into their families of origin shaped their interest in dating. As described above those who were most integrated into their families were less interested in pursuing romantic possibilities. Also, religion mattered in that the women commonly commented that dating conflicted with their religious values of not having sex outside of marriage. Finally, gender and class were additional factors in that women had strong expectations regarding the earning potential of romantic partners. That is, they felt that in order to have a serious relationship, a man should be able to be a good provider.

Women who had experience with dating reported feeling that it was very difficult to find a single man with good economic prospects in their community. This finding is similar to findings in other research with young, working class and poor adults in the United States who delay or deny marriage for economic reasons (e.g., Cherlin, 2009; Huston & Melz, 2004). It is important to note, however, that although I found this pattern for midlife single women, other scholars studying Appalachian families using census data have not found that young, poor Appalachian people delay or deny marriage (e.g., Mather, 2004). I speculate that because the region has been a place of persistent poverty for decades, young people make their decision to marry on the basis of age and religious beliefs rather than economic prospects. The women I interviewed, however, stood to lose what economic security (e.g., former partners' retirement/

social security benefits) they had if they remarried. For those women highly integrated into their families of origin, the combination of a sense of place, economics, gender, and religion were all confluent factors. Conversely, young people may have less to loose. In Appalachian communities young couples may gain access to family resources when they marry, such as land to build a home and set up housekeeping. Thus, I conclude that place and age intersect to change the association of economics and the decision to marry in Central Appalachia.

Grounded Theories

Substantive Theory

Using the women's collective life story, I propose that the more integrated a woman was into her extended family of origin (or her former husband's), the less likely it was that she would seek out a new partnership (Table 2). Generally, most women reported receiving much

Table 2: Effect of Family of Origin on Romantic Potential in Later Life

	Theoretical Concepts			
Pseudonym	Marital Trajectories[ab]	Perception of Childhood	Sense of Place: Integration into Family of Origin	Desire for New Romantic Relationship
Nancy	M, W	Idealized	High	Never crossed my mind
Barb	M, W	Idealized	High	Unlikely
Lisa	M, W	Idealized	High	Unlikely
Jackie	D	Idealized	High	Unlikely
Cathy	D (x4)	Idealized	High	Unlikely
Ivy	NM	Idealized	High	Only if
Gwen	D, W	Idealized	High	Only if
Darla	NM	Mixed	High	Only if
Eva	D, S	Mixed	Low	Maybe
Karla	D (x2), W	Traumatic	Low	Maybe
Mary	D (x5)	Traumatic	Low	Hopeful

[a] M = Married; D = Divorced; NM = Never Married; S = Separated; W = Widowed
[b] All the women had been single for at least one year, and many had been single for decades.

fulfillment from family life rather than particular relationships, and that entering in a new relationship—with the possibility of becoming a wife again—would disrupt family life (Allen, 1994). Contrary to Giddens' (1992) conceptualization of pure relationships where people use relationships for personal development (e.g., "How can this relationship make me happy?"), from childhood throughout adulthood, most women I interviewed prioritized family as a whole rather than particular members. This finding is consistent with Allan's (2008) argument that despite the prevalence of individualistic discourses, most people prioritize relationships with family members over individualistic pursuits in their everyday lives. I found that age and place mattered in how the women prioritized family relationships in that all the women pursued romance and marriage possibilities as younger women, but they did this as a cultural expectation for young women rather than an individualistic pursuit. As they approached later life, they were re-prioritizing relationships with their families of origin as romantic relationships ended. With the exception of the never-married women, this finding is in contrast to Allen's (1994) findings with an older cohort of single, never married women who prioritized family of origin relationships throughout most of their lives.

In regards to relationships with individuals within their family, occasionally some women formed a strong attachment to one particular family member, however, the closeness of the relationship had more to do with the amount of time they spent with each other. This is demonstrated by the special relationship that some women, especially those who were oldest daughters, described having with their mothers. They spent a large share of time in their mothers' company and helped their mothers with household and farming duties, i.e., the mothers' responsibilities. Likewise, the few times women mentioned friendships, shared time and physical proximity were the factors that facilitated these relationships. When the person

moved, little effort was made to maintain those friendships. The women's relationships with their own children varied among the women, and among their children. Some relationships were more conflicted than others, and some adult children lived closer to their mothers than others. For instance, Lisa's own children were highly integrated into her family of origin. Two daughters, one of whom was a single mother who was engaged and the other was divorced, lived in Lisa's home, the home in which they all spent their childhood. Lisa's son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren lived next door on family property. Lisa had to work full time to make ends meet, but helped her children and grandchildren in any way she could. This is in contrast to Cathy, who was also highly integrated into her family of origin, yet her children were not when I interviewed her even though her daughter lived in the same community. According to Cathy's descriptions of her interactions with her son and daughter, both of her children were more integrated into their partners' families of origin.

Thus, families of procreation (i.e., children) were not particularly salient, rather place was a key ingredient in determinig integration into family-of-origin. That is, the women needed the physical proximity to family members and kin networks to maintain their sense of integration into their extended family of origin. The more geographic proximity, and more history in place, the more integrated the women were into their families of origin. This is congruent with my integrated theory of the intimate self (Figure 1), in that when people find meaning in and are rewarded for particular identities, they will be less motivated to do activities which challenge those identities. I theorize that women who had a stronger sense of place had more salient identities in the outer and middle levels of the intimate self. Conversely, for those who had a deeply conflicted sense of their family of origin (i.e., trauma), they were less invested in a kin-based intimate self, although they may feel emotionally close to particular family members.

Mary's story illustrates this concept. Mary reported a traumatic childhood, and she did not live within an extended kin network. Indeed, most of her siblings and their children lived out of state, as did her own children. Over the course of her adulthood, she also moved several times to find work out of state. She was the only participant who used consistently negative language to describe Heaven's Gate. The point is that although Mary reported loving her mother and other family members, she was not highly integrated into a place-based kin network, and therefore did not get intimate fulfillment from her family of origin. She drew on contemporary discourses and expectations of romantic love within marriage, and at times seemed to endorse a discourse of pure relationships, as Giddens proposed. I theorize that her most salient identities were more personal (inner triangle) than those with more salient collective and family identities because she did not have a strong place-base family identity.

The women who were highly integrated into their families of origin consistently used "we" language to answer questions about *her* childhood or family life. I posit then that the more integrated into their extended families of origin, the more likely that a sense of family identity shaped how these women experienced their intimate selves. It is not simply that these women felt emotionally close to their parents or siblings, but rather that they shared daily life with family members who lived in close proximity. For instance, Darla visited with siblings, nieces, and nephews on a daily basis as they stopped in on their way to or from work. Likewise, Jackie visited with her father who lived next door and saw other family members frequently throughout the week. In fact, during my interviews with most women family members dropped in or called. Sometimes it was to borrow an item from the kitchen; other times it was to ask a question; and sometimes it was just to see who was visiting (i.e., me). Thus, members of the family of origin were intimately involved in each other's everyday life because they shared a common connection

to family land. Also, "family" did not necessarily mean the nuclear family of origin (i.e., parents and siblings), but could include others in their kin network, such as in-laws, aunts, nieces, nephews, and cousins, as well as their own adult children.

Further, I posit that race, class and gender, in addition to place, matter in this model of family integration. First, race matters because in rural areas in Central Appalachia similar to Heaven's Gate, White families are most often the land owners. Thus, this sense of connection to family and place functions to keep many rural areas deeply racially segregated. Unless members of White land-owning families begin to marry others who are not White, it is likely that rural Central Appalachia will remain racially homogeneous (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010; hooks, 2009). Similarly, only those with a certain amount of family resources have access to family land. For example, although Cathy described much of her adult life as impoverished in an economic sense, she had at least some access to her extended family's resources. When she needed a place to stay after her divorce, she moved back to her childhood home set amongst her siblings and cousins. Similarly, Barb was able to depend on her deceased husband's family resources to help maintain her integration (she and two of her adult children lived on land that belongs to his extended family of origin). Karla, who had moved back to the community of her family of origin, but whose parents and grandparents were deceased, had no family resources on which to depend. Nevertheless, she was trying to build a sense of place. She reported choosing to live with others all of her adult life, but said that she currently lived alone. After becoming a Christian she decided that she needed to find her own place to live in order to escape the negative influences, namely illegal drugs, of her fictive families. Her daughter and grandchildren visited her daily, and she endeavored to create a new circle of close others who lived nearby. Karla reported some challenges—her lack of financial resources and the influence

of her previous lifestyle—but said she was happy with the choices she had made (e.g., becoming a Christian).

Finally, gender also intersected with place, race, and class in how the women experienced their intimate selves. Specifically, the women's gendered expectations meant that they were not interested in doing the emotional and domestic work it would take, as women, to be involved in a romantic relationships. Typically the men in their lives did not fulfill their role expectations, which also contributed to some women's lack of desire to find a new partnership in later life. Although many women discussed the conflict between their religious beliefs and dating (i.e., men's expectations regarding sex before marriage), it was not a salient factor in determining whether or not they wanted to pursue a romantic relationship in later life. That is, those who had the least interest were not necessarily the most religious. In fact, Mary who had the most interest in finding a romantic partner was one of the most religious of the women. I propose that although religion was an issue for the women, place and age were larger factors than religious beliefs.

Towards a Formal Theory of Intimacy and Family in Central Appalachia

Going beyond the women's expectations for romantic relationships, I examined the data holistically and theorized about the meaning of family. Consistent with Glaser and Strauss' (1967) articulation of formal theorizing, I also went beyond the data and used previous research to contextualize my findings. Particularly, my own theorizing (McCann & Roberto, in press) about the intimate ties of older rural women with chronic health conditions was useful. In that research we posited that the intimate self was two similar interlocking *relational systems*. Readers can use the triangle model of the intimate self (Figure 1) to see the two systems. The first system is interactional. Similar to my theorizing in chapter two, relational intimacy is the result of the interaction between collective intimacy (contextual forces) and personal intimacy

(inner characteristics). When two people interact, they create a system at the level of the middle triangle.

The second system that we articulated was that each individual has their own intimate system from which they relate. Here it is useful to conceptualize the triangle as layers of the self: (a) outer triangle, a person with particular social locations based on gender and race, for example; (b) middle triangle, a person who has relationships and belongs to social networks; (c) inner triangle, the innermost self, the bedrock of one's identity and typically shared with only a select few.

The formal theory I propose now develops the second system. I posit that the meaning of family is two-fold: *symbolic ties* and *selective ties*. Symbolic ties penetrate the outer and middle layers of the self. These ties include all kin, and anyone "like family." Symbolic ties are any combination of (a) physically close or distant and (b) emotionally close or distant—with the exception of a physically close and emotionally close relationship. Symbolic ties are about *family identity*. People feel close to those in their kin network because they are linked to others via a common family identity. I theorize that in Central Appalachia in particular, this family identity, or rootedness in place, is an important social location similar to gender or race. Thus, in the case of Mary or Karla, I argue that they have weaker symbolic ties to their families of origin than the other women because they have conflicted emotional ties to their families of origin.

I propose that selective ties in Central Appalachia are characterized by physical *and* emotional closeness; and these ties penetrate all three layers of the intimate self. They include relationships that meet all four of the following criteria to some degree: (a) physical proximity, (b) fulfillment of expected roles/duties, (c) shared special time (e.g., holidays, family traditions), and (d) warmth in the relationship. Individuals may or may not have the expectation that a

marriage partner would become a selective tie. For the White midlife women in rural Central Appalachia I interviewed, romantic relationships were not necessarily selective ties, but were always symbolic ties. To illustrate, Barb described her deceased husband in terms of a symbolic tie. He was family, he even fulfilled his duties, but she indicated that there was limited warmth and sharing in their relationship.

In conclusion, all the women had symbolic ties to families of origin; and women who were highly integrated had salient identities connected to their symbolic ties. That is, women who were highly integrated into a place-based kin network had strong family identities and found more meaning in their symbolic ties. The two women who were not highly integrated (Mary & Karla) had stronger salient identities connected to their selective ties. These women had symbolic ties, but because they did not have a place-based kin network, their family identities were not as strong as the other women.

Practical Implications

In terms of advancing research and practice on intimacy and family ties, this study confirms and forwards other work (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; McCann & Roberto, in press) which suggests that intimacy is a larger construct than interpersonal processes such as communication. Specifically I could find no other work that discusses place as a concept that matters in terms of the development of one's intimate self over the life course, although bell hooks (2009) talks about how her search for place and community has brought her back to Appalachia in later life. Related to the research on rural White Appalachian culture, this study calls attention to the strengths and challenges in these kinds of Appalachian families. For example, rather than how previous studies on families focused on problems (e.g., Fitchen, 1981), I suggest that some family patterns may at times be a strength and

other times a challenge to individuals within family systems. For example, Bryant (1983), Plaut (1983), and Duff (2005) refer to the importance of place in situating family identity. However, not all individuals in the region are deeply rooted to a place, and not necessarily well integrated into their families of origin. That is, some families are more privileged than others in terms of place (i.e., they have access to family land). On the other hand, this privilege may also present specific challenges in other facets of life. For example, women deeply rooted in a place may feel more obligated to provide care work to members of their kin network. In terms of health, some women who are well integrated may not feel that they are able to make changes to live a more healthy lifestyle if they must provide food for other family members who are not ready to make such lifestyle changes.

Thus, practitioners, such as family life educators, social workers, and health care professionals, working with rural Appalachian populations may want to consider the ways in which a sense of place operates with particular clients. Moving away from one's family of origin to address health or safety needs may not be a realistic option for those with a strong sense of place. For example, for those coping with family violence, practitioners could suggest that women needing safe shelter consider who in their family of origin might provide help such as a sympathetic aunt or cousin. Related, public awareness campaigns could give information to kin networks in how everyone can work to prevent and recover from episodes of family violence, similar to campus campaigns that raise awareness about how friends can help friends deal with violence in romantic relationships. Moreover, practitioners implementing health interventions should take seriously the likelihood that health promotion should be addressed at a family and cultural level, as well an individual level. As suggested above, a woman managing diabetes, who also does most of the family cooking, may not feel that she can impose dietary changes on the

rest of the family, or unilaterally change family traditions such as Sunday suppers characterized by fried and starchy foods.

Family life educators should consider the possibility that midlife single women, regardless of marital history, may benefit from educational interventions as all the women in the study were involved in intergenerational kinship networks—though some were larger and more rooted in the community than others. Thus, family life education taking place in Central Appalachia should use a broader conceptualization of family beyond that of young, married couples with small children, and address topics such as caring for aging relatives including parents, aunts, and uncles, or how to manage family resources when some family members are dealing with unemployment. Also, family life educators could address grandparent headed families, as some grandparents in the region must take on a parenting role when their adult children are incarcerated.

Limitations

This study has some important caveats and limitations. First, my research questions were limited in the extent to which they allowed me to investigate the strengths and challenges of midlife White women in Central Appalachia in the 21st century. My rationale for choosing aging single people was good as a first step in uncovering family processes in the region, but recruiting a more diverse sample in terms of age, racial and ethnic background, sexual orientation, and gender will help me build a more inclusive theory of family integration in rural Appalachia. My third research question was particularly problematic in that when I first began I wanted to understand if sexuality was important to the women. Because I did not have any direct questions in my interview protocol related to sexuality, I had to change this question to focus on romantic

relationships. The issue of sexuality did emerge in most interviews, typically in that women felt that men expected sex in a romantic relationship.

Another limitation of this research is that I conducted only one interview per person and relied on retrospective accounts of their childhood. Their perceptions regarding family life and romantic relationships may change over time. On the other hand, people's perceptions of their previous experience, specifically perceptions of their childhood and romantic relationships, were contributing factors in how they made meaning about family life and their expectations for the future (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 57).

Directions for Future Research

My next step in regards to this research is to investigate the ways in which people in midlife or later life of any marital status experience family life in Central Appalachia. I want to further investigate the relationships between place, integration into family of origin, and intimacy in particular. I am interested in whether or not those who have more conflicted relationships with their families of origin use more individualistic discourses that reflect the notion of the pure relationship, for example, to explain their lives. Also, based on my findings I want to ask participants to consciously and explicitly reflect on what a sense of place means to them (Allen, 2000).

Finally, I want to intentionally explore the influences of the War on Poverty more deeply in the next phase of this project. It was clear that changes stemming from the War on Poverty (1964) produced great transformations in the everyday lives of the women I interviewed. Before the War on Poverty, few people had automobiles or television, children walked to one- or two-room community schools, mothers grew most of the food, and seasonal practices such as canning vegetables or religious gatherings brought extended kin networks together. Hearing the women's

reflections on their lives before and after this cultural shift in the region, with its intended and unintended changes to their lives, helped me to think about the power of place in constructing their intimate and family experience.

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[Text on fliers and newspaper ads]

Research Participants Needed

If you are single, divorced, or widowed and are between the ages of 50 and 64, I would like to talk to you. Please consider sharing your story. Participation is confidential.

As a token of appreciation, those interviewed will receive a $20 gift card to Wal-Mart. For more information and to find out about eligibility, please contact Brandy McCann at bmccann@vt.edu or 540-231-6817. This research project is approved by the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Tech.

[Demographic Form: Designed for phone or email but was usually given in person.]

Dear [potential participant name]:

Thank you for your interest. I am a student at Virginia Tech and am conducting this study. My supervisor is Professor Katherine Allen in the Department of Human Development. If you have questions, or would like to verify this study, you may contact her at 540-231-6526.

In order for me to determine your eligibility I need for you to reply to this email and answer the following questions. Or you may answer these questions by phone if that is more convenient. My phone number is 540-231-6817.

By answering these questions you are implying consent. You do not have to answer any of these questions [and may hang up the phone at any time (if over the phone)].

Year you were born:

Marital status (married, divorced, always single, widowed):

Education level (What is the highest education level you've obtained? If you completed some college, or certificate program, please include that information.):

What county do you currently live in? For how many years have you lived in this county?

Gender (Male, Female):

Are you willing and able to participate in a 1 hour interview during the daytime (including weekends) sometime within the next 4 months?

Thank you for your time!
Brandy McCann
366 Wallace Hall
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, VA 24061

[Interview Consent Form]
Participant ID: _____

INFORMED CONSENT

Purpose of this study: The purpose of this study is to understand how single people think of family and close relationships.

Procedures: This interview will be audio-recorded and will take approximately 1 hour.

Risks: You will be asked to describe your family and other close relationships. Sometimes talking about close relationships makes people feel uncomfortable as they remember negative, or sometimes even happy, experiences. Please know that you are free to end the interview at any time, and that you may choose to skip questions if you do not wish to answer them. All information is confidential and your participation is voluntary.

Benefits: Taking part in this study means that you will be contributing to knowledge about human behavior.

Compensation: As a token of appreciation, you will be given a $20 gift card to Wal-Mart at the end of the interview.

Confidentiality: Your consent form will be kept in a locked cabinet in an office. Only those directly involved in the study will have access to your information. If you agree to participate, this interview will be recorded and transcribed. The recording and transcription text (the written version) will be kept on a password protected computer. When writing reports we will never use your real name, any name of others you may talk about, or any other identifying information.

Approval of Research: This project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact:

Brandy McCann   Dr. Katherine Allen   Dr. David Moore, IRB Chair
540-231-6817   540-231-6526   540-231-4991
bmccann@vt.edu   kallen@vt.edu   moored@vt.edu

Participants' Permission:
I have read and understand this document. By signing my name I am consenting to participate in this study:

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

[Interview Protocol]

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Research Questions:
1. What discourses do single, older, White working class baby boomers use to "story" their intimate selves? How do they conceptualize intimate relationships?
2. *In what ways do these adults who are transitioning into old age negotiate conflicting narratives about family, intimacy, and aging?*
3. *How do larger cultural narratives intersect with the social locations of aging single people to shape their decision to use (or not use) sexuality as an expression of intimacy?*

To Address Research Question #1:

As I said when we spoke on the phone, I'm interested in the family life of single people. My first question is a big question, but just take a few moments and start wherever you like.

1. Describe your family when you were a child.
    Probe: Were both your parents living? Were they married to each other? Who lived in your household?
    Probe: Were you close to any particular family member?
    Probe: Did you have friends or cousins that you played with as a child?
    Probe: Can you tell me a story about you and [close other(s)]?

2. How about when you were a teenager? Did these relationships change as you grew up?
    Probe: Can you tell me a story about you and [close other(s)]?

3. Was there anything else very important to you when you were young such as religion, books, nature, or a pet?
    Probe: If yes, in what ways was that important to you?

4. Now I am going to ask about yourself as an adult, for example between the ages of 18 and 50. What relationships have been most important during this time?
(Interviewer: Write down names and ask about each person.)
    Probe: In what ways do you think they have been important?
    Probe: Can you tell me a story about you and [close other(s)]?

5. Currently, who are the people you are closest with?
    Probe: What makes these relationships special?
    Probe: Can you tell me a story about you and [close other(s)]?

To Address Research Question #2
6. Now I will switch directions a bit and ask you about what it means to be getting older. In what way(s) do you think your ideas or beliefs about relationships have changed as you get older?

Probe: Sometimes people say they are more mature about relationships because of past experience. What do you think about that?
Probe: Can you tell me about a relationship that has changed as you grew older?
Probe: What does getting older mean to you?

To Address Research Question #3.
7. Tell me about your interest in finding a romantic partner? Or not?
Probe: Under what circumstances would you be willing to date?
Probe: How would your family and friends react if you started dating?
Probe: If you wanted to meet someone, where would you go?

Developing Theoretical Saturation

I include this description of the way in which I used interviews for theory development as part of my audit trail, rather than in the methods section, because details provided here discuss findings and conclusions. Rather than making this a discussion of findings and conclusions, I wished to include it as an example of my analytic process during data collection, consistent with Charmaz's (2006) description of theoretical sampling.

The first interview with a rural Virginia woman, which I used as a pilot interview, revealed that in addition to focusing on specific close others, this woman discussed her identity in terms of family. She often used the term "we" when responding to questions specifically about herself. Several times she said that family was the most important part of her life and that she had only worked in places where there was a family-like atmosphere. For instance, she was a nurse and explained why she took a new job by saying that the transient nature of the town where she first worked meant that no one stayed on the job for very long. Therefore, she said she was dissatisfied with the job because it was impossible to get a sense of family established with other co-workers. She stayed at her second job for many years, until she was disabled, because she and her co-workers had a formed a little family there. Perhaps not surprisingly she met the one romantic partner in life at her job.

Since I was unable to recruit other Virginia women at that time I used some insights from this interview to sensitize me to issues that might come up when I interviewed women in rural West Virginia. Again, with the first WV interview, this woman said there were no specific close others in her life, but rather she had a sense of closeness to her family in general—saying she had "always been family-oriented," from childhood, through marriage, and in her current life. Thus she described her relationship with her deceased husband as being "old fashioned" in terms of

gender roles and that they loved each other but were not particularly close emotionally. In her own description of her life she said she had lived a "pretty boring" life, meaning that she had not done anything out of the ordinary in terms of the normative expectations of her community. That is, she married as a young woman, had children, was a stay-at-home mother, and was a caregiver for her parents and husband when they were dying.

I began to wonder how women with non-normative histories experienced intimacy and a sense of family. The next several women who agreed to participate had a variety of experiences to share. Again, these women focused on family as a unit rather than individuals as they told the narratives of their lives.

As this theme of the salience of a sense of family emerged, I began to wonder what is "family" to these women. Initial interviews suggested that family was home, or place, and mother, or "mommy." Mothers overwhelmingly were the face of family and home life. Family was, for the most part, the people who lived at "home," the place where they were reared as children. Sometimes not everyone in a woman's family lived at "home" in close geographic proximity, and the women worked at those relationships, but acknowledged that they were not as close emotionally as they would like to be because they were not close physically. Some women with younger family members living out of state especially struggled to make sense of close others moving away from home, and it was common for the women to ask about my own history as they theorized about younger people moving away.

Then I began to wonder for whom is this version of family—associated with place and mother—not true. Two of the last four interviews were with women who endorsed more "mainstream" notions of family and intimacy (e.g., the assumption that close relationships have a voluntary component), and both these women had experienced trauma as children, suggesting

that more contemporary discourses may be used in situations where midlife women do not have a strong, positive sense of place.

Concurrent with this investigation of the meaning of biological family, I was also interested in the ways in which these women's romantic partners fit into "family," especially given that most of the women consistently expressed no interest in having a romantic partner or dating in their future. First, as will be discussed in the findings, men were categorized as good men or bad men. Good men worked and provided for their families; bad men did not work or provide and added to mothers' already heavy burden. Second, with the exception of sons, individual men were seldom a source of intimacy for the women. Thus, I conclude that intimate relations become increasingly homosocial (i.e., emotionally close ties with those of the same gender) as women get older.

Final Open Coding Scheme

100 Family
    101 Describing childhood (Idealizing young family life; childhood stories; childhood work)
    102 Prioritizing family rather than individual members
    103 Seasonal family time (holidays; food traditions)
    104 Storying mom (mom's family history; employment; mourning loss of mother)
    105 Storying dad (dad's family history; employment; dad's personality)
    106 Family dynamics
    107 The other side of family life (drinking in the family; family violence; sexual abuse)

200 Romantic Relationships
    201 Describing romantic relationship (the story; bargaining with a partner)
    202 Breaking up (perceptions about relationship dissolution; difficulties; staying friends)
    203 Romantic forecasts (speculation about future; defining desirable partner; loneliness)
    204 Perceptions of marriage (their own marriage[s]; beliefs about committed relationships)
    205 Perceptions of men (beliefs about men)

300 Social Structural and More Distal Processes
    301 Defining friendship (describing best friend; qualities that make a good friend; problems)
    302 Social support (getting and needing help)
    303 School life (meeting new people; continuity with family; changes in structure)
    304 Employment
    305 Turning points (stories of pivotal life moments; evaluations)
    306 Gender
    307 Health (descriptions of perceptions of their own health)
    308 Getting older (about self; changes in the world or community)
    309 Spiritual life (finding God; the social aspect; church roles; fatalism; beliefs)
    310 Talking class
    311 Place (time spent in place; family history as relates to place; rural life)

Example of Two Memos

Reflexive Memo

Because of my background, I am afraid that I will emphasize the experience of women with whom I more strongly identify. In fact, I often catch myself thinking of one participant in particular when I am theorizing, using her as the group representative. For instance, if I have an idea, hunch, or intuition about the meaning or interpretation of a theme, I think of how she might respond to my idea. I catch myself having little conversations with her in my head.

Like me this woman has been married multiple times, and has been in abusive relationships. She was deeply rooted in place and, though she lived alone, she was surrounded by her kin network, as well as her flower and vegetable gardens. Chickens, cats and dogs roamed her fenced yard. She told me that she quit high school and that she could not read nor write well, she often struggled to find words to express her ideas. Moreover, she said more than once that she would love to write, but did not feel that she could. She discussed this part of her life matter-of-factly, and did not express shame, but desire for the ability to write. This woman was confident in her ability to tell stories, to narrate her family and community's past, as well as theorize about its problems, but words and discourse sometimes failed her by limiting what she was able to express.

Though she is my mother's age, I can imagine that had I stayed home, living near or with my parents, I could have a life even more similar to hers. I know the feeling of frustration quite well, the frustration of being unable to find the right words. And in her regretful tone about her lack of education, and therefore her ability to write her stories, I experience cathartic relief that I have somehow, by some grace and series of fortunate events, been gifted with education. Also, I envy this woman who never really left home. As I grow older my desire for homeplace grows

stronger, but I feel my educational achievements mean that I cannot go home again. Education breeds discontent. I also envy her confidence and ease in her body; she spoke confidently of her own attractiveness. Though I have never had body image issues, I worry that I will eventually internalize White, middle-class conventions of beauty (e.g., looking young and being thin) as I move more and more into middle-class America.

On the one hand, this identification and my imaginary conversations with this participant helps me to keep my ideas grounded in the data. I use her experience as initial confirmation of ideas. Sometimes I hear her laughing, gently telling me I am wrong about some hunch. On the other hand, I have found that I need to more often look at cases which I found less interesting or with participants with whom I had less in common.

For this reason I have decided to use *the intensity matrix* (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002) to foreground the saturation of themes. As I develop this theory of family of origin integration and intimacy, I can also use the matrix to look at diversity within this group. A second method I am using to combat this over-dependence on the stories of participants with whom I more strongly identity is by taking out my list of pseudonyms with their basic stories and checking my hunches and ideas against each woman's experience. I take notes when I do this and these notes help me to construct my intensity matrix and theory development.

Analytic Memo

I keeping running into this idea that the women talk about having to put in a lot of time and effort into romantic relationships—being with a man requires a lot of work. This is related to feminist theorizing on women's work, particularly the division of labor within the household and emotional work, that is, that women are responsible for the psycho-emotional maintenance of heterosexual relationships. Generally, the women expected to do this work, and embraced it when they were younger. However, this acceptance changes as they get older. They were idealistic when they were young, but have found other ways to do satisfying emotional family work as older women. This allows them to set boundaries with close others, using their authority as mothers and grandmothers, or their differentiation as siblings or cousins. By not seeking out a romantic relationship, they can still endorse traditional gender norms, without having to do all the work that would be required if they were involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship. They believe that if only individual men had "done their part" then things would be different. Interestingly, for the widowed women who had "good" husbands, their interviews do not reveal more explanation: it is not different. Even more so for the women who were widowed, it is as if they had not contemplated upon the fact that they were single, i.e., available, women. In fact, the last widowed woman I spoke with said she had never even thought about finding a new partner, saying that her siblings never remarried, and it never occurred to her as a possibility. Are "good" husbands integrated into the family of origin to such a degree that they become family more so than a romantic partner?

Purpose	Research Questions	Interview Questions	Findings (derived from salient codes)		Theoretical Concepts: Relational Intimacy
			Personal Intimacy Codes	Collective Intimacy Codes	
To investigate the strengths and challenges of family life in Central Appalachia.	What discourses do single, midlife, working class women use to "story" their intimate selves? How do they conceptualize intimate relationships?	Describe your family when you were a child.	All family codes (100)	Place; Gender; Employment (300)	Perception of childhood
		Did these relationships change as you grew up?			
		Was there anything else very important to you when you were young such as religion, etc.?			
		What relationships have been most important during adulthood?			
		Currently, who are the people you are closest with?			
To understand how people living in Central Appalachia (so-called transitional culture) experience family life in the 21st century.	In what ways might those who are transitioning into old age negotiate conflicting narratives about family, intimacy, and aging?	In what way(s) do you think your ideas or beliefs about relationships have changed as you get older?	All Romantic Relationships Codes (200)	Getting Older (300)	Sense of place
*specific to single women	*How do cultural narratives intersect with the social locations of single, working class women to shape their decision to form romantic relationships in later life?	Tell me about your interest in finding a romantic partner? Or not?		Gender; Talking Class; Spirituality (300)	Desire for new romantic relationship