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Sherry Kaye Ms.
East Tennessee State University

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Women, Feminism, and Aging in Appalachia

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Sherry Kaye

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Dr. Marie Tedesco, Chair

Dr. Jill LeRoy-Frazier

Dr. Mary Langenbrunner

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ABSTRACT

Women, Feminism, and Aging in Appalachia

by

Sherry Kaye

Aging has become a problem for men and women in Western societies where youth is touted and revered as a standard of success by which individual value is measured and esteemed. Older women in particular find that as they age they face discrimination in the form of ageism and social diminution. The purpose of the study is to remedy a lack of scholarship on aging in Appalachia and to establish a precedent for future studies. A liberal, feminist approach is used to analyze the results of recorded interviews and to interpret transcripts of relevant data. The results of the analysis are mixed owing to the heterogeneity of the women interviewed and the differences in personal circumstances, socioeconomic status, and levels of education that influence their perceptions. Limitations of the study include: the size of the sample, and a lack of ethnic diversity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I have undertaken the study on "Women, Feminism, and Aging in Appalachia" in an effort to discern whether or not women in the Southern Appalachian region face discrimination based on age, as do women elsewhere in Western culture. Women in the Southern Appalachian region were chosen for this research due in part to the unique and distinct character of Appalachia as described by local writers and nonnative scholars alike. Descriptions of the region include laudatory praise as a place steeped in traditional values that emphasize respect for the elderly, home, family, church, and community. The question I seek to address is whether or not these traditional values offer protection to older women in the region from the more prevalent emphases on youth, productivity, and attractiveness found in Western culture.

The study uses a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach and employs liberal Western feminist theory for interpretation of the data. Personal, in-depth interviews with women in their homes and/or places of employment provide the bulk of the evidence for the narrative. Women in Southern Appalachia are the object of the study and the goal was to compare my interviews with them to feminist scholarship on aging to determine if they are at risk and vulnerable to attitudes of ageism. Another purpose of the study was to discover which cultural practices contribute to ageism and why women, more so than men, are elected to model eternal youth. It is my contention that the politics of aging in Western society subject women to greater social pressure than men to remain viable as youthful and productive members of society because women as they age are made especially vulnerable to the loss of social value and visibility.

This study combines the critical insights of feminist scholarship on aging with research on women in Appalachia to argue that ageism, as a discriminatory practice against women, is prevalent in Southern Appalachia. Women in the region, despite the emphasis on family and respect for the elderly that define traditional values in Southern Appalachia, are not protected from the social consequences of aging. Moreover, women in Southern Appalachia are subject to, and experience, age discrimination to the same degree as do women in other parts of the United States. In Western culture aging has been defined as detrimental to men and women; however, for women the physical characteristics of age pose an additional threat of social exclusion and the loss of social esteem.[1] Men, as well, tend to suffer from age related losses; these, however, tend to relate less to value and visibility than they do to status and power.[2]

The cultural emphasis on youth in Western society creates an intense desire among many older adults to avoid being identified as old and, for some, instigates perceptual discrimination of the aged as "other." The reasons that underlie my interest focus primarily on how women resist and defend against ageist attitudes that threaten their identities and how women maintain their self-esteem in the face of social devaluation. As well, how women perceive and practice "othering" strategies against other older women as a form of distance and denial, Kathleen Riach offers a definition of the "other" as "marginalized" due to difference when she explores how ageism affects older adults in the workforce. Riach found "othering" to be a strategy designed to emphasize difference and was used by younger employees to justify discrimination against older

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[1] For studies on women and ageism see Colette Brown, *Women, Feminism and Aging* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1998); Laura Hurd Clark, *Women Growing Older in Anti-Aging Culture* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2011); and Baba Copper, *Over the Hill: Reflections on Ageism Between Women* (Freedom: The Crossing Press, 1988).

[2] For an excellent discussion of how ageism affects men see Jeff Hearn, "Imaging the Aging of Men," in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 97-115.

workers in the workforce.[3] Women in multicultural communities of African-American, Hispanic, and lesbian and gay identities are confronted with double exposure to discrimination as they age. Feminist scholars Frances Yang and Sue Levkoff describe this confrontation as "double jeopardy."[4] The term "jeopardy" denotes the vulnerability of women in minority populations to ethnic as well as age discrimination. For many women of diversity, discrimination relates to skin color and gender rather than age. The process of aging courses on a continuum that is relative to where one stands at any given point in time; it is also a subjective as well as an objective process, entailing social and cultural observation. How cognitions of age are formed and what stigmatizations occur can be attributed in part to social evaluations of cost vs. contribution and support vs. productivity.[5]

Western culture, situated within the capitalist system of enterprise, seeks to maximize profit while minimizing loss, a philosophy of economy that pervades the personal and political realm as well.[6] Against the panoramic backdrop of Western economic philosophy, older adults are viewed as a liability rather than an asset and are subject to cultural ageism. Western systems of capitalism value productivity and pervade social systems of value assignment in how older adults are viewed and regarded, thus devaluing the elderly who are perceived as nonproductive.

Robert Butler, M.D. first coined the term "ageism" in 1968 and in testimony before the Senate Special Committee on Aging in 2002 Butler described the detrimental effects of

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[3] Kathleen Riach, "'Othering' older worker identity in recruitment," *Human Relations* 60 no. 11 (2007), 1706, http://hum.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/60/11/1701 (accessed June 11, 2013).

[4] Frances Yang and Sue Levkoff, "Ageism and Minority Populations: Strengths in the Face of Challenge," *Generations* 29 no. 3 (Fall 2005): 42 http://ehis.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=17ba4e66-038a-44c5-8679-8af53e05c7b0%40sessionmgr4&vid=3&hid=17 (accessed December 9, 2012).

[5] A. Regula Herzog and James N. Morgan, "Age and Gender Differences in the Value of Productive Activities: Four Different Approaches," *Research on Aging* 14 No.2 (June, 1992), 169. http://roa.sagepub.com/content/14/2/169.short (accessed August 9, 2013).

[6] William J Baumol, Robert E Litan, and Carl J Schramm, *Good Capitalism, Bad Capitalism and the Economics of Growth and Prosperity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). http://libraries.etsu.edu/record=b2258489~S12 (accessed June 10th,2013, EBSCO host EBook), 35-60.

discrimination on the nation's elderly.[7] The social effects of aging are not evenly distributed, however, with women, more so than men, likely to face devaluation stemming from, as feminist Margaret Cruikshank notes, a lifetime of devaluation.[8] Print and televised media add to the cultural communities focus on youth as a desirable objective and adopt a double standard of application, with media advertisements touting wrinkle removing creams directed primarily at women. Laura Hurd Clark addresses this issue in her comments regarding the multi-billion dollar cosmetic industry that focuses primarily on women.[9] So great is the influence of print and televised media and the emphasis on maintaining a youthful appearance, that recently the cosmetic industry has begun to focus on antiaging products for men with the result that they too seek to remain looking young and virile.

Feminist scholar and author Toni Calasanti concurs with Clark to write, "The anti-aging industry is both profitable and growing."[10] Calasanti undertook an examination of health and beauty internet websites to explore the focus of their claims, clientele, and products to find, as Calasanti writes, "anti-aging ads directed at aging men emphasize bodies that perform while those for aging women focus on appearance."[11] The point here is that for men the focus is on performance, while for women the emphasis reverts to appearance-a division that reinforces the difference in social expectations of men and women. Print and televised media that extols youth and touts virility for men, in turn, shows women as passive reactors who attempt to attract attention by looking as young and appealing as possible.

[7] Robert Butler, M.D., invited guest speaker on aging, on September 4, 2002, to the Senate Special Committee on Aging, 107th Cong., second sess., serial no. 107-35.

[8] Margaret Cruikshank, *Learning to be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2003), 140.

[9] Laura Hurd Clark, *Facing Age: Women Growing Older in Anti-Aging Culture* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2011).

[10] Toni Calasanti, "Bodacious Berry, Potency Wood and the Aging Monster: Gender and Age Relations in Anti-Aging Ads," *Social Forces* 86 no.1 (September, 2007), 339. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4495039?origin=JSTOR-pdf (accessed May 6, 2013).

[11] Ibid., 343.

The difference in the focus of the ads for men and women redraws the line of social valuation as performance trumps appearance in capitalist terms of value.[12] A big part of the problem, as Calasanti sees it, is that, in Western culture at least, "old people lose autonomy and authority" and the "cultural imperialism of youth means that being old is to be avoided at all costs."[13] Glenda Laws, in her discursive critical analysis of age, aging, and ageism, writes; "it is often the aged body that acts as a catalyst for ageist acts."[14] The phenomenal growth of the "Anti-Aging" beauty industry's cosmetics, creams, and treatments is testament to the growing concern by women, as well as men, to capture and preserve the illusion and fiction of youth. It is not just youth but flawless perfection that is touted to the accompaniment of coins as they course into capitalist registers that generates reinforcement of the fiction.

<u>Goals of the Study</u>

The first and primary goal of the study was to ascertain the extent to which mainstream feminist literature is a corollary for distinct cultures such as that of Southern Appalachia. There is reason to question the transferability of feminist scholarship on women in general to women in the Appalachian region. Beginning with John Campbell in 1921, but ascribed to by other writers, Southern Appalachia long has been designated as a separate and unique area of lifestyle, worldview, and attitude.[15] The second goal is to provide a qualitative review of aging in Appalachia that appraises the social indices of perception and attitudes among older women as they age and toward other aging women. The third goal, and possibly the hardest, is to discern

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[12] Allen W. Wood, "The Marxian Critique of Justice," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 1, No. 3 (Spring 1972), 246. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265053?origin=JSTOR-pdf (accessed August 8, 2013).

[13] Calasanti, "Bodacious Berry," 337.

[14] Glenda Laws, "Understanding Ageism: Lessons from Feminism and Postmodernism," *The Gerontologist* 35 no.1 (February 1995), 114. http://search.proquest.com/docview/211012198/fulltextPDF?accountid=10771 (accessed May 6, 2013).

[15] John C Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 10.

from the conversations with interviewees, what, if any, corroborating feminist theory on ageism emerges from the discourse. While many of the women interviewed for the study were extraordinarily explicit in their detail of age and/or gender discrimination, still others were not and resorted to anecdotal or tangential parallels of explanation. If, for instance, I asked whether or not they had direct experience age-related discrimination, some of the women stoutly denied that this had ever happened to them. Yet, in the next breath the women would confirm with a story, either of themselves or someone they knew, an incident of age discrimination. It was as if by denying the discrimination these women could deny that they were victims of it. The fourth goal was to fill a gap in regional scholarship on aging and to open up the discussion on aging and attitudes toward the aged in Appalachia. While the sample set of women who participated in this study was extremely modest and monochromatic, it still serves to highlight the region of Southern Appalachia and to provide a basis for future comparison. Finally, a fifth goal was to elucidate how the identity of "old" was accepted or rejected by Appalachian women.

Rational for the Study

In his report for the Appalachian Regional Commission on the changing demographics of Appalachia, John Hagga quotes statistics drawn from the United States Census Bureau on the swelling population of adults turning 65 and entering into retirement and the Social Security system.[16] Hagga shows that as of 2000, 12.4% of all polled residents nationally were over the age of 65. At that time, the population percentage of adults over 65 in Appalachia was 14.3%. Hagga's report uses the census data to compare the populations of adults nationally and in Appalachia to show that the percentage of adults aged 65 and older in Appalachia is higher than the national average. In a more recent report issued May 2010 for the United States Census

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[16] John Hagga, "*The Aging of Appalachia, 2004*," under "Demographic and Socioeconomic Change in Appalachia," The Population Reference Bureau, http://www.arc.gov/research/researchreportdetails.asp?REPORT_ID=36 (accessed May 6, 2013).

Bureau, Greyson Vincent and Victoria Velkoff published updated statistics on the percentage of

adults in the population nationally aged 65 or older:

> Between 2010 and 2050, the United States is projected to experience rapid growth in its older population. In 2050, the number of Americans aged 65 and older is projected to be 88.5 million, more than double its projected population of 40.2 million in 2010. The baby boomers are largely responsible for this increase in the older population, as they will begin crossing into this category in 2011.[17]

What these statistics show is that the trend towards an older population is well underway and the

region of Appalachia is ahead of the curve with a significant percentage of the population turning

65 or older. The significance of these statistics suggest additional implications in particular for

the Appalachian region where the available scholarship on aging portends a dismal prognosis for

the aged and a subsequent lack in readiness of social services.[18] Hagga's report is noteworthy

for several reasons; one, he notes that Americans are living longer with declining mortality and,

two, for younger Americans fertility is at "replacement levels."[19] As Hagga points out, in

concurrence with Vincent and Velkoff, "The first baby boomers will turn 65 in 2011, which will

begin a period of several decades of rapid increase in the proportion of the population ages 65

and over."[20] Hagga delineates Appalachia, in particular, as a region where:

> Demographic projections prepared by Regional Economic Models, Inc., show that, with current trends, the Appalachian region will be home to over 5 million people ages 65 and over in 2025, just under 20 percent of the total population. One of every 40 Appalachian residents will be among the oldest old, those ages 85 and over, in 2025. As is currently the case, Northern Appalachia is expected in 2025 to have a significantly older population than the rest of the region and the nation as a whole, with 23.5 percent of its population ages 65 and over.[21]

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[17] Greyson K. Vincent and Victoria A. Velkoff, "*The Next Four Decades: The Older Population in the United States, 2010-2050*," under "Publications," U.S. Bureau of Census http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p25-1138.pdf (accessed May 6, 2013).

[18] Phillip J. Obermiller and Robert L. Ludkey, "Appalachia and its Aging Cohort: An Early Warning System for American Aging?," *American Society on Aging* (September-October, 2012), xxxiii no.5. http://www.asaging.org/aging-today (accessed August 9, 2013).

[19] Hagga, "Report on Aging," 2.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Hagga, "Report on Aging," 7-8.

Considering that census bureau reports indicate that Appalachia is projected to have an expanding population of adults with slightly more women than men surviving into age 65 and older, it appears that a study on ageism is warranted. In addition, the changing economic infrastructure created by a burgeoning population of retirees changes the patterns of development and services needed to support and provide for that cohort. Furthermore, with more women than men surviving into old age, there is an increased concern for women's well-being in a social environment antithetical to aging. In terms of social justice, this may translate into a lack of access for women to social services and a consequent substandard of living, with many single female-headed head of households in financial need due to poverty. Survival then becomes an issue for many older single women living alone. How the decrements in the standard of living, as applied to women in the Appalachian region, compares to women in other regions of the United States may be the subject of other research. The next section discusses the redefinition of what constitutes the social definition of age. The arbitrary and artificial boundary of old age beginning at 65 has been challenged by social researchers and gerontologists with the result that many current studies on aging employ different parameters of measure that redefine where old age begins and where it transitions to the very old. In recognition and concurrence with this development the present study expands the age range to include women as young as 45 and as old as 80.

Redefining Age

The definition of what constitutes 'old' has become increasingly flexible in the lexicon of description and interpretation as individuals are living longer thanks to modern medicine and technology. Studies on aging that in the past focused on an arbitrary age (65) as an exemplification of normative aging have fallen by the wayside as newer studies review

individuals who are both younger and older than those who participated in previous studies. Studies on aging that involve individuals as young as 45 and as old as 95 can be found to justify the redefinition of what comprises the norms of aging in Western culture today. The inclusion of women in their early forties and fifties has precedent in other studies on aging such as the one conducted by Lyn White.[22] White used a national sample of adults aged 20-60 to investigate the concept of aging and how that perception affects quality of life issues. White's focus is on how the perception of age is affected differently due to external factors of socioeconomic status, life course, and quality of life.[23] In her research, White employs the individuals own "self-concept" to "ask whether men and women differ in their awareness of aging or in the factors that cause a sense of aging to develop."[24]

In another study by Ursula Staudinger, Steven Cornelius, and Paul Baltes on intellectual aging, the discussion concerns the use of an arbitrary, chronological number as an indicator of age and dysfunction. Staudinger, Cornelius, and Baltes write, "People age at different rates, and the point in time when losses outweigh gains varies considerably from one person to another. When talking about intellectual decline, it is important to recognize that notable decrements in performance can begin for some adults by their early to mid-fifties."[25] A third study on aging that employs middle-aged adults in their fifties was conducted by John Logan, Russell Ward, and Glenna Spitze. The study initiates a sociological look at the social labels attached to the various stages of aging and of how social labeling impinges upon the self-identity of older adults and on

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[22] Lyn K White, "Gender Differences in Awareness of Aging among Married Adults Ages 20-60," The Sociological Quarterly, 29 no.4 (Winter 1988) http://www.jstor.org/stable/4121092?origin=JSTOR-pdf (accessed April 24, 2013).

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 488.

[25] Ursula Staudinger, Steven Cornelius, and Paul Baltes, "The Aging of Intelligence: Potential and Limits," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 503 (May, 1989) http://www.jstor.org/stable/1047216?origin=JSTOR-pdf (accessed April 24, 2013).

their roles in society.[26] Logan, Ward, and Spitze voice their concern of these labels with the

comment that, "At age 55, for example, some may consider themselves young, others old, and

perhaps the majority middle-aged."[27]   In addition, the researcher's remark that, "The research

reported here also extends an interest in age identity from the usual focus on later life, to an

interest in mid-life, and to the transition into middle age."[28] With these studies, and others like

them, expansion in the field of research on aging has extended past what has usually been

denoted as the advent of old age.

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[26] John Logan, Russell Ward, and Glenna Spitze, "As Old as You Feel: Age Identity in Middle and Later Life," *Social Forces* 71 no. 2 (December 1992), 451. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2580019?origin=JSTOR-pdf (accessed April 25, 2013).

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN REGION DEFINED

Don Byerly and John Renton describe the Appalachian Mountains "As impressive as their immensity and biological diversity. Rather than a chain, the Appalachians [mountains] constitute a system encompassing no fewer than four distinct geological provinces: the Piedmont, the Blue Ridge, the Appalachian Plateaus, and the Ridge and Valley."[1] Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell note in the introduction to the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* that the broad federal definition of Appalachia "reflects a core region where the affinity of history, culture, the economy and the mountain land is strongest."[2]

The Appalachian region as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission consists of a "205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia."[3] Southern Appalachia has been defined as a distinct region within the Appalachian physiographical area starting with the account given by John C Campbell in 1921 in his report for the Russell Sage Foundation. Campbell delineated the Southern Highlands as "a part of the great Appalachian province that extends from New York to central Alabama."[4] Campbell writes "within the boundaries of this territory are included the four western counties of Maryland; the Blue Ridge Valley, and Allegany Ridge counties of

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[1] Don Byerly and John Renton, "Geology," in *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, ed. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 3.

[2] Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell, introduction to *The Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), xxiii.

[3] Appalachian Regional Commission, "The Appalachian Region," http://www.arc.gov/appalachian_region/TheAppalachianRegion.asp (accessed September 3, 2013).

[4] John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and his Homeland* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1969), 10.

Virginia; all of West Virginia; eastern Tennessee; eastern Kentucky; western North Carolina; the four northwestern counties of South Carolina; northern Georgia; and northeastern Alabama."[5] The utility of dividing Southern Appalachia from its northern counterpart yielded the benefit of identifying what Campbell describes as "depressed social conditions, which are true of only limited areas, have been given without qualification as existing throughout the Southern mountains, this term has come to carry with it the implication that such conditions prevail generally throughout the region."[6] Southern Appalachia, then, was set apart as culturally and economically distinct even through it shares a common heritage with the rest of the region. Likewise, conservationist Benita Howell follows Campbell's lead in defining Southern Appalachia: "we include in Southern Appalachia the mountainous area from north Alabama to West Virginia."[7]

Andrew Isserman and Terance Rephann offer an updated definition of the divisions within Appalachia with reference to the President's Appalachian Regional Commission PARC created by Congress in 1965 at the behest of President Kennedy in 1963 to "Assist with the development of the Appalachian region."[8] Isserman and Rephann write,

> Official Appalachia is heterogeneous. Coal fields run down the center of the region, but most of the counties are not coal producers. ARC first divided Appalachia into four sub-regions and later settled on three. Northern Appalachia stretches from New York through most of West Virginia and is the most populated and urbanized portion. Central Appalachia includes portions of Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia and is the smallest, poorest, and least populous sub-region. Southern Appalachia extends from Virginia to Mississippi.[9]

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[5] Campbell, "The Southern Highlander," 10.

[6] Ibid., 12

[7] Benita J. Howell, ed., "Appalachian Culture and Environmental Planning: Expanding the role of the Cultural Sciences," in *Culture, Environment, and Conservation in the Appalachian South* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 4.

[8] Andrew Isserman and Terance Rephann, "The Economic Effects of the Appalachian Regional Commission," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 61 no.3 (summer, 1995), 345. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eih&AN=9508023378&site=ehost-live (accessed July 8th 2013).

[9] Ibid.

Isserman and Rephann quote part of a report to President Lyndon B. Johnson from PARC in 1965 to write, "'Appalachia is a region apart geographically and statistically. It is a mountain land boldly up-thrust between the prosperous Eastern seaboard and the industrial Middle West--a highland region which sweeps diagonally across 10 states from northern Pennsylvania to northern Alabama.'"[10] According to Isserman and Rephann the PARC report to President Johnson concluded that "region wide development is feasible, desirable, and urgently needed."[11]

Appalachian historian and author Allen Batteau references Appalachia as a "literary and political invention rather than a geographical discovery."[12] Batteau notes the influence of native writers, such as Henry Caudill, whose book *Night comes to the Cumberlands* was instrumental in, "focus[ing] the attention of progressive thinkers and political leaders upon the plight of the Appalachians," in conjunction with Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty.[13] Batteau writes of Caudill's book that "more than any other single book or article, it is today responsible for the resonant image of Appalachia held by the American public."[14] Henry Caudill was one of many native writers who, according to Batteau, "initiated an extraordinary season of national attention for Appalachia in the mid-1960s."[15] But it was Caudill's work in particular that focused attention on the rural insolvency of Southern Appalachia.[16] Among the native writers on Appalachia that made an impression upon the American consciousness were Mary Noailles Murfree who used the pseudonym Charles Egbert Craddock in 1870 to write for *Appleton's Journal* and in 1875 for

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[10] Isserman and Rephann, "The Economic Effects," 345.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Allen Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1990), 1.
[13] Ibid., 4.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 7.
[16] Ibid.

the *Atlantic Monthly*.[17] While Murfree chose to write under a *nom de plume*, Emma Bell Miles elected to write under her own identity as a women, wife, and mother. The prolific poetic of Miles captured for many the essence of life in what was referred to in the antebellum period as the Southern Mountains.[18] In his own work, Batteau notes that "Appalachia was often called the "'first battlefield in the War on Poverty,'" initiating what Batteau describes as "legions of Poverty Warriors into the hills."[19] The extent to which Southern Appalachia can be considered distinct as a region in the South is due in large degree to the "textual inventions" of its writers and the political interventions of federal mandates to alleviate extreme conditions of "urgent need."[20] Batteau writes, "to the extent that billions of public and private dollars have been expended in an effort to help people and development in the Southern Mountain Region, we are compelled to understand the relationship between its mythical images and historical realities."[21]

Demographics of Southern Appalachia

Appalachia in general, and Southern Appalachia in particular, reflect the many influences of Native American, African-American, and Scotch-Irish, and Celtic ethnicities. Patricia Hudson and Sandra Ballard write "the polygentic South has benefited from the presence of many ethnic strains."[22] Slavery, too, contributed to the racial intermixing of peoples from African American and Native American ethnicity to create, in the words of Hudson and Ballard, "a mixed heritage that is manifest in the music of Appalachia."[23]

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[17] Writers on Appalachia include: Charles Lanman, *Letters from the Allegheny Mountains* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1849), Fredrick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country* (New York: Manson Brothers Publishers, 1863), and Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders: A Narrative of Adventure in the Southern Appalachians and a study of Life among the Mountaineers* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1913).

[18] Emma Bell Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975).

[19] Batteau, "Invention of Appalachia," 7.

[20] Isserman and Rephann, "The Economic Effects," 345.

[21] Batteau, "Invention of Appalachia," 1.

[22] Patricia L. Hudson and Sandra L. Ballard, *The Smithsonian Guide to Historic America: The Carolinas and The Appalachian States*, ed. Roger G. Kennedy (New York: Stewert, Tabori and Chang, 1989), 15.

[23] Ibid., 14.

As Hudson and Ballard point out, it was "the Celts from the fringes of the British Isles" who, far from being "homogenous," brought with them the socio-political and religious differences of their homeland that set them apart and against each other.[24] Hudson and Ballard write, "There were great differences . . . in the ancestral memories brought to the southern highlands by the Roman Catholic Highlanders of Scotland and the Presbyterian Scotch-Irish."[25] Appalachian historian Richard Drake concurs with the assessment of political strife between the various factions of England when he writes, "when England first established her North American colonies in the seventeenth century, religious differences and political turmoil so dominated English life that the migrant to the colonies was usually one who sought to escape the prevailing political and religious troubles in England."[26] Drake describes the migration to the North American colonies and the circumstances that led up to the decision of so many to leave their homeland: "When frustrations such as difficulty acquiring land, or political and religious discrimination, combined with want and crop failures, these border folk left England's boarder lands, Ulster, and Lowland Scotland for the American colonies."[27]

Drake goes on to describe the people who ultimately would inhabit Appalachia as those who "aspired to small, independent land ownership . . . and who shared a desire for land to support their basically simple lives."[28] The descendants of these political and religious refugees would come to develop an intense and passionate love for the land that in the words of Melinda Bollar Wagner "transfigured physical space" into a, "culturally meaningful place."[29]

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[24] Hudson and Ballard, "The Smithsonian Guide," 15.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Richard B. Drake, *A History of Appalachia* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 16.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., 17.

[29] Melinda Bollar Wagner, "Space and Place, Land and Legacy," in *Culture, Environment, and Conservation in the Appalachian South,* 121.

Wagner describes the sentiment of Appalachian residents with whom she spoke with about their lives and their connection to the land with this quote from one, who said, "From here to here this has been in the family for generations."[30] Wagner goes on to comment on "the importance of living in the genealogical landscape where the land is a '"historical anchor that reaches several generations into the past."'[31] Writers and historians of the Appalachian region begin to hint at the ethnic diversity of Appalachia with these descriptions. There are, however, many more ethnicities that shaped and forged Appalachia into the diverse region that it is today. Rudy Abramson and Roberta Campbell record the many populations of Europeans that came for opportunity and work and stayed to build new lives in the region. Abramson and Campbell write, "Native Americans can be viewed as the first of many immigrants who continue to shape the regions' identity . . . . Colonial times brought English, Scots-Irish, and German farmers to the Appalachian frontier."[32]

But there were others who added their influence to the region. As Abramson and Campbell write "With the Industrial Revolution, tens of thousands of immigrants from northern and western Europe poured into western Pennsylvania coal mines . . . . They were followed, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by Italians, Poles, Hungarians, Austrians, Jews, Romanians, and Russians."[33] While the Scots-Irish in Appalachia continue to consider their historical antecedents in Anglo-Saxon roots and heritage to reflect what Abramson and Campbell refer to as "the old identity," it is the "modern identity that supersede[s] the well-worn stereotype."[34] The "stereotype" referred to by Abramson and Campbell relates to the image of Appalachia as a region that is beset by poverty, isolation, and ignorance.

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[30] Melinda Bollar Wagner, "Space and Place," 122.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Rudy Abramson and Roberta Campbell, "Ethnicity and Identity," in *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* 244.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 245.

Indeed, as Audra Himes and Charles Moore write, "the term *hillbilly* historically refers to mountain dwellers, primarily of Scots-Irish descent who lived in the southern part of the Appalachian Mountains."[35]For better or worse, Southern Appalachia has been designated as a distinct demographic region.

Appalachian Literature, Lore, and Legend

Harry Teter Jr. writes, "Even hard times could not sever the bond between the people and the land that their ancestors had settled."[36] Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely contribute to an understanding of Appalachian lore when they write, "the largest groups, in number and influence, were the Germans and Scots-Irish. They came early, and endured, and they shaped the ways of life- the attitudes and products, legends, and realities-that are considered particularly "Appalachian," today."[37] Grace Toney Edwards and Theresa Lloyd in concurrence with Allen Batteau, observe that "'Appalachia is in many ways a textual construction.'"[38] These observations unite in the production of literature, lore, and legend that contribute to the image of Appalachia moving, as Edwards writes, "from oral tradition to print and then back out again, but continuing to live through the ages."[39] Much of the literature that has contributed to the impression held by those who live outside the region has been the "construction" of writers who, as Edwards observes, helped to shape the American consciousness "largely through publications in mass-market magazines such as *Harper's, Lippencott's, Appletons'*, and the *Atlantic*

[35] Audra Himes and Charles F. Moore, "Hillbilly," in *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* 260.

[36] Harry Teter Jr., Foreword to *Appalachian Ways: A Guide to the Historic Mountain Heart of the East*, ed. Jill Durrance and William Shamblin (Washington, D.C.: Appalachian Regional Commission, 1976), 4.

[37] Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, "The People and the Land," in *Appalachian Ways: A Guide to the Mountain Heart of the East*, ed. Jill Durrance and William Shamblin (Washington D.C.: Appalachian Regional Commission, 1976), 30.

[38] Grace Toney Edwards and Theresa Lloyd, "Literature," in *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* 1035.

[39] Grace Toney Edwards, "Emma Bell Miles Pioneer Folklorist of Appalachia," in *The Many Faces of Appalachia: Exploring a Regions Diversity*, ed. Sam Grey (Boone, N.C.: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1985), 27.

Monthly."[40] Edwards and Lloyd refer to writers such as Frederick Law Olmsted, Charles Lanman, John Fox Jr., Emma Bell Miles, and Mary Noailles Murfree who, to a large extent, are responsible for "constructing" the image of the Southern Mountains.[41] It is, however, as Edwards writes of native Appalachian and feminist crusader Emma Bell Miles, "The significant contribution Miles made as one of the earliest folklorists . . . in the Southern Appalachians" that informs of the literary and oral traditions that describe life in Appalachia.[42] The portrait of Emma Bell Mile's life emerges as a contradictory transposition of two contrasting worlds. David Whisnant writes of Miles, "her professional career . . . like her life, was infused with painful ambivalence toward both of the cultures of which she was a part."[43]

Miles has largely been considered feminist in her approach to the social conditions within which women live, work, and raise families. Her life, like those of the women she writes about in her stories, was fraught with poverty, ambivalence, and acceptance. Roger Abrahams notes, "Emma Bell Miles is particularly perceptive on the importance of women, especially older women, in the preservation of mountain life-ways."[44] Abrahams goes on to comment, "Her perceptions aris[e] . . . from her own painful experiences of trying to raise a family and maintain a difficult marriage in the most austere of conditions."[45] The inclusion of works written by Miles connects the historicity of Appalachian women to the land, to family, to hard work and poverty, and to the image, and traditions of Appalachia. Elizabeth S.D. Engelhardt lauds Miles as an "ecological feminist," along with Grace MacGowan Cooke, as women who were, "Speaking out

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[40] Grace Toney Edwards and Theresa Lloyd, "Literature," 1037.

[41] Edwards and Lloyd, "Literature," in Encyclopedia of Appalachia 1035.

[42] Grace Toney Edwards, "Emma Bell Miles," 27.

[43] David E. Whisnant, introduction to the new edition of *The Spirit of the Mountains*, By Emma Bell Miles, new ed. (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), xxi.

[44] Roger Abrahams, preface to the new edition of *The Spirit of the Mountains*, By Emma Bell Miles, new ed. (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), xi.

[45] Abrahams, "The Spirit of the Mountains," xi.

for gender and the environment."[46] As well, states Engelhardt, "Both Cooke and Miles place their feminism in the specific Southern Appalachian Mountains in which they lived."[47] Engelhardt describes Miles as a writer "whose implicit discussion of activism is coupled with her public role as a naturalist and suffragist."[48] But, Engelhardt claims that Miles was not alone in her role as a women and a writer to expose "gender roles in Tennessee mountain (white) society."[49] Engelhardt points out that Cooke added her skill as a writer to critique "women's experiences in the new, environmentally damaging cotton mills" and to "write explicitly about the action women can take to improve all life in the mountains."[50] Nor were these the only feminist voices to be heard; joining them was Rebecca Harding Davis whose compelling work, *Life in the Iron Mills*, published in 1861 in *The Atlantic Monthly*, sought to portray the gritty, stolid existence of those who worked in the mills.

Authoritative work on the customs and people of Appalachia continue to capture the imagination of twentieth century authors such as Cratis D. Williams, Henry Shapiro, Denise Giardina, and Lee Smith.[51] Recent fictional literature on Appalachia can be found in novels and short stories from authors such as Barbara Kingsolver and Ron Rash. The distinctive quality of Appalachia comes through in the writing of these authors who contribute to the "textual construction" of Appalachia through the literary device of prose and poetry to mark the Southern

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[46] Elizabeth S.D. Englehardt, "Placing Their Feminism in the Southern Appalachian Mountains: Emma Bell Miles, Grace MacGowan Cooke, and the Roots of Ecological Feminism," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 20 no. 1 (Spring 2001), http://www.jstor.org/stable/464465 (accessed July 10, 2013), 12.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Engelhardt, "Feminism in the Southern Appalachian Mountains," 12.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Cratis D. Williams, *Southern Mountain Speech* (Berea: Berea College press, 1992): Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978): Denise Giardina, *Storming Heaven* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987): Lee Smith, *Appalachian Portraits* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993): Barbara Kingsolver*, Flight Behavior* (New York: Harper, 2012): Ron Rash, *Nothing Gold Can Stay* (New York: Ecco, Harper Collins Publishers 2013).

Mountains as uniquely different in custom and tradition. The lore and legends of Appalachia are preserved in the familial fictions passed down in stories and oral traditions that speak to the value of family, kinship, and the necessity of hard work. [52]

Economics

It was the austerity of rural impoverishment in the Appalachians that led women to seek employment in the mines and opened up new opportunities for women to earn wages independent of their husbands. Traditionally, work in the mines was considered to be a male prerogative. Carletta Savage Bush writes, "Male miners had worked the pits for centuries, creating a thoroughly masculine world underground and declaring it off limits to women."[53] Bush goes on to note that, "whether laboring for wages, bartering for farm goods, or bearing children . . . Appalachian women have always worked."[54] Bush writes, "Most women performed the less visible, unpaid tasks required for maintaining the family and household."[55] The "unpaid tasks" of women's labor that Bush refers to kept women dependent on their husband's earnings and on their continued support of the family. As Bush notes, "options remained particularly limited for women living in rural areas where earning opportunities beyond housework, quilting, and sewing were few."[56] The long history of women's labor in the Appalachian region, visible and invisible, has led to the characterization of Appalachian women as independent and self-reliant. It is a fitting description of women in Appalachia who work alongside their husbands in the mines and on the farms to help provide for their families.

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[52] Kenneth Murray, *Myths, Legends, and Landscapes of the Southern Highlands* (Johnson City: Overmountain Press, 1993): Joyce Dyer ed. *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

[53] Carletta Savage Bush, "Women Coal Miners," in *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* ed. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 607.

[54] Bush, "Women and Employment," in *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* 606.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

Bush makes note of this when she writes that, "In addition, women worked in coal mines alongside of their husbands and fathers on a sharecropper basis or went to work in textile mills and glass factories."[57] However, beginning in the 1960s with the creation of federal improvement programs traditional divisions of labor began to change in rural Appalachia, leading to less clearly defined role assignment and a more even distribution of relational equity due to women's role outside the home in the labor force. Christina Miewald and Mary O'Quinn write on women in Appalachia and offer a different approach to the understanding of gender equity and the economy of need within Appalachia. Miewald and O'Quinn direct their focus to the dismantling of federal programs and discuss the effect of government withdrawal from the region; they write, "Dismantling of federal social support programs for poor single women . . . have significantly affected the region's economic security and the gender division of labor in the region."[58] Miewald and O'Quinn combine their insight on gender equity with this quote from political scientist Richard Couto, to write, "'[the] rise in female employment alter[s] gender roles within households, family groups, and communities.'"[59]

Sociologist Mary K Anglin observes that "The fact of having or needing jobs outside the home creates a different set of dynamics within the household."[60] Anglin speculates that "this state of affairs has offset some of the power traditionally vested in the male heads of household."[61] Women, writes Anglin, "Have gained some autonomy from the power of the family and the kind of exploitation it represents. However, it would appear that they have paid

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[57] Carletta Savage Bush, "Women Coal Miners," in Encyclopedia of Appalachia, 606.

[58] Christina Miewald and Mary O'Quinn, "Women's Roles," in *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, ed. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 195-197.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Mary K. Anglin, "Redefining the Family and Women's Status within the Family: The Case of Southern Appalachia," in *Feminist Visions: Toward a Transformation of the Liberal Arts Curriculum*, ed. Diane L. Fowlkes and Charlotte S. McClure (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 112.

[61] Ibid.

for this measure of freedom by submitting to the authority of the state as represented by the

social policies and economic programs it has instituted in the region."[62] It may be that the

politics of poverty in Appalachia laid the foundation for women for what would later become a

politics of resistance to cultural subordination. The tactic of women's resistance to gender and

age discrimination becomes clear in the narratives of interviews with women who participated in

this study. Feminist theory posits a culture of resistance among women in response to gender,

age, and ethnic discrimination. In addition, feminist scholars take note of the politics of

exclusion directed towards lesbian and gay identities in Western culture, as noted in the works of

Bonnie Zimmerman, Diane Richardson, and Adrienne Rich. [63]

Religion

Religion, as well, has been a force equal to or greater than the poverty that ruled the lives

of Appalachian women providing them with a reserve of strength and support. Church in the

rugged Appalachian Mountains has been and continues to be a unifying denominator of cause

and purpose that trumps diversity and difference. Faith, strong and spiritual, continues to

provide women in the Southern Appalachians with reassurance and hope for a better future.

Women's participation in the church can also be seen as political, as it is there that women vote

their voice. Of all the influential forces of life in Appalachia, religion takes precedence in

organizing activity, home, family, tradition, art, and music. In the interviews with women from

Washington County, TN, but, in particular, Carter County, TN, the church is central to their lives

and acts as a cohesive, unifying continuity within the community.

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[62] Anglin, "Redefining the Family," 112.

[63] Bonnie Zimmerman, "What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Literary Criticism," *Feminist Studies*, 7, No. 3 (Autumn, 1981), http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177760?origin=JSTOR-pdf (accessed July 11, 2013): Diane Richardson, "Claiming Citizenship? Sexuality, Citizenship and Lesbian/Feminist Theory," *Sexualities* No. 3. (May 2000), http://sex.sagepub.com/content/3/2/255 (accessed July 11, 2013): Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs*, 5, No. 4, (Summer, 1980), http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173834 (accessed July 11, 2013).

The strong influence of the church and the religious commitment of some of the women I spoke with can be seen in the interviews I conducted and are reflected in their answers to questions that tested their resilience to aging. Deborah Vansau McCauley expresses it best when she writes, "Mountain religion has its own historical integrity that informs its uniqueness . . . [the] geography itself, the reality of the *land*: the mountainous terrain that is the Appalachian region has had an enormous impact on its character, its texture, and its religious values."[64] McCauley describes mountain religion as "one of the very few uniquely American regional religious traditions . . . it is made up of church traditions found almost entirely in the region's mountains and small valleys."[65]

It should be noted that McCauley's work focuses primarily on small churches located in the mountains and does not reference the larger mainstream churches of the valleys. The description McCauley offers fits with my own experience of contact with women from Carter County who participated in the interviews and responded to questions about the church as a source of support and comfort. For some of the women I spoke with, church was not, as McCauley writes, "simply a facet of an umbrella-like entity called mountain culture, but is the very core of it."[66] Whatever else mountain religion might be, it is also a source of subordination and a legitimizing tradition of constraint on women. Theresa Lloyd comments on the "circumscribed roles" to which women are delegated that, "Mirrors the region's generally conservative stance on gender issues."[67] Much of the church doctrine stems from a literal understanding of biblical exegesis that prohibits women from the pulpit or from any position of authority over men in the community.

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[64] Deborah Vansau McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 7.
[65] Ibid., 2.
[66] Ibid., 52.
[67] Theresa Lloyd, "Women in Traditional Churches," in *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* 1358-59.

Lloyd takes note of this to write, "Despite these restrictions, however, women have found ways to attain power, status, and personal fulfillment in a religious context."[68] In an interview with a woman from Carter County who was a congregant in the local neighborhood church, she confided to me with regret and resentment that the church did not permit women to hold office or to minister. The woman who spoke with me was herself highly regarded and a leader in the women's branch of the church. Indeed, as Lloyd points out, women join and stay within the church for reasons that border only slightly on the religious. As Lloyd writes, "it may seem puzzling that some of them [women] are willing to join churches that openly subordinate them to men. In addition to theological considerations, probably the greatest incentive to women's continuing participation in these denominations is the close sororal bonding that occurs among female members."[69]

Appalachian writer and researcher Mary K. Anglin makes similar observations of women from Moth Hill, North Carolina, with whom, as part of her study on women factory workers, she joined in church. Anglin notes that these women used the leverage of their votes within the church to accomplish change.[70] Anglin's observation is not unique to her research; in interviews I conducted with women from Carter County, Tennessee who belonged to and participated in the church, I was informed that many of them were elected to the board and regularly attended meetings on policy and governance. Many of the women from Carter County spoke of "their church" as "family," referring to it in terms of fellowship, encouragement, and as a place they had "grown up in."

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[68] Lloyd, "Women in Traditional Churches," 1358-59.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Mary K. Anglin, *Women, Power, and Dissent in the Hill of North Carolina*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 123.

Summation

The consensus of opinion on the Appalachian region as distinct began in earnest with the federal mandate (heavily influenced by the work of Henry Caudill) to alleviate what was perceived to be "urgent need."[71] Beginning with President John F. Kennedy in 1963, and later in 1965, with Lyndon B. Johnson who formed the President's Appalachian Regional Commission to investigate reports of regional poverty in Appalachia, the region has been designated as deserving of special attention and, thus, distinct. The work of well received and published authors who chose to write on Appalachia informed the public opinion and created in the public mind an image (right or wrong) of a region with distinctive traditions and customs, as well as, negative stereotypes. The ideas regarding those traditions came from the pens of gifted and articulate authors who wrote of their perceptions, experiences, and in some instances, e.g. Emma Bell Miles, of their lives growing-up and living in the Southern Mountains.

Religion in the region is not a tradition, for many it is an integral part of life giving rise to well preserved notions of family, community, and respect for the elders in a family that in many aspects is modeled on the hierarchal structure of the church. The emphasis on traditional values will evidence later in interviews with women from two adjoining counties in Tennessee, and will reference the cherished ideal of respect for the elderly. In the Appalachian region many women, due to economic circumstances, are invested and involved as financial providers for their families in addition to being fulltime wives and mothers. A situation not unlike other parts of the United States, however, at least for the women with whom I spoke to in this region it is not an option, but a necessity. The ethic of hard work harks back to the arrival of the Scots-Irish and others to the American colonies with the aspiration of owning small independent plots of land upon which to establish their livelihood.

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[71] Isserman and Rephann, "The Economic Effects," 345

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Western society aging is not a desirable destination for anyone, but for women, in particular, aging can become a critical process involving the reevaluation of self-identity, recognition of social diminution, and a sense of social invisibility. Feminist scholarship on the subject of aging presents a gendered perspective on ageism that addresses the concerns of women within the cultural context of Western society. As feminist writer and scholar Margaret Cruikshank remarks in her book *Learning to be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging*, "the tenacity of ageism is not surprising, given its deep roots in Western culture."[1]

Feminist scholarship embraces a number of ideological and methodological approaches; for the purposes of this review, however, I will employ a feminist perspective that embraces the principles of liberal feminism. Liberal feminism, as a philosophy, defines the personal and political autonomy of women. English feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, who in 1792 wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, exemplifies the liberal philosophical viewpoint held by many feminists and was one of the earliest proponents of equal rights for women. Wollstonecraft, whose work was extraordinarily liberal for her time, did not advocate for the social equality of women with men, rather, she argued for the moral equality of women and men as equals before God. Wollstonecraft argued for the education of women as befit their social position, stating that "she who has sufficient judgment . . . will not submit to the social laws that make a non-entity of a wife."[2]

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[1] Margaret Cruikshank, *Learning to be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2003), 135.

[2] Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects ed. Charles W. Hagleman, Jr. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 1967). 263.

Nearly a century later in 1869, Englishman John Stuart Mill, as a member of the British

Parliament, argued vehemently for the right of women to vote and to be seen as intellectual

equals to men. The work of Mill, who wrote *The Subjection of Women*, has been held by many

feminists to be a seminal text and an early foundation to feminism. Wendell Robert Carr writes

in his introduction to Mill, "his numerous essays . . . are among the most intelligent, lucid, and

provocative."[3] The liberal views and politics of Wollstonecraft and Mill undergird the early

constructs of feminism, setting in place the guiding principles that would later develop and

define liberal feminism for women in Western societies.

Following suit, Angelina and Sarah Grimke´ published their treatise on the plight of

women, with Angelina writing an Appeal to Women of the South in 1836 and Sarah publishing

Letters on the Equality of the sexes and the Condition of Women in 1837-38. Feminist author

Gerda Lerner, in her biography of the Grimke´ sisters, comments on her own identification with

the sisters to write, "As the only Southern women of the planter class who became abolitionist

agents in the North, they were not only immigrants but exiles from their own class."[4] Lerner

quotes a section of speech given by Angelina Grimke´ in 1838 before the Hall of Representatives

in Boston, Massachusetts,

> I stand before you as a Southerner, exiled from the land of my birth by the sound of the
> lash and the piteous cry of the slave. I stand before you as a repentant slaveholder. I stand
> before you as a moral being and as a moral being I feel that I owe it to the suffering slave
> and to the deluded master, to my country and to the world to do all that I can to overturn
> a system of complicated crimes, built upon the broken hearts and prostrate bodies of my
> countrymen in chains and cemented by the blood, sweat and tears of my sisters in
> bonds.[5]

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[3] Wendell Robert Carr, Introduction to *The Subjection of Women* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1970), vi.

[4] Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Womans Rights and Abolition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), xiv.

[5] Gerda Lerner, *The Grimke´ Sisters from South Carolina: Rebels Against Slavery* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), 8.

The history of women's activism in the the suffragist movement, and liberal feminism in the nineteenth century, emerged out of the abolitionist movement. Susan Brownell Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were key organizers of the women's suffrage movement in the United States. Stanton, in her exegete argument for equality of women with men, draws upon the legitimacy of the Bible and in an anticipatory prelude to Dale Spender and Julia Stanley writes, "the paucity of a language may give rise to many misunderstandings."[6] Alice Stokes Paul and Lucy Burns campaigned for women's suffrage and together formed the National Women's Party in 1913 to advocate for women's rights. Carrie Chapman Catt campaigned for the nineteenth amendment to the constitution in 1920 and served as president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Anna-Marie Kappeli notes the progress of women to write, "The sufferagettes looked forward to a new identity. Breaking the silence surrounding sexuality, they argued in favor of a new morality."[7]

The accomplishments of these women and others in the fight for women's rights laid a foundational basis for the emergence of liberal feminism and links directly to the movement for abolition of slavery. Activism, on the part of conscientious women, for the human rights of their "countrymen in chains and their sisters in bonds" paved the way for recognition of all women to share in equal standing with men.[8] No small coincidence then a century later, women would rally to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s to once more argue for their own liberation and that of their "countrymen," who also demanded recognition. This group of women formed what would become known as the second wave of feminists and sparked vociferous debate by women as Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Susan Moller Orkin, and Martha Nussbaum among others.

[6] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 15.
[7] Anna-Marie Kappeli, "Feminist Scenes," in *A History of Women in the West*, ed. Genevieve Fraisse and Michelle Perrot (Cambridge: The Harvard University press, 1993), 482.
[8] Lerner, "Rebels Against Slavery," 8.

Friedan was one of the first to break new ground and expose the myth of the happy homemaker with her work *The Feminine Mystique*, Steinem followed with *Her Passions, Politics, and Mystique*, and Nussbaum summed the situation of women succinctly when she wrote, "all too often women are not treated as ends in their own right, persons with a dignity that deserves respect from laws and institutions. Instead, they are treated as mere instruments of the ends of others."[9] Myra Jehlen would make the argument that, "It hardly matters . . . what a woman wants to write; its political nature is implicit in the fact that it is she (a she) who will do it. All women's writing would thus be congenitally defiant and universally characterized by the blasphemous argument it makes in coming into being."[10] Writing, feminist writing in particular, is defiantly political regardless of whether it espouses liberal feminism or radical individualism and denotes resistance by feminists to the loss of respect that occurs with aging. Colleen Kennedy and Dale Bauer write, "Women's writing can be conceived more narrowly as writing by women conscious of their differences as women."[11]

There are many women who write as feminists and it would be beyond the scope of this paper to pay adequate homage to them all. Suffice it to say, however, that from the earliest recording of women's dissent from subordination, women have remained vocal and active in women's rights. The principles of liberal feminism differentiate the process and issues of women's aging from that of men by assessing the distribution of social worth as it is applied culturally to older women and men.

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[9] Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2. For related works see: Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 1963), and Gloria Steinem *Her Passions, Politics, and Mystique* (Secaucus: Carol Publishing Group, 1997).

[10] Myra Jehlen, "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism," Signs 6 no. 4 (Summer 1981): 582, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173733 . (accessed June 18, 2013).

[11] Colleen Kennedy and Dale M. Bauer, "Politics and Writing," in The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 691.

Leading feminist scholar Martha Nussbaum puts forth an argument for liberal feminism as founded on "the tradition of Kantian liberalism and . . . the classical Utilitarian liberal tradition, especially as exemplified in the work of John Stuart Mill.[12] Nussbaum writes,

> At the heart of this tradition is a twofold intuition about human beings: namely, that all, just by being human, are of equal dignity and worth, no matter where they are situated in society, and that the primary source of this worth is a power of moral choice within them, a power that consists in the ability to plan a life in accordance with one's own evaluations of ends."[13] Nussbaum's argument centers on two fundamental objectives, "it must respect and promote the liberty of choice, and it must respect and promote the equal worth of persons as choosers.[14]

Virginia Held chooses a different approach to the equitable distribution of social justice for women focusing instead on an overarching framework that Held refers to as an "ethics of care."[15] Held contends that within this wider network "room should be made for the liberal individualism that has contributed so much to our understanding of justice and well-being."[16] Held writes "Within a network of caring relations we can require the justice and equality, fairness and rights highlighted by liberal political theory."[17] Yet another approach is taken by Catharine MacKinnon who views equality as a question of "the distribution of power" and gender as a proposition of power.[18] MacKinnon's observations are based on a differential of dominance and a socially constructed hierarchy of male supremacy and once more relate social justice with "the implicit model of racial justice applied by the courts in the sixties."[19] Although the approaches taken by feminists are different, key agreement on substantive issues regarding women's social standing in relation to men can be found that link as well to issues of aging.

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[12] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 57.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political and Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[16] Ibid., 88.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 40.

[19] Ibid., 42.

Western feminist scholars have found that as women age they tend to lose social value and visibility in comparison to men in their age cohorts. Aging, from the perspective of liberal feminism, is more punitive toward women than men in Western society and thus creates a disparity within which women are disadvantaged and victimized.[20] They are, in Cruikshank's words, "typecast as carriers of pathos."[21] Feminist writers such as Cruikshank argue that "an old woman bears the brunt of ageism because she is already devalued as a female."[22] Aging is a natural process, but ageism is a cultural phenomenon that, as Cruikshank points out, does not reside in the sole province of old women but affects old men as well. Men, writes Cruikshank, experience ageist bias too, but not to the extent or in the same way that women do.[23]

As a social phenomenon, ageism, first coined by Robert Butler, M.D., in 1968, has achieved growing recognition by gerontologists, sociologists, and feminists as a phenomenon to be reckoned with. In his testimony before the Congressional Committee on Aging in 2002, Butler spoke out against the discriminatory practices of ageism, saying in his statement that "the underlying basis of ageism is the dread and fear of growing older, becoming ill and dependent, and approaching death."[24] Butler used as an example of ageism the cover on The New Republic magazine published in March of 1988, to illustrate the pervasive attitude of antipathy toward older adults. The cover shows an angry mob of seniors brisling with demands and a headline that reads, "Greedy Geezers."[25] The article, according to Butler, rails against adults over 65 who are "unproductive" and a "drain" on economic resources.[26]

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[20] Cruikshank, "Learning," 140.

[21] Ibid., 137.

[22] Ibid., 139.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Robert Butler M.D. invited guest speaker on aging, on September 4th, 2002, to the Senate Special Committee on Aging, 107th Cong., second sess., serial no. 107-35.

[25] Ibid., 15.

[26] Ibid.

Speaking before the Congressional Committee, Butler referenced the portrayal of older adults by the media as, "Feeble, ineffective, helpless, and irrelevant."[27] Contrary to the ageist rhetoric in *The New Republic* regarding the affluence and greed of older adults, the demographics of age and the economic realities that accompany these statistics do not enhance with age, as evidenced by Butler's testimony "70 percent of older households have an annual income below $35,000 and almost 30 percent have an income of between $10,000, and $20,000."[28]

The poorest of these households are invariably those of older women and women of color, as Colette Brown notes in her work *Women, Feminism and Aging*. Brown, who writes from the perspective of a social gerontologist with feminist understanding, notes that, "It is not just poor young women who grow into poor older women, middle-aged women are also at risk of poverty in later life as a result of divorce . . . discrimination and years of unpaid care-giving duties."[29] As Brown states "simply put, older women are poorer than older men."[30] Being old, female, and alone, either through death or divorce creates a lower social economic class for white women, but for older women of color it is, as Brown writes, "yet another determinate of poverty . . . . Throughout their lives, women of color tend to be poorer than white women."[31] Brown's critical analysis of women's social and economic status in later life provides a realistic glimpse of the way in which ageism translates primarily into a women's issue in Western society.

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[27] Butler, "Senate Committee on Aging," 17.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Colette Brown, *Women, Feminism, and Aging* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1998), 6.

[30] Ibid., 8.

[31] Ibid. For critical reflection on the African-American perspective see: Patricia Hill Collins, "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought," *Signs* 14 no.4 (summer, 1989). Collins makes it clear that "Black women's political and economic status provides them with a distinctive set of experiences that offers a different view of material reality than that available to other groups," and "these experiences stimulate a distinctive Black feminist consciousness concerning that material reality." 747-48.

Brown employs an encompassing candor in her approach to the issues of women and aging within the socio-historical context and a thorough assessment of the challenges women face as they age. One peculiar aspect of aging for women lies in confronting the mirror of physical decline held up to women by the cultural demand for productive and successful aging. The implicit requiem inherent in the loss of youth challenges women to resist aging by resorting to cosmetic repair of the body, as Martha Holstein argues, "Ironically, after years of struggle, as women have achieved a stronger status as agents than ever before, we face an escalating set of expectations about our bodies."[32] Holstein refers to the cultural demand for the fictional preservation of society's youthful ideal and the assumption that "control is putatively within our grasp" and that women are "moral failures for being complicit in our own aging."[33]

According to Holstein the social reversal of older women from a status as victims of ageism to agents of control instigates a discursive dualism that makes women morally responsible for their own aging. Holstein references a "discursive grid" in which the "outward signs of aging discount the person displaying those signs."[34] Women are encouraged to buy into the social fiction of eternal youth by choosing, instead, to deny the realities of age with any cosmetic means available in order to reinforce the fabrication. Holstein writes "this postmodern project . . . works best for people with the luxury of time and the resources to pursue it- but its advocates tend to be blind to the vicissitudes of class on this ability to make the self a project."[35] Holstein echoes Brown in her concern for the multiple intersections of race, class, and age as they work together against women. The complicit collusion of older women in the cultural deprecation of the aged body engages their cooperation, argues Holstein, in a "culturally

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[32] Martha Holstein, "On Being an Aging Woman," in *Age Matters: Realigning Feminist Thinking*, ed. Toni M Calasanti and Kathleen F Slevin (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 320.
[33] Ibid., 316.
[34] Ibid., 316.
[35] Ibid., 320.

meaningful set of values that ultimately will betray [them]."[36] Holstein's essay provides a

realistic appraisal of the dialectical discord between the inner and outer versions by women of

themselves; between the normative demands of cultural ideals, and the struggle to meet those

expectations, and the dissonance that divorces the mirror image from the media image.

In 2002, the Congressional Committee had good reason to be concerned with the way

older adults were being portrayed in the media. Reflecting that concern, Kim Kjaersgaard writes

in her essay, "The media-television, movies, magazines and newspapers-play an extremely

powerful role in shaping constructions of reality."[37] The social construction of image and

identity is not a new idea, but the proposition, as Kjaersgaard points out, that "people are both

observers and creators of reality . . . [that] people build their own reality," puts an entirely

different emphasis on the medium from which image and perceptions arise.[38] Television, in

particular, writes Jean Kilbourne, "tells us who we are," and more importantly "who we should

be."[39]   Kilbourne, noted for her work exposing the exploitation of women in advertising,

questions the ethics of advertisers who "dismember" women into parts to sell products that tout

eternal youth: writes, "She has no lines or wrinkles which would indicate she had the bad taste

and poor judgment to grow older."[40] Kjaersgaard has found that older women, as depicted in the

media, are portrayed as asexual victims frail and vulnerable in comparison to male actors who

appear robust and adventurous. The central message disseminated to wide audiences of young

and old alike that aging is undesirable and to be avoided at all costs prompts Kjaersgaard to

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[36] Holstein, "Aging Woman," 321-23.

[37]   Kim Kjaersgaard, "Aging to Perfection or Perfectly Aged? The Image of Women Growing Older on Television," in *Featuring Females: Feminist Analysis of the Media*, ed. Ellen Cole and Jessica Henderson Daniel (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2005), 202.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Jean Kilbourne, "Beauty and the Beast of Advertising," in *Gender, Race and Class in Media: A Text Reader*, ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 115.

[40] Ibid.

write, "Women continue to perceive aging as the relentless enemy and consequential culturally promoted self-hatred is evident by the multi-billion-dollar cosmetics and beauty industries."[41] Concurring with Kjaersgaard and Kilbourne, Laura Hurd Clark writes, "Media imagery suggests that older women are unattractive and undesirable living examples of everything younger adults should strive against with all available means within consumer culture."[42] The question to ask here is why is there such a desperate denial of age by women? Why does the multi-billion-dollar cosmetic industry target women, if not exclusively, at least predominantly? The answer lies in the politics of age as practiced from within a context of patriarchy in Western culture.

Ageism from a liberal feminist point of view emasculates old men, even as it defeminizes old women, as shown by Jeff Hearn who writes, "In particular a focus on older men may problematize dominate forms of men and masculinities, including hegemonic masculinities."[43] Interestingly, Hearn applies to aged men many of the same pejoratives used to describe old women writing, "first, beyond a certain point, the older the man, the weaker he becomes not just physically and bodily, but also socially."[44] Hearn's remarks reference the loss of social esteem and social currency and this admission regarding visibility: "Older men are constructed pre-death. They are relatively redundant, even invisible, not just in terms of paid work and family responsibilities, but more importantly in terms of life itself."[45] With feminist emphasis on the inequities of aging between women and men, it seems relevant to review the social processes of aging for men, as well. As Hearn points out, while the sharp edge of ageism may cut more deeply against women, it is the social construction of aging in Western culture that diminishes

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[41] Kjaersgaard, "Aging," 205.
[42] Laura Hurd Clark, *Facing Age: Women Growing Older in Anti-Aging Culture* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2011), 105.
[43] Jeff Hearn, "Imaging the Aging of Men," in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (New York: Routledge, 1995), 98-99.
[44] Ibid., 100.
[45] Ibid., 101.

human worth. Power is largely a man's issue if only because not many women have ascended into the inner circles and sociopolitical hierarchies that control power.[46] Hearn offers a perspective on aging that is compatible with feminist ideologies on the subjective nature of power when he writes, "generational power and the power of the father has been to some extent superseded by the power of the state and state law."[47] What Hearn suggests is that as men age they, too, lose power and become subject to the authority of younger, stronger, and more powerful men. If what Hearn writes is true, then men, as well as women, suffer from the indiscriminate diminishment and marginalization that accompanies old age in Western societies.

In what seems to be a reversal of the socially isolating role of the "other" as portrayed by lesbian women, Hearn comments on older gay men who identify their experiences as being "specific and significant" positioning themselves socially in what Hearn describes as "otherness."[48] Hearn's concluding observation narrows the distance between the feminist focus on women and its antithetical twin, male masculinity, on the issues of gender and aging when he writes "the category of older men is fundamentally a contradictory one. It makes gender explicit in a way that is not often done . . . It connects oldness to gender, to men, and to men's social power." [49] Robert Meadows and Kate Davidson add to what Hearn has found when they write "aging is fluid affecting everyone, and is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon."[50] Meadows and Davidson "seek to illustrate . . . the ways in which age matters to feminisms" by "centering on the lives of old men."[51]

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[46] Hearn, "Imaging the Aging of Men," 101.
[47] Ibid., 103.
[48] Ibid., 112.
[49] Ibid., 113.
[50] Robert Meadows and Kate Davidson, "Maintaining Manliness in Later Life: Hegemonic Masculinities and Emphasized Femininities," in *Age Matters: Realigning Feminist Thinking*, ed. Toni M Calasanti and Kathleen F Slevin [New York: Routledge, 2006], 304.
[51] Ibid.

Meadows and Davidson argue that "age relations present critical axes of inequality that subordinate old men particularly in relation to other, younger, men."[52] The ways in which ageism affects men are important for feminists to recognize because this is an issue that has equal consequences of discrimination within contemporary Western society. Meadows and Davidson identify three structures within which "hegemonic masculinities" reside; "production relations, power relations and emotional attachments."[53] Taken together these form the spaces that young men inhabit and from which old men are conspicuously absent. Meadows and Davidson draw on Emma Renold's work to suggest that notions of otherness are reinforced not only through being absent from a masculinized space but also through inhabiting spaces associated with "'emphasized femininity.'"[54] Meadows and Davidson define feminine spaces as ones associated with subordination and support of the dominant hierarchal structure. Interestingly, in their discussion of old men, Meadows and Davidson touch on how, "Old people resist being seen as old by dismissing chronological age as irrelevant and by reserving the label old for those in physical or mental decline."[55]

Several comparisons are important to note in connection with this study that directly concur with findings in other studies by feminist writers. One is the theory of social comparison proposed by Leon Festinger in 1954, and used by Meadows and Davidson who argue that, "People have a drive to evaluate their abilities . . . and this need is satisfied through evaluating oneself in comparison to similar others."[56] A second comparison addresses the advantage of similarity in conducting research with specific chronological and cultural groups.

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[52] Meadows and Davidson, "Maintaining Manliness," 295.

[53] Ibid., 297.

[54] For further discussion on Renold's see, Emma Renold," 'Other' boys: Negotiating non-hegemonic masculinities in the primary school." *Gender and Education* 16, no. 2 (2004): 247-265.

[55] Meadows and Davidson, "Maintaining Manliness," 303.

[56] Ibid. For a complete discussion of Social Comparison Theory see "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes," by Leon Festinger. (1954). http://hum.sagepub.com/content/7/2/117

In the study advanced by Meadows and Davidson, a group of 85 men older than 65 were interviewed by "an older male social scientist" who presented a comfortable figure the men could identify with."[57] A third similarity alludes to age, for both men and women, as a state of loss in terms of production, power, value, and visibility. In their concluding comments Meadows and Davidson note that "focusing on the lives of old men challenges and informs feminism in three ways."[58] First, the study of old men defines the "nature" of hegemonic masculinity in that it makes explicit the relationship of power between old men and young men situated in masculine identity as control and authority. Second, the study of old men illuminates strategies for coping with the stress of human aging; and finally, as Meadows and Davidson point out; "unlike most other social inequalities, everybody will experience the loss of privilege that comes with aging."[59] Just as aging applies indiscriminately to categories of heterosexual women and men, it does so then to nonconforming categories of gay men and lesbian women.

Social estrangement due to the nonconformity of gay and lesbian orientation can become a defining category of exclusion by the larger conservative community. Older women, as well as younger women, who identify as lesbian meet with multiple discriminations based not only on a feminine gender no longer perceived as youthful and desirable within the lesbian community, but also with exclusion from the larger social community precisely because of their noncontribution to the maintenance and support of the dominant hierarchal structure.[60] Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich are two women who are unafraid to confront age as an issue immediately personal and disturbing.   Macdonald and Rich speak from within a context of difference from the normative category of heterosexuality to challenge the media stereotype of

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[57] Meadows and Davidson, "Maintaining Manliness," 297.
[58] Ibid., 309-310.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich, *Look Me In the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism* (Denver: Spinster Inc. Books, 1983), 54.

the older woman by demanding social visibility and finding it in peer relationships with other women. Writing from the singular vantage point as a lesbian, Macdonald and her partner Cynthia Rich explore the personal and political landscape of old women in *Look Me In the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism,* finding as Rich remarks, "a deep underlying terror and hatred of our aging selves."[61] In her essay on "Aging, Ageism and Feminist Avoidance," Rich touches on the themes that repeat within feminist scholarship, especially those that link to older women who decline to identify with being old. Rich describes the reluctance of the old to ascribe to such an identity as an "avoidance of stigma" that "renders them unseen." [62] Women, remarks Rich, choose instead to practice the time honored art of "passing," a choice says Rich that is a "serious threat to selfhood" and one that "blurs into denial."[63]

Cynthia Rich's remark on "passing" initiates a comparison between women who make an effort to be seen as younger than they are to avoid the stigma of age and individuals of minority ethnicity who attempt to pass for white to avoid the stigma of race.[64] The social denigration of age and race in Western society creates barriers to social inclusion and has been implicated by feminist scholars to present a triple threat to older minority women. Barbara Macdonald, in her essay "The Power of the Old Woman," focuses on finding her own direction apart from the message society delivers when she writes, "From the day the old woman was born, society has been afraid that she would someday take charge of her own life. To make sure she would not, society kept her living on the edge, living with the fear of not surviving."[65] The essays by Macdonald and Rich are honest interrogations into the sources of ageism, especially as these

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[61] Macdonald and Rich, "Look Me In the Eye," 54.
[62] Cynthia Rich, "Aging, Ageism and Feminist Avoidance," in *Look Me In the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism*, [Denver: Spinster Inc. Books, 1983], 55.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Barbara Macdonald, "The Power of the Old Woman," in *Look Me In the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism*, [Denver: Spinster Inc. Books, 1983], 100.

resonate between women. For single women not securely seated within the comfortable confines of heterosexual conformity, economic-and-political survival becomes the leverage of control and the weapon of choice that is most often wielded within a culture of male dominance, male myths, and male ideals. Stridently echoing similar sentiment, Baba Copper has produced a slim volume of virulent denunciation on the culture of service in which women find themselves embedded, in *Over the Hill: Reflections on Ageism Between Women*. Picking up where Macdonald and Rich leave off, Copper speaks from outside the paternal imposition and demand of hetero-conformity to assail the expectation that older women take on the mantle of service providers in order to escape a far worse designation—that of the ugly, useless old woman.[66]

Copper echoes Mcdonald's fear of survival lamenting, "What is so strange about me? . . . I am simply a woman saying no to some patriarchal expectations and conditioning. I say no to the extent that I am able to do so without threatening my basic survival."[67] Copper takes readers up over the hill and down the slippery slope of speculation in her writing on the relationships between women and men and, more importantly to Copper, to relationships between women. There is no port of refuge for Copper as she is at war on all fronts; dissonant within her own community of lesbian women, estranged from heterosexual women, and in a state of utter contempt and disdain for men. Copper is at once angry and reclusive, railing against what she perceives as systemic prejudice against women, she writes, "Women bear the limitations and restrictions that come with their gender, a fact of birth that settles their future, almost without question, on the day they are born."[68] Like her predecessors, Macdonald and Rich, Copper shares a resistance to the status quo on women and image when she writes, "as women age, the

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[66] Baba Copper, *Over the Hill: Reflections on Ageism Between Women* (Freedom: The Crossing Press, 1988), 48.

[67] Ibid., 37.

[68] Ibid.

people that use them may find their services convenient, but expendable."[69] For Copper it is this social attitude that evidences the superfluous regard for old women in Western society.

Women, Feminism, and Aging in the South and Appalachia

There is not much in the way of feminist scholarship on the issues of age and ageism in the South; however, that is not to say that there is not an abundance of literature written on women and activism in Appalachia and the South. One such book, *Helen Matthews Lewis: Living Social Justice in Appalachia*, combines memoir with biography to produce intimate recollections of history and tradition in the Appalachian South. The memoirs of Helen Lewis are a primary source of historical notation that describes the tenor and tempo of life in the South and Appalachia in 1915 as reviewed by Lewis. Following the chronological trail provided by Lewis leads one across important landmarks in the making of history that directly influence women's activism today. In one vignette, Lewis recounts her days at Georgia State College for Women from 1943 through 1946: "the 1940s were a decade of enormous change in the South and the world, and these changes had great impact on the college and the women who were students during that time." and "for me it was here that I was encouraged . . . to believe that women could be leaders."[70] The social change Lewis refers to was, in fact, rippling across the nation as World War II created new job opportunities for women. As Lewis writes, "WWII opened up the world for all of us . . . there was emphasis on women power in industrial work and women's leadership."[71] More importantly, the progressive curriculum at Georgia State College set a standard for women of encouragement and expectation modeled by what Lewis describes as "a lot of older spinster-suffragette teachers: strong independent women who were among the first

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[69] Copper, "Over the Hill," 39.

[70] Helen Lewis, *Helen Matthews Lewis: Living Social Justice in Appalachia* [Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012], 20.

[71] Ibid., 21.

generation to vote." [72] While the work by Lewis does not directly address the issue of ageism, it does provide a precedent of feminist activism and resistance to racism and sexism that combine to influence feminist agendas against ageism today. Feminist activism is founded on principles of resistance to encroachment upon, and erosion of, female identity; these acts of militancy against erasure of feminine selfhood are evident in the South and in Appalachia in ways not immediately recognizable as rebellious. One insurrection deals with women and literacy in Appalachia. Erica Abrams Locklear writes on this issue in *Negotiating a Perilous Empowerment*: *Appalachian Women's Literacies*.

The term 'insurrection' reflects the idea, still perpetuated in rural communities within Appalachia, that literacy, as Locklear writes, "will cause one to get above their raising." [73] Women from rural Appalachian mountain communities who engage in formal education often find, according to Locklear, "that while certain literate activities are sanctioned by their communities, those that threaten established gender norms are not well accepted." [74] Thus, the empowerment of Appalachian women by introduction to literacy carries with it the potential to further feminist resistance to male positions of power and privilege. While these principles of resistance do not directly challenge the issue of age discrimination in Southern Appalachia, they do establish a foundation for activism in the region and speak to a gendered definition of identity and self-esteem, both of which are critical to women's self-respect. Making the case for protest and political activism in Southern Appalachia, Elizabeth S.D. Engelhardt writes that "as early as 1880 in North Carolina, women and children made up 75 percent of the workforce in textile mills . . . such difficult jobs and the labor struggles associated with them motivated many women

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[72] Lewis, "Living Social Justice in Appalachia," 21.
[73] Erica Abrams Locklear, *Negotiating a Perilous Empowerment: Appalachian Women's Literacies* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), 2.
[74] Ibid., 4.

. . . to become political."[75] Women in Appalachia express their identity and their independence through paid labor; bringing home a paycheck has an equalizing effect on male assertions of dominance and contributes to the welfare of the family. Mary K. Anglin writes on the interconnections of women's lives and identities observing that "women's lives are partially constructed in terms of class relations and the experience of waged labor, which [are] normatively part of every non-elite woman's life in Appalachia.[76]

Reflecting on her research, Anglin writes "factory work was not the most important dimension of women's lives . . . Kinship connections, religious beliefs, and community ties and traditions were important activities."[77] These values of hard work, family, and church factor into forging the identity of women from Southern Appalachia by creating a unique ethic of conscience and caring that extends across the generational divide. Faith-based religion plays a key part of that identity for rural women providing networks of support among them, as Anglin found in her participatory ethnography of Appalachian women. Anglin lived among the women and participated in the rural lifestyle of women who worked in a locally owned mill in Moth Hill, North Carolina, and attended the local church with them. Writing on her experiences there, Anglin observes that systems of patriarchal control are found in fundamental Christianity where only men are allowed to hold positions of authority such as deacon or preacher. Women, writes Anglin, "were secretaries or treasurer" within the church.[78] Anglin sets her goal to elucidate the patterns of feminist autonomy and activism within the restricting circumstances of rural poverty and traditional Southern masculinities and writes "That women were blocked from the highest

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[75] Elizabeth S.D. Engelhardt, *The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 17.

[76] Mary K. Anglin, Women, Power, and Dissent in the Hill of North Carolina. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 124.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

ranks within the church did not mean they acceded to a position of subservience to male authority."[79] Anglin provides an example of this when she describes how the religious women of Moth Hill practice particular forms of biblical exegesis that moderates parochial patrimony and how the women wielded their votes within the church as a form of protest against it.[80] In many of the previously reviewed works by feminist scholars, there exist terms of bias and a proclivity toward themes of activism, resistance, and agency that reflect feminist ideology and entrenchment against age discrimination, disparaging media stereotypes, and social devaluation. In addition, the works reviewed by feminist scholars who write on women in the South and Appalachia reflect a tendency by southern women to resist patriarchal aspirations by political manipulation within the existing circumstances of rural poverty, kinship loyalty, and established tradition to form a feminine culture of activism and protest. In both fields of feminist scholarship, feminist studies in general, and in particular, a feminist study of the South the focus is on women's political resistance to social devaluation and discrimination.

<div align="center">Feminist Interviewing</div>

A third category of review centers on feminist methodology for interviewing women and addresses the issues that arise between women that may hinder or work against the desired candor and free flow of expression needed in a research endeavor. Ning Tang argues that "despite women's shared understandings of gender subordination, other social attributes contribute to different power relationships in women interviewing women."[81] Tang addresses the fluid dynamics of power to question the "presumed dominant position of the interviewer within

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[79] Anglin, "Women, Power, and Dissent," 124.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ning Tang, "Interviewer and Interviewee Relationships Between Women," *Sociology* 36, no.3 [2002]: 703, http://soc.sagepub.com/content/36/3/703 [accessed September 12, 2012].

the hierarchal research relationship."[82] In her research Tang finds that cultural issues of race,

class, and age can make a difference in who is perceived as privileged. Tang writes on the

hierarchies of power within academia to discuss the ambiguities of deference within a cultural

context of comparison between China and the United Kingdom. While Tang's comments are

specific to the exploration of power differentials between women in academia, the underlying

issue of how perceptions of difference may work to influence the nature of what is reported,

and the ease with which responders reply to questions, is central to the interview process.

Highlighting the problem of perception, Tang observes that "the women interviewer and

the interviewee's perceptions of each other based on differences in social, cultural and personal

backgrounds have an impact on the power relationship in the interview."[83] Given that the nature

of social interaction takes place within a hierarchal context of exchange, an individual's

perception of place will automatically initiate an assessment of another's social status, education,

or other earmark of social location by which to determine where one is in social relation to that

person. Such observations are inherent in any social exchange that problematizes the relationship

between the interviewer and the interviewee. If the interviewee perceives that the interviewer is

of a higher social placement, then there is a danger of reticence and resentment that could affect

the quality of the interview.[84] As Tang points out, "other social attributes, such as race and class,

can influence the balance of power relationship in interview."[85] Tang makes an important

observation in her article when she comments on how the researcher's similarity to the

respondent is "based not only on gender, but on past experience" and thus provides a foundation

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[82] Tang, "Relationships Between Women," 703.
[83] Ibid., 704.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

on which to establish a rapport within which women can relate to one another. [86] This "similarity" can be seen as a bridge over the divide of difference that separates women and what makes it possible to find a common ground of agreement within which to interact to the mutual benefit of both. As laudable as this seems, however, what if there is no basis of similarity other than gender between women? What happens in the event of a cultural dissimilarity that provokes misunderstanding? Catherine Kohler Reissman, who is white and middle-class, spoke to this issue when she conducted research that enlisted both white and Hispanic interviewees.

Reissman concurs with Tang that there are divisive issues beyond gender that affect relations between women based in ethnic diversity and in culturally important ways of talking and listening.[87] Reissman's article recalls her research with two women, one white and middle class and the other a "working-class, Hispanic," who despite her description by Reissman as a "highly competent narrator," was not fully understood due to her culturally idiomatic way of relating events.[88] Reissman, who reports no difficulty in creating "shared understanding" with the white interviewee, explains that the interview with the Hispanic interviewee did not go as well because "Gender was apparently not enough to create the shared understandings necessary for a successful interview."[89] In her work, Reissman employs "narrative analysis [as] an approach . . . that can be applied to women's life stories," however, the problem, as Reissman shows, is that "the listener may not hear what is important to the narrator" creating what Reissman refers to as "barriers to understanding."[90]

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[86] Tang, "Relationships Between Women," 706.
[87] Catherine Kohler Reissman, "When Gender is not Enough: Women Interviewing Women," *Gender and Society* 1, no. 2 (June 1987): 173, http://www.jstor.org/stable/189947 (accessed November 25, 2012).
[88] Ibid., 172-73.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

These "barriers" are, as Reissman notes, "particularly consequential for they reproduce . . . [the] cultural divisions between women that feminists have tried so hard to diminish."[91] Reissman's experience is not unusual, as evidenced by Margaret Devault, who found, although in a slightly different context, that the gendered appropriation of language by men left many women silent and inarticulate. Devault approaches the problem of interviewing from an entirely different perspective, as evidenced by her argument that "an observation central to much feminist thinking: that language itself reflects male experiences, And that its categories are often incongruent with women's lives."[92] Devault argues for an empathetic response from interviewers when the lapses that occur in interview are the result of women searching for, and not finding, ways to express their experiences.

Central to Devault's argument is the proposition that the "lack of fit" between a women's experience and the exclusion or deviance of women from a male gendered vocabulary serves to mute women from expression.[93] Devault, however, echoes Reissman when she admits that even when women communicate with each other, they are still at risk to"speak and hear quite different versions of women talk."[94] Perhaps what is most instructive from Devault's discourse is the reiteration of the idea that men use their social power to "control less privileged men as well as women." [95] Devault provides feminist scholarship a service by recognizing that the social and political hegemony of men is not exclusively a women's issue in the broader social context. Jacqueline Watts speaks to experiences similar to those reported by Reissman and Devault when she interviewed working-class British women employed as civil engineers.

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[91] Reissman, "When Gender is not Enough," 173.

[92] Margaret Devault, "Talking and Listening from a Women's Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis," *Social Problems* 37, no. 1 (February 1990): 96, http://www.jstor.org/stable/800797 (accessed September 14, 2012).

[93] Ibid., 97.

[94] Ibid., 98.

[95] Ibid.

Watts states that issues of integrity for the researcher are "complex and dynamic" Watts, like Tang, refers to the need for a constant reassessment and "re-negotiation of the boundaries with participants."[96] Importantly, Watts echoes Tang when she writes that "specific considerations for feminist researchers may include the power relations between researcher and participants.[97]" Watts comments on the need to remain aware of the "different relation to the production of knowledge between researcher and subjects" Watts reiterates Reissman in reference to narrative, but for Watts it is in regard to a difference in the objective between the interviewer and the interviewee.[98] The goal for the interviewee is to relate to the interviewer a particular perspective or performance of reality, while the goal of the interviewer is to interpret that performance within a chosen framework. Doing so creates an objective that Watts interprets as, "Assigning meaning . . . to offer [an] explanation of social reality."[99]

This is largely a grey area and one that is fraught with cautionary hesitation, as Watts admits in quoting Uwe Flick that these "narrative constructions of reality" are essentially "interpretive repertoires" that place "discourse as performance."[100] As Watts points out, interpretation is "necessarily selective" and stems from "a theoretically informed understanding."[101] My analysis is that there is danger here for the researcher, especially in light of the possibility of misunderstanding message and intent from the participant amidst the culturally induced interstices of understanding that occur between people of diverse ethnicities.

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[96] Jacqueline Watts, "The Outsider within: Dilemmas of Qualitative Feminist Research within a Culture of Resistance," *Qualitative Research* 6 no.3 (2006): 385, http://qrj.sagepub.com/content/6/3/385 (accessed September 12, 2012).

[97] Ibid. On a personal note I can attest to the validity of these concerns in the interviews I conducted. In those instances where interviewees perceived me to be of a higher status than they were, due in part to my position and education, I encountered a hesitant quality of anxiety, and in situations where the respondent was older than me, I perceived a peculiar sort of condescension that left me feeling indebted.

[98] Watts, "The Outsider within," 386.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid. For a full explanation of Uwe Flick see *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (London: Sage Publications Limited, 2008).

[101] Ibid.

Moreover, there is an introduced element of bias in the "selectivity" of theory chosen by the researcher that has the potential to change the meaning and intent of what the participant said. In addressing these questions, Watts references "multiple realities" meaning the "realities" of the interviewee and those of the interviewer.[102] The question then becomes whose reality will ultimately be represented and to what extent will the "selectivity" of a chosen theory influence the published outcome of the research? Disclosure of a particular theoretical viewpoint employed by the researcher becomes an issue, as it did for Watts, when it directly contradicts the views of the study's participants. Watts chose not to reveal the feminist framework that informed her analysis, citing the "success or viability" of her research, because to do so would jeopardize the cooperation of the study's participants who did not adhere to feminist ideology.[103] As well, Watts indicates in her forthright disclosure that to make her ideological position public would invariably alienate the upper-level managers who supported and promoted her research.

<u>Ethnic and Minority Aging</u>

Most of the articles previously reviewed reflect the perspective of white, middle-class women, though some reflect a less-conventional lesbian orientation. The problems of aging, even within this select group of women, are multiple, but the added dimension of ethnic identification and race complicates the issues and presents challenges not experienced by whites. The articles that follow identify some of the problems experienced by African American and Hispanic minorities. Esther Madriz, who identifies as a Latina, touches on many of the same themes previously discussed in feminist strategies for interviewing. Madriz uses the collaborative intimacy of focus groups within the framework of feminist methodology to work with lower socioeconomic inner-city women of Latino and Hispanic descent.

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[102]Watts, "The Outsider within," 387.
[103] Ibid., 390.

Madriz, unlike Reissman, encounters no communicative lapses of understanding as she joins in the "culture of familism" that shapes the experience of the Latina.[104] Echoing the concerns of many feminists, Madriz questions the "use of traditional methodologies when studying women . . . specifically, women of color and of lower socioeconomic status."[105] Madriz cites concern for "listening to the voices of those women," women who have been excluded from social research.[106] In her article Madriz expresses the need to interview women who largely have been ignored by mainstream social recognition and who find themselves distanced by and from the dominant culture in which they are situated. Expressing this concern, Madriz views the role of social research as "one more element in the polarization and distancing between the Self and the Other."[107] Madriz identifies the "self" as middle class, white and male, and the "other" as "colonized women and men of color, poor people, gays and lesbians, and individuals with disabilities."[108] Picking up on the theme of listening, Madriz argues for researchers to "listen, instead to the plural voices of those 'Othered,' as constructors and agents of knowledge."[109]

Recognizing the "double, triple, or sometimes quadruple marginality of Latinas as women and more precisely, as women of color," writes Madriz, "makes it imperative to listen to their voices from a perspective in which they are not otherized."[110] The significance of this tactic of listening is clear for Madriz, as she states that the use of small focus groups contributes

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[104] Esther I Madriz, "Using Focus Groups with Lower Socioeconomic Status Latina Women," *Qualitative Inquiry* 4 no.1 (March 1998): 2, http://sagepub.com/content/4/1/114.short (accessed November 26, 2012). The terms Hispanic and Latino have been used interchangeably; however, the term Hispanic tends to be used in a collective sense to refer to individuals of Spanish heritage regardless of race. The term Latino is used more specifically by individuals, born in the United States, who refer to themselves as bi-cultural.

[105] Ibid., 1.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid., 2.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid.

to her, "learning to listen" to what she terms "collective testimony."[111] The use of focus groups

with Latinas constitutes for Madriz a confirmation of ethnic experience and empathy fostering

what Madriz identifies as "self-disclosure and self-validation" from among the participants.[112]

Madriz states the purpose of her study is to expose the hidden realities of crime and victimization

of women who, because of their lower social status, find themselves targets of violence and

vulnerable to social stigma.[113]

Jeffery Burr and Jan Mutchler compare the living arrangements of older unmarried

Hispanic females with those of non-Hispanic white females. Citing many of the same

socioeconomic factors that combine to influence African American minorities, Burr and

Mutchler, note that, "many elderly Hispanics have experienced a lifetime of reduced

opportunities, which results in poor socioeconomic status and poor health."[114] Again, as with

elderly African American women, Burr and Mutchler have found that older Hispanic females are

more likely to be head of household in "more complex households."[115] In their summary

analysis Burr and Mutchler find that especially with the Hispanic population there is a greater

emphasis on family life consistent with the findings from other studies that support "the highly

familistic" model of Hispanic culture.[116] A finding that leads Burr and Mutchler to conclude that

Hispanic families employ extended networks of inclusion and support for their elderly.[117]

Adding his perspective on minority aging, Fernando Torres-Gil comments on the growing

population of Hispanics in the United States and addresses the issue of diversity from within the

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[111] Madriz, "Latina Women," 2.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Jeffery Burr and Jan Mutchler, "The Living Arrangements of Unmarried Elderly Hispanic Females," *Demography* 29 no. 1 [February 1992]: 93, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2061365 (accessed December 9, 2012).

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid., 94.

[117] Ibid., 97.

catch-all term Hispanic. Torres-Gil notes that Hispanics, who include "Puerto Ricans, Cuban, Mexican American, and Central and Latin Americans," comprise the largest minority group in the United States.[118] The pluralism of Spanish speaking individuals accounts for the cultural diversity of customs and attitudes toward the elderly retained and practiced by Hispanics. Torres-Gil reiterates a recurrent theme of poverty among the Hispanic population, projecting that as Hispanics age they will be at even greater risk for an impecunious old age.[119] In a rather eerie portent of the 1988 cover on the New Republic Magazine, which excoriated greedy seniors for their demands of additional entitlement programs, Torres-Gil, remarks on the "tensions" between the situated elderly who receive federal subsidies, such as Medicare and Social Security, and younger, Hispanic minorities whose priorities center on employment and education.[120] In a prescient grasp of the future, Torres-Gil identifies areas of potential conflict when he writes, "as the intersection of aging and cultural pluralism draws near, then, we are faced with tensions related to age, race, and ethnicity."[121]

April Few, Dionne Stephens, and Marlo Rouse-Arnett write an article that centers on interviewing African-American women. In this research endeavor, Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett contacted and interviewed Black women scholars to understand how these women were able to, "Negotiate and transcended boundaries that emerge and dissipate between Black women in the researcher-informant relationship."[122] Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett address the disconcerting realization that despite being from socially diverse situations, they find themselves

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[118] Fernando Torres-Gil, "The Latinization of a Multigenerational Population: Hispanics in an aging Society," *Daedalus* 115 no. 1 [1986]: 326, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20025036 (accessed December 9, 2012).
[119] Torres-Gil, "The Latinization," 333.
[120] Ibid., 334.
[121] Ibid., 336.
[122] April L Few, Dionne P Stephens and Marlo Rouse-Arnett, "Sister to Sister Talk: Boundaries and Challenges in Qualitative Research with Black Women," *National Council on Family Relations* 52 no. 3 [July 2003]:205.

as research scholars, "Bound by the commonalities of being both black and female in academia and in American society."[123] Operating from within a framework of black feminist consciousness, Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett consider the critical collective experiences of black women in the "creation of knowledge" to shed light on a, "shared historical reality" of "marginalization . . . characterized by their gender and race."[124] Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett, in making their argument for the inclusion of black women in the research process, agree that "Black women are no longer simply talked to, but talk for themselves.[125]" The authors point out that "Black feminists emphasize the absolute necessity of black women to be empowered to speak from and about their own experiential location."[126] In one particularly revealing comment, Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett state that "despite the fact that we were all Black women studying Black women, we never assumed that we would be granted . . . insider status."[127]

Lynn Weber Cannon, Elizabeth Higginbotham, and Marianne Leung come together to discuss bias in race and class in research on women. Cannon, Higginbotham, and Leung frame their argument in terms of the "relatively small homogenous samples" that comprise most qualitative studies.[128] Arguing that "small samples" can "block discovery of the diversity of human experience," Cannon, Higginbotham, and Leung write "too often . . . [they] excludes women of color and working class women."[129] Cannon, Higginbotham, and Leung make explicit that for recruitment purposes they assigned "Black members of the research team to speak to

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[123] Few, Stephens and Rouse-Arnett, "Sister to Sister Talk," 205.
[124] Ibid., 206.
[125] Ibid., 207.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., 208.
[128] Lynn Weber Cannon, Elizabeth Higginbotham and Marianne L.A. Leung, "Race and Class Bias in qualitative Research on Women," *Gender and Society* 2 no. 4 [December 1988]: 450, http://www.jstor.org/stable/190209 [accessed November 25, 2012].
[129] Ibid.

exclusively Black groups" and "white members to speak to exclusively White groups."[130] They

emphasize that they did this to reassure and quell the privacy concerns of African American

participants who, because of their more visible position in the community, felt vulnerable. In

discussing the need for diversity in qualitative studies to avoid drawing "false inferences" based

on missing data; Cannon, Higginbotham, and Leung reference the women in their study, and

state "had we not attended to the class background . . . as well as their race we would have

concluded that . . .Black women receive less family support than White women."[131] In writing

their concluding remarks, Cannon, Higginbotham, and Leung echo Watts in making reference to

"particular social realities" as these apply to select groups of non-minorities.[132] Cannon,

Higginbotham, and Leung argue that the "social realities of other groups, such as minorities and

working classes, become relegated to side issues in the field".[133]

Patricia Kasschau examines how being a member of a group identified as minority can

affect an individual's life chances and experiences.[134] Kasschau compares passing for younger

and passing for white by minority individuals who are reluctant, according to Kasschau, to

identify as minority in order to, "Avoid the stigma and discrimination [of their] minority

status."[135] In her concluding remarks Kasschau admits that "age discrimination [has] greater

visibility than . . . anticipated."[136]

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[130] Cannon, Higginbotham, and Leung, "Race and Class Bias," 457.
[131] Ibid., 458.
[132] Ibid., 460.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Patricia Kasschau, "Age and Race Discrimination Reported by Middle-Aged and Older Persons," *Social Forces* 55 No.3 [March 1977]: 728, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2577466 (accessed December 9, 2012).
[135] Ibid., 731. The comparisons Kasschau draws are apt and fitting, however, the assertion made by Kasschau that "passing may be more easily accomplished by aging than minority Americans" is debatable. It should be noted, that Kasschau draws her conclusions on the greater visibility of race discrimination over age discrimination from information available in 1977.
[136] Ibid., 740.

Inclusion of this early study by Kasschau establishes a historical precedent and a pattern of correlation between age and race discrimination that is reiterated in other studies on minority aging. Frances Yang and Sue Levkoff bring the issue on age and minorities up to date in their report in 2005 by informing readers that as minority populations grow and age "research on ageism [becomes] increasingly important as an issue."[137] For Yang and Levkoff the issues of age and race constitute a "double jeopardy" of disadvantage for minority women and groups.[138] The study by Yang and Levkoff focuses on the differences in rates of disease and morbidity for different populations of minorities as compared to their white cohorts in the same age groups, due in part, to inadequate access to health care over the life course.[139]

Yang and Levkoff make the issue clear when they write, "the various disparities in health status, needs, and access to healthcare in the U.S. that characterize the diverse health-related experiences of older minorities in the U.S. are the result of historical, demographic, and sociocultural features."[140] Yang and Levkoff note that by using life expectancy as an indicator of health for older African American, and American Indian populations, in comparison to their white cohorts, "they appear to have [a] worse health status." [141] In their reference to the ageist and racial stereotyping that accompanies minority otherness, Yang and Levkoff write, "stereotyping older minorities represents a self-perpetuating cycle of fear that older and younger individuals have toward aging, disability, dependence, death, competition for resources, and perceived inferiority of particular individuals."[142]

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[137] Frances Yang and Sue Levkoff, "Ageism and Minority Populations: Strengths in the Face of Challenge," *Generations* 29 no. 3 (Fall 2005): 42, http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=a4511f8b-c6fc-4898-9059-047a0d6bf1ee%40sessionmgr12&vid=1&hid=28 (accessed December 9, 2012).
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid., 44
[142] Ibid.

In addition, the authors state "research on ageism in minority populations is sparse," making it a priority for future research.[143] Yang and Levkoff quote from a study conducted by Becca Levy and Ellen Langer to point out that ageism, as with racism, has the potential to isolate individuals from the social community with an internalization of negative cognition.[144] Yang and Levkoff acknowledge this when they write, "When faced with ageism and racism, some older minorities may tend to retreat from those communities that stigmatize them, and instead become connected with people who share their language, culture, and values."[145] In a final note, Yang and Levkoff make explicit the heterogeneity of minority populations advising a "new direction for research" that would encompass the health status and outcomes of minorities with their links to racism and ageism.[146]

Jacqueline Worobey and Ronald Angel write on the association of health status and living arrangements among older minority women.[147] Citing the interrelation of multiple factors of race, ethnicity, poverty, and health on the well-being of older minority women, the authors look at the rise in female-headed households among African American and Latina women. Worobey and Angel point out that "poverty is one of the major problems faced by female-headed households" and, "for many women the length of time spent single and in poverty has increased in recent years.[148] Worobey and Angel reference African American women who, through death, divorce, cohabitation, and "extra marital fertility," have greater likelihood of being poor and

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[143] Yang and Levkoff, "Ageism and Minority Populations," 44.

[144] Becca Levy and Ellen Langer, "Aging Free From Negative Stereotypes: Successful Memory in China and Among the American Deaf," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 66 no.6 [1994]: 990 http://ehis.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=b4667d6f-e416-428e-944e-72e9813fcfe6%40sessionmgr4&vid=1&hid=17 (accessed December 9, 2012).

[145] Yang and Levkoff, "Ageism and Minority Populations," 46.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Jacqueline Worobey and Ronald Angel, "Poverty and Health: Women and the Rise of the Female-headed Household," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 31 no. 4 [December 1990]: 370, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2136820 (accessed December 9, 2012).

[148] Ibid., 371.

single in comparison to white women.[149] With this admission, Worobey and Angel make the case for risk factors associated with health outcomes and the well-being of single minority women. One way, write Worobey and Angel, that single minority women adapt to circumstances is to "form mutigenerational female-headed households."[150] Worobey and Angel note that for elderly minority women who suffer from diminished health, living in such mutigenerational households may be the "only acceptable alternative" to institutionalization.[151] What is brought out in this study, as in the studies mentioned previously, is that there exists a complex interrelationship among race, ethnicity, and age that is not easily disentangled. Worobey and Angel refer to as "a complex response to poverty."[152] In their concluding remarks, Worobey and Angel find that, "for all practical purposes, blacks and Hispanics do not enter nursing homes," but chose instead to remain with family.[153] They comment that the complex processes of generational poverty are wrought over the life course for minority women, beginning with their social location, education, and economic opportunities.[154] Worobey and Angel make explicit that "older minority group females have fewer options in events of poor health" when compared to older white women.[155]

One direction that emerges from the literature is a consensus of opinion by scholars in the field of minority studies that minority populations who are exposed to greater socioeconomic disadvantage have a subsequent risk to their health status. In addition, it has been found that greater numbers of older African American women serve as head of household when compared to non-Hispanic white women. John Skinner composed an interesting article on elderly African Americans that incorporates insights into aging that have been observed by other scholars.

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[149] Worobey and Angel, "Poverty and Health," 371.
[150] Ibid., 372.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid., 379.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.

Skinner writes that as minority people age, the unique quality of their experiences "do not disappear with old age; instead, they may become further exaggerated."[156] Skinner also addresses the difficult decision to relocate for elders due to health and economic concerns and states, "the years of disadvantage and increasing frailness may create obstacles to the choice of a living arrangement."[157] In regard to relocation, Skinner echoes the concern of Barbara Macdonald when he writes, "relocation, especially when forced, may disturb the delicate balance that took years of community living and sharing to establish, resulting in the potential loss of goodwill and social contacts that have been cultivated over many years."[158]

Katherine Conway-Turner returns to the issue of discrimination for African Americans when she observes that "negative stereotypes and attitudes toward African Americans in general are widely held . . . . This combination places Black elders in double jeopardy . . . because they are both Black and old."[159] Conway-Turner cites studies that have found that "Black elders were substantially disadvantaged in old age, particularly in income and health status."[160] Conway-Turner argues that "this reflects . . . the effects of both racism and ageism on a segment of the population."[161] In her conclusions, Conway-Turner finds that the results of her study with a group of non-Black college students, show attitudes that were "overwhelmingly negative, reflecting both ageist attitudes and racial bias."[162] Even more interesting, though, is that according to Conway-Turner, "the source of these stereotypes was the television," a media source of informal dissemination that invokes systems of belief and influence over perceptions of

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[156] John Skinner, "The Experience of African American and other Minority Elders," *Generations* 16 no.2 [1992]:4, http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/delivery?sid=da0969bb-3e35-4b80-a (accessed December 9, 2012).

[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Katherine Conway-Turner, "Inclusion of Black Studies in Gerontology Courses: Uncovering and Transcending Stereotypes," *Journal of Black Studies* 25 no.5 [May 1995]: 578, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784632 (accessed December 9, 2012).

[160] Ibid., 579.

[161] Ibid.

[162] Ibid., 585.

age and race for wide audiences of viewers.[163] Conway-Turner makes the observation that "this vehicle in today's society is powerful and nearly universal," an observation that has been confirmed by other scholars, among them Kim Kjaersgaard, Jean Kilbourne, and Laura Hurd Clark.[164] Beverly Mason contributes to the discussion on minority aging by proffering statistics on the African American population in the United States, when she quotes the study by Harry Moody: "'African Americans are the largest minority group among aging Americans; they make up 9% of the population older than 65.'"[165] Mason sheds new light on the complexity of living in urban inner-cities as she writes "aging in place, the process whereby seniors remain in the areas where they worked and made their lives, helps explain why the majority of black elderly live in urban communities . . . the majority of all elderly people do not move, they stay put."[166]

Summation

The examples of feminist scholarship on white and minority aging reviewed here illustrate an overwhelming concern for the effects of ageism on the old of both genders within the wider context of Western society. Feminists identify women as being more susceptible and vulnerable to the effects of aging precisely because of their status, relative to men, as persons of lesser value and social worth. While feminists acknowledge that old men, too, become disadvantaged in terms of social power and recognition, they concede that as men age they tend to retain the respect of other men and women and are seen as valued in comparison to old women.

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[163] Conway-Turner, "Inclusion of Black Studies," 585.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Beverly Mason, "And I Am Part of the Greatness: Twelve Black Elderly Women and Men Decry their Urban Community's Reality," *Journal of Black Studies* 36 [2005]: 99, http://jbs.sagepub.com/content/36/1/97 (accessed December 9, 2012). For further information on Harry R. Moody, see Moody, Harry R. Aging: Concepts and controversies. *Sage Publications*, Inc., 2006.

[166] Ibid., 99.

Perceptions of social value and visibility by the old of both genders continues to be troublesome for the aged and problematic for social gerontologists and sociologists who see ageism as indicative of wider social problems regarding aging in Western culture. The burden of age on white, heterosexual men is demoralizing and for women, defeminizing, but the same burden on women of color and poor, disempowered, non-white men creates a new class of the disenfranchised who experience double discrimination. Likewise, the isolation and social distance created by age and experienced by lesbian women places them at risk within a triple category of disdain and discrimination within the hierarchal confines of a society largely controlled by men. Gay men who find their experiences to be "specific and significant" find that they, too, are outside of the conventional main-stream community, ostracized for being different and nonconformist. To a certain extent old age and the old are perceived differently in Appalachia based on regional scholarship that describes and defines the old in terms of attachment to the land and to generations of close family ties that continue to influence Appalachian attitudes toward the old. Appalachian scholarship points, as well, to attitudes of strong religiosity that recognize the old as valued.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

The method I chose to conduct the study centers on personal, in-depth interviews with women between the ages of 45-75 who were born and /or raised in the Southern Appalachian region previously defined in Chapter 2. The interviews took place on two separate occasions and involved two distinct groups of women, as will be discussed below. In group one (N=12), the social demographics of the women I interviewed placed them in lower to middle-class socioeconomic status and in a lower educational status in comparison to group two (N=8). The American Psychological Association defines socioeconomic status as: "educational attainment, income (personal or household), and/or occupation as indicators of SES."[1] Accordingly, the definition I have applied to the first group of women from Carter County takes into account their income, occupational employment, and educational attainment.

These indicators, when used as a measure of comparison with the women interviewed from Washington County, show a higher level of socioeconomic standing across all three indicators. For instance, women in the first group from Carter County, if employed, worked in service sector jobs as secretaries or as providers of day care for young children. Educationally, most held at least a high school degree, but none had earned a college degree. Personal and/or household income was modest and substantially less than that of the women in Washington County. The women I interviewed in the first group all professed some degree of religious involvement and eight were closely affiliated and actively involved with a neighborhood church of Southern Baptist denomination. All members of the group from Carter County were white, eight had high school diplomas, and four had general educational degrees (GED).

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[1] American Psychological Association, "Report of the Task Force on Social Economic Status," *American Psychological Association* (2007), 14.

The interviews took place in the homes of the respondents and lasted 45 minutes for each participant. The conversation consisted of the interviewer asking open-ended questions taken from a prepared list of questions that dealt with age, aging, and perceptions of age discrimination in Appalachia.[2] Each respondent was asked the same questions to insure a uniformity of themes for analysis. Women from the first group became part of the study as the result of word-of-mouth recommendations; this was especially true of the women who were affiliated within the church and knew one another. The interviewer recruited others from within a personal network of friends and acquaintances. All of the women interviewed in the first group were born and/ or raised in the surrounding areas of Roan Mountain and Elizabethton, Tennessee, and at the time of the interviews currently lived in Carter County, Tennessee.

The second group of women interviewed (N=8), belonged to upper, middle-class social economic statuses and were drawn from a convenience sample of university women, retired faculty, and private individuals living in the area of Johnson City, Tennessee. The women, with the exception of one who is African American, are white and held graduate and postgraduate degrees. The interviewer recruited women from Johnson City into the study by personal invitation and through mediated referrals by women faculty and associates of the university. Intercession by members of the university faculty lent legitimacy and an implied endorsement of the endeavor that resulted in easy access to other potential participants in the study. Interviews for members of the faculty took place in their offices on campus and interviews for unaffiliated individuals took place in private, multipurpose rooms to ensure confidentiality. Women in the first sample were not asked the same questions as those asked of women in the second sample; however, the same themes predominated to center on aging, gender, and traditional life in Appalachia.

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[2] Questions used in the study are presented in an appendix.

One reason why the questions were different in the first interviews was that the questions were composed differently and were intended as part of a pilot study. As well, they took place two years prior to the formal start of the current study. For both groups of women, the interviews were recorded for transcription and later analysis. Half of the participants in the second sample of university women (N=8), upon direct question, professed to some form of religious affiliation or practices, two indicated that they were spiritual, but not religious. Brian Zinnbauer et al. finds that "researchers define these terms differently [and that] is mirrored in the ways that religious and spiritual believers themselves define the terms."[3] According to Zinnbauer "spirituality is now commonly regarded as an individual phenomenon and identified with such things as personal transcendence, supraconscious sensitivity, and meaningfulness. Religiousness, in contrast, is now often described narrowly as formally structured and identified with religious institutions and prescribed theology and rituals."[4]

The questions asked of both groups of women in regard to an assessment of religious involvement pertain to whether or not religious affiliation provided support for women as they age by increasing their networks of group support, validation of their social worth, and the positive social identification that can be found within many religious organizations. This question played a central and distinct role in the perceptions and behavior of the first group of women interviewed. Divisions of social class and education between women appear to form a difference in adherence to religious beliefs and attendance at religious rituals. Further discussion of these phenomena will be discussed later in the chapter on analysis.

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[3] Brian J Zinnbauer et al., "Religion and Spirituality: unfuzzying the fuzzy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 no. 4 (December 1997), http://www.jstor.org/stable/1387689?origin=JSTOR-pdf (accessed April 25 2013), 550.

[4] Ibid., 551.

<u>Conceptual Framework of Feminist Ideology</u>

For the study on "Women, Feminism and Appalachia," I employed a qualitative methodological approach to obtain data within a conceptual framework of Western, liberal feminism to view and analyze results. For a definition of liberal feminism, I have chosen to use one set forth by Judith Lorber in her book *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics.* Lorber categorizes feminisms into three main political reforms of theory with definitions accorded to each in conjunction with its political objectives. For the first category, Lorber describes liberal, Marxist, socialist, and postcolonial feminist politics as, "Gender-Reform Feminisms" that seek to "purge the gendered social order of practices that discriminate against women."[5] For Lorber, the politics of a theory imbue it with its character or *raison d' etre*, (the reason for existence) that prescribes the way it is employed; thus, for liberal feminism, it is to "[make] visible the pervasiveness of discriminatory practices . . . in the work world" and the inequitable "distribution of economic resources and family responsibilities" that attends to the lives of women.[6] According to Lorber, "Gender reform feminists locate the source of gender inequality in women's and men's status in the social order," placing emphasis on the socially constructed conception of gender that relegates women to a lower social status due to her designation as a mother and care-giver.[7] The invisible and unpaid labor of women creates what Lorber describes as a "gender imbalance" from "structural inequalities."[8] The emphasis in Lorber's definition rests on gender equity as the basis of relationship between women and men and it is for this reason that I have chosen to use liberal feminism as an ideological concept with which to interpret the data.

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[5] Judith Lorber, *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics* (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 2005), 12.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 13.

[8] Lorber, "Gender Inequality," 13.

In making the decision to use liberal feminism, I have encountered from some of the women, notably those from group one, the same resistance to the term "feminism," Jacqueline Watts experienced in her study of women civil engineers in Britain when she attempted to employ the term in discourse with her participants.[9] Watts chose to maneuver around the issue by using language in her disclosure statement that avoided direct reference to feminism as a consideration for the women and for the managerial supervisors who sponsored her. Watts illustrates her need for discretion when she writes; "As I constructed the research statement that would be circulated to all potential participants inviting their involvement in the study, I was very careful to use language to outline topics in straightforward material terms avoiding any reference to feminist aims or debates."[10] The statement Watts drafted was, as she remarks, "not duplicitous but sufficiently bland in its tone to be informative yet not prescriptive to put off sponsors and participants alike."[11]In my own study, despite the disavowal of the term "feminism" by some of the women, I was clear in communication with the participants that the present study was based on a feminist political agenda of discovery and redress of the "structural inequities" referred to by Lorber and others.[12]

I presented the current study as an investigation into the possible existence of selective age discrimination against women in the Appalachian region and asked for their help in identifying incidents from their own experience. My use of the term "feminist" did not deter the respondents, regardless of their worldview, from acknowledging disparities in the way that women are viewed and treated, in contrast to men as they age in Appalachia.

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[9] Jacqueline Watts, "The Outsider within: Dilemmas of Qualitative Feminist Research within a Culture of Resistance," *Qualitative Research* 6 no.3 (2006): 385, http://qrj.sagepub.com/content/6/3/385 (accessed September 12, 2012).

[10] Ibid., 390.

[11] Ibid., 391.

[12] Lorber, "Gender Inequality," 13.

Another feminist scholar, Elizabeth Bucar, undertook an exhaustive study of the ways in which women manipulate the political language of the existing hierarchies within which they function to derive a reconceived understanding of status and place in society. I have drawn on Bucar's logical rational for employing Western liberal feminism as a lens through which to interpret data from her interviews with women in the United States and Iran and as a means to locate my own study within liberal feminism.[13] Bucar writes, "I understand feminism to include any system of thought that challenges stereotypes that misrepresent women's experiences."[14] Bucar further delineates difference among feminist politics, description, and feminist analysis. It is Bucar's articulate definition of feminist description and analysis that serves to inform my own study of women and aging by addressing, as Bucar says, "what is going on in particular women's lives" and "attempting to explain why women are like they are."[15] It is important to note that, as Bucar writes, "analysis searches for the reasons between the actions and beliefs of women, as well as for external factors that create and influence these actions."[16]

As mentioned earlier, there are different types of feminisms which, in accordance with one's political ideology, seek to reform or change the socio-political environment. Judith Lorber defines these as "Gender Reform, Gender Resistance, and Gender Rebellion."[17] For Lorber these umbrella terms contain within them the subcategories of feminisms that comprise the range of political activism by women. Under the term "resistance," Lorber groups radical, lesbian, and psychoanalytic feminisms; likewise, Lorber groups together multicultural feminist studies of

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[13] Elizabeth Bucar, *Creative Conformity: The Feminist Politics of U.S. Catholic and Iranian Shi'i Women*. (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University press, 2011), xvi-xvii.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Lorber, "Gender Inequality," 12.

men, social construction, and postmodern feminisms under the term "rebellion."[18] What these diverse forms of feminisms have in common is the desire to change the social status of women by challenging the current political order. The difference lies in the ways and means used to achieve this end and the political ideology that is brought to bear to envision change. In comparison, Western liberal feminism employed as a form of ideology, seeks to restore relational respect for women based on increased opportunity and access to work, production, and education. Lorber comments on gender inequality with the remark, "inequality is built into the organization of marriage and families, work and the economy, politics . . . and the very language we speak."[19]Feminist scholars in the field of ethnographic and qualitative studies support the use of liberal feminism as an ideology with which to analyze interviews and the theory fits well with the objectives of my study on women and aging in Appalachia.

Feminist scholar and writer Carol Hanisch's work in the women's movement in the 1970s exemplifies the political ideology behind the slogan, "the personal is political."[20] Hanish clarifies that "political" is used in the "broad sense of the word as having to do with power relationships."[21] The principles of liberal feminism enhance the concept of the political as that applies to "relationship" and to the question of "who benefits" as we look at the structural inequities that subsume women of all ages in a politicized culture based on power. My concept of ageism is rooted in the politicization of age and in the liberal principle of relational parity. As noted previously in the introduction, aging in Western culture creates inequitable disparities that parallel and inform social biases between young and old, men and women, multicultural communities, lesbian, and gay orientations.

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[18] Lorber, "Gender Inequality," 12.

[19] Ibid., 8

[20] Carol Hanisch, "The Personal Is Political," *Paper to the Women's Caucus of the Southern Conference Educational Fund.* http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PersonalisPol.pdf (accessed April 27, 2013), 1.

[21] Ibid.

Nancy Hirschmann views the political aims of liberal feminists as valuing "the primacy of individual women and their ability to compete with men, which require[s] the elimination of the kinds of social barriers placed in the way of women's achievement."[22] Hirschmann, who writes for a variety of philosophical references, explicates liberal feminism from the description of other feminists as, "Its best hope; its emphasis on individuals is a key to gaining recognition and respect for women as independent people rather than attachments to men."[23] Hirschmann notes in reference to liberal feminism that, "its notion of freedom and equality can allow women to make choices that will result in control over their lives."[24]

A slightly different variation of liberal feminism can be found in the Stanford Encyclopedia: "Cultural libertarian feminists . . . hold that the culture of societies like the United States is patriarchal and a significant source of oppression of women."[25] This definition seeks a "nonviolent movement for feminist social change." [26] Regardless of which version of liberal feminism is accepted, the fundamental character of this feminism relies on the understanding that women are individuals who value an equitable distribution of the political power that governs their lives. Kennedy and Bauer declare that "Liberal feminist politics dominate women's writing . . . this politics, evolving from the work of Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, holds that rationality is the defining human characteristic and that women are as fully capable of rational thought as men."[27]

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[22] Nancy J Hirschmann, "Feminist Political Philosophy," In *The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Linda Martin Alcoff and Eva Feder Kittay (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), 146.

[23] Nancy J Hirschmann, "Feminism: Liberal North American," in *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women's Issues and Knowledge*, vol. 2, ed. Cheris Kramarae and Dale Spender (New York: Routledge, 2000), 789.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Amy R Baehr, "Liberal Feminism", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2012 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/feminism-liberal (accessed April 10, 2013), 1.31,3.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Kennedy and Bauer, "Politics and Writing," 693.

Consequently, write Kennedy and Bauer, "Liberal feminism argues for women's right to participate as fully in society as men."[28] Myra Jehlen's claim that the way women write is "defiant," refers to that political tradition of resistance employed by women dating back to 1792, and foregrounds the development of liberal feminism.[29] Further, as Connie Miller and Corinna Treitel remark, "Feminists have added to our understanding of methodology in terms of approach, purpose, objectivity, the omission of women, and gender."[30] The last consideration in the choice to use a feminist perspective argues the question of how the use of a feminist methodology would make a difference to the research. Since the subject of this study was women, the choice of a feminist perspective seemed a natural fit because it elucidates the challenges that women face as they grow older in a culture that venerates youth. As well, the use of a feminist methodology transforms the transcripts from chatter to a comprehensible schema out of which emerge the patterns of age discrimination as they are experienced by women. It makes a difference because by applying the principles of feminist interpretation, I can bring out what would otherwise remain hidden, namely that women, more so than men, fear growing older and go to great lengths to avoid the appearance of age.

Finally, the use of a feminist sieve through which to filter information creates a clear understanding of the ways in which women are subjected to subtle forms of discrimination in the workplace and socially. More cogent still, to the idea of difference are what Lorraine Code posits of feminist epistemology when she writes of feminists; "They have shown that rhetoric of disinterested neutrality integral to hegemonic theories of knowledge has consistently masked

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[28] Kennedy and Bauer, "Politics and Writing," 693.
[29] Myra Jehlen, "Archimedes," 582.
[30] Connie Miller and Corinna Treitel, *Feminist Research Methods: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 33.

operations of power, privilege, and vested interest."[31] As Code rightly claims, "they have

subjected the structural underpinnings of orthodox epistemology to critical scrutiny, thereby

exposing a sedimented politics of exclusion and oppression which . . . they seek to counter."[32]

Thus, the use of an epistemology that helps to emphasize the experiences of women has innate

value. My goal in this study is to elucidate as clearly as possible the social effects of aging on

women in the Southern Appalachian region and to determine whether the discursive polemical

commentary used by feminist scholars to rail against the injustices of aging for women, holds

true in Southern Appalachia. In seeking to accomplish that goal, I incorporate the tenets of

liberal feminism as a guide when framing the questions I wanted to ask of the respondents.

Women who encounter age discrimination do so under social conditions different from

those experienced by men. In part, this is due to the political organization of society that grants

men greater retention of privilege and authority. It is also the consequence of the selective

imposition on women in Western culture to conform to sanctioned standards of youth and

attractiveness as a condition of social acceptance. Men, according to Jeff Hearn, operationalize

gender differently, to engage assumptions of hegemony, dominance, and power. Hearn writes;

"power is a very significant, pervasive aspect of men's social relations, actions and

experiences."[33] Hearn's assessment of the way that men monopolize power critiques the social

structures in which that occurs and looks at the relationship among men who accumulate

power.[34] In response, liberal feminism espouses political parity as a condition of an equitable

society not just for women but for communities of individuals who are estranged from political

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[31] Lorraine Code, "Feminist Epistemologies and Women's Lives," in *The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Linda Martin Alcoff and Eva Feder Kittay (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), 211.
[32] Ibid., 212.
[33] Jeff Hearn, "From Hegemonic Masculinities to the Hegemony of Men," *Feminist Theory* 5 no. 1 (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004), 51. http://fty.sagepub.com/content/5/1/49 (accessed April 25 2013).
[34] Ibid.

consideration and who do not share in those "relationships of power."[35] The liberal feminist

perspective defines for women the political context within which the exchange, negotiation, and

barter of power takes place to argue for equal opportunity, equal access, and equal recognition.

<u>Interdisciplinarity</u>

The decision to use an interdisciplinary approach resulted from several considerations,

one, my study incorporated three distinct fields of inquiry, women's studies, gerontology, and

Appalachian studies; two, I acted on established precedent set by leading feminist scholars. My

objective was to correlate these diverse fields of research to investigate how women's

experiences are impacted by aging. Women's studies supports and grounds the choice to use an

interdisciplinary approach to structure the inquiry into women and aging, while Appalachian

studies are uniquely suited to an interdisciplinary approach. Judith Allen and Sally Kitch remark

on interdisciplinarity when they write, "From the early 1970s, scholarly work exploring women's

diverse situations and experiences has consistently confronted the limits of prevailing

disciplinary criteria. Questions posed by feminist analysis have not been fully answered by any

single discipline."[36] Kitch puts it more succinctly when she states, "feminist researchers have a

particular stake in transdisciplinarity . . . it is only through the validation of gender as a

methodological and epistemological foundation for knowledge that feminist research in any field

acquires its validity. Integrative interdisciplinarity promotes that foundation."[37] Crossing

disciplinary boundaries is essential to the formation of new epistemologies and as Kitch

maintains "in the construction of knowledge about women and gender."[38]

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[35] Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," 1.

[36] Judith Allen and Sally Kitch, "Disciplined by Disciplines? The Need for an Interdisciplinary Research Mission in Women's Studies," *Feminist Studies* 24 no. 2 (Summer 1998): 277.

[37] Sally Kitch, "Feminist Interdisciplinary Approaches to Knowledge Building," in *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007), 129.

[38] Ibid., 123.

Reflecting on the use of interdisciplinarity, Julie Thompson Klein observes that "feminist practices constitute a form of restructuring."[39] Klein writes that interdisciplnarity is "a critique of the state of the disciplines being restructured and . . . the prevailing structure of knowledge."[40] Klein's reference to "restructuring" illustrates the epistemological inclination to cross disciplinary boundaries to promote the formation of new fields of inquiry. It is a new way to observe and to understand what is learned. As Klein states, "when intellectuality is premised on rediscovery and rethinking, resocialization and reintellectualization, interdisciplinarity becomes not just a way of doing things but a new way of knowing."[41] Klein describes disciplinary boundaries as "divisive barriers;" however, Klein tempers this by insisting that they are "also permeable membranes."

In reference to disciplinary classification, Klein writes that "naming is an important index" and "naming a field or a practice lays claim to the nature of an object as it expresses methodological and theoretical commitments." For Klein, "the act of naming entails a concurrent process of gathering, sorting, comparing, and contrasting within an evolving view of reality." Klein evokes precisely the ontological nature of interdisciplinarity that encapsulates the evolutionary direction of epistemology in the field of women's studies and in the academy. According to Allen Repko a leading proponent of the interdisciplinary approach, there are three distinct types of interdisciplinary practice that approach the integration of knowledge in unique application; these are identified as interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary.[42]

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[39] Julie Thompson Klein, *Crossing Boundaries: Knowledge, Disciplinarities, and Interdisciplinarities* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 11.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 15.

[42] Allen f. Repko, Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory (Los Angeles: Sage Publications Inc., 2008), 11. Repko defines interdisciplinary research (IDR) as a "mode of research . . . that integrates information . . . perspectives concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge." Multidisciplinarity, according to Repko, "refers to the placing side by side of insights from two or more disciplines, but makes no attempt to integrate the insights produced by these perspectives into an interdisciplinary

Similarly, Joe Moran defines interdisciplinarity "to mean any form of dialogue or interaction between two or more disciplines."[43]

Qualitative Data Analysis

Barney Glaser introduced Grounded Theory in 1965 as a method to integrate data with analysis to produce a review that is consistent with the data.[44] Theory accompanies research and for my research I have chosen to locate it in the principle of Grounded Theory as adjured by Carl Auerbach and Louise Silverstein to "listen to what the research participants say."[45] Auerbach and Silverstein describe coding as a derivative of grounded theory and they offer a definition of theory as "a description of a pattern that you find in the data."[46] Auerbach and Silverstein declare that "the coding method is a procedure for organizing the text of transcripts, and discovering patterns within that organizational structure."[47] Basically what that involves is a reduction of text down to what is considered "relevant text."[48] Using the steps outlined in grounded theory, the researcher moves vertically through a series of logical levels with each new level predicated on the accomplishment of the former step. What is of note here is that the selection of relevant text rests solely with the researcher and those identified goals of the study as each is situated within a chosen ideological framework that informs the approach taken.

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understanding of the topic." Repko defers to Lisa Lattuca for an explanation of transdisciplinarity as "the application of theories, concepts, or methods across disciplines with the intent of developing an overarching synthesis." For further discussion of Lisa Lattuca see: *Creating Interdisciplnarity: Interdisciplinary Research and Teaching Among College and University Faculty* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001), 83.

[43] Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity: the Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 14. Moran explains that multidisciplinarity is confused with interdisciplarity and he clarifies the difference of the later term as a proximal juxtaposition of two or more disciplines with no real integration, whereas with interdisciplnarity disciplines merge.

[44] Barney Glaser, "The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis," *Social Problems*, 12, No. 4 (Spring, 1965), http://www.jstor.org/stable/798843 (accessed April 28, 2013), 437.

[45] Carl Auerbach and Louise Silverstein, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 7.

[46] Ibid., 31.

[47] Ibid., 37.

[48] Ibid.

Auerbach and Silverstein express it this way: "it is important for you to realize that you do have a theoretical framework that influences what you chose to include and exclude from your analysis. In effect, your theoretical framework determines your biases."[49] Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin advance another perspective on grounded theory to offer this definition: "grounded theory is a *general methodology* (emphasis in the original) for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed."[50] According to Strauss and Corbin "theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continual interplay between analysis and data collection."[51] The basic idea conveyed by Strauss and Corbin is that grounded theory "explicitly involves generating theory and social research as two parts of the same process."[52]

Echoing the sentiments of Auerbach and Silverstein, Strauss and Corbin write "that interpretations must include the perspectives and voices of the people whom we study."[53] Grounded theory develops from an ethical position of accountability that is borne by the researcher to not only "report or give voice to the viewpoints of the people" but "to assume the further responsibility of interpreting what is observed, heard, or read." [54] I have chosen to apply feminist political theory to the selection of relevant text in part because the study employs critical observation of women concerning the ways in which they think and act; and partly, because feminist theory analyzes the social, political and cultural devaluation of women in Western society. As well, feminist politics incorporates an examination of the practices of aging in Western culture as these may work toward the inequitable distribution of social resources,

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[49] Auerbach and Silverstein, "Qualitative Data," 46.
[50] Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin," Grounded Theory Methodology: An Overview," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research* ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 273.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 274.
[54] Ibid.

recourses, and social capital. As feminist scholar Elizabeth Bucar states, "I define feminist politics as a form of action that attempts to reshape the conditions of women's individual or collective existence."[55] Bucar suggests the compatibility of feminist political theory with a study on women, feminism, and aging when she writes, "feminist politics begins with some normative claim (e.g., women are equal to men) and a normative agenda of insurgency (e.g., women must be treated as equal to men)."[56] Another, more cogent reason I have chosen to apply proactive political feminism as a theoretical framework to the textual analysis of interview transcripts is, as Lorber explicitly states, "remedies for redressing gender inequality such as creating culture and knowledge from a women's point of view, may not look political, but to feminists, they are deeply political because their intent is to change the way people look at the world."[57] The nature of my study is not merely to observe and report but to rectify, redress, and add to the collective body of knowledge as it concerns women and aging in Appalachia.

The issue of gender inequality as it applies and relates to women can be seen as more than political because these issues are, as Lorber points out, "structural in that it orders the processes and practices of a society's major sectors—work, family, politics, law, education . . . and culture."[58] It is to this end, then, that I appeal in my decision to apply a feminist interpretation to data in the analysis of text, irrespective of the stated theoretical distance to feminist theory that is expressed by some of the participants in this study. I intend to show with textual analysis that much of what is expressed by women who disavow feminist theory, in practice concurs with the goal and objectives of feminism. As feminist interviewer Jacqueline Watts points out, "all qualitative social research must operate on a parallel continuum of

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[55] Bucar, "Feminist Politics," xvii.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Lorber, "Gender Inequality," 11.
[58] Ibid.

abstraction and compromise between assigning meaning and letting the data have their own voice."[59]

Conversational Analysis

I employ a relatively little known and infrequently used method of conversational analysis that integrates well with qualitative data analysis by addressing and applying interpretation to the parts of the text not deemed relevant by conventional coding methods. I refer to the laughter, hesitancies, silences, and an assortment of inarticulate expressions, the um's and uh's, used by women to convey an uncomfortable confrontation with, and preferential distance to, the subject of aging. I will begin with a definition of what feminist scholars consider conversational analysis (CA) to be, why the use of CA can be of value to the endeavor of feminist analysis, and what information can be elicited by the use of CA. Feminist scholars such as Susan Speer offer a description of CA that shows the close relationship it shares with ethnomethodology, as one that "takes as its topic the study of recorded, naturally occurring talk-in-interaction."[60] Speer writes "conversation analysts aim to unravel the procedures through which members produce orderly social interaction."[61] As Speer points out, "conversation analysts are concerned not to impose their own formulations on what gets said and thereby obscure members' ordinary, everyday accounting practices." [62] For Catherine Kohler Riessman CA discerns the "pauses, disfluencies, and other aspects of talk" and the "unspoken."[63]

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[59] Watts, "The Outsider Within," 391.

[60] Susan A Speer, "What Can Conversational Analysis Contribute to Feminist Methodology? Putting Reflexivity into Practice," *Discourse & Society* 13 (2002): 784, http://das.sagepub.com/content/13/6/783 (accessed March 15, 2013).

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., 785.

[63] Catherine Kohler Riessman, "Narrative Analysis," in *The Researchers Companion*, ed. A. Michael Huberman and Matthew B. Miles (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002), 5.

Ceila Kitzinger observes "feminism and careful attention to the details of talk are not incompatible."[64] As well, Kitzinger writes "the small details of talk are important because conversation analysis has established beyond reasonable doubt that people use the tiny details of talk (micro-pauses, mm hms, restarts, inbreaths . . . to conduct and understand the course of their interactions."[65] In the same vein Marjorie DeVault writes of the difficulties women have in trying to fit their experiences into words that do not convey the emotional impetus involved in their experience, leaving them groping for words. DeVault comments, "I believe, this halting, hesitant, tentative talk signals the realm of not-quite-articulated experience, where standard vocabulary is inadequate, and where a respondent tries to speak from experience, and finds language wanting."[66]

The decision to use CA can be viewed as a way to get at the meaning imbued in the hesitancies and the inarticulate restarts of speech that compose the parts of women's responses when language fails to provide a means of communication. It is precisely here in this device of derived meaning that CA has value and can contribute more completely to the translation of the transcripts. CA transforms the complaint, heard often in the conversations, "I don't know how to say this" or "I can't put it any better than that." CA contributes as well to the ethical responsibility to represent fully the reality of the respondent that, as DeVault notes, when the "unspoken gets left behind" then it is, "in some sense a betrayal of the respondent."[67] DeVault comments that CA can be an alternative way of reviewing content for what otherwise is not a

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[64] Ceila Kitzinger, "Doing Feminist Conversation Analysis," *Feminism and Psychology* 10 (2000): 173, http://fap.sagepub.com/content/10/2/163 (accessed February 27, 2013).
[65] Ibid.
[66] Marjorie L DeVault, "Talking and Listening from Women's Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis," *Social Problems* 37 no. 1 (1990): 103, http://www.jstor.org/stable/800797 (accessed December 09, 2012).
[67] Ibid.

"good quote" and "making sense of the drawn out silences that occur when words fail."[68] I have tried to retain in the transcripts the original emphasis of the inarticulate expressions used at times by the interviewees and while the phenomenon becomes more pronounced in the sample of women from Carter County, to an extent it can be seen in the sample of women from Washington County. In analysis of the interviews that follow, I will examine and comment on these lapses. Celia Kitzinger remarks that "feminism has always been deeply concerned with recovering women's own meanings and understandings about the world."[69] Initially, when I transcribed the recorded interviews, I was annoyed by what I thought of as the lack of clarity or articulate response to my questions. However, as I listened to the playback of the interviews, I was struck by what seemed numerous hesitations to questions that I thought of as straight forward, and by the resort of some women to "ums," "uhs," and "huh?"

There was, as well, a good deal of laughter between myself and the participants when their memory dredged up some old recounted outrage to my inquisitive prodding, but I began to notice a pattern in their dodge of answering me directly. The pattern I refer to was one of circuitous detours into irrelevant trivia that would sidetrack the conversation away from an issue they could not describe to me. Women default into a pattern of response that may hold insights into why they are at a loss for words when confronted with questions that require subtle expression. In studies of how language is used, how it is constructed, and who benefits from it, Dale Spender writes, "The outcome of these studies concerned with class and ethnic considerations has been twofold . . . they have also helped to expose some of the means by which dominant groups construct and perpetuate their power."[70] Women, according to Spender, remain "borrowers of the language," a language that Spender asserts as being "primarily the product of

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[68] DeVault, "Talking and Listening," 103.
[69] Kitzinger, "Conversation Analysis," 169.
[70]Dale Spender, *Man Made Language* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 13.

male effort."[71] The principle of symbolism inherently contained in language reflects the culture,

rules, and roles of the dominant and subordinate members of a group. Spender finds the English

language to be "sexist in so far as it relegates women to a secondary and inferior place in

society," as such; language itself constitutes a system of inequality for women.[72] As I have noted

before, women, though not all women, are at a loss for words with which to express the more

subtle shading of feeling that attends to their inner emotions when confronted with questions that

strike at the core of their apprehensions. When I ask them questions like: "How do you feel now

that you're getting older?" To which participant R-18 responded: "I feel old. I don't know, I just

feel old."[73]

The difficulty of trying to express what it is like to grow old, to feel left behind by a

culture racing toward the new and more interesting future evinces in the gaps, and spaces of

speech like the response from J-10 to the question: "When you encounter other people younger

than yourself, do you feel like they are looking through you?" "Umm yeah, sometimes, just not

even paying attention to me."[74] participant K-11 echoes the that sentiment with nearly the same

response: "Do you think that society looks at you differently now that you're older?" K-11: "I

don't think they really pay much attention to older people." IR: "Why do you say that?" K-11:

"Well because uhhh, well I don't know," IR: "Because they overlook you?" K-11: "Yeah!" IR:

"Do you feel like they look through you?"   K-11: "Yeah! We are there, but were not really

there."[75] In response to questions regarding identity, many of the women experienced what

Kitzinger referred to as "restarts" such as this response from F-6 to the question: "Do you

identify with older women?" F-6: "As opposed to younger women? Yes. I don't really identify,

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[71] Spender, "Man Made Language," 12.

[72] Ibid., 15.

[73] Interview, R-18 in her home. April 18, 2011. Cited from transcript.

[74] Interview, J-10 in her home. April 16, 2011. Cited from transcript.

[75] Interview, K-11 in her home. April 14, 2011. Cited from transcript.

I'm not social, I identify with . . . I like old . . . I."[76] It can be deduced from these examples and others like them that an intimate inspection of women's speech shows the anxiety many women experience in trying to use a language, that as Spender writes, "has been literally man made and that is still primarily under male control . . . [the] monopoly over language is one of the means by which males have insured their own primacy, and consequently have insured the invisibility or 'other' nature of females."[77] Kitzinger remarks that we "need to explore how ways of talking actively *produce* (emphasis original) speakers as males or females."[78] Kitzinger thus reinforces the idea that "gender and sexuality are socially constructed and continually produced and reproduced in social interaction."[79] While it may be Kitzinger's intent to show that the way we use language constructs our identity, it can be equally asserted that the use of a language with sexist implications for women shapes not just how women perceive themselves, but others.

Language informs our ideas of the world in which we live by imbuing it with symbolism, the way a culture adopts the use of language impresses it with shades of inference that are imposed by the dominant group. Interestingly, Julia Stanley made just such an observation in her study of linguistics when she found 220 negative terms to describe women who are sexually active, as opposed to 20 for men.[80] Stanley, who has written extensively on the exclusive control of language by men, points out that "The names we give things affect, for all time, our attitude toward them. Naming embodies our judgments as inherent features of the objects to which we attend."[81]

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[76] Interview, F-6.

[77] Spender, "Man Made Language," 12.

[78] Kitzinger, "Conversational Analysis," 170.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Julia Stanley, "Paradigmatic Woman: The Prostitute," Paper presented to South Atlantic Modern Language Association (1973). Documents from the Women's Liberation movement: An Online Archival Collection, Special collections, Duke University.   http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/ (accessed April 19th, 2013). 1.

[81] Stanley, "Paradigmatic Woman: The Prostitute," 1.

Concurring with that observation, participant F-6 makes a similar comparison:

> You will see men depicted in their fifties, sixties, and seventies as partnered in a film with somebody that's twenty-five or thirty years old, not partnered with somebody that's even anywhere near their age. We see it in movies, in magazines, I don't know what you would call a man if he goes after a younger woman I don't think that there is even a name for it, we call a woman a cougar if she goes after a much younger man whether you see that as a positive or a negative it's a label. There's no comparable predatory word [for a man] like there is for women so I definitely see that it is driven by our media.[82]

Language, and the way it is used, to a large extent shapes and determines how it projects our personalities and how we tend to express ourselves. When women try to use a language that has been fashioned by men for their own discussions, the results can leave women without the means to communicate effectively their experiences in terms that other women can relate to. For many women the hesitancies, the stretched out syllables, and the resorts to exasperated declarations of "well you know" and "I don't know how to say this," come from the frustration of having to deal with androcentric forms of expression. By analyzing the conversation for clues as to what may lie behind such inarticulate utterances, the interviewer opens up the possibility that women are simply stymied by the monolithic symbolism inherent in sexist language. When an interviewee responds to the question: "Do you notice a difference in the way people react to you now?" With the following statement, K-11:"Yes! There just not . . . I can't put things like that into words,"[83] it may be due to the intractable nature of an unwieldy language and time to change how we approach analysis. Not all of the women interviewed expressed similar incongruity or lack of skill in self-expression; however, there were enough to warrant further consideration of what may underlie the phenomenon. It should also be noted that despite the age of the studies on communication, linguistics, and gender, the subject still presents as a timely one due in part to its relevance for this research.

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[82] Interview, F-6.
[83] Interview, K-11.

As an analytical tool, conversational analysis can be helpful in uncovering how language is used by nondominant members of society to convey meaning and in what ways such meanings are constructed and resisted by women.[84] If language itself serves to disqualify women as equal coconstructors of their own reality, then perhaps as Kitzinger writes, women become "predefined victims in a hetero-patriarchal system."[85] The last rationale for the use of CA relates to the way it interacts with the tenets of Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin) to justify data by its relevance to the participant. Elizabeth Stokoe and Janet Smithson describe an inherently salient feature of CA that works to make the theory extremely compatible with grounded theory. Stokoe and Smithson approve of the insistence and reliance of CA upon, "What participants . . . orient to in their discussions," stipulating that, "If one wants to make claims about sociological variables (such as gender or class) [or ageism] such variables must be shown to be relevant to the participants."[86] The integral reliance of CA upon locating relevance solely to what is ascribed to by the participant "grounds" the resulting analysis of the data in much the same way as Grounded Theory.

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[84] Kitzinger, "Conversational Analysis," 168.

[85] Ibid., 167.

[86] Elizabeth H Stokoe and Janet Smithson, "Making Gender Relevant: Conversation Analysis and Gender Categories in Interaction," *Discourse and Society* 12 no.2 (2001): 245 http://das.sagepub.com/content/12/2/217 (accessed March 2, 2013).

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

In this chapter, using fifteen distinct frames of reference as measures of perception on aging, I present a dual analysis of the data that result from the interviews I conducted with women in Carter and Washington counties of Tennessee. In the first analysis, I use a narrative analysis that excerpts relevant speech from the coded transcripts of the participants to emphasize their reaction to questions regarding personal and social aspects of aging. Narrative analysis justifies and grounds analysis of the data in the text and makes clear the verbatim exchanges of conversation between the interviewer and interviewee. In the second analysis, I apply a liberal feminist interpretation that takes into account the tone, nuances, and admissions of the women interviewed. While bias is inherent in the selection and application of a particular theory to examination of data, I hope to offset that with the use of relevant narrative. The frames of reference can be thought of as a focus on the issues of aging that confront women as they age in a youth oriented culture. The frames represent areas of interest in the overall topography of social aging as that occurs in Southern Appalachia and are designed to discern differences in attitude toward women and aging within Appalachia, and feminist scholarship on the issue.

Participants in the study respond to a list of open-ended questions regarding their own aging and their subjective perception of aging in Southern Appalachia. The interview questions are structured along two complimentary theoretical constructs that divide the issue of aging into the personal and social components. The questions are representative of themes as they are presented below and each question asked matches one of the themes into which data were grouped for analysis.

Two overarching abstract theoretical constructs contain the fifteen themes into which relevant data have been grouped as repeating ideas. Construct one relates to "Coping with Age in a Youth-Oriented Culture" and reflects the themes that reference age:

- Do you think of yourself as old?

- Do you identify with older women?

- Have you ever felt invisible?

- What is it that makes a woman old?

- Beauty work

- Cosmetics/Passing as younger

- Exercise

The second theoretical construct, "Social Institutions, Interaction, and Support," contains themes that reference issues of gender and age within the larger social sphere:

- Organizational involvement

- Workforce discrimination age/gender

- Roles of older adults on TV and social media

- Respect for the elderly

- Maintaining productivity to remain valued

- Traditional Appalachian values: Family, Church, and Community

- Family/ Church support

- Religious involvement

Narrative Analysis

The variety of responses from women when asked about their feelings in regard to their own age varies with respect to their individual circumstances of social support and well-being. When asked: "Do you think of yourself as old?" most of the respondents declined to identify themselves as being old. Regardless of their age, the most common response was one of denial. While responses from some of the participants were short and sweet: "No!" I-9 was more explicit: "No! When it comes down to it I don't consider myself old. I don't want you to look at me and say she's ollld! In my heart I'm not old."[1] D-4 who was asked the same question, said:

> No, not old! Uh mature, yes! I don't consider myself to be old, I do consider myself to be a senior citizen and I don't think of that as a negative term. I don't ever expect that I'll be an old woman. I might get older in age, but it's an attitude I think. To say that a woman is an old woman is a negative thing to me. She could be a mature woman, she could be a senior citizen, she could be elderly even, but not old. I think 'old woman' has a negative connotation.[2]

From these responses and others like them, the verdict was nearly unanimous except for one lone dissenter, 0-15 who reported: "Older people get skipped over because we are on our way out." IR: "How has being older affected you?" 0-15:"I am comfortable with myself as an older woman."[3] Considering the social, economic, and educational disparity of the women interviewed, the overwhelming majority rejected the idea that they were old and expressed emotions concerning the prospect of old age that ranged from outright denial to despair at the thought that they would be considered old.[4] Notably, some of the most vehement denials of old age came from women well advanced in age, such as this response from one eighty-three year old, E-5, who remarked that: "I don't really feel old. I think if you start doing that you will be

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[1] Interview with I-9 in her home on April 4, 2011. All responses are cited from transcript in author's possession.
[2] Interview with D-4 in her office on February 7, 2013. On campus of East Tennessee State University.
[3] Interview with 0-15 in her home on April 10, 2011.
[4] Interviews with respondents in 2011 and in 2013 produced similar reactions and responses.
  ➢ Legend: IR: Interviewer, The coded designation of each participant will be used to designate the interviewee and correlate with citation given. Responses from participants are verbatim.

old."[5] The intensity of emotion that this question evokes appears to be in concert with the body of feminist literature reviewed for this study that postulates aging for women in Western society as undesirable and reprehensible.[6] Similarly, when I asked the women: "What is it that makes a woman old?" Some responded that it was physical characteristics such as grey hair or wrinkles, while D-4 said: "That would be a woman who has given up, who has a solitary life, who has an attitude of being old, who has many complaints about being old and who has a lot of negative things to tell about being an old woman."[7] Many of the women interviewed responded that age was an attitude, such as this response from participant G-7: "What makes her old? Her attitude! Attitude underlies behavior so if you think you're old, you act old."[8]

One important denominator of age discrimination was the question, "have you ever felt invisible?" Responses to this question run the gamut from emphatic rejection of the idea, "No I wouldn't say that, I don't let other people treat me like that," to a middle ground of acceptance, IR: "Do you feel unseen?" "Yes, but that's all right, I feel that I can hold my own," to this grudging admission from another respondent, "Yes! Absolutely! It is a culture of young people nowadays and old people are just absolutely overlooked. I mean they just see through you."[9] IR: "So do you mean that you sometimes feel invisible?" M-13: "Yes, exactly" IR: "Do you notice a difference in the way that people treat you?" M-13: "Yes." [10] Three other age- related questions concern the time spent on beauty work, cosmetics, attempts to pass for younger, and

[5] Interview with E-5 took place on February 8, 2013. On campus of East Tennessee State University.
[6] Considerable resources of feminist scholarship on women's aging exist, however, for an explicit review I recommend: Colette Brown, *Women, Feminism, and Aging*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1998: Laura Hurd Clark, *Facing Age: Women Growing Older in Anti-Aging Culture*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2011: Margaret Cruikshank, *Learning to be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2003.
[7] Interview; D-4.
[8] Interview with G-7 on February 15, 2013 on university campus.
[9] Multiple interviews: Question of feeling invisible was emphatically rejected by G-7 in an interview in her office on February 15, 2013; response to question of being unseen was responded to by O-15 on April 10, 2011, and last response was from interviewee M-13 on April 20, 2011.
[10] Interview, M-13.

the time spent on exercise as a means to remain in shape. With the exception of exercise, approximately half of the women interviewed admitted to using cosmetics daily to enhance their appearance as evidenced by this response from A-1: "I feel better so it's for me. I feel better about myself, but at the same time I don't want others to see me without it! If I go out to mow the yard, I won't go out there unless I draw around my eyes in case someone sees me.[11] Participant C-3 responded, "Well I powder my nose so my nose isn't shiny; I put blush on because I look better and not so pale. Is that younger or just better?"[12]

The issue of passing for younger was also met with a range of responses as this one from D-4 who replied: "I have received some sincere reactions that to me do indicate surprise when people know my real age," IR: "Now, when that happens and you 'pass' for younger are you pleased?" D-4: "Ah of course, I do, I do like to be . . . I think that's a compliment!"[13] Participant B-2 answered: "I have grey hair! I don't dye my hair. Does that answer your question?"[14] Other women were just as adamant that they did not use cosmetics or attempt to pass for younger as this response from F-6 who said: "I wear make-up very occasionally, I don't wear much at all and I think that was the release of becoming over fifty. I just don't care anymore about the things that used to matter to me, not that I ever spent a huge amount of money."[15] G-7 responded: "As I get older I wear less I don't really care what people think so much anymore."[16] Exercise as a means to stay in shape was unanimously endorsed by the sample of university women who were asked about it.[17]

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[11] Interview with A-1 on February 1, 2013. On university campus.

[12] Interview with C-3 on February 6, 2013. On university campus.

[13] Interview, D-4.

[14] Interview, B-2.

[15] Interview with F-6 on February 12, 2013. On university campus.

[16] Interview, G-7.

[17] The same question was not asked of women from Carter County because the questions for these women were part of a pilot study in 2011 that focused on their perception of aging in Southern Appalachia.

Gerontologists John Rowe and Robert Kahn remark that "factors of diet, exercise, nutrition, and the like may have been underestimated or ignored as potential moderators of the aging process."[18] One valid reason given by women and men who exercise is that they want to maintain their health. A second reason given by many women is the desire to control their weight and retain a youthful appearance. The implications behind diet and exercise for many women depend on their desire to forestall the aging process, as this exchange with participant F-6 indicates: when I asked her if she exercised, she replied, "Every single day."[19] Probing a bit further, I asked, "do you think personal health decisions are important?" She replied: "They're critical, in fact, if I don't exercise one day because of something that I've been doing, I make myself do twice as much the next day. For me it's more mental than physical in terms of what it does for me."[20]

The second construct, "Social Institutions, Interaction, and Support," contains themes that deal with the social world and the institutions that women inhabit, persons with whom they interact and who have an impact on their well-being. Questions regarding workplace discrimination based on gender or age brought an overwhelmingly affirmative response from more than half of the respondents, with some women recounting stories from thirty years prior. Many of the women in the study related memories of gender discrimination in the workplace with detailed resentment, such as in this response from G-7:

> Yes, when I was younger I was working a summer job to help put myself through college it was working in the construction industry and they put a sign up one day that they were going to be doing training for a forklift driver and my rate of pay was 90 cents an hour and the rate of pay for this job was 2.10 an hour so as I was getting ready to sign my name my supervisor put his hand out and pulled my hand back and said "'you needn't put

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[18] John Rowe and Robert Kahn, "Human Aging: Usual and Successful," *Science* 137, no. 4811 (July 1987), http://www.jstor.org/stable/1699814?origin=JSTOR-pdf (accessed May 22, 2013).
[19] Interview F-6.
[20] Ibid.

your name on that list! No woman forklift driver has ever been on this planet and there never will be.'" It was a summer job for me so there wasn't any way to push it.[21]

I received this response from E-5 who, even in her eighties, remembers discrimination:

"Age discrimination? To some extent it seems that the older you get you're really not there. You're overlooked, you're pushed back its very obvious." IR: "Could you tell me about a specific instance?" E-5: "I don't know if it was based on religion or gender, but I did not get that [job] position and I was qualified for it and that stuck in my craw."[22]

Age discrimination presents another contentious forum in which women relate reserved animosity toward protagonists from years ago, as in this report from F-6:

> In the last year I let my hair go grey. It is remarkable the way people have treated me since I let my hair go. Remarkable! Before, because of my good genes, most people thought that I was younger than I was, but since I let my hair go it's obvious that I could not be that young or I could not be this gray and definitely a difference in being ignored. Sometimes when you're trying to buy something there is preferential treatment for someone younger or more attractive. It has been remarkable the difference I have seen in my treatment by allowing my hair to go grey.[23]

Still another woman, D-4, remarked on age discrimination with this comment: "I have been in the same position for seven years and there have been opportunities where based on skills, background, and education that I could have moved into a different position, but I feel that because of my age I was not given that opportunity."[24] Several women denied having experienced either gender or age discrimination when asked directly, yet in later comments these women verify discrimination, as this exchange reveals: IR: "Does your idea of how younger people perceive you make you uncomfortable or ill at ease?" D-4: "No. I don't really care. I think that if I tried to join a younger group of women in their forties that I probably would not be accepted" IR: "Why do you say that?" D-4: "I think that there is age discrimination out there.

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[21] Interview, G-7.
[22] Interview, E-5.
[23] Interview, F-6.
[24] Interview, D-4.

I think we make younger people uncomfortable."[25] When asked the same question, respondent F-6 replied with this response:

> I don't think it does sometimes I think that you can be in denial that it bothers you more than you think it bothers you, but I definitely think that they see me as less able, less vivacious. I think that their perception is not all positive when they see you, but I honestly don't think I care. I was much more likely to care when I was younger. When you get into you're fifties you're like oh, they can take me or leave me![26]

Perceptions of discrimination based on gender and/or age vary considerably among women, with more women likely to report instances of workplace discrimination based on gender than other forms of discrimination according to the self-report of participants. Interviewees, when asked about other forms of social discrimination (e.g. waiting in line for service or in interactions with younger cohorts that ignore them), admitted to feeling slighted. Not all women interviewed held this opinion, however, with some denying any recognition of social or workforce discrimination. One participant interviewed responded with an acute awareness of discrimination based on her experiences in the workforce and in the community where she lives. For this African-American woman, discrimination was due to her race and skin color, factors that, for her, trumped age and gender as indices of discrimination.[27] The degree of social involvement through organizational groups was another gauge of age discrimination used to discern to what extent older women elected to remain in the social mainstream. Questions regarding social group involvement intended to elicit how older women perceive their social value and acceptance into mixed age groups of adults. Again, responses varied due to the personal circumstances and life experiences of the women, with more women from Carter County than Washington County responding that most of their involvement was through the church.

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[25] Interview, D-4.

[26] Interview, F-6.

[27] Interview with H-8 on February 18, 2013. Interview took place in the respondents' home in Elizabethton, Tennessee.

Women who lived in Johnson City and worked at the university were more inclined to participate in secular groups and organizations. Respondent G-7 had this to say about social inclusiveness when asked: "How has being older changed the way you look at the social world? Do you think being older has changed the way that the social world looks at you?"

> Yes, how the world looks at me because our society and our culture are not very kind to how we look at the aging process, as far as me accepting that no! As far as the way that I see our society now that I am older it lets me . . . it confirms what I felt in my radical, feminist youth that I was right then, and that has given me strength to make it through because our society is very anti-woman, anti-aging, still very traditional in 2013. Very sexist![28]

Yet another woman in her late sixties, when asked about social inclusion, responded ambiguously, denying and affirming age recognition with this comment: IR: "As an older woman in your interaction with strangers do you ever feel overlooked?" N-14: "Not to my knowledge; what does surprise me is the term 'ma'am' applied to me. 'Ma'am' is a term addressing an older person."[29]

Adding to the social perception of aging are the roles that older adults are assigned to play in the influential world of communication media as seen on television and in theaters. Participants, when queried about their perception of role assignment for older adults on television, were quick to respond with comments such as this one, G-7: "I think that older individuals are ridiculed on TV in mainstream shows. I think it is a symptom of the unrealistic youth orientation that the United States has and so if you don't look a certain way,

If you are female, then you know that mainstream TV or popular culture probably doesn't appeal to you."[30] When I asked this participant, "What is your perception of the way in which older women are portrayed on television?" G-7 replied:

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[28] Interview, G-7.
[29] Interview with N-14 on April 5, 2011.
[30] Interview, G-7.

I think it's better than it used to be. There are older women and older men acting nowadays. Thirty years ago you wouldn't have seen an older man with an older woman; she would have been a thirty year old. There have been some shows where the lead characters are women and older. They are women in their late thirties and forties. In the movies there are women who have been given roles that would have been given to bimbos thirty years ago.[31]

I asked G-7 if, in her opinion, women's roles have improved? "Yes, you didn't used to see an older woman and the romantic lead was always a young woman in love with an older man thirty years her senior. I think things have evened out and since the women's movement I think we are more vocal."[32] I followed up with this question, "Do you identify with the media portrayal of older women?" G-7: "Yeah, yeah the old saying, men fantasize and women identify and I think that's true. I don't like to think that all the interesting comedies and dramas are happening to women who are a third my age."[33] A number of women responded with strongly-held opinions when asked if television portrays older adults fairly, including this reply from D-4: "No! No, I don't think that they are; I think that they are portrayed as being weak and needy and sometimes as just downright stupid. I don't think that's the case; I think that's the portrayal that I see on media and television particularly in this area of Appalachia."[34] I asked respondent D-4, "Do you identify with the media portrayal of older women?" She replied: "No! No, not as far as I'm concerned, I work very hard at keeping a youthful attitude. I work hard at trying to maintain a healthy body and a positive attitude about life. I do try to keep in good shape so no, I'm not identifying with what in my opinion I see on television."[35] Questions regarding magazine advertisements and articles, included in the category of communication media, brought similar reactions from women, especially in regard to the way in which advertisements used female

[31] Interview, G-7.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Interview, D-4.
[35] Ibid.

models. I asked: "Do you feel that magazines address the concerns of older women?" B-2 replied: "They do yes." Then I asked: "Do you notice the advertisements and how they portray women?" B-2 responded: "The advertisements are a whole different ball of wax! I mean you know you've got women as commodities basically. I have gotten very interested in the way women are used in travel advertisements because it seems like we are not really advertising the culture, we are advertising some sort of male fantasy."[36]

While most of the women agreed that the visual and communication media of movies, magazines, and television promoted age prejudice and unrealistic stereotypes of women as young and flawless, a few women did not agree, saying that they saw no evidence of this. When asked about their reaction to the images of decrepit older adults on television, many were quick to point out that they did not identify with those portrayals. In response to questions regarding magazine advertisements and articles, many women approved the articles as timely and worth reading but disliked portrayals of women in advertisements.[37] In an interesting development, a facet of social aging came to light when, in discussing their concerns about growing older, a few women revealed a desire to remain productive. Related to social involvement is the commitment by many older adults to remain busy and productive and thus be seen and perceived as valuable. To remain productive is a sentiment oft repeated in social gerontology and in feminist literature as a means to offset devaluation caused by aging. D-4 responded with this comment in reply to the question of continued productivity and community involvement:

> I think that older adults and seniors have moved into that groove of what that expectation is for an older adult and I don't plan on doing that. I think that it seems that because you're retired you're not progressive or not doing anything worthwhile. I was retired for two years and I volunteered myself to death. So, I was productive and I plan to continue to be productive when I retire in July and I already have plans for what I want to do.[38]

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[36] Interview, B-2.
[37] Multiple interviews: B-2, G-7, and D-4.
[38] Interview, D-4.

I remarked: "You make a point of remaining productive when you retire; do you see productivity as a measure of youthfulness?" D-4: "Mmmm, yes I do. It doesn't have to be related to making money; productivity has to do with a lot of things besides making a living, you can be productive even if you're babysitting your grandchildren that's productive; you can be productive by giving back to your community and volunteering" IR: "And that's important to you?" D-4: "To remain productive? Yes."[39] In a follow-up question I asked, "How do you think of yourself within the larger social context? Do you feel as if you still play a part in the social organizations and groups that once interested you?" D-4 replied: "Oh yes, we have lots of social opportunities because we are involved with organizational groups. Absolutely, now that certainly is part of my identity."[40]

The emphasis on productivity imposes a double burden on women to deny the process of their aging bodies to satisfy the cultural demand for contribution and remain visible as productive members of society. The demand for productivity, especially in Western societies founded on capitalist principles of worth, in combination with the ethic of work, and the edict of positive aging, sets in place a standard of expectation for older adults that can be difficult to meet. The last questions deal with religious involvement, support from family and church, and Appalachian values. Questions that regard women's involvement in the social institution of the church can determine if religious affiliation mitigates the social effects of aging. Addressing Appalachian traditions and values puts this particular region into perspective and summons forth memories of home, family, and the way old people were treated and respected. Recollections of the past present a counterpoint contrast to the way values have shifted over the years that leaves

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[39] Interview, D-4.
[40] Ibid.

old people with, in the words of K-11: "no place to go."[41] Another woman with the advantage of many years had this to say: "When I look at the stamina of the Appalachian women I think they're strong and have come through a lot, but they have come through holding their heads up. I think that they have been beaten down, but I think that you can come back."[42] I asked: "What are these strengths that you are speaking of?" E-5: "Having a family and bringing them up and just your outlook on life. I mean nothing was easy. Everything was hard and they aged way beyond their years early and that's to be admired." IR: "So how have these strengths influenced you, as you're getting older?" E-5: "Nothing is as tough as it seems, if you have come this far you can go just a little further. I like to see older women hold up their heads and be proud. In this world things change so rapidly a woman has to have a strong constitution."[43]

I asked women how their Appalachian up-bringing within traditional values had influenced their sense of themselves and others and received this reply from B-2: "It gives me a sense of comfort to see the generations, my family has been here since the 1700s. I'm very connected to the land."[44] The majority of the women interviewed recognized the church and the community as the embodiment and source of those values that they describe as part of Appalachia. As K-11 notes, "When I was growing up everybody helped everybody! If you needed food the church was there! If you needed help the church was there! Nowadays it seems as if they're more interested in doin' this or doin' that or building on getting higher up in society."[45] K-11 continues, "Now there's just too much political say in and out of the church.

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[41] Interview with K-11 on April 5, 2011. Interview took place within the business operated by the respondent in Elizabethton, Tennessee.
[42] Interview, E-5.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Interview, B-2.
[45] Interview, K-11.

The community I live in helps and is [one of] the most generous I've lived in."[46] In the same

interview, I asked: "Are family values and cohesion an Appalachian value?" K-11 answered,

"Yes, I think so. I think it's passed down from generation to generation." I asked her, "Have

these values you've identified helped you sustain your sense of self and identity?"   K-11

responded: "Exactly, I mean I couldn't describe it any better."[47] Religion in Southern Appalachia

has a distinct place reserved in the lifestyle and worldview of women in this region especially,

but not limited to, rural areas such as Carter County. I asked I-9, "What makes Appalachia

different for a woman as she grows older?" I-9 answered: "Oh, I think it's a big difference,

compare it say to New York or San Francisco, you get out of the Bible belt and I think you see a

big difference in how people are taught. I think that in the community here, we were brought to

church as children and you don't see that in a lot of the areas anymore."[48]

Religious affiliation cannot be demarcated, however, by rural boundaries as this comment

from D-4 in Washington County, who when asked, "Are you religious or spiritual?" D-4 replied,

"Absolutely!" IR: "How has that helped your adjustment to getting older?"D-4: "Acceptance,

acceptance of everything and acceptance of the will of God, and acceptance of that's how it's

supposed to be."[49] IR: "Do you attend services?" D-4: "Yes, every Sunday." IR: "Do you belong

to groups within the church?" D-4: "Yes, Bible study, fellowship dinners, and that sort of thing."

IR: "Do you think that you find support in these groups?" D-4: "Yes, it's not my main source of

support, but it's definitely a source of prayer support and support with problems."[50] Many of the

women interviewed expressed similar sentiments regarding religion demonstrated by this excerpt

from an interview. IR: "How has your belief and spirituality helped you?" M-13: "I pray; in fact,

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[46]Interview, K-11.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Interview with I-9 on April 4th, 2011 in her home in Elizabethton, Tennessee.

[49] Interview, D-4.

[50] Ibid.

I start each morning with a prayer to help me get through this day." IR: "So your faith has been a source of inner strength to you?" M-13: "Yes, if I didn't have that faith I don't know what I would do."[51] Within Southern Appalachia, it is the church and the family that foster and comprise the community values that provide support and bolster the self-esteem of women caught in the conflict of aging in a culture focused on youth. N-14 sums it up with this observation: "I see the world becoming younger and younger and maybe not really needing the older people, but I personally have some self-worth, my church family, my neighbors, my family put value on my life. I certainly do think I am of value in this world."[52]

For many of the women, predominantly, but not exclusively situated in rural areas, the sense of belonging, support, and comfort that is derived from their association within the church far out-weighed any disadvantage of its' authoritative, masculine structure. In Carter County, the denominational practice of the participants' church (Southern Baptist) is based on a literal interpretation of the Bible that declares women to be subservient to their husbands. Despite this, many women derive a sense of community and sisterhood that, for them, offsets the structured division of labor and assignment of value perpetuated within the church. The patriarchal order of the church reflects the dominant role of men in the Southern Appalachian region and the subsequently inferior role of women in a traditional culture of female service. Women who participate in the church are not unaware of these divisions, but work within and around them to achieve their goal of maintaining family and community within traditional Christian values. In the preceding segment, I have used excerpts from the transcripts of recorded conversations to show how the interviewees themselves respond to questions related to aging. And, in addition, I sought to establish a basis for consensus among the women in regard to aging despite the

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[51] Interview, M-13.
[52] Interview, N-14.

differences dictated by their lifestyles. Narrative analysis lends what Carl Auerbach and Louise

Silberstein refer to as "justification" to the process of interpretation and allows the veracity of the

research to be borne out.[53] While most of the women interviewed related age based concerns,

others did not and denied having experienced age discrimination either personally or

perceptually. The lone African-American respondent who participated indicated that, for her,

racial discrimination was the overriding factor in her experience that subsumed other factors of

gender and age. The African-American experience of Appalachia, at least for this participant,

diverges from that of white participants on several key indices of discrimination, including social

visibility and age. Feminists who write from a multicultural point of view have noted that women

of diversity face a double barrier of discrimination that can be seen in the confirming testimony

of the African-American participant who encountered bias based on her race and gender as

shown here, H-8:

> Yes, being a black and a female I think I have been perceived and stereotyped as some type of female. All black females are not loud, being black and female doesn't mean that we are uneducated, doesn't mean that we can't reason and think for ourselves, and that's how I think some of the dominant people in the area have perceived black females to be. In every culture there are those people that lie and steal, but when you're black and female you do get this double negative that you are these things and that's not true.[54]

On age this participant remarked: "I can't remember any experience I felt that I was

discriminated against because of age. I don't think age has been my issue; it's been more the

color of my skin."[55] And on social visibility H-8 commented: "It's sometimes like, well, she's

not there, it's just like well why pursue this? It's just like your there, but they don't see you

unless you raise your hand and have a question or if you start to leave the room and then

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[53] Carl Auerbach and Louise Silverstein, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 83.

[54] Interview with H-8 on February 18, 2013. Interview took place in the respondents' home in Elizabethton, Tennessee.

[55] Interview, H-8.

somebody notices. Yes, I have experienced feeling invisible."[56] IR: "What do you attribute that to?" H-8: "Oh it's several things. Why is she here? What does she want? We don't hear from females and people of color unless there is a problem."[57] In the next analysis, I will follow up with a review of the responses using a feminist interpretation that, in part, reflects the position argued by feminist scholars in the field of social gerontology. As a theoretical ideology, feminism employs the use of the subjective and the political in its search for meaning and in its application of motive to the social construction of gender and age. As Auerbach and Silverstein point out, "it is inevitable for a researcher to use his [or her] subjectivity in analyzing and interpreting data" as long as it is "grounded" in the data.[58]

Feminist Analysis

I apply a liberal feminist perspective to the data derived from the interviews I conducted. For the application of a feminist analysis to be successful, it should be defined for what it hopes to accomplish and how it is applicable to the data.[59] Feminism serves to advocate for all women, cognizant, yet irrespective of their difference. As well, feminist analysis necessarily entails an imposition of representation on the interviewer, as DeVault and Gross point out, "Understanding how we represent others, who has the power to represent others, and the implications of our representation of others is imperative to any feminist project."[60] I include this advice from DeVault and Gross as a reminder of the inherent responsibility borne by the interviewer for fair and accurate representation of the data.

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[56] Interview, H-8.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Auerbach and Silverstein, "Qualitative Data," 83.
[59] Marjorie DeVault and Glenda Gross offer a broad definition of liberal feminism, "We define feminism as a set of practices and perspectives that affirm differences among women and promote women's interests, health and safety . . . for most adherents it includes the aspiration to live and act in ways that embody feminist thought and promote justice and the well-being of all women." De Vault and Gross, "Feminist Interviewing: Experience, Talk, and Knowledge," in *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007), 174.
[60] De Vault and Gross, "Feminist Interviewing," 192.

In the application of a feminist framework of analysis, the researcher assumes the responsibility to represent the data ethically in accordance with the directives in the definition of feminism. In addition, using a feminist approach to analysis offers an opportunity to recognize the diversity among women in their experiences and situations. Feminism, and in particular, liberal feminism places women at the gravitational center of the political quest for equity. It is the well-being of women socially, economically, and politically that occasions the use of feminist analysis and the principles of equity to the gendered constructions of identity. While the constituent advocates of feminism are themselves fractioned into separate ideological goals, the main principles of individualism, freedom, social, and political equity stand as the foundational precedent for liberal feminism.

The use of a feminist viewpoint when reviewing conversations with women is integral to the process of interpreting the essence of what women are communicating. By applying a feminist perspective to how and what women are saying in response to questions regarding them, an active listener can begin to make sense of seemingly contradictory testimony. For instance, a few of the women when asked directly about their perceptions of aging answered that they did not notice any difference in their treatment now by younger cohorts. In follow-up questions, however, these same women made contradictory comments that when reviewed from a feminist perspective, show age discrimination as a factor in their lives. Such contradictions become apparent in review of testimony by applying an interpretation informed by perspective. Moreover, the use of feminist analysis helps to circumvent the cumbersome use of an androcentric language that leaves women groping for words with which to express their views.[61]

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[61] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Our Man-Made World or Our Androcentric Culture* (New York: Charlton Company, 1911), 6.

Importantly, the use of the feminist perspective centers women as the agents acted upon and looks at the information that is generated from the standpoint of women as they relate their experiences. In choosing to use a feminist perspective, it should be asked, "In what way is this method applicable to the research process?" The first consideration takes into account the interdisciplinary nature of the research itself as it "crosses the blurred boundaries between academic and other activist sites" in its search for meaning.[62] In addition, the feminist perspective accommodates a wide range of diversity among women, acting to integrate that difference to present a unified concept of the social venues of discrimination that devalue women.[63]

The information as it reveals itself in the transcripts shows the individuality of the women who were interviewed expressed in ways that are at once unique and, yet, still closely matched on some issues. In the first question that women replied to about their own aging, almost all chose to answer negatively with a vigorous denial of personal aging. In the answers received from the women, it appears that despite the close culture of family in Appalachia, many women are still victim to the prevalent and predatory display of youth as the fashionable ideal. Television and print media are the areas that most of the women agree have a significant impact upon their consciousness and upon the socially mediated perception of age. From a feminist standpoint, the political ramifications of this for women, particularly older women, redefines their social inclusiveness and redraws the boundary line of their political presence.

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[62] DeVault and Gross, "Feminist Interviewing," 175.
[63] Hirschmann, "Feminism: Liberal North American," 789.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The interview data collected from the women in Carter and Washington Counties points to the prevailing presence of age discrimination and indicates that women are subject to social rebuff as they age. Analyses of the transcripts and the recorded conversations from the interviews reveal a repetitive pattern and perception of age discrimination within both samples of the women interviewed. However, not all of the women who participated in the study concur with feminist observations that women are at risk for age and/or gender discrimination. Nor do all of the women, using their own life experiences as examples, face social exclusion based on age. Women who do perceive and experience age and gender discrimination agree that double standards exist in society when applied to men and women. The main points in the consensus of the data reveal a composite picture of women as vulnerable to the social depredation that age imposes upon women in particular.

One of the goals for the study on women and aging in Appalachia was to rectify the lack of scholarship on the issue of aging in the region and to identify specific areas of concern for women. As well, I sought to align feminist commentary on women and aging with women in Southern Appalachia to test the applicability of feminist observations to women in this region. To accomplish that objective, I employed a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach that combined analysis of regional attitudes toward women and aging with the subjective standpoint of women from Southern Appalachia. Another initiative of the study was to determine if women in this region felt socially ignored or invisible; responses to this query were mixed with some women emphatically endorsing that idea backed by personal experience, while others refuted the idea.

In important ways, the idea of social visibility and participation addresses one of the problems with aging, that for many women, affects their self-image and self-esteem. A key determinate of social visibility for many of the women interviewed appears to be their level of self-confidence and resistance to social devaluation. Other results of the study indicate that many women, despite their individual differences in educational attainment and, subsequently, of their social economic status, report knowledge of at least one incident of gender discrimination in the workplace, either to themselves or to someone they know. Review of interview transcripts reveal that women in the Southern Appalachian region strongly identify gender and race as motive for workplace discrimination of women in hiring, pay, and promotion practices. While the samples of women who participated in the study were white and described discrimination in terms of gender and age, one participant who was African-American said that for her discrimination came as the result of race and ethnicity. The experience of this participant confirms what many multi-cultural feminist writers describe as a double barrier of discrimination against women of color based on gender and race.

Other findings that result from the study show the importance of traditional values as heritable assets for women in the construction of self-identity and as links to the land and to each other. Women identify these values as consisting of and promoting family, community, and, importantly, for many women who were interviewed, religion. Religious affiliation and the church were identified by more than half of the participants, mostly, although not exclusively, from Carter County, as primary sources of community and support. One result to emerge from interviews with women in Carter County, who are affiliates of the Southern Baptist denomination, is that they belong to the church despite its patriarchal structure and history of resistance to women's leadership and ministry.

Many of the women who were interviewed found relief by forming support groups with others within the church. Professional women from Washington County who professed to religious involvement did not indicate the denomination or structural practices of their church but did reveal that it was a significant source of comfort and support for them. For women who adhere to religious practice and observance, the church plays a vital and central role in their lives by shaping their attitudes and their responses to the social world around them. Review of conversations with women who are active in their church reveal a greater degree of acceptance toward their ascribed place in society and to social attitudes toward them. For many of the religious women interviewed for the study, the church is a mainstay of support and a focal point of faith upon which they depend. Answers to questions that regard faith, values, and tradition are so interlaced with one another as to be nearly inseparable from the larger social matrix that involves their perceptions of social acceptance and inclusion.

The results of the study support and confirm what has been written by feminist scholars in regard to women and aging and much of what has been asserted by these scholars can be applied to women in Southern Appalachia. Regional studies on aging are needed that take into account the diversity of women and their experiences of discrimination that align better with the broader scholarship on women. Additionally, there is a need for multi-cultural studies to focus on issues of relevance to minority populations as they age, as well as, studies inclusive of gay and lesbian identities to serve their needs. The changing demographics of the Appalachian region would appear to warrant the added social services that such a population will invariably need. As well, with a greater percentage of the population cohort aging, a need arises to identify better those needs that contribute to the vulnerability of the aged.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF QUESTIONS

1.   Hello; before we begin could you tell me your age and where you were born? How long have you lived in in this region? Are you married?

2.   Do you, as a woman raised in Southern Appalachia either acknowledge or perceive, now or in the past, gendered discrimination of yourself as a woman by women younger than yourself or by men in this region?

3.   Do you as a woman living here in Southern Appalachia either acknowledge or perceive, now or in the past, ageist discrimination directed at you by women younger than yourself or by men?

4.   Have you ever encountered age or gender discrimination in the workplace? If so, what form did this discrimination take? What specifically caused you to think that you were a victim of age discrimination? Who do you perceive as being responsible for making you feel that way? How did you deal with it? Did this happen to you in this region?

5.   Can you tell me what happened, for instance, did you file a complaint with anyone? If not, why not? Did you leave after this incident? Why? Did you feel forced to leave by the actions of others? Do you think that your chances for promotion were affected?

6.   Have you ever encountered gender and/or age discrimination in other circumstances, such as when shopping or traveling?

7.   Do you think television portrays older individuals fairly? What is your perception of the way in which older women are portrayed on television? Which programs do you enjoy

watching? Why? Do you identify with the media portrayal of older women? What do you think could be done to improve the image of older adults on T.V.?

8.   What about magazines? Do you subscribe to magazines? Which ones? Do the articles address the concerns of older women as well as younger women? Do the advertisements target a particular age group? What do you think are the qualities of women that magazines set forth as desirable? How do you feel about these values that you see modeled in magazines? Do you think that they are appropriate for older women too?

9.   Do you think that you are influenced by what you see and read in magazines? How does that affect the time you spend on your appearance, your clothes, hair, make-up? How much time / money would you estimate that you spend on your appearance? Do you think that cosmetics make a women appear younger than she is actually?

10.   Do you think of yourself as old? Do you identify with older women? Why or why not? How do you describe an older woman? What is it about her that makes her 'old'?

11.   Do you take pride in 'passing' for younger than you are actually?

12.   Do you exercise? Why? Why not? Do you think personal health decisions are important? Do you believe in having personal autonomy over your life, health, and finances? Do you think age has diminished your personal autonomy and independence?

13.   Have you ever thought or had a perception of yourself as being invisible, unseen, or unnoticed when you are in a mixed age group of people? Have you ever felt as if you were socially invisible when you are out shopping, dining, or in a theater? Have you ever noticed or thought that younger people 'shift' their eyes away from you when in public?

14.   What do you think younger men and women think when they look at you? Does your idea of how younger people perceive you make you uncomfortable or ill at ease? Do you think younger women accept you into their circle of friends and confidants?

15.   Are you religious or spiritual? If you are religious and /or spiritual how has that helped or hindered your adjustment to being older? If you consider yourself to be religious do you attend services regularly? Do you belong to any groups within the church? Do you find support and understanding from your church group? Do you feel as if you are in need of support in your identification of yourself as being older? Does being part of a church group of women bolster your self-esteem and sense of identity?

16.   How do you think of yourself within the larger social context? Do you feel as if you still play a part in the social organizations and groups that once interested you? Are you politically active? Organizationally active? Do you feel as if your input is desired and respected?

17.   How has being older changed the way you look at the social world? How do you think being older has changed the way that the social world looks at you? How has getting older made a difference in your life? How has your Appalachian up-bringing influenced your strengths and abilities to cope with getting older?

VITA

SHERRY KAYE

Personal Data:	Date of Birth: January 28, 1951
	Place of Birth: San Diego, California
	Marital Status: Single
Education:	Northeast State Community College-Division of Nursing 2002-2004
	Walter State Community College-Department of Nursing 2004-2006
	B.S. Psychology, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2006-2009
	M.A. Liberal Studies, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2009-2013
Professional Experience:	Registered Nurse-Holston Valley Medical Center, Kingsport, Tennessee, 2006-2007
	Registered Nurse-Excel Staffing Agency, Greensboro, North Carolina, 2007-2009
Publications:	

Hirsch, J.K., Kaye, S., & Lyness, J.M. (2009, August). Functional impairment and depressive symptoms: Mitigating effects of trait hope. Presentation at the 117th annual convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Hirsch, J.K., Visser, P.L., Hatfield, J., Kaye, S., Peake, A., & Mason, H. (2008, September). Screening for mood disorders in rural primary care: A review of the literature. Presentation at the 5th annual Primary Care and Prevention Research Day, Department of Family Medicine, East Tennessee State University, J.C., TN.

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Honors and Awards: Dean's List Walter State Community College, Morristown, Tennessee, 2005

Community Activity: Volunteer Community Food Bank, Fund Raising, Supervisor Loading and Distribution 2008

Volunteer Second Harvest Food Bank, Johnson City, Tennessee, Hunger Outreach Program 2009

Volunteer Second Harvest Food Bank, Children's Charity Event 2012

Extra-Curricular Programs: Ronald McNair Post Baccalaureate Research Program, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2010