

**Giles High School Graduates at Virginia Tech: Investigating the Relationship  
between Appalachian Identity and the College Experience**

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative exploration of the relationship between Appalachian identity and the college experience among Giles High School graduates who attend Virginia Tech. The population for this study was Giles High School graduates who attend Virginia Tech. The sample size included ten volunteers who graduated from Giles High School in Pearisburg, Virginia, and have attended Virginia Tech in the past three years. Data collection was obtained from the sample by conducting semi-structured interviews. Coding occurred in two phases using thematic coding. The first phase consisted of an initial coding to establish an understanding of the responses and develop codes to fit the responses for analysis. The second phase of coding consolidated, re-affirmed, compared, and contrasted categories created in the first phase using matrices. The results revealed that the interviewees did communicate an Appalachian identity. When describing Appalachia, the interviewees communicated both positive and negative perceptions of their hometown. Attending college did result in a change in their Appalachian identity. Common changes were in their willingness to accept people different from themselves, their perceptions of Giles County in comparison to more diverse and urban areas, and their appreciation for the natural beauty of Giles. Compared to previous research, I found that Giles High School students seem to have less of a disrupting experience when attending college; however, dominant cultural messages still influence the identity of Appalachian students. Further research should be conducted to confirm the results and analysis.

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## **Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

From summer orientation to walking across the stage upon completion of my degree in sociology, I noticed a difference between myself and my peers that arose from where I come from. Though I lived no more than a thirty minute drive from the university, on campus I struggled with the Appalachian identity that I had acquired from growing up in Giles County, Virginia. These experiences spurred my interest in Appalachian studies and inform this thesis about Giles High School graduates at Virginia Tech.

The purpose of this study is to conduct a qualitative exploration of the relationship between Appalachian identity and the college experience among Giles High School graduates that attend Virginia Tech. The research questions ask how the college experience affects Appalachian identity/how Appalachian identity affects the college experience. There are a number of studies that focus on Appalachian identity issues; however, there is a lack of knowledge on the relationship between Appalachian identity and the college experience for those students who make it into large four-year universities. Entering these universities as an Appalachian student can be filled with the sense of being out of place and the need to change to fit in. By conducting semi-structured interviews with Giles High School graduates who attend Virginia Tech, I hope to reach a better understanding of the academic and social identity struggle that Appalachian students face.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study aims to update and reevaluate the available research on Appalachian students attending college. Research shows that Appalachian students struggle to adjust and fit into the

prevailing norms of college. Despite the predominant idea that Virginia Tech is all-welcoming and home to a diverse student body, Appalachian students may feel disempowered, alienated, less prepared than their peers and unable to fit in due to their native identity. Consequently, Appalachian students are left to negotiate the continual development of their identity in what can seem to them a hostile environment. By conducting this study, I hope to address the conflicts that Appalachian students face as they negotiate their identity in college.

Additionally, this study can be used as a framework for further studies to be conducted in different Appalachian counties. The conclusions that may be drawn from this study of Giles High School graduates may differ from high school to high school in the Appalachian area. Pinpointing differences and similarities between these Appalachian counties may provide substantial information for understanding Appalachian identity and formulating realistic solutions.

## **Framework**

This thesis follows a qualitative research design. I write in it in the first person and to my “audience” – those reading this text. As I uncovered general themes while analyzing various articles, I organized the subsections to the literature review appropriately. The information that I presented in my proposal was information necessary to begin the project with a solid foundation in Appalachian identity studies and the thesis has developed from it.

Chapter 1, the introduction, provides an overview of the project, potential significance, and the framework of the study. The overview sets the stage for the study by presenting my connection to the study, discussing the purpose of the study, and establishing generally what I hope to accomplish.

In chapter 2, the literature review, I discuss four main topics—the development of Appalachian identity throughout history, Appalachian identity, Education and Appalachia, and Appalachian identity at college—and present the research questions. First, however, I orient the readers to Appalachia by distinguishing what is considered Appalachia and where Giles County, Virginia, and Virginia Tech are located within the region. I then establish the importance of understanding history when studying Appalachian identity. Working from the Spanish Conquistadors in the sixteenth century to the modern day, I discuss how views of Appalachia have changed, remained the same, and cast a diverse region as largely homogenized. I then establish an understanding of Appalachian identity in the sociological context of Cooley’s “Looking-glass self.” I also discuss the myths of Appalachia and the various forms of identity that are built as a result of power and dominance. Once I establish an understanding of Appalachian identity, I discuss the development, issues, and current state of Appalachian students in higher education. The last subject discussed in the literature review is based on four articles that specifically discuss the issue of Appalachian identity at college. Based off the literature review, the research questions are then presented.

Chapter 3, the methodology, provides overall approach and rationale, population selection, data collection, coding and data analysis, personal biases and interests, and ethical considerations. The overall approach and rationale defends my qualitative semi-structured interview approach over experimental or quantitative studies. Population selection discusses and defends my selection of Giles High School students who attend Virginia Tech. Data collection provides a detailed description of my interview schedule and how the interviews were recorded. Coding and data analysis describes how I connect my research questions to the data. The personal biases and interests section reiterates my connection to the study as an alumnus of both

schools and explains how these connections enhance the study. The final part to the methodology section, ethical considerations, goes over the risks and benefits that the participants may experience due to the study.

Chapter 4, the results, presents the results that emerged from the data analysis. First, I discuss the varying levels and types of Appalachian identity among the sample. Second, I discuss whether the sample was willing to communicate and voice their Appalachian identity during the interview and to the general public/student body. Next, I review how the sample described and viewed Appalachia in terms of diversity, education, entertainment, and population. Lastly, I discuss how the college experience changes Appalachian identity for the sample population and results in a culture shock, new awareness of their accent, more openness and leniency, and identification of interests outside Giles County.

Chapter 5, the discussion, relates the results back to the discussion questions and previous research. First, I will answer each of the four discussion questions using the data from the results. Second, I relate the results back to the previous research by comparing and contrasting my results to their results.

Chapter 6, the conclusion, summarizes the thesis, presents hypotheses and suggestions for further research, proposes the importance of the study, and discusses limitations to the study. The summary goes through each section of the thesis and provides a general overview of what was discovered and determined. The suggestions for further research highlight the findings of the research and what needs to be done next. The importance of the study suggests actions and changes that should take place because of the results and analysis of this study. The limitations

of the study go over the limitations of a specific population, a small sample size, and the considerations for relating this research to previous research.

## **Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Orientation to the Map**

Appalachia is located on the eastern side of the United States of America. The Appalachian Regional Commission, or ARC, designates five sub-regions as a basis for sub-regional analysis. The five sub-regions located within Appalachia are Northern, North Central, Central, South Central, and Southern [See Appendix A] (Appalachian Regional Commission 2009). Giles County, Virginia, the location of Giles High School, is located within the South Central sub-region of Appalachia [See Appendix B]. Virginia Tech is located within Montgomery County, a neighboring county to Giles County, and is also within the South Central sub-region [see Appendix B]. Consequently, the following section discussing the history of Appalachia is primarily focused on the history of Southern Appalachia.

### **The Development of Appalachian Identity throughout History**

Common stereotypical images used to depict rural Appalachia are quaint mountain people, perhaps missing a few teeth, wearing overalls, and looking a little bit scraggly. They talk with a southern twang and use words like “y’all,” “over yonder,” and “holler.” The scenery that comes to mind is a beautiful mountain landscape that is largely untouched by the human hand with the exception of a few small towns down in the valley. Hunting, farming, and moonshining are the primary occupations of the mountain men. While these people may not have some of the amenities that those in the cities have, they have a freer, more liberated lifestyle. However, at the same time, there is also a sense that these people in rural Appalachia are backwards and in need

of modernization. To fully understand the rural Appalachian identity of individuals, it is important to understand the development of rural Appalachia and how the public eye has perceived it over the ages. Many of the myths and perceived common knowledge of Appalachia are “exaggerations that have grown from kernels of truth” (Satterwhite 2013b).

The Appalachian Mountains cover four geomorphic provinces—Piedmont, the Blue Ridge, the Appalachian Plateaus, and the Ridge and Valley [see Appendix C]. The Piedmont Province is a broad, relatively flat plateau that serves as the eastern gateway to the Appalachians. The Blue Ridge Province extends from Pennsylvania to northern Georgia and is divided into two distinctive parts—northern and southern—distinct in their size, drainage systems, and elevation. The Appalachian Plateaus Province extends from New York to north-central Alabama and is separated into seven smaller distinct plateaus. The Ridge and Valley Province stretches from the Gulf Coastal Plain to the Saint Lawrence River and is characterized by long, high ridges and parallel valleys (Byerly and Renton 2006). The Appalachian Regional Commission, or ARC, divided Appalachia into five contiguous and relatively homogeneous regions—Northern, Northern Central, Central, South Central, and Southern—that aid in sub-regional analysis (Appalachian Regional Commission 2009) [see Appendix A]. Giles County, Virginia and Virginia Tech, located in Montgomery County, Virginia are located on the South Central region border next to the North Central Region.

The first Europeans to come into contact with Appalachia were Spanish exploration parties in the sixteenth century who did not find much interest in the region when compared to Mexico and Peru (Drake 2001). While the Appalachian Mountains did not have the rich minerals and exotic cities, Euro-American settlers were infatuated with this southern backcountry that held “primeval splendor and geological significance” (Dunaway 1996). By the seventeenth

century and into the eighteenth century, the European demand for fur spurred trade operations with the Appalachian located Indians. Tensions between French and British fur trades caused a number of various wars that initially caused British loss of the Appalachian frontier. By the eighteenth century, along with more French-British wars, capitalistic speculation schemes of Appalachia began by the British in attempt to reclaim the land. The first pioneers who came to settle the Appalachian Mountains during the eighteenth century tended to be migrants from Europe who were unable to attain enough lands in England sufficient for sustainment due to the closure of “common lands” (Drake 2001). While some historians claim that the initial pioneers of the Appalachian mountains were yeomen—a farmer idealized not for his capacity to exploit opportunities and make money but for his honest industry, his independence, his frank spirit of equality, and his ability to produce and enjoy a simple abundance—others believe that the “myth of the happy yeoman” was created as a strategy to continue continental development and that rural Appalachian farmers participated in the global trade networks as early as the eighteenth century (Drake 2001, Dunaway 1996). However, pioneer yeoman-farmers or capitalistic speculators, they had to deal with French and British tensions—which ended in 1763 with the Treaty of Paris—and aggression from the Indians until after the American Revolution. European settlers lived a precarious life on the Appalachian Mountains (Drake 2001).

Following the Revolutionary War and various efforts to remove Native Americans, Euro-Americans and their slaves came to the mountains by the thousands to farm. While some historians still believe that the yeomen existed as the predominant form of life in the Appalachians many historians believe that American rural society after the Revolutionary War was transitioning from a partly or largely self-sufficient homesteaders to market capitalism due to the demands of technology, trade, and population growth (Drake 2001, Dunaway 1996). By



the nineteenth century, dependence on outside markets, slavery, paid labor, centralized workshops, and factories began to emerge. Since three-quarters of the area of Southern Appalachia was situated in counties with direct access to transportation systems, the region's external trade existed since the frontier years. Local elites and absentee capitalists monopolized productive resources and land, thereby leaving many families without property to work as laborers. As early as 1820, one of seven free men were employed outside farming (Dunaway 1996). However, the Appalachian frontier was treated largely with hostility by the planter elites to the east and indifference by the state governments (Drake 2001). The region remained underdeveloped because there was little to attract capitalistic development and the area lacked the infrastructure needed to create an economic takeoff. By 1850, Southern Appalachia was losing ground in areas of trade, the land was being overused and exhausted, and as the population was increasing food crop production was declining (Dunaway 1996). If the happy yeoman ever existed, they had largely disappeared by the nineteenth century.

During the Civil War, much of the Appalachian region was considered "borderland" areas where the war was fought by and split states, neighbors, families, and friends; it was not some Union or Confederate monolith (Noe and Wilson 1997). While some historians assert that the Union-Confederate divide was determined by economic class, there is a wide array of research on the subject (Noe and Wilson 1997). The Shenandoah and Blue Ridge regions of Appalachia saw large amounts of Confederate and Union movement, battles, guerilla warfare, and consequently also deserters (Drake 2001, Noe and Wilson 1997). In the Appalachian region the Civil War proved to be particularly destructive; it closed schools, disrupted trade, and devastated an already struggling agricultural life (Drake 2001, Noe and Wilson 1997). While some northern Appalachian counties experienced some economic stimulation from

Reconstruction, the Appalachian South was largely forgotten following the Civil War and became increasingly isolated experiencing economic downturn (Drake 2001). Throughout the United States, the war created an environment where the state governments continued to retreat from their responsibilities for providing law and order and violence from the war created situations that inflated levels of violence (Noe and Wilson 1997). In the absence of effective state power, feuding became a more common form of settling disputes, and prominent Appalachian Feuds gained national attention. While the media presented feuding as an Appalachian phenomenon of post-war anger and a lack of sophistication, the actual instigators of feuds were local elites over economic reasons (Drake 2001, Waller 1995).

In the Gilded Age and Local-Color Literary Movement of Appalachia, from 1865-1895, Appalachia was “discovered” by local colorists (Satterwhite 2011). Local colorists, such as Will Wallace Harney, Mary Murfree, James Allen, Francis Lynde, William Frost, and John Fox, Jr. all wrote on the “quaint and picturesque” conditions of Appalachia in a descriptive rather than analytical way that both romanticized and degraded the mountaineer (McNeil 1995). The Agrarian Myth of simplistic and barbaric yeomen farmers living a self-sustaining life in mountains created an interesting story that captured readers, but was far from truly depicting the actual life of Appalachian mountaineers (Satterwhite 2013b). Local colorists tended to be metropolitan visitors or local elites. They conceived a static view of Appalachia as a rooted, rural place populated by Anglo-Saxon whites protected from mass culture (Satterwhite 2011). Local colorists created “authentic Appalachia” so readers could identify with the region as distinctly other yet still be able to inhabit and enjoy its unique life; essentially, they commodified Appalachia. Additionally, in the wake of the Civil War and on into the Progressive Era from 1900-1920, “authentic Appalachia” provided white readers with belonging and identity while

their own lives felt destabilized. The simplistic definitions that developed from “authentic Appalachia” celebrate whiteness, praise American nationality, and portray primitive people in need of guidance. While this local-color movement spanned only three decades, the simplification of rural people has created long lasting consequences that are still present today (Satterwhite 2011).

With the end of the Civil War and Reconstruction, the United States was looking for any way to create a more unified and homogeneous national entity and Appalachia diverged from the uniform national culture. As people became aware of “a strange land and peculiar people in the southern mountains,” they began to believe that it needed to change and match the rest of society (Shapiro 1979). The aspects that the local-colorists depicted as interesting and quaint also made Appalachia seem like a suitable area for missionaries and capitalists to industrialize and modernize. As the South pushed away Northern-aid, the Appalachian Mountains appeared as a worthy recipient of assistance from outside agencies. Missionaries believed that mountaineers were in some way isolated from the currents of modern American life and the missionaries could provide what they lacked—schools and churches. The missionaries believed that if they could provide what the Appalachians were missing, they would take their place alongside national America. By 1910, Appalachia would be viewed as a region. Various programs were implemented to attempt to address the needs of mountaineers via regionalist conceptions. However, the programs still tended to focus on genetic and cultural characteristics of the mountain people and life, depicting it as something disturbing and troubling in the face of a uniform nation (Shapiro 1979).

The machine age came early to Appalachia as the demand for coal increased. The bulk of railways and road building in the southern mountains prior to the 1880s was in the Ridge and

Valley section, but by 1890 the Appalachian areas with mineral wealth were integrated into the nation's railway system [see Appendix C] (Drake 2001). The expanding market economy altered land use patterns, social relationships, and the meaning of work (Eller 2008). Industrial development was concentrated around the coal and steel industry—mainly the southern and northern extremities of Appalachia. Following the Civil War, the invention of the saw mill led to the rapid expansion of the timber industry. By 1890 and into 1920, large companies from outside Appalachia came in and conducted vast cuttings that exploited entire mountainsides. Another booming industry for Appalachia was tourism. Urban elites flocked to the natural springs and favored sections of Appalachia for summer retreats and escaping the busy metropolitan life. Unfortunately, the growth in industry and tourism has come at a great cost to Appalachia (Drake 2001). The land was exposed, gouged, polluted, and the soil on the hillsides eroded and washed into the valleys and streams (Eller 2008). In the last 300 years, over 99% of Appalachia's forests have been cut leaving second-growth woodlots scattered through human-cleared fields. Forest fragmentation, inadequate land-use planning, acid deposition, and exotic species endangerment pose great environmental threats on the Appalachian Mountains (Constantz 2006). Due to capitalists and entrepreneurs of Appalachia, much land was destroyed and many locals and Native Americans were forced from their homes and livelihoods (Drake 2001).

During World War I, local-color fiction began to lose some of its appeal due to the needs of the war and the increased acceptance of the metropolitan character of the larger nation (Satterwhite 2011). Although Alvin York, a Tennessee Mountaineer, was awarded the Medal of Honor and gained Appalachia a relatively positive image for single-handedly capturing more than one hundred enemy troops (Brosi 2006). When a movie was made about his heroics in 1941, it reinforced images of regional innocence and patriotism (Brosi 2006). In the 1920s and

30s, a fully self-conscious regionalist movement began, but the literature did not reach as large of an audience as it had during the Gilded Age (Satterwhite 2011).

Throughout the history of Appalachia, rural mountain residents have been depicted as being close to the land, but another, perhaps more prominent depiction was their strong ties to family and place. As the Great Depression began to take hold, displaced industrial workers resided on overcrowded family farms that had not been bought by outside buyers while others remained in abandoned coal camps. Almost half of Appalachians were on some kind of public assistance during the Great Depression. New Deal programs opened up jobs for Appalachian workers building new roads and buildings; however, it created an economy of growth without development (Eller 2008). During the Great Depression, the hillbilly image appeared in the media as both a threatening and welcoming primitive character (Satterwhite 2011). The 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain in West Virginia, 1930s mine wars in Harlan County, Kentucky, and prohibition moonshine shakedowns reemphasized the public fear of violent mountaineers (Brosi 2006). The media portrayed the mountain men in these battles and wars as childlike, irresponsible, and more pitiful than threatening (Brosi 2006). The images that the media was once portraying that appealed to missionary work was now creating negative stereotypes of violent mountaineers, miners, and moonshiners (Brosi 2006). In 1935, the U.S. Department of Agriculture conducted a survey of Appalachian Region life and published the region as a problem area (Brosi 2006).

As early as 1938, the economy began to pick up in Appalachia with the anticipation and beginning of World War II. An increase in coal, timber, aircraft plants, steel mills, ordnance factories, and uniform manufacturers created a huge need for workers and spurred a new era of production and life in Appalachia. Enlistment rates among Appalachians was among the highest

in the nation, many outside companies recruited and transported those not able to fight into the factories, and those who remained in Appalachia found jobs in coal mines, saw mills, and chemical plants; war mobilization effectively redistributed the Appalachian population away from the overcrowded farms. However, the region's development was owned by outside corporations and interests.

As the war began to draw down, overexpansion of the economy would lead to instability and intense competition within the region. By 1948, the high demand for coal began to wear off, the increased mechanization of coal mining required less workers, and alternative energy sources began to be utilized. As jobs disappeared, over three million people left Appalachia between 1940 and 1970 to find employment in the Midwest. Linkages between the mountains and urban migrants remained strong and migrants often utilized the "hillbilly highway" to visit their families that had remained in the mountains. These frequent trips home often slowed their assimilation and migrants often faced hostilities and discrimination. Many Appalachians valued family and kinship over the "American Dream" of competition and advancement. Their Northern neighbors saw them as apathetic, lazy, and uneducated. In Appalachia, unemployment, poverty, and welfare dependence became a way of life due to the decline of agriculture, resource exploitation, and manufacturing. By 1960, one in three families in Appalachia lived below the national poverty level. Corrupt local politicians used the feudal-like structure of politics in Appalachia to control the distribution of welfare benefits. Between economic self-interest and political corruption, the high levels of poverty and exploitation remained in Appalachia.

With the election of President Kennedy, the Civil Rights movement, and the emergence of the War on Poverty in the 1960s, Appalachia reemerged as a part of the national debate on modernization and progress. Once again, the old stereotypes of quaint-ness, violence, and

isolation emerged, and outside observers believed the region's backwardness could be fixed with modernization. Appalachia would serve as the yardstick to measure government success in the War on Poverty. Unfortunately, government programs often failed to address the underlying problems of the region by avoiding issues of political and economic relationships within the region. With the onset of the Vietnam War, however, more people began to question the political and economic system. Additionally, greater access to education in the 1960s and 1970s produced a large generation of cultural and political leaders willing to challenge the power structure. Similar to the Civil Rights, Women's, and Anti-war movements, community action emerged by 1966 to challenge poverty, economic, and political injustice and demand entire systemic reform in Appalachia. The blame for poverty shifted from the Appalachian to the political economy that had limited the regions potential and created a dependent region. In addition to the War on Poverty, many Appalachians and activists began to vocalize their opposition to strip mining industries by the 1970s because of their destruction on the land and the region's people. Similar to their approaches on poverty, activists did not believe government regulations would solve their problems.

Some deem the time from 1985-2008 as the "Neo-Gilded Age"; similar to the Gilded Age from a century ago, wealth disparities increased, large corporations gained power, and the United States continued to expand outward. Once again, local-colorists emerged writing about the backward and simple people of Appalachia to calm the social and economic dislocations and anxieties of an urbanizing society (Satterwhite 2011). Since the 1960s, some communities have prospered and grown while others have continuously faced serious setbacks, struggles, and poverty. The shift from an agricultural and manufacturing economy to service economy has caused lower wages and higher unemployment rates in the region. Consistent with history, the

primary owners of industry and development continue to remain outside the region. Due to the growth of world markets, the shift of manufacturing jobs abroad, and escalating demand for cheap energy, Appalachia has remained a battleground for American values and socioeconomic problems (Eller 2008). The breakdown of traditional forms of work solidarity, a rise in use of such drugs as methamphetamines, and a rise in immigration has compounded tensions in the region (Groenke and Nespor 2010). Appalachia remains one of the most poverty stricken and economically distressed regions in the United States (Billings and Blee 2000).

### **Appalachian identity**

“...place is fundamental to the operation of power, the production of inequality, and the mobilization of resistance. In doing so, it also reveals that there is nothing fixed or inevitable about the current production of Appalachia as a place of intensive human and environmental exploitation. Another place is possible if we have the imagination to envision it and the collective political will to create it.”

(Smith and Fisher 2012)

Important to the understanding of Appalachian students in the institution of education are the construction and development of identity. Individual construction of identity is a complex process. Being Appalachian is just one role, however significant it may be in the overall process of constructing identity. Charles Horton Cooley’s “looking-glass self” depicts the development of identity through the use of self-image, which emerges as a product of group involvement and communication with others (DeFleur, D'Antonio and DeFleur 1972). Despite the complex and abundant variations within the Appalachian region, dominant cultural messages affect and define what it means to be Appalachian (Smith et al. 2010). Identity is the negotiated project or program—rather than an empirical fact—of a complex and dynamic field of power relationships,



among locals and outside forces (Kalb 2006). Through family, community, school, media, and various other interactions with institutions and people, the Appalachian identity is learned by the individual (Smith et al. 2010). Though identity may be affected by these institutions and people, identity exists only when social actors internalize the cultural messages and construct their meaning around the internalization (Castells 1997). Through self-monitoring, the individual manages his or her images in the eyes of others in order to come to terms with the basic social emotions, pride and shame. However, it is important to understand identity and cultural messages within terms of power, domination, inequality, and privilege (Reid and Taylor 2002). Accepted by the individual or not, these cultural messages are inescapable and inevitably come to affect how Appalachians think of themselves (Theobald and Wood 2010).

### **Confronting the Myths of Appalachia**

The belief that Appalachia is synonymous with backwards and deficient yet quaint and reminiscent of the true American is centuries old but still present today (Theobald and Wood 2010). The Agrarian Myth and happy yeoman farmer describes a story or wishful thinking that frontier America was and is dominated by small subsistence farmers who live off the land and produce only enough for steady economic sustenance. In reality frontier America was just as classist, capitalistic, and vulnerable to outside economics and society as the rest of America from the very beginning (Dunaway 1996). Emily Satterwhite addresses five current myths of Appalachian exceptionalism that originated from the Agrarian Myth—1. Appalachia is all poor and the poorest place in the United States, 2. Appalachia is all rural and also the most rural part of the country, 3. Appalachia is all white and the whitest place in the United States, 4. Appalachia is all mountains, and 5. Appalachia is pre-modern (Satterwhite 2013b). Analysis of statistics and maps provided by the ARC and U.S. Census Bureau shows that the myths are

exaggerated versions of reality and homogenize a diverse region. While Appalachia may be home to some of the poorest white people in America, there are other poor, white, and rural places in the nation. Additionally, not all Appalachians are poor, white, or rural (Satterwhite 2013b).

According to popular culture, the people of Appalachia are uniformly placed into a rural mountainous geographic region. The Appalachian Region covers four geomorphic provinces—Piedmont, the Blue Ridge, the Appalachian Plateaus, and the Ridge and Valley [see Appendix C]. The Piedmont Province is a broad, relatively flat plateau that serves as the eastern gateway to the Appalachians. The Blue Ridge Province extends from Pennsylvania to northern Georgia and is divided into two distinctive parts—northern and southern—distinct in their size, drainage systems, and elevation. The Appalachian Plateaus Province extends from New York to north-central Alabama and is separated into seven smaller distinct plateaus. The Ridge and Valley Province stretches from the Gulf Coastal Plain to the Saint Lawrence River and is characterized by long, high ridges and parallel valleys (Byerly and Renton 2006). Despite the geographical lines that define Appalachia, it is important to understand region as a cultural history and dynamic cultural construct rather than a static, geophysical thing (Reichert Powell 2007).

Another dominant stereotype of Appalachia is its isolation and rurality. The U.S. Bureau of the Census defines towns as urban when the population reaches 2,500. Cities must have a population of 25,000 or more (United States Census Bureau 2015). Found within Appalachia, Birmingham, Alabama, and Knoxville, Tennessee, both have populations over 150,000 (Satterwhite 1999). The U.S. Bureau of the Census also uses metropolitan delineations to indicate urban populations. Metropolitan areas have a population of 50,000 or more (United States Census Bureau 2015). In 1997, 39 percent of Appalachians lived within a metropolitan

area (Satterwhite 1999). Appalachia covers a diverse 205,000 square-mile expanse of the United States (Appalachian Regional Commission 2015). Simply because of its geographical scope and location, Appalachia is not an isolated space nor is it withdrawn from larger cultural forces or practices (Reichert Powell 2007). [See Appendix D]

Popular culture portrays Appalachia as the most destitute region with little economic diversity. The primary options for employment are manufacturing, mining, and farming. Retail, service industry, and governmental jobs such as teaching are also dominant forms of employment within Appalachia. While the region does consistently exceed the nation in poverty rates, it only lays claim to 9 percent of the nation's persons below the poverty level. Unemployment rates compared to the nation are fairly equal, but do vary at the county level. The ARC uses an index-based economic classification system to measure the economic status of counties within the region. Compared to the nation's three-year average unemployment rates, per capita market income, and poverty rate, Appalachian counties are deemed distressed, at-risk, competitive, or attainment. Today, 93 counties are distressed, 110 are at-risk, 205 are transitional, 11 are competitive, and 1 has achieved attainment (Appalachian Regional Commission 2012). The highest concentrated industries in Appalachia are manufacturing, farming, mining, and utilities, but the fastest growing industries are finance, education and information services, and professional and technical services (Regional Planning & Research Division 2014). While Appalachia still lags behind the nation in poverty rates and economic diversity, it is not as homogenous as it is commonly depicted.

The historical and current predominance of whites in Appalachia has come to be depicted as a harmless demographic fact that is unimportant to the region (Smith 2004). Quite to the contrary, race has played a large role in Appalachian history and popular culture stereotypes.

Slaves have been present since Europeans began settling the region and non-white immigrants came in on the trains and highways to take jobs in mining and manufacturing (Eller 2008). Depending on the conversation, popular culture uses stereotypes of the poor white hillbilly and redneck to emphasize either biological deficits or purity. Both discourses endorse race as a meaningful biological distinction (Smith 2004). Perhaps part of the reason why the region attains so much attention is because of its high concentration of white poor people (Satterwhite 2013b). Criticism by activists such as Barbara Ellen Smith show that the “whiteness” of Appalachia is a product of white supremacist practices. By rarely recognizing racial implications within Appalachia, we are reinforcing the normalcy of whiteness (Smith 2004).

### **Building Appalachian Identity**

Manuel Castells describes three forms of building identity: 1. Legitimizing Identity: introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination through social actors, 2. Resistance Identity: generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society, and 3. Project Identity: when social actors, or on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by doing so, seek the transformation of overall social structure (Castells 1997).

The popular culture stereotypes that were discussed in “Development of Appalachian History and Identity” and “Confronting the Myths of Appalachia” describe a legitimizing identity. Throughout history and even today, dominant institutions such as the government, industry, and media developed images of Appalachia that reassured people outside Appalachia,

encouraged the infiltration of industry, and blamed poverty on the Appalachian people (Dunaway 1996, Eller 2008, Satterwhite 2011). This form of legitimizing identity generates a society that rationalizes its sources of structural domination (Castells 1997).

Resistance identity takes many of the assumptions and generalizations of Appalachia that are viewed negatively and interprets them in a positive light. Rather than constantly claiming sophistication and modernization, those who embrace a resistance identity may celebrate associations between Appalachia and traditional agrarian ways of life (Satterwhite 1999). However, resistance identity is built on the same forms of structural inequality that they fight (Castells 1997).

Both perspectives, positive and negative, resistance and legitimizing, use the assumptions and generalization of Appalachia without a proper discourse on the diversity of the region. Resistance identity reinforces the binaries just as much as legitimizing identity. Appalachian identity must understand and accept the positive and negative realities of multiple Appalachian experiences and take into account the specificity and diversity of who we are (Smith et al. 2010). Additionally, resistance and legitimizing identities create an artificial understanding of who counts and who does not count as Appalachian, limiting the kinds of people who can identify with the region in an insider/outsider discourse (Satterwhite 2013b). It is important to challenge the idea that there is only one legitimate Appalachian identity or experience (Smith et al. 2010). The identity and relationships of people and places across space are incredibly complex. To understand a region, we must understand the larger network of sites, cultural forces, and processes it is related to. However, Appalachia has come to be understood as a specific site that is disconnected from the larger network of the nation, existing in a vacuum. In maintaining assumptions and generalizations that are overly romantic or negative, legitimizing and resistance

identities limit the scope of regional understanding to describing, defining, and isolating Appalachia (Reichert Powell 2007). Consequently, this limited outlook on Appalachia, or parochialism, leads to a flat discussion of insiders and outsiders, authenticity and inauthenticity (Smith et al. 2010).

Insider/outsider discourses reinforce racism and classism. Hillbillies, rednecks, and white trash depict the shape and circumstance of lower-class white lives, the stratification of power and privilege within whiteness, and the maintenance of boundaries that support whiteness and class identity (Hartigan 2003). Cultural messages would dictate that an Appalachian is white, poor, and living in a mountainous rural area. These boundary-marking distinctions between who does and does not belong to Appalachia create hostile connotations that can become discriminatory attacks on that which is foreign and support a classist system (Smith et al. 2010). When these essentialist declarations of insider and outsider statuses are present, many are barred implicitly and explicitly from identifying or allying with the region (Satterwhite 2013b). Those who are non-white, middle-class, or not living in the mountains, whether it is because they are in a non-mountainous region of Appalachia or moved away from the region, find it difficult to identify with the Appalachian identity fully because of the predominant insider/outsider discourse (Satterwhite 2013b). The term “Appalachian” is often used to gloss over the diversity of the region, which then constrains political utility of regional identity (Smith et al. 2010).

For example, Edward Morris reveals the resistance identity that Clayton High School students developed to distinguish themselves from the mainstream stereotypes understood by outsiders (Morris 2012). The awareness of negative outsider judgements conjured a “strong, reactive pride” in the community. Students embraced and redefined white rural stereotypes such as the “redneck” and “hillbilly” to create a positive local identity that emphasized honesty, hard

work, resiliency, toughness, and other white working-class traits. To reinforce the legitimacy of the hillbilly and redneck—and inadvertently maintain the classist and racist hegemony—the community created the local expression “rutter.” Rutter refers to the very poor in the community that do not fit into the community’s perceptions of rednecks and hillbillies. Rutters were perceived as less than white for their inability to claim the white working class traits emulated by rednecks and hillbillies. Students made many efforts to distinguish and elevate themselves from the rutters. The resistance identity that they established still maintained the status-quo of a hegemonic white classist system (Morris 2012).

In order to subscribe to resistance and legitimizing identities, you do not have to live within or have any tie to the region. Rural Appalachian stereotypes that are depicted as negative and backwards can also be conventional and romantic depending on the discussion at hand. Some audiences have interpreted Appalachia negatively and emphasized its ignorance and tendency towards violence and illegal activities. On the other hand, many fans of cultural products featuring Appalachia have interpreted Appalachia positively and desired the authenticity of the region over industrialized America and displayed eagerness to revisit an old way of life (Satterwhite 2011). Many national readers reinforced the legitimizing identity while fans often reinforced the resistance identity, but both reinforced the homogenous stereotypes and structural inequality of Appalachia.

To move away from the limitations of insider/outsider discourses, project identity must be developed. Unlike legitimizing and resistance identities, project identities acknowledge the larger networks, cultures, and processes that it are located within and works to create its own dynamic identity (Castells 1997). Understanding Appalachia in its relation to the rest of the nation and globe can provide the basis for making claims about the region’s connections to

spatially and conceptually broader patterns of meaning (Reichert Powell 2007). Rather than developing falsely essentialistic or defensive identities for Appalachia, the project identity perspective allows us to reach across boundaries and form connections between people in Appalachia and others resisting race and class oppression (Smith 2004). To begin this process of project identity and social change Reichert Powell (2007) suggests using colleges and universities to access students and the opportunity to teach them ways to create their own descriptions of the world.

Currently in Appalachian Studies, there are significant divisions about the political content, utility, and legitimacy of Appalachian identity. To encourage the differences of Appalachian identity without reference to power and domination promotes conclusions that are politically useless and/or maintain the status quo, i.e. legitimizing identity (Reid and Taylor 2002). To begin creating a project identity, regional identity must understand and accept the positive and negative realities of multiple Appalachian experiences and take into account the specificity and diversity of who we are (Smith et al. 2010).

### **Education and Appalachia**

“[We are] well aware that we don’t have the best schools, we don’t get the best teachers or best education. We know that we’re going to have to catch up when we go to college.”  
(Theobald and Wood 2010)

Many Americans look to education as the source of economic mobility; education and work are inextricably intertwined—a good education leads to a good job and a good job leads to economic mobility and success (Bills 2004). As societies advance, increased schooling is required for employment. Conflict theory suggests that employment requirements reflect the



efforts of rival status groups to monopolize or control jobs by forcing their cultural standards on the selection process. Research by Randal Collins reveals that conflict theory is more strongly supported and rising educational requirements are due to the expansion of mobility opportunities through the school system rather than employment structures (Collins 1971).

Inequalities within the institution of education create disparities that make economic mobility less attainable for minorities and underprivileged groups. From discriminatory practices to problems of poverty bleeding into school performance and experiences, the educational system is far from a system of equality (Rothstein 2004). The educational system in the United States is controlled at the local level and results in varying educational opportunities among the different areas. Wealth and education are linked in maintaining social, racial, and class inequality (Johnson 2012). Many Americans hold onto the belief that the educational system is based upon a meritocratic system that is equally applied and beneficial to all. Those who put in the effort and have the intelligence will succeed. Unfortunately, this kind of meritocratic discourse fosters economic inequality through justifying upper-class success and legitimizing lower-class failure. In a study on Ivy League universities, Karabel dismantles the notion that institution of education is meritocratic by revealing the existence of legacy scholarships, rising costs of tuition, and reliance on standardized tests that the wealthy are more prepared to excel at (Karabel 2005).

The institution of education is used to maintain and strengthen the status quo and dominance of the white-classist hegemony. Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* describes two paths that students take when the institution of education simply requires the reproduction of knowledge that already exists (Freire 1970). Similar to Castells' legitimizing identity, the students acquire a naïve consciousness in which they are aware of their situation but do not make

any efforts to change it and take up a conformist stance, considering their situation to be normal (Castells 1997, Freire 1970). Or, similar to the resistance identity, they construct their own reality to liberate themselves from the oppression, but only go to the opposite extreme, simply becoming the reverse of their oppression, and ultimately still supporting the hegemony (Castells 1997, Freire 1970). On the other hand, if the institution of education supports a method of learning that requires students to create their own knowledge rather than regurgitate it, education can help students become aware of their reality and fight for their own emancipation (Freire 1970). This learning is similar to Castells' project identity (Castells 1997).

Incorporating place into the study of educational inequality is also important. Morris' work with students from Clayton High School reveals that universal definitions at the local level create unique patterns of action and consequence. Additionally, local history and norms create disconnects between national and global economics. Local hegemonic practices of masculinity at Clayton hindered boys in school by encouraging fighting and viewing academic work as feminine. Dictated by local history maintained that the "breadwinner" of the family must conduct physical labor, but such practices were difficult to accomplish due to the new economic structure. Understanding rural inequalities are just as important as understanding urban inequalities (Morris 2008).

Regardless of population density, urban models of education have been used since the standardization and consolidation of state-run education in the mid-1800s (Rosenfeld and Sher 1977). The use of standardization for running a national education program supports the notion that the United States is a "monolithic" structure when in fact much diversity exists (DeYoung 1991). Reformers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century believed that rural communities did not have the capabilities and experience to run their own schools and produce competitive students in the

modernized economic world because they were inefficient. Their solution was to make rural schools more like the urban schools by consolidation and bureaucratization, so standardized testing and business models of school management came to dominate the United States. Rural schools were originally centers of social activity and cultural meaning, but the reform made them a place of contradiction to rural values and identity. Rather than maintaining rural identities and traditions, the new school systems pushed urban values on the students that would serve the new modernized economic world (Theobald and Wood 2010). In most cases, Appalachian schools avoid diverging from the state, federal, and global standards. The consequences of rural schools' small size, isolation, and methods and amounts of support reflect the quantifiable consequences of an urbanized education system in a rural area (DeYoung 1991). As a result, many Appalachian schools fail their communities, families, and students (Howley and Howley 2010).

Appalachian schools are not immune to the issues stemming from a nation that emphasizes globalization and standardization. Appalachian schools face a number of issues regarding race, population, economics, and politics. Some Appalachian counties offer incentives for economic development that deplete already dwindling school funds. Out-migration to metropolitan and urban areas creates a top-heavy population and declining birth rates that lead to low school enrollment. Some Appalachian schools struggle to meet the federal education regulations and are forced to consolidate. As communities experience increasing racial diversity, the schools do as well, sometimes causing tensions (Groenke and Nespor 2010). In the early 2000s, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) created punishments for schools if they failed to improve test scores; consequently, in small Appalachian communities, the slightest variation in test scores ruined the required yearly average progress. NCLB also required standardized curriculum that often frustrated teachers and students because it ignored rural life, reality, values (Edmondson

and Butler 2010). As NCLB has ended and other educational initiatives like Race to the Top have begun, the issues for Appalachian schools remain. Educational institutions use market-based models and emphasize individual achievement, standardized curricula, and competition. Consequently, the schools are weakened, the teachers are alienated, and the students are disengaged (Schafft 2010).

From 1980 to 2012, data reveals that Appalachia has consistently been behind the national and respective state average for those who have completed high school and college (Appalachian Regional Commission 2012). While the gap between the national average and Appalachia's high school completion percentages has been reduced from 9.0% to 1.6%, the gap for college completion percentages has increased from 5.1% to 7.2% (Appalachian Regional Commission 2012). Within the sub-regions of Appalachia, the central Appalachian region has lagged behind the regional average on educational measures. While the general increases in educational measures are encouraging, the gap in measures within the region, state, and nation remain (Couto 1994). Data from 2013 shows that for Giles County, the percent of people who completed a high school diploma is 80.5%. Appalachia Virginia is 79.9%, Virginia is 87.5%, and the United States is 86.0% (Appalachian Regional Commission 2013b).

The development of identity for children outside the home typically begins in schools. Through teachers, curriculum, and textbooks, the education of American youth in public schools constantly reinforces the values of patriotism, infallibility, and omniscience. Appalachian life is displayed as a past condition that has been replaced by urban growth and development. By shaping identities that willingly embrace departure, Appalachians must leave their home or else be non-participants in the American experience. The American education system feeds the cultural assumption that bigger is always better and technology is always considered good. If it

causes Appalachian people to be displaced, that is the price of progress. Within the textbooks, stories of rural and Appalachian life is often left out entirely or shown in a biased negative or romanticized light (Theobald and Wood 2010). At a time when the production and distribution of goods is becoming a globalized market and competition for jobs is spreading around the globe, the lessons that Appalachian students are internalizing are holding even more power than before (Theobald and Wood 2010). Public schools in Appalachia are the primary institutions where young people learn to leave rural places (Howley and Howley 2010).

### **Appalachian Identity at College**

“If we really can go back to what we were before—or at least acknowledge the value of that previous knowledge, whatever its form—without losing what we have since become, then we will be headed in the right direction.” (Abrams Locklear 2013)

The foregoing literature was presented in an effort to be able to understand the history, background, and identity that the Appalachian student brings with him or her to college. The four articles that will be discussed at length in this section relate specifically to Appalachian college students renegotiating their identity (Abrams Locklear 2013, Cole 1995, Pennington 2013, Satterwhite 2013a).

Pam Cole’s article follows four students from rural Southwest Virginia high schools in their first year at Virginia Tech. When the students arrived, their identities were greatly influenced by their Appalachian upbringing—strong sense of family, neighborliness, and personal identity—and the students were motivated to do well in college. However, the dominant group of students at the university was more accustomed to bureaucratic systems, had more elaborated speech codes, and had more diverse experiences and thinking. The number and

diversity of students enrolled in classes and the impersonal nature of the university setting stunned them when they were used to one-on-one student-teacher interaction. They quickly came to see their education as inadequate and their region as culturally underdeveloped. Additionally, the Appalachian students struggled with peer-relationships because of the different way they made friends growing up. While other students quickly joined and created cliques, the Appalachian students viewed friendship as a lifelong commitment and were hesitant to jump into friendships so quickly. Often, the Appalachian students were teased about their intelligence or way of speaking and felt the need to hide their Appalachian origin. They frequently found refuge and support in their fellow peers from high school. New to this culture and unfamiliar with the dominant group's prevailing ways, the Appalachian students needed to renegotiate their identities in opposition to their native group in order to gain acceptance. As Appalachian students struggled with feelings of marginalization, disempowerment, stigmatization, and disloyalty to home, they began to feel unsure about their native culture. When they returned home, they felt out of place there as well because their new ways of thinking and talking made them elite outsiders to family and friends. To overcome their ambivalence towards their native culture, they began to develop negative stereotypes about their Appalachian identities and see themselves as more open-minded (Cole 1995).

Mary Beth Pennington provides the introduction to Erica Locklear's and Emily Satterwhite's articles that originated as presentations for a roundtable discussion on "Finding Our Place: Region, Identity, and Education" (2013). She describes how students from marginalized backgrounds feel not only the pressure to succeed, but also to transform. The further one goes from their rural backgrounds—intellectually, geographically, culturally, and economically—the sweeter the success. The renegotiation of identity, place, and purpose is a fact seldom recognized

by privileged groups. While the privileged groups come from cultures that have literacy expectations similar to those of universities, marginalized cultures may have conflicting values and literacy habits. Assimilation into university settings can be severely upsetting to the sense of self for those college students with marginalized backgrounds. Education comes at a cost to marginalized college students because many see no other way to progress and succeed unless they fully abandon their native culture and identity (Pennington 2013).

Erica Abrams Locklear describes her experience as a Western North Carolina native attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Before she attended college, she admits that she would not have identified as Appalachian, but rather Southern. She was eager to learn and fit in with her peers, but despite a diverse set of friends, her accent stuck out as odd and improper. She quickly found that her strong identification with Appalachian identities did not meet up with the identities required to fit in and succeed for college. Attending Chapel Hill was the beginning of an identity conflict that would continue beyond college and into the present day. She criticizes colleges for taking up a one-size-fits-all approach that not only delivers content, but also dominant cultural messages that dictate how we should speak, dress, and be. The one-size-fits-all approach also imparts value judgements on the students that affect the ways the students learn. Emphasizing mainstream norms over Appalachian ones, colleges implicitly force their students to devalue their home communities and take up dominant cultural identities. In order to combat this homogenization of identity and its consequential disempowerment at college, Abrams Locklear suggests that teachers and professors utilize empowering literature to encourage problem-posing dialogue among students and view their students' identities with value. This approach allows for students to recognize, validate, and value Appalachian and other

oppressed heritages while also offering a way to contend with identity conflict (Abrams Locklear 2013).

Emily Satterwhite describes her experiences and observations as a professor of Appalachian Studies. After presenting the Cole article discussed above to her class, she was surprised that many students resisted the notion that Appalachian students struggled to gain legitimacy in a college setting. Many claimed that all students were treated equally, there is an organization for every minority and interest, everyone has to adjust, and everyone is equally stereotyped and disadvantaged from stereotyping. On the other hand, one student native to Appalachia describes how acutely aware he is of his lack of academic opportunities and tells about how he was ridiculed for returning home to attend high school football games and other functions. In order to gain legitimacy, Satterwhite calls for individual instructors to support Appalachian students as they examine their native identity and discourage repression and denial. By helping students understand their background, the values and assumptions that come with it, and where they are located within a rapidly globalizing society, instructors can provide students with a way to understand their identity without being controlled by it (Satterwhite 2013a).

### **Research Question**

Based on the concepts described in the literature, to explore the relationship between Appalachian identity and the college experience, I pose my research questions to investigate my thesis project: How does the college experience alter Appalachian identity and, vice versa, how does Appalachian identity alter the college experience?



## Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

### Overall Approach and Rationale

The pursuit to send more Appalachian high school graduates to college has been a long-standing goal in the United States. The Pam Cole article discussed in the literature review discusses the difficulties that Appalachian students face at college, but the study was very limited in population size and was conducted twenty years ago. The need for an updated study on Pam Cole's work is essential for continuing a relevant discussion on Appalachian identity and college experience. While this project is not directly comparable to Pam Cole's article due to variations in population specifications and generational differences, this project will hopefully provide a useful insight for researchers to reference as a more recent and comprehensive study.

I selected a qualitative interview methodology to address the exploratory nature of the research questions and the importance of individual analysis. Using quantitative or experimental methods for this research is neither practical nor applicable. I seek to describe the culture and identity of Appalachian students and college experiences and how the two intermix and develop over time. I pursue the tacit knowledge and subjective understandings of identity that ignore the complexities and processes of negotiating the college experience. I seek to explore where and why policy and local knowledge and practices are at odds between and within the college experience and Appalachia. Ultimately, I hope to identify relevant variables for future research in understanding the relationship between the college experience and Appalachian identity that can be applied beyond Giles High School students at Virginia Tech. However, it is important to acknowledge that the sample selected for my study is very limited and does not pose a representative sample of Appalachian students. Rather, the results reveal the experience of a few

students that are from an Appalachian area. Further research needs to be conducted to prevent an unrepresentative homogenization of Appalachia.

My definition of Appalachian students is based on the ARC definition and includes all students within the 205,000 square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi to include West Virginia and parts of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia (Appalachian Regional Commission 2015). Giles County, Virginia, is located within the Virginia Appalachian area. Further research should be conducted to distinguish what characteristics are specific to Giles County students at Virginia Tech rather than wholly Appalachian.

My definition of identity is based off of Manuel Castells' three forms of building identity and Charles Horton Cooley's Looking Glass Self. 1. Legitimizing Identity: introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination through social actors, 2. Resistance Identity: generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society, and 3. Project Identity: when social actors, or on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by doing so, seek the transformation of overall social structure (Castells 1997). Cooley's Looking Glass Self helps to explain why Giles High School graduates' Appalachian identities are changing at Virginia Tech—they are interacting with people who perceive them differently than if they had remained in Giles. Giles High school graduates attending Virginia Tech must alter their identity to create an acceptable image for others and become a part of the Virginia Tech community.

## **Population Selection and Description**

The population for this study is Giles High School graduates who attend Virginia Tech. I recruited ten volunteers age 18 or older, male or female, who graduated from Giles High School in Pearisburg, VA and attended Virginia Tech in the past three years. The sample was selected purposively based upon the above criteria. I contacted all potential subjects through Facebook Messenger. The first ten people who responded to the message, met the criteria, and agreed to an interview comprised the sample. All participants conducted their interview over the phone at a time coordinated with the interviewer.

According to U.S. Census data, Giles County, Virginia, is 96.7 percent white. Altogether, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanics/Latino, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, and two or more races consist of less than 5 percent of those living in the county. The median household income is \$45,141 and persons below poverty level are 13.3 percent. The percentage of people age 25 and over who have graduated from high school is 80.5 percent and who have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher is 16.6 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2015).

According to 2015 enrollment data provided by Virginia Tech, 65 percent of those enrolled at Virginia Tech identify as white. 11 percent are categorized as "non-resident alien." Altogether, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanics of any race, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, two or more races, and not reported consist of less than 25 percent of those enrolled (Virginia Tech 2015).

The restriction to students who attended Giles High School and Virginia Tech was based on three reasons. First, as the researcher, I also graduated from Giles High School and Virginia

Tech, so I am better able to understand my participants and create a comfortable environment to promote discussion. Second, by selecting such a small and specific population size, the research will be very applicable to many in the population versus if it was with a larger population. Third, the small and specific population size can be used in further research to compare the differences and similarities among other Appalachian communities and experiences. Participants should be attending or have attended Virginia Tech in the past three years to ensure that the memories and feelings about the college experience are recent. While in-person interviews were made available, all participants chose the over-the-phone interview method. Due to the ethnic homogeneity of Giles High School graduates who attend Virginia Tech, all participants were white; however, intentional exclusion of ethnic diversity was not practiced in this study. The study was open to all ethnicities as long as the prospective volunteers met the required criteria and were willing and able to conduct the interview.

### **Description of Sample**

Four of the participants were male and six were female. Six of the participants came from the more suburban parts of Giles County while the other four described the location of their home as more rural. All of the participants estimated their parents/guardians combined income over \$50,000 per year. The participants' parents had a wide range of occupations including teachers, librarians, university academic researchers, nurses, chemists, site managers, bankers, and various local and non-local company/corporation workers. Four of the participants claimed that at least one of their parents/guardians had a job at Virginia Tech. Two participants stated that neither of their parents received an Associate's Degree or greater and the other eight participants had at least one parent with an Associate's Degree or greater. All of the participants graduated from Giles High School in 2010, 2011, and 2012. All but one of the participants

attended Giles High School all five years. Giles High School has grades eight through twelve. While attending Virginia Tech, only one participant changed their major, but several added various minors and majors to their original one. Participants were pursuing or had attained degrees in Accounting and Finance, Human Nutrition and Food Exercise, Communication, Sociology, Biology, Forestry, Computer Science, Wildlife Science, Aerospace Engineering, and Spanish. Achieved and projected graduation dates from Virginia Tech among the participants were Fall 2013, Spring 2014, Fall 2014, Spring 2015, Fall 2015, and Spring 2016.

All of the participants participated in college prep or dual enrollment classes. Eight of the participants attended the Southwest Virginia Governor's School for Science, Mathematics, and Technology. College prep, dual enrollment, and Southwest Virginia Governor's School for Science, Mathematics, and Technology all provide Giles High School Students with opportunities to experience college level classes. Classes through dual enrollment and Southwest Virginia Governor's School provide college credits in addition to high school credits. All of the participants entered Virginia Tech with college credits from these programs.

Since the participants all had parents with combined incomes over \$50,000 per year, there is no representation of the experiences of lower income students at Virginia Tech. Income could possibly be a significant factor affecting the college experience. Additionally, all of the participants had already completed their degree or were very close to completing their degree. None of the participants felt that they were unable to complete their degree. Experiences of students who were not successful at Virginia Tech are therefore not included in this study. Furthermore, all of the participants completed some kind of college preparatory/dual enrollment courses—such as biology, chemistry, U.S. history, or calculus—before attending Virginia Tech. The experiences of those who did not take the college preparatory/dual enrollment courses

before attending Virginia Tech could not be explored with this sample which limits the perspectives on the college experience offered by this study.

As mentioned in the literature review, the Pam Cole article serves as a comparison point to this paper. While our populations are similar in that we are both studying the effects of college on Appalachian students, our population parameters and samples have distinct differences. Since the Cole article was published twenty years ago, there are most likely significant generational differences. Additionally, the type of Appalachian student I selected may be very different from the type of Appalachian student she selected. Specifically, while Cole's sample consisted of students from a mining county, Giles County is classified as a manufacturing, government, and services county. Additionally, my sample consists of students who grew up near the college they attended. Giles County borders Montgomery County, where Virginia Tech is located. That did not seem to be the case in the Cole article.

## **Data Collection**

Participants were recruited via a secure messaging system and further contact was made over email and phone. Following the agreement to conduct the interview, a time to conduct the over-the-phone interview was arranged. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours, with the length of the interview depending upon the participants' responses to the series of semi-structured interview questions. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked if they were willing to be contacted for additional questions should they arise.

Participants were emailed and asked to read the consent form before the interview. Interviews were documented using a free phone recording application called "Call Recorder." At

the beginning of the over-the-phone interview, consent for the study and recording were obtained verbally.

See Appendix E for the interview schedule. The interview schedule is a basic outline of what was discussed during the interviews, but it is not a limitation to what could be actually discussed. While I discussed all aspects on the interview schedule, due to the conversation-like method of the interview, there was variation among the participants' responses and some topics were discussed more than others. As the interviewer, I made efforts to ensure the direction of the conversation remained applicable to the discussion of Appalachian identity.

The interview schedule begins with establishing the background of the participant to include information on family life, parents' status, and current occupation. This part is to establish a basic understanding the participant's history and how they might view their Appalachian identity.

The interview then transitions to discussion of experiences at Giles High School, opinions on their secondary education, and how the high school has affected their identity. This section focuses the development of identity to the educational institution and further establishes how they view their Appalachian identity. Throughout this section, I encouraged the participant to distinguish between feelings they had in high school and feelings they currently have now.

After discussing high school, I asked them about their experiences with the organization and academic side of Virginia Tech. The next section discusses the actual college experience which focuses on the day-to-day life of being a college student and interactions with peers. These two sections focus on the development of identity at Virginia Tech and encourage discussions of how Virginia Tech has caused changes in opinions of Appalachian identity.

The final part of the interview asks about the future goals that participants have to include whether they intend on returning to Giles County, Virginia. I then concluded the interview by asking for further information that may not have been discussed and encouraged them to contact me if they have any comments, questions, or concerns about the study. After the interviews were conducted, I reviewed all of the recordings and transcribed every word from each interview in a script-like document.

### **Coding and Data Analysis**

After all interviews were conducted and recorded, they were transcribed into Microsoft Word in a script-like format. After all ten of the interviews were transcribed, I read over the interviews multiple times to obtain a baseline understanding of the interviews and developed four discussion questions to answer the research question—1. Do the interviewees communicate an Appalachian identity? 2. How do the interviewees view Appalachia and their hometown? 3. How do the interviewees' college experiences change or influence their Appalachian identity? 4. How do the Appalachian identities of the interviewees change due to exposure to larger amounts of diverse people at college? Once the discussion questions were developed, I began coding for each question using ATLAS.ti. Thematic coding was used because it enabled me to categorize a set of data into an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas that in turn can be used to answer the discussion questions and research question. The codes were developed as I read over the interviews initially and as they emerged, I continued to add codes as I saw necessary throughout the coding process. All codes were equally applied to each interview.

To explore the first discussion question, do the interviewees communicate an Appalachian identity, I developed four codes using thematic coding as I read through the



interviews and found various statements within the interviews that exemplified the definitions of the codes. Table A. displays the definitions for the four codes.

**Table A. Discussion Question 1 Codes**

<b>Name of Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Appalachian Identity Present	Claims and/or supports ownership of and/or pride in the local region
Lacking Appalachian Identity	Renounces and/or repudiates ownership and/or pride in the local region.
Avoided Communication	Directly making statements about a conversation where they avoided talking about their local region or implying the unwillingness to talk about their local region
Open to Communication	Directly making statements about a conversation where they talk about their local region or implying the willingness to talk about their local region

To explore the second discussion question, how the interviewees view and describe Appalachia and their hometowns, I used thematic coding. A total of 11 codes were created. The codes are not only limited to how the interviewees themselves view Appalachian identity, but also include how they think others view Appalachian identity.

**Table B. Discussion Question 2 Codes**

<b>Name of Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Sports	Describes the local culture in regards to a sport or activity,

	typically involves football
Giles County Diversity	Describes racial, cultural, social, or economic diversity of the local region
Education	Describes an education program in secondary education or knowledge received from a secondary education in the local region
Small Town	Any statement that specifically states “small town” or “small” and/or refers to life living in an area with a small population and close knit community
Joke	Any statement that specifically states “joke” or “laugh” in reference to the local region or talks about a part of the local region that the interviewee or others view as humorous
Giles County	How the interviewees reply when they are asked to describe where they are from
Religion	Describes the local region’s composition, disposition, and/or practices towards religious congregations, such as Christianity, does NOT include interviewee’s own religious beliefs
Politics	Describes the local region’s political happenings, such as the Ten Commandments and Confederate Flag issues, and how interviewees view these local political happenings
Stereotypical Language/Beliefs	Statements that elicit generalization towards the local region that may not necessarily be true of the entire local region or directly comment on stereotypes/stereotyping

Scenery/outdoors/hiking	Statements that discuss the local region's natural environment as a source of beauty, activity, or entertainment
Tone	How the interviewees discuss the local region in a conversation, such as joking, prideful, or negatively

To explore the third discussion question, how the interviewees' Appalachian identity changed in college, I developed four codes using thematic coding. For this set of codes, only statements referring to the individual's Appalachian identity was recorded because the question focuses on the individual's Appalachian identity and how it changes.

**Table C. Discussion Question 3 Codes**

<b>Name of Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Less Appalachian Identity	A statement that distinguishes a particular change in ideas or character, the interviewee believes that it takes away from their connection to their local region or makes them different to those from their local region
Same Appalachian Identity	A statement that affirms no change has occurred in their connections or feelings towards the local region
More Appalachian Identity	A statement that distinguishes a particular change in ideas or character, the interviewee believes that it adds to their connection to their local region or makes them more similar to those from their local region
Struggled with Identity	Does not necessarily result in more or less Appalachian identity,

	but a statement that suggests a conflict of views occurred as a result of attending college and having particular connections and feelings towards the local region
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The next discussion question is a follow-up question for question three and helps to further distinguish why the interviewees' Appalachian identities are changing. In order to explore the fourth discussion question, how the interviewees' Appalachian identity changes due to exposure to larger amounts of diverse people at college, I developed four codes using thematic coding. Once again, thematic coding was used because it enabled me to categorize a set of data into an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas. For this set of codes, only statements referring to the individual's Appalachian identity was recorded because the question focuses on the individual's Appalachian identity and how it changes.

**Table D. Discussion Question 4 Codes**

<b>Name of Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>
More Open/Lenient/Well Rounded	A statement that suggests the interviewee has become more accepting and/or aware of other people or ideas in comparison to before they went to college
Accent	Any statement that pertains to how the interviewee's or others talk with a dialect from their local region
Culture Shock	Statements that refer to the interviewees experiencing new and different kinds of people and places with relatively little or no prior experience, typically discuss feeling an

	emotion such as shock, surprise, or confusion
Found Myself	After experiencing college, the interviewee states that they have discovered a new or different part of themselves or something that interests them that they did not know of before

Once all codes were applied to the interviews, matrices were created to further interpret and categorize the codes. The matrices condense the data into simple categories within the discussion questions, reflect further analysis of the data to identify degree of support, and provide a multidimensional summary that will facilitate subsequent, more intensive analysis in the results and conclusion. By using matrices, I am able to categorize and arrange collected data in tables to represent the cause and process in a tabular manner. This approach helps make comparisons and constructions of hypotheses. See Appendix F for basic matrix outlines that were used to develop the results. The matrix outlines are intended to be used to interpret one interview. Questions four and five matrices work off question three, so the codes from question three reemerge in the questions four and five matrices.

### **Personal Biases and Interests**

I moved to Giles County, Virginia, when I was ten years old, I am a graduate of Giles High School, I attained my bachelor’s degree of Sociology at Virginia Tech, and I am currently pursuing my Master’s degree in Sociology at Virginia Tech as well. The participants of my study have grown up with me and had many similar experiences. My interest in researching Appalachia has been present since my first classes at Virginia Tech as an undergrad. I remember writing about racial relations within Appalachia in a class on diversity and communities my first

semester. However, until recently, I have also had a strong sense of denial to my Appalachian identity and distaste for my Appalachian education. Upon taking various graduate level sociology courses and Appalachian Studies courses, specifically, I have come to better understand my Appalachian identity and learn healthy and productive ways to embrace it. I am familiar with the subject matter of this project at a personal level. However, since I experienced life outside Appalachia when I was younger and my parents and family are not natives to Appalachia, I have had ample opportunity to experience and learn about other ways of life and identity. Thus, I do not see my personal connection to the study as a hindrance; this liminality allows me to maneuver among different identities and see the field from many different points of view.

### **Ethical Considerations**

There are no potential physical, economic, or legal risks. The participants were not asked for information on sensitive personal issues that would lead to psychological or social injury. Particular care was taken to ensure that all information that could possibly be traced back to an individual participant was removed. If participants were aware that if they became emotionally upset during an interview, they would be given the opportunity to continue the interview and go on to the next question, or to end the interview and/or quit the study if they chose.

Interviews were conducted in a private area of the participant's choice to protect their confidentiality. All information was kept anonymous and confidential. Their names and identifying information were removed from all audiotapes, papers, and other documentation resulting from the study. Participants will only be identified by an ID number. All digital data, including voice recordings and interview transcripts, will be password-protected and secured. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than

individuals working on the project without their written consent. Should an adverse event occur, I will immediately contact IRB. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

The study may help participants better understand their place and Appalachian identity while also finding ways to create a more positive college experience. Additionally, participating in a study that aims to improve the experience of those from the same area can be fulfilling. This study may provide an opportunity for students to voice their experiences. Also, study findings may serve as a resource to the community of educators, administrators, and others in the education field.

## **Chapter 4: RESULTS**

In this section, I will go over the results that emerged from the data analysis. After discussing the variations among the interviewees and how they may have affected their responses to interview questions, I will discuss the varying levels and types of Appalachian identity among the sample. Then I will discuss whether the sample was willing to communicate and voice their Appalachian identity during the interview and to the general public/student body. Next, I will review how the sample described and viewed Appalachia in terms of diversity, education, entertainment, and population. Lastly, I will discuss how the samples' college experience changes Appalachian identity and results in a culture shock, new awareness of their accent, more openness and leniency, and identification of interests outside Giles County. The next section, the discussion, will relate the results back to the discussion questions and previous research.

For discussion, anonymity, and organizational purposes, I have assigned each interviewee a pseudonym—Liam, Noah, Emma, Olivia, Mason, Sophia, Ava, Isabella, Ethan, and Abby. Throughout the results, discussion, and conclusion, I will refer to these pseudonyms to help the reader follow the experiences and perspectives of the interviewees.

### **Revisiting the Sample and their Variations**

The following are factors that were considered to possibly affect the responses and perspectives on Appalachian identity and the college experience: gender, rural/suburban home location, parents with a job at Virginia Tech, parents with little or no college education, and participants attending Giles High School for all five years. Giles High School has grades eight through twelve. This sub-section will discuss these aspects of the sample and how they did or did not come to affect Appalachian identity and the college experience. However, to be able to



suggest more concrete conclusions for the population, further research would need to be conducted focusing on the different factors.

Gender did not seem to have a particular influence on the interviewees' responses. There were female and male interviewees with very strong Appalachian identity and very weak Appalachian identity. Additionally the college experience and how it affected Appalachian identity varied regardless of gender.

Location of the interviewees' homes in more rural or suburban areas did not seem to have an effect on the interviewees' responses. Isabella, as will be discussed further in another section, had a very weak Appalachian identity and came from a very rural part of the county. On the other hand, Mason was also from a rural area but had a very strong Appalachian identity. Ava and Noah were from more suburban parts of the county, but Ava had a much stronger Appalachian identity than Noah.

There were four interviewees with parents who had a job at Virginia Tech and one interviewee with a close relative who had a job at Virginia Tech. While it is difficult to suggest that there was a distinct effect on Appalachian identity or the college experience with such a small sample, there may have been an effect on preparedness for college and/or acclimating to the college environment. Abby, when asked how the large amounts of diversity at Virginia Tech affected her college experience, replied "I don't think it was really a cultural shock because my mom worked over there and I got to see a whole bunch of people there anyways." Ava brought up that having a close relative at Virginia Tech helped her decide on a major and stay on track.

Parents with little or no college education may have had an effect on the college experience and Appalachian identity, but more research would need to be conducted to draw any

concrete conclusions. Out of the ten interviewees, only two, Abby and Emma, had parents who did not receive an Associate's Degree or greater. They both struggled when they first entered college with making friends and academics. However, they were not the only ones to struggle when they entered college and with such a small sample it is difficult to make any conclusions on whether parents' education level affected Appalachian identity and the college experience.

Not attending Giles High School for all five years may have had an effect on Appalachian identity and the college experience, but more research would need to be conducted to draw any concrete conclusions. Oliva was the only interviewee to not attend Giles High School for all five years. She moved from an area with larger schools and more diverse population. While she still communicated an Appalachian identity, she had experiences that the other interviewees did not—such as reputable schools and exposure to diversity—that may have helped her have an easier transition into the college atmosphere.

### **The Variety of Appalachian Identity**

While all of the interviewees said that they grew up in a rural area, each of the ten interviewees expressed varying degrees of Appalachian identity and had different ways of expressing it as well. Additionally, each interviewee, except for Mason, had varying degrees and different ways of expressing their lack of an Appalachian identity. While each interviewee had a unique response to communicate the extent of their Appalachian identity, several themes emerged among the interviews. When the interviewees communicated an Appalachian identity, they typically talked about a connection to family, pride in Giles, politeness, love of nature, and appreciation for the small town atmosphere. When the interviewees communicated a lack in Appalachian identity, they typically talked about the restrictive culture that pervades Giles in regards to diversity, a lack of resources within the county, the need to explore elsewhere, not

fitting into the confines of a typical Appalachian identity, distancing from those who remained in Giles, and embarrassment towards local issues. These themes will be further discussed in the following subheadings.

Three interviewees, Mason, Ava, and Abby, expressed particularly strong Appalachian identities. Those with a strong connection to Giles County typically discussed how they were very proud of where they came from, embrace the characteristics they developed in Giles, and have remained unchanged from attending college in many ways. Abby expressed how her attachment to Giles and Appalachia increased from attending college as she developed a higher appreciation for the area and rural living. While studying abroad, Abby stated “I really missed the mountains, I missed using our slang words and having everyone be able to understand.” Interestingly, they did not necessarily feel the need to stay within Giles. In fact, Ava and Abby specifically stated it was important for them to not remain in Giles. Ava felt that she was a “city girl trapped in a country area,” but still considered Giles to be “a very large part” of who she is. These interviewees remain within the highest Appalachian identity category because they would embrace and communicate their Appalachian identity regardless of their location in the world.

Four interviewees, Liam, Emma, Olivia, and Sophia, expressed weaker Appalachian identities, but not necessarily the weakest. This group had more variety in their responses than the other two. However, as a whole, those with a weaker connection to Giles emphasized how important it is for them to explore different experiences and places, but communicate an interest in returning to the area or close to it. In particular, this group refers to family, friends, and/or love of nature as their influence in returning or staying close. While they may not embrace their Appalachian identity to the same extent that the interviewees with the strongest Appalachian identity do, they discuss how nature, friends, and family draw them back to the area. Sophia and

Olivia discussed how most people did not see them as Appalachian, but relate how important family is to their connection to the area. Sophia stated that Giles is “a significant part” of her identity and leaving her family for a job in a different state will be “very difficult,” but she also states that “people don’t really see me that way. I live in the city now... they don’t really think of me as being someone from the country.” Emma and Liam describe how they do not fit the typical Appalachian identity and resist people’s grouping them into that image, but they also explain how either friends or family keep them close to the region. Emma stated “my family is very important to me, and I’m still friends with people from high school. I can’t imagine living in the city my whole life.” For each of the four interviewees, there are parts that they embrace and other parts that they try to distance themselves from because they do not agree with them. Olivia stated “I try to distance myself from the parts that I don’t agree with. And then I try to kind of embrace the parts that I do agree with.”

Noah, Isabella, and Ethan expressed the weakest Appalachian identities. Those with the weakest communication of an Appalachian identity felt that there was nothing holding them back from leaving the area and did not feel that they fit into the definition of an Appalachian person. Referring to an Appalachian identity, Ethan stated that he “didn’t feel like it was me.” Noah and Isabella emphasized how they saw their upbringing in Giles as nothing but their background and certainly not where they were headed in life. Isabella stated “I definitely think [Giles] has taught me a lot... I feel like I will always know where my roots are. But I think I have definitely grown a lot since moving from there.” Isabella mentioned that her family was planning to move away and stated “if I don’t have any family there I’m not going to go back to Giles ever.” Noah primarily emphasized how he did not feel he fit the Appalachian image and that Giles did not have much to offer him in regards to the future—“I don’t really feel too attached to Giles County

emotionally. I don't see it as my place where I go home." Isabella and Ethan mentioned a connection to and appreciation for nature, but only Isabella attributed it to her upbringing in Giles.

### **Willingness to Communicate the Identity to Others**

Whether they were friends, professors, classmates, or strangers, interviewees had various ideas and methods when it came to actually communicating an Appalachian identity to others. Eight of the ten interviewees expressed a willingness to communicate their Appalachian identity. Only Isabella and Noah did not voluntarily communicate their Appalachian identity to others and were part of the weakest communication of an Appalachian identity category. They did not feel like typical Appalachians and did not want to be attached to the stigma associated with the area. Noah stated "I don't really identify with any country style, or Christian, or Confederate flag stuff. I really don't like any of that stuff. I never really was super country anyway, so I just feel weird and I don't agree with it." Ethan, the other interviewee who was a part of the weakest communication of Appalachian identity category, actually enjoyed discussing where people came from; he just did not personally see where he came from as something that influenced his current identity. When asked why he did not speak up in class about his Appalachian identity, he stated "Just because I felt like I wasn't a typical Appalachian. My parents were from the North and don't have an accent." Isabella did not communicate with others because she felt that people would associate her with Appalachian stigmas and stereotypes. Contrarily, Noah did not believe talking about his upbringing in an Appalachian environment would affect how others thought of him. While Noah may have not talked about it much, he was not opposed to talking about his Appalachian identity.

For those who did communicate their Appalachian identity to others, most agreed that it depended upon the person they were talking to when discussing where they came from. There are inevitably people who are not accepting of others in this world and the interviewees would commonly steer clear of these people or avoid talking to them about their upbringing. Liam talked about how he hesitated to talk about Giles in a classroom setting, but when talking with his friends about his Appalachian upbringing he would often “joke around.” Five of the ten interviewees specifically mentioned that they discuss their Appalachian identity with friends. Sophia even encouraged some of her friends to come home with her and see how she actually lived. For the most part, however, discussion of Appalachia typically revolved around its shortcomings or beauty of nature. Ava stated “I have friends that come to the Cascades [waterfall] and tell me how beautiful it is up here.” The interviewees felt that their friends’ perceptions were not exactly representative of the area compared to their own views.

Six of the interviewees—Ava, Olivia, Sophia, Noah, Mason, and Abby—were open to discussion of their Appalachian identity in the classroom and the other four—Liam, Emma, Isabella, and Ethan—were not. Of the six who were not opposed to talking about Appalachian identity in the classroom, only Ava, Olivia, and Sophia actually talked about it in the classroom. They reported positive experiences and felt that their views were valued. Olivia discussed her Appalachian upbringing in a class presentation and when asked if she felt people viewed her differently afterwards she replied “Not really. I do like to point it out to people that I come from the middle of nowhere.” The other three, Noah, Mason, and Abby, while they were not opposed to discussing their Appalachian identity in a classroom, did not necessarily see the need or relevance to discuss it. When asked how he would feel about discussing Giles in a classroom setting, Mason stated “I mean I don’t think Giles is that much different from other counties. I

mean obviously it is in many ways, but people seem to be pretty accepting your background/culture around Virginia Tech.” Liam, Emma, Isabella, and Ethan were opposed to discussing their Appalachian identity in the classroom primarily because they did not want to be associated with the stigma of an Appalachian identity in a classroom setting. Ethan had taken an Appalachian Studies class and did not speak up because he felt that he did not fit the image—“I guess I didn’t really speak up much in that class... just because I felt like I wasn’t a typical Appalachian.” Liam avoided speaking up in class after a teacher jokingly asked students for their town’s “church to bar ratio.” He felt that if he had answered that question “people would think [he] lived a very shelter life and maybe even backwards,” so he never spoke up.

Sophia, Liam, Emma, and Isabella specifically stated that they were embarrassed or pained by the legal issues that have occurred in Giles as a result of the Ten Commandments being posted illegally in the high school and the Confederate Flag being flown on many trucks and homes. In reference to the legal issues, Emma stated “I’ll talk about it, but I’ll tell them, I’ll separate myself from the situation. I’ll say I was not involved with that because I don’t agree with that.” This embarrassment resulted in avoiding or changing the subject in conversations about the area because they did not want to be associated with those who supported the Ten Commandments and Confederate Flag issues. Sophia stated “But like the legal troubles and some of the ideologies I try to distance myself from.” They did not agree with the stance of many in Giles and did not want people to assume that they did, but at the same time they found it hard to discuss it to people who were not from the area. Olivia and Sophia believed that the legal issues within Giles are embarrassing partly because they are so insignificant yet so typical of a small rural town. Olivia stated “what happens [in Giles] is honestly kind of insignificant on the larger scale.”

## **Homogenous Region in Diverse World**

When asked to describe the diversity of their county, the interviewees overwhelmingly acknowledged the lack in racial diversity. Only Mason considered Giles to be racially diverse, but he still acknowledged that almost everyone was White—“Giles is pretty diverse. We have all kinds of different races and exchange students. And you know it’s by far primarily a white school.” Though I did not ask specifically for any certain type of diversity, only Olivia described diversities beyond racial diversity. She considered Giles to be diverse economically and intellectually—“I think Giles has a large spread of wealth and lack thereof. I think there is a large spread of intelligence and lack thereof. More diverse than a lot of schools I would say in that aspect.” All interviewees stated that the high school consisted of almost all White people, with only a few African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans. Some interviewees added that there was an exchange student or two from another country. Noah, Liam, Olivia, and Sophia made jokes or joked to others about the relative lack of diversity at Giles. When asked what tone Noah uses when describing Giles, he responded “I mean I joke about it. I know the people who come from Giles County and I joke about it not being very diverse.” When describing the diversity of Giles County, seven of the ten interviewees compared Giles to other places in their description. Abby, Sophia, Noah, and Isabella compared the diversity of urban places to Giles. Liam and Ava compared the diversity of Virginia Tech to Giles. Olivia compared the diversity of her previous high school to Giles. Overall, when describing the diversity of Giles, the interviewees had strikingly similar responses—primarily White with a few other races that were small in numbers.



## **Educational Underdogs**

When asked for their view on their education at Giles High School, Mason, Ava, Liam, Noah, and Sophia described their education as average or better using words such as “overall pretty good” and “decent.” No interviewee used words that suggested they were extremely proud of or grateful for their high school education. Abby, Emma, Isabella, Olivia, and Ethan communicated a more negative perception of their education, but still acknowledged it was not the worst possible education using words such as “not as good as it should be” and “other schools were better.” Specifically, these same five interviewees stated that Giles High School either did not prepare them well for college or that some of the classes at Giles High School were not challenging and should have been harder.

Noah, Abby, and Mason viewed the smaller size of Giles High School preferentially or as an advantage. When Mason was asked how it made him feel that he did not have large, affluent high schools, he responded “To me, it wasn’t really a big deal. I always like the smaller class size myself.” Interestingly, all three interviewees who appreciated the smaller size of Giles High School also commented on how surprised and unprepared they were for the larger student body at Virginia Tech. The other seven interviewees did not comment on the size of the high school being any better or worse.

Liam and Olivia specifically mentioned issues of internal drama within the faculty at Giles High School. Olivia stated “I feel like the staff had a lot of internal drama going on. That kind of played out in the way they taught.” They associated it with small town community characteristics. They felt that it took away from the students’ education. None of the other interviewees mentioned internal drama within the faculty, but the question was not directly asked during the interview.

All of the interviewees were asked to state what factors influenced their decision to attend college. Four answers emerged from their responses—myself, family, teachers or guidance counselors, and/or academic programs—and each interviewee had more than one influence. Only Emma did not mention herself as an influence for attending college. Only Olivia did not mention her family as an influence for attending college. Most interviewees stated that their family directly encouraged them or family members attending college influenced them. Ethan stated “My parents went to college, so that was the expectation kind of.” Emma, Mason, Sophia, and Ava stated that teachers or guidance counselors were an influence for attending college. Most of the interviewees stated that their teacher/guidance counselor directly encouraged them or placed them in advanced classes. Seven of the interviewees—Liam, Noah, Emma, Sophia, Ava, Isabella, and Ethan—believed that the academic programs offered by Giles High School influenced their decision to attend college. They cited dual enrollment, Governor’s School, and/or college prep classes as the academic programs. As mentioned earlier, all of the interviewees had participated in at least one or two of the mentioned programs. These influences on their decision to enter college and college preparatory programs could suggest that most, if not all, of the interviewees felt that they were expected to attend college. Sophia stated “I had always wanted to go to college because my whole family had, but the teachers there were definitely encouraging, especially in the NRCC [New River Community College], Governor’s School, or any type of college prep course. Everyone was always very encouraging.”

Liam, Olivia, Ethan, and Abby felt that the focus at Giles High School was not to attend college, but rather to enter the workforce immediately after graduating high school. Olivia, who had attended a college preparatory high school before attending Giles High School, stated “it was a different environment and not as much was expected from you.” Ethan also mentioned how

growing up in Giles taught him how to be skilled with his hands, but did not teach him how to succeed in college. Since this question was not directly asked, the subject did not come up in the six other interviews. Interestingly, none of these four interviewees stated teachers/guidance counselors as an influence for wanting to attend college.

Only Noah and Mason felt that Giles High School was comparable to other schools, particularly those in urban areas. Noah, a member of the lowest Appalachian identity category, had confidence in his academic abilities coming out of high school and stated “I mean I definitely can compete with people that were from Northern Virginia.” Mason acknowledged that more urban high schools had more resources, but did not believe that enabled them to receive a better education. However, the eight other interviewees felt that more urban high schools in areas such as Northern Virginia provided a better education for preparing their students for college.

When asked to compare Giles High School to schools that were located in areas considered more rural, six of the interviewees—Emma, Ethan, Olivia, Sophia, Noah, and Isabella—believed Giles High School outperformed these schools, typically commenting on the smaller size of the more rural high schools and the fewer amounts of programs offered. In reference to the smaller neighboring high school, Isabella stated “I feel like Giles was a little bit better than Narrows from what I’ve heard from people who went to Narrows. I think we had a wider variety of classes that we could take than they did.” The other four interviewees did not necessarily see Giles High School as any better or worse than other rural high schools.

Seven of the interviewees—Abby, Ethan, Isabella, Emma, Sophia, Noah, and Olivia—directly stated that they wanted more courses for Giles High School and/or felt disadvantaged

because Giles did not offer the same classes as other schools. Mason, Liam, and Ava felt that the courses offered at Giles High School were substantial for attending college. Ava emphasized that Giles did not need to offer more courses and believed students would be disinterested in more courses—“I don’t think a normal person at Giles would want to learn like German or anything.” Liam stated that Giles did not offer a more diverse set of liberal arts classes most likely due to a lack of prevalence in the area—“I think they may have offered that [Governor’s School for the Arts] because I know Virginia Beach... [has] like a lot of music studios over there... it’s just kind of more apparent over there in that area than Southwest Virginia.”

Emma, Olivia, Isabella, and Ethan believed that Giles tends to be stereotyped as an uneducated place. Emma expressed anger towards this stereotype because people automatically assume she is uneducated when she tells them she is from Giles. She stated “Well maybe it is just all in my head, but when you do tell them they just seem to automatically think you’re stupid or I don’t know or you’re just into hunting and very religious and those sorts of things.” Isabella commented on how she tries to distance herself from the region because of the perception that the people of the area are uneducated. The other six interviewees did not make statements about Giles being stereotyped as uneducated.

All of the interviewees were asked whether they planned to settle and raise a family in Giles County. Only one interviewee, Mason, answered that he would definitely like to live and raise a family in Giles County with the current educational system—“I mean I have a farm here. It is home to me.” Six interviewees—Noah, Emma, Olivia, Isabella, Ava, and Ethan—specifically stated that the education system was a significant reason why they would not want to raise a family in Giles County. Noah stated that he would “probably not” want to raise his children in Giles because “I know how the schools are. Maybe they could go to Blacksburg High

School or something like that for a decent education.” Liam, Sophia, and Abby did not state directly that the educational system dissuaded them from raising a family in Giles County; they tended to refer to financial and career implications instead.

### **Natural Beauty in Giles County**

Eight of the interviewees—Isabella, Olivia, Emma, Sophia, Noah, Ava, Ethan, and Abby—made statements about the nature and landscape within Giles when describing where they are from. Mason and Liam did not talk about nature or the landscape during their interviews. Virginia Tech students’ unfamiliarity with the local area and especially Giles was a common issue for the interviewees when describing how they communicate where they are from. While some of the interviewees simply stated that they lived near the Cascades, others go more in depth and describe their love for the local nature and hiking on trails. In fact, Isabella, in the weakest Appalachian identity category, described nature and the landscape as one of the only things she likes about the area—“I appreciate, like, I do like the rural area and you know just being able to go hiking and doing outdoors stuff all the time. I do like that aspect.” Contrarily, Noah, also in the weakest Appalachian identity category, simply uses the Cascades as a reference point for when he is describing the area to Virginia Tech students—“ I tell them it’s where the Cascades are and people generally know where that is.” Noah, Ava, Ethan, and Abby directly reference the Cascades waterfall in their description of Giles because it is a frequently visited hiking spot by Virginia Tech students and the person they were talking to would be familiar with it.

Olivia, Abby, Ava, Ethan, Sophia, and Emma state that most people who visit Giles appreciate its natural beauty. Sophia states that she tries to get her friends that are unfamiliar with the area to come home with her and see the beauty that Giles has to offer—“I like to try and

bring people home so they can see it. I've tried to get some of my friends from more urban areas to come and visit and I think when they do they get kind of a better view of what I mean because it is a hard thing to explain." Isabella stated that while most people probably think of Giles as a place of uneducated people, they also see it as a place with pretty nature and landscapes. However, to contrast the positive view of nature in Giles, Ethan, Ava, Olivia, and Noah specifically refer to Giles as the "middle of nowhere." Mason gets told he is from the "boonies" all the time. While he does not agree with those people who tell him he is from the boonies and feels that Giles is not really all that far out of the way, he does not correct them.

### **Small Town Drama**

Liam, Noah, Emma, Sophia, and Isabella had a strong negative perception of the legal troubles that occurred due to Giles High School's having the Ten Commandments posted in the lobby and/or locals flying the Confederate flag on vehicles and homes in response to the recent issues surrounding the flag. Mason, Olivia, and Ava did not have nearly as strong opinions on the legal troubles. Abby and Ethan stated that they were supportive of the posting of the Ten Commandments in Giles High School and/or the flying of the Confederate Flag.

Mason, Abby, Olivia, and Sophia saw the legal issues within Giles as insignificant concerns when compared to other problems occurring in the world. Olivia added that she appreciates the intellectual conversations she has with people in college while the conversations she has with people who have remained in Giles are frustratingly narrow minded and unstimulating. These interviewees did not necessarily have a negative perception of the legal issues. Mason stated that he saw these issues as an attempt to draw attention to a county that is largely ignored by public news—"More of it over anything is trying to get some attention... you know we aren't really talked about too much and when something comes up like that... it's

something to talk about, you know what I mean.” The six interviewees who did not compare Giles’ legal issues to other areas may or may not have felt that Giles’ legal issues were insignificant, but it did not come up in the interview.

Five of the interviewees—Sophia, Isabella, Liam, Emma, and Noah—stated that they were embarrassed or pained by the local legal issues and made efforts to distance or separate themselves from these issues. Sophia stated “It’s a little painful for me. I will tell people about it as an example of how rural the area I come from is. I think saying that they are backwards is wrong.” Ethan and Abby sided with the local legal issues and were not ashamed to defend them. Abby stated that she “would try to explain it” to anyone who asked her about the legal troubles in Giles County. Even though Ethan was placed in the weakest Appalachian identity category, interestingly he still felt the need to defend the local legal issues—“I feel like maybe it was the way we were taught stuff... I feel like we were told different perspectives [in school].” Ava, Olivia, and Mason did not state whether they were embarrassed or agreed with the local legal issues.

### **Small Town Community**

Emma, Olivia, and Ava talked about growing up with the same people from the very first days of school until they graduated from high school. Olivia had not grown up in Giles and only moved there her sophomore year. She did not like this aspect of Giles because it was difficult for her to make friends—“I mean I am sure some people felt connectedness at Giles, but since like I’d come in and I hadn’t known everyone since I was two, I was like an outsider.” In addition to growing up with the same people in Giles, five of the interviewees—Emma, Isabella, Sophia, Abby, and Ava—felt that a small town characteristic of Giles was that “everyone knows everyone.” When saying “everyone knows everyone” the interviewees typically meant that

private affairs usually became publicly known within the high school and/or, more simply, they do not meet a lot of new people while growing up. Abby, who had traveled abroad before, really liked the “everyone knows everyone” aspect of Giles because it made her feel much safer than when she had spent time in another country and not known anyone.

Six of the interviewees—Abby, Noah, Isabella, Liam, Emma, and Sophia—felt that Giles has a very narrow set of social, cultural, and/or religious norms. However, the degree of distaste they had for the strict social norms varied. Abby simply felt that she was able to explore other religions more freely outside of Giles and did not mention any other issues. Sophia, Emma, and Liam viewed the restrictive norms negatively and tried to distance themselves from them and Giles. In the most extreme cases, Noah and Isabella, who were placed into the weakest Appalachian identity category, commented on how the strict cultural, religious, and social norms in Giles made them feel repressed and unable to express themselves while they were in high school. Isabella stated “I don’t usually have like the same views as people from Giles County have. I guess that is another, I don’t really talk about my views on things with people from Giles County because it is so different from them and I usually get looked down on when do voice my opinion on things. Yeah that’s why I keep my mouth shut on a lot of stuff.” The strict norms within Giles made them feel that they could not speak up for or defend themselves in high school. Noah mentioned the fear of bullying if he had spoken up for his points of view in high school—“I would say I have become more myself at college than high school...when I was in high school I was worried about bullying and what not... there is a lot more freedom at college to try out new things than at high school.” This inability to use self-expression in Giles could possibly be connected to their weak connections to an Appalachian identity and significant loss of Appalachian identity after attending college.



Olivia, Mason, Sophia, and Isabella stated that they grew up on a farm outside the town limits and in relative isolation from others. Liam, Ethan, Abby, Ava, Emma, and Olivia commented on the small number of things to do and amenities available in Giles. For instance, Abby stated “we do have McDonalds... and a Wal-Mart, but that’s about it.” Emma liked to emphasize that there were no stoplights in the town she grew up in when describing Giles to her Virginia Tech friends. Liam, Ethan, and Abby specifically mentioned how Wal-Mart is the only real place to shop. The interviewees depicted Giles in a negative light because there were so few things to do and places to shop when compared to other places. Ava and Ethan commented on how they had to go to another county to watch a movie at a movie theater or shop at a mall. Olivia stated that when she first attended college, she felt inferior to other students who had more access to shopping malls where they were from.

### **College Changes Appalachian Identity**

All of the interviewees expressed some kind of change in their identity after attending college, but they also acknowledged parts that remained the same. While some college experiences decreased their Appalachian identity, other aspects of the college experience increased their Appalachian identity. Six of the interviewees—Liam, Olivia, Emma, Ava, Sophia, and Abby—explained how parts of their Appalachian identity lessened, stayed the same, and increased. Four of the interviewees—Noah, Mason, Isabella, and Ethan—explained how parts of their Appalachian identity have stayed the same and decreased. The reason and extent for the change was unique for each interviewee, but several themes did occur among them.

When interviewees described how their Appalachian identity lessened in college, several themes emerged. Seven of the interviewees—Ava, Sophia, Emma, Olivia, Isabella, Liam, and Noah—talked about finding and becoming more in tune with themselves and their interests at

college. Whether it was discovering their dream job or finding people they could connect with, they were able to find people and activities that matched their own interests and beliefs. The interviewees felt that they would not have been able to find these people or activities back in Giles. Emma stated, “I feel like I found myself more in college. Like who I am, what truly interests me.” Eight of the interviewees—Liam, Noah, Emma, Olivia, Sophia, Ava, Isabella, and Ethan—felt that their connection to the area faded after leaving for college. When they returned to Giles for a visit, they felt disconnected from the people and the area. It no longer felt like the home it had felt like before they went to college. Ava stated that she felt “weird” when going back home and preferred to stay at Virginia Tech than go home. Additionally, Liam, Noah, Emma, Olivia, Sophia, Ava, Isabella, and Ethan felt that friends that they had in high school were not as close or they had completely lost all connections with them. For example, Isabella stated “I don’t really see them a lot. I really don’t hang out with people from [Giles].” All of the interviewees felt that they had become more aware of the world beyond Giles and began to understand the great vastness of diversity in the world. When interviewees described how their Appalachian identity stayed the same in college, several themes emerged. While college may have changed how they view Giles or their desire to be associated with Giles, the three interviewees with the weakest Appalachian identity—Noah, Isabella, and Ethan—still acknowledged that Giles was a part of their background and it would always be where they came from. Noah stated “I would definitely say it makes up a lot of my background because I’ve been there for so long.” Isabella, Emma, Ava, and Abby mentioned that they continued to enjoy the natural beauty of Giles after attending college. Abby talked about how she liked “seeing all these farms and the mountains” and not being “bombarded by people.” Often using the natural beauty of Giles to depict the brighter side of their hometown to other Virginia Tech students, many of

the interviewees continued to embrace the natural beauty of Giles. Despite some of their decisions to leave the area, family, friends, and property kept them close or visiting as much as possible. Liam, Oliva, Emma, and Abby explained the importance of maintaining family ties. Emma and Mason described how keeping local friends was important to them. While keeping local friends did not make up the larger proportion of the interviewees, it was extremely important for the two interviewees and kept them in close ties with Giles. Emma stated that when she was thinking about the different colleges she could apply to “Tech would be a good place to go because I don’t think I was ready to leave my family and friends for a place that was more than like thirty or so minutes away.” Ethan, Emma, and Olivia described how keeping property or eventually purchasing property in the area was important to them.

When interviewees described how their Appalachian identity increased while in college, three themes emerged. Emma, Ava, and Abby talked about how their appreciation for the beauty of Giles increased. Ava talked about how she has a “better respect” for her hometown because “friends come to the Cascades and tell me how beautiful it is up here.” While other interviewees had already developed an appreciation for Giles’ natural beauty before attending college, college enabled these three interviewees to develop more appreciation for the landscape and nature. These interviewees specifically connected their increased appreciation for Giles’ natural beauty to other Virginia Tech students commenting on and appreciating Giles’ natural beauty. Five of the interviewees—Emma, Ava, Abby, Sophia, and Olivia—talked about how they developed a better respect for the area after experiencing new places. The small town atmosphere and close-knit community created a feeling of belonging and safety that other places failed to provide. After experiencing other places, the interviewees were able to appreciate Giles for some of its more positive aspects. Liam and Abby explained how they were taught to be polite to everyone

and how it seemed not to be reciprocated at college. While before college they had considered politeness to be something everyone was taught, once they attended college they realized it was a quality few others had and took more pride in their quality of politeness. Abby specifically mentioned how she would hold doors for people and no one would say thank you. Liam mentioned how surprised people would be at his politeness.

## **Culture Shock**

When entering college, all of the interviewees but Abby were shocked by the large student body and wide array of different and diverse people. Noah stated that it was “Definitely a little bit of a culture shock because there are so many people at VT versus GHS. There is a lot more variety and diversity.” However, while all of the interviewees stated that the initial culture shock from attending Virginia Tech was a daunting surprise, it did not last long and they had assimilated into Virginia Tech within the first year. Noah goes on to explain that he got used to the environment at Virginia Tech “probably after his first semester. That first semester I was settling in. I was realizing I’m in college, this is okay, I’ll be fine.” The interviewees made statements crediting the initial culture shock to Giles County’s lack of diversity and small population. Giles had not prepared them for the large and diverse population at Virginia Tech.

Abby, the one interviewee who felt that she did not experience a culture shock, credited living close and having a parent working at Virginia Tech. However, Abby did experience a culture shock when she traveled to a more populated city outside the United States. The large and densely packed population along with high crime rates proved to be quite a challenge for her that she had not anticipated.

Isabella, Sophia, Emma, and Ava thought that growing up in a small town hindered them from interacting with new and different people at Virginia Tech, especially in comparison to students who came from urban areas like Northern Virginia. Ava stated “I think it would be nice to have diversities and ethnicities and races to get people more used to and able to go out in the real world and meet new people and not just be secluded to one thing for the rest of their life.” They felt that students from urban areas were at an advantage when it comes to meeting new people because they have much larger student bodies and are familiar with having to meet new people in classroom settings because they do not know everybody. However, after the first semester, they were able find friends and fit into the groups that they found.

### **Accents and Awareness**

Seven of the interviewees—Liam, Noah, Mason, Sophia, Ava, Ethan, and Abby—discuss how Virginia Tech students point out their accents in conversations. While some of the Virginia Tech students who point out their accents were just curious about where they came from, some would make fun of the interviewees. Liam talks about how people always acted “shocked” by his accent. However, none of the interviewees stated that they felt particularly singled out or embarrassed by their accents at Virginia Tech. In fact, Mason stated “they have their accents and I have mine, so it was never a big deal.” Ava, Liam, Abby, Noah, and Mason believe they have a strong Appalachian accent while Sophia and Ethan state that they only have a few phrases or words that bring out their Appalachian accent. Since being in college, Abby and Sophia believe their accent has increased, Liam and Ava believe their accent has decreased, and Ethan, Noah, and Mason believe their accent has remained the same. Interestingly five of the interviewees—Sophia, Abby, Liam, Ava, and Ethan—state that they were unaware of their accent until Virginia Tech students pointed it out.

## **Openness to Diversity**

One of the biggest changes that the interviewees felt occurred to them from attending college was the shift in their understanding of people who were different from them. All of the interviewees with the exception of Ethan specifically discussed how the college experience and the diversity that they encountered at Virginia Tech opened their eyes to new and different people and enabled them to become more accepting of others and their differences. Ava stated “I think that going from GHS to Tech, I am much more accepting of people. And I am a good listener to anyone and all the diversity.” The nine interviewees also discussed how they had to change their views in college and most likely would have not changed their views if they had remained in Giles.

As they experienced more places and people, they realized how important it was to explore beyond Giles or not completely restrict themselves to the beliefs they grew up with. All of the interviewees felt that they had developed different opinions in certain areas and broadened their acceptance of others as a result of attending college. Liam and Ava specifically mentioned how they had become more accepting of different sexual orientations. Liam stated “One of the biggest issues I’ve faced is gay rights and all of that. I met several people at VT and friends that are gay. Thinking that it is morally wrong to be gay or whatever... it hurts me to think I would have to tell them that just because my church dictates that. I have really loosened up on those kinds of issues.” After attending college, they felt that Giles was largely unaccepting of different sexualities and did not think they would have developed more accepting opinions had they remained in Giles.

## **Found Myself**

All of the interviewees described how attending Virginia Tech made them more in tune with themselves and enabled them to become more of who they wanted to be. Whether it was just appreciating the skills they had developed while growing up in Giles or taking the steps to attain their dream job, attending Virginia Tech proved to be a place where people could discover and learn to appreciate themselves. While some interviewees found themselves being distanced from Giles as they changed, others found they were becoming closer to their Appalachian identity.

Seven of the interviewees—Noah, Olivia, Isabella, Liam, Sophia, Ava, and Emma—described how they could explore their interests more at Virginia Tech and ultimately became happier with themselves. Sophia stated “I think what I learned at Tech was that I wasn’t very happy at Giles. My ideologies really didn’t match much with the area.” Not only were there more things to explore and participate in, but also the freedom to explore these things without judgement was present. Noah, Olivia, Isabella, Liam, and Sophia found that Virginia Tech offered an atmosphere where they had friends with similar interests and beliefs and they were able to open up more than they had at Giles. While this discovery of their interests and similar people enabled them to become more in tune and happy with themselves, it also reflected a lessening of their Appalachian identity and connectedness to Giles. The interviewees described how it was not in their interests to return home and that they felt the need to continue exploring elsewhere rather than return to Giles after graduating college. Ava stated “I don’t think I would be happy here... I feel like a city girl trapped in a country area. I want to see what it’s like living in the city for a while.” Another interviewee came out as gay while at Virginia Tech and expressed no interest in returning to Giles.

Abby, Ava, Emma, Olivia, and Sophia found that attending college enabled them to enjoy Giles County and embrace certain aspects of their Appalachian identity more. Some of the same interviewees who described a lessening of their Appalachian identity in college also described an increase in their Appalachian identity—different parts were embraced and other parts were left behind. The interviewees describe the increase in their Appalachian identity as result of an increased appreciation of the area after experiencing more people and places. Between the natural beauty of Giles and the close knit community, they found aspects of Giles to appreciate despite their concerns.



## **Chapter 5: DISCUSSION**

In this section I will relate the results back to the discussion questions and previous research. When comparing the results back to previous research, especially the Cole article, it is important to recognize that my methodology is not identical to theirs and may be a factor in the differences that occurred between the studies. In the next section, the conclusion, I will summarize the thesis, describe the implications of the study, and make other concluding remarks.

### **Discussion Questions**

Discussion Question one is “Do the interviewees communicate an Appalachian identity?” The simple answer is yes, the interviewees did communicate an Appalachian identity. To a degree, Giles High School students who attend Virginia Tech share a common experience. The extent that they expressed their Appalachian identity and their willingness to communicate it varied among the interviewees. When discussing identity, it is important to remember that each person is different in their analysis of themselves and their identity. The results revealed that there were similarities among the interviewees, but no single interviewee’s identity was identical to another’s. Each interviewee experiences their own trials and tribulations and deals with them in their own way as well. Regardless, various themes occurred throughout the interviews that help us understand the struggles and discoveries that occur when Giles High School students attend Virginia Tech.

Discussion Question two is “How do the interviewees describe an Appalachian identity?” Even with the most opinionated interviewees, all interviewees had both positive and negative ways to describe their Appalachian identity. Additionally, each interviewee had a unique way to describe their Appalachian identity, but several themes emerged. The positive ways interviewees typically discussed their Appalachian identities were by describing their strong connection to

family, pride in Giles County, politeness, a love of nature and the natural beauty of Giles, and appreciation for the small town atmosphere. The more negative ways interviewees typically discussed their Appalachian identities were by describing the restrictive culture that pervades Giles in regards to diversity, a lack of resources within the county, the need to explore elsewhere for fulfillment, not fitting into the confines of a typical Appalachian identity, distancing from those who remained in Giles, and embarrassment towards local issues. The positive and negative ways the interviewees described their Appalachian identities revealed the complexities of developing identity for Appalachian students attending college.

Discussion Question three is “How do the interviewees’ college experience change or influence their Appalachian identity?” Each of the interviewees had a unique response to the ways they had changed, but several themes emerged among the changes that they communicated. All of the interviewees, even those with the strongest Appalachian identities, found that attending college had changed them. They found things that interested them that they never would have discovered in Giles, they became more accepting of people different from them, returning home became awkward and unwanted, they lost touch with friends, and they believed it was important to settle and explore outside Giles. Not all of the changes resulted in a loss of Appalachian identity; some found that college increased their Appalachian identity as well. Interviewees found that their appreciation for the natural beauty of Giles increased and they developed a better respect for Appalachia and Giles after experiencing new and different places. And, for each of the interviewees, aspects of their Appalachian identity remained untouched by the college experience. They acknowledged that Giles and Appalachia would always be a defining part of their childhood, the natural beauty of Giles would never be forgotten, and friends, family, and land would keep them closely tied to the region.

Whether Appalachian identity was increasing, decreasing, or remaining the same, many of the changes that occurred were a result of exposure to greater amounts of diversity, bringing us to discussion question four—How do the Appalachian identities of the interviewees change due to the exposure to larger amounts of diverse people at college? Upon entering college, many of the interviewees described their initial experience with the diversity of Virginia Tech as a culture shock. However, over time, the interviewees found friends and activities that interested them. Many of the interviewees described how they had become more open and accepting of others after being exposed to the diversity at Virginia Tech. Additionally, many of the interviewees felt that they were able to fully express themselves at Virginia Tech because of the diverse opportunities and people. They were no longer restricted to the strict social norms of Giles County. Many of the interviewees also described a realization of their Appalachian accent. They had not thought of themselves as having an accent until several students brought it up. The interviewees were not necessarily ashamed of their accent and some even used the accent purposefully and with pride.

### **Comparison to Previous Studies**

Many of the results that emerged from my research do not replicate the findings that occurred in the Cole article and other previous research. It is important to recognize that there may be significant methodological differences in my research in comparison to theirs. The differences between the results could possibly be explained by differences in sample selection and generational differences.

Giles County is primarily a manufacturing, government, and services county, not a mining county. The Cole article's sample was from a coal county, so there may be distinct differences between the counties that Cole's participants came from and Giles County that would

obscure an attempt at purely updating the Cole article. Additionally, Giles County is only thirty minutes away from Virginia Tech, so the close proximity to home may be a beneficial factor for my participants that the Cole participants could not indulge in. In the Cole article, all four of the participants were in their first year of college. In my study, all of the participants had already completed their degree or were very close to completing their degree. All had successfully navigated the transition to college. None of the participants felt that they were unable to complete their degree; thus, the experiences of those students who were not successful at Virginia Tech are not voiced in this study. Furthermore, the Cole article did not suggest that its participants had any college preparatory classes. In my study, all of the participants completed some kind of college preparatory/dual enrollment courses before attending Virginia Tech. The experience of those who did not take the college preparatory/dual enrollment courses before attending Virginia Tech was not explored and could also reveal a different perspective on the college experience. The income level of the families featured in the Cole study is not clear, while all ten of my interviewees came from families with incomes over \$50,000/year.

Additionally, social changes and increased media representation during the “Neo-Gilded Age” may have led to a greater acceptance of supporting the “backwards” and “simple” life of Appalachian people (Satterwhite 2011). For example, television shows that depict a romanticized version of Appalachia and Appalachian people tend to reflect similar characteristics that the interviewees embrace. This could explain the change from overall denial in prior research to partial embracing of an Appalachian identity in the current research. The interviewees display the parts of their Appalachian identity that the dominant culture has distinguished as acceptable or quaint, but hid or avoided the parts that have not become acceptable.

Another possibility to explain the differences between my research and the previous research is generational differences since the Cole article precedes this research by twenty years. As time has passed, more students have begun to attend college. It has almost become an expectation for many young adults to go to college when compared to twenty years ago. In Appalachia alone, the college completion rates have increased from 14.2% in 1990 to 21.7% in 2013 (Appalachian Regional Commission 1990, Appalachian Regional Commission 2013a). With more Appalachian students graduating from college, Appalachian students may not feel the same amount of pressure that Appalachian students in the 1990s felt to hide their identity. However, it is important to note that Appalachian students still lag behind the general population in college attendance and completion (Appalachian Regional Commission 2013b), and that young people who attend college are still in the minority.

### **The “One-Size-Fits-All” College Conundrum**

The Cole article suggests that her interviewees came into college with a strong Appalachian identity, but over time, the interviewees were forced to change and diverge from their Appalachian identity to fit into the college atmosphere. The Pennington, Abrams Locklear, and Satterwhite articles also discuss how Appalachian students must assimilate into dominant cultural identities at college and face the consequential difficult transition with little sympathy. My research suggests that the interviewees did not feel the same extent of homogenization or difficulty in transitioning as previous research shows, but the issues were still present.

Cole’s article suggests that despite a strong Appalachian upbringing, her participants were teased about their intelligence and way of speaking, so they felt the need to hide their Appalachian origin (1995). Abrams Locklear describes similar feelings of conflict with her Appalachian identity in college (2013). In my research, only one interviewee stated that they hid

their Appalachian identity from others to avoid being associated with the stigma of inferior intelligence. Many more of the interviewees typically just avoided certain negative topics associated with their Appalachian identity and openly discussed and displayed the parts of their Appalachian identity they viewed more positively.

Interviewees in my research seemed very open to changing themselves to fit into the college atmosphere, unlike in the Cole article where the participants really struggled with their change (1995). Once again contradicting the Cole article, many of the interviewees did not feel as though they had lost themselves in the process, but rather came to be more aware of themselves (1995). In particular, the interviewees proudly asserted that they had become more openly accepting of different people. However, more in conjunction with the Cole article, the interviewees still discussed the initial culture shock from entering a diverse environment they were unfamiliar with and from confronting large class sizes. Additionally, many of the interviewees felt weird or awkward when returning home after being at college and for some, their connection to their home county faded. While the interviewees may communicate a more willing attitude towards assimilating into the dominant cultural identities at college and regardless of how positive the changes may seem, Appalachian students are still being required to distance themselves from their Appalachian upbringing and change their perspectives to fit into the college atmosphere.

### **Expanding How Appalachian Students Describe their Identity**

Cole, Pennington, Abrams Locklear, and Satterwhite all believe that Appalachian students at college are implicitly and explicitly encouraged to diverge from their Appalachian identity and take up the dominant cultural identities while attending college (Abrams Locklear 2013, Cole 1995, Pennington 2013, Satterwhite 2013a). Participants in the Cole article and

Abrams Locklear went from identifying with Appalachia and their hometown to experiencing a significant amount of negativity and conflict with their identity while attending college (Abrams Locklear 2013, Cole 1995). Though many of the interviewees came to describe parts of Giles and Appalachia negatively, some of the interviewees came to describe Appalachia and their hometown more positively after attending college, or they maintained their positive perceptions of Appalachia throughout college. Specifically, many of the interviewees found that they began or continued to appreciate the natural beauty of Giles and small-town, close-knit communities. Previous research did not discuss this increase or continuance in positive perceptions of Appalachia. Additionally, many of the negative perceptions that participants communicated in the previous research were less pronounced in the current research. By including positive descriptions of Appalachia and reevaluating the negative perceptions, we can more fully understand where Appalachian college students' identities are changing.

Consistent with previous research, the constant comparison of the interviewees' Appalachian origins to other college students and more urban places becomes a defining point in the interviewees' description of their hometown, especially in regards to education. The participants in the Cole article describe their education as inadequate after experiencing the large, diverse classes at college (Cole 1995). While the interviewees in my research communicated a similar distaste for the educational system in Giles, especially in comparison to more urban high schools, the feelings of inferiority at college due to a lesser education seemed to be less pronounced than in the Cole article. Many of the interviewees were appreciative of the alternative programs and college preparatory classes that were offered at Giles High School. Additionally, many of the interviewees felt that their education was substantial enough for them to do well in college. However, the interviewees still talked about how they found their college

classes particularly difficult initially and that it was hard to compete on the same level with the students coming from high performing high schools from the Northern Virginia area.

Once again consistent with the research, many of the interviewees felt that there were few options of fulfillment in their hometowns and success could only be found in more urban areas (Pennington 2013). Despite even the interviewees with the most positive outlooks on their hometown and Appalachian identity, many of the interviewees felt that Giles had little to offer for the pursuit of their future goals. Only one interviewee communicated a desire to remain in Giles and raise a family there.

The Cole article and Abrams Locklear article describe how Appalachian accents at college stick out, often result in negative stereotypes from fellow college students, and Appalachian students often feel the need to hide or repress their accent (Abrams Locklear 2013, Cole 1995). Contrarily, in my research, many of the interviewees embraced their Appalachian accent. Even when friends and classmates pointed out their accent, the interviewees stated that they did not feel embarrassed by the way they talked or would brush off the comments as unimportant. Interestingly, these interviewees also communicated that people were either surprised by their accents because they did not fit the image associated with the area's accent or people would label them with terms associated with their accent such as Country, Southern, or Redneck. For instance, one interviewee with an accent mentioned that people would comment that she was very "country." Even though she did not feel like she was very "country," she accepted these statements as fact because "if you are from the country it is what I'm supposed to have." Similar tones of acceptance resonated with the interviewees who were told that they did not fit the image associated with their Appalachian accent. The use of accents to emplace certain stereotypical ideas onto the interviewees did not seem to be an issue they were concerned about



or aware of. Using an accent alone to determine the identity of a person fails to employ a holistic view of the individual or identity, but the interviewees did not communicate an effort to correct those who made judgements about their accent.

### **Friendship for Appalachian Students**

Cole suggests that Appalachian students have difficulties making friends when attending college because they viewed friendships more as a lifelong commitment and hesitated to jump into friendships. Non-Appalachian students seemingly did not hesitate to jump into friendships and form cliques (Cole 1995). My research finds that a few of the interviewees experienced similar difficulties, but not all of the interviewees had difficulties establishing friendships. Interestingly, Emma did not have issues establishing friendships, but did have issues maintaining prior friendships. While she tried to maintain her friendships with the people she grew up with, she found that her new friendships at college were forcing her to pick between one and the other. Consequently, she ended up parting with her new friends in preference for her friends she had since childhood. Another interviewee who stated he did not have any issues with making friends at college still noticed the differences in the bonds between college friends and high school friends. He found that the smaller classes in high school fostered closer relationships with his friends than he was able to build with college friends. For those interviewees who expressed issues making friends initially, they typically described a situation where they were surrounded by people with interests that did not match up with their own, not necessarily that they were hesitant to make quick friends. All of the interviewees found friends and cliques within the first year at college.

Cole also discusses how her participants utilized fellow Appalachian students as a source of refuge. The interviewees that had not maintained their friendships from Giles did not

communicate a need for fellow Appalachian students as a source of refuge. The close proximity to Virginia Tech may have influenced the interviewees' dependence on fellow Appalachian students. However, the interviewees that maintained their friendships with the people they graduated high school with communicated a pronounced appreciation for those friends, similar to Cole's suggestion that fellow Appalachian students were a source of refuge. One interviewee stated that his high school friends were people who he could really trust and hang out with. Once again, close proximity to home appears to be helpful for interviewees while they attend Virginia Tech.

### **Transform to the Norm**

Pennington suggests that marginalized college students must fully abandon their native culture to succeed at college and obtain their degree (Pennington 2013). Satterwhite supports this notion by proposing that Appalachian students struggle to gain legitimacy in the college setting (Satterwhite 2013a). Further, Locklear claims that colleges implicitly force their students to devalue their home communities and take up dominant cultural identities (Abrams Locklear 2013). My research showed that only four of the ten interviewees felt uncomfortable discussing their Appalachian identity in the classroom and even fewer felt uncomfortable discussing their Appalachian identity with other students and friends. When asked if their Appalachian identity would be respected and appreciated in a classroom setting, many of the interviewees responded positively. Initially it would seem that my research contradicts the previous research. However, further analysis shows that many of the interviewees would avoid the parts of their Appalachian identity they did not believe would be received well in a college setting. If avoidance of the topic did not work, the interviewees would typically joke about it, try to change the subject, or distance themselves from the parts of Appalachia they did not agree with. Gaining legitimacy in

a college setting for Appalachian students is a complex path of determining the aspects of their life and upbringing that will be accepted and embraced or rejected and ridiculed. While Appalachian students do not necessarily have to completely abandon their identity as previous research has suggested, the implicit devaluation of Appalachia and the struggle to gain legitimacy is still an inherent problem.

### **The Issue in Today's Change: Legitimizing and Resistance Appalachian Identities**

While initial perceptions of the change that has occurred between this research and previous research would imply that the situation has improved for Appalachian students, that may not be the case. Even though Appalachian students may be finding it easier to fit into the college atmosphere, the influence of dominant cultural messages is still affecting how Appalachian students perceive their hometown and identity. Rather trying to define their own Appalachian identities, many of the interviewees display the images created by mainstream culture that are generally accepted while hiding, avoiding, or distancing themselves from the ideas of Appalachia that are not accepted.

As Charles Horton Cooley describes, people shape their image based upon the understanding of how others view them. The interviewee's identity is a socially derived understanding of his/her abilities, characteristics, and qualities as they are assessed by the shared criteria of the society he/she currently lives in (1902). While some interviewees felt that their abilities, characteristics, and qualities were inadequate and that they had to change to fit into society, other interviewees were able to determine that their identity was adequate and they did not need to change to fit into society.

This difference among the interviewees' feelings of adequacy and the need to change can be explained with the help of Manuel Castells' three forms of identity—legitimized, resistance, and project (Castells 1997). Those with a legitimizing identity felt inadequate and the need to change because due to cultural messages and norms determined by dominant institutions. Those with a resistance identity did not feel inadequate or the need to change because they resisted the cultural messages and norms established by dominant institutions and determined that they were different from and opposed to the permeating institutions of society. Additionally, those with a project identity did not feel inadequate or the need to change, but rather than being opposed to the permeating institutions of society, they felt content with their identity because they redefined their position in society without the constraints of the dominant institution.

For this study, the use of Castells' forms of building identity revealed very little. The interviewees primarily exhibited various signs of legitimized and resistance identities, but none achieved a project identity. There was no real shift in their identities from before college and after college to one certain kind of identity as defined by Castells. Moving on into a project identity is not a simple task, but could possibly be achieved through an educational system like Virginia Tech. Unfortunately, the educational systems that are currently in place do not seem to encourage the environment for or development of a project identity.

## Chapter 6: CONCLUSION

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative exploration of the relationship between Appalachian identity and the college experience among Giles High School graduates that attend Virginia Tech. The research questions ask how the college experience affects Appalachian identity/how Appalachian identity affects the college experience and then what kind of identity each builds. While the majority of studies focus on urban and suburban identities, there are still a number of studies that focus on Appalachian identity; however, there is a lack of knowledge on the relationship between Appalachian identity and the college experience for those students who make it into large four-year universities. Entering these universities as an Appalachian student can be filled with the sense of being out of place and the need to change to fit in. By conducting semi-structured interviews with Giles High School graduates that attend Virginia Tech, I hope to reach a better understanding of the academic and social struggle that Appalachian students face in order to suggest potential ways to create a more positive college experience and constructive Appalachian identity.

The literature review sets the stage for the rest of the project by providing a comprehensive history of the development of Appalachian history. The history establishes a concrete understanding for why and how certain ideas of Appalachia developed. This allows for a more knowledgeable discussion of identity in the next section of the literature review. I present and debunk today's Appalachian myths and reveal how identity is affected and built. Castell's three forms of identity—legitimacy, resistance, and project—are presented and discussed. Legitimacy and resistance maintain the status quo and structural inequalities. Project identity, on the other hand, creates words and knowledge outside of hegemonic institutions. I then discuss the

difficulties that Appalachian institutions of education face, particularly the discourse that encourages Appalachians to leave the region if they are to be successful. The final discussion in the literature review provides four articles that specifically address Appalachian identity at college and how Appalachian college students must renegotiate their identity in opposition to their native group. I then present the research questions at the end of the literature review.

The methodology section presented how I selected the population and how I will conduct data collection. I provided methods for coding and data analysis. I also presented personal interests and biases and ethical considerations. The population for my study was Giles High School graduates that attend Virginia Tech. I argued that such a specific population allows for very specific and applicable solutions. It also provided the opportunity for comparable research across other Appalachian counties. Due to time constraints and limited resources, I only interviewed ten people. Data collection was obtained from the sample by conducting semi-structure interviews that are recorded. Appendix E is the interview schedule. All interviews were typed into a word document. Coding occurred in two phases using thematic coding. The first phase consisted of an initial coding to establish an understanding of the responses and develop codes to fit the responses for analysis. The second phase of coding consolidated, re-affirmed, compared, and contrasted categories created in the first phase using matrices. The coding and matrices allowed me to determine how the college experience affects Appalachian identity/how Appalachian identity affects the college experience and then what kind of identity each builds. I then discuss my personal biases and interests by presenting my intimate connection to the study. As a Giles High School and Virginia Tech graduate, I already know my participants and have experienced many of the same experiences as them. I defend my close connections to the study believing that they will help me connect to the participants and provide a more welcoming

environment for discussing identity. The ethical considerations review the potential hazards that may come to the participants of the study and they are determined to be quite small. I also discuss the potential advantages to the study, such as helping the participants to understand their identity and the positive feelings that come from contributing to a study that may help others in the future.

The results present the findings that emerged from the data analysis. I discussed the varying levels and types of Appalachian identity among the sample. The interviewees were far from homogenous in their expression and description of Appalachian identities. While some expressed very strong attachments to their Appalachian identities, others did not. Second, I discussed whether the sample was willing to communicate and voice their Appalachian identity during the interview and to the general public/student body. Once again, the interviewees all expressed differing levels of willingness to communicate their Appalachian identity. Generally, however, the interviewees were more willing to communicate parts of their Appalachian identity that were accepted and viewed favorably by the dominant cultures at college. Next, I reviewed how the sample described and viewed Appalachia in terms of diversity, education, entertainment, and population. The interviewees communicated both a positive side they embraced and negative side they avoided or distanced themselves from in their description of Appalachia. Lastly, I discussed how the samples' college experience changes Appalachian identity and results in a culture shock, new awareness of their accent, more openness and leniency, and identification of interests outside Giles. All of the interviewees communicated a change in their identity when they attended college and the changes were not necessarily just away from their Appalachian identity.

The discussion relates the results back to the discussion questions and previous research. First, I answered each of the four discussion questions using the data from the results. The interviewees did communicate an Appalachian identity. When describing Appalachia, the interviewees communicated both positive and negative perceptions of their hometown. Attending college did result in a change in their Appalachian identity. Common changes were in their willingness to accept people different from themselves, their perceptions of Giles in comparison to more diverse and urban areas, and their appreciation for the natural beauty of Giles. Second, I related the results back to the previous research by comparing and contrasting my results to their results. I found that much of Locklear's and Cole's findings were more focused on the negative perceptions of Appalachia that develop after attending college. I emphasize the importance of also understanding how Appalachian students become more appreciative of their hometown in some aspects. I also distinguish the generational differences between the previous research and mine. Ultimately, I find that Appalachian students seem to have less of a disrupting experience when attending college than a decade ago; however, it is difficult to make direct conclusions due to the different samples and research designs in my research and the previous research. An issue that is still prominent is the influence of dominant cultural messages on Appalachian students and the consequential changes in their identity.

### **Hypotheses and Suggestions for Further Research**

The following hypotheses have been formulated from the analysis of this research and previous research. These hypotheses are in need of further testing to ensure the small and specific sample selected has not skewed the results.

1. The transition for Appalachian students attending college has become less difficult than a decade ago. Factors such as socio-economic class, access to pre-college



curriculum, and/or physical proximity to the attended university should be considered when studying why current Appalachian students are faring better than previously studied Appalachian students.

2. Appalachian students display selective components of their identities and conceal others perceived as not acceptable.

Since this is a baseline, exploratory study, no comparison group was developed for this study. Therefore it is difficult to definitively suggest if the themes, experiences, and perspectives that emerged from this study are unique to Appalachian students. However lacking a comparison group should not disqualify the results and analysis drawn from this study. The perceptions and experiences that the interviewees described in their interviews were ways that they perceived themselves to be different and Appalachian. Further research should be conducted with comparisons to more urban students that attend Virginia Tech to see if Appalachian students' experiences are unique. An especially interesting study would be comparing Appalachian students to students who attended highly ranked Northern Virginia Schools such as Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology and Langley High School. Another possible comparison group would be different Appalachian regions.

### **Importance of the Study**

The research suggests that Appalachian students are still suppressing parts of their identity because they are embarrassed by it or think that others will not be accepting of it. Additionally, the research suggests that Appalachian students are moving away from hometown ideals and norms because they view them as inappropriate when interacting with people outside their community. These changes, both good and bad, are resulting in legitimized and resistance

identities. Legitimized and resistance identities take the power of the individual away and replace it with dominant cultural messages. The result is a society that ignores marginalized cultures and homogenizes tastes, desires, and concepts to support the dominant culture regardless of the consequences for marginalized cultures (Castells 1997). Mentioned in the literature review, Satterwhite discourages students from repressing and denying their Appalachian identity and tries to help them understand their background and identity without being controlled by it (Satterwhite 2013a). By helping Appalachian students better understand their identity and how it defines them, project identities can be formed to redefine their position in society and transform the overall social structure.

## **Limitations**

As previously discussed, my study is limited to a specific population and small sample. Consequently, the study is directly applicable to only a small group of people. Additionally, no comparison group was developed. However, I encourage other researchers to compare this study to other Appalachian counties. This comparison between counties will create an interesting dialogue on the description of Appalachian identity by revealing similarities and discrepancies in my observations of the selected population.

Since the participants all had parents with combined incomes over \$50,000 per year, there is no representation of the lower income students that may attend Virginia Tech. Income could possibly be a significant factor affecting the college experience. Additionally, all of the participants had already completed their degree or were very close to completing their degree. None of the participants felt that they were unable to complete their degree. The experiences of those students who were not successful at Virginia Tech are not voiced and may bring to light a different perspective not realized in this study. Furthermore, all of the participants completed

some kind of college preparatory/dual enrollment courses before attending Virginia Tech. The experience of those who did not take the college preparatory/dual enrollment courses before attending Virginia Tech was not explored and could also reveal a different perspective on the college experience.

Throughout this project I make efforts to emphasize the importance of acknowledging the individuality of identity and the variation of Appalachian experience. Giles County, Virginia, and the surrounding counties differ from one another for various reasons. The proximity of Giles County to Virginia Tech may provide Giles High School graduates with an easier transition and acclimation to college life. Additionally, it may prepare the students expectations of the college experience more. Giles County is also primarily a manufacturing, government, and services county, not a mining county. The Cole article's sample was from a coal county, so there may be distinct differences between the Cole article's county and Giles County that would obscure an attempt at purely updating the Cole article. The Cole article and Locklear article both write about students from over a decade ago, so there may also be a generational difference.

### **Concluding Remarks**

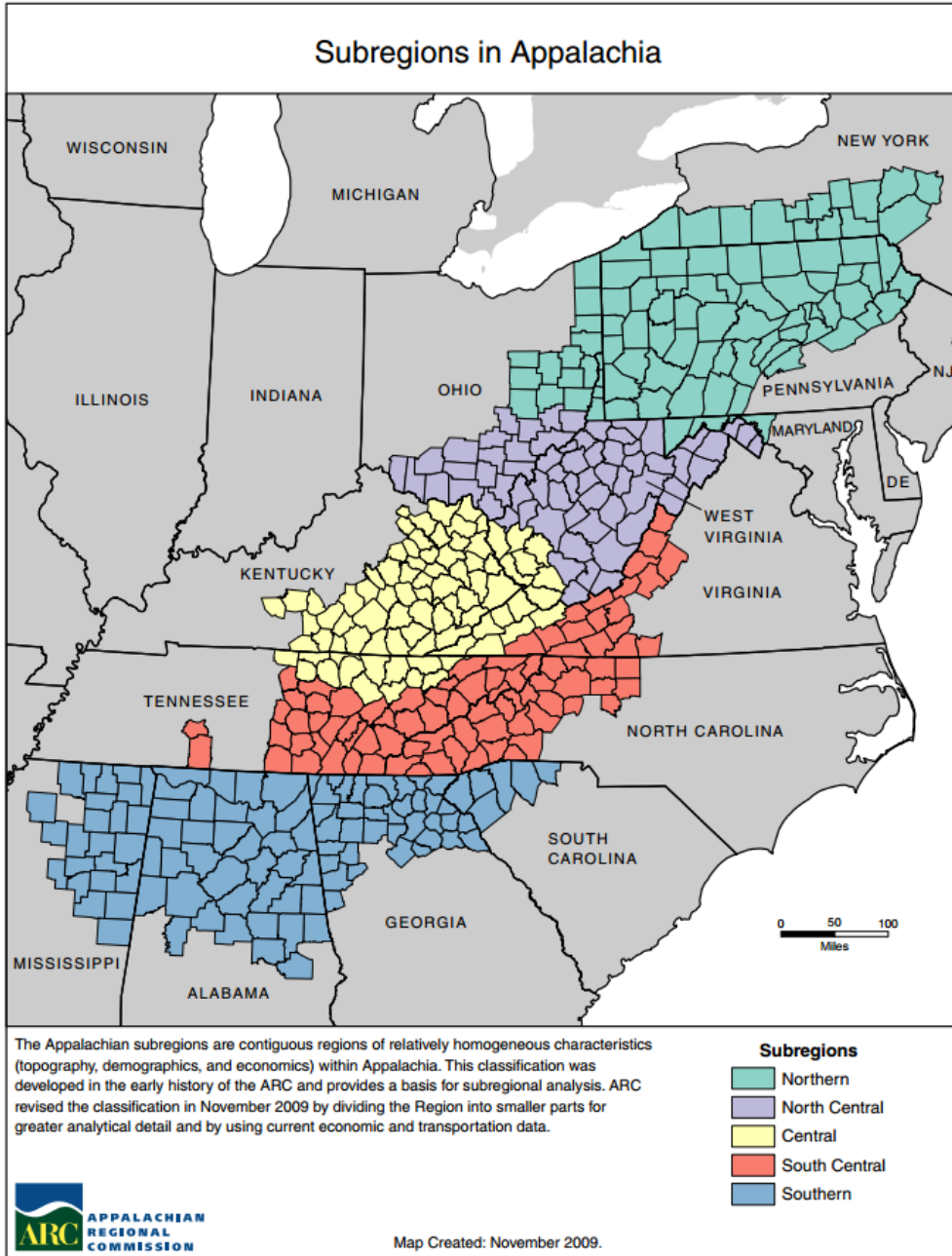
Despite the various limitations of the study, it is important to remember that the interviewees in this study perceived the factors that they discussed as a result of their Appalachian background. Many Appalachian students attending college arrive with the burden of defending their hometown or abandoning it. They must explain their accents, translate their experiences, and hide parts of their identities. This burden is not just a phenomenon limited to Appalachian students. Many minoritized students also carry a similar burden and must educate mainstream students about their differences. This burden should not be a responsibility of the students, but rather the university in which the students attend. The university should take a

stronger stance and focus on educating the student body to the vast diversities that exist in today's society.

# APPENDICES

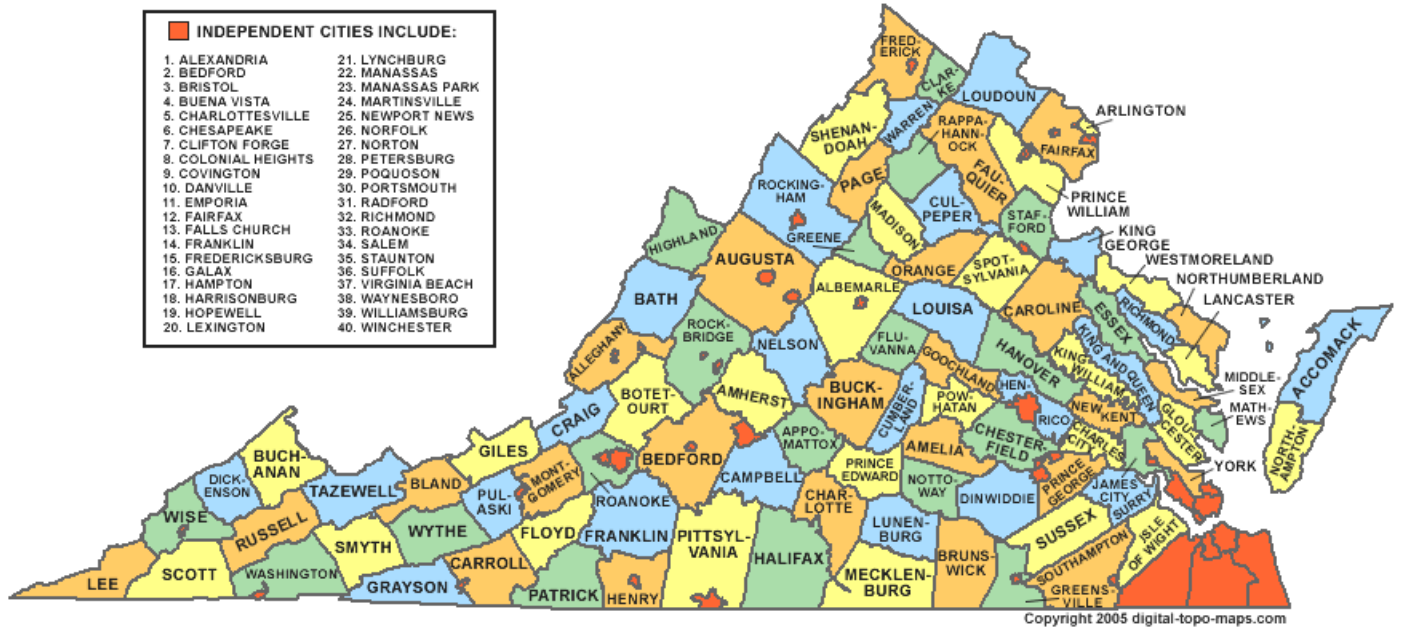
## Appendix A: Subregions in Appalachia Map

[http://www.arc.gov/assets/maps/related/Subregions\\_2009\\_Map.pdf](http://www.arc.gov/assets/maps/related/Subregions_2009_Map.pdf)



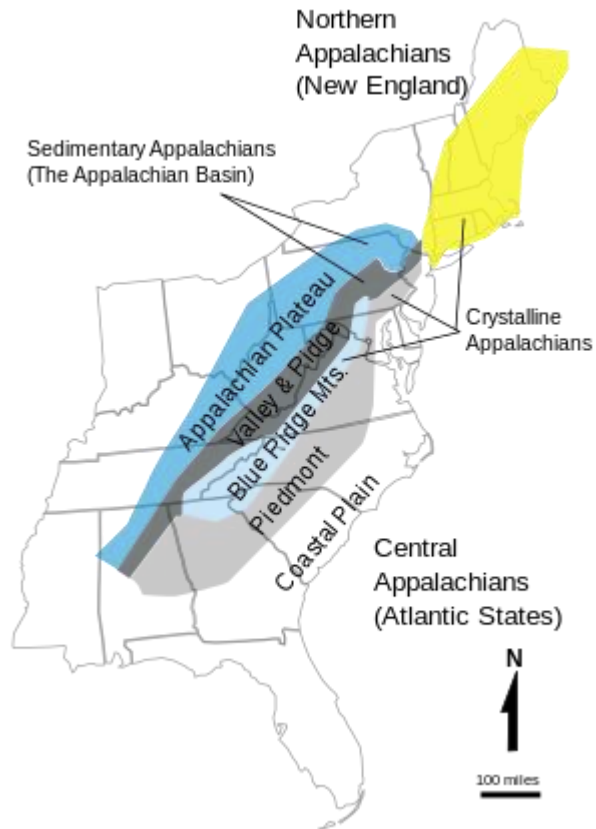
## Appendix B: Map of Virginia Counties

<http://www.digital-topo-maps.com/county-map/virginia-county-map.gif>



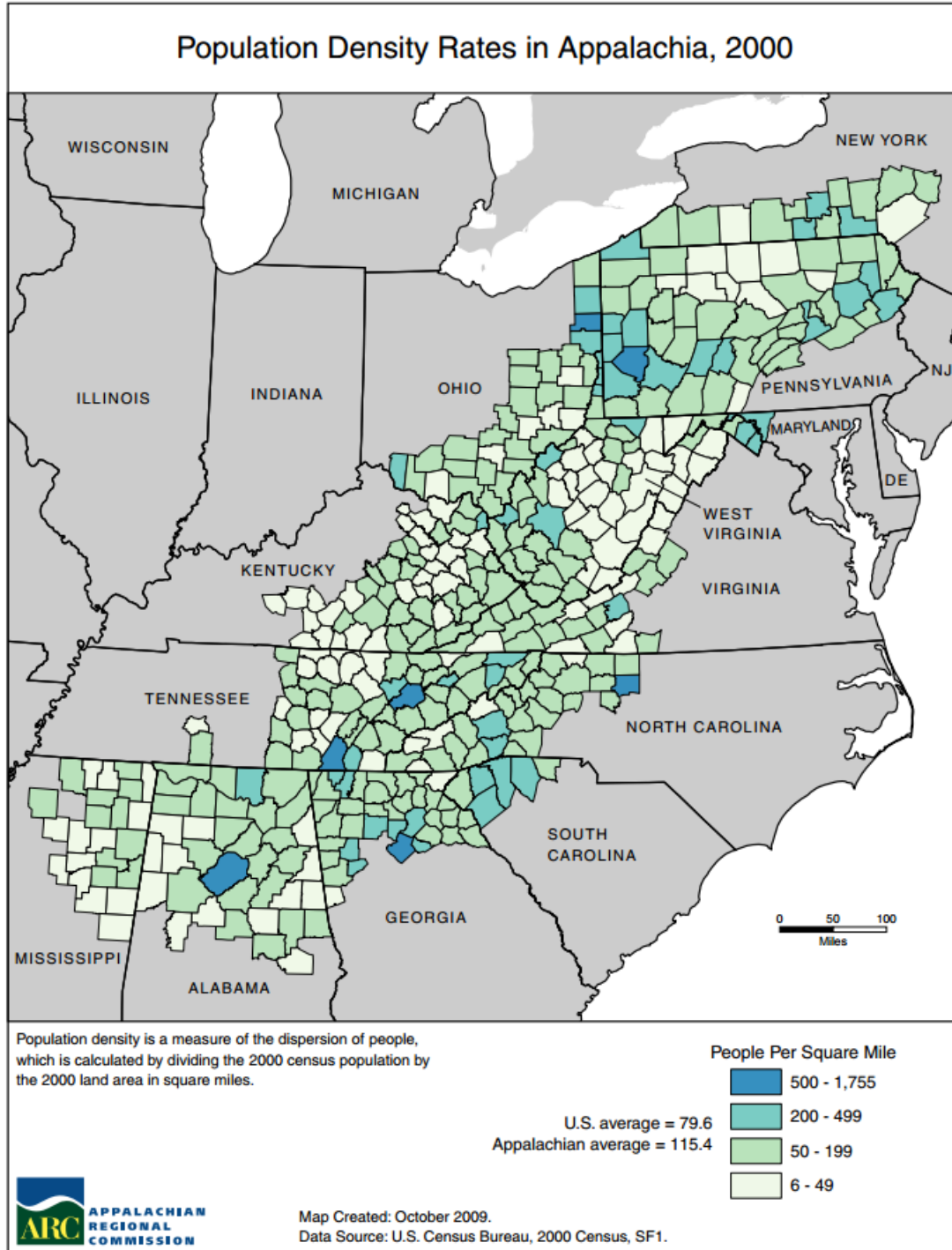
## Appendix C: Map of Geological Appalachia

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/3f/Appalachian\\_map.svg/300px-Appalachian\\_map.svg.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/3f/Appalachian_map.svg/300px-Appalachian_map.svg.png)



## Appendix D: Population Density Rates in Appalachia

[http://www.arc.gov/assets/maps/related/Population\\_Density\\_2000\\_Map.pdf](http://www.arc.gov/assets/maps/related/Population_Density_2000_Map.pdf)





## Appendix E: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule; last update 4/05/15

<p><b>Background</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Age</li> <li>○ Please tell me a bit about your life growing up: siblings, parents, places lived</li> <li>○ Please tell me about where you come from.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: Do you view that environment as rural?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ What is the highest grade/degree your parent[s]/guardian[s] completed?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: [not attend college] Any post-high school training?</li> <li>○ Probe: [attend college] What kind of college? What college?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Occupation[s] of parent[s]/guardian[s]</li> <li>○ Occupation of siblings [if applicable]</li> <li>○ Do your parent[s]/guardian[s] own or rent their residence?</li> <li>○ Can you estimate your parent[s]/guardian[s]' income level?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: [show card] Here are a number of income ranges. Would you say our parent[s]/guardian[s]' [combined] income is [less than 25k, between 25-50k, between 50-100k, 100-250k, more than 250k?]</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ What is your current occupation? Do you currently hold a job?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Giles High School</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ GHS years of attendance/graduation date</li> <li>○ How do you view the education you received from GHS?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: How does it compare to NOVA students? Blacksburg Students? Craig County students?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What sorts of people/programs provided by GHS aided your decision to go to college? What do you think about these programs? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: Governor’s School, extra-curricular activities, teachers, on-site admission with VT</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Please describe the amount and kinds of diversity in GHS</li> <li>○ How much do you consider where you come from to be a part of who you are?</li> <li>○ How has coming from Giles Co. and graduating from GHS had an effect on the type of person you have come to be?</li> </ul> <p>*Encourage the participant to provide details on views before attending college and after attending college</p>
<p><b>Virginia</b></p> <p><b>Tech</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ VT admittance/Graduation date, what year are you in?</li> <li>○ Please tell me about how you decided to attend VT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: When did you start exploring colleges? How many colleges did you apply for?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ How do you feel you are performing/performed at VT</li> <li>○ What is/was your major at VT? What made you select this major? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: High school/college counselor, teachers, professors, family</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Do you think you will have any difficulty completing your degree at VT? Why or why not? [For those who have already graduated, did you have any difficulty completing your degree at VT?] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: How do you think being a GHS graduate has helped/hindered you?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Have you ever taken a class that is specifically about Appalachia or has discussed Appalachia? Have you ever had the opportunity to talk about your hometown? Do you feel where you come from is valued in class discussions?</li> </ul>
<b>College Life</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Describe the transition from Giles Co. to Virginia Tech? Did the transition make you feel nervous/excited/motivated/independent/sad?</li> <li>○ What was the easiest and most difficult part about your transition to VT?</li> <li>○ Do you ever feel like coming from Giles Co. has been a hindrance to your college experience? In what ways? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: Such as making friends with students from NOVA [other more urban places]</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ When people asked you about where you came from, how do you typically reply? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: Did you joke about/take pride in/devalue being Appalachian?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Please tell me about how people viewed your hometown. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: Did you ever get the sense that people viewed you differently because you were from a rural area? Did these perceptions bother you?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Have you ever struggled with your identity in college in regards to your hometown experiences and beliefs? If so, how have you dealt with it? Why do you think you experience these struggles?</li> <li>○ How do you feel your experiences at college have changed the perspectives and identities you developed in high school? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: Such as religion, family values, attachment to place, pride in</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<p>place, politics, local accents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: Do you feel less connected to your hometown? Yes or no, how do you feel about that?</li> <li>○ Have family members and friends from Giles Co. perceived any differences in you because of college? If so, how do they view these changes?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Future Goals</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Please talk about what you plan to do in the near and long term <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: Jobs, marriage, families, furthering education, moving away</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Do you see yourself remaining and/or returning to Giles County? Why/why not? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: What are the financial and career implications for returning to Giles County?</li> <li>○ Probe: If no, would you stay in Giles County if career and money opportunities were not an issue?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Conclusion</b></p>	<p>Is there anything else that we haven't covered that would be important for me to know about life at Virginia Tech?</p> <p>Are there any other challenges you face or benefits you get from being who you are that I haven't asked about?</p> <p>Do you have any questions for me?</p> <p>Thank you for your time, please feel free to contact me with any questions, comments, or concerns about this study.</p>

## Appendix F: Matrix Outlines

Discussion Question 1: Do the interviewees communicate an Appalachian identity?

		Description
Yes	Appalachian Identity Present	
	Open to Communication	
No	Lacking Appalachian Identity	
	Avoided Communication	

Discussion Question 2: How do the Interviewees view Appalachia and their hometown?

	Description
Sports	
Giles County Diversity	
Education	
Small Town	
Joke	
Giles County	
Religion	
Politics	
Stereotypical Language/Beliefs	
Scenery/outdoors/hiking	
Tone	

Discussion Question 3: How does the interviewees' college experiences change or influence their Appalachian identity?

<b>Change in Identity</b>	<b>Description</b>
Less Appalachian Identity	
Same Appalachian Identity	
More Appalachian Identity	

Discussion Question 4:

	<b>How do the Appalachian identities of the interviewees change due to exposure to larger amounts of diverse people at college?</b>			
<b>Change in Identity</b>	More Open/Lenient/Well Rounded	Accent	Culture Shock	Found Myself
Less Appalachian Identity				
Same Appalachian Identity				
More Appalachian Identity				

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