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Stewards of the Forest: An Analysis of Ginseng Harvesters and the Communal Boundaries That Define Their Identity in an Area of Environmental Degradation

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Stewards of the Forest:

An Analysis of Ginseng Harvesters and the Communal Boundaries That Define Their Identity in
an Area of Environmental Degradation

A Thesis submitted to
The Graduate College of
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the Requirements of the degree of

Master of Arts

Sociology

by

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Approved by

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Abstract

Research introduced here demonstrates the use of protagonist framing as a means of identifying the boundaries that define a community's identity in relation to an antagonist. Specifically, this research examines the two-sided nature of boundaries and the impact such boundaries have on the identity of a community. Through the telling narrative of two distinctively contrasting members of the ginseng steward community, this research explores how boundaries and protagonist framing can be used to identify the schemata of interpretation that enables the ginseng steward community to locate, perceive, and label themselves in relation to American society and a capitalist mentality. The author interprets the boundaries used by the ginseng steward community as a means of understanding for American society and as being reflective of the steward's identity through their adherence to these boundaries as being central components of their identity. The research finds that the boundaries maintained by ginseng stewards influence and even dictate their notions of stewardship, sustainability, morality, and American society. Drawing on ten months of ethnographic research involving interviews and observations of the everyday activity conducted by members of the ginseng steward community, this research contributes to our understanding of how boundary identification can be used to classify and discuss a community's identity and their perception of non-community members.

Preface

As I began this research, my intent was to divulge the nature and reason for the decline in wild American ginseng populations in states legally eligible to harvest the herb. I examined literature that suggested the reason ginseng was in a state of decline was due to increased animal population, increased demand in Asian markets, and improper management strategies. With each new bit of information I obtained, the reason for ginseng's decline was different. The various literature sources seemed to have consistency or commonality in them. It appeared as though the answer I was seeking could be any number of things. The more I delved into the literature the more I realized I would never find the answer to my question by focusing on the existing research. I choose instead to ask the people who harvest ginseng every year -- the people who depend on it for income and whose lifestyle is subject to the continued existence of ginseng harvesting.

Having grown up in the Appalachian coal fields of southern West Virginia, in a family reliant on the harvesting of wild American ginseng as a supplemental income source, I know of a small eccentric community of ginseng harvesters known for their defiant adherence to tradition and stewardship of their lifestyle. I approached this community and conducted ethnographic interviews and observations of the everyday activity conducted by the members in hopes of further understanding the reason for ginseng's decline. The ginseng steward communities are rebellious to most aspects of modern society and tend to isolate themselves from anyone who they believe is not part of their fold; yet the ginseng steward community prides itself on its traditional attachment to ginseng harvesting, a life of subsistence, and devout moral ethos. They do dedicate themselves to the stewardship of ginseng as a useful economic plant, but more so pride themselves on practicing a concept of stewardship that protects not only ginseng, but all things. They are keen in their understanding of stewardship as a concept that encompasses the protection of all life, human animal or plant, without concern for their own pride of economic well being.

When I presented the question to members of the ginseng steward community I was given a unanimous and quick response. They did not deliberate or present multiple reasons for the decline of ginseng. They simply said greed. For them, the answer was clear. Wild American ginseng populations are declining because the plant is one of the most highly sought and expensive herbs in the United States today. Society is driven by greed for the money that can be obtained by harvesting this high-demand herb. The community's answer was given with inflection and antagonism. They knew and resented the nature of greed and believed it to be not only cause for the declining ginseng population, but the plight of their way of life. To some extent I felt as though I had found my answer, but I questioned the motives of a community that prides itself on being separate from all aspect of today's society. It seemed only logical that such a community would point to the decline of ginseng as being due to society's shortcomings. Still the adherence to their convictions and the unanimous nature of their answer made me question what could possibly cause such a profound understanding of society as to cause this entire community to view people outside their collective as merely money hungry, self-absorbed adversaries.

I began to focus my efforts on identifying the ginseng steward community in hopes of understanding their adherence to such rigid ideals. I wanted to understand the interpretations that enable the ginseng steward community to locate, perceive, and label themselves in relation to the larger scope of society. To do this, I focused on the boundaries the community maintained and protagonist framing in an effort to draw attention to the two-sided nature of the ginseng steward community. The focus of the research became to demonstrate the use of boundary identification not in a context of being used to understating the differences between groups, but, rather, to isolate how groups adhere to the boundaries they create as being indicative of their identity. The application of this concept is done by isolating the protagonist nature of the boundaries maintained by a group in conjunction with a perceived antagonist. The focus of the research changed from a desire to answer the question of ginseng's decline to understanding the identity of the community who is self-elected as the steward of ginseng. Although my research did not go as planned, and I still have no definitive answer for ginseng's continued decline, the

identity of the ginseng steward community and the impact their boundaries have on their views of themselves and the world are clearly understood. They are devoted to their subsistence lifestyle and isolation, yet they maintain a rigid moral code that governs their notion of stewardship as obligating them to protect all things, even if this means protecting those individuals who oppose the very nature of the ginseng steward community.

Chapter I: Introduction

Spring Planting with the Boys: A Prelude to Identity

In the early spring I took my two sons into the woods to plant ginseng seeds and roots. My boys are six and three years old, inquisitive, and eager to be in nature continuously. As we walked to our destination the two of them were running ahead chasing each other with sticks while yelling about being their favorite superhero. As usual I found myself trying to quiet them down. I explained, once again, how when we were in the woods we needed to be quiet so we did not scare away animals. The remnants of my remarks lasted only a few moments with them and then they were back to being boys all over again. My oldest son seemed to understand that he had to be quiet in order to see the wildlife. He told his younger brother to “be quiet or we’ll never see a deer!” We made our way to a northern facing hillside in a shaded location not far from our home. It was littered with large oak trees that I know would provide an abundant canopy of leaves in the summer. My oldest son asked, “What are we doing here, dad?” I told him that this was an ideal location for us to plant our seeds. “Seeds in the woods, seeds are for the garden?” he asked. I found myself explaining something to my son that I remember my father explaining to me when I was young. I told him that the woods are our home too, and they must be treated with respect. We are the stewards of our home, and it is our duty to ensure we protect what we have. I explained that sometimes this meant planting and caring for the plants and the trees that live there. He looked at me for a moment as if he were taking in my explanation. “So what do we have to protect the woods from dad; there’s nothing in them but us and the animals?” Sometimes the simplicity of a child is so honest and true. The only answer I had for my son was, “We protect the woods from us, son.”

We spent the day digging shallow holes on the hillside and planting two year-old ginseng roots. The boys relished in digging in the cold, wet dirt. They took turns flicking mud balls at one another and laughing at how it would stick on their face and fingers. I showed them how to place the roots into the ground and how to carefully cover them with dirt and leaves. As they followed my lead, I could see the patience and devotion they had to succeed in their task. As we finished

our planting, my youngest son said, "We planted a lot dad, let's go plant some more." I told him that we were done for the day but that we would come back to check on our plants in a few weeks. My oldest son said, "We need to come back a lot because we don't want someone to hurt the plants. Somebody might step on them while we're not watching." Without knowing, I had imparted an idea to my son, an idea of protection and responsibility that seemed so simple when coming from the mind of a child. How easy it seems to be a steward of the forest.

Stewardship, however, is not as simple a concept to understand. The term is used generally to refer to the accountability of taking care of something or protecting what needs protected. It can be thought of as an ethic, a code of responsibility and planned management. But what brings a person or community to live a lifestyle governed and directed by these sentiments? What are the frames that define a situation associated with practicing stewardship? Are these frames of understanding created by the stewards themselves or do they originate from another source? The purpose of my analysis is to isolate the framework of understanding used by a community devoted to the stewardship of wild American ginseng by identifying the boundaries they perceive as indicative of their identity. I do so through the use of protagonist framing to illustrate the distinctions of a strong we-feeling among the community. It is here in the establishment and maintenance of such boundaries that my research concentrates and finds its contribution. I focus on how these boundaries are established and why they are maintained by the community of ginseng stewards. In so doing, my research demonstrates how the identification of existing boundaries can be used as a tool for developing an understanding of a community and how to better address their needs and issues.

To illustrate the findings of this research and the use of protagonist framing as a strategy for the boundaries as an indicator for the condition of the ginseng steward community I used a series of ethnographic narratives. These narratives not only demonstrate the usefulness of boundary identification as a theoretical tool, but also provide an example for the larger scale understanding of the ginseng steward community in society.

American Ginseng in Appalachia: The Identity of Plant and People

The notion of stewardship of the land and all its elements is a concept that was imparted to me at an early age. I was born in Pikeville, Kentucky in a hospital near the Tug River. My family was made up of coal miners and lived in an isolated portion of the Appalachian Mountains known as Pigeon Creek. We were poor, living below the poverty line. We struggled to carve out a living between my father working in the mines and our constant agriculture efforts. On our 10 acre farm we grew corn, beans, potatoes, and squash. We gathered berries in summer, apples in late summer, pears and persimmons after the first frost. In the fall, we entered the forests to gather "Mountain Bananas" (also known as pawpaws), walnuts, and mushrooms. In late September, we began what we called our yearly Christmas money ginseng harvest. We were poor, and Christmas was an expensive undertaking on a miner's wage, but our Christmas harvest could make up the difference. At an early age, I realized the value of ginseng for me and my family and the importance of maintaining and preserving its existence for the future. For me, as a child, being able to harvest ginseng each season meant my family and I could enjoy some of life's pleasures. We could indulge, if only for a moment.

My family lived with the forest in order to survive and in doing so I was given an understanding of stewardship based on my experiences as a child. My family and I are part of a social group of individuals who locate themselves closely, not only geographically but culturally, to prosperous herbaceous plant communities in an effort to carve out a livelihood and maintain balance with the plants they are harvesting. They are a "ginseng harvesting community." I use the term "community" to mean and be representative of the cultural knowledge and behaviors found within the boundaries established by ginseng harvesters who view themselves as stewards of ginseng. The term "boundaries" refers to the real or perceived distinctions between the community of ginseng stewards and those people or entities designated as non-ginseng stewards by the steward community. This classification, as designed and implemented by the stewardship community, and its involvement in ginseng harvesting, contain complicated issues of identity, place and economy. What is distinctive about ginseng harvesters who fancy themselves as

stewards of the forest in comparison to those who desire only economic advancement from harvesting profitable plants in the forests? What is the relationship between their stewardship-focused community and the plant community they protect? How do they perceive their communal identity in relation to the world around them?

This research will discuss these issues by illustrating the shared commonality in history, heritage, and culture among ginseng stewards. It will detail their common interests, sentiments, and distinct perceptions of who they are and who they are not, how they believe themselves separate and unique among the larger backdrop of Appalachian society, and how their communal identity is connected to the plant community encompassing wild American Ginseng and other economically sustaining plants. I do this by focusing on the identification of boundaries used by this community to establish their understanding of communal identity. They are the community of ginseng harvesters in southern West Virginia, and this is a study into how they identify themselves as stewards of ginseng.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Identity of Communities through Identity Boundaries

“You’re not from around here are you?” Those were the first words I heard as I approached the front porch of Mr. Varney. I do not recall ever meeting the man taking to him. In fact, I had been completely unaware of him until only an hour prior when the local librarian directed me to his home near Whitesville. She said he was “a pillar of the community,” a man who could tell me anything I wanted to know about the local area or its inhabitants. He is an established ginseng harvester and a man who has lived in the area his entire life. He is also recognized for “knowing the local gossip.” I believed Mr. Varney would be a valuable source of information on the area, the people, and ginseng harvesting. As I approached his home, I was not received well. It was only after informing him of my family name, my father, and who my grandfather was that he said, “Well, why didn’t you say so! I didn’t know you was family. Me and your granddaddy used to *seng* up on Coal Mountain when we was kids.” Other than the fact that Mr. Varney knew my grandfather as a child, I am unaware of any family connection, although as soon as I established who I was, he eagerly encouraged conversation.

Although this is not a research project focused on kinship and kinship systems, the patterns of behavior and attitudes of ginseng stewards toward their relationships to each other are distinct; however, the group does not utilize any form of kinship system or kinship categories to identify themselves. The extent of the ginseng steward’s kinship is merely in referring to members of their group as belonging. This being said, they do demonstrate a distinct sentiment of family cohesion and loyalty to one another. They consider themselves to be a group of interacting members who share a common sense of values and attributes that give them social cohesion similar to that of a community. For this reason, my research is deliberately designed to isolate the frameworks of understanding associated, not with the concepts of kinship or family, but rather with what ginseng stewards use to identify and label their own understanding of their community. To Mr. Varney, being part of the ginseng harvester community is a distinguishing factor to his existence, and it influences who he is willing to associate with. The term

“community,” however, is ambiguous. Some definitions of “community” revolve around a concept of place, whereas, others rely more heavily on a connection to social interaction and activity. The term “community” and its significance have long been a topic of debate. Robert Redfield regarded community as an ecological system encompassing social structure, history, and communal personality (Redfield, 1956). George Hillery defined 94 different types for community based on wide-ranging characteristics such as social relationships and ecological orientation (Hillery, 1955). The determining factors used to define and identify community depend on concepts and terminology that attempt to outline social interaction in a communal setting. Unfortunately, this often fails to address community at all. Brett Williams argued that to define community alone was of little interest. He believed that the important aspects to consider when studying community were, “What are the different kinds of communities? How do they grow across dispersed and fragmented spaces? When do people who share a place also build community? What kinds of feelings and ideas do we attach to communities? When are they blurred and shifting? When are they coherent and lasting?” (Williams, 2002: 348). Like Williams, my research focuses on illustrating the uniqueness of ginseng stewards as a communal group, their sense of place, and what ideas they have about the boundaries used to identifying them as a steward or not. My initial encounter with Mr. Varney and his immediate classification of me as an outsider based on his first impression and then a complete transformation upon learning about my communal connection illustrates the importance of addressing these boundaries intimately in order to frame the ginseng harvester community and their sense of stewardship.

Rebecca McLain and Eric Jones (1997) studied the challenges of defining community when looking at wild mushroom harvesting in the United States. Their work addressed the notion of local community as not being fixed to a place but rather as being linked in a multitude of ways to a larger context. Connections to a larger context, or outside linkage, are viewed as fundamental to the construction of inside boundaries that define the local community. They illustrate this concept by discussing the observed struggle between mushroom harvesters understanding of proper stewardship and that of government officials tasked to oversee mushroom conservation. McLain and Jones also propose a broader definition of community to

encompass not only a connection to place but also to address mushroom harvesters and their activity directly. McLain and Jones argue those people who are stakeholders in matters concerning mushroom harvesting should be defined as part of the local community in spite of their physical residence in the local community. They proceed with a perception of community that has greater emphasis on individuals practicing “resource stewardship” of mushrooms and how those individuals distinguish their activity and themselves relative to the plant community and influences that affect it. Such influences include, but are not limited to, habitat degradation, over harvesting, or government regulation (McLain and Jones, 1997). Similar to the use of community by McLain and Jones, my research will show ginseng harvesters in the Coal River area are stakeholders to the welfare of wild ginseng. Their ability to manage the ginseng population is relevant to their ability to sustain themselves and their livelihood. Without their ability to harvest wild ginseng, the community will lose the regular annual income provided from ginseng harvesting. Based on the information collected during the course of this research, earnings from ginseng harvesting activity are commonly used to supplement low earning gathered from harvesters regular employment or income obtained through state or federally supported welfare programs. Many ginseng harvesters also indicated that the income earned from harvesting was critical to their ability to sustain themselves and their families during the holiday season, due to the increased expense of merchandise purchased during Christmas. With proper management, they are able to maintain both the continued existence of a healthy plant community and benefit economically.

Like mushroom harvesters, they also have an intimate relationship with the plant community harboring the plant they so prize. They develop an understanding of how to manage this community through experience with the plants and knowledge of stewardship passed down from generation to generation. Their experience with and connection to the plant community give them a prospective on how stewardship of ginseng should be conducted, as well as establish them as practical contributors and stakeholders in managing the plant community. In Coal River, this practice of stewardship can be seen in conflict with the coal mining operations destroying ginseng habitat, and conservation management practices by federal and state governments that

contradict the harvester's idea of proper stewardship. My research focuses on how this conflict contributes to ginseng harvester's development of boundaries and further identifies them as stewards of ginseng in contrast to outside influences such as government conservation management. This emphasis is complementary to the research of McLain and Jones in that it furthers discussion of community identity based on relationship to plant communities and addresses the focus of appropriate stewardship on the part of both individual stakeholders and government entities. Specifically, my research contributes to the study of both boundary establishment and maintenance by groups who identify themselves as having a connection to a plant community, much like mushroom harvesters in the American Northwest. By identifying boundaries established and maintained by the ginseng steward community, my research will, like McLain and Jones, establish a more precise understanding of groups who associate their identity to a plant or plant community. I do this by centering my research on the everyday activity of ginseng stewards in order to provide a functional, and contextual, illustration of what boundaries are being used and why. The reason for this concentration is to look behind the everyday activity in search of the structures that govern how the ginseng steward community identifies itself. I accomplish this by employing the theoretical concepts of framing. I focus on the representations of interpretation that enables the ginseng steward community to locate, perceive, and identify aspects of their community as telling of who they are. This basis allows me to develop, and illustrate, the precise understanding of the boundaries used by groups who are closely connected to plants or plant communities. It can also assist in establishing a fuller understanding of, not only a group's identity but also their concept of how a plant community should or should not be managed and who the stakeholders in formulating these management decisions should be. This knowledge could be particularly useful in the development of environmental conservation policy or endangered plant species research.

In an effort to better understand wild ginseng harvesting and Appalachian traditions, Mary Hufford studied the Coal River Valley region of West Virginia from 1992 until 1999 in a manner complementary to my efforts. Supported by the Library of Congress as a folklore study of the area, Hufford sought to describe the region's fight with maintaining Appalachian cultural

traditions, environmental conservation, while struggling with environmental issues related to the coal mining industry. More than ten years later, the Coal River Valley is still struggling over the same regional issues concerning the coal mining industry and the environment. Much like Hufford, my research illustrates the relationship between ginseng harvesters in Coal River and the mining companies. My research delves more specifically into understanding ginseng harvesters or stewards as a community by addressing their sense of place in a high coal producing area which has historically struggled with environmental issues (Shapiro, 2010). I do this by focusing on the boundaries they designate as separating themselves from non-ginseng stewards. My research illustrates how ginseng steward boundaries have been established in relation to the coal industry and its impact on the environment. It also illustrates how this industry is perceived by ginseng stewards as being representative of the larger scope of American society and capitalism. Ginseng stewards not only formulate their identity as being antagonistic to the coal industry, but also to what the industry represents in the form of monetary wealth, power, and the perceived capitalistic nature of American society.

The Coal River Valley is one of West Virginia's largest coal producing areas. It is also one of the state's largest producers of wild ginseng, producing approximately 27,627 tons over that last 30 years (West Virginia Division of Forestry, 2010). Much of this area's struggle centers on people's tension, or inability, to live with the environment as their ancestors did to include harvesting wild ginseng and other profitable herbs from the area's fertile mountains, which are now owned and controlled by the mining industry (Cavender, 2003: 60-61). This relationship has contributed to ginseng harvesters distinguishing themselves from those entities thought of as representative of the coal mining industry. This includes persons of authority in the mining industry such as mine owners or operators and state or federal government persons who are supportive of the coal industry in the creation of legislation that supports and expands coal production in the area. According to Stewart, the coal fields of Appalachia are occupied by two groups. The "locals", or people who reside in the area and who trace their lineage back generations to family members who have also lived in the area and by companies or organizations who control the local mining and timber industries from elsewhere (Stewart, 1996).

Although a portrayal of Coal River is to these companies often one of profitability, accounts from locals are often ones of economic deprivation, cultural decline, and hardship (Hufford, 2002: 110,112). Although Stewart's concept of dual occupancy in the coal fields may hold merit, the complexity of circumstances surrounding her inability to obtain a local perspective due to her own position as a social scientist, or outsider, leaves a gap of understanding in the actual relevance of this distinction for locals which my research fills. I am a local, and although I have been forced to prove my authenticity in terms of my belonging to the community, once established I was given an insider's view on ginseng stewardship. Outsider, or non-locals, are often shunned or not given full disclosure (Erikson, 1976). In contrast to Stewart, my research is structured specifically from locals' perspective and more specifically from the local ginseng harvesters' perspective. By taking this approach, I am able to not only address boundary distinction for stewards of ginseng, but also situate these boundary distinctions in the larger context of dual occupancy established by Stewart. This approach serves to complement and contribute to the research provided by Stewart and provides an alternative perspective and focus on the identity boundary creation in an area governed by differing views on environmental management.

To clarify boundaries as they are used in my research, I utilize the concept of framing or the use of an interpretative outline to understand and respond to the world. It is used to support meaning and significance to features within the frame, as well as, distinguishing features that are outside the frame (Buechler, 2000: 41). Frame alignment is the concept within framing that illustrates how individuals develop a congruency or cohesiveness based on the similarity of their frames of understanding in order to form groups or communities. For my research, I employ only one type of frame alignment, which is frame extension. Although this type of frame alignment is more commonly associated with a group's effort to incorporate or recruit new participants by extending boundaries, I used it in order to demonstrate only the existence and identification of the boundaries that are currently being maintained by ginseng stewards. My research demonstrates how the identification of existing boundaries can be made by examining what views, interests, or sentiments a group or community incorporates. I address how ginseng stewards react to incorporation of new ideas based on the framework the situation and how they relate it to their

agenda. An aspect of this concept, as illustrated by Buechler, is protagonist framing that “establishes distinctions between in-groups and out-groups and a strong we-feeling through boundary maintenance” (Buechler, 2000: 190). Buechler utilized the concept of protagonist framing to define social movements and how they distinguish themselves. I use the same concept to identify the distinctions made by the ginseng harvester community when creating and maintaining their community boundaries. It is here in the establishment and maintenance of such boundaries that my research concentrates. I focus on how these boundaries are established and why they are maintained by the community of ginseng stewards. I directly emphasize the community’s morality by focusing on their desire for separation from entities of power, excessive monetary wealth, and desire for capital gain. In doing this, I also provide an indication of the perceived adversary of stewards of ginseng, or in framing terms, the antagonist portion of protagonist framing. I specifically address the antagonist of the ginseng harvester community from the perspective of the harvesters. Without incorporating the harvesters’ antagonist into the analysis it is impossible to discuss what they have established as boundaries. This approach acknowledges that there is at least a perceived opponent to their community.

Established boundaries by stewards of ginseng were observed in another study conducted by Hufford. This study specifically intended to address the social interaction of ginseng harvesters in the Coal River area. She argued that coal mining, specifically mountaintop removal, was an “ecological crisis” destroying ginseng harvesting and the cultural contribution it has to the Appalachian tradition (Hufford, 2004: 268). She focused much of her attention on analyzing stories told by ginseng harvesters about their activity and the meanings these stories had for them. She suggests these stories are representative of a collective identity based on a connection to ginseng and the act of harvesting it. Hufford also illustrates how these stories are examples of boundaries that have been established between ginseng harvesters and their perceived opposition. She uses one such story to express the boundary between mine workers and mine owners in a capitalist context through the use of an individual’s views on employee and employer identity.

'Some men work from the neck up. Most men work from the neck down. He looked at me intently. What do you think of that? Ford's image graphically depicts a social body formed of management and labor, and the dehumanizing fragmentation of the laboring self under the Fordist regime' (Hufford, 2004: 281).

Hufford uses this account, and others, to discuss the devastating effect mountaintop removal has on ginseng harvesting and by so doing to illustrate distinct boundaries established between locals and coal companies. Her research provides a detailed telling of how ginseng harvesters are affected by mountaintop removal and what boundaries they have associated with mining activity and the mining industry.

I use Hufford's focus on mountaintop removal as a basis to expand my analysis into the boundaries established and maintained by stewards of ginseng in relation to their views on the mining industry and the greater American society. Specifically, I demonstrate how they practice these boundaries in their daily lives and frame their existence in relation to others. I explore how they interact with each other and outsiders, how they distinguish themselves economically by harvesting ginseng as a supplemental income source, and by how their history has shaped their understanding of who they are from an insiders perspective. I discuss their lives while concentrating on the behaviors and beliefs that are used as boundaries. I illustrate key concerns for ginseng stewards and identify their community by, not only following their stories, but also following their lives. This approach offers a distinct perspective that is similar to Hufford's work in that it depicts communal identity with the use of boundary identification but also encourages discussions about how boundaries are perceived by the groups who establish them.

According to Anya Royce's research into ethnic identity boundaries maintained from inside and outside of the identifying group hold meaning in distinctly different ways. Individuals who are a part of a local group and derive from interactions with the group an inner boundary have a unified cultural knowledge. Interaction with the outside is more limited, resulting in a lack of shared knowledge. When double boundaries are in place, groups tend to limit their interaction

with outside influences, and choose rather to remain “safe” within their own bubble of normality (Royce, 1982: 29). The double boundaries concept can be seen in how Appalachian culture is often viewed as being inferior or backward by outsiders. Although my research focuses on identifying boundaries in a community rather than in an ethnic group, the concept of double boundaries is applicable in identifying the significance of understanding one’s self as an insider rather than an outsider. Stewards of ginseng maintain a common knowledge and understanding of what it is to a steward, as well as, limit their interaction with outside influences. By analyzing the limits of their interaction with outside elements and identifying their definition of identity, I am able to demonstrate the significance of double boundaries in ginseng harvesters. The concept of double boundaries, as presented by Royce, is used in my research to enforce the concept of the protagonist and antagonist framing. The double boundaries concepts supports the notion that the ginseng steward community identifies themselves through the use of boundary maintenance and, in turn, have developed an “us and them” mentality that is representative of their community identity.

Kai Erikson, a sociologist conducting ethnographic research in the wake of the Buffalo Creek West Virginia flooding Disaster in 1972, presented a descriptive view of local Appalachian identity, similarly to Royce, the double boundaries concept, and the concept of protagonist framing. He encountered a community that he believed attributed much of their identity to how outsiders viewed them. His thoughts on the cultural identity of the people he interviewed with the concept of “axis of variation.” According to Erikson, this concept is the dividing point between core elements that describe a culture as a unit and the opposing elements that are not part of their social unit. Erikson found this distinction to be critical in understanding the elements used to distinguish cultural identity (Erikson, 1976). According to Clifford and Marcus, to consider cultural identity as not only the boundaries that a group exhibits to be fundamental to themselves but also as the boundaries that are imposed on them from external circumstances suggests a definition of identity that is not merely derived from the group itself, but by the perception of the group, observers of the group, and the reflections these observers have on a group (Clifford and Marcus, 1986).

Erikson suggests that this outside influence was responsible in part for the stereotypical views of Appalachian peoples as being culturally deficient (Erikson, 1976). The axis of variation concept and the concept of double boundaries assists in analyzing stewards of ginseng by emphasizing the relevance boundaries have in establishing the identity of the community. In accordance with Erikson, my research discusses the core elements that describe and define the identity of ginseng stewards while being aware of opposing factors to ginseng stewardship. I use this concept and the concept of double boundaries, as presented by Royce, together in order to reveal, not only the protagonist aspect of ginseng steward boundaries, but also the antagonist. My research thus contributes, not only to the identification of ginseng steward boundaries, but also to the use of boundary identification as a means of addressing internal and external issues for communities and how they deal with these issues.

Contribution

The contribution of this research is to illustrate how boundaries and protagonist framing can be used to identify the schemata of interpretation that enables the ginseng steward community to locate, perceive, and label themselves in relation to the larger scope of society. As shown, research conducted by Hufford, Stewart, Royce, and Erikson all contain aspects of understanding that pinpoint a two-sided condition to boundaries and the impact such boundaries have on the identity of a community. My contribution is to demonstrate the use of boundaries as a tool for community identification. This contribution is done by isolating the protagonist nature of the boundaries maintained by the group in conjunction with a perceived antagonist. The research further focuses this by highlighting what is relevant to the ginseng steward community and by demonstrating what they view as being “in frame” or “out of frame” through a series of ethnographic narratives. These boundaries and the “us and them” mentality developed and exhibited by the ginseng steward community tell the story of their identity and how the community defines itself in the larger context of American society.

Chapter III: History

American Ginseng in Appalachia: A Brief History of Harvesting

Within the plant communities of the Appalachian forests resides a plant that has long been prized for its value as an herbal supplement and economic staple for local residents willing to harvest it. *Panax quinquefolius*, or American Ginseng, was used for generations by Native Americans for such ailments as weakness of the womb, loss of virility, and fatigue. It was even used as the active ingredient for a traditional Native American love potion (Griffin, 2008: 77). Herbal knowledge of ginseng quickly took hold with European apothecaries, who ventured into the Appalachian region in the eighteenth century looking for new products for the blossoming European and American medical and drug industry. They made short work of establishing American Ginseng as a productive economic basis of trade with European markets. In the 1750s, the American Ginseng trade was given a considerable increase as Chinese traders began to focus on the import of American Ginseng from the Appalachian region of the United States, as opposed to Canadian or other North American markets (Davis, 2006: 167). Appalachian American Ginseng, along with *Panax ginseng*, commonly referred to as Korean or Chinese ginseng, were sought after for their use in traditional Chinese medicine to treat impotence, nervousness and agitation, lack of appetite, stress, and infection (Boon and Smith, 2004:153). The demand for American Ginseng was so great that tons were exported to China on a yearly basis during the mid-1700s. These actions lead to over harvesting and scarcity of the plant in the late 1700s. This left the Appalachian region of North American as one of the few remaining areas where wild ginseng was produced in enough abundance to sustain the demand; but this area soon became threatened as well. It was only by following the example of Native Americans in the Appalachian region that Chinese ginseng markets began to stabilize and see a sustainable export from American ginseng providers.

Native Americans believed ginseng to be a sentient being that merited respect. When collecting ginseng they placed a signal seed in place of a harvested plant in order for it to replenish the plant's spirit (Dykeman, 1978: 52-55). This practice, along with other aspects of

Native American belief, relevant to cultivation of medicinal plants and harvesting schedules filtered into the ecological knowledge of European settlers. For reasons of practicality, settlers established a sensible means of harvesting commodities from the forests and maintained sustainability in the Appalachian region for current and future generations (Witthoft, 1977: 250). This sustainability came, not only in the form of harvesting practices, but in handing down the knowledge of how to sustain healthy ginseng populations for years to come. The ginseng steward community draws directly on the notion of sustainability as being a shared practice that is expected to be handed down from generation to generation. While interviewing a ginseng steward about how he learned to harvest ginseng he said, "I was taught by my daddy like he was taught by his, and I do my best to teach my boy the same, because I have to keep this alive." Sustaining his knowledge and sustaining the ginseng plant are one in the same. "If I can let my boy know the right way to *seng*, [ginseng] the way I was, then he got this problem of *seng* disappearing beat."

In the 1920s and 1930s, harvesting of American Ginseng was widely promoted by the United States Department of Agriculture as a supplemental income for the impoverished portion of the population. The campaign was widely used in Appalachian regions and illustrated ginseng as money for the digging. The Department of Agriculture disseminated extensive literature to assist people in identifying the plant and how to properly prepare it for sale to local buyers, who in turn sold the wild ginseng to local distributors or exported it to Asian markets. The harvesting scheme designed by the Department of Agriculture continued until the mid-1960s when the United States began to consider the sustainability of American Ginseng, specifically wild American Ginseng. They began discussions toward an international agreement concerning the protection of endangered or potentially endangered species. The agreement was finalized in 1973 and went into effect in the United States in 1975. Today, American Ginseng harvested in the wild is strictly monitored by state fish and wild life agencies and the United State Fish and Wildlife Service under this agreement and in conjunction with additional state and local regulations that further restrict ginseng harvesting. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora agreement is uniquely designed to incorporate

nineteen states authorized to export ginseng. Appendix II of the agreement regulates species that are not currently threatened with extinction but could become endangered through the over exportation of the plants to foreign markets (Johannsen, 2006:146-154).

Statistical data collected over the past decade also indicate that of the four states responsible for the majority of wild ginseng export, three have a forty percent reduction in harvesting levels. West Virginia is among these three. The wild ginseng harvest as a whole has also declined by approximately thirty percent from the total United States export in the 1970s. This decline has continued even though the price and demand for wild ginseng has continued to rise (Chief, 2000: 1). The reason for the prolonged decline in harvesting wild ginseng in The United States and the Appalachian mountain range is to date an elusive matter.

Chapter IV: Methodology

Research Method, Data, Setting, and Self

This research was conducted over seven months of fieldwork in four rural communities of the Coal River Valley region in West Virginia. The valley is centered on a shallow river flowing northwest from Raleigh county West Virginia through the communities of Whitesville, Orgas, Sylvester, and Racine (combined population 1051). The nearest urban community, Charleston, West Virginia (population 50,846), is approximately 40 miles Northeast of the Coal River Valley and holds the title of being the largest city in the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Coal companies in the Coal River Valley are the state's third largest producers of coal, generating an average of approximately 8,000,000 tons annually (Shapiro, 2010). The area has also been known for its contribution to the yearly harvesting and export of Wild American Ginseng, producing the state's fifth largest crop (27,627 tons over the last 30 years) (West Virginia Division of Forestry, 2010).

The data collected in this project were gathered through in-depth, open-ended interviews. The majority of the individuals interviewed have engaged in wild ginseng harvesting for the past 40 years and self-identify as being stewards of ginseng. Ethnographic interviews emphasized the individual's understanding of their communal identity as ginseng harvesters, how they distinguish themselves through boundary creation and maintenance, and how they relate to wild ginseng plant communities. Interviews also engaged in furthering the understanding of activities conducted while harvesting individual's personal background or history, their understanding and perceptions of the local environment, reasons for harvesting wild ginseng and other plants, their understanding and reasoning for wild ginseng's decline, and what is needed to maintain wild ginseng populations. Interviews with each participant also sought to understand the nature of the community by inquiring about how cognizant ginseng stewards are about their community and how they distinguish membership. Individual interviews were conducted with a total of twenty-five individuals. This sample size was used due to the inability to acquire information from additional ginseng harvesters and the small population size. It is a practical issue of conducting this

research that the population is only forty to fifty members strong. The community is also in a state of decline according to the West Virginia Division of Forestry and local environmental activist Ed Wiley (West Virginia Division of Forestry, 2010), (Wiley, 2011). Interviews were, in general, conducted at length and in an open-ended, conversation format, which allowed the participants to present detailed narratives about their experiences and ideas. Some of these interviews lead to follow-up conversations to further clarify and expand on the information previously discussed. Although twenty-five individuals were interviewed for purposes of this research, I continued frequent contact with two key informants who offered their life's experience as wild ginseng harvesters. I spent time in the homes of these two individuals and accompanied them on herbal harvesting outings and recreational events such as hunting and fishing. Participants for the study were found by using snowball sampling. Individual respondents were found by the use of the local social networks, word of mouth, and insight from the local community historians and known ginseng harvesters. The reason for using a snowball sampling approach in this research is the existence of a well-established social network of ginseng harvesters in the Coal River Valley. Use of this network allowed me to connect to individuals who could not be reached by alternate means due to their lack of communication with anyone outside their network.

George Hicks (1992), conducted research into Appalachian culture in 1965 by moving to the North Carolina town of Little Laurel Valley. He also made use of the existing social network to conduct his research. He and his family integrated into the community in hopes of experiencing how the community lived in the same way the locals did. Hicks found, and studied, the local story telling activity as being a key element in understanding aspect of understanding the community.

“At least one each day I would visit several stores in the valley, and sit in the groups of gossiping men or the storekeeper happened to be alone, perhaps attempt to clear up puzzling points about kinship obligations. I found these hours, particularly those spent in the presence of the two or three excellent storytellers in the Little Laurel, thoroughly enjoyable. ... At

other times, I helped a number of local men gather corn or hay, build sheds, cut trees, pull and pack galax, and search for rich stands of huckleberries. When I needed aid in, for example, repairing frozen water pipes, it was readily and cheerfully provided" (Hicks, 1992: 32).

In order to understand another way of life, Hicks immersed himself into the community and became a student of their stories and storytelling. My research utilizes a similar approach to Hicks in that I look at the ginseng harvesting community from an insider's perspective, to the extent that I am able. Although I am a local and am personally known by several participants in my research, I have not lived in the area for nearly twelve years and have only recently returned as a social scientist seeking answers and asking questions. Although I have meet with little opposition during my research, I did spend time establishing my identity to many of the participants by informing them of my family, our history in the area, and my own history while I was away from the area. I also became a student of the harvesters and further narrow my gaze to focus directly on stewards of this community and how they identify themselves through the use of boundaries. As with Hicks, I approached learning about this community by immersing myself into their day to day activity. This allows for deeper understanding of what holds meaning for the community and what is significant to them.

Ethnographic field research is often referred to as "participant observation" due to the ethnographer's involvement with the group or people to be studied and the inherent social proximity the ethnographer has to the group's daily life and activity (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995: 1-2). It encourages engagement into another's life in order to attain what they experience as being noteworthy and significant. It is not conducive to neutrality and inspires an in-depth and expressive approach by exposing the researcher to the social setting of the research. It is in conducting research with participant observation that gives me the fundamental experience needed to address what I have learned about the lives and identities of ginseng harvesters, and how to express their lives, not with numbers or variables that may only be representative of the people, but rather with in-depth participatory knowledge gathered from being a part of their day to

day world (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995: 216). When I came into contact with the first participants of this study, I found myself being asked who I was and what I wanted in a relatively uninviting manner until I informed people of my name, my father's name. I was confronted with the realization that my own sense of identity and community was in question because some individuals in my sample group did not know me personally and viewed me as an outsider. I had to establish myself, or be established, as a local in order to be granted access. The manner in which I classified myself was important to the individuals I wanted to interview. This realization made efforts of analysis into ginseng harvester identity take on a parallel characteristic in which I was not only analyzing them but myself as well (Marcus, 1998: 68).

The significance of my identity became very clear during an interview with an elderly man who explained the importance of knowing who you are. He told of his childhood growing up in the mountains with his eight brothers and sister and the struggles they shared living in a world of poverty. He explained that knowing yourself in relation to where you were from, and your connection to family, was critical in understanding your values. He described the life he lived as having two types of people, "family" and "outsiders." Families were the people who had experienced the same hardships, persecutions, and struggles in their lives that he did. Outsiders were, put simply, the "people who just don't understand and never will, because they've never experienced the evil that men do." During the interview, it became apparent that this "us" and "them" worldview was important to him and that, in his own way, he wished to impart the notion to me. He encouraged and even offered instruction in how I conducted my research. "You need to know these things when you go out and talk to folks around here. Namely sengers, they don't like no outsider college boy out here asking about their crop. You'd be best off to let them know who you are before talking about what it is you're doing." He gave me one last bit of advice as we ended the interview, "Keep this in mind when you're writing all this up in that school book of yours too. You need to tell it like it is from our eyes, that means you too."

I use the turn "local" to describe myself because that is how I was described and introduced to people throughout this study. When being introduced, people would refer to me as

“Brent’s Boy”, in reference to my father or “you know, he grow up on Pigeon Creek, played ball back in the 90s.” My introduction was critical. Without my introduction, I question if I would have the opportunity to talk to the participants in this study or accompany them on many of their outings. Once I was defined by the participants of the study, I was welcomed with open arms and encouraged to ask any questions that I wanted and to participate in activities. The boundaries used by stewards of ginseng both encourage in-group cohesiveness and exclude the out-group influence similar to Buechler’s illustration of the protagonist and antagonist aspects of framing and boundary maintenance (Buechler, 2000: 190). As a member of the community, I was given access to what boundaries are in place and why they are maintained.

Although I do acknowledge my connection to this research, I do not list it as a limitation but rather an advantage. Although my approach may be from the inside looking in, it is also a side that is seldom heard and difficult to obtain. Due to the nature of the prolonged cultural isolation and distrust, many Appalachian residents are reluctant to speak with those who are perceived as outsiders (Erikson, 1976). Having been raised in the area by a known family and partaken of the some of the same activities, I was welcomed as one of their own.

The demographics of the ginseng harvesters participating in the study were living below the poverty line in terms of monetary wealth as defined by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). All harvesters participating in the study referred to themselves as unemployed, although they do maintain a living from money earned from harvesting. This employment status encompassed the classifications of retirees, displaced workers, and disabled workers. Sixteen participants were displaced workers who had not been able to re-acquire employment or a stable income for more than two years. Eight participants were living primarily from government aid or retirement pensions. All of the harvesters who participated in the study used the proceeds from their ginseng harvesting activity to support their personnel economic welfare. Eighteen of the participants used earnings collected from ginseng harvesting as their primary means of yearly income. Eighteen participants engaged in wild ginseng cultivation on their property and the

property of others. Twenty five participants were engaged with wild ginseng harvesting only as a recreational activity or as a means of obtaining supplemental income for use in seasonal spending activity such as holidays.

Additionally, twenty four participants were in their forties or older and all but one individual was male. Fifteen of the participants were married with grown children no longer living with the participant or having no children at all. The remaining ten were divorced with children living with their former spouse. Sixteen of the participants had lived in the Coal River Valley area their whole live, two had lived in the area for the last ten years, and fifteen maintained residency outside the Coal River area but used Coal River as their primary ginseng harvesting location. Participants who maintained residency outside of the Coal River Valley were unanimous in claiming desirable harvesting areas in the Coal River Valley such that they preferred harvesting in Coal River as compared to their home area.

The community of ginseng harvesters and their relationship to their environment was expressed not only as a means of obtaining monetary gain, but also as a partnership with the plant community harboring ginseng. As one such participant put it, "I know my mountain and river and everything in them. Y'all have to when ya live out here." It is the day-to-day experiences, the knowledge that is handed down from generation to generation, and the very place in which the people reside. It is the boundaries the community uses and establishes to identify and distinguish themselves from others. The two individuals focused on in my research show how the ginseng steward community express and are conscious of the boundaries they use and maintain. In the coming narratives, I look in depth at the unique identity of ginseng harvesters together with analysis informed by my experiences with two individuals positioned against a larger sample of research participants.

A Sense of Place: An Expression of the Coal River Valley

The areas of Whitesville, Orgas, Sylvester, and Racine have a rural population of approximately 1051 residents. They live and build homes on the sides of mountains in places

that appear to defy gravity; and yet they are here. The area filled with reminders of religion, coal mining, and the ever present struggle for environmental conservation in spite of the industrialized mining industry. In researching the identity of ginseng harvesters and the boundaries they set to distinguish themselves, it is important to acknowledge the place they call “home” and what aspects are present in their home that may contribute to their identity. A profile of the area also provides a basis for understanding the inclination local area residents have towards the ginseng steward community.

Coal River is situated around Rural Route 3, which is used as the only route of travel for one end of the valley to the other. The road is lined with a number of churches, community centers, and libraries situated along the edge of Route 3. A brief insight into the area assists in developing a broader understanding of the boundaries used and established by ginseng stewards by addressing how those individuals geographic area, and in fact the area itself, contribute to the identity of stewardship.

Route 3: The Road in the Mountains

Traveling through the densely forested mountains Southwest of Charleston on a twisted road, threaded into the contours of the land, are a series of small communities with modest homes, churches, family owned gas stations and a few privately owned restaurants and stores. The communities are arranged narrowly along Rural Route 3 between precipitous mountains and the twisting Coal River as it cuts its way through the land. The communities are distinct yet maintain similarity in their appearance. It is promptly apparent to me that these are coal mining communities, established to support and house workers of the industry. The coal industry is impossible to miss. Mine entrances are scattered throughout the valley leading from Route 3 into the mountains. The roads seem simply to disappear into the wilderness as if they lead to nothing. The mining industry is the primary employer in the area and provides nearly eighty percent of all jobs (Wiley, 2011). Employees of the industry, although troubled by its environmental impact, are dedicated to continued mining in the area and the continuance of their employment in the industry. Local mountaintop removal activist group Coal River Mountain Watch leader, Ed Wiley,

suggested that although local residents disagree with the environmental degradation caused by the mining industry they are reluctant to endanger their employment during the current economic situation. They are also apprehensive of groups or organizations they believe may endanger their employment through their environmental or stewardship efforts (Wiley, 2011).

The mountains are lush with vegetation and thick undergrowth. Blackberry and honeysuckle vines linger on the edge of Route 3 as if there is not enough room for them in the forests. The homes are tidy and decorated with native shrubberies and trees. Vegetable gardens can be seen in the back and side yards of nearly every residence, with their recently planted corn, beans, and tomatoes beginning to sprout. It reminds me of how my mother and father worked diligently to gather and store the garden's harvest before winter. It was an important undertaking, without a bountiful harvest we know it would be difficult to sustain ourselves through the winter. I see many of the same tools and gardening methods being employed in the gardens of Route 3. Hopefully their harvests will be plentiful.

Many of the homes are arranged precariously near the river and have narrow bridges large enough for only one person to cross and connect them to civilization. Most homes are of modest size and stature and are arranged as if to become a part of the surroundings. Although this rural section of Route 3 appears to be in a world of its own, its isolation is only an illusion. It has long been recognized that communities are rarely isolated from political and economic systems of other places and larger constructs of society. Historical and cultural influences are also important influences that affect the most isolated of areas (Appadurai, 1995). Thus, the isolation of Coal River is not as profound as it may appear. Residents here are still inundated with state and national politics in the form of coal mining policy and regulation, ginseng harvesting rules and regulation, and environmental activism against mountaintop removal. Ginseng harvesters must contest with portions of ginseng habitat being eliminated by the mining industry and government rules and regulations that limit both place and times that ginseng can be harvested legally. These issues place the ginseng steward community in direct conflict with the

mining industry and, to a lesser degree, the residents of the Coal River Valley who are employed by the mining industry.

The Church: A Visit to White Oak Freewill Baptist Church

Along Route 3 from Racine to Whitesville, places of worship are prevalent. There are over eighteen Baptist churches and three community centers affiliated with these churches in only a nineteen mile section of road. Many of the churches are accompanied by road signs informing motorists of impending doom and the road to salvation. One such sign reads; "And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, Rev 13:17. What's your credit card number?" The passage encourages thoughts of world domination, power, and greed. It evokes the notion of society as being evil and dominating and inspires local residents to question their own sensibility, or to distinguish themselves from evil. The sign also fosters a sense of separation between those who have large sums of money and those who do not.

The community's church in Orgas, White Oak Freewill Baptist, is a modest building situated near Route 3 in Orgas. I entered the church and sat with Ms. Evens, who was admiring her Bible. She explained that it was given to her by her mother just before she died. Her mother was a midwife in the area for years and apparently was responsible for bringing many of the church's congregation into this world. She was known for her devotion to God and ability to heal those in need. Ms. Evens was fond of talking about her mother and smiled as she told a tale of when her mother helped a man who was covered in poison ivy. Ms. Evens giggled at how the man had come into contact with the poisonous plant but, as she put it, "Ladies don't talk about things like that". She instead described how her mother went into their backyard and picked a plant known for its medicinal effects on poison ivy rash known as Jewelweed. Ms. Evens said that the man was so itchy he could hardly wait to rub the weed all over himself. She recalled just how funny it was to see a man in a frenzy rubbing weed all over himself for relief. Ms. Evens said as she laughed, "But that's who mama was; she helped people when they needed it, even the crazy ones." I could only imagine the stories Ms. Evens had and the memories of her midwife mother. Her fondness for her mother was evident as was her understanding of who she was in

the community. Ms. Evens took great pride in the fact that her mother was an important person in the community because of what she know and what she was capable of. The community knew her as a healer. Ms. Evens expressed great pride in this understanding of her mother and expressed that she too walked in her mother's footsteps if only for a short while. Ms. Evens was a nurse during World War II. She was stationed in Hawaii and was a part of caring for wounded soldiers returning from the fight in the Pacific. She expressed her pride in the fact that she, like her mother before her, helped to heal those in need.

The congregation of White Oak Freewill Baptist Church all appeared to be between the ages of 50 and 90, most were dressed modestly, and many had the appearance of just coming in out of the cold although today was a warm spring day. As the men shook hands with each other I began to take notice of the condition of their hands. They looked hard, rough, and weathered. Many of the men's hands were darkly stained and did not appear to move freely. One man in particular appeared to have difficulty grasping other's hands yet he eagerly offered his hand in friendship. His pain was so apparent that even from across the room I could see the expressions of ache and hurt in his face. Another aspect of the congregation that I was drawn to was their shoes. I am not entirely sure why I started taking notice of the individuals' shoes, but I do believe it was telling of the types of individuals within this congregation. Norms are "the set of expectations concerning the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of a particular group of people" (Hogg, 1988: 159), which are expressed and made relevant in the uniformity of dress and appearance demonstrated by the congregation. The men were often wearing boots that had mud on the sides and around the toes. Often the boots appeared weathered. They had cracks near the toes and the soles were often uneven in appearance as if they had been worn for an extensive amount of time. Many individuals wore sneakers that were once white but had since been stained various shades of green, gray, brown and black from use. Research into intragroup behavior suggests that groups can carry a bias toward those within their group and can be discriminatory against behaviors that are outside the norm (Theiss-Morse, 2009: 67). The dress and actions of the congregation are indicative to normative identification. This notion was soon represented when a gentleman member of the congregation entered the church wearing a black

business suit. He was dressed as if he were prepared to enter a court room or bank and conduct the day's business transactions. The congregation quickly took note of the abnormally dressed man and engaged in enthusiastic jests about the man's dress. The man explained that he was attending a wedding in Charleston after church and wanted to look "presentable." Regardless of their appearance or dress each individual took time to greet everyone who entered the church.

Everyone in the congregation was promptly in place when the pastor approached the podium and the music began to play. Each member of the congregation stood and began to sing, "I'm Going Home with Jesus" in rhythmic and chant-like harmony. As the music ended, the pastor began his prayer. He said, "Lord, we thank you for this glorious day and the people who are here today. We thank you for the gifts that you have given us and we pray that you fill our hearts with your grace this morning." The pastor continued with blessings for parts of the congregation who were hospitalized with health problems and other medical issues then with a concurrent "amen" from the congregation, he began talking about the state of the nation. He discussed the latest controversy surrounding government shutdown and the economy. The reason for this issue, according to him, was the greed for money in our society. He said that God did not care what an individual's status or wealth was in this in this world. The importance to God was the individual's purity of soul. "This world is not intended for the gaining of monetary wealth. This world is a place of trials and tribulations which we must endure in order to be granted entrance into heaven. The suffering and evils of this world are meaningless, as are the temptations and injustices that are a part of our society." The congregation agreed with the pastor as he continued discussing the evil nature of this world and the "fact" that the true path to heaven was not in material things but in believing in Jesus. "The evils of the world are nothing more than a test of your faith!" The pastor progressively increased his tone and inflection with each passing word. He threatened the congregation with everlasting damnation if they partook of the evils this world had to offer and encouraged them to come forth and testify to their devotion in Jesus.

As the congregation began to leave the church, Ms. Evens asked me for assistance to her car. As we walked to her vehicle she said, "You know he's right. This nation has become so interested in money that it's lost its way. It's good to see young people like you who are good people." I smiled as I assisted Ms. Evens into her vehicle. "God bless, she said. Good bye."

Racine Library: Learning about Connection

In discussing the area with a local librarian, I learned about the connection local residents have with their community and with their church. She discussed the community centers and their daily lunches for the elderly. Apparently lunches at the centers are very social events where local residents gather for a good meal and to share the latest news and gossip. Local events are often held at the community centers. One of the most important events held at the centers revolves around a simple mushroom known as a "Molly Moocher." These tastily fungi are harvested in the mountains of the local area by local residents who harvest multiple types of mountain-grown plants. "People come from every part of the river to get a taste of those little guys, and the community centers are the place to be if you want the freshest right from the hills Molly Moochers." The churches in the area are also popular establishments where residents congregate not only for worship but also community events and companionship. There are several churches in the area, all of the same or similar denomination that serve as meeting points for family gatherings, summer softball, and community outreach programs. When asked what kind of outreach or support the churches give to the community, the librarian said, "The churches are good about looking after those in their flock; we take care of our own if they're in need we help." Many of the churches have members who have attended services for more than sixty years, but on occasion, members will get disheartened or "rubbed the wrong way and go to another church down the road."

She discussed ginseng harvesters, particularly older harvesters, as being "keepers of heritage." She views them as individuals who prefer preservation of nature by maintaining the "old ways of life." "They would rather be out hunting in the woods than in town dealing with people and all the problems they bring." Harvesters are thought of as introverted, with more

interest in the plant community than in issues they perceive to originate from society. Although environmental degradation related to coal mining expropriation, and federal or state regulations governing ginseng harvesting profoundly affect their livelihood, they have little interest other than contempt and disgust. The view of the ginseng steward community from local area residents is one of dissatisfaction. Although they are tolerated and somewhat understood, they believe them to be cantankerous and unwilling to socialize with non-ginseng stewards. They are viewed as being antisocial and outsiders in the local area. They are understood to have a strong dislike and contempt for government and government officials. As Royce described in her concept of double boundaries, interaction with the outside is more limited resulting in a lack of shared knowledge between harvesters and the mining industry. This has created a distinct level of contempt and disgust in the harvester community and in the local residents who feel ginseng stewards are antisocial and primitive. "They've been fighting for their plants for so long that now most of them don't even care. They just do what they're going to do no matter what anyone says."

Chapter V: Research Findings

Everything in Moderation: The Stewards of the Forest

It was a mid-March morning; the air was cold and crisp with the distinct smell of frost. As I turned off of the main road, I passed by a covered white bus stop building that had icicles dangling from the eaves. Then I noticed a long narrow field with a road running down the center and small identically built homes arranged in near perfect rows along the road's edge. I remember this place. Airport Bottom is now, as it once was, a perfectly straight and flat stretch of open field surrounded by high Appalachian Mountains on all sides. The field was approximately one mile long and has a rural one lane gravel road bordering a shallow mountain creek. The road and creek run the length of the field and are lined on each side with small modest homes, each having the same appearance and style. At the end of the road sits the only house with a different appearance. It was slightly smaller than the other homes with a tin roof and gray asphalt shingles on the walls.

I pulled into the driveway and parked. Looking into the yard, I could see several planters made from used tires and wash tubs situated randomly between a waist high chain link fence and a front porch with two worn rocking chairs. The planters were each covered in leaves, yet the yard was completely clear. Attached to the side of the home was a wood shed filled with freshly sawed oak and ash waiting to be chopped. Behind the wood pile in the shed was what looks like a work bench, but it was not covered in tools for wood working or home improvement. It had several bundles of hung drying herbs and four three foot square trays covered in ginseng roots. The hung roots and plants were varieties of cohosh, mayapple, and wild grape. As I approached the house, I could smell sawdust with a faint hint of gasoline. Silhouetted in the front door stood a frail elderly man who appeared to be waiting for my arrival. He opened the door and said, "My, my look at you in that big fancy truck of yours." I greeted him with a smile and a hand shake. His hands were small and frail, yet hard, calloused, and covered in dirt. "What a you been up to old timer?" I asked as he shook my hand. "Well you know me, its planting time." As he smiled you could truly see the years in this man's face. His skin seemed to hang as if it was two sizes too

big, and his blue eyes were sunken back into almost cavernous eye sockets. “Come on in; let’s get out of the cold.”

This was the home of Ames, a longtime family friend and well known ginseng harvester in the region. He is a long-standing member of the ginseng steward community who upheld their social views and ideals for years. He is respected in the community as being a dedicated ginseng steward and representative of their philosophy. One member of the community referred to Ames as “the granddaddy of stewardship,” implying a degree of respect and admiration for Ames and his work in protecting the ginseng harvester lifestyle. Ames was chosen for this research for this very reason. He is a pillar of the community. His actions and stewardship ideals are not only representative of the community as a whole, but also lead the rest of the community’s activity. Many times during the course of interviewing members of the ginseng steward community I was encouraged to discuss topics with Ames because of his experience and the communities reverence for his opinion. He has harvested Ginseng for over 40 years, but to ask Ames, he will only smile and say, “I been senging since before seng know what it was.” The connection to ginseng and ginseng harvesting exhibited by Ames as something he has done for a very long time is indicative of each harvester who participated in this research. Every harvester made a comment to the importance of ginseng and discussed its existence, not in terms of a plant or commodity, but as an idea that has been with them for generations. They do not distinguish how long or when ginseng harvesting began, but rather they acknowledge it as something that gives their community a lineage and history relating the plant and the community as having a long standing symbiosis. Ames is now in his mid-seventies and has lived in southern West Virginia nearly all of his life. His father taught him how to survive and even thrive in this area with nothing more than what the mountains provide. Ames has always said that he did not “grow up with anything fancy, but he also never wanted for anything.” His father provided him with the knowledge he needed to live in harmony with the land and instilled a strong sense of responsibility toward protecting the balance of nature. Ames left his mountain home only once in the mid-fifties to join the United States Navy, and as he says, “To see what’s out there.” He was stationed in Japan and Korea for the extent of his military career. He found the culture in the

Orient to be fascinating, particularly how the people practiced medicine. Ames used his time in the Orient to learn from the people and traditional medicine practitioners. Ames said,

“I find it amazing that they do some of the same things my daddy would do. They may use different plants sometimes, but they have the same results. They do things like the Indians did way back when there wasn't a doctor to go running to when you got sick. Back when you needed to know what things did and how to make the mountain cure what ealed you. I haven't been to a so called doctor in twenty years and look at me, I'm still kicking!”

When Ames returned to West Virginia after his military service he took a job as a mine worker with a local mining company. In southern West Virginia working in the mining industry has always been a way of life. Nearly every person has a connection to the industry. Ames, however, did not like working in the mines and felt he would benefit more from working on his own. He disliked how the mining industry treated the environment and resented having to work for them. “All them mining companies want to do is rape the land for all its worth, and they don't give a damn about the damage they do.” He believes that the mining industry represents the “greed” in men, and he is adamant about his disgust. His sentiments echoed the views I heard being expressed in White Oak Freewill Baptist Church and I almost expected to hear someone in the background shout out, amen! Ames is very adamant when it comes to his morality and he considers his views to be reflective of the majority of people who have dealings with the mining industry. “You just talk to anyone around here and see what they think about the mines. I tell ya they hate them, but ya see as a senger I got even more right to hate them.” While being mindful of the people in Coal River, he considers his connection to the plant community as grounds for his position on the mining industry. He believes that his life, and the lives all ginseng harvesters, are threatened by poor environmental stewardship on the part of the mining industry. Ames has a stake in what happens to ginseng and the plant community where it resides, similar to the mushroom harvesters of the American northwest. He survives on the modest income he makes

from harvesting ginseng and the mining industry directly impedes his ability to harvest by destroying the plant communities where ginseng thrives. The money Ames gains from harvesting is, however, the least of his concerns. He has a relationship with the plant community in that he not only uses it as a means of income, but he lives with it and strives to maintain a balance between what he needs and what the plants need. This balance suggests that his relationship with the plant community is symbiotic. He needs it to survive, and it needs him to protect it from greedy attackers like the coal industry. Keeping in mind the concept of protagonist framing and through interviews of other ginseng stewards who portray a similar sentiment on the coal mining industry, the antagonist of ginseng stewards begins to develop. The ginseng steward community views the coal mining industry as being in direct conflict to their ideals and morality. They consider them to be interested in only the monetary wealth that can be obtained from mining the land and having no concern for proper protection of the environment. Stewards also believe that the coal mining industry disregards the sentiments held by the ginseng harvester community leading to their stereotypical view of ginseng harvesters as being counterproductive and a nuisance to mining operations. This notion is indicative of the axis of variation concept purposed by Erikson and supportive of the boundaries created by protagonist framing as being significant to the identity of the ginseng steward community. "The life of the plants is my life too, and when they make up their mind to get the coal under these mountains they don't care what or who they kill to get at it. It's all about the money and nothing else."

He began gathering herbs and selling them to local state sponsored herb dealers for income. He gathered the herbs his father had taught him to identify and learned precisely how to recognize the best time, place, and conditions in which to gather the most profitable herbs. "I've made over twenty thousand dollars a year just on ginseng alone," Ames often boasts. "The trick is knowing when the plant is ready and being patient enough to wait." Ames nurtured his harvesting endeavors into a livelihood. Soon his only source of income was a modest government pension from his military service and his harvested earnings. Ames said, "I've been doing this most my life and been doing good at it too!"

Greed and the Nature of Man

After a cup of coffee and a few minutes of becoming reacquainted, Ames took me outside to show me his latest projects. We made our way to his work bench where a blue cooler was sitting on the ground. He opened the lid revealing a gallon sized plastic bag filled with ginseng seeds. Each year Ames plants several planters full of ginseng seeds near his home. He later uses the sprouts to plant areas where he will harvest in the future. By doing this Ames says he will always have a source of healthy mature plants to harvest. I asked him if he thought it was necessary to plant this way each year, or was it simply his preference. "Ginseng is getting harder and harder to find these days. If I don't plant it myself I'm not going to have enough for the next years." Ames said that by planting new ginseng each year he could give the plant population a fighting chance to become mature and of harvesting age, which is five years. "It takes time and patience, but in the end it pays off." He said that most people do not plant seeds as he does because most are not interested in the preservation of plant species or in managing the species with the welfare of the environment in mind. "Most people just want the money they can get out of the seng right here and now. They don't care about what happens in the future." He discussed money as being the root of this problem. "All people want is money so they can go out and buy, buy, buy. But they don't see the damage they do." Ames uses ginseng to make his living as well, but he maintains strict rules for when to harvest, how to harvest, and how much the harvest. He said there is a difference between "taking" and "managing" ginseng. Taking, according to Ames, is what thieves do, and thieves are "anyone who's out for the money and their own." "People are thieves, companies are thieves, hell even the government is a thief." Ames maintains that there are very few individuals or groups that truly have an interest in living in harmony with the environment and managing it wisely.

The ginseng steward community has a moral code or compass that functions as a continuation of their identity and serves to direct their actions and relationships with the outside world. It is a portion of their protagonist frame that they use to distinguish themselves from outside entities and helps them develop and sustain a strong we-feeling among the community.

They identify those without their same moral code to be exterior to their community and attempt to minimize any contact. They orient their beliefs into what they view as morally good for the plant community and for continuing their way of life. Their moral stance has shaped their identity by creating the boundaries they associate with proper ginseng stewardship and who is practicing proper stewardship. They disagree with the concepts of plant management that are associated with government, or any entity they feel is focused on acquiring monetary wealth. This morality is so strong amongst ginseng stewards that they have almost entirely isolated themselves from the rest of the world in an effort to maintain the moral good of stewardship. They believe that to manage a person must dedicate themselves to insuring they will do what is best for ginseng and its environment above the wealth that can be obtained by harming the plant community or over harvesting. According to Ames, ginseng is interwoven into the environment not only as a part of the plant community in which it resides, but also as an invitation for human exploitation. "People get into the woods hunting seng and don't care what damage they cause. They think that things will just grow back. They think that them picking too much don't effect anything else. Well it does!" Hunger and self-indulgence are the things Ames is referring to. An aspect of human nature that is beyond self-preservation and reasonable need, something this is excessive and filled with desire, often a concept accompanied by a longing for wealth or power. "It's greed that kills ginseng! And the reason all these scientists and politicians don't see it is because their blinded by it to!" Ames takes a spirited stance on the subject of greed as being a key factor in the sustainability of ginseng or any aspect of the environment but also sees it as a primary factor in American society. He also describes himself as a person who understands greed and is able to rise above it in order to achieve the greater task of stewardship. He pointed to his father as being responsible for this ability and said that, as a child, he taught Ames not to be concerned with money or power, but rather to focus on "family and keeping traditions alive because that truly mattered."

He points to a limited few individuals who maintain this view and ability to set aside their greed as being "genuine stewards." He, and other stewards, maintain this distinct concept of greed as being fundamental to who they are and what they stand for. They draw definitive

boundaries separating their perception of stewardship, and greed as being the antagonist to their ideals. They also maintain that greed is a widespread phenomenon effecting local ginseng harvester, the American people, and government officials alike. It is the perpetual hunt for monetary wealth that Ames and other stewards see as disgusting and infectious in all levels of society and they separate themselves from it. Their frame of understanding is that all American society is focused on increasing their monetary wealth and not concerned with appropriate management of the environment or natural resources. This frame of greed is used by the ginseng steward community as an antagonistic indication to their understanding of what appropriate stewardship should be and why they withdraw from society. "A real steward don't care about the money, it's the world that matters." The ginseng steward community is more concerned with living in harmony with the land and the plant community. They are not intent on becoming monetarily wealthy from harvesting ginseng, but rather to managing a symbiotic relationship with the plant community in hopes of both continuing their traditions of sustainable living and providing this knowledge to future generations. This aspect of their community gives them a social capital in the sense that they maintain a profound connection to one another and to the plant community they strive to protect. The social benefit, or wealth, they gain from their community is the knowledge of traditional sustained living, the pride of self-sufficiency, and a link to one another. They trust each other and they rely on each other for companionship, knowledge, and support in their struggle to protect their way of life and the plant community. The ginseng steward community holds a sentiment of isolation and separation from American society in that they have little desire to interact with anyone outside their group. They maintain that their way of life is contradictory to "American greed" in both a moral sense and an economic sense. Ames said while discussing the concept of greed, "We know it ain't important to have money, and we know just how important it is to have a solid set of values and know that you can trust and depend on your fellow man." Ames refers to the stewardship community as a brotherhood. He knows and trusts that the community holds firm to each other because they have the same sentimentality or reliance on feelings about their dedication to sustaining their way of life and their unified aversion to those who focus their lives on gaining wealth.

As Ames discussed the concept of greed and its impact on his life and his connection to stewardship I could not help questioning why he feels the way he does. Do ginseng stewards believe that society is shallow and driven only by their desire for wealth? If this is the case, then what brought them to this conclusion and why has it made such an impression on them? I put these questions aside for the time being because Ames appeared irritated and flushed when talking about greed. I anticipated revisiting the topic at a more suitable time. As things would have it, that time came when I least expected it.

Homegrown Engineering: A Steward's Tale of Trade Sufficiency and Authority

This summer is hot and dry. The ground changes from a loose rich dark brown soil to a hard yellow cracked inhospitable earth not fit for growing anything. As I began my fieldwork in the spring, the Valley was green with newly sprouted wild flowers and weeds. The air was crisp, cold and the rains were cool and refreshing. Things have changed now. The freshness of spring has given way to the heat of drought and dust. "This heat just aren't no good," Ames declared. "We're gonna have to fix us up a way to get water in here or we're a gonna go hungry come this fall." Summer gardening is a ritual that is taken very seriously by Ames. His harvest is used as his primary source of food throughout the winter months. Having a poor harvest would mean not having an adequate amount, and this was not an option. To remedy the issue Ames devised a plan to pump water from the nearby creek into a holding tank near his garden. He intended to use a water pump he obtained through trading a number of his dried ginseng roots to another ginseng harvester who lived on the opposite end of the bottom.

Trade among harvesters is a common occurrence, and Ames delights in the act of bartering, but bartering amongst harvesters is not only about the exchange of goods. It is a social event. Trade gives them an opportunity to interact with one another socially and share stories of what they have done and the plans they have for the future. From a frame alignment perspective, this is one of the points when ginseng stewards develop a congruency or cohesiveness based on the similarity of their frames, or understanding of current events and their collective responses to these events. Trading also provides ginseng harvesters with a means of exchanging capital.

Trade among harvesters is primarily for the exchange and reinforcement of information and ideas. It is also exclusively conducted within the community. Ginseng stewards are adamant about trading only among themselves and will only rarely trade with outsiders. This is a significant factor and representative of the boundaries they maintain. The community limits their interaction with outside influences choosing rather to trade in what they consider being a “safe” circumstance. This limits the interaction the community has with outside influences and often results in a lack of shared knowledge or cross community knowledge. Trade is, however, a reunion that often takes place on a truck tailgate or a front porch and is often accompanied by a glass of ice tea and pleasant conversation. Many of the stories revolve around the latest gossip in the area. Talk of what Mr. X did with Mrs. Y and a shared laugh to “poke fun” and the whole situation for being as trivial as most things are. Other stories, however, are directly correlated to managing the plant community and providing an exchange of knowledge that is used to benefit the community. Trade is a social event that allows harvesters to exchange not only goods, but ideas and information. It is a bonding experience that strengthens their ties to one another as depicted in the concept of double boundaries. Individuals who are a part of the local group acquire a unified understanding of cultural knowledge and meanings. The stories harvesters tell are the engines for this connection. Stories also have a more thoughtful framework that is related to the season’s harvest, the current conditions of the plant community, and the effects of the latest mining activity. The connection stewards have with the plant community can be seen in these stories.

While trading for a water pump, Ames told his fellow steward a story about his latest walk into the mountains near the bottom. The story focused on the fact that during his walk he noticed a lack of acorns near the oak trees. With only a nod and “Hummm,” the man listening to Ames said, “Guess the deer gonna give us trouble this year. I best put out some corn in my deer feeder to keep’em occupied.” As if it was instinctual, the man grasped the reference Ames was referring to and was aware that the local deer populations may not have enough acorns to eat this season. He knew they would turn their hunger on ginseng and other plants. This reference, however, was not needed by either man. Without acknowledgement of how or why, the two stewards

understood the meaning behind the subtlety of Ames's story. They have a shared knowledge of the plant community and link themselves to it by tending to its needs regardless if others understand or not. Ames replied to his friend's plan of feed corn to the deer by saying, "Ya better feed'em. If you don't take care of them ya know the DNR not gonna." The two men laughed at the very mention of the Division of Natural Resources, knowing that they had no intention of dealing with any issues related to the plant community even though it is within their mandate. The stewards believe they are more realistic in their management of ginseng and its community. They believe the DNR is incompetent, and only enforce policies relevant to government gain and not in the best interests of ginseng harvesters or the plant community. They also believe that the DNR does not acknowledge them or their ideas for proper management of ginseng.

Much debate has occurred among the ginseng steward community about how to deal with or interact with the DNR. The community is concerned with the actions of the DNR in relation to ginseng and ginseng harvesting and their perceived inability to properly manage the plant community. Stewards do not believe the DNR has the plant community or stewards best interests in mind. During my research, one steward said that the community should interact directly with the DNR to proactively influence their management practices, but most other stewards have agreed that the DNR is a tool of capitalist gain and have elected to treat them as outsiders. The incorporation of the DNR, or at least positive interaction with them, could have been the beginning of a frame extension for the ginseng steward community to integrate governmental management ideas and practices and sentiments with their own. One steward said during an interview, "If the ginseng community were to incorporate their ideas with the DNR, the community could really get the word out about how to manage the land around here. We're both should be out to do the same things, right?" Although some stewards believe a relationship with the DNR would prove worthwhile, the majority disagrees and regards the DNR as enemies. The ginseng steward community has thus formed a boundary against the DNR and does not interact with them directly. Some stewards do believe that interacting with the DNR would be productive, but ultimately the community has elected to not interact with them directly. A steward who believes a relationship with the DNR would be helpful said, "I think we should work with them, but

that's not how most of us think, so I'm not gonna go against them. I respect the other harvesters. And hell maybe they know something I don't." A strong sentiment of cohesiveness and belonging weighs out in the debate over DNR involvement. Throughout the research community members voiced their views on the DNR but were unanimous in agreeing that the community's stance would be to treat the agency as an outside entity with a government driven agenda. Although my research did not divulge a unified leadership structure within the stewardship community or a profound agenda to distrust all government agencies, there is a unified understanding of among harvesters that isolate the government as being driven only by greed. Findings suggest that the nature of this unification is due primarily to the lack of interaction with outside groups resulting in the stewardship community deriving the majority of their opinions from interactions within their community.

The pump Ames traded for was an old aluminum cast pump that had been used to pump water from a well for years. The pump had a crack in the intake housing and would not pump water, but Ames had a plan for that. "You can still use a welder can't ya?" I told him that I could, and without question gave the old man a smile and started walking to his work shed. Ames and I worked on the pump and irrigation set-up for hours, stopping only to drink water and rub the sweat from our eyes. When the time came for our final test we were both nervous with anticipation. Ames said, "Well hope you knew what you was doing with that welder." I smiled and said, "let's find out." Ames stared the pump and opened the valve. We waited to see if water would flow. The pump hummed and shuck while it ran as if it were performing a ritualistic water dance. We continued to wait and wait. Just as we thought, our work was fruitless, the water began to dribble out the end of the pipe. Soon we witnessed the might of our creation as water gushed from the end of the pipe into the holding tank. Ames laughed clapped his hand together with joy. His garden was saved.

Ames is notorious and revered by the ginseng steward community for inventing, creating or trading for whatever he needed to survive. He once built an automatic cow walker from the remnants of a Volkswagen rear axle and pipe he scavenged from a forgotten waste water

treatment plant near his home. Ames is often viewed by the ginseng steward community as an eccentric old man who lives his life as separated from the rest of the world as he can be. The ginseng steward community, on the other hand, views Ames as a man with extensive knowledge and experience. He is somewhat of an elder for the community, providing ideas on how to be more self-sufficient and how to best manage the plant community. He is respected and valued in the community as someone who represents the moral direction of stewardship and is often sought out for his guidance and wisdom. A steward said while I interviewed him, "You been talking to Ames I hear. Well best ya learn from him than some of them educated idiots, he knows how things are and he'll learn ya right." Ames believes in being, as he puts it, "self-sufficient." He believes that prices of goods in today's economy are over inflated due to the greed of big business and large corporations. To remain as self-sufficient as possible stewards often trade or work amongst themselves, but rarely seek aid or goods outside their community. If Ames does need something that he cannot obtain from another steward, he will send a list of items to town with his niece. He gives her explicit instruction on where to obtain the good, strictly locally owned and operated merchants only. Ames says that this irritates his niece tremendously because it is an inconvenient, but he insists. Among stewards there is a general sense of mistrust and dislike for businesses and people who represent "authority" or capitalism. Being as self-sufficient as possible allows the community to separate themselves from what they believe to be the root of the problem of sustaining ginseng and their way of life. "Capitalist greed" is their opposing interest and intent. Ames and other stewards concur that they have grown into a community that is aware of the authority and power capitalism and money have over this nation, their way of life, and they openly oppose it. This distinction of character and their community is a significant boundary used to distinguish ginseng stewards. They produce the majority of their own food, they have their own tools to build what they need, and they harvest what supplies they can from the forests. They also connect with each other for support both socially and economically.

An example of this communal self-sufficiency occurred while admiring Ames's new irrigation system. Another ginseng steward approached Ames and I in need of assistance. He was covered in dirt, grease, and appeared exhausted from struggling with his broken down lawn

mower. "I been working on this thing all day and still can't get it to run." The man explained what was wrong and what he needed. He said, "I'll be damned if I'll go up to that hardware store for parts. They charge and arm and a leg, and I ain't got time for them anyway." Without hesitation, Ames went to his work shed and obtained the necessary parts and tools to repair the man's lawn mower. "Let's go," Ames said, and off we went to fix what needed fixing. "You have to help people, especially folks that are family like Jim here. He's helped me out more than once."

Ames continued to discuss the need for helping Jim as being fundamental to stewardship. "If we don't stick together then we're no better than any of these yahoos out here that are just out for themselves." The ginseng steward community makes distinct efforts to help their members. They believe that they are alone and forgotten in the world and have only themselves for support. They rarely if ever ask for assistance from outside their community and seldom engage in dealings with non-stewards or businesses. They have developed boundaries based on this notion of solitude and self-reliance and regard individuals and other communities who are unwilling or incapable of being self-supporting and resilient as weak. They also share in the sentiment that outsiders who view their way of life as backward are ignorant and unwelcome in their community. Ames describes one aspect of this as the business industry. He discussed "big business" and the damage it has done to American and American citizens. He believes big business has a relationship with the government that allows them to be overly influential. He uses Walmart as a prime example and he is easily irritated when the topic of Walmart is brought up. "That store is the devil's creation," he said when I asked if he wanted me to get him supplies for his latest project. "The only thing it's good for is taking hard working people's money and giving it to rich folk!" As Ames describes his feelings on Walmart and the business world in general, he becomes more and more enraged. He describes how hard it is for the working class to feed their children while a relatively few reap the profits of their labors due to their position of authority or economic power. He says that the businesses run the government and are only interested in more money.

As Ames continued to discuss his ideals, I began to learn some of the reason behind his frustration. Ames has sufficient reason to dislike government and large corporations. Fourteen years ago Ames bought a 50 acre farm near where he resides at present. The farm was lush with several fruit trees bordering a field of wild clover. He raised ginseng in large quantities in the wooded areas of the land, along with cohosh, yellow root and several other herbal plants that he sold to make his living. On the southern portion of the farm he raised countless rows of potatoes, corn, and beans which he sold at the local farmers market each year. It was his dreams come true. As he describes the memories of his farm, he smiles in remembrance and exudes a sense of peace and happiness until he recalls what happened. Ames owned the land but not the mineral rights to the land. This is a common occurrence in southern West Virginia where mineral rights are often held by coal mining companies or natural gas developers (Wiley, 2011). A mining company conducted a geological survey of the area surrounding Ames's farm and found a large deposit of coal near the surface. Ames was approach countless time by the coal company and asked to sell, but Ames refused. He claimed he was threatened by the coal company and harassed on a daily bases for more than a year. And then one day the harassment stopped. Ames thought he had won, only to learn that the company had been given a land grant from the state to mine all of the surrounding lands near his farm. Within months Ames began to notice a difference in the quality of the ground water and would often have dust and debris slung onto his crops from the continual blasting away of the mountain. His ginseng began to die, his corn would not grow, and the fruit trees began to wither away. He filed complaints with the state and the mining company and received no response. He later sold the land for a fraction of its market value. Disgusted, Ames to this day says that the government betrayed an average farmer to help a corporation destroy the earth.

Memories of the Past

Slowly but surely we made our way up the mountain side. The face was thick with vegetation. Honeysuckle and briars fought against us every step as if they were an occupying force protecting their last stronghold. We stepped over them and under them, around them and

even through them fighting to reach our goal. “Yellow Seng Mountain”, as Ames called it, is situated northeast of the township of Orgas, West Virginia in the remote mountains surrounding Coal River. Ginseng leaves in this area are known for their tendency to turn yellow earlier in the year, making the ginseng stand out brilliantly against other still green herbaceous plants. “When the leaves on any mature plant start to turn, that’s when ya know it’s ready,” Ames declared. The state season for harvesting ginseng begins on September first of each year, but according to Ames, the plants in this area are ready for harvesting nearly a month earlier. Ginseng stewards have a distinct understanding of how ginseng harvesting and management should be conducted. Their knowledge comes not from, as Ames puts it, “A book or an educated idiot,” but from experience gained through years of harvesting. They have learned every aspect of ginseng through the time honored traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation and from their devotion to maintaining these traditions in spite of the modernized world around them. Ginseng stewards maintain a fundamental connection to their roots and to each other by continuing their lifestyle. The knowledge they maintain and the methods they practice to sustain the plant community and their lifestyle is often in direct contrast to state or governmental views on conservation. Findings gathered from interviews with ginseng stewards suggest that the two varying views on conservation are at the root of the ginseng steward communities “us and them” mentality. Government conservation efforts are viewed as antagonistic to the steward’s knowledge of proper practices and rejected. Their frame of understanding and continued maintenance of this boundary is so profound that even when faced with a perceived “good idea” from the government, they still reject it as having an alternative agenda. The knowledge that they keep is, in their perspective, unique to them. They believe that government management practices are not concerned with sustained existence of ginseng, but rather the economic value ginseng harvesting can provide now. Stewards also believe themselves to be an undesired minority by the government and maintain the sentiment of being shunned and not taken seriously. In turn, ginseng stewards have shunned the government and utterly disregard them as being evil. “Ya see they don’t know a thing about when seng should be dug up.” The “they,” Ames refers to the government entities who are in control of wild ginseng harvesting regulations in the state of

West Virginia. "The only way they would know when the right time is if they come in the woods like I do, but that ain't gonna happen!" Ames forms distinct barriers between who he is and those he perceives as external to him. In his view those individuals who are not in constant connection with the environment do not understand or appreciate its existence. "Outsiders," according to Ames, are only interested in exploiting the land for what riches they can extract. They have no sense of conservation and only strive to profit from what they can take in the here and now. "They ain't no different than any other sinner! Only out for what they can get and don't care about nobody else." Outsiders, in Ames's opinion, are morally and ethically barren. Like other stewards, Ames is faithfully religious. He attends church every Sunday without fail and reads from his Bible every night. He contends that having a "strong set" of moral values is critical in today's world and believes that having this set of values is becoming more and rare in American society. His morality is deeply spiritual but focused on his desire maintain proper stewardship of ginseng and his way of life. In his opinion being devoted to a cause, such as ginseng stewardship should be the focus of a person's morality, but that sentiment is fading. "Now a days, all people want to do is watch the TV. They don't care nothing for living a wholesome life."

The nature of stewardship, to Ames and his community, is to live a wholesome life in the "eyes for God." This means living by the Bible's teachings and making a concerted effort to do what is right and just by nature. "People don't care to live that way no more. Not the way I do." Ames finds distinction in his spirituality in comparison to others and often focuses on his distinction as a boundary for identifying himself and his views for living in harmony with the land. A belief in a higher power is ingrained in the ginseng steward community from an early age. Each ginseng steward interviewed during this research stated they have been devout Christians from childhood and that their beliefs play a key role in determining their views of themselves and others. Many community members stated during interviews that having a profound belief in God separated them from the rest of American society, whom they believe to be "lost in wickedness." When asked why they held these sentiments community members, including Ames, said that they base their ideas on observations of people in the media and positions of government or authority. They believe that American society has strayed from a respect and reliance in wholesome

religion values in exchange for a devotion to money. One ginseng steward community member stated that she felt American society was driven only by the desire for monetary wealth. "They warship the dollar," she said. This advocates the struggle ginseng stewards have with American society as being their antagonist in terms of religion. This perceived religious separation has served to further solidify the boundaries they maintain and encourage their separation from the larger societal structure. Ames, and other ginseng stewards, believe outsiders have no respect for the world they live in or themselves. They are only interested in acquiring monetary wealth. Ames, on the other hand, privileges himself a person who understands the environment he lives in and is willing to sacrifice his profit for the betterment of environment and his own spirituality. He believes that outsiders, or non-locals, view his ways to be old-fashioned and unproductive. Ames wants nothing to do with anyone outside of his notion of right and wrong. He prefers to interact only with individuals within the ginseng steward community in the same way Royce described the limited interaction of groups with outside influences.

We continue up the mountain side, fighting our way to a place Ames said would be littered with blackberries. Many people living in the area harvest Black berries from near the roadside as they ripen throughout the summer, but this summer is hot and dry. The berries are very few and people who normally harvest the roadsides are looking elsewhere for their summer berries. The place that Ames and I are going is an abandoned coal wash plant near what was once one of the area's largest mining operations. "Gonna be plenty of berries up here, you wait and see." As we arrived at the wash plant, I had the sensation that I was stepping into a ghost town. Three partial tin and wood frame buildings still stood were rusted and decrepit. There were remnants of the miners who once worked here. Initials carved into the wood, an old leather work boot now half buried in the dirt. One of the tin doors to the main building had been badly damaged and beaten by what appeared to be an axe or pick. Ames explained that this mining operation had been a staple for the local community for generations until it was bought by a larger mining company interested in obtaining the coal through modern mountain top removal techniques. This technique requires fewer employees and the majority of the workers were fired.

Ames said that when they left many were angry and took their frustrations out on the only thing they could.

Each experience with Ames is accompanied by a lesson. On this outing he made his feelings about the coal industry more clear. He believed that the system of government controlled everyone and affected the manner in which the nation does everything. He was expressly concerned with how they have influenced and “given power” to the coal industry. He is concerned that the current system of society is not interested in harmonizing with nature but rather controlling nature in order to profit from it. Ames is in his seventies and says that he has seen this change coming throughout his lifetime and he fears what is coming next. It is very apparent that he wishes to pass on his knowledge and understanding of nature in hopes of encouraging a more harmonious relationship with the environment. He believes that passing on his knowledge is critical to both preserving his way of life and the plant community, which he holds dear.

I began to understand that Ames and his fellow stewards have a profound understanding of their place not only in a high coal producing area, but also in American society. Thinking of Ames and to Huffords work conducted some ten years ago on the impact mountaintop removal has on Appalachian traditions, I began to realize that Ames and his community are not only angry about how the mining industry has damaged their livelihood. They are angry about how people’s greed has taken away their ability to pass on their way of life. Many ginseng stewards maintain the belief that not only America, but the world is being harmed by their lack of respect for traditional views and their inability to allow people to practice their traditions freely. A ginseng steward said, “If only people would pay attention, then maybe they would learn there’s more to life than making the next dollar. Ya can learn a lot from our history and what us old folks know.” To Ames, this is more profound than just taking away his traditions or being faced with a society that does not listen to him; he views it as if society is taking away his ability to give his traditions and ideas to others. Without this ability, Ames believes he, the ginseng steward community, and the plant community with vanish.

“Look here, I told ya,” Ames shouted. On the far side of the largest building stood an entire forest of blackberry vines, all with berries as big as my thumb hanging from every tip and end. We filled two five gallon buckets to the top before leaving to make our journey home. As we made our way back down the mountain I could not help wondering about the site I had seen. The anger and fear that must have been in the minds of the workers who had worked for this coal company for so long only to be betrayed when a new cheaper method of mining was introduced. I wondered how I would feel about a company who abandoned me after giving them a lifetime of work. What I would do if my only means of providing for my family were suddenly destroyed for the betterment of another pocketbook? How this event must have molded the identity of these men and how they viewed the outside world.

The Herbal Opportunist: Gathering Every Last Root

The Gold Rush of Black Cohosh

For reasons unknown to herbal harvesters in the Coal River area, the asking price of several plants increased dramatically in later summer. Prices increased by more than 300 percent in a two month period with no indication as to why. Many harvesters who were normally inactive or moderately active during this timeframe increased their harvesting activity drastically in response to the increased profits they could earn. Black Cohosh was one of the plants with the most dramatic price increase. “I don’t know why they want it so bad and I don’t care. It’s all more money in my pocket.” Mike intended to take full advantage of this price increase and enlisted the help of both his brother and his son in order to completely remove every Black Cohosh plant from a three acre patch, an effort that took them two full days to accomplish. He does not fully understand why there is such a substantial increase in price, but he is well aware of the impact large scale demand for herbs has on him and his income.

Mike is the embodiment of the ginseng steward community’s antagonist. He is a ginseng harvester and opportunist. He is currently self-employed as a harvester and makes his living from harvesting plants that have a market value. He says that he can make far more

money harvesting plants than he can in any other legal profession. He also attributes his ability to maintain his self-reliance and autonomy to his current employment situation. He spends much of his time either in the woods hunting plants or on the phone with area buyers bargaining for more money. Mike does not consider himself a steward of ginseng. Mike's role in this research was originally unclear. He originally presented himself as being someone who did not fit the characteristic ginseng steward frame. In fact, he was thought of as being opposed to the community in many respects. His condition, however, presented a unique circumstance that proved useful in further understanding the boundaries maintained by the ginseng steward community.

As we talked about the latest price increase of cohosh Mike said, "Everyone else is getting rich by exploitation so why shouldn't I?" In his view the time for preservation of ginseng or the plant community is gone. Mike is a strong supporter of ginseng stewardship and its community, but he believes their struggle to maintain the traditions and their conflict with capitalism in general is pointless. "People are only interested in getting that money, and hell I'm not gonna get left behind." He works continuously to increase his wealth by constantly harvesting what the herbal market desires and he gives little consideration to when, where, or how he harvests. "It's not like they care where I get it or how I get it. They just want it!" Mike refers to "they" as a collective term that is representative for his notion of people in a position of power or control not only in the herbal market, but in the roles of government, business, and society. Mike describes "they" as the opposite to ginseng stewards. "They, are the masses of people who have no idea what's going on in the world and don't care to know what's going on." They represent the opposing ideals and sentiments held by ginseng stewards as similarly described by Erikson in the use of the axis of variation. They define the identity boundaries of ginseng stewards by providing the opposing elements which are not ingredient of the steward community. The ginseng steward community is distinctly opposed to the "they" from a moral prospective. Stewards believe that "they" do not have a moral direction or concern when considering the sustainability of the environment or traditions. Mike does not consider himself to be one of the "they," but he is ruthless in his pursuits for capital gain. He has earned a reputation among ginseng stewards as

being an outlaw or sellout. Mike, on the other hand, says that he is only helping the unavoidable. “You can try and try to fight for and protect the plants and mountains around here, but nobody cares. It’s just a matter of time before they kill it all anyway, so why not take what ya can while ya can!” Mike has no reservations in what he does or how others view him. To him the system of government, business, and society in America are fixated on the acquisition on money by any means, fighting the system is fruitless. But Mike did not always have this view.

I knew Mike as a young man and his views were much different. We went to the same high school, and although we were not close friends, we knew of one another. In his youth Mike was an activist fighting for any reason he could find. He protested mountaintop removal, the timber industry, and even animal testing. He was also highly supportive of the ginseng steward community. His life revolved around his struggle to “make the world a better place,” but Mike’s struggle is now over. “I would fight the government at the drop of a hat twenty years ago, but it don’t matter none. You can’t win. In all those years I didn’t change anything.” Mike, like the ginseng steward community, is disgusted with America and the greed they believe it is based on. He is disenchanted, beaten, and assimilated into what he refers to as “the system.” He sees American society as a system that is driven by a desire for monetary wealth. Mike frames his understanding of American society on the notion that greed is the key driving force behind the political system and industry. His sentiments on government revolve around a concept of power that sees and uses the American people as tools from monetary gain. The power is absolute and, according to Mike, unavoidable. “You can’t maintain traditional values, you ether throw them away and become another pawn or ya get left behind.” In his view, he has no alternative but to integrate into the system and give it what it wants, exploitation. Mike has altered his frame of capital and understanding of proper stewardship. He defected from a lifestyle dedicated to the reform of society in exchange for the very system of capitalism that he and the ginseng steward community had struggled against. This aspect of Mike allows for a greater understanding of the ginseng community by illustrating how individuals within a group can reframe their identity into a new or altered context.

Before harvesting the three-acre Cohosh patch, the hillside was lush and green. The plants stood tall and healthy supporting an array of other plant and wildlife, but the profit to Mike was much more than he could resist. After harvesting, the hillside area appeared scared and devastated. The area was unrecognizable, only loose remains of topsoil and broken roots scattered from top to bottom. As fate would have it, two days after the harvest, a heavy rain washed away the loose dirt left behind from the harvesting activity, along with any habitat that was left. The broken earth fell into a nearby stream contributing to the season's most devastating flood. Several homes were left with water damage, including Mike's.

I arrived at Mike's home the day after the disaster and anticipated helping with the clean-up. I expected there to be extensive work to be done, but when I stepped out of my truck I heard, "There he is! Get over here and get a shovel we ain't got all day." It was Ames accompanied by Jim and two other ginseng stewards who lived nearby. "Come on and help with this mud in here and when you're done get out there and see if ya can fix up that bridge support cable." The men were working diligently to clear the mud and debris from Mike's home. I grabbed a shovel and joined the work. The mud layered the floor of the house and collected in clumps around heaps of broken furniture and appliances. The effort was difficult and time consuming, but Ames and the other stewards did not falter. They worked the entire day without stopping. I was baffled and astounded. Why help a man who stood for everything you hate and despise? What reason did Ames have for his actions?

Ames and Jim are sitting on the tailgate of my truck scraping the mud from their boots. Tired from a hard day's work, the two are now silent with fatigue. I walk up to the truck bed, throw my arms over, and look at the two men with anticipation. I want to know why these two old stewards have worked all day to help a man who goes against everything they believe, but before I can ask, Ames says without looking up, "You want to know why we been helping Mike don't ya." After spending nearly eight months with Ames and learning about his ways and who he is I suddenly realized that he has learned about me too. Although I know Ames considers me to be an insider, and I believe that he views me as his apprentice, I see now that he also understands

me as a social scientist, which does not seem to concern him. He believes that by sharing his story he would in turn share his story with a world that he has separated himself from. He once said to me, "People need to know about their past and who they are." I now realize that just as I have used Ames for his knowledge and experience, he has also used me to spread his way of life to outsiders. Without lifting his weary head Ames says, "It's not right to not help a man in need, no matter who he is. Mike might not believe in what we do and think, but ya got to understand he's lost a lot in his life and we need to do what's right to help him now. He's part of use too." I have no need to question Ames further on the matter. His words are direct reflections of his morality and his voluntary efforts to help clean Mike's home speak even more clearly.

Although he dislikes what Mike stands for, Ames harbors him no ill will. This sentiment is also maintained in the ginseng steward community's view of society. Although they maintain rigid boundaries against what they believe American society to be, they harbor outsiders to their community no threat. Their identity is centered on a desire to sustain their stewardship existence and, part of that existence, is in their desire to also steward society to a degree. The way of stewardship is not only in taking care of what the steward holds dear, but in taking care of what or who needs cared for, even if that means helping the herbal opportunist. Mike is still thought of as a member of the community even though he has chosen to abandon the ways of stewardship and embrace a lifestyle focused on monetary gain. The community of ginseng stewards, although offended by what Mike represents, is based on a system of morality that encourages assisting those in need. Although ginseng stewards do maintain a rigid set of boundaries associated with their understanding of American society as their antagonist, these boundaries do not include a desire to do harm. It is a boundary set designed to separate their lifestyle from outsiders but also to demonstrate to outsiders that they are capable and knowledgeable of profound actions of stewardship. This aspect of the stewardship community illustrates how boundaries can be used in the context of protagonist framing to identify the schemata of interpretation that enables the ginseng steward community to locate, perceive, and label themselves in relation to the larger scope of society by demonstrating their community's in-group cohesion is strong enough to transcend differences if it means maintaining their core boundary understandings. Ames and the

other stewards helping Mike did so without being asked or receiving payment. Ames later told me, "If we were to treat people that way we're treated then nobody would care about anyone. Everyone would be out of number one." The ginseng steward community is dedicated to a lifestyle of fellowship and harmony with all things, even if it means helping the antagonist to their morality and lifestyle. The boundaries they establish and maintain are used directly to separate themselves from entities of power and those with a desire for capital gain, but they also emphasize the stewards need to rise above the concept of greed and focus on the more prominent sentiment of helping their fellow man. Ames said, "I hope in some way we rub off on people." He hopes that if outsiders see how the ginseng steward community is capable of putting their ideals aside, maybe they too will reconsider their actions of greed and environmental degradation.

A Fishing Trip to a Hidden Pond of Memories

I was told that today I would be given insight into one of the world's best kept secrets, a wonder of all mankind, the place that held all the answers. This was how Mike described our early morning destination. We were driving to his very own secret fishing spot, which, according to him, was famous for having some of the area's largest catfish. The location, an obvious secret, was located near an abandoned coal preparation plant secluded from view by years of unattended underbrush and overgrown weeds. To reach the shoreline was an accomplishment in and of itself. Mike used a pair of pruning shears to trim the branches that were in the way as he stomped a path through the vines and rosebushes. "This is the best fishing hole you'll ever find, he said with a smile. He went on to talk about how his father had brought him here when he was a boy. The two of them would fish for catfish, or as Mike said, "Mudcats." They would try to catch two or three fish large enough to feed their family for a few days. Mike explained that his father's fried catfish recipe was amazing. He used basic cooking ingredients. Mike explained that his father told everyone he used cornmeal, flour, salt, pepper, and garlic as the ingredients for his recipe, but according to Mike, his father had a secret. "He never would let anyone see him mixing up the batter, but I snuck a peek one day and seen him putting cayenne pepper in there." "I never did tell him I knew, thought it best not to." Mike respected his father as a man who had

very little in life but was struggling to feed his children and give them a suitable home. Mike's mother died in a car accident when he was a child, leaving his father as the only family provider. The accident which took Mike's mother from him involved a semi-truck transporting coal on a narrow stretch of Route 3. According to Mike, the truck was over its weight capacity and could not navigate the twists and turns of Route 3 easily. The driver of the truck entered a blind curve left of the center line and hit Mike's mother head-on. She was killed instantly. Prior to his mother's death, Mike's father worked as a coal miner, but after losing his wife, he decided to leave the mining industry behind forever. He blamed the coal companies for the death of his wife. Mike explained,

“The coal companies don't give a shit. All they want is their coal and they want it as fast as they can get it. That's why they load them trucks so heavy. They don't care who they hurt, they just want to money.”

When Mike's father quit working in the coal mines, he reverted back to the agrarian lifestyle he was taught by his father. He focused his farming efforts on raising ginseng and other profitable herbs in order to provide for this family while also working part-time as a carpenter. “Seng is worth more than about any other plant out there and daddy knew it.” Mike said as he remembered his father. “He knew that if he could raise enough of it and keep thieves out of it he'd have enough to feed us kids.” Living a lifestyle focused on a sustainable supplemental income was the best means of support Mike's father could give. He instilled in his son the ability to be self-sufficient and dedicated to living off the land. Mike's father cultivated nearly 20 acres of forest grown American Ginseng for 25 years; providing enough of a supplemental income to feed, cloth, and house Mike and his two siblings until they were grown. Mike said in a proud and confident tone, “We never did have much but then again we didn't need much the woods couldn't provide, and we got by just fine.” Mike looked at the pond blankly when I asked how his father was now. “He died last year from black lung and the family died with him.”

Black lung is a form of cancer often found in coal miners who have been exposed to the coal dust in and around the mines. I now began to understand Mike's story. He fought his whole

life to inform the world about the plight people living in the shadows of the coal industry were experiencing, only to have everything taken from him by the entity of power he so hated. At a young age, and with the guidance of his father, he had allied his beliefs and ideals with ginseng stewards for support and an exchange of social capital provided as an exchange of knowledge, companionship, and a common antagonist. This bond strengthened both his ties to what he stood for in fighting against power and industry and the connection to sustainable living he obtained from his father. When Mike later lost his father to the same industry that took his mother, he turned away from the ginseng steward community and their sense of morality against greed in frustration. The boundaries that he knew and maintained as being fundamental to his identity as a ginseng steward and activist were replaced by a sense of loyalty to the antagonist component of his previous identity. Mike has a unified understanding of the cultural knowledge, boundaries, and meanings associated with ginseng stewardship, but he no longer trusts in them. Mike may attribute his father's and mother's death to the coal industry, but he also holds resentment for the ginseng steward community for their failure to act more proactively against the industry. Mike said, "They know what needs to be done, and they know that if they don't fight for their traditions and land it's all gonna be taken by the coal companies. They fight, and they fight hard, but it's not enough." Mike's answer about his father's death was quickly followed by silence. He had no desire to continue the conversation.

I realized what Ames was talking about when he said Mike had "lost a lot." Not only had Mike lost his parents, but he had lost his connection to his family and the community he loved. I later learned that Mike's father was an active member in the ginseng steward community. He worked hand in hand with Mike, helping him fight against mountaintop removal and the destruction of plant community habitat by the mining industry. Without his father's support and guidance, he had no desire to fight for ginseng or any other cause. Mike later said, "I wish I had the heart to fight like Ames and Jim and Bill do. But I just don't have it in me anymore. Best I can do not is make sure my boy is taught right and has what he needs to survive. Maybe he can pick up where I fell." Although Mike is well aware of the definitive boundaries stewards use to distinguish themselves in terms of greed, morality, and tradition, he has given up his struggle in

maintaining a connection to stewardship but still maintains hope that he has imparted his father's wisdom on to his son.

A Drive to Redemption

"We're gonna run this load down to Kentucky, they been paying even more down there. Ya want to come?" Mike asked me as if he already knew the answer. Mike, his son and I loaded six 50 pound feed sacks of cohosh into the back of his truck and off we went, bound for Kentucky and new found riches. As we traveled, Mike's son asked me about what I was studying. I explained my research and some of the classes I had been taking to which he nodded and said, "I been saving my money to go to school in a couple of years. Been thinking about maybe studying biology or environmental science." Mike chimed in and explained that his 18 year-old son had always been extremely intelligent and had expressed an interest in working with the local ecology. "I'd like to study watersheds, the young man said. "I think if people spent more time understanding how water works in the landscape we wouldn't cause as much damage to our water supply." The young man continued discussing his ideas on water, water conservation, and environmentalism in general. He presented ideas not unlike ideas that I had heard in college seminars and classrooms. He was collected, thoughtful, and well versed on the condition of the watersheds in his area. He discussed effects of mountain top removal and the effects it had on water quality in Coal River with the precision and knowledge of a college educated environmentalist, ready to change the world.

This was the first time I had an opportunity to spend time talking to Mike's son. His thoughts took me by surprise. I did not expect to have such an enlightened conversation while on this trip to Kentucky. He was concerned for the wellbeing of the environment and had plans for doing his part in protecting it. He had explicit views on the damage mankind had inflicted on the environment but also on ways mankind could repair some of the damage done. He discussed subsistence living and a concept of returning to a more localized agrarian way of life. Many of the ideas Mike's son discussed I had heard many times before from the ginseng stewards that I interviewed. He was filled with same sentiments of living a lifestyle dedicated to environmental

stewardship, and yet he was focused on obtaining an education from a university. It is not common among stewards to have a college education. Many stewards considered attending college to be supportive of America's fascination with greed. Ginseng stewards believe that the college system is one of the government's largest greed focused systems. They believe that universities and the education system in general are products of societies desire to attain more monetary wealth. Ames once said, "Why do ya think that big university you go to has things like business degrees?" Ames elaborated, "It's because that place is nothing but a machine build for turning out new tools used to make the government more money." As with most things related to the government or power, the ginseng steward community distrusted and disliked them, but Mike's son had plans for integrating some of the morals maintained by stewards together with his father's understanding of capitalism. Mike's son is in many ways the new generation of ginseng steward. He has relinquished the older generation's established boundaries and embraced a new mentality that incorporates the knowledge of stewardship given to him by the ginseng harvester community and an understanding of American society that permits him to integrate with the society. This combination may be what the old, like Ames, and the distraught, like Mike, have hoped for. He sees both sides to the boundaries maintained by ginseng stewards, and he bridges them. He made several comments separating who he perceived himself to be from what he referred to as "the masses." When asked who the masses were he said, "You know, all those people who are more interested in watching Charlie Sheen go nuts than making sure their world is gets taken care of. Most people care more about Hollywood than the environment." At 18 years old, this young man had a defined perception of who he was based on his own observations of pop culture and a perceived disregard for the environment by the world around him. Mike smiled as the young man continued. He was proud of his son and the man that he was becoming. Although Mike may have strayed from stewardship, he deliberately instilled the concepts of stewardship in his son. Mike had groomed him in hopes that he will take up where Mike could not and fight against what he, and apparently his son, define as wrong. Mike has passed on his knowledge of nature, and his distinct definitions of morality, greed, and tradition to

a son he hopes is the next generation of stewardship. Maybe Mike is not as far detached from his community as he thinks.

Chapter VI: Discussion

The analysis and contribution of this research illustrate how boundaries and protagonist framing can be used to identify the schemata of interpretation that enables the ginseng steward community to locate, perceive, and label themselves in relation to the larger scope of society. This contribution is accomplished by drawing attention to the two sided nature of boundaries and the impact such boundaries have on the identity of a community. Boundary identification is not used in the context of understating the differences between groups, but rather, to isolate how groups adhere to the boundaries they create as being indicative of their identity. This identification is done by isolating the protagonist nature of the boundaries maintained by the group in conjunction with a perceived antagonist. The identification is further emphasized by the double boundary concept that highlights the distinction between groups and how they tend to limit their interaction with outside influences, and choose rather to remain “safe” within their own bubble of normality. In addition, the axis of variation is utilized as a means of emphasizing boundaries as the dividing point between opposing communities and provided the isolation needed to demonstrate boundaries as identifying factors of the ginseng steward community.

The research further focuses on boundaries by highlighting what is relevant to the ginseng steward community and by demonstrating what they view as being “in frame” or “out of frame” through a series of ethnographic narratives. These boundaries that have been identified relate a definitive “us and them” mentality developed and exhibited by the ginseng steward community, which is telling of what is relevant to the community and what governs their identity in relation to the larger context of American society. The community has a profound sentiment of morality that dictates their sense of purpose in providing appropriate stewardship to the plant community they protect, as well as, obligating them to protect and help those who they perceive as antagonistic to their existence. They find American society to be driven by monetary greed and a thirst for acquiring political or monetary capital; where as they focus on maintaining their own social capital by looking inward to their community as a support function. They adhere to the notion that they are self-sufficient in their community and that their views exclude them from the

greater social unit because of their focus on proper stewardship without the influence of capitalism. The boundaries upheld by the ginseng steward community serve to define them as a cohesive group dedicated and bound by their adherence to an “us and them” mentality that distinguishes their existence as being outsiders to the norm. Yet their morality and devotion to their ideals drives them to exude stewardship even in terms of their opposition. Although they are seen as cantankerous, ill tempered, and against capitalist influence, they still understand the true nature of stewardship and who they are.

Chapter VII: Limitations and Implications

The study does not address the influence from Asian markets on wild ginseng harvesting or American ginseng market production even though a distinct relationship does exist between the two marketplaces and industries. There are unique aspects of supply and demand from Asia that strongly affect American markets and harvesting practices. The study is also focused on the production of wild ginseng and not cultivated ginseng. The reasons for these limitations are to ascertain the relationship wild ginseng harvesters, primarily ginseng stewards, have with the plant, the environment supporting the plant, and especially the boundaries that identify them as ginseng stewards. This distinction is accomplished by drawing attention to the two sided nature of boundaries and the impact such boundaries have on the identity of a community. To further focus the efforts of this study, only the area of Coal River was utilized as a research location. The reasons for these limitations are because, West Virginia is the third largest producer of American Ginseng in the nation, and Coal River is one of the largest producers of wild ginseng in the state of West Virginia. Coal River is also an area with rich historical data and controversial activity in dealing with the coal mining industry and government entities. The industrial and environmental influence coal mining and mountain top removal have in the Coal River area lead to communal reprisal, protest, and anger on the part of local residents. The controversial and antagonistic relationship Coal River residents have with the local coal mining industry, and its degradation of the environment that supports wild ginseng habitat, makes for a unique view of the significance wild ginseng has on local people that have historically produced the product on a large scale.

Chapter VIII: Conclusion

It is now late September, well into the ginseng harvesting season. My two sons and I are once again in the woods making our way to the ginseng that we planted in the spring. "I wonder how much it's grown dad." The two of them run far ahead, swinging sticks like swords and screaming make-believe battle cries. "I bet it's so tall I'll have to chop it down with my sword," my youngest son said. "I can cut it down to size!" I explained that our ginseng was not going to be that tall. We would need to ensure the plants were tended to for at least three years before reaching maturity. My youngest son asked, "Is that a long time, dad?" Time must be such a trivial thing when you are four years old. Yes, I told him. It's almost as long as you are old. "Wow, that is a long time," he said with widened eyes and an up-turned brow.

The boys reached the planting site first, but instead of shouting and talking about the plants, they stood silently. "Where is everything dad?" I did not fully grasp what my son had discovered until I caught up to them. The plants were gone. Not a single ginseng plant was left in our planting. My oldest son said, "Where did it all go, dad, did the deer eat it?" For a moment, I thought he was right, surely an animal did this, until I noticed the boot track in the freshly dug soil. Our ginseng plants had been stolen by someone poaching on our property, and by the looks of the tracks and fresh dirt, the crime was recent. Without showing it to my children, I was outraged. How could a person have the audacity to take our ginseng from a planting bed that was so near our home? Everything about the theft sickened me, but then I remembered something that an old man told me.

My oldest son said, "Dad, why would someone take our plants?" I collected my thoughts and said, "Son I don't know why someone would take our plants but maybe he needed them more than we do. It's wrong not to help a man in need, no matter who he is or what he's done. He might not believe in what we do and think, but we have to try and understand his reasons." For a moment, I was not sure if he understood what I was trying to say, but then he looked at me intensely and said, "It's because we have to protect the woods, dad, and he's part of the woods too." The only answer I had for my son was a smile.

Stewardship is not as straightforward a concept to understand, but it is a concept that, if followed strictly, provides a greater understanding of our humanity and the need to protect not only what is dear to us as individuals, but what is necessary for us all. Although we may be viewed as outsiders or view others as opposition, to follow a path of true stewardship is to set our distinctions aside and simply do what is right.

Appendix

IRB Approval Letter



Office of Research Integrity
 Institutional Review Board
 401 11th St., Suite 1300
 Huntington, WV 25701

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205

IRB2 #00003206

February 25, 2011

Brian Hoey, Ph.D.
 Sociology/Anthropology Department

RE: IRBNet ID# 216106-1

At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Hoey:

Protocol Title: [216106-1] Decline of Wild American Ginseng in Appalachian Communities:
 An Analysis of Cultural Distinction using Supplemental Income Sources in an
 Area of Environmental Degradation

Expiration Date: February 17, 2012**Site Location:** MU**Type of Change:** New Project APPROVED**Review Type:** Exempt Review

In accordance with 45CFR46.101(b)(2), the above study and informed consent were granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Chair for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire February 17, 2012. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

This study is for student Eric Edwards.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Bruce Day, CIP at (304) 696-4303 or day50@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

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