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"HOME IS MORE THAN JUST A PLACE": ORAL PERSONAL NARRATIVE STORYTELLING IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA

Brandon Jent

University of Kentucky, lil_chikn_byte92@yahoo.com

Author ORCID Identifier:

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2251-3988>

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Brandon Jent, Student

Dr. Jennifer Cramer, Major Professor

Dr. Allison Burkette, Director of Graduate Studies

“HOME IS MORE THAN JUST A PLACE”: ORAL PERSONAL NARRATIVE
STORYTELLING IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Linguistic Theory and Typology in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

Brandon Jent

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Jennifer Cramer, Professor of Linguistics

Lexington, Kentucky

2020

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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2251-3988>

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

“HOME IS MORE THAN JUST A PLACE”: ORAL PERSONAL NARRATIVE STORYTELLING IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA

This project seeks a linguistic understanding of oral personal narrative storytelling in Central Appalachia, particularly as it manifests in Eastern Kentucky, with aims of providing insight into the Appalachian storyteller trope (e.g., Montgomery 1998). Structural and discursive elements of oral personal narrative were identified and positioned within their sociocultural context through discourse analysis and narrative studies. Data were collected from story circles, a methodology first implemented in cultural and community organizing spaces in the South and throughout Appalachia (Roadside Theater 2014, Junebug Productions n.d.). The collected stories were transcribed and analyzed through a discourse analysis framework that combines discourse pragmatics, sociocultural linguistics, and narrative analysis (e.g., Grice 1975, Ochs 2004, Bucholtz and Hall 2005, Davies 2008, Falconi and Graber 2019). A post-mortem survey established a baseline for rootedness, or place-based identity (Reed 2016), as well as demographic information, task comfortability, and self- and peer-evaluation. The author posits Central Appalachians approach oral personal narrative structure and performance in a stylistically unorthodox manner. Several potential explanations for the prevalence of the storyteller trope in and outside of the region are offered, limited by their need for further study.

KEYWORDS: Appalachian Englishes, Central Appalachia, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, sociolinguistics, storytelling

Brandon Jent

(Name of Student)

May 8th, 2020

Date

“HOME IS MORE THAN JUST A PLACE”: ORAL PERSONAL NARRATIVE
STORYTELLING IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA

By
Brandon Jent

Dr. Jennifer Cramer

Director of Thesis

Dr. Allison Burkette

Director of Graduate Studies

May 8th, 2020

Date

DEDICATION

To my mother, my family, my friends, my community, my region, and to all Appalachian mountain peoples past, present, and future: I am here, in every sense of the word, because of y'all. I dedicate not only this thesis, but my life and its work to the protection, stewardship, and betterment of our home for as long as I possibly can. Until my hand is forced or my last breath is drawn, my place is at home.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is of immense personal importance to me to first acknowledge that this thesis was written on ᑕᑦᑰᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦ and Shawnee lands and submitted to an institution on Osage, ᑕᑦᑰᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦ, Shawnee, Adena, and Hopewell lands. While Indigenous issues have not been addressed in what is to follow, I refuse to write about language, place, identity, and belonging in Appalachia without remembering and lifting up the original and rightful guardians of the mountains...their languages, their communities, their stories, their hardships. I urge not only linguists but all humanities and social science scholars on Turtle Island and beyond to reflect on how you and your respective fields of study interact with this. I also encourage you to pay tribute not just in words, but with appropriate actions. It is my intention to do the same.

The number of people that have supported me on this journey are innumerable; while I cannot mention them all here, I hope to be able to do so in person. To my participants, thank you for trusting me with your stories. I hope I have done right by each of you, as well as our communities and our region. To my Chair, Dr. Cramer, thank you for over a decade of instruction, mentorship, and encouragement. You have now guided both my first research project as an undergraduate and my last one as a graduate student at UK, with countless more in between, and this thesis is a testament to your dedication, skill, and integrity as an educator. To my committee, Dr. Barrett and Dr. Lauersdorf, thank you both for your years of instruction and guidance as well. To the late Dr. Michael Montgomery, thank you for the warmth and sense of home you gave me from the moment I met you. Thank you for helping to pave the way: you have and will continue to inspire Appalachianists for generations to come.

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INTRODUCTION

The trope of the Appalachian storyteller is well-known both in and outside of the Appalachian region, so much so that it is internalized by many Appalachians as part of their regional identity, a cultural marker of Appalachianess inherent to those who call the mountain range their home. While it is certainly true that Appalachia has a rich heritage of oral storytelling traditions, how did this trope come to be, and can it really be argued that all Appalachians are talented storytellers? How do Appalachians share stories about themselves and others? What discursive, narrational, or other features are characteristic of Appalachian storytelling, and are these different from those used by the rest of the US?

This project seeks an understanding of oral personal narrative storytelling in Central Appalachia, particularly as it manifests in Eastern Kentucky, with aims of providing insight into the Appalachian storyteller trope (e.g., Montgomery 1998). Structural and discursive elements of oral personal narrative are identified and positioned within their sociocultural context through discourse analysis and narrative studies. Data are collected from story circles, a methodology first implemented in cultural and community organizing spaces in the South and throughout Appalachia (Roadside Theater 2014, Junebug Productions n.d.). The collected stories were transcribed and analyzed through a discourse analysis framework that combines discourse pragmatics, sociocultural linguistics, and narrative analysis (e.g., Grice 1975, Ochs 2004, Bucholtz and Hall 2005, Davies 2008, Falconi and Graber 2019). A post-mortem survey establishes a baseline for rootedness, or place-based identity (Reed 2016), as well as demographic information, comfortability with the task, and self- and peer-evaluation. I

posit Central Appalachians approach oral personal narrative structure and performance in a way that is stylistically unorthodox. I offer several potential explanations for the prevalence of the storyteller trope in and outside of the region, limited by their need for further study, ranging from pragmatic cooperativity and narrative competency to socialization through narrative.

This thesis is organized into the following chapters, which begins with this introduction: chapter one is a review of the literature most pertinent to this study; chapter two explains the methods implemented; chapter three is data analysis; chapter four is discussion and implications; chapter five identifies limitations and possible avenues for further study; and the last chapter is a conclusion.

1. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

1.1. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND NARRATIVE

Linguistic analysis of narrative has been longstanding; in fact, narrative was among the first genres analyzed in linguistics (Johnstone 2015, p.635)¹. Johnstone attributes the early phases of structural narratology to the works of Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss, both of whom propose universal features in construction and content of folklore and myth. Propp (1968) details a universal structure composed of character functions that are more or less predictable (Johnstone 2015, p.636); Lévi-Strauss (1955, 1964, 1966) explored meaning as it pertained to myth, positing that all traditional narrative boils down to a select number of basic themes (Johnstone 2015, p.636). These early attempts at universality in narrative construction mirrored generativist

¹ I turn to Johnstone (2015) for a comprehensive first glance into the field.

linguistic scholarship of the time, namely that of formal syntax and semantics, and eventually lead to the notion of a distinction between the events of a story and their presentation. Benveniste (1971) outlines this as the *histoire*, or story, and the *discours*, or discourse, respectively (Johnstone 2015, p.636).

Arguably the most influential work on narrative analysis in the English-speaking world is Labov and Waletzky (1977), dealing with personal experience narrative (PEN), referred to in this thesis as oral personal narrative storytelling. Akin to Propp's attempts to uncover universalities in folklore, Labov and Waletzky proposed an underlying structure of "narrative clauses" in oral narrative that Johnstone summarizes as "...[a clause] that cannot be moved without changing the order in which events must be taken to have occurred" (Johnstone 2015, p.637). Clauses can either be referential (referring to the elements of the story itself, such as characters and events) or evaluative (referring to the reasoning behind the value of telling and listening to the story). The minimum requirement for a simple narrative in this analysis is to have at least two of these clauses; a more complex narrative can include "free clauses" or sets thereof. Johnstone gives the following as an outline of the six clauses, their functions, and a general order of appearance that, according to Labov and Waletzky, typically appear in a "fully developed narrative": abstract, a beginning summary of the narrative to be told; orientation clause, or the introduction of characters and setting; complicating action, the series of events that build to the climax of the narrative; the result or resolution, the release of the tension of the climax; evaluation, a statement or statements from the narrator to the audience indicating the value of telling and listening to the story; and coda, a clause or set of

clauses that end the story, summarize it and/or connect it to the present day (Johnstone 2015, pp.637–638).

Labov and Waletzky’s work does not come without criticism. Johnstone (2016) argues that it favors a certain genre of narrative and underscores the importance interlocutors and other extranarrative factors play in shaping story. That said, the structure of narrative as it pertains to its functions – and the notion that narrative, like language itself, is subject to order and structure – goes largely uncontested (Johnstone 2015, p.639).

The above texts represent a historic split in scholarly approaches to storytelling, delineating between more “formal,” traditional, and practiced narration (Benveniste, Lévi-Strauss, Propp) versus more “informal,” conversational, and everyday personal narrative (Labov and Waletzky). Falconi and Graber (2019) argues for a unified analysis. Storytelling is defined here as a “diverse set of narrative practices by which the crucial links between individuals, communities and the language(s) they use are reaffirmed and reworked” (p.1). They assert that storytelling is something people do, and distinguishing between, blurring and renegotiating different categories of narrative events are also things people do. Such distinctions align more with a domain of practice than a domain of analysis (pp. 1–3). This thesis approaches narrative analysis in the same manner.

Apart from the structure of narrative and how it has been approached in scholarship, factors of significant importance to this thesis are the motivations for telling stories, the social value it contains, and variation in narrative across mediums and social contexts. Polanyi (1981, 1985) posits that “adequate paraphrases” in American conversational storytelling mirrors the most basic beliefs a storyteller holds about the

world; Johnstone (1990) affirms that sharing stories creates community and sense of place in members of a Midwestern community. Pratt (1977) looks at the differences in literature and conversational storytelling as it pertains to the violation of an audience's expectations: in literature, audiences interpret violations as "intentional floutings of conventions," not mistakes (Johnstone 2015, pp. 643). Heath (1983), an ethnography on working class Black and white communities in Piedmont Carolinas, is an example of how communicative style can vary between social contexts, particularly in regard to cultural differences in home and school. An example of this is the assumptions a child holds about narrative as they have come to interact with it at home, what that entails, what makes it good or bad, and how that aligns with or diverges from what is expected at school.

This notion of narrative style hegemony (and diversion from it) is illustrated in Michaels (1981): in an ethnically mixed first grade classroom, Black children, especially Black girls, demonstrated use of a different narrative style than their white schoolmates. Michaels refers to the style use by Black students as "topic associating," defined as "...discourse consisting of a series of implicitly associated personal anecdotes" (pp.428–429), whereas white students used a primarily "topic centered" style. In topic associating style, there is no explicit statement of an overall theme or point, nor is there a linear, beginning-middle-end structure. From the perspective of those accustomed to the topic centered style, these students appeared to ramble or free associate. Those who expected topic centered style, such as the teacher, found the thematic development hard to follow or as having no point at all; these differences in racial (and by extension, cultural and

communicative) backgrounds led to “unintentional mismatches in conversational style” (p.440).

1.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Pratt’s notion of “violation as intentional” versus “violation as mistake” is an important factor to consider in not only the construction of narrative, but its reception; in fact, I would argue that the interactions between narrator and audience mirror the goals, conventions and exchanges of conversation. For this I turn to Gricean pragmatics and assert that the goals of conversation, as outlined by the Cooperative Principle, inform the motivations behind constructing and communicating narrative: “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice 1975, p.45). This is fulfilled by the four conversational implicatures, or maxims:

- Quantity (“Make your contribution as informative as is required [for the current purposes of the exchange]; do not make your contribution more informative than is required.”),
- Quality (“Do not say what you believe to be false; Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.”),
- Relevance (“Be relevant.”), and
- Manner (“Avoid obscurity of expression; Avoid ambiguity; Be brief [avoid unnecessary prolixity]; Be orderly.”) (Grice 1975, pp. 45–46).

He structures this by outlining motivations for speakers to fulfill the maxims of the Cooperative Principle or fail to fulfill them (by violating, opting out, flouting, or exploiting maxims to achieve a certain end), as well as drawing the distinction between

conversational and conventional implicature (Grice 1975, pp.49–50). This claim is reinforced in Ochs (2004), which boils down to ten “lessons” or guidelines for personal narrative construction based on analyses of conversation dynamics between two or more interlocutors as they attempt to piece together the experience(s) intended to be shared in various forms.

Goffman (1959) is also particularly useful for understanding oral personal narrative as it is presented in this thesis. Goffman offers a dramaturgical analysis of social interactions, in which interlocutors in a given face-to-face interaction are akin to actors playing the ideal character versions of themselves they wish to be perceived as by their “audience” (other interlocutors). Actors make use of “fronts,” what Goffman describes as “expressive equipment,” to carry out their performance (p.13). This usually consists of the “setting,” or scenic aspects, and an actor’s “appearance” (that which cues an interlocutor’s social statuses) and “manner” (that which indicates to an audience how an actor will carry out the role). An actor’s performance can be supported or challenged by the audience.

Most pertinent to this thesis, however, is how Goffman organizes interactions into “front region” and “back region” or “backstage.” The front region is where performance interactions takes place, where interlocutors act as performers for their audience; the back region or backstage consists of interactions where performance is prepared, contradicted or modified. This model overlays nicely with the story circle methodology outlined in chapter two; the connection to Goffman’s dramaturgical model is expanded upon further in chapter four.

Themes of place, belonging, and community are central to the stories analyzed in chapter three, meaning the intersection of language and place and how it is used to construct identity is also of importance. This thesis assumes the principles of the sociocultural linguistic framework set forth in Bucholtz and Hall (2005), which understands identities as social, cultural, linguistic, and semiotic phenomena that contain a wealth of micro- and macro-level positions, stances and categories. Identities can be linguistically indexed, are constructed through the relationship between self and other, and are inherently interactional. Reed (2020) gives an overview of how place has and is currently being used in linguistics, as well as its importance and prominence in research. In a discussion of geographic place and region as reference points for community identification, Reed specifically highlights Appalachia as an example of a region with strong connections to place (p.3). Reed demonstrates the effect of place attachment on speech patterns in his own research, as well; Reed coined the term *rootedness* to describe the phenomenon of using of dialectal features to index local orientation (Reed 2016). It is also important to note that place has been called the “hallmark of Appalachian literature” (Olson 2004).

1.3. STORYTELLING IN THE US AND APPALACHIA

Although several publications cited above have approached US storytelling in a variety of regions and contexts, I am finding it difficult as of this writing to find a source that can operate as a baseline for North American storytelling more broadly. The inclusion of such a source is essential to making claims for distinguishable regional variations in narrative construction and performance. The closest fit in this regard is Ochs

(2004), and for this reason it will be used as a guidepost for oral storytelling conventions in the US.

Some of the earliest scholarship on storytelling in Appalachia comes from the field of folklore. However, the basis of these initial works is steeped in myth and stereotype. Dorson (1964) designates Appalachia as “folklore’s natural habitat” (p.162) and cites stereotypical cartoon strips such as Li’l Abner and newspaper clippings about the feuds of the Hatfields and the McCoys as evidence. “Here a city observer can find the muse of old folksong and the well of primitive superstition in their pure state, protected by layers of folkways in which laziness, filth, incest, and violence breed unchecked” (p.162). Halan is only slightly less subjective, calling Appalachia “one of America’s most richly folkloristic places” and citing Dorson (1964) as evidence. He claims that “...mountain culture [is] an oral culture” (Halan 1977, p.30), attributing this to underdevelopment of the region caused by “isolation, illiteracy and a rural-based economy” (p.30) that can be traced back to socioeconomic, geographic, and historical factors as early as the post-Civil War era. He also identifies the first tales collected in the region as being of British origin, citing *Tales from the Southern Blue Ridge* (Carter 1925) and *The Jack Tales* (Chase 1943) as the first notable collections.

While the factors Halan gives to evidence his claim are indeed factual, it is this very same evidence that disproves the assumptions he makes about the region. The trope of an isolated, illiterate, and exclusively rural Appalachia is not an uncommon one, yet it clashes with the reality of Appalachia’s long history of in- and out-migration, recognized literary tradition, centuries-long participation in global economy, and urban center

development.² Why is Appalachia specifically “an oral culture” to Halan and “folklore’s natural habitat” to Dorson? These notions are not attributed to mountain communities, rural communities, or communities with lower reading capacities as a whole across the US. These assumptions instead fall in line with broader stereotypes about the region that have served as socially and politically useful since the beginning of European settlement in the region³; some of these are exemplified by Dorson’s own words above.

Arguably the publication on storytelling most relevant to this thesis is Davies’ (2008), which looks at Southern storytelling style as it pertains to oral personal narrative storytelling. Davies uses Alabama storyteller Kathryn Tucker Windham’s *Recollections* as a case study (Tucker Windham 1987, 1988, 1989, 1997). Davies notes the use of digression, which she describes as “thematic, layered parallels” (p.173), as characteristic of Southern storytelling. This is comparable to the topic associating discourse described in Michaels (1981). Similar to Dorson and Halan, Davies draws on notions of illiteracy and Flynt (1989)’s assertion of the “cultural isolation” of poor white communities as influences on this storytelling style. Other potential factors and implications Davies provides for the use of digression are a “stream-of-consciousness” quality to Southern storytelling, the cultural value of extended storytelling as entertainment, indirectness as a Southern discourse strategy and deference/distance ethos, and Southern ambivalence towards modernization. She also claims that this oral tradition comes from settlers from the British Isles and is akin to storytelling styles found in Irish folk taxonomies. I discuss these factors, implications, and historical connections further in chapter four. Given its close alignment to the region of study and analytical frameworks used in this thesis, I will

² See Blethen (2004), Lewis (2004), and Olson (2004), respectively.

³ See Hsiung (2004), Hartman (2012), and Werner (2015).

assume Davies (2008) as a guidepost for analysis of Southern (and by extension, Mountain Southern) storytelling conventions.

It should be noted that the subregion this thesis is concerned with goes by many different formal and informal regional classifications. Central Appalachia normally refers to the Appalachian regions of Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky; with the exception of Ohio, all of these states are generally considered to be Southern states as well, and frequently have overlapping designations as Southern Appalachia and the Mountain South. I will refer to Eastern Kentucky as Central Appalachia and Mountain South interchangeably and consider Eastern Kentucky to be part of the larger South, hence the inclusion of Davies (2008). I address how this thesis aligns with and deviates from Davies' findings in chapter four.

1.4. THE ELIZABETHAN ENGLISH MYTH AND THE STORYTELLER TROPE

The perception of Appalachians as talented storytellers appears to be one commonly held in and outside of the region; at the very least, it is one people are not surprised to hear, and it goes largely uncontested. The only real mentions of this, however, are merely allusions to Appalachians as good storytellers, or claims based upon the assumption that this is fact. Internet searches for “Appalachian storytelling” return mentions of *Jack Tales* and *Grandfather Tales*⁴ (Richards and Williams 1948), either read aloud or acted out in performance on YouTube or in PBS specials, or emphasized in K-12 education curricula. It appears that these collections are still the most commonly referenced works of Appalachian fictional storytelling and are still told and theatrically performed today.

⁴ A continuation of *The Jack Tales* (Chase 1943).

Although a positive one, this is still largely a stereotype, and one that fits into broader stereotypes and attitudes surrounding Appalachian varieties of American English and the communities that speak them. While seemingly unrelated to narrative construction at the surface, attitudes about these communities and their speech practices can help us triangulate potential origins of this stereotype, along with any potential linguistic or extralinguistic justification for it. Luhman (1990) gives an in-depth look at the perceptions of self and others regarding the use of Eastern (Appalachian) Kentucky dialect and Standard American English. His results indicate that Eastern Kentuckians are more apt to accept stereotypes involving lower status yet reject negative stereotypes involving integrity, attractiveness, etc. Of most relevance to this paper, however, is his finding that both speakers and non-speakers of Appalachian English in Kentucky rank this speech community and its dialect as low in status and education, yet high in honesty, sympathy, dependability, kindness, politeness, etc.

Appalachian Englishes have also been erroneously associated with older English variants. Montgomery (1998) addresses the notion of Appalachians speaking “Elizabethan,” “Shakespearian” or even “Chaucerian” English, a notion which appears in tourist guides, articles, essays and more. Excerpts from nineteenth- and twentieth-century articles, essays, and speeches assert that the English spoken in the mountains is a “survival” of Elizabethan English rather than a “degradation” of modern English; they provide examples of lexemes and grammatical structures, attempt to link them to historical use of Elizabethan or Chaucerian English, and give sociocultural information, such as the idea that most mountaineers were “an Old England folk” (Montgomery 1998, p.71) of English or Scots-Irish descent. They even claim that when mountaineers began

to read, they tended to prefer the works of Shakespeare as the characterization feels “more ‘natural’” to them (Montgomery 1998, p.72). Montgomery addresses the inconsistencies and linguistic invalidity of these claims, the most obvious one being that Elizabethan English was spoken 400 years ago, Chaucerian English even longer ago, and the Appalachians were first inhabited by European settlers just 200 years ago. He also explains that this myth was created by mountain folk, specifically educators and clergymen and then journalists and travel writers, as a way of explaining via shedding positive light on pre-existing ideas about the Appalachians and Ozarks (isolation, whiteness/Anglo-Saxonness, backwardness, use of a nonstandard English variety, etc.). While the myth is ahistorical and linguistically unsound, it has persisted for so long due to its usefulness in romanticizing and politicizing the region. Appalachians are also aware of the myth: in an interaction with a community member in east Tennessee, Montgomery was not given specific information as to who told him that people speak Elizabethan English somewhere there, only that it was “something that ‘just everybody knows’” (Montgomery 1998, p.67).

Montgomery’s interaction with the Elizabethan English myth in East Tennessee is similar to one I have had with the storyteller trope in Eastern Kentucky: an Eastern Kentucky media maker and educator once told a group of documentary film interns, myself included, that Appalachians are natural storytellers. She justified this with saying that we tell and hear stories all the time with friends and family members, on porches and around dinner tables, and that it is a part of our culture and heritage. As an Appalachian myself, I saw this in my own experiences and did not contest it; it is just something we all “know.”

Montgomery (1998) gives clear evidence of the development of this myth through the citation of primary source documents, going back as far as an address given in 1899 at Berea College. While the Elizabethan English myth is now fading out in favor of more modern associations like the movie *Deliverance* (Cramer 2014), its genesis and propagation could help potentially explain the origins of the Appalachian storyteller trope, given the similarities between the two. We can see the roots of Appalachian-associated storytelling performance traditions like Jack Tales and Grandfather Tales traced back to the British Isles, being valued and validated for their sociohistorical currency as well as the romanticism, heritage and prestige associated with those countries and the varieties of English spoken there. The association appears to stop there, however: Appalachians are not seen as Shakespearean storytellers inside or outside of the region, only “good,” “natural,” or “talented.” Perhaps the connection lies in its positioning of Appalachia as other: if the Elizabethan English myth has served as a tool to romanticize Appalachian Englishes’ nonstandard (and therefore other) status within the region, the storyteller trope may currently serve as a tool to highlight an unorthodox manner of telling stories in and outside the region, albeit in a relatively positive light. Understanding Appalachian narrative practices is the first step to understanding the Appalachian storyteller trope.

2. METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in the Introduction and detailed by the literature cited in chapter one, this thesis primarily relies on a discourse analysis framework that combines pragmatics, sociocultural linguistics, and narrative analysis. Stories were collected from a joint interviewing method known as story circles, described in detail below. A post-mortem survey established a baseline for participant rootedness, or place-based identity, in addition to demographic information, how comfortable participants felt with the activity, and evaluation of the stories they and others told in the circle.

2.1. STORY CIRCLES

The methodological tool used for data collection in this thesis has its origins in community theatre and cultural and community organizing, not academia.⁵ The method is called story circles, a form of story- and idea-sharing that was developed in the 1960s by Roadside Theater, a project of the arts and media nonprofit Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky, in conjunction with Free Southern Theatre (now Junebug Productions), a community theatre project started at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi. The methodology was born out of collaboration between Roadside and the Free Southern Theater, when the two groups co-created story-plays based off of stories shared by community members in an attempt to highlight commonalities between white and Black working-class people (Roadside Theater 2014, Junebug Productions n.d.). While it is still used to create community theater, its use has now expanded to include everything from

⁵ It should be noted that Dorgan et al. (2013) also uses a story circle methodology that is unrelated.

introductory “ice-breakers” to oral history collection and even conflict mediation by community groups and nonprofit organizations across Appalachia and the South.

The format⁶ is simple: four or more participants, including the facilitator, sit either in chairs or on the floor in a circle while facing each other. The facilitator gives a prompt in the form, generally but not restricted to a question, command, or theme to be interpreted as the participant sees fit; this is generally structured along the lines of “Tell me a story about...” or “Tell me about a time when...,” although other approaches do exist. The facilitator gives everyone a few moments to think about the theme, and whoever wishes to go first can start. After that person share their story, they then choose the direction of the circle to go either to their right or to their left. Depending on time and number of participants, the facilitator can decide if there is a time limit per person or opt to not have a time limit.

Stories are told one by one by everyone in the circle, with no crosstalk or commentary from other participants until there has been a complete rotation of all participants sharing a story. A facilitator may mention that stories generally have a beginning, middle, and end, but this was omitted from the instructions given in the circles facilitated for this thesis as to not influence how the stories were structured. Participants have the opportunity to “pass” and share after the rest of the participants have taken their turn or opt out completely. Under normal circumstances, the facilitator also participates, but I opted out of all three rounds to avoid priming participant responses. I recommend other researchers consider doing the same; see section 4.4 for further discussion. The

⁶The story circle format detailed here is the one I have used since I first learned to facilitate story circles from Roadside Theater in 2015, with slight modifications made based on personal facilitation experience. See Roadside Theater (2014) and Junebug Productions (n.d.) for further instructions and discussion.

most important aspect of this activity, however, is that the emphasis is on listening to the story being told; participants were told to think of these more as “listening circles” than storytelling circles. Participants are encouraged to not ruminate on the prompt and plan their story out beforehand, but rather give their full attention to the person speaking. The facilitator normally mentions that this way, if one does not have a story in mind or has drawn a blank, someone else’s story may inspire a story one did not think or originally intend to share. Crosstalk, questions, reflection, and general commentary happens after the completion of each prompt, and the number of prompts given is completely up to the facilitator and the participants.

2.2. ROOTEDNESS, COMFORTABILITY, AND EVALUATION SURVEY

After all rounds of the story circle were conducted, participants took a survey to establish baselines for rootedness, demographic information, comfortability with the task, and self- and peer-evaluation. The rootedness questions and metric are a modified version of the one used in Reed (2016); they can be found below in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively. Points were assigned to each answer per the metric, and participants’ rootedness classification was determined based on the median score; those who scored at or above the median are classified as more rooted (MR) while those below it are classified as less rooted (LR). I will refer to participants by their rootedness classification (e.g., Participant (MR/LR)) or their rootedness score (e.g., Participant (R=X)) as necessary when comparing more and less rooted speakers.

The demographics portion asked participants to identify basic social variables with which they identify (age, race/ethnicity, gender, household income, level of education). The survey gauged each participant’s level of comfortability with the

storytelling tasks they were asked to perform, including how comfortable or natural it felt to share stories in the story circle environment, if they had any prior experience with story circles, how good the stories were that they and others shared and how talented they felt they and others were. Participants were also asked if there were any stories they felt were told particularly well or any participant(s) that stood out to them.

It is important to note that all surveys were geared towards Letcher County residents, as this is where data collection was held and from where participants were anticipated to arrive; one participant was from an adjacent county, however, and manually changed the questions on the survey to reflect this in his answers. The Demographics, Comfortability and Evaluation survey can be found below in Appendix C.

2.3. TRANSCRIPTION

The story circle session was recorded with a Zoom H4n Pro Handy Recorder placed in the middle of the circle. Recordings from the session were manually transcribed using Montgomery (2019) with slight modifications. The transcription conventions can be found in Appendix D; the full transcription can be found in Appendix E.

3. *DATA ANALYSIS*

Five Eastern Kentuckians, three cis men and two cis women, met in Whitesburg, Kentucky to participate in the story circle: Andrew, (22, cis man, Letcher County); Jolene (54, cis woman, Letcher County); Missy (26, cis woman, Letcher County); Whitney (32, cis woman, Letcher County); and Eli (29, cis man, Pike County). The names given here are pseudonyms; participants opted out of choosing their own and were therefore assigned by me on their behalf. They were chosen in a way that preserves anonymity yet are still immediately recognizable for analysis and discussion. All participants identified as white, working-class or below, and indicated education levels ranging from high school diploma/GED to some college or completed bachelor's degree. For transparency, it should be noted that an unanticipated sixth participant was also present but did not meet IRB criteria; all information pertaining to this participant has been redacted and destroyed.

Participants sat in a circle around a table with the Zoom recorder in the center. After I gave the instructions and clarified any questions, participants went through three rounds, one prompt each, with no set time limit. I opted out of participating each time it became my turn to share a story. The prompt for round one, "Tell me about a time when you felt inspired," was given as a practice round to acclimate to the task. The stories from this round are not included. Responses to round two, "Tell me about a time when you felt like you belonged," and round three, "Tell me about a time when you felt like you did not belong," are what has been analyzed below. While it does not appear to have affected his

performance of the task, it is important to note that Andrew (22, cis man, Letcher County) arrived late for the study and did not participate in the first round.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section one outlines structural and functional aspects of Central Appalachian storytelling; section two is a discussion of narrative practice and performance; and section three addresses rootedness, comfortability, and evaluation results.

3.1. STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF CENTRAL APPALACHIAN STORYTELLING

This section describes three aspects of Central Appalachian storytelling, referred to as digression, repetition, and summation as end-framing. As mentioned in section 1.3, this thesis uses Davies (2008) as a guidepost for Central Appalachian storytelling due to similarities in region and analytical approach, and therefore assumes the use of the term “digression” as a category of analysis. Repetition and summation as end-framing are categories of my own design. These three categories are admittedly broad and differ from those of the Labovian approach to narrative analysis outlined in section 1.1 (orientation, complicating action, resolution, evaluation, coda). Future study may consider cross-analysis of these findings with Labov’s framework, as they could provide additional insights outside of the scope of this thesis.

3.1.1. DIGRESSION

Davies (2008) does not offer an explicit definition of digression but describes their presence in discourse as “...digressive loops, serving as thematic, layered parallels, typically introduced by discourse markers” (p.173). Building on this, I offer the following

working definition of digression: a departure from a given subject, theme, or plot in a segment of discourse.

All five participants demonstrated multiple instances of digression use in at least one story circle round. The various ways that digression is used to initiate and structure narrative is first highlighted in Whitney's story from round three, presented in its entirety in Example 1 below:

Example 1. Whitney's story, round 3.

WHITNEY: Uh <sigh> I mean there's been several times where I've felt like I haven't belonged one was when I worked in an all Spanish-speaking factory <laughter on end of 'factory'> for a year four hours from home and literally could not communicate with anyone, but um <clears throat> I would say this last year of my life has been pretty unbelonging um moving- moving three times in a year working loving my job but not belonging in the culture uh and also just going through some of the hardest shit I've ever gone through especially in the last six months and not really having people want to talk me about it uh my family gets really frustrated because they're not here <assumingly referencing her work; mentions in previous story circle round that they live in the county> they don't understand s-s-stuff that I've been going through and so they're just like we don't understand why you want to complain about this all the time or- and then no one else wants to h- talk about it <laughs> no one wants to address it like so for the last six months I have literally cut myself off, I go home at five o'clock I eat dinner with my baby we watch whatever he wants to watch he goes to bed I read a book that's it, and so while being a mom feels really great like it's really- it's so contradicting to feel like XX <"I have"?'> this really good thing in my life while everything else just felt like it crumbled around me uh but I- I don't- I don't talk to anybody I don't go out with anybody no one comes to hang out with me really anymore uh and part of that is like there is this thing when you become a mom where like a lot of your social life goes away but also just like when you do it single there's not that other person- I get now why people don't do it single <laughs> because there's not that other person like your baby does something really cute there's not that other person to laugh with your baby has a really sick day there's not someone else to like take a shift uh childcare doesn't work out you've got to figure it out so like all that stress and then there's no one there to like support you and then add in all the other shit that's happened like and no one wants to talk about it or address it or be there for you and so it's weird because you feel like you have this crew but you also don't feel like you have this crew anymore and uh or like you're an inconvenience because you're doing something diff- like none- like if you're the only one of your friends that has a child there's just a huge divide that

happens, it's just a huge divide and and when you- when you are the only one of your friends that has a child and you don't have a partner then you're just really on an island, so I would say <laughter on 'motherhood'> motherhood has made me belong and not belong in a lot of ways.

At first glance, there is not any immediately recognizable narrative structure in Whitney's story, only a juxtaposition of different ways she felt she has not belonged. Whitney initiates her story by responding affirmatively to the prompt ("I mean there's been several times where I've felt like I haven't belonged"), followed by an example of feelings of physical and metaphorical isolation working at a Spanish-speaking factory four hours from home. She then discusses the complexities of finding belonging as a mother but also feeling isolated as a single mother, being the only single mother in her friend group, not having a social life and not having a partner to share the ups and downs of motherhood with. She notes the complexities of these feelings ("It's so contradicting to feel like [I have] this really good thing while everything else just felt like it crumbled around me") and again mentions the isolating nature of her experiences ("You're really just on an island"), ending the narrative with summation ("so I would say motherhood has made me belong and not belong in a lot of ways").

It is in this juxtaposition of different aspects and instances of lived experience that we see the structure of Whitney's narrative. The goal of the narrative was not to recount a singular instance of not belonging from beginning to end, but to convey the ways that not belonging has isolated her, and using various experiences, emotions, metaphors and social dynamics to express the complexity of that isolation. Digression is a strategy that Whitney uses to structure her narrative in a way that achieves this goal.

Example 1 also showed how digression can appear as a framing device, particularly in initiating story. Three of five participants signaled future use of digression by mentioning that they would first be giving “backstory,” or a *mise en scène* of sorts, to provide information they felt their listeners would need for later in the narrative.

Example 2. Excerpt from Eli, round 2. Beginning of story.

ELI: I'll start, uh so s-slight real quick back story uh I had I was an only child then added a uh stepbrother who was two so he's basically been my brother since he's- his entire- for his entire life and then there for a while my mom married a guy and I had three brothers at one point and then I went back down to one so I've had- been an only child had one like sibling and then also had like a whole family of everybody like a big family kind of thing so I've had a little bit of experience from each of those uh but when I was working in uh the IT department at <PLACE OF WORK>...

Eli initiates story with background about his childhood and family structure. Later in the story, he reveals that his work relationships were the closest thing he has had to having siblings outside of his family, using digression to combine notions of physical and metaphorical closeness to express how this parafamilial bond came to be, and mentioning multiple times that his relationship with his coworkers were brotherly/sisterly in nature. He ends the story with a summation, affirming the sibling-like nature of the relationships once again, saying they are some of the best professional relationships he has ever had.

Example 3. Excerpt from Jolene, round 2. Beginning of story.

JOLENE: Uh two almost- a little back story I moved back home here in Letcher County after almost thirty years in Central Kentucky so it's been about four years since I moved back and I came back uh basically with no job and no place to live and friends quickly made sure I had a place to live and a job, also uh th-then there was a lot of healing I needed to do mentally so I started hiking and I would go up on the mountain and uh I found <GATHERING PLACE> <laugh, inhale>...

Jolene's story from round 2 starts relatively linearly: she moved away from Letcher County, lived in Central Kentucky for thirty years, came back and had to start over in terms of housing, employment, and social circle. She mentions finding this at a communal gathering place at the top of a mountain that she frequents for hiking. This is where the linear nature of the story changes: she expands on notions of healing and community support by citing different experiences she has had on the mountain, deployed primarily by repetitions of the verbal phrase "you could." This is discussed further in subsection 3.1.2.

Example 4. Excerpt from Andrew, round 3. Beginning of story.

ANDREW: Uh back story with this June twenty-seventh of think it was last year or year before last I came out as gay, uh August eighth I accepted a job in <Central Kentucky> working in a m-mine working in a limestone mine as a maintenance man, worked there for nine months you know did my best because I figured it was best not to – I've always been the type of person- I always said after I came out if you ask me I'm not- I'm not going to lie I'm going to tell you the truth but if you don't ask and you don't need to know s- I'm not going to make it your business, worked there for nine months they asked me one day uh somebody had found out they said are you gay...

A counterexample is Andrew's story from round three. He begins the story by describing the setting's time and place: he notes he lived in Central Kentucky for nine months, gives the date he first accepted his job in Central Kentucky and orients listeners to the proximity of this time period to the time he first came out as gay in Eastern Kentucky. However, this does not appear to be an instance of digression; in fact, Andrew's round three story is arguably the most linear story told in the story circle, detailing how he was forced to come out as gay to his coworkers, the ways he was discriminated against and reprimanded at work, how alone he felt to face this away from

his support network back home, his realization that he did not belong there, and his move back to Eastern Kentucky. The instances of digression come in the form of phrasal repetitions as with Jolene in round 2, used to demonstrate the intensity of the emotions he felt throughout the ordeal. Examples of this can be found in subsection 3.1.2.

3.1.2. REPETITION

There is some evidence for repetition as a narrative strategy in Central Appalachian oral personal narrative, primarily used by Jolene and Andrew. As mentioned in subsection 3.1.1, Example 3, Jolene uses verb phrase repetitions to expand on notions of healing and community support. Repetitions of “anybody could,” “I could” and “you could” phrases form the bulk of her narrative, likely indicating that she feels the experiences she has could be universal. She ends with a summation that indicates the open and welcoming nature of the place and the people that go there.

Example 5. Excerpt from Jolene, round 2. Middle of story.

JOLENE: ... Anybody up there anybody that goes up there they just take you in and they love you and they take care of you regardless and they're non-judgmental and I really felt like uh I belonged and I could go up there at any time and ever who was up there uh they too were what we call a friend of the mountain so you could hike you could talk you could just be there and hang out and you could go up and look at the stars or whatever you needed to do and it was ok and it's kind of your peaceful go to place and uh that was the first time I really felt like I belonged as an adult and being alone as an adult and to come back uh not knowing what you're going to do or how you're going to take care of yourself and then uh to find that group you could just kind of fall into at any time that you need to it's almost like if you need some healing you can go up there and there's usually somebody up there and you can talk to and even if you don't know them you can become fast friends.

In subsection 3.1.1, Example 4, I mention that Andrew also uses phrasal repetition to convey emotional intensity in what is otherwise a linear retelling of his forced coming

out experience at work. While there are several instances of this, Examples 6 and 7 highlight repetitions that depict his capacity to take care of himself and the severity of the situation he faced. He ends his turn with a summation that again focuses more on the emotions he experienced than temporal recounting of events: “I just- I hope that nobody else ever has to go through something like that because- because of how they identify or who they love that’s- that’s the worst feeling in the world.”

Example 6. Excerpt from Andrew, round 3. Middle of story.

ANDREW: ...I’ve always been able to handle my own problems I’m a pretty good sized youngin and I don’t care to fight I’ll fight a tree if it says the wrong thing to me I have- I’m hard headed I’m stubborn I’m from the mountains I don’t care I don’t back down...

Example 7. Excerpt from Andrew, round 3. Middle of story.

ANDREW: ...I was four hours away from home four hours away from my support network nobody I could call and say hey this is going on can you be here, nobody could help me and I was by myself and that was the first time in my life I ever had to tackle something that big by myself...

Surprisingly, Andrew’s first story in round 2 does not make use of linearity at all, is much shorter and only uses repetition as its narrative structure. Like Jolene’s story in round 2, Andrew uses repetition to expand on notions of belonging, care, and interaction with his chickens. The entirety of the narrative is presented in Example 8:

Example 8. Andrew’s story, round 2.

ANDREW: I have to say the only time I’ve really ever felt completely at peace and like I truly belong somewhere is when I’m working with an animal, if I’m out in the chicken yard or out on out messing with an animal I can go out in the chicken yard and it’s it’s not even work to me it’s like it’s second nature I know what to do I can pick the chicken up I can look at him I can see how he’s if he’s

healing alright if he's what his health condition's in how his feet look how he's acting I can tell you if he's sick if he needs medicine if he needs wormed if he needs different stuff and it's it's just it's one of those things I've done it my entire life and I feel I can go out there and be madder than- madder than fire at anybody in the world- me me and mom get in a big old argument and I can't stand to look at her and I can go out in the chicken yard and it's- it just all melts away it's just me and those chickens I focus on nothing else, I give them my full undivided attention I- I feel like I belong out there, that's where I write music that's where I have the most fun that's where I spend- that's where I spend my- I like to spend my alone time, it's- it's kind of weird because they're a bunch of chickens but- you know I love them just like they GRAM <copula deletion> family, they're- they're my kids I take care of them I've raised them they was babies hatched out of an egg and I'll- I'll have them until they die.

Based on Jolene's and Andrew's use of repetition in round 2, repetition could arguably be considered a form of mini digression, a way of quickly referencing experiences that could be formed into their own stand-alone narratives. However, the differences in Andrew's round 2 and round 3 stories are striking in terms of their length and structure, and since Andrew was not present for round 1, there is not a third story circle round to compare to. Perhaps repetition can be used both as elaboration and as structured mini digressions; perhaps Andrew was nervous and did not speak of his experiences with his chickens as he normally would; perhaps he has told his forced coming out story more than once and has practiced how to deliver it most effectively; perhaps Andrew uses a combination of linear and nonlinear storytelling regardless of prior planning. Regardless, there is insufficient evidence at present to claim repetition as a feature of Central Appalachian storytelling, and further study is needed to understand it as such.

3.1.3. SUMMATION AS END-FRAMING

All participants use summation as end-framing in closing out at least one of their story circle turns. We can think of this in the same vein as finding the “moral of the story,” or “getting to the point” of the narrative. Examples in subsections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 have already demonstrated how Whitney, Eli, Jolene, and Andrew close out their turns in this manner. Missy is shown doing the same below in Example 9:

Example 9. Excerpt from Missy, round 2. End of story.

MISSY: ... and so when I'm playing music with my friends or just sitting around with them that's my biggest sense of belonging.

Even without any prior context, we can see from this summation that Missy finds her biggest sense of belonging from her friends. Prior to this, she started the round with a response to the prompt about belonging, saying she has spent more time feeling like she does not belong anywhere. She then goes on to say she is independent but ultimately finds her sense of belonging and connectedness in her friendships, the bandmates in her newly formed, all-femme rock band being a newfound sense of home. She also mentions that Letcher County has at times felt like home and not felt like home and how she has searched for other places to find that sense of home.

3.2. NARRATIVE PRACTICE AND PERFORMANCE

Section 3.1 was concerned with the narratives constructed by participants during the individual story circle turns and their structure and functions. The present section will

address the crosstalk portions⁷, where participants made commentary on the stories they told and heard and interacted with the broader themes therein.

Two major themes appeared in the crosstalk. The subsections to follow exemplify participant use of narrative in identity construction, reconstruction, management, and negotiation, as well as the effect of external social forces on participant notions of identity, place, and community.

3.2.1. (RE)CONSTRUCTING, MANAGING, AND NEGOTIATING IDENTITY

There are myriad instances of participants navigating the complexities of their identities through narrative in ways that aligned, disaligned, and challenged those of their peers, highlighting the multiplicity of communities and intersecting identities present in a small town in a largely rural area. One of such instances most pertinent to this thesis demonstrates the ways in which participants used the crosstalk portion to construct and navigate different experiences with rootedness and belonging:

Example 10. Excerpt from round 2 crosstalk. Middle of crosstalk.

ANDREW: But you <referring to JOLENE> was talking about leaving and coming back every time I've left – I lived in <Central Kentucky> for nine months and that's how I know this place will always be my home I was in <Central Kentucky> and I was working- I mean I'd get off work six seven eight in the morning after working all night and drive five hours falling asleep all the way back home, I can't – I- I don't know if I could ever imagine a time where I didn't live in Letcher County...It's the air here, I don't know.

...

JOLENE: [XX] When I first moved to Lexington to go to college I would get off work at nine o'clock and drive home and turn around and drive back the next day to go to work, because I missed home.

ANDREW: I don't know if it's because I'm a momma's boy or not.

⁷ Please note that the examples shown here have been truncated as much as possible for brevity. For the full conversations, see Appendix E.

[<laughter from multiple participants>]

ANDREW: [I love]- I love- I love my home.

...

ELI: You-you <referring to WHITNEY> said you didn't feel like you belonged at first [a-]

WHITNEY: [Uh-huh.]

ELI: a lot and uh- I- I don't know about everybody else but I think i- feeling like you don't belong makes it easier to belong when you get out of that situation

MISSY: Mm.

ELI: I feel like uh- a- at least the- but the same thing I was talking about with uh the IT department that was right after I worked at uh <PLACE OF WORK>... in telemetry... I worked- I worked at that and I- I hated the job but honestly the worst part was- it was near the nurse's station but like disconnected from it and so not only did I like- telemetry felt like it was already not connected and then... I never really connected with any of the co-workers and effectively a lot of times you were in the room by yourself...

...

ELI: and work- getting to go to <PLACE OF WORK> like I immediately felt like I was a part of like a team there and... that was- that made me feel like- I- uh- I feel like I attached to them quicker because of not belonging first at <PLACE OF WORK>.

...

MISSY: It's like belonging- it's like I- ah- i- it's like when I moved back I'm like well who do I hang out with? [Like]

WHITNEY: [Yeah.]

MISSY: I- I- I don't- I don't really like to clique up because when people clique up there's like typically drama involved and <inhales> all of these things and it's like I just like being- I like being my independent self but I think my belonging is in my relationships which are kind of mobile because I have friends in Louisville I have friends you know all over the place and so it's like when we get together that's like my belonging, that's coming home like I find home in my relationships more so than just a geographical place,

JOLENE: Hmm.

MISSY: even though this is home but it's not- it doesn't give me that all the time.

JOLENE: Home is more than a place,

MISSY: Uh-huh.

JOLENE: XX you hit it.

Example 10 shows a portion of the crosstalk from round 2. Andrew and Jolene show explicit connection to Letcher County, both discussing how they immediately would travel home from Central Kentucky for weekend visits after work and school obligations. Eli connects Whitney's story from the story circle to his own story circle turn, discussing how first feeling like he did not belong in a former work environment made it easier for him to feel belonging in the IT department he referenced in his story. Missy is also explicit in her connection to place in that she does not find belonging as much in physical place as a "coming home" in her relationships with people; she also notes the mobile nature of these relationships, saying she has friends from all over. Jolene responds to this notion of home as relationships with the namesake of this thesis: "home is more than just a place." While Whitney is not directly represented in this example, she does note later on in the crosstalk that she belongs to several social circles, discussing how she can take her baby to a protest on Saturday, church on Sunday, and to her place of work on Monday.

Further participant discussion of belonging connected to relationships, different communities, and place happens later in the round two crosstalk. A portion of this is shown below in Example 11:

Example 11. Excerpt from round 2 crosstalk. Middle of crosstalk.

ANDREW: [I-] I- I look like a- a giant hick but I'm also a giant nerd on the [inside.]

JOLENE: [<soft laughter >]

MISSY: <Soft laughter >

ANDREW: I- I- I think that was the coolest part about high school for me because I could go at lunch and sit and I'd sit with all my friends that XX <were the?> bubby type you know packing big dips in our lip <referring to chewing tobacco>

with their hats turned you know backwards and VoTech <referring to vocational-technical school> and then seventh period come around I'd be in the- I'd be in band nerding out playing [Magic <referring to Magic The Gathering> in the]

ELI: [*<soft laughter>*]

ANDREW: band floor with all my buddies [and I- I don't know]

ELI: [Uh-huh.]

ANDREW: I just- I felt like high school was- high school was terrible, I would never ever ever go back,

ELI: Or wish it on anybody.

ANDREW: [Or wish it on any human being that walks this Earth]

[*<Laughter from multiple participants>*]

ELI: [XX *<Yeah?>*]

ELI: Uh-huh.

ANDREW: but the friendships and the relationships that were made there I think made this place even more special to [me.]

MISSY: [Mm.]

ELI: Uh-huh.

Unknown: Mm.

...

JOLENE: High school friends uh- I've been out of high school thirty-seven years uh and there was a small group of friends and we stayed close but then after high school everybody splits up and goes their separate ways and raise their families and get busy with life but we always kind of tried to stay in touch and in this past year I had two friends that lost their husbands uh so we started this group called <GROUP NAME ACRONYM> and it's called <FULL GROUP NAME>

[*<Laughter from multiple participants>*]

JOLENE: [and we] have since taken two trips as a group and it's not- it's as many that can go and we've had as many as seven XX *<uh? uh-huh?>* which is good we took uh- I wasn't on the trip but they went to Asheville for uh a long weekend and then uh this past February we went to Gra- Gatlinburg for a long weekend and there's probably on our Facebook chat there's probably almost twenty of us and anybody can go at any time and as many that can get together anywhere do and we just make a point to do that so we can stay in touch and uh honestly I can say we're probably closer now with all our life experiences than we were then.

MISSY: Mm.

WHITNEY: Mm.

Andrew and Jolene are of particular interest in this segment of discourse. After Eli makes a reference to a Marvel movie (not included in the example), Andrew asserts that although he may appear to be a “giant hick,” he is also a “giant nerd on the inside.” He offers his experiences from high school as justification for this, citing material and socioeconomic markers that indicate his friends were what he calls the “bubby type”: dipping smokeless tobacco, wearing hats backwards and taking vocational school classes. He makes further use of material and social stance⁸ to contrast the “hicks/bubbies” with his more “nerdy” social circle, where he recalls playing Magic the Gathering with friends on the classroom floor in his seventh period marching band class. Andrew does not only make attempts to manage and reconstruct the portions of his identity he shared in the story circle, but also doubles down on his connection to place: he offers that the variety of friendships he made in high school makes Whitesburg and Letcher County even more special to him.

Jolene also discusses her high school friend group and how her connection to them has changed over time. Jolene says she has been out of high school for 37 years and that everyone went their separate ways after graduating, “rais[ing] their families and get[ting] busy with life,” that they still tried to stay in touch but began really keeping in touch more recently after two friends lost their husbands. They all made a Facebook group for women in Whitesburg, where they chat and organize weekend trips together.

⁸ For more information on material stance, see Burkette (2016).

We already know from examples in chapter three that Jolene left Whitesburg to go to school in Central Kentucky, living there for several decades before returning home and finding new forms of community belonging, specifically at a mountaintop gathering place. This example further reveals how notions of community has changed for her over time, even with the same group of people in the same hometown, as this group of women goes from being only connected as former high school friends and classmates to a group of women peers that live in Whitesburg and travel together on social outings.

3.2.2. IDENTITY, PLACE, COMMUNITY AND EXTERNAL SOCIAL FORCES

Participants also discussed how larger social forces outside of their control influenced their notions of identity, sense of belonging and connection to place, particularly those socioeconomic and sociopolitical in nature. Example 12 shows a lengthy portion of crosstalk from round 3 that encapsulates larger themes of modern life, identity, and struggle in Central Appalachia:

Example 12. Excerpt from round 3 crosstalk. Middle of crosstalk.

JOLENE: <soft laughter> Sometimes it's really hard to live here and economically everybody knows it's really hard to live here you touched on that um and that as much as I love it and as much as I love being back you know something may have to give in a couple years or I may have to leave again

BRANDON: Mm.

JOLENE: And it's- it's- it can be a hard place all the way around.

BRANDON: Yeah.

ELI: I- I know a lot of this is about Letcher County and WHITNEY judgingly calls Pikeville Eagleton <referencing the TV show Parks and Recreation> but uh I've- as I've said many times I swear it's not

<soft laughter from participant>

ELI: Uh

<exhale through nostrils from another participant as if in laughter>

ELI: And for the love of God the rent's not but [the-]

[<soft laughter from participant>]

ELI: the uh- uh the- eco-economically like i- it- literally living here when you know what's- when you know what is out in the world that like the rest of the world it feels like they're five years in the future from here,

WHITNEY: Uh-huh.

ELI: Like it- it feels like martyrdom to have to- to like live here, like you're- you're s-sacrificing so much that you could be doing and like you know ha- like being able to go and enjoy other like cuisines and stuff like that like- I like food a lot, [but]

Unknown: [XX]

ELI: like and I- it drives me insane that we don't have like an Indian food restaurant like I love that and I can't get it without driving like three hours which is

JOLENE: [Uh-huh.]

ELI: [absurd] to me but like not being like you're sacrificing all the things you want out of you know the w- the rest of the world because you're- you want to live at home and some days it's worth it and some days it just really really is

[not <said through laughter>.]

JOLENE: [<soft laughter>]

Unknown: Mm.

BRANDON: [Uh-huh.]

JOLENE: [It's kind of] a trade-off between the jewels that we have and the commercialism out in the

[world.]

ELI: [<laughter>] I was going to say and s-[society?]

JOLENE: [laughter]
[soft laughter from other participants>]

ELI: [laughter>]

ANDREW: [I-]

WHITNEY: [I] think- sorry. [I-]

ANDREW: [Oh] no go ahead.

WHITNEY: I think if you live in a city like you're going to- you're like I have all these things but I don't have quiet solitude or I don't have the mountains or I don't have- but I think martyrdom pretty much hits on like why I feel like I should move with my baby <said through soft laughter> because I'm like- I felt like all my life my mom's sacrificed to live here and am I going to let him spend his entire life thinking that I've sacrificed to be here like and I- XX<"uh?">- I don't know, I don't want to be a martyr for him <said through laughter>. [<laughter>]

BRANDON: [Yeah.]

...

ANDREW: There's not a day that goes by that I don't ponder leaving,

ELI: Uh-huh.

ANDREW: Because with the skill set I've acquired through twenty-three years of working you know around here because I- I mean- I've held pretty much a man's job since I was eight years old, I've had to, because dad left mom at an early age so I've had to work and I've had to you know help- help out because otherwise I wouldn't have anything and I could- I mean I know right now I could make forty fifty dollars an hour on an oil rig all day long,

Unknown (ELI?): Uh-huh.

ANDREW: But that means having to go wherever- wherever the oil rig goes, I could make eighty dollars an hour working on the railroad as a welder, that means going with the railroad, and I think and I'm like yeah I need to do that but then at the same time I'm like I don't want to leave home,

Unknown: Mm.

Unknown (BRANDON?): [Mm.]

ANDREW: [I'm-] I'm co- XX- I- I guess I've gotten that weird- that weird state of constantly being on my toes because things are always happening and bad people are always around here but I'm also really comfortable here because I- I know the enemy that I'm having to look at, I know the- I know the wolf in sheep's clothing when I see it here, I know who the bad people are I know what the bad things are here, out in the other places I <said with voice break, as if in exasperation or surrender> don't know anything, and I never felt so scared as to go to <Central Kentucky>, I hate cities I hate them with a passion it's too [fast]

Unknown: [Mm.]

ANDREW: Paced... .

...

ANDREW: And then- I don't- I- it's- it's a constant struggle and I- I'm just glad to hear that other people have that constant fight,

ELI: [Uh-huh.]

ANDREW: [And I-] and you don't feel as alone when you know that people out there feel the same way you do about something.

BRANDON: Mm.

ELI: Yeah absolutely, I- the- I don't have welding experience or anything like that but like I- I- my experience is in IT and in uh tech and the uh... but the- in Pikeville there are three IT departments and I can tell you almost everybody that works in them like and nob- there are no other options there are no other jobs like I know the three there's one at <PLACE NAME> one at <PLACE NAME> and one at uh <PLACE NAME>, like that's it and so those jobs exist but like there's no other jobs and so like I- I always feel like I need like economically like if I want to work in that field I have to just pick up and leave and it's [j-]

BRANDON: [Yeah.]

ELI: But at the same time I just- I don't know this has always been where I've belonged s- well not belong but been, so.

BRANDON: [Mm.]

WHITNEY: [That's] why Tennessee always appeals to me is the nature, like when I lived in Tennessee before- I have a sister that lives there and I would drive thirty minutes to Pigeon Forge and make pretty decent money when it was an on season when it's an off season you don't but at three o'clock I clocked out I went home her myself my nephew drove five minutes to the lake he fished we read books we drove back to her house we drank a cup of coffee on the deck and like that was the day and like but I was always especially now like thinking about what I want with the baby is like I would be forty-five minutes from being able to take him to an aquarium instead of spending my Saturday alone with a one year-old because where am I going to take him in Letcher County other than taking him somewhere outside by myself and then I've got to like <laughter> lug a one year-old and all his stuff with me

<interference or contact with microphone>

WHITNEY: and somewhere else like I could just go to a zoo I could go to an aquarium <said through laughter> I could go to a museum like it's those little things I want and I also want to still have like coffee on the deck and go out to the lake and small town feelings without- I don't know, maybe it's that I want a small town without a small town that knows my entire life history.

[<laughter>]

[<laughter from multiple participants>]

WHITNEY: [I think that's what I want.]

This segment of the conversation begins with the economic challenges of living in Eastern Kentucky and primarily deals with the notion of migration in Eastern Kentucky (and Central Appalachia as a whole). Participants expand on this, discussing how pressures of staying and going is also tied to access to better economic and recreational opportunities and overall more viable material conditions than those available at home; choosing to stay in the region can sometimes feel like being a “martyr.” Intersecting identities and circumstances such as age, motherhood and safety also add to the pressures of leaving the region.

Jolene initiates this by saying it is economically challenging to live here. She says that while she loves the area, she may have to leave again in a couple of years, and that “...it can be a hard place [to live in] all the way around.” She mentions her age later in the crosstalk (not included in this example), saying if she moves again it would hopefully be for the last time, and she struggles with whether it will be at home or away. Eli talks about living in Pikeville, which Whitney jokingly refers to as “Eagleton” from Parks and Recreation⁹ because of its comparatively larger size and wider variety of social and economic offerings. Eli downplays these benefits and notes that he only has three options for work in his field. He mentions liking cuisines from other cultures and wishes there was an Indian food restaurant closer than three hours away; he is the first to compare the material sacrifices of staying home to martyrdom. Jolene agrees and notes that sometimes it is a “trade-off” between the “jewels that we have” and the “commercialism out in the world.”

⁹ A US television show that aired on National Broadcast Corporation (NBC), Daniels and Schlur (2009).

Whitney also resonates with the feeling of martyrdom associated with staying home, struggling between the quiet and solitude of the mountains and what would be available to her and her baby elsewhere if she moved. She calls back upon themes she first mentions in her story circle turns, both of which dealing with feeling like she does not belong more than she belongs: her mother sacrificing her life for her children to live here even though she always wanted to move, how she does not want her baby to see her do the same by being a martyr for him, how Northeastern Tennessee appeals to her more because she knows from prior experience living there that she could offer her baby more than what she can in Eastern Kentucky. She ends by saying maybe she still wants “small town feelings” or to still live in a small town, but one that does not know her entire life’s history.

Andrew has already made it clear in past examples that Whitesburg is home and he loves living there, but he says here that there is not “a day that goes by that [he doesn’t] ponder leaving.” He speaks to how he could easily make double-digit hourly wages as an oil rigger or railroad welder with his skill set, but that means going where the oil rig or the railroad go, and he does not want to leave home. He also speaks to knowing who his enemies are at home and the comfort it brings him to “know the wolf in sheep’s clothing when [he sees] it,” and how he does not have that same knowledge or comfort other places. He tells the group it feels good to know they have the same “fight” with staying and leaving and that it makes him feel less alone.

These conversations are by no means new or out of the ordinary for Appalachians to have; as an Eastern Kentuckian myself, migration has touched every aspect of my and my family’s lives, and the push and pull between staying and going is still one I feel today.

These narratives show that not only is there no simple answer, but that Appalachia’s history of migration, exploitation and destabilization is one that is still unfolding as part and parcel to the experience of many if not most Central Appalachians. In these cases, to claim Appalachia as identity is to anticipate uncertainty in experience; to feel connection to Appalachia as home is to acknowledge it may one day be from a distance.

3.3. *ROOTEDNESS, COMFORTABILITY, AND EVALUATION*

As mentioned in chapter two, participants took a survey post-story circle to establish baselines for rootedness, demographic information, comfortability with the task, and self- and peer-evaluation.

Table 1 shows participants’ rootedness scores and classifications:

Table 1. Participant Rootedness.

NAME	AGE	GENDER	ROOTEDNESS SCORE	ROOTEDNESS CLASSIFICATION
Andrew	22	Cisgender man	32	More Rooted
Jolene	54	Cisgender woman	27	More Rooted
Whitney	32	Cisgender woman	26 (median)	More Rooted
Missy	26	Cisgender woman	23	Less Rooted
Eli	29	Cisgender man	15	Less Rooted

The median score was R=26. Three participants, Andrew (R=32), Jolene (R=27) and Whitney (R=26), are classified as more rooted; two participants, Missy (R=23) and Eli (R=15), are classified as less rooted.

It is interesting to note that three of five participants explicitly stated their rootedness in the crosstalk in ways that mirror their rootedness classifications; Example 11 from subsection 3.2.1 showed Andrew (MR) and Jolene (MR) explicitly stating their rootedness to Letcher County and Missy (LR) stating the opposite. Although Whitney (R=26) is classified here as more rooted, her stories about wanting to move from Whitesburg could give some indication as to why she aligned with the median score. Eli (R=15), scoring the lowest in rootedness, mainly centered his stories and conversations around work and family relationships, interacting with notions of place mainly to highlight the disadvantages he faces staying in Pikeville.

Table 2 shows participants' responses to task comfortability as well as self- and peer-evaluation of task performance:

Table 2. Participant Responses to Comfortability and Evaluation Survey.

SURVEY QUESTION	ANDREW (MR)	JOLENE (MR)	WHITNEY (MR)	MISSY (LR)	ELI (LR)
Prior experience with story circles	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Story circle naturalness	Natural	Natural	Definitely Natural	Somewhat Natural	Somewhat Natural
Story circle comfortability (in general)	Comfortable	Comfortable	Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Comfortable
Were the stories you shared comparable to those you and your social circle share with each other?	Yes	Yes	“Maybe. I was a little more honest about my feelings today I think”	Yes	Yes
Self eval – are you a talented storyteller?	No	No	Yes and No both circled	No	No
Self eval – were your stories high-quality?	Yes; none specified	“Somewhat”; round 1 story specified	Yes and No both circled; round 1 story specified	Yes; “No, storytelling isn’t my strong suit.”	Yes; none specified
Peer eval – were other participants talented storytellers?	Yes; [participant redacted]	Yes; “All!! Super great people.”	Yes; “Missy and Andrew”	Yes; “Whitney’s story stood out to me”	Yes; none specified
Peer eval – were others’ stories high quality?	Yes; none specified	Yes; “All”	Yes; “All of Missy and Andrew”	Yes; none specified	Yes; none specified

Two of five participants had prior experience with story circles, and all participants reported that story circles felt at least somewhat natural and somewhat comfortable to them. Four of five participants said the stories they shared were

comparable to those they and their social circle share with each other; one participant, Whitney, indicated “Maybe,” saying she thought she may have been more honest about her feelings in the story circle than she normally would be.

Four participants did not consider themselves to be talented storytellers; one participant, Whitney, circled both yes and no. Interestingly, the same four participants said they felt the stories they told were of high quality. Whitney again circled both yes and no. When asked if there were any particular stories they told well, Jolene and Whitney both mentioned their stories from round one; Missy responded, “No, storytelling isn’t my strong suit.”

All five participants said their peers were talented storytellers, and that their peers’ stories were of high quality. Andrew mentioned a redacted sixth participant who, as previously mentioned, did not meet IRB criteria. Jolene said all the participants and their stories stood out, noting that they were all “super great people.” Whitney specified Missy and Andrew and all their stories; Missy said, “Whitney’s story stood out to me,” but did not specify from which round.

4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As detailed in chapter three, Central Appalachian oral personal narrative storytelling exemplifies the inherent interdiscursive¹⁰ and entextual¹¹ nature of oral narrative in both individual and conversational narrative production and performance. Transcript excerpts and survey data showcased how Central Appalachians engage in nonlinear storytelling, primarily through the use of digression, to weave together one or several experiences, emotions, metaphors, themes or variations on themes in ways that convey larger messages, capture complexities, display tensions and contradictions, and give insight into the dynamics of Appalachian life and identity.

The present chapter will situate the findings in chapter three within existing research on narrative and storytelling in the US and the Southern US. Also covered are the implications of awareness, acceptability, and narrative drift, story circles as interview methodology for sociolinguistic research, and rootedness in Central Appalachian storytelling.

4.1. NARRATIVE UNORTHODOXY

The findings in chapter three support the argument that Central Appalachians structure and perform oral personal narrative in an unorthodox manner. This is further supported by the diversion of these findings from certain assertions proposed in Ochs (2004), particularly as they pertain to narrative organization and competency.

¹⁰ Falconi and Graber (2019) defines interdiscursivity as “the myriad ways that particular stretches of discourse are linked, as well as the culturally-specific principles used by speakers and listeners to decode or create such links from one moment of conversation to the next” (p.3).

¹¹ Bauman and Briggs (1990) defines entextualization as “the process through which discourse is rendered extractable, though still bearing traces of its history of use” (p.73).

As first mentioned in chapter one, Ochs proposes ten narrative lessons that have served as a guidepost for this thesis in terms of US-based personal experience storytelling practices. These ten are as follows (Ochs 2004, pp.270–285):

- Narrative Lesson One: Temporal and causal orderliness,
- Narrative Lesson Two: Narrative attention is given to unusual, unexpected, or problematic life events,
- Narrative Lesson Three: Narrative is organized in terms of human time (“a remembered past, an anticipated future, and/or an imagined moment”),
- Narrative Lesson Four: Transformation of personal experience into narrative logics,
- Narrative Lesson Five: Division of narrative practices into displaying coherent logics and probing alternative ones,
- Narrative Lesson Six: Pursuit of a coherent logic of events and authenticity of experience,
- Narrative Lesson Seven: Ramifications of narrative practices for narrative analysis,
- Narrative Lesson Eight: Narrative practices as narrative competence,
- Narrative Lesson Nine: Five dimensions of analysis (tellership, tellability, embedding, linearity, moral stance), and
- Narrative Lesson Ten: The role of narrative realization in configuring selves.

While Central Appalachian storytelling does appear to comply with a majority of Ochs’ lessons, the stories presented in this thesis challenge expectations of temporal and

causal orderliness (lesson one), narrative competence (lesson eight), tellability, linearity, and moral stance (lesson nine). Take Whitney's story from round three (Example 1), for example. There is no discernable temporal or causal relationship between her job at an all-Spanish speaking factory and the feelings of isolation and unbelonging she experiences as a single mother; the only connections between the two are that they are both examples of not belonging and are both instances in which Whitney felt isolated, and that underlying emotion is what motivated the events detailed in her narrative.

Although we may assume the existence of such, there is very little we can point to in stories like Eli and his coworkers, Jolene on the mountaintop or Andrew with his chickens for indications of temporality, causality or linearity. These narratives in particular do not speak so much to a specific recounting of events as they do to a multiplicity of aspects or interactions across space and time that, when combined together, showed the family-like bonds between coworkers, the sense of openness and warm welcome among "friends of the mountain," and the intimacy of care between animals and owner. The quality of these stories feels almost mosaic-like (or quilt-like...) in their preference for holism over granularity.

In narrative lesson eight, Ochs asserts that there are two categories of narrative competence, the first being a skill developed in childhood that entails the ability to "articulate a temporal sequence of events; situate the events; compose a coherent plot line with a beginning, middle, and end; and maintain a moral perspective" (p.280). Only one of the narratives elicited from the story circle (Andrew, round 3) demonstrates this, and as mentioned in chapter three, it was far and away the outlier, and may have been due to practiced retellings or experience with multiple forms of narrative planning. Would this

imply that Central Appalachian storytellers are not competent by this measure? This is contradictory to participant notions of storytelling quality in the circle, and the larger storyteller trope that is largely accepted in and outside of the Appalachian region. The answer to this could lie in the second category of narrative competence, the ability to “probe, challenge [or] revise a logic of events” (p. 279). Perhaps Central Appalachian storytellers are received positively due to the proficiency they demonstrate in combining multiple experiences and finding connections between them.

The dimensions of analysis delineated in lesson nine culminate in two narrative practices (NPs). Ochs’ summarization is presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Dimensional characteristics of Narrative Practices 1 and 2 (Ochs 2004, p.286).

NARRATIVE PRACTICE 1	NARRATIVE PRACTICE 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One active co-teller • Highly tellable experience • Relatively detached • Linear plot line • Certain, constant moral stance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple active co-tellers • Moderately tellable experience • Embedded in ongoing activity • Indeterminate plot line • Uncertain, shifting moral stance

In the narratives presented in this thesis, there are several instances of NP 2 characteristics appearing in what could otherwise be categorized as NP 1. Setting aside the number of tellers and the detachment/embeddedness of the narratives (as the story circle format could have influenced both), notions of tellability, linear plot line, and moral stance did not appear as anticipated by this framework. It is debatable whether stories like Andrew’s about his chickens are highly tellable in a rural context, as feeling a close connection to pets is common, and raising chickens is not out of place in the region; in fact, Jolene later mentions in the crosstalk that she too has chickens at home, and they

share a small aside about what breeds they each have and how many. Here Andrew mentions that he has eighty-seven just-hatched diddles (baby chicks) at home, which would seem to be far more tellable in comparison. Some stories were unclear in moral stance or showed changes in moral stance as the narrative went on. In round three, Eli discusses how good his friends were for taking care of him after his father passed away, but also that he couldn't see that goodness at the time; in round two, Whitney talks about how moving to Tennessee and returning home to Kentucky have been both good and bad choices over time in different contexts.

4.2. ISOLATION OR INNOVATION? PRESERVATION OR UTILITY?

As first mentioned in chapter one, Davies (2008) has served as a guidepost for this thesis in terms of storytelling in the broader South (and, by extension, the Mountain South). This thesis provides strong evidence for digression as a feature of Southern and Appalachian storytelling, providing support for Davies' argument of digression as an explicit norm. Several participant stories mirror those analyzed by Davies in terms of digression use, nonlinearity, and lack of discernable narrative pattern. Summation as end-framing is also somewhat reminiscent of a finding in Delargy (1945), "opening and closing statements which echo one another and serve to sum up the discourse and signal that the speaker is finished," which Davies cites as evidence of her claim that Southern storytelling is connected to Irish folk taxonomies (Davies 2008, p. 177).

It is assertions like these, however, that give me pause. Davies cites scholarship that claims the South already had a "certain Irish flavor" in the nineteenth century from eighteenth-century migration, using this and notions of preliteracy to connect Southern storytelling style to Irish storytelling taxonomies (Davies 2008 and cites therein, p.177).

She specifically points to Lambert (1985)'s descriptions of two categories of twentieth-century Irish storytelling taxonomy: *béaloideas*, "oral remembrance and instruction in the ways of the cultural heritage by an older person," and *seanchas*, "personal experience remembrance and accounts" (p. 177). She also cites Delargy (1945)'s gender distinctions: "a genre which men knew, but at which women excelled" (p.177).

While it is certainly possible that Southern storytelling style could have retained elements of other cultural storytelling traditions through historical contact, these two genres are considerably large in scope; in fact, *seanchas* covers essentially all of oral personal narrative storytelling, and the only factors that connect it to present-day Southern storytelling are eighteenth-century Scots-Irish migration and a claim that the region had an Irish "flavor" two hundred years ago. Davies also does not make any connection between her hallmark claim of digression and any historical Irish equivalent. More evidence is needed to make this claim, and it begs the question: what would it mean for a contemporary American region to preserve or retain potentially centuries-old Irish storytelling practices? Additionally, recognizing this may have been true at times throughout history, what does it mean to follow Flynt's claim of poor Southern white "cultural isolation" and apply it with broad strokes to one of the largest and most diverse regions of the nation, in what is by far the most connected era of human history?

For starters, my participants are from Eastern Kentucky and Davies' case study, Tucker Windham, is from Alabama; the appearance of digression in both places complicates the argument for a culturally or geographically isolated racial population. The similar (if not identical) concept of topic associating style in Michaels (1981) also complicates this, as this was predominantly used by Black children in California. In this

thesis, participants showed no signs of preserving a storytelling tradition passed down to them over time: there was no connection to how their families or previous generations tell stories, no competing notions of how stories should or should not be told, no comparisons to other stories also deemed as good examples of Appalachian storytelling, and really no constructive criticism at all. In fact, the only tangible feedback about the stories told in the circle was that they were all of high quality, but no specifics were given as to why. That said, my participants were not interviewed or surveyed for notions of tradition or preservation; future research may do well to include this. It should also be noted that I did not find any gender distinctions among my participants in terms of performance, narrative content, structure, or proficiency.

It is also important to consider the long, winding, and at oftentimes conflicting history of literature and scholarship concerning Scots-Irish settlement in Appalachia. Anglin (1992) identifies the roots of dominant discourses surrounding Appalachia in 19th century local color writing, using ethnography to problematize notions of power and identity. She found the following in her inquiry into the movement:

Through the machinations of what came to be called the local color movement, the Appalachian mountain chain was rendered exotic and its inhabitants constructed as archetypical “Scotch-Irish mountaineers,” descended from “pure Anglo-Saxon stock” and manifesting picturesque customs reminiscent of the Elizabethan era (Batteau 1990: 62). (Anglin 1992, p.106)

This both summarizes and exemplifies my concerns with situating Central Appalachian narrative practices in Irish folk storytelling taxonomies. Batteau calls these local colorist constructions the “invention of Appalachia” (Batteau 1990); Anglin calls local colorism central in academic constructions of Appalachia, even stating an intention to “disabuse” anthropology of romanticized imagery of the region (p.105). This imagery

has been called upon and reified time and time again in the social sciences. One of the earliest examples comes from sociology, nearly a century before Anglin (1992): Roosevelt (1889) relied on local color writing as historical fact to construct an argument for a new race of American men called “the Kentuckian.”¹² It has also been argued that Scots-Irish (also known as Ulster-Scots) as an ethnicity is indistinct among other white populations in the US, making narratives about (and performance of) such a constructed identity highly malleable (see Wilson 2015).

This is not to say that looking towards Scots-Irish influence in the region is unfounded; it is true that they migrated to the region in large numbers, and it has even been argued that some grammatical features of Appalachian Englishes have Scots-Irish origins (e.g., Montgomery 1991, Hazen and Fluharty 2004). Yet the discussion above also demonstrates how notions of Scots-Irishness align with what folklorists have referred to as “tellable narratives,” defined by Ann K. Ferrell as public discourses that “reflec[t] common, but often unquestioned, ideas and the topic at hand” (Ferrell 2012, p.128)¹³. I am only asking that scholars take all the above into consideration in their treatment of Appalachia and exercise the utmost caution in discerning scientific fact from widespread discursive fiction; may we not repeat the mistakes of our predecessors. For now, I argue that a link between Irish folk taxonomies and Mountain Southern narrative is one made prematurely and is a question that remains unanswered, as neither Davies nor I have compelling evidence for or against such a claim.

¹² The local color origins of race and gender theories such as this one are detailed in Hartman (2012).

¹³ Ferrell’s tellable narratives should not be confused with Ochs’ definition of tellability, which is concerned with how reportable an event is and how compellingly it is reported (Ochs 2004, p.282).

To return to Davies, she also mentions the following as other potential factors and implications in Southern storytelling: the use of digression as “stream-of-consciousness,” the cultural value of extended storytelling as entertainment, indirectness as Southern discourse strategy, Southern deference/distance ethos and Southern ambivalence towards modernization. While these could all very well be both past and present influences in Mountain Southern storytelling, I am unsure of its influence in the stories collected for this thesis. An intergenerational group of rural Eastern Kentuckians told and reflected on intimate and vulnerable stories of their everyday without explicit regard for politeness or entertainment value in regard to theme, yearning for access to cultural cuisines and amenities common in more urban areas, speaking of taking their children to protests, being defiantly queer at the risk of physical harm, and finding home in music. The story circle culminated in a collection of narratives that gives only the tiniest glimpse into a dynamic, nuanced, evolving, living, breathing, and certainly connected Mountain South.

Given the complexities of all of the abovementioned, I urge scholars to consider the possibility of digression’s continued existence not as a product of its historical preservation or potential ties to tradition, but because of its utility in a modern-day Appalachia. Although digression as narrative structure may be atypical in terms of the linear, beginning-middle-end we normally associate with stories in the US, I argue that digression is used as a means to achieve a certain conversational end in Central Appalachian storytelling. Chapter three demonstrated how digression can add information and perspectives that the teller feels are relevant to the story they are constructing in the moment. In some instances (such as in “backstory” initiations), they enrich the common ground between teller and listener. Digression by the definition

provided in this thesis violates maxims of Quantity, Manner, and at times Relevance; perhaps violating these maxims in this way is within the common ground of Central Appalachian tellers and listeners as it pertains to storytelling and not in that of those outside the region.

Digression used in this manner is not a meaningless distraction from a primary narrative; it is a discourse strategy that combines multiple narratives or portions of narratives for a larger conversational goal. This could offer a potential explanation for the storytelling trope's popularity in and outside of the region: an expected, familiar form of narrative "planning" for those inside the region that at the same time may be unexpected or feel novel to those outside the region. However, further study is needed to verify this claim.

Davies also mentions socialization into a certain genre of narrative; while I am uncertain of the validity of the British Isles/Irish taxonomy claim, the presence of socialization through narrative is possible. It is interesting that all participants evaluated their and their peers' stories as high quality, yet only considered their peers as talented storytellers and not themselves (or in Whitney's case, circling both yes and no, at least expressing some form of unsurety). Perhaps this is out of politeness; Jolene qualified her fellow tellers as "super great people" when asked if any of them were talented storytellers, which otherwise feels out of place. Saliency could also be the answer here; in this case, participants may not be fully aware of what they consider to be "good" storytelling, at least not consciously, and making judgements based off what *sounds* or *feels* good. Making metanarrative commentary and evaluation more explicit (or its own task) in future study could be of benefit in discerning participant awareness.

This could also hold implications of socialization through narrative in a parallel process to Miller et al. (2012), in which Taiwanese and European-American families demonstrated this through explicit feedback on the personal narratives they shared. Given no feedback was given in this manner during story circle crosstalk or in the survey evaluations, perhaps this occurs for Central Appalachians *implicitly*, in which they learn what is “good” oral personal narrative storytelling through observation and emulation.

Heath (1983) and Michaels (1981) could also provide support for a narrative-as-socialization-event argument. Perhaps narrative construction and performance mirrors dialect use for Central Appalachians in that they first learn how to construct and perform narrative at home in conversation and are later confronted with negotiating standardized genres of narrative (oral and written) at school and in formal contexts. This could also explain why Andrew demonstrated two different approaches to narrative in the story circle. Again, further study is needed to verify these claims.

4.3. AWARENESS, ACCEPTABILITY, AND DIVERSION FROM PROMPT

Although participants may not have been fully aware of the ways in which they constructed and perceived narrative, the use of “backstory” initiations discussed in chapter three holds implications for awareness of digression use on some level.

Reminiscent of Kathryn Tucker Windham’s assertion that she was “doing what Southerners do” by digressing (Davies 2008, p.167), participants here also signaled that there would be some form of future diversion away from what was about to be said.

One participant also demonstrated sensitivity to the appropriateness of what could or could not be divulged in the story circle. Although the first story circle round has been

treated as an opportunity for acclimation to task, Eli says something in the crosstalk portion that may have influenced his subsequent turns:

Example 13. Excerpt from round 1 crosstalk. Middle of crosstalk.

ELI: Uh you <referring to JOLENE> made me rethink everything that I was about to say

[because yours was very-]

JOLENE: [<soft laugh>]

ELI: like- yours was very heartfelt [and uh you know]

JOLENE and WHITNEY: [<laugh>]

ELI: about your mother and uh after that I was just like yeah I- [I don't want to talk about]

WHITNEY: [<laugh>]

ELI: e-sports anymore now, [like- <laugh>]

JOLENE and WHITNEY: [<laugh>]

ELI: But yours was xx <“fucking good”?>,

JOLENE: Thank you.

ELI: [It was really nice.]

MISSY: [Uh-huh.]

The prompt for round one was “Tell me about a time when you felt inspired.” Eli talked about starting an e-sports team at a local college, while Jolene talked about her mother. Eli compliments Jolene on her story and says it makes him “rethink everything [he] was about to say.” This is important to note because Eli is noticeably much more vulnerable in the next two rounds, ending with him talking about his father committing suicide in round three. This demonstrates construction and management of *thematic acceptability*, or what can or cannot be shared in a given context with a given party or parties (in this case, in a group of coworkers and community members).

Other participants challenged thematic acceptability by diverting from the story circle prompt. To revisit Missy's story from round two, "Tell me about a time when you felt like you belonged," is an example of this. She starts by saying she has spent more time feeling like she does not belong, not knowing that that was the prompt for round three. Her story is presented in its entirety below:

Example 14. Missy's story, round 2.

MISSY: Yeah I've- I think I've spent more time feeling that I didn't belong anywhere uh than belonging uh and that's with moving off to school and then you're in this new place and it's like I don't really have a clique I've never really you know had a space I felt like, I've always felt like I've kind of stood alone which is OK I'm- I'm- I think I'm independent and strong enough to where that's fine but to have that small group of people where you feel like they call me if they need anything and- and they- they lean on me and they admire my advice and things like that and- I'd say my- my biggest feeling of belonging is in my friendships because to- <sigh> it's having that- that connectedness I think it- I feel more that I belong in people's lives and that I'm glad to have a- a place in people's lives and I think that's my biggest feeling of belonging is being with my friends, uh and especially my band mates um that's a recent newfound sense of like home because- not just being in Letcher County I've been in Letcher County and it not feel like home and so i-it's kind of like you search different avenues like where- where am I getting uh you know that warm fuzzy feeling and so when I'm playing music with my friends or just sitting around with them that's my biggest sense of belonging.

She moves on to talking about how she does not have a "clique" and has mostly been independent, but later answers the prompt, saying her band mates have given her a "new found sense of home" and that she finds her biggest sense of belonging in her friendships.

However, this later influences the story Whitney tells in round two. At first Whitney was supposed to tell her story before Missy, but she skipped her turn and ended up going last. Given Missy's original deviation from the prompt, Whitney is then able to

tell her story of not feeling like she belonged. Her story is also presented in its entirety below:

Example 15. Whitney's story, round 2.

WHITNEY: XX Uh yeah I guess I was thinking two different things and I couldn't figure out but I guess they're really actually in-intertwined and uh it's that I don't feel like I belong here, uh I- there are parts that I belong to here but overall this is not where I belong, and I have been coming to that realization more and more lately uh I spent my whole life like every weekend – I had family in Tennessee and every weekend my Mom packed up the car as soon as school was over and we went to Tennessee and so sometimes I say I really feel like Tennessee is as much as home as Kentucky is for me, uh but my whole life my Mom said we were leaving we were leaving as soon as something happened like- when her parents passed away we were going to be gone when she retired we were leaving so I spent my whole life preparing to leave here uh and then when I turned eighteen I did I left and I went to Tennessee for a few years and then I would feel the need to come back home because I felt like I- I owed that to my parents I saw them do that for their parents and so I would come back home and then I left again in 2011 and I stayed gone <clears throat> through 2015 so for quite a few years and most of those years were in Tennessee and that was like where I felt like that time that space is where I felt like I belonged the most like I found a crew of people who genuinely loved me and like accepted all of the behaviors good and bad uh but I always feel like it sounds really narcissistic to say this but they felt like- I- it always just felt good because they saw a lot of good in me that I didn't feel like I s- think people see here, I feel too under the microscope here I feel too critiqued here I feel too- I don't feel like people see the good in me here, uh but I came back again because my parents are older both of my parents got disabled when I was in high school so I came back again and I made the decision to become a mother uh <soft laughter> and becoming a single mom at that uh and that's probably where like in my heart I feel like I belong the most like I made this decision to become a mom and that's where I belong I belong as his mother, uh but as he gets older and I think about our futures and I think about the hardships that I have to go through here sometimes and I think about what I want for him, it's not that I don't want him to grow up here because that- I see- I mean I- you know we're here doing this today <referring to the story circle> like I get to call this work today, uh so I see like all the good I see all the great things but I also just see like if I stay here forever he's going to grow up with a Mom who says when this happens we're going to leave when this happened we're going to go and he's going to feel that same divide that I felt, and so every day I just like count down like when do I get to adopt him when do we get to go because I don't want him to grow up feeling like he doesn't belong in a space because I don't feel like I belong in a space and I want to give him a mom who feels like she's where she's supposed to be so that he can figure out

where he's supposed to be, so as much as I love here and as much as I love parts of here it's just not where I'm myself right now.

Whitney describes how her mother's sense of place and yearning to move to Tennessee influenced her own and how she feels Tennessee is as much her home as Kentucky. She ultimately does not feel like she belongs in Kentucky, though, saying she is too "under the microscope" and critiqued here. She fears her son's sense of place and belonging will be influenced by her and that he will feel the same divide she felt if she does not move after adopting him, if she herself does not feel she "belongs in a space."

Whitney later acknowledges Missy's influence on her story in the crosstalk portion for round two:

Example 16. Excerpt from round 2 crosstalk. Middle of crosstalk.

WHITNEY: Yeah I thought it was interesting when you said <referring to MISSY> you felt like you spent most of your life not feeling like you belonged somewhere and I was like yeah.

MISSY: [Yeah.]

WHITNEY: [<laughter>]

MISSY: [Yeah.]

WHITNEY: [Yeah. <laughter>]

4.4. STORY CIRCLES AS INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

As of this writing, this project is the first that I am aware of to deploy story circles as an interview method in linguistics-to collect multiple individual narratives in addition to stretches of multiparty conversational discourse. Story circles accomplish many of the same objectives of traditional sociolinguistic interview methodology and offer potential solutions to some of its larger limitations. The sociolinguistic interview, born from

Labov's seminal work in the Northeast (e.g., Labov 1966, 1972a, 1972b, 1972c), is arguably the gold standard for interview methodology in US sociolinguistics. It consists of informal conversation between interviewer and interviewee(s) and formal language tasks, such as reading passages or word lists, with the goal of eliciting naturally occurring speech in a variety of contexts.

The limitations surrounding the use of sociolinguistic interviews as data boil down to the role of the interviewer, the nature of the interview itself, and the impact of both on the naturalness of elicited speech. This includes the interview as its own genre of speech event (Wolfson 1976), differences in social variables and language use between interviewer and interviewee (e.g., Trudgill 1986, Bell & Johnson 1997), and interviewer cultural incompetence as expressed through metacommunicative practices (Briggs 1986). For the most part, I had an advantage regarding the latter two; I am from the same community as my participants, speak the same variety of Appalachian English, and am similar in demographic profile. All participants knew me prior to the interviews or shared mutual friends, which is not uncommon for our small town. This may not be the case for other researchers looking to adopt this model and should be taken into consideration.

However, the role of the interviewer is vastly different. Story circles are effective in that they provide an environment amenable to eliciting naturally occurring speech with little to no interference from the researcher; the focus is on participants intently listening to stories during the rounds until it is their turn to tell their own and then discuss and reflect on the experience afterwards with other participants. Participants are not necessarily directing their narratives to an interviewer, but to the circle as a whole; while the presence of the interviewer in the circle could certainly still affect what is said, the

risk of the observer's paradox¹⁴ is minimal in comparison to direct interviewer-interviewee conversation. Instead, the researcher is able to simultaneously steer conversation through prompts while otherwise not participating, primarily acting as an observer to responses and conversations.

That said, the story circle model is not without its own limitations. The distinction between single and multiparty discourse in story circles is not one that exists in a vacuum; this is still largely a multiparty interview format, which can have an effect on single party discourse. This is evidenced by the previous section's discussion of thematic acceptability and diversion from prompt.

The story circle format also dovetails nicely with Goffman (1959)'s dramaturgical model: the story circle rounds themselves serve as a "front stage" environment, in which participants are most aware of the performer-audience dynamic in the task; the crosstalk portion serves as the "backstage," in which participants manage, negotiate, challenge, contradict, and/or give support to what was presented in the previous round while using any new information or commentary to prepare for the next.

4.5. *ROOTEDNESS*

This project does not have sufficient evidence to determine any effect rootedness may have on narrative construction. This is due in part to the fact that all participants

¹⁴ From Labov (1972c), "the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain this data by systematic observation" (p.209).

made use of digression, but the participant ranking highest in rootedness, Andrew (R=32), used two distinct narrative structures. Also, four of the five participants shared experiences they had with out-migration from the region, which may have played a role in this outcome.

That said, rootedness was indeed expressed *through* narrative in ways that mirrored their rootedness classifications, which was particularly useful in understanding the nuances of rootedness as detailed in chapter three. Missy is another example of this; on the survey she answered that she felt her identity was more tied to Letcher County than not (marking a 4 out of 5), yet still scored as less rooted in comparison to her peers. She also mainly positioned herself as not finding belonging in geographical place and instead valuing belonging in her relationships. In round three, however, she says coming home from college has given her new opportunities to find belonging in Whitesburg. Perhaps rootedness is also fluid, especially in a place where migration is almost expected. This would explain the discrepancy between her lower rootedness score and higher identity self-score.

Modifying Reed's rootedness metric for use in another part of the region was challenging. The point-assigning system is unpredictable, and it was difficult to discern how many points or options a given question should have, especially when creating new questions, as was necessary for this project. A standardized model would be beneficial in future research.

5. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIVES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This project has analyzed Central Appalachian storytelling and implemented story circles as an interview methodology. It joins Davies (2008) in arguing for regional storytelling distinctiveness in the US, and it opens the door for further nuanced discussion and analysis of narrative use in both Appalachia and the South. This chapter offers acknowledgements of study limitations and suggestions for future study, excluding those already given in previous chapters.

All five participants were white and cisgender, all but one were under the age of fifty and all but one had some experience with college, if not a college degree; the homogeneity of this sample was not intentional, nor is it representative of the demographics of Appalachia, Central Appalachia, Eastern Kentucky, or even Letcher or Pike Counties. Future research must be sure to include the broad array of race, age, class, and gender demographics present in the region.

What does it mean for a narrative to collapse? What constitutes “bad” or “failed” attempts at storytelling, especially in digression-based and nonlinear storytelling? How do storytellers determine, navigate, and manage this in practice? These questions are some of the many not yet answered. Story circles involving non-Appalachians (and non-Southerners) would also be helpful for understanding the differences between storytelling in and outside of the region, as would metapragmatic analysis of differences in storytelling expectations in Appalachians and non-Appalachians. Analysis of story circles as it pertains to formality may also prove beneficial. Irvine (1979) could help determine whether the story circle structure affects discourse in a way that would render it unnatural.

Taking the potentially emotional nature of story circles into account is also important in using them as an interview method. In my five years of facilitating them, it has almost always been my experience that the format lends itself to an environment that feels close and intimate, and the session documented here was no exception. However, it was due to my oversight that the story circle prompts were structured in a way that left what ended up being the most emotionally loaded prompt – dealing with not belonging – for last. It was clear in the crosstalk that the subject weighed heavy on everyone in the room. I made sure we had extensive time for talking after the fact for everyone to process and move on from these feelings before ending the circle and continuing to the survey. In the future, it may prove useful to avoid this by “ending on a good note,” either by saving a happier or less intense prompt for last or including some sort of a “cool-down” round at the end.

CONCLUSION

Four questions were raised in the introduction of this thesis: How did the Appalachian storyteller trope come to be? Can it really be argued that all Appalachians are talented storytellers? How do Appalachians share stories about themselves and others? What discursive, narrational or other features are characteristic of Appalachian storytelling, and are these different from those used by the rest of the US?

This project recognizes that understanding Appalachian narrative practices is the first step to understanding the Appalachian storyteller trope. An intergenerational group of rural Eastern Kentuckians told intimate and vulnerable stories of identity, place, community, and belonging in story circles, culminating in a collection of stylistically unorthodox narratives that are but a small example of a dynamic, nuanced, evolving, living, breathing, and connected Mountain South. Transcript excerpts and survey data showcase how Central Appalachians engage in nonlinear storytelling, primarily through the use of digression, to weave together several experiences, emotions, metaphors, themes, or variations on themes in ways that convey larger messages, capture complexities, display tensions and contradictions, and give insight into the dynamics of Appalachian life and identity. This offers support for possible explanations of the prevalence of the storyteller trope in and outside of the region, limited by their need for further study, ranging from pragmatic cooperativity and narrative competency to socialization through narrative.

What city or cities do you visit most often?

When you go to nearby cities, where do you say you're from?

4. If you traveled to somewhere else in the U.S. and met someone who asked where you were from, where would you tell them you were from?

5. How many family members do you have that are currently living in Letcher Co.?

6. How many generations of your family have lived in Letcher Co.? _____

7. What three traits best characterize Letcher Countians?

Do you feel you have these traits? (Yes | No)

If no, what three traits best characterize you?

-
8. Rank the following (1-8) in the order that you most identify with:

___ Letcher Co.

___ My local community

___ Kentucky

___ Southeastern KY

___ Eastern KY

___ The South

___ Appalachia

___ The Mountains

9. Are you a University of Kentucky fan? (Yes | No)

Do you watch or listen to the games? (Yes | No)

10. Do you follow country music? (Yes | No)

Bluegrass? (Yes | No)

Old Time/Traditional Appalachian music? (Yes | No)

Other kinds of music? (Yes | No)

If yes, what kind? _____

11. Do you usually attend local events, like Mountain Heritage? (Yes | No)

12. Please indicate on the following scale to what degree you would say your identity is tied to Letcher Co.

Not at all tied

1

2

Somewhat tied

3

4

Closely tied

5

Please use this space to leave any additional comments:

APPENDIX B: ROOTEDNESS METRIC

1. No +2 Yes 0
- 1a. Helps to clarify
- 1b. Rural +1 Suburban 0 Urban 0
- 1c. No +2 Yes 0
- 1d. Helps clarify
- 1e. Frequently +2 Occasionally +1 Never 0
2. Frequently +2 Occasionally +1 Never 0
- 2a. Helps clarify
- 2b. Local Community +3 Letcher County +2 Whitesburg (if not local community) +1
Other 0
3. *(Note: this question ended up not being necessary and was thrown out.)*
- 3a. Helps clarify *(Note: this question ended up not being necessary and was thrown out.)*
- 3b. Local Community +3 Letcher County +2 Whitesburg (if not local community) +1
Other 0
4. Local Community +4 Whitesburg/Letcher County +3 Southeastern KY +2 Eastern
KY +1 Kentucky 0 Other 0
5. 5+ +2 2-4 +1 <2 0
6. 5+ +2 2-4 +1 <2 0
7. Helps clarify
- 7a. Positive +2 Negative 0
- 7b. Helps clarify
8. Local community +5 Letcher County +4 Southeastern Kentucky +3 Eastern Kentucky
+2 Appalachia +1 The Mountains +1 Kentucky +1 The South +1
9. Positive +1 Negative 0
- 9a. Positive +1 Negative 0
10. Positive +1 Negative 0
- 10a. Bluegrass/local +1
- 10b. Old Time/Traditional +1

10c. Helps clarify

10d. Helps clarify

11. Positive +1 Negative 0

12. Closely +3 Somewhat +1 Not 0

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHICS, COMFORTABILITY AND EVALUATION SURVEY

Name _____ Age _____

Race/Ethnicity (select all that apply)

- African American
- Latinx/Latin American/Hispanic
- Asian
- Native American and Alaskan Native
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
- Asian
- Caucasian
- Not Listed (please specify): _____
- Prefer not to say

Gender (select all that apply)

- Male
- Female
- Trans
- Non-binary/Genderqueer/Gender nonconforming
- Agender
- Not Listed (please specify): _____
- Prefer not to say

Household Income

- Less than \$15,000/year
- \$15,000-\$25,000/year
- \$25,000-\$50,000/year
- \$50,000-75,000/year
- \$75,000-\$100,000/year
- More than \$100,000/year
- Prefer not to say

Highest Level of Education Attained

- Some high school/GED
- High school graduate/GED
- Some college
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral or Professional degree
- Prefer not to say

Where do you call home/what place do you identify with most? _____

Have you participated in a story circle before today? (Yes | No)

1. How natural did it feel to share stories in a story circle?

Not at all		Somewhat		Definitely
1	2	3	4	5

2. How comfortable were you with sharing stories in a story circle?

Not at all		Somewhat		Definitely
1	2	3	4	5

3. Were the stories you shared today comparable to the ones you and your social circle would share with each other? (Yes | No)

If no, what kinds of stories do you and your social circle normally share?

4. Do you feel that you are a talented storyteller? (Yes | No)

5. Do you feel the stories you shared today were of high quality? (Yes | No)

Is there a story or stories you feel you told particularly well?

6. Do you feel that others in the circle were talented storytellers? (Yes | No)

Were there any participants that stood out in your mind?

7. Do you feel the stories you heard others share today were of high quality? (Yes | No)

Were there any stories that stuck out in your mind?

Please use this space to leave any additional comments:

APPENDIX D: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Note: below is an abbreviated, listed version of M. Montgomery's transcription protocol, with slight modifications. See Montgomery (2019) for the full protocol.

Transcribe in two stages: first stage purely for meaning or content, second stage for further analysis.

Transcribe verbatim.

Use standard spellings with three exceptions: (1) overlapped speech (2) when argument can be made for individual basis ('hit' for it, 'they' for there) (3) verb principal parts ('shuck' for shook, 'tuck' for took). Less conventional contractions rendered only when absolutely confident. Be sure to keep a log of exceptions.

Pay attention to presence/absence of suffixes that encode morphological info (i.e., ten year ago).

Transcribe partial words/false starts.

Transcribe filler words. Use uh-huh for yes, huh-uh for no, even if nasalization is present. (*Note: "mm" was used in one instance due to its use by multiple participants and its prevalence in the transcript.*)

Periods are only for the end of a speaker's turn or in abbreviations. Otherwise use commas, even after complete sentences. Spell out forms of address/titles (Mister, Doctor) and numerals.

Do not indicate pauses.

Include overlapping speech when it causes a speaker to finish a topic (e.g., when a separate turn can be assigned and a new turn started). Indicate in brackets.

Tag words/phrases that have particular interest (i.e., PRON, GRAM, LEX, etc.), followed by IPA or bracketed comment indicating why it is of interest (*note: in this transcript, angle brackets were used for this and other commentary*). Be conservative in doing this during initial transcription.

If one or more words are unintelligible at first, listen again. If still unclear after three or four times, insert flag notation XX and go on. If a name is uncertain, put ?? at the end of it.

APPENDIX E: TRANSCRIPT

Speakers: Interviewer (BRANDON), ANDREW, ELI, JOLENE, MISSY, WHITNEY.

Note: Participants have been assigned pseudonyms.

ROUND ONE – A TIME WHEN YOU FELT INSPIRED

BRANDON: OK so thank y'all again for being here, uh, the first prompt I have for us is tell me about a time when you felt inspired, so again I'll give us a little time to reflect on it and whoever wants to go can start.

I'm actually going to move this closer to the center <BRANDON adjusts the microphone in the center of the table>

WHITNEY: I'll start, starting's always hard, uh I can think of a few times I felt really inspired but as I'm getting ready for <MEDIA PROGRAM>, as I'm getting ready for the summer I always think about my first summer with <MEDIA PROGRAM> and I had left home, I didn't go to college, I'd freaked out after high school, panicked, didn't want to go to college, uh and like wasn't really sure what I wanted to do, I'd knew I'd always been interested in journalism but didn't know if I wanted to move away from home or if I wanted to stay here, I also knew like I never really fit in with like the women in my life here like I loved them and the women raised me and I had a lot of girl cousins but I was also kind of different from all of them, uh, and so I left home and spent a few years sweeping up popcorn in a movie theatre, and like eating popcorn for breakfast lunch and dinner, and uh, and so finally someone had sent me the application for AMI and I knew I was ready for something different, like I- I don't regret going- not going to college after high school, I think it was the best two years of my life, part of the best years of my life, uh but I knew like after a while 's like PRON <'(I) was like', pro-dropped, [z+laik̩]> I don't want to sweep popcorn for the rest of my life there's got to be something else, and so I knew I xx <sort? sorta? sort of?> wanted to do media so I decided to apply for the internship and was really hesitant about coming home, uh and so I came home, I got the-I got the job, uh, I interviewed over the phone and talked about Barack Obama, it was before he even- I think he was like just putting in his bid for the presidency, it's funny now to think about like what was on my mind, uh, but I came home and uh started the program really- I was one of the older students, I wasn't in school, I wasn't focused on anything uh but then we watched- we started watching all these documentaries and I had grown up like, my papaw was like my biggest like influence, uh he was like political, he talked about politics, he was self-educated, uh he- he taught me how to garden, all these different things and so he also passed away that summer, and he had been big part of the UMWA, so it was like I was coming home, I wasn't sure what I was going to do, biggest figure in my life passed away, and we watched Harlan County, USA, and it was all these stories he had told me like come to life that I never seen, but like more so like just the fact that it was stories he had told me and like me being unsure, what they- what he had never told me was like the role that women played in the Brookside strikes, uh or- or watching a woman filmmaker actually make the film, because when you watch it like you can see Barbara Kopple getting harassed, you can see her like getting pushed around and

uh it was just the first time xx <where? when?> I saw- really saw women's role in this community and really saw a woman's role with a camera, and it was the first time xx <where/when?> I was like maybe this is something I can do, uh it inspired me to do a lot of really crazy things in the years afterwards like organizing and protesting uh and they're experiences I'm glad I had, they're not experiences like- some of them I would continue for the right reasons but I also like threw myself at a lot of wrong projects afterwar- that too, but I felt really inspired to like figure out who I was within this community, not just who I was growing up or whose daughter I was or whose sister I was but who I was in this community, uh and I was really lucky to go through with a program with two women leaders who kind of helped guide that at the same time too, and I'm going to go to the right <giving the direction the circle is going in>.

MISSY: OK well uh this recent projects and things going on, uh I'm currently coordinating <MUSIC CAMP> and that camp is about empowerment to young girls, also trans and gender non-conforming folks uh who kind of want to have a space – we create a space for them uh to form a band and they just have creative freedom and free space not dominated by anyone, uh they get to create their own, and this project alone- f-finding out about it has inspired me in so many ways because it resonates so deep within me, growing up here and being a female musician and always being around music, I don't feel I was ever picked for the bands, you know I had a bunch of guy friends that were like yeah I'm in this band or I'm playing music with these guys and d-d-d-d-duh LEX <nonsensical, [, didɪ , didɪ'dʌ]> and I'm like we-you know I play you always talk about how good I am and uh but why am I never asked to be in a band? So I-I never really had anybody to play a lot of music with no one really picked me but they wanted to talk about how great I was all the time, and I'm like well am I really that good? So I was always like depending on like the feedback but then I was getting you know I wasn't getting picked for the team but I was getting told how good I was, so I didn't have the space to hang out with other female musicians or you know girls going through the same thing, and so fast forward almost ten years from my high school days I'm finding out about this camp that people are putting together all across- through the world and I just recently attended a <CONFERENCE FOR MUSIC CAMP> and that's where people from all across the world that are doing the same work come together and share resources and we attend workshops on social justice on race gender uh working class uh urban rural uh just all different types of caucuses were happening and sharing that space with so many people that feel or went through such similar things but at- in a differently- like a totally different place is just so bizarre and just connecting and inspiring, people are so curious about where I was from and I was so curious about where they were from and and we bond on that on the fact that we never really had a space or we felt like we were kind of just shoved to the side like oh you know us playing music isn't serious we're just girls or or however you identify but uh like you don't have a space to just take up space or or express yourself, and so being around all these different individuals totally- we were in New Jersey at this conference but being around that and the energy and just the genuine love and care that everyone had for everybody is just- everybody had this mutual respect, no one talked over anybody space wasn't dominated it was just- everybody- I really can't put words to it, but being in that space reassured me and inspired me to come back here and to make sure that this camp happens, because there's been so much doubt in it happening where it's – I-I guess it's supposed to have happened a few years now, and it's

[not]

Unknown: [<cough>]

MISSY: and I understand it's not an easy thing to just coordinate something if you're not used to it, and so I have no experience in that in coordinating or organizing none whatsoever, but just those two or three days in that environment lit a fire inside me and I've made it a goal to be the person that I needed when I was in high school, I want to be that person and so I always think I want the entirety of Letcher County to be aware of this opportunity not just Whitesburg, because I know that a lot of programs that come up and all the things that happen most of the people that hear about it they just hear about it in Whitesburg so kids from Jenkins kids from Neon Macroberts Blackey like all these different little nooks and crannies in our county these people aren't hearing about it and that's not just young girls or gender non-conforming that want to play music or get together in a space together, it's not just them it's bigger than that also, but in organizing this I'm being mindful of like- if flyers were just hanging up in Whitesburg I wouldn't have seen them,

<cough from another participant>

MISSY: and so I'm thinking like- I'm thinking of all the ways that I can reach all the potential young people that you know were me were me ten years ago, and so I'm just- I'm so fired up I'm still fired up and I'm hoping to reach all the little nooks and crannies and to create this space for young people in our community, that's my biggest inspiration right now that I can think of.

JOLENE: My biggest inspiration uh was my mother and I'm probably the oldest one in this group but uh when they got- my mother and father got divorced when I was between eighth grade and Freshman so that was pretty crucial I thought in my age, and so during high school it was all the the difference between that and we moved a couple times and uh my mother always kept her job she always supported us and she was m- probably- mine as well as my sibling's biggest cheerleader but uh she had gotten remarried, I went to college, I wasn't sure if I was going to go and I ended up going to what was then <COMMUNITY COLLEGE> and I got my uh Associate's degree and when I graduated she told me how proud she was of me because no one in our family had ever went to college and she had never graduated high school, uh and that caused a lot of differences in her life and how hard it was for her to get ahead because of that, and it takes more now than even just a high school education it seems like to get somewhere and sometimes it takes a lot more than an Associate's degree to get somewhere, uh and I wasn't sure after I got that what I was going to do I was working at a minimum wage job and going to school and ended up having to change my majors, uh initially I was going to be a mining inspector and that's when the mines was big and booming and uh- got to think this was nineteen eighty-one eighty-two and the mines were really going and then they dropped, so I instantly had to change my major from a mining inspector to uh a business major so I could graduate on time, and I was blessed with a lot of good professors uh but when I did graduate and I graduated on time got my Associate's degree my mom did tell me exactly how proud she was of me and that inspired me to go on to go to UK and to get my Bachelor's and- and to finish out my education and to know as a young female that came from this area uh that you could go on and that you could do things and basically the

ROUND ONE CROSSTALK

BRANDON: Alright so uh this is now our- our space for crosstalk, were there
[any]

WHITNEY: [<cough>]

WHITNEY: Sorry.

BRANDON: The- You're fine! Uh were there any questions that came up or comments?
Reflections? Anything on your heart you want to say?

(17:52) JOLENE: <to MISSY> I think what you're going to do is great [and]

MISSY: [Thank you.]

JOLENE: to give the opportunity to the young girls in the county is awesome, that they
know that they can do it and that there's a place to do it here local [and]

Unknown: [<cough>]

JOLENE: what you said uh about- you wanted to be the person you needed in high
school that was [great,]

MISSY: [mm.]

JOLENE: so that was- I hope it goes well and I'm excited for you.

MISSY: Thank you, thank you.

BRANDON: Yeah I'm real excited for it too.

MISSY: <soft, short laugh>

WHITNEY: Yeah I liked hearing you talk about what it meant to give the opportunity
outside of Whitesburg because we both grew up on the same s- end of the county and

MISSY: Uh-huh.

WHITNEY: <inhale, cough> Yeah I know I didn't feel like I fit in felt like I had no idea
what <LOCAL NON-PROFIT> was,

MISSY: Yeah.

WHITNEY: Like not really, you know what I mean? And so like I wonder like what it
would've been like had someone really shown me what <LOCAL NON-PROFIT> was
as a kid <inhales> versus <laughs>

MISSY: Finding [out] about it so much later.

WHITNEY: [like]

WHITNEY: Yeah,

Unknown: Uh-huh.

WHITNEY: After you've already developed all these insecurities and questions and yeah,

MISSY: Uh-huh.

WHITNEY: So I appreciate that.

MISSY: Yeah.

ELI: Uh you made me rethink everything that I was about to say [because yours was very-]

JOLENE: [<soft laugh >]

ELI: like- yours was very [heartfelt] [and uh you know]

[<unknown interference with microphone until (19:02)>]

JOLENE and WHITNEY: [<laugh >]

ELI: about your mother and uh after that I was just like yeah I- [I don't want to talk about]

WHITNEY: [<laugh >]

ELI: e-sports anymore now, [like- <laugh >]

JOLENE and WHITNEY: [<laugh >]

ELI: But yours was xx <"fucking good"?>,

JOLENE: Thank you.

ELI: [it was really nice.]

MISSY: [Uh-huh.]

WHITNEY: And I'm going to keep coughing through all of this I'm so sorry y'all

[<laugh >]

ELI: [I-]

Several: [<laugh >]

ELI: [I was-]

JOLENE: [Allergies.]

ELI: [Literally-]

Unknown: [<laugh >]

WHITNEY: [<coughs >]

ELI: [I've literally]

been like pinching my hand to keep from sneezing. [<laugh >]

MISSY:

[<laugh>]

ELI:
are rebelling.

[Because I'm -] like my allergies just

ROUND TWO – A TIME WHEN YOU FELT LIKE YOU BELONGED

BRANDON: OK so we'll start with the next uh prompt then and this one is uh tell me about a time when you when you felt like you belonged, so tell me about a time when you felt like you belonged. (0:34)

ELI: [I'll] start, uh so s-slight real quick back story uh I had I was an only child then
[sound of vehicle passing]

added a uh stepbrother who was two so he's basically been my brother since he's- his entire- for his entire life and then there for a while my mom married a guy and I had three brothers at one point and then I went back down to one so I've had- been an only child had one like sibling and then also had like a whole family of everybody like a big family kind of thing so I've had a little bit of experience from each of those uh but when I was working in uh the IT department at <PLACE OF WORK> uh there was floor techs and then a couple different offices that had uh few different uh like there's a network office a programming office but we had uh we had about eleven of us but within the tech pool and the networking side because we worked together so often uh honestly I- besides my brother <NAME REDACTED> that's the- probably the closest I've felt to having like a big family of bro- of a lot of brothers, uh we had- well like brothers and sisters sh- should say, uh but we- I don't know- uh there was a lot of uh camaraderie- XX- we had a uh bullpen style office so being in that area like it- there was a lot of camaraderie and also office politics m-m-m-made us end up feeling like it was uh us versus the hill uh of-of the rest of campus, and so there was a lot of uh felt like we were under fire from everyone else s-so we kind of bonded together but it- it created like- uh like I said like the closest I've ever felt to like having a brother as far as some- or or sisters uh working and it's just been uh those relationships have been really strong it- even since I left the IT department, those have been one of the best coworker relationships I've ever had and uh they have been really awesome.

BRANDON: And do we [move-]

ELI: [Oh- oh right,] uh we'll go right.

WHITNEY: Uh I'm going to pass.

MISSY: Yeah I've- I think I've spent more time feeling that I didn't belong anywhere uh than belonging uh and that's with moving off to school and then you're in this new place and it's like I don't really have a clique I've never really you know had a space I felt like, I've always felt like I've kind of stood alone which is OK I'm- I'm- I think I'm independent and strong enough to where that's fine but to have that small group of people where you feel like they call me if they need anything and- and they- they lean on me and they admire my advice and things like that and- I'd say my- my biggest feeling of belonging is in my friendships because to- <sigh> it's having that- that connectedness I think it- I feel more that I belong in people's lives and that I'm glad to have a- a place in people's lives and I think that's my biggest feeling of belonging is being with my friends, uh and especially my band mates um that's a recent newfound sense of like home because- not just being in Letcher County I've been in Letcher County and it not feel like home and so i-it's kind of like you search different avenues like where- where am I

getting uh you know that warm fuzzy feeling and so when I'm playing music with my friends or just sitting around with them that's my biggest sense of belonging.

JOLENE: Uh two almost- a little back story I moved back home here in Letcher County after almost thirty years in Central Kentucky so it's been about four years since I moved back and I came back uh basically with no job and no place to live and friends quickly made sure I had a place to live and a job, also uh th-then there was a lot of healing I needed to do mentally so I started hiking and I would go up on the mountain and uh I found <GATHERING PLACE> <laugh, inhale> and anybody up there anybody that goes up there they just take you in and they love you and they take care of you regardless and they're non-judgmental and I really felt like uh I belonged and I could go up there at any time and ever who was up there uh they too were what we call a friend of the mountain so you could hike you could talk you could just be there and hang out and you could go up and look at the stars or whatever you needed to do and it was ok and it's kind of your peaceful go to place and uh that was the first time I really felt like I belonged as an adult and being alone as an adult and to come back uh not knowing what you're going to do or how you're going to take care of yourself and then uh to find that group you could just kind of fall into at any time that you need to it's almost like if you need some healing you can go up there and there's usually somebody up there and you can talk to and even if you don't know them you can become fast friends.

<Loud sounds of car passing, microphone adjusting>

ANDREW: I have to say the only time I've really ever felt completely at peace and like I truly belong somewhere is when I'm working with an animal, if I'm out in the chicken yard or out on out messing with an animal I can go out in the chicken yard and it's it's not even work to me it's like it's second nature I know what to do I can pick the chicken up I can look at him I can see how he's if he's healing alright if he's what his health condition's in how his feet look how he's acting I can tell you if he's sick if he needs medicine if he needs wormed if he needs different stuff and it's it's just it's one of those things I've done it my entire life and I feel I can go out there and be madder than- madder than fire at anybody in the world- me me and mom get in a big old argument and I can't stand to look at her and I can go out in the chicken yard and it's- it just all melts away it's just me and those chickens I focus on nothing else, I give them my full undivided attention I- I feel like I belong out there, that's where I write music that's where I have the most fun that's where I spend- that's where I spend my- I like to spend my alone time, it's- it's kind of weird because they're a bunch of chickens but- you know I love them just like they GRAM <copula deletion> family, they're- they're my kids I take care of them I've raised them they was babies hatched out of an egg and I'll- I'll have them until they die.

<Background noise>

BRANDON: And then I'm going to pass, WHITNEY did you want to [XX]

[<Adjusting
microphone>]

WHITNEY: [XX] Uh

<Continued sounds of adjusting the microphone>

WHITNEY: Yeah I guess I was thinking two different things and I couldn't figure out but I guess they're really actually in-intertwined and uh it's that I don't feel like I belong here, uh I- there are parts that I belong to here but overall this is not where I belong, and I have been coming to that realization more and more lately uh I spent my whole life like every weekend – I had family in Tennessee and every weekend my Mom packed up the car as soon as school was over and we went to Tennessee and so sometimes I say I really feel like Tennessee is as much as home as Kentucky is for me, uh but my whole life my Mom said we were leaving we were leaving we were leaving as soon as something happened like- when her parents passed away we were going to be gone when she retired we were leaving so I spent my whole life preparing to leave here uh and then when I turned eighteen I did I left and I went to Tennessee for a few years and then I would feel the need to come back home because I felt like I- I owed that to my parents I saw them do that for their parents and so I would come back home and then I left again in 2011 and I stayed gone <clears throat> through 2015 so for quite a few years and most of those years were in Tennessee and that was like where I felt like that time that space is where I felt like I belonged the most like I found a crew of people who genuinely loved me and like accepted all of the behaviors good and bad uh but I always feel like it sounds really narcissistic to say this but they felt like- I- it always just felt good because they saw a lot of good in me that I didn't feel like I s- think people see here, I feel too under the microscope here I feel too critiqued here I feel too- I don't feel like people see the good in me here, uh but I came back again because my parents are older both of my parents got disabled when I was in high school so I came back again and I made the decision to become a mother uh <soft laughter> and becoming a single mom at that uh and that's probably where like in my heart I feel like I belong the most like I made this decision to become a mom and that's where I belong I belong as his mother, uh but as he gets older and I think about our futures and I think about the hardships that I have to go through here sometimes and I think about what I want for him, it's not that I don't want him to grow up here because that- I see- I mean I- you know we're here doing this today <referring to the story circle> like I get to call this work today, uh so I see like all the good I see all the great things but I also just see like if I stay here forever he's going to grow up with a Mom who says when this happens we're going to leave when this happened we're going to go and he's going to feel that [same]

[<unknown interference with mic>]

WHITNEY: Divide that I felt, and so every day I just like count down like when do I get to adopt him when do we get to go because I don't want him to grow up feeling like he doesn't belong in a space because I don't feel like I belong in a space and I want to give him a mom who feels like she's where she's supposed to be so that he can figure out where he's supposed to be, so as much as I love here and as much as I love parts of here it's just not where I'm myself right now.

ROUND TWO CROSSTALK

BRANDON: Thank you all for- for sharing your stories, so is there any- this is again our- our space for crosstalk was there any questions or comments or reflections that came up?

JOLENE: I have a few, uh WHITNEY hit the nail on the head when you said you felt like you belonged when you became a mom it's almost like you become a sec- uh a member of a secret society, and you get this overwhelming of like yeah this is how it works thing uh and I still get that sometimes and my kids are raised and knowing where you want to raise your child- and that's why I was gone for thirty years because in my heart- I had a chance to move home- I have twins when they were babies and I thought they'll just grow up and leave is exactly what I thought and I guess because I was a new mother at the time I didn't realize they're going to leave regardless of wherever I'm at but then again in consistency I wanted them to be wherever they were from the time that they were in preschool up until the time that they graduated high school so that they would develop some roots and some sense of community, and <referring to ANDREW> your chickens I love I have three [chickens]

Unknown: [soft laughter]

BRANDON: <soft laughter>

JOLENE: I had to stop my car and run my chickens [back up to my yard]

Unknown: [soft laughter from two participants]

JOLENE: before I came here this morning so I only have [three]

[sounds of chair scooting]

JOLENE: but I love them.

<More soft laughter from participants, more chairs scooting>

ANDREW: Eighty-seven diddles LEX <baby chicks> just hatched out.

JOLENE: Oh.

WHITNEY: [Oh my [God.]]

ELI: [Jeez.]

ANDREW: [From a] month old to just hatched out of the egg we've got eighty-seven, and actually I've got a picture of a chicken tattooed on my arm, it was the first tattoo I ever got.

JOLENE: Alright. [laughter]

WHITNEY: [laughter]

JOLENE: What kind of chickens do you have?

ANDREW: Uh I raise game fowl.

JOLENE: OK.

ANDREW: Uh I got everything from Albanies all the way down to Blue Face Hatch I've got Greys I've got Butchers I've got just about anything and everything you can imagine and I've spent upwards of fifteen-hundred dollars on one rooster.

JOLENE: Wow.

ELI: Jeez.

ANDREW: And now I've spent eight hundred dollars on eggs

ELI: Huh.

ANDREW: Not even knowing if they was going to hatch just to bring home and incubate.

MISSY: Uh-[huh.]

ANDREW: [But] you was talking about leaving and coming back every time I've left – I lived in <Central Kentucky> for nine months and that's how I know this place will always be my home I was in <Central Kentucky> and I was working- I mean I'd get off work six seven eight in the morning after working all night and drive five hours falling asleep all the way back home, I can't – I- I don't know if I could ever imagine a time where I [didn't]

[<loud unknown sharp, snapping noise. Bottle lid falling?>]

ANDREW: live in Letcher County.

MISSY: mm.

JOLENE: When I first moved-

ANDREW: It's the air here, I don't know.

ELI: <laughter>

Unknown (JOLENE?): I'm sorry.

ANDREW: [XX]

JOLENE: [XX] When I first moved to Lexington to go to college I would get off work at nine o'clock and drive home and turn around and drive back the next day to go to work, because I missed home.

ANDREW: I don't know if it's because I'm a momma's boy or not.

[<laughter from multiple participants>]

ANDREW: [I love]- I love- I love my home.

<background noises – shuffling, adjusting in seats, etc.>

ELI: Something I was thinking about XX <like? Late?> while you were talking about yours was [uh]

WHITNEY: [Yeah.]

ELI: You-you said you didn't feel like you belonged at first [a-]

WHITNEY: [Uh-huh.]

ELI: a lot and uh- I- I don't know about everybody else but I think i- feeling like you don't belong makes it easier to belong when you get out of that situation

MISSY: Mm.

ELI: I feel like uh- a- at least the- but the same thing I was talking about with uh the IT department that was right after I worked at uh <PLACE OF WORK>

MISSY: Mm.

ELI: in telemetry which by the way if you ever have the opportunity to uh do telemetry like you said with the grouting thing <referencing an unrecorded conversation> uh run in the uh opposite direction, it's twelve hours of staring at screens and literally your job is to not fall asleep while you stare at screens and they beep at you, it's horrible, I hated it,

MISSY: <soft laughter>

ELI: It's- and night shift was even worse but [uh]

MISSY: [<soft laughter>]

ELI: I worked- I worked at that and I- I hated the job but honestly the worst part was- it was near the nurse's station but like disconnected from it and so not only did I like-telemetry felt like it was already not connected and [then]

MISSY: [hmm.]

ELI: I never really connected with any of the co-workers and effectively a lot of times you were in the room by yourself

MISSY: mm.

ELI: just staring at a screen and the entire time I just felt like I never belonged to anything at the hospital, like I never [felt]

MISSY: [mm.]

ELI: like I worked there I just walked into the building for twelve hours and then walked out kind [of thing]

MISSY: [mm.]

ELI: and work- getting to go to <PLACE OF WORK> like I immediately felt like I was a part of like a team there [and]

MISSY: [Uh-huh.]

ELI: that was- that made me feel like- I- uh- I feel like I attached to them quicker because of not belonging first at <PLACE OF WORK>.

MISSY: mm.

WHITNEY: Yeah I thought it was interesting when you said <referring to MISSY> you felt like you spent most of your life not feeling like you belonged somewhere and I was like yeah.

MISSY: [Yeah.]

WHITNEY: [<laughter>]

MISSY: [Yeah.]

WHITNEY: [Yeah. [<laughter>]]

MISSY: [It's] like belonging- it's like I- ah- i- it's like when I moved back I'm like well who do I hang out with? [Like]

WHITNEY: [Yeah.]

MISSY: I- I- I don't- I don't really like to clique up because when people clique up there's like typically drama involved and <inhales> all of these things and it's like I just like being- I like being my independent self but I think my belonging is in my relationships which are kind of mobile because I have friends in Louisville I have friends you know all over the place and so it's like when we get together that's like my belonging, that's coming home like I find home in my relationships more so than just a geographical place,

JOLENE: Hmm.

MISSY: even though this is home but it's not- it doesn't give me that all the time.

JOLENE: Home is more than a place,

MISSY: Uh-huh.

JOLENE: XX you hit it.

ELI: I'd say you're quoting Odin but

Unknown: <soft laughter>

ELI: I feel like nobody else watches Marvel movies as much as

<Laughter from multiple participants>

ELI: I do [so.]

[<Laughter from multiple participants>]

ELI: [XX shut up.]

[<Laughter from multiple participants>]

ELI: XX <"He'll say"?> Asgard is not a place it's a people.

MISSY: <Soft laughter>

ELI: [Sorry.]

ANDREW: [I-] I- I look like a- a giant hick but I'm also a giant nerd on the [inside.]

JOLENE: [soft
laughter>]

MISSY: <Soft laughter>

ANDREW: I- I- I think that was the coolest part about high school for me because I could go at lunch and sit and I'd sit with all my friends that XX <"were the"?> bubbly type you know packing big dips in our lip <referring to chewing tobacco> with their hats turned you know backwards and VoTech <referring to vocational-technical school> and then seventh period come around I'd be in the- I'd be in band nerding out playing

[Magic <referring to Magic The Gathering> in the]

ELI: [<soft laughter>]

ANDREW: band floor with all my buddies [and I- I don't know]

ELI: [Uh-huh.]

ANDREW: I just- I felt like high school was- high school was terrible, I would never ever ever go back,

ELI: Or wish it on anybody.

ANDREW: [Or wish it on any human being that walks this Earth]

[<Laughter from multiple participants>]

ELI: [XX <Yeah?>]

ELI: Uh-huh.

ANDREW: but the friendships and the relationships that were made there I think made this place even more special to [me.]

MISSY: [Mm.]

ELI: Uh-huh.

Unknown: Mm.

WHITNEY: Yeah tha- I was- uh my Mom always accuses me of having too many circles, she [was like]

MISSY: [Mm.]

WHITNEY: you have too many ci- like- and it's like not- I don't know it's weird- I always feel like I don't belong but then I also realize that I do run like a lot of different circles like- and it's one thing that after becoming a mom I appreciated because I can take my baby to a protest on Saturday and church on Sunday and

<interference with microphone>

WHITNEY: he's at [<PLACE OF WORK>]

MISSY: [soft laughter]

WHITNEY: on Monday and

MISSY: <soft laughter>

WHITNEY: <soft laughter> It just like goes back and forth but uh yeah I- high school was the same for me like I had a group of friends who literally called themselves the clique, [uh <laughter>]

[laughter from multiple participants]

WHITNEY: and it had a lot of drama and there's been quite a bit of space where we didn't talk to each other but talking about home when one of them- like we've known each other since- some of us since we were three but we've basically been four girls who have been best friends since sixth grade, and we fought like cats and dogs like it's been terrible, and I wouldn't relive high school for a minute but

Unknown: <laughter from participant>

WHITNEY: when shit happens those are the four- those are the three people that I call on

MISSY: Mm.

WHITNEY: Uh I mean we just- one of my friends just lost her husband last summer and in an instant we were like all four there together crying together like uh when one of them- when one of us has a baby we're all four there like whether- like whether or not we've spoken in months or we just get too busy or- there's just something about it we're like- we're tied to each other, uh and that's just how it'll be and- and a- a lot of the reasons why we were tied to each other is because we all felt <says through laughter> like the outcasts in school, we were like the nerdy girls or the quiet girls or whatever like- we didn't feel like we were a part of it so we just- it sort of backlashed where we created a clique and then we were like- <laughs> didn't let other people in it but it was a defense mechanism more than anything, uh but yeah.

JOLENE: High school friends uh- I've been out of high school thirty-seven years

<possible laughter around here? Unclear if connected to utterance, potential facial expression or something external to conversation>

JOLENE: uh and there was a small group of friends and we stayed close but then after high school everybody splits up and goes their separate ways and raise their families and get busy with life but we always kind of tried to stay in touch and in this past year I had two friends that lost their husbands uh so we started this group called <GROUP NAME ACRONYM> and it's called <FULL GROUP NAME>

[laughter from multiple participants]

JOLENE: [and we] have since taken two trips as a group and it's not- it's as many that can go

<passing car noises in the background start here, ending approx. around "almost twenty of us">

and we've had as many as seven XX <uh? uh-huh?> which is good we took uh- I wasn't on the trip but they went to Asheville for uh a long weekend and then uh this past February we went to Gra- Gatlinburg for a long weekend and there's probably on our Facebook chat there's probably almost twenty of us and anybody can go at any time and as many that can get together anywhere do and we just make a point to do that so we can stay in touch and uh honestly I can say we're probably closer now with all our life experiences than we were then.

MISSY: Mm.

WHITNEY: Mm.

Unknown: Mm.

ROUND THREE – A TIME WHEN YOU FELT LIKE YOU DIDN'T BELONG

BRANDON: Well and that's actually the last prompt so we've touched on it a little bit uh but my last prompt for you all today is tell me about a time when you felt like you didn't belong.

JOLENE: I'll start because it's really came GRAM <non-standard use of past tense common in Appalachian Englishes> to my mind, when I moved uh from here after I went to school in Hazard and moved to Lexington and uh got a job and went to school I really felt like I didn't belong, uh I think I'd been to Lexington six times in my life so learning to drive there was an adventure and probably the worst time that I felt like I didn't belong- I took a business law class and we stood up- to make your point you were called on and when I was called on I said my piece or whatever I had to say and the professor looked at me and he said where are you from? And I- I mean that just liked to kill me and then he told me that I slaughtered the King's English

[and]

Unknown: [<exhales through nostrils, assumingly implicating indignation or as a snort or sigh>]

JOLENE: I- you know- that's when uh part of my backwoods I guess smartass stepped in and [I told him that]

[<soft laughter from two participants>]

JOLENE: that I spoke the pure King's English [more]

WHITNEY: [<soft laughter>]

JOLENE: than he did,

Unknown <MISSY?>: <soft laughter>

JOLENE: So that was when I didn't feel like I belong the worst.

BRANDON: And then do you want us to [go right or-]

JOLENE: [Let's go left let's change it.] [<laughs>]

Unknown: [<laughter>]

BRANDON: [OK.]

MISSY: OK.

ANDREW: XX

MISSY: Uh like I've said before I've spent a lot of time not belonging but I think specifically at college, uh I thought it was my ticket out uh to get out of here and to get away I felt like I always just need to get away, uh and so I went <soft laughter> I worked my shitty jobs around here and saved up enough money got a c- new car that would stand the drive and I got accepted to <COLLEGE> and while I had a lot of great experiences and a lot of great friendships and so many things happened in my life during that time at

school there was just always this like dissonance happening it's like I shouldn't be here I'm wasting my time I don't feel like I'm getting anything out of this anymore I don't- <sigh> it's like I'm surrounded by younger people I started college later and I just- it just didn't feel right, coming home didn't necessarily feel like the answer either and I think that was just my biggest like internal struggle, I'm up here I'm going into debt I don't feel like I belong here I don't feel like I belong there, what do you do? So you end up coming back home, uh doing contract work completely out of your element working with youth- not necessarily working with youth but uh supervising housing for youth and that's how I learned m-m-more about <LOCAL NON-PROFIT> and everything going on in this area and I think i- in ways it's brought its own <exhale, potentially as a sigh> type of problems and I've not always felt like I belonged but it was kind of the- the ticket that I need in coming back that helped me have a better sense of belonging in town.

<sound of adjusting microphone>

WHITNEY: Uh <sigh> I mean there's been several times where I've felt like I haven't belonged one was when I worked in an all Spanish-speaking factory <laughter on end of 'factory'> for a year four hours from home and literally could not [communicate]

[<interference or
adjustment of microphone>]

WHITNEY: with anyone, but um <clears throat> I would say this last year of my life has been pretty unbelonging um moving- moving three times in a year working loving my job but not belonging in the culture uh and also just going through some of the hardest shit I've ever gone through especially in the last six months and not really having people want to talk me about it uh my family gets really frustrated because they're not here <assumingly referencing work; mentions in previous round that they live in the county> they don't understand s-s-stuff that I've been going through and so they're just like we don't understand why you want to complain about this all the time or- and then no one else wants to h- talk about it <laughs> no one wants to address it like so for the last six months I have literally cut myself off, I go home at five o'clock I eat dinner with my baby we watch whatever he wants to watch he goes to bed I read a book that's it, and so while being a mom feels really great like it's really- it's so contradicting to feel like XX <"I have"?> this really good thing in my life while everything else just felt like it crumbled around me uh but I- I don't- I don't talk to anybody I don't go out with anybody no one comes to hang out with me really anymore uh and part of that is like there is this thing when you become a mom where like a lot of your social life goes away but also just like when you do it single there's not that other person- I get now why people don't do it single <laughs> because there's not that other person like your baby does something really cute there's not that other person to laugh with your baby has a really sick day there's not someone else to like take a shift uh childcare doesn't work out you've got to figure it out so like all that stress and then there's no one there to like support you and then add in all the other shit that's happened like and no one wants to talk about it or address it or be there for you and so it's weird because you feel like you have this crew but you also don't feel like you have this crew anymore and uh or like you're an inconvenience because you're doing something diff- like none- like if you're the only one of your friends that has a child there's just a huge divide that happens, it's

just a huge divide and and when you- when you are the only one of your friends that has a child and you don't have a partner then you're just really on an island, so I would say <laughter on 'motherhood'> motherhood has made me belong and not belong in a lot of ways.

ELI: Uh so- sort of the same thing uh- so in 2014 uh my dad uh took his own life and I have always looked up to my dad, hundred percent like wanted to be him when I grew up like and we argued when I was a teen but uh I had reconciled pretty hard and like he and I were very close, and uh to the extent that uh when that happened I- uh my- my sense of belonging was gone uh I basically felt like uh like I had died uh more than I can describe uh for about <exhales> uh <blows air> for probably about eight months- eight or nine months I was in a haze and I- I- looking back now I can see where I had- you know friends that like- i- i- sort of like what you were saying <referring to WHITNEY> like- I belonged but I didn't like I had friends that were there and were you know taking care of me and helping me but I couldn't see that at the time and- I don't know tha- that's- that's the most I've ever felt like I didn't belong like I'd- I- to the extent that I felt like I didn't belong on like- like in the world, like I just was shattered, so, sorry for this,

Unknown: <exhale through nostrils as if to express soft laughter>

ELI: <in falsetto> Downer.

BRANDON: And I'll pass again.

ANDREW: Uh back story with this June twenty-seventh of think it was last year or year before last I came out as gay, uh August eighth I accepted a job in <Central Kentucky> working in a m-mine working in a limestone mine as a maintenance man, worked there for nine months you know did my best because I figured it was best not to – I've always been the type of person- I always said after I came out if you ask me I'm not- I'm not going to lie I'm going to tell you the truth but if you don't ask and you don't need to know s- I'm not going to make it your business,

[<microphone is adjusted>]

ANDREW: [Uh] worked there for nine months they asked me one day uh somebody had found out they said are you gay I said yes what does it matter I've worked here for nine months right beside you welded with you been- been- been here worked my butt off we've went out to bars together we've drank we've hung out didn't matter, I walked in the next day to work <exhales> they had put sticky notes all over my locker they had left death threats inside my locker my boss had pulled me in that morning he pulled me into the office they took away my position as a maintenance man took away my right to go in the men's locker room told me if I wanted to use the bathroom I had to use one of the port-a-potties outside put me in a truck dropped my pay basically looked at me and said the best thing you can do is find other employment opportunities, I said this is not right I don't agree with this y'all can't do this they said but we can because Kentucky is a right to work state if you refuse we'll fire you, so I went and drove a truck worked my shift, when I got done with my shift I come back to my car and they had took chalk uh that we write on metal with soapstone and they had wrote fag queer co- I mean they had wrote some of the worst things that you could ever be called in your life all over my car, they

had threw GRAM <non-standard past tense common in Appalachian Englishes; potential analogical change>- they uh somebody had sliced one of my tires I mean and I've never in my life- I've always been able to handle my own problems I'm a pretty good sized youngin and I don't care to fight I'll fight a tree if it says the wrong thing to me

<soft laughter from participant>

I have- I'm hard headed I'm stubborn I'm from the mountains I don't care I don't back down but at that point I've never felt that helpless that alone because I was four hours away from home four hours away from my support network nobody I could call and say hey this is going on can you be here, nobody could help me and I was by myself and that was the first time in my life I ever had to tackle something that big by myself and at that point I realized I do not belong in this environment I don't belong where I'm at and I packed up and I come home GRAM <analogical change of come/came, refer to other examples of non-standard use of past tense in transcript> and when I got home my parents blamed me for losing my job, they refused to hear my side of the story and that was probably the hardest three months of my life like the transition from losing that job coming back having to work whatever job I could find doing whatever I could do to make enough money to pay my bills, I don't know if I- I- I don't know if I ever had it to live over again how I would've handled it but I mean just to have all sense of dignity pride to feel like you're not even a human I mean they made me feel like I was sub-human like I was some kind of creature that- like the creature from the black lagoon that crawled out of a swamp somewhere, I just- I hope that nobody else ever has to go through something like that because- because of how they identify or who they love that's- that's the worst feeling in the world.

ROUND THREE CROSSTALK

BRANDON: Alright well thank you all again for the stories that you shared, uh this is our last crosstalk period is there any questions or comments or reflections that came up? Kind of ended on a heavy question [that's my fault I'm sorry,]

[<soft laughter from participants>]

BRANDON: [should've maybe uh]

ELI: [I- I was actually just thinking] I was like- I feel like [the heavy]

[<soft laughter from participant>]

ELI: question should've been somewhere in the middle [maybe.]

[<soft laughter from multiple participants>]

BRANDON: [Yeah we] should[ve]

ANDREW: [Yeah]

BRANDON: [XX]

ANDREW: [We had] happy stories [then everybody got real sad.]

[<laughter from multiple participants>]

ELI: [I-] I was going to say and now everybody's just real sad, we're just going [to-]

JOLENE: [XX]

ELI: I'm going to go crawl over there on the [couch just]

JOLENE: [<soft laughter>]

ELI: take a nap.

BRANDON: [Yeah we might should GRAM <double modal construction common in Appalachian Englishes just]

JOLENE: [<soft laughter>]

BRANDON: have another one <referring to story circle prompt> for morale.

ADNREW: <laughter>

ELI and JOLENE: <laughter>

ANDREW: But I will say this to bring the mood back up, if it hadn't have been for Whitesburg being the amazing town that it is and having the amazing friends that I do in Whitesburg I don't think I'd ever made it back from that uh- when I- when I first grew up- I waited until I was twenty-one to come out because I didn't think there was nobody

GRAM <double negation common in Appalachian Englishes> else like me in Letcher county, well we was all wrong

<sound of hands rubbing together>

ANDREW: I've had- I have- the- the gay community in Whitesburg has made my life a lot easier they've been a big help to me in making me feel not alone and I think if it wasn't PRON <['wΛ.rĩn?]> for that I'd- I don't know how I'd have- how I'd- how I would've come back from that in <Central Kentucky>.

<Sound of car passing by begins at 39:36 just before WHITNEY begins speaking, ends around 39:45 near end of "...nothing like that">

WHITNEY: It's funny how different communities work for different people because I don't feel that from Whitesburg, like I was thinking that your story- I can't imagine going through nothing like that but I did recently have an image of myself drawn with my child that circulated the internet,

BRANDON: <soft gasp>

WHITNEY: And it was violating on so many levels and horrible on so many levels and it is a huge reason I want to run from here as fast as I can, uh because I just think when someone depicts all your insecurities and all your like- when someone like- having words written about you or having things like about you it's just like it's hard to find your place back in that community if you feel like it's that community attacking you, so it's like I- it's always weird because like huh <as if to scoff> Letcher County is like is that security for people then it's that like <laughs> beast for others and right now it's a beast for me.

Unknown: Mm.

BRANDON: I didn't know about that.

ANDREW: Nah this- I-

Unknown: XX <"Mm"? Not sure if used as response (i.e., affirmation "uh-huh") or just to clear throat>

ANDREW: My- my biggest thing is being that this is my home I would've- I- I'm the type of person- now I feel comfortable up there I was completely out of my element,

Unknown: Mm.

ANDREW: in this county? If someone was to do something like that they'd have hell to pay,

<soft laughter from multiple participants>

ANDREW: because pappy <in reference to himself> ain't going down like

[that no more,]

[<soft laughter from participant>]

ANDREW: I'll- I'm- I made a promise to myself I'd never let somebody call me the things I was called in <Central Kentucky> without there being a fight, and I know physical violence is not always the answer but it's the only answer I know to call upon when- when certain things happen

Unknown: Uh-huh.

ANDREW: and in your- a-a-and I could never put myself in the position that- w- with that <referring to WHITNEY>, because the Internet's there forever and for somebody to be so low as to do that like I- doesn't PRON <['dʌ.rɪn]> even matter who it is or how much of regard I held them in I would lose a lot of respect for a human being to do that to another human being because I know what it's like to be belittled and I know what it's like to be made f- to be made to felt like you're not- you're something you know

ELI: Yeah.

ANDREW: I can't- I can't respect a human being who would do that to somebody else, that's- that's- that's in no way shape or form OK.

MISSY: Mm.

JOLENE: I'm sorry you've had to go [through that-]

WHITNEY: [Mm, <exhale through nostrils>.]

JOLENE: that-

MISSY: Mm.

JOLENE: I mean I didn't know either when you said that I was- just nobody should ever do that especially to someone that- you know to a child.

WHITNEY and BRANDON: Uh-huh.

JOLENE: No that's uh like you said the whole mom thing you can [talk about]

WHITNEY: [loudly clears throat>]

JOLENE: me all you want to but you talk about my kids it's fighting [words.]

WHITNEY: [Yeah I never-]

BRANDON: [Uh-huh.]

WHITNEY: I've never- I never felt momma bear [<laughter>]

JOLENE: [<laughter>]

WHITNEY: [Until then I was like] oh this is what it's like to want to protect your cubs [like]

JOLENE: [<laughter>] yeah <soft laughter>

WHITNEY: This is what it feels like.

BRANDON: Yeah.

JOLENE: Yeah one of those I'll- [I'll kill]

[<something falls off of the table>]

JOLENE: for it. <soft laughter>

WHITNEY: Yeah.

BRANDON: No that's despicable but I think what you said kind of summed up like what I'm hearing like in all the stories and uh what I feel and have felt too as someone from this county uh is that for some people it's that security blanket and for others it's that beast and it's been both for me too.

Unknown: Uh-huh.

JOLENE: I think there's still a big divide here that uh there's an embracing community and a very- I'm not going to use it as a political term but a very liberal accepting community and I love that because we are that little- that little star in the mountains that no other place is and that part of our community and then there's still the other part of the community

<sound of car passing by beginning roughly around "community" and ending roughly around "and he lives">

JOLENE: that's or the county that's not accepting that's kind of looking at people going what uh but I know just uh I travel a couple times a month to Tennessee to see my boyfriend and he lives in a very conservative community and they can't decide the difference between conservative religious Republican

<sound of car passing by beginning roughly at "Republican" and ending roughly at "and I listen">

JOLENE: they- it's all one thing to them and I look and I hear and I listen and I'm going oh my God we're not like that here at home you know <said through soft laughter> and that's- that's a good thing that we're not but on the other hand there are still some pockets that are, [so.]

Unknown: [Mm.]

ANDREW: It's- it's terrible that one bad apple can spoil the who- can spoil the whole bushel for somebody.

JOLENE: Uh-huh.

ANDREW: One- you know one or two bad people I just I- I wish that we could just take all the bad people and put them in one little spot [and]

JOLENE: [<exhales through nostrils as if in laughter>]

ANDREW: leave the rest of the- leave- leave the rest of it to us because there's so much beauty and so much peace here f-f-for me and I- I just- I wish everybody could feel that here.

Unknown (BRANDON?): Mm.

WHITNEY: For me I- I've been trying to reconcile with like- when someone does something bad I- still not feeling like they're a bad person but just- we are so quick to like cut each other to the core,

BRANDON: Uh-huh.

WHITNEY: like we can't disagree with each other, we have to destroy each other and like that's where I'm like this is- this is why we can't have nice things, [because]

Unknown: [<soft laughter >]

WHITNEY: we can't talk about it we can't disagree civilly like it is quick to the core des- destruction, and that's where I'm like I just- I hadn't felt that anywhere as much as I feel it here, and like still trying to reconcile XX <"it" ? > when someone does something that I'm like hurt by like but I still don't <soft laughter > hate them [<laughter >]

BRANDON: [Uh-huh.]

WHITNEY: like you know what I mean? Like how do you- I don't know like- I don't know, I'm still str- I'm- I'm struggling XX like I hope people- I want people to feel easier here I want it to be better for everyone here.

Unknown (BRANDON?): Mm.

WHITNEY: And-

<creaking sound >

WHITNEY: But I also want to survive here. [<said through laughter >]

BRANDON: [<soft laughter >]

WHITNEY: [<continued laughter >] I just want to survive at this point

BRANDON: Uh-huh.

WHITNEY: And I feel like I've- [REDACTED] I think me and you have went through a lot together

[REDACTED]

WHITNEY: [This] last- this last year and it made me realize like I've been feeling isolated I should do better and realize when other people feel isolated too.

[REDACTED]

BRANDON: Yeah Whitesburg's always the place well just Letcher County in general is the place that I miss the most when I'm gone but uh <I? > like can definitely sympathize

with XX <"some of- a lot of what"?> you all said too is that I don't really completely fit in here either like this place i- this is home this is always going to be home this is like the- probably the place I love the most- here I reckon is the place I love the most but yeah XX <"I'm not like one hundred percent here either I guess in a lot of ways, but."?>

<sound of car passing beginning roughly before JOLENE's turn and ending roughly around "or I may have to">

JOLENE: <soft laughter> Sometimes it's really hard to live here and economically everybody knows it's really hard to live here you touched on that um and that as much as I love it and as much as I love being back you know something may have to give in a couple years or I may have to leave again

BRANDON: Mm.

JOLENE: And it's- it's- it can be a hard place all the way around.

BRANDON: Yeah.

ELI: I- I know a lot of this is about Letcher County and WHITNEY judgingly calls Pikeville Eagleton <referencing the TV show Parks and Recreation> but uh I've- as I've said many times I swear it's not

<soft laughter from participant>

ELI: Uh

<exhale through nostrils from another participant as if in laughter>

ELI: And for the love of God the rent's not but [the-]

[<soft laughter from participant>]

ELI: the uh- uh the- eco-economically like i- it- literally living here when you know what's- when you know what is out in the world that like the rest of the world it feels like they're five years in the future from here,

WHITNEY: Uh-huh.

ELI: Like it- it feels like martyrdom to have to- to like live here, like you're- you're s-sacrificing so much that you could be doing and like you know ha- like being able to go and enjoy other like cuisines and stuff like that like- I like food a lot,

[but]

Unknown: [XX <Mm? Soft laughter? Something in response to liking food>]

ELI: like and I- it drives me insane that we don't have like an Indian food restaurant like I love that and I can't get it without driving like three hours which is

JOLENE: [Uh-huh.]

ELI: [absurd] to me but like not being like you're sacrificing all the things you want out of you know the w- the rest of the world because you're- you want to live at home

and some days it's worth it and some days it just really really is [not <said through laughter>.]

JOLENE: [<soft laughter>]

Unknown (WHITNEY? MISSY?): Mm.

BRANDON: [Uh-huh.]

JOLENE: [It's kind of] a trade-off between the jewels that we have and the commercialism out in the

[world.]

ELI: [<laughter>] I was going to say and s-[society?]

JOLENE: [<laughter>]
[<soft laughter from other participants>]

ELI: [<laughter>]

ANDREW: [I-]

WHITNEY: [I] think- sorry. [I-]

ANDREW: [Oh] no go ahead.

WHITNEY: I think if you live in a city like you're going to- you're like I have all these things but I don't have quiet solitude or I don't have the mountains or I don't have- but I think martyrdom pretty much hits on like why I feel like I should move with my baby <said through soft laughter> because I'm like- I felt like all my life my mom's sacrificed to live here and am I going to let him spend his entire life thinking that I've sacrificed to be here like and I- XX<"uh?">- I don't know, I don't want to be a martyr for him <said through laughter>. [<laughter>]

BRANDON: [Yeah.]

ELI: My- my dad always like- everything that he ever talked about was always wanting to like better this area like get people to s-stop like caring about county lines and just the- uh there's a billion things but like constantly just wanting that stuff and like I'm always thinking like do I want to b- is that going to be what- is that going to be my cross to bear now or am I just going to like end the cycle and j- be like no you know what like I'm done <wheeze, as if in laughter>

BRANDON: Uh-huh.

ELI: XX<"I'm told this fight?">.

BRANDON: Yeah.

ELI: Uh-

ANDREW: There's not a day that goes by that I don't ponder leaving,

ELI: Uh-huh.

ANDREW: Because with the skill set I've acquired through twenty-three years of working you know around here because I- I mean- I've held pretty much a man's job since I was eight years old, I've had to, because dad left mom at an early age so I've had to work and I've had to you know help- help out because otherwise I wouldn't have anything and I could- I mean I know right now I could make forty fifty dollars an hour on an oil rig all day long,

Unknown (ELI?): Uh-huh.

ANDREW: But that means having to go wherever- wherever the oil rig goes, I could make eighty dollars an hour working on the railroad as a welder, that means going with the railroad, and I think and I'm like yeah I need to do that but then at the same time I'm like I don't want to leave home,

Unknown: Mm.

Unknown (BRANDON?): [Mm.]

ANDREW: [I'm-] I'm co- XX- I- I guess I've gotten that weird- that weird state of constantly being on my toes because things are always happening and bad people are always around here but I'm also really comfortable here because I- I know the enemy that I'm having to look at, I know the- I know the wolf in sheep's clothing when I see it here, I know who the bad people are I know what the bad things are here, out in the other places I <said with voice break, as if in exasperation or surrender> don't know anything, and I never felt so scared as to go to <Central Kentucky>, I hate cities I hate them with a passion it's too [fast]

Unknown: [Mm.]

ANDREW: Paced nobody's family I can't stop and sit on my bud- on my neighbor's front porch drink a cup of coffee and play guitar I can't do that in a city because then you'll go to jail for breaking and entering

<soft laughter from multiple participants>

ANDREW: <laughter> and I don't know it's just- it's- it's- I'm a very slow paced person, I like to just kick back and sit on the front porch with no shirt on and a cup of coffee sitting next to me there ain't [nothing]

Unknown: [<short, sort laughter>]

ANDREW: better,

JOLENE: <soft laughter>

ANDREW: I [love to work-]

Unknown: [Mm.]

ANDREW: I love doing yard work I love just- I love that stuff and- but at the same time I'm like I'm going to Colorado next month I'm leaving I ain't- I ain't looking at Co- I

ain't looking at Kentucky not more I'll never be back here I'm leaving my home and I'll never be back and then te- ten minutes later I'm like I can't leave I've got chickens here I can't leave [I]

JOLENE: [<soft laughter>]

ANDREW: like to fish [too much]

ELI?: [soft laughter]

ANDREW: And then- I don't- I- it's- it's a constant struggle and I- I'm just glad to hear that other people have that constant fight,

ELI: [Uh-huh.]

ANDREW: [And I-] and you don't feel as alone when you know that people out there feel the same way you do about something.

BRANDON: Mm.

ELI: Yeah absolutely, I- the- I don't have welding experience or anything like that but like I- I- my experience is in IT and in uh tech and [the uh-]

[<sounds of rustling in the background begin here as employees approach from outside to enter the building. Sounds of movement and doors opening and closing almost throughout the rest of the audio>]

ELI: Uh-

WHITNEY: XX

<more rustling, door opening, footsteps>

BRANDON: Kicking me out. <referencing BRANDON's use of the space for story circles>

WHITNEY: <soft laughter>

<continued background sounds as ELI resumes turn>

ELI: Uh but the- in Pikeville there are three IT departments and I can tell you almost everybody that works in them like and nob- there are no other options there are no other jobs like I know the three there's one at <PLACE NAME> one at <PLACE NAME> and one at uh <PLACE NAME>, like that's it and so those jobs exist but like there's no other jobs and so like I- I always feel like I need like economically like if I want to work in that field I have to just pick up and leave and it's [j-]

BRANDON: [Yeah.]

ELI: But at the same time I just- I don't know this has always been where I've belonged s- well not belong but been, so.

BRANDON: [Mm.]

WHITNEY: [That's] why Tennessee always appeals to me is the nature, like when I lived in Tennessee before- I have a sister that lives there and I would drive thirty minutes to Pigeon Forge and make pretty decent money when it was an on season when it's an off season you don't but at three o'clock I clocked out I went home her myself my nephew drove five minutes to the lake he fished we read books we drove back to her house we drank a cup of coffee on the deck and like that was the day and like but I was always especially now like thinking about what I want with the baby is like I would be forty-five minutes from being able to take him to an aquarium instead of spending my Saturday alone with a one year-old because where am I going to take him in Letcher County other than taking him somewhere outside by myself and then I've got to like <laughter> lug a one year-old and all his stuff with me

<interference or contact with microphone>

WF: and somewhere else like I could just go to a zoo I could go to an aquarium <said through laughter> I could go to a museum like it's those little things I want and I also want to still have like coffee on the deck and go out to the lake and small town feelings without- I don't know, maybe it's that I want a small town without a small town that knows my entire [life]

[<interference or contact with microphone>]

WHITNEY: history. [<laughter>]

[<laughter from multiple participants>]

WHITNEY: [I think that's what I [want.]]

ANDREW: [Where] at in Sevier County did you live?

WHITNEY: Uh I lived in <TOWN> in <COUNTY NAME>[but]

ANDREW: [OK.]

WHITNEY: like worked in Sevier [County.]

ANDREW: [Uh] I lived uh out in the middle of Sevier County for a long time my dad's actually lives there

WHITNEY: [Oh yeah?]

ANDREW: [and] so I've- I've been out there and- Tennessee I go out to Tennessee at least three times a year during bear season.

WHITNEY: Yeah. <said through an exhale as if in laughter>

ANDREW: Because that's the only place I can chase hunt and

WHITNEY: Yeah.

ANDREW: actually run my dogs you know for what they're intended to do and that's hunt bear so I'm down there all the time and I've made some really good friends that's my constant struggle I've moved back and forth to Tennessee probably

WHITNEY: Yeah. <said through an exhale as if in laughter>

ANDREW: Eight times I'll pack up my stuff say I'm going to Tennessee I ain't never coming

[back,]

WHITNEY: [<laughter>]

ANDREW: Three weeks later where am I at? I'm [in Letcher County.]

JOLENE?: [soft laughter]

WHITNEY: [Yeah.]

ELI: [Uh-huh.]

ANDREW: And I stru- I- I- I- I feel the struggle because down there there is so much more to do,

WHITNEY: Yeah.

ANDREW: There's just- there- and you never see the same people twice,

WHITNEY: Yeah.

ANDREW: You go to- you go to Gatlinburg and other than the people who work at the places you never see them again.

WHITNEY: And it's kind of fun to be a part of the- part of that crew that- of people who work at the places because then you do like have- there's like this whole subculture there of like- there's the really cheap dive bar <laughter> that's like five minutes off the- the- the strip and [that's where]

BRANDON: [Uh-huh.]

WHITNEY: All the performers go to perform at night and all the people at the theater go hang out and so it is kind of like this little subculture within- yeah. [What-]

ANDREW: [Mm.]

BRANDON: Mm.

ANDREW: Knowing all the back roads and

WHITNEY: [Yeah.]

ANDREW: [Trying] to fight tourons LEX <blending of tourists + morons> to get around
[to places,]

Unknown: [<exhale through nostrils as if laughter>]

ANDREW: Yeah.

JOLENE: I struggle with where- as an older person with where I'm going to land at because hopefully if I move again it would like more than likely be the last place I ever

live so that's a big decision on where I'm going to land and how I'm going to do and if I choose to stay here uh or move.

BRANDON: Mm.

BRANDON: Well I hate to- I don't want to stop us at all because this has been wonderful uh but it seems like they're uh-

ANDREW: XX

BRANDON: Trying to <referring to the employees now coming in and out of the building>

ELI: Got our morale back from...?

Unknown: <exhale through nose as if laughter>

BRANDON: Yeah [well I was even going to ask like do we want to do another...? <referring to another story circle round> for-]

JOLENE: [*<laughter>*]

WHITNEY: I'm ready for a trip to Pigeon Forge. [*<laughter>*]

ANDREW: [*Yeah*]

JOLENE: [*Let's go. <laughter>*]

ANDREW: [*When we- what time are we leaving?
I've got cash-*]

END OF AUDIO

END OF TRANSCRIPT

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VITA

BRANDON JENT

EDUCATION

- BA Linguistics, University of Kentucky. Magna Cum Laude. Lexington, December 2014.
- BA Spanish, University of Kentucky. Magna Cum Laude. Lexington, December 2014.
- Minor, French and Francophone Studies, University of Kentucky. Lexington, December 2014.
- Study Abroad, Pontificia Católica Universidad de Valparaíso. International Studies Abroad (ISA), Valparaíso and Viña del Mar, Chile, Fall semester 2012.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- University of Kentucky, APP 200 Primary Instructor. Department of Appalachian Studies, Lexington, Spring Semester 2018.
- University of Kentucky, APP 200 Teaching Assistant. Department of Appalachian Studies, Lexington, Fall Semester 2017.
- University of Kentucky, SPA 101 Instructor of Record. Department of Hispanic Studies, Lexington, Academic Year 2016-17.

HONORS AND AWARDS

- May 2018. A&S Certificate for Outstanding Teaching Award Nominee. University of Kentucky College of Arts and Sciences, Department of Linguistics.