

Journal of Rural and Community Development

Working out Place: Processes of Migration Decision Making and Resistance in Appalachian Kentucky

Author: Jeanelle Sears

Citation:

Sears, J. (2022). Working out place: Processes of migration decision making and resistance in Appalachian Kentucky. *The Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 17(4), 50–72.

Publisher:

Rural Development Institute, Brandon University.

Editor:

Dr. Doug Ramsey

Open Access Policy:

This journal provides open access to all of its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge. Such access is associated with increased readership and increased citation of an author's work



**BRANDON
UNIVERSITY**

Founded 1899



Working out Place: Processes of Migration Decision Making and Resistance in Appalachian Kentucky

Jeanelle Sears

Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH, United States
jssears@bgsu.edu

Abstract

Young people bring fresh ideas and energy to local economies and social life. Yet, high rates of outmigration have long challenged the recruitment and retention of young people in rural communities. This study sought to understand what processes inform young people's choice to stay or return to distressed areas of Appalachian Kentucky and to work as economic, social, and environmental change makers therein. Using a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach to interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, a context-specific decision-making model for staying in rural Appalachia was developed as *Working out Place*. Prior to describing the methods, results, and their implications, a brief overview of the Appalachian context is offered to situate this study and its aims.

Keywords: Migration, rural, youth, Appalachia, community

Lieu d'entraînement : Processus de prise de décision migratoire et résistance dans le Kentucky des Appalaches Lieu

Résumé

Les jeunes apportent des idées nouvelles et de l'énergie aux économies locales et à la vie sociale. Pourtant, les taux élevés d'émigration ont longtemps entravé le recrutement et la rétention des jeunes dans les collectivités rurales. Cette étude visait à comprendre quels processus informent le choix des jeunes de rester ou de retourner dans les régions en difficulté des Appalaches du Kentucky et d'y travailler en tant qu'acteurs du changement économique, social et environnemental. À l'aide d'une approche constructiviste fondée sur la théorie des entretiens, de l'observation des participants et de l'analyse de documents, un modèle de prise de décision spécifique au contexte pour rester dans les Appalaches rurales a été développé sous le nom de lieu de travail. Avant de décrire les méthodes, les résultats et leurs implications, un bref aperçu du contexte appalachien est proposé pour situer cette étude et ses objectifs.

Mots-clés : Migration, rural, jeunesse, Appalaches, communauté

1.0 Introduction

The history of Appalachia is complex, marked by both catastrophe and rebirth (Williams, 2002). Among the many challenges has been that the region's natural resources are often regarded higher than its people and their connections to place. This is evidenced by multiple historical proposals for sponsored depopulation. Such strategies were promoted in 1911 to support the region's use as a timber economy and again for national parks in the 1920s (Eller, 2008; Williams, 2002). During the Great Depression, planned outmigration was again proposed to facilitate the building of dams (Eller, 2008; Williams, 2002).

At the onset of World War II, Appalachian labor was mobilized for jobs in defense industries and military positions in urban centers (Brown & Hillery Jr., 1962; Eller, 2008). Millions of Appalachians also joined in the Great Migration to industrial cities outside the region (Eller, 2008; Williams, 2002). In the 1950s, Appalachian Kentucky lost more residents due to changes like the mechanization of mining activities and unsuccessful labor negotiations (Brown & Hillary, Jr. 1962; Eller, 2008). By the 1960s, bust conditions had returned due to diminishing coal prices and the continued displacement of mine workers (Eller, 2008). Outmigration continued, and images of those who remained shocked the nation through numerous journalistic and fictional accounts (e.g., Harrington, 1962; see Drake, 2001; Eller, 2008). The region then became a laboratory for experimentation among governmental programs and scientists interested in developing tools for the "War on Poverty," declared by President Johnson from the front porch of a home in Martin County, Kentucky (Eller, 2008). In total, more than three million people left Appalachia for employment, education, and other opportunities between 1940 and 1970, many of them young adults (Eller, 2008; see also Berry, 2000).

Subsequent decades are characterized by increasing economic gaps between Appalachia and the rest of the nation (Eller, 2004). While government and philanthropic initiatives changed the appearance of Appalachian communities over time, these developments did not alter other fundamental issues and, in some cases, created new ones (Eller, 2008). These include political corruption, lack of long-term economic sustainability, environmental exploitation, and the degradation of communities and culture (Drake, 2001; Eller, 2008). Despite the best efforts of the so-called "poverty warriors" and policymakers of previous eras, Appalachian poverty and its associated stereotypes have not been ameliorated (Eller, 2008). Between 2012 and 2016, all but one of Kentucky's 54 Appalachian counties had poverty rates above the U.S. national average, and 37 ranked in the bottom 10 percent of counties nationally based on economic standards (Appalachian Regional Commission [ARC], 2018).

As Appalachia's economy has been highly reliant upon natural resource extraction, environmental issues have also long plagued the region. The environmental impacts of coal mining, for example, include irreversible changes to landscapes, damage to wildlife ecosystems, degradation of soil, air, and water quality, as well as impacts through generation of greenhouse gases (Morrice & Colagiuri, 2013). Well-known also are the occupational effects of coal mining and a number of health disparities that result from proximity to mining activities (Blackley et al., 2018). Comparing Appalachian counties with non-Appalachian counties across the country, Marshall, and colleagues (2017) found that Appalachian counties in the region underperform on 33 of 41 health indicators examined compared to non-Appalachian counties in the region's states. Over the last decade, attention has also turned toward "diseases

of despair” within the region, including those related to alcohol and drug use, as well as suicide (Meit et al., 2019). Combining mortality from all of these, Meit and colleagues (2019) found that mortality rates from these causes were 45% higher in the Appalachian compared to non-Appalachian parts of the country.

The Appalachian region also continues to lag behind the rest of the country in terms of educational parity (Marshall et al., 2017). Between 2012 and 2016, 23.8 percent of Appalachian Kentuckians over 25 had less than a high school diploma (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2018). In the same period, only 56.1 percent of Appalachian Kentuckians over 25 earned a high school diploma, 6.7 percent had an associate degree, and 14.3 percent had a bachelor’s degree or more (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2018). All percentages were lower than those of non-Appalachian Kentucky and the United States in the same period (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2018).

As elsewhere in the United States, Appalachian communities are also attending to racism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination (e.g., Chae et al., 2015; Fischer & Smith, 2012; Gray, 2018; House, 2018; Wright, 2018). In this pursuit, scholars and activists are contesting narratives of the region as devoid of cultural complexity and centering the voice and visibility of difference that includes race and ethnicity, gender expression and sexuality, and also of political and religious affiliations and other identities and positions (e.g., Anglin, 2004; 2016; Catte, 2018; Eller, 2001; Fischer & Smith, 2012; Gray, 2018; hooks, 2014; House, 2018; Smith, 2016). There is widespread recognition in and beyond Appalachia that issues of diversity and inclusion are intimately tied to young adults’ decisions and abilities to stay (Daniels, 2014; House, 2014; McMichael, 2014) and to the sustainability and progress of any community (Johnson, 2014).

Although there are no current proposals to move Appalachians in mass, it is still common for accounts of the region’s problems to suggest the obvious solution for the region’s residents is to simply move (e.g., Lowrey, 2014; see Catte, 2018). Indeed, many continue to do so. Recent estimates indicate that the percentage of young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 is well below the national average in nearly all of Kentucky’s Appalachian counties (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2018). Combined with the long history of outmigration described above, these figures illustrate the continued significance of young adults’ commitments to staying and working to improve the economic, social, and environmental challenges in the region.

In fact, younger adults have been critical to the transformative changes being witnessed in the region at all levels. At the state level, for example, many young adults are part of the *Shaping our Appalachian Region* (SOAR) initiative which hopes to add 30,000 jobs to Appalachian Kentucky through projects related to broadband access, local food systems, tourism, healthcare, small business, and workforce training (SOAR, 2016). Grassroots organizations like Kentuckians For the Commonwealth (2018) and the Kentucky Student Environmental Foundation are working hard for a *Just Transition* away from coal dependency. They, too, depend on young adults for their energy and ideas. Joining with other organizations, their strategies attend to both economic and environmental concerns and include organizing protests against current destructive practices, lobbying political leadership to embrace renewable energies, providing training for displaced miners, and promoting principles of sustainability.

Younger adults have also been leading efforts to support entrepreneurship and arts-based initiatives that contribute renewed vitality to the region's economies and social life (Stephens et al., 2013; Turpin, 2015; Wojan & Nichols, 2018). So too have they demonstrated the important role art plays in addressing health concerns and issues of diversity and representation. For example, Harlan County's community theatre group *Higher Ground* developed and toured a program titled "Needlework." This production drew on and sensitively explored the region's substance use challenges within culturally relevant narratives and themes (Griffey, 2018). Finally, youth-focused organizations are providing platforms for reframing and reclaiming narratives of membership and belonging as part of both the region's rich history and its future (Fischer & Smith, 2012; Gray, 2018; hooks, 2014; House, 2018). This involves working toward development and change models that emphasize inclusion (Wright, 2018), including through organizations that explicitly target retaining young people within the region, such as Stay Together Appalachian Youth (2018).

Though brief, these examples demonstrate that young adults are leading efforts to reshape and reimagine their Appalachian communities (Toth, 2014; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Wolfe et al., 2017). Within this context, this study asked, "what processes which inform young adults' decisions to live and work in Appalachian Kentucky?" A qualitative approach was selected as this aim sought to understand this decision-making process through in-depth exploration with individuals with direct experience of it (Padgett, 2008).

2.0 Methods

Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) was chosen as it concentrates analysis on meaning and action (Charmaz, 2014). This approach draws on constructivist epistemology and ontology, as well as the theoretical frameworks of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism (Charmaz, 2014). In addition to these overarching orientations, we used 'place' as a sensitizing concept for the processes of meaning-making and decision-making with regard to location.

There is generous support for place as an organizing framework for analysis and action within Appalachian studies (e.g., Billings & Kingsolver, 2018; Fisher & Smith, 2012). This study adopted the definition of place as a "meaningful location" (Cresswell, 2015, p. 12; see also Agnew, 1987) with an orientation to the ways in which place shapes individuals and their decisions, and these decisions and commitments shape place (Therborn, 2006). Specific attention was paid, for example, to the cultural discourses surrounding Appalachia as part of what shapes the meanings young people associate with the region and their location therein. Often, for example, depictions of Appalachia keep alive well-worn stereotypes, render Appalachians as passive or naïve victims; ignore histories of resistance, simplify root problems, and perpetuate the indivisibility and marginalization of differences within the region (Anglin, 2016; Billings et al., 1999; Catte, 2018; Fisher, 1993; hooks, 2014; House, 2018). It is also argued these discourses permit the region's status as a "sacrifice zone" (Fox, 1999, p. 163); where significant environmental, social, and economic exploitations are accepted in exchange for the greater good of the nation (Bell, 2013; Reid & Taylor, 2010). These broader contexts and components of place, then, are situated as part of the reification of rurality as a condition to overcome or outgrow (McClay, 2014); through which young people associate staying in Appalachia with individually and culturally

inferior identities (Wolfe et al., 2017). At the same time, we interrogate and explore their potential role in fueling the commitments of the young people in this study to stay.

3.0 Sampling Criteria

Five inclusion criteria were used to recruit young people who made conscious decisions to stay in Appalachian Kentucky and work toward social, economic, and environmental improvements in their communities. First, young adulthood was defined using Stein's (2013) definition of the Millennial generation, which includes those born between 1980 and 2000. Second, all participants lived in an Appalachian county of Kentucky at the time of participation, as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (2009). Next, all participants were asked to have had 15 years of cumulative residency in the region, as this history in place is noted for its contributions to relevant factors such as community and culturally based identity, engagement, social capital, and decision-making about migration (Adams, 2016; Bell, 2013; Hatch, 2009). Additionally, young adults were included if they identified themselves as working on social, economic, and environmental change efforts in the region, whether through volunteer or paid efforts, and on a full or part-time basis. Finally, we recruited young adults with some college education, as this informs migration decisions by expanding choice and possibility with regards to location (Black et al., 2011; Carr & Kefalas, 2009).

4.0 Data Collection

This study triangulated in-depth interviews with participant observation and document review. For interview data, purposive snowball sampling was used, beginning with initial contacts with representatives of agencies and organizations engaged in regional change efforts, broadly conceived to include such institutions as local schools, public health departments, and agricultural extension offices alongside social justice groups. A semi-structured interview guide directed conversations toward an individualized understanding of timelines and decisions regarding living and working in Appalachia. Both in vivo (n=26) and telephone (n=4) interviews were conducted, transcribed, and stored within Dedoose™ (Sociocultural Research Consultants, LLC, 2014).

While interviews focus on the importance of what people say, the method of participant observation moves closer toward an analysis of what they do (Spradley, 1980). Participant observation supported CGT's emphasis upon understanding interview data in the context of the broader circumstances surrounding individual lives and the broader issues facing their communities and work (Charmaz, 2014; Hammer et al., 2017). This included, for example, necessary entry into the spaces and examining what is happening with regards to diversity and inclusion, and how that showed up in physical and material arrangements, language, and interactions, such as who is given a platform for speaking and other privileges (Brinkmann, 2014; Hook, 2001; see also Aagard & Matthiessen, 2016).

Settings for participant observation included those that provided insight into the research questions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Participant observation activities were conducted in communities, college campuses, and businesses as part of the travel for each interview. Additional locations of observations included a *Poor People's Campaign* event in Lynch, Kentucky, an environmental rally at the Kentucky State Capitol Building, an environmental teach-in on fracking pipelines,

a community clean-up, a drag show, a downtown revitalization, and community event planning meeting, and a student potluck for Appalachian students hosted by the Kentucky Student Environmental Coalition. I also participated in three days of the Appalachian Studies Conference and an all-day Tedx event in Corbin, Kentucky; both highlighted themes relevant to this study and were attended by multiple participants. In total, 74 hours of participant observation were conducted for this study, and field notes were used to capture immediate thoughts and reflections on the interactions therein.

Document review situated the above-noted data within the larger regional context of development and change efforts. Selected documents were retrieved by searching relevant regional websites and following organizations via social media. A total of 45 documents were examined, including news articles and social media postings relevant to the communities and work of individual participants and the region at large. Careful attention was paid at all stages to participant confidentiality. Data was stored in a locked box or password-protected digital folder. Participants were assigned numbers attached to their interview transcripts, and demographic data was deidentified.

5.0 Data Analysis

Analysis of data involved memo writing, coding, diagramming, constant comparison, reflexivity, and situational analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Clarke, 2005). These processes and theoretical sampling facilitated the examination of sufficiency and saturation of the developing model (Charmaz, 2014; Clarke et al., 2018; Rubin & Babbie, 2016). Results were discussed and refined through follow-up interviews with participants (n=16), further supporting the trustworthiness of the interpretations and attending to concerns regarding participant voice and representation in the process (Birt et al., 2016; Padgett, 2008). Results are presented with pseudonyms and with detailed attention to balancing the need for rich description and context with the protection of participant confidentiality.

6.0 Results

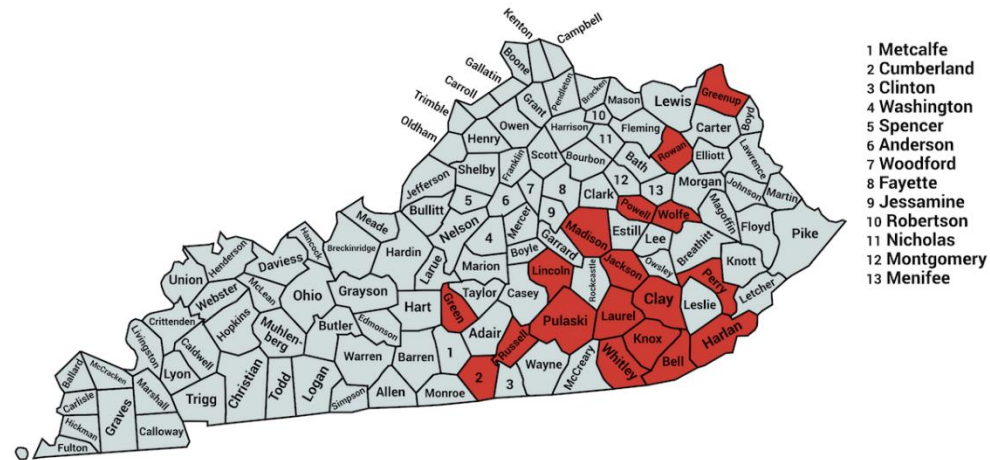
6.1 Sample Characteristics

Young adults participating in the interview (n=30) were between 18 to 38 years old, with an average at of 29 years. Four participants did not report gender or race during the interview process or via email attempts to gather this data. Of the remaining 26 participants, gender identity was self-reported as follows: Female (n=13), Cisgender Female (n=1), Male (n=10), Non-Binary Transgender (n=1), and Gender Queer (n=1). Participants' race was self-reported as White or Caucasian (n=25) and African American (n=1).

Though young people were recruited through targeted organizations and efforts, participants described their involvements as crossing multiple domains (e.g., social, economic, environmental) of this study's focus. For example, one participant did paid work connected to economic development and tourism, but also engaged beyond their employment in activism and art that progressed social and environmental change efforts. Thus, we report multiple engagements for each participant, as indicated by their own description of their work and its implications. These included: Education and Youth Development (n=11), Arts & Media (n=9), Environmental Activism, Natural Resource Management, Agriculture, &

Sustainability (n=8), Social and Political Activism or Advocacy (n=4), Economic Development, Downtown Revitalization, Tourism, & Business Ownership (n=13), and Direct Social Services (n=11). Figure 1 highlights the counties where participants resided, or counties of permanent residence in the case of full-time students living on college campuses; those campuses were also within the region.

Figure 1. Participants by County of Residence.



Source: Author. Created with mapchart.net ©

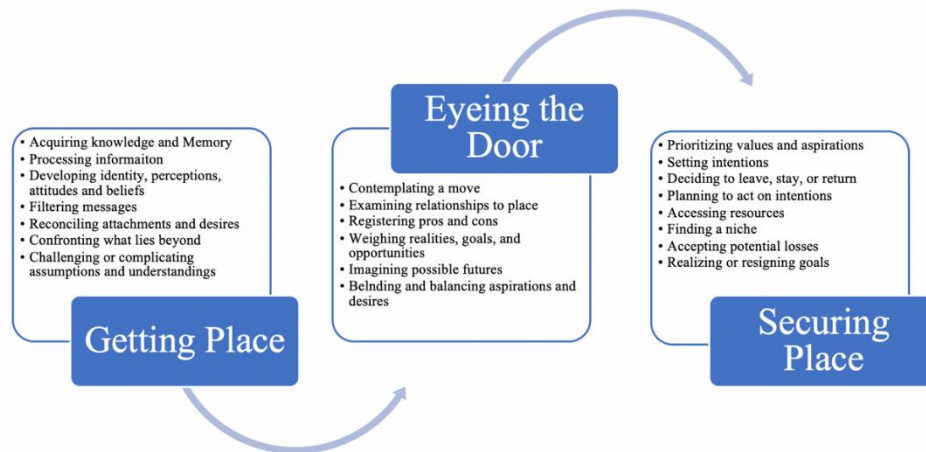
6.2 Working Out Place

Working out place was developed as a descriptive category that encompasses the diversity observed across young adults' process of commitment-making in Appalachian Kentucky. Within this category, three distinct phases were identified: (1) *getting place*, (2) *eyeing the door*, and (3) *securing place*. The first and third titles were developed by the researcher to represent multiple voices and perspectives. *Eyeing the door* was an in-vivo quote lifted directly from an interview transcript, which also encompassed varied participant experiences. By laboring through these phases, individuals worked out their unique understanding of their home communities and the Appalachian region. They also developed a sense of their own identities, goals, and positions and negotiated these in relation to place. Figure 2 illustrates these stages and identifies the major tasks associated with each. Below, these are described in detail with each task underlined in the narrative.

6.3 Getting Place

Getting place comprises how young adults came to know and understand Appalachian Kentucky. Early in life, young adults began acquiring knowledge and memories of place, both their home community and the region at large. Processing this information then informed their developing identities, perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs in relation to place, which then incited motivations to leave, stay, or return. This section will describe how *getting place* occurs as one is coming of age, but also evolves continuously as individuals renegotiate their relationships with place.

Figure 2. Working Out Place.



Source: Author.

Through the *getting place* process, young adults asked questions such as: What is unique about this place? What does it mean to be from this place? Do I belong here? What can this place offer me? What can I contribute here? Will I miss this place if I leave? Is there somewhere, or someone I can come back to if I return? For individuals, a unique set of answers developed over time, based on how they received, interpreted, and synthesized information about their communities and the region, but also about themselves.

This place-based knowledge was created and transmitted through a variety of sources and mediums, including direct interactions with significant adults, sensory experiences, implied cultural norms, and stereotypes presented by the broader society. Many young adults, for example, developed positive attitudes toward Appalachian Kentucky through formative experiences in the mountains or on farms, art, or cultural activities, and by way of the strong social and kinship networks that surrounded them. These encounters then shaped cherished memories of place and nurtured awareness of, as one participant stated, “where and who we’re from.”

At the same time, most filtered these messages alongside a collection of negative ideas. For example, like many others, Ash’s early encounters conveyed a sense that future success required distancing oneself from the region, not only geographically but also culturally, hearing “This place is bad. This place is inferior. Don’t talk like these people. Don’t do these behaviors if you want to have a decent life... You have to become more than this place if you want to survive.” During participant observation at a regional event, the author witnessed such messaging firsthand. Sitting among other attendees at a round conference table, we were asked to discuss solutions to regional poverty and other disparities. A state politician sitting at our table responded, “We have to come up with ways for kids to get out.”

As a result of these mixed impressions, *getting place* for most young adults encompassed reconciling attachments and desires regarding who and where they wanted to be. But in addition to the slow-moving accumulation of messages, *getting place* was also facilitated by single experiences. In Russell’s case, this occurred when the landscape of his childhood was destroyed by a pipeline project. He remembered:

Everything I could see was changed. The little rick ledges that used to be there...no more. The trees were gone. The animals were gone. The tranquility was gone... It was all blasted out. Now it's just a grassy little area. It's not even the same place to me anymore. That one event really triggered everything that happened afterwards... [Now], I could never fully leave this area or the work that I do. I think it's important enough to this community, to this area, to stay.

Thus, for Russell, one devastating event shaped how he *got place* as a threatened location. His experience also illustrates how one's concept of place eventually informs their commitments, as the destruction he witnessed sparked his environmental activism within the region.

While *getting place* includes information about one's home community and the region at large, this understanding also emerges by confronting what lies beyond. For instance, many shared that new appreciations of place developed while they were away from the region, particularly because of homesickness and longing. Others expressed that stereotypes and outsider perspectives challenged them to reconnect with home in new ways. In the excerpt below, Becca shares how her perspective on place was altered while attending graduate school out of state:

I became a little more defensive of where I'm from while I was away. It's like with your family; only family can talk bad about your family...That's how I felt about Appalachia. I was doing some research on the region and people were so curious that I was from Appalachia. They were like, "You know those people?" [One time] I was asked, 'How did you get out?' ...like I needed to escape. That struck a nerve with me. When people would say things like that I would say "Yes, I am those people. I'm proud of where I'm from." Because I was in graduate school, I was able to look at it from a more of a macro level and to understand why some of the problems exist in the region; things that I wasn't really thinking about before.

For Becca, *getting place* was facilitated by grappling with distance and difference, but also through education. The salience of *getting place* in this way was shared by many participants, particularly those who looked closely at the historical and structural conditions that shaped the Appalachian region. This acquisition of higher learning thus facilitated another important task in challenging or complicating their assumptions and understandings of place. In addition to real-time experiences and understandings, new insights and reflections and attitudes were generated through nostalgia and memory when one is beyond a particular place.

6.4 *Eyeing the Door*

Where *getting place* is situated around comprehending and evaluating place, *eyeing the door* involves contemplating a move by examining one's relationship to place. Based on a growing understanding of both self and the region of Appalachian Kentucky, everyone seemed to register the pros and cons of staying or returning. This involved weighing current realities, goals, and opportunities and imagining possible futures, both in and outside of the region.

Often, *eyeing the door* emerged as a focused deliberation that preceded making a commitment to a particular place or position. Major life transitions regularly provoked such introspection among participants and intensified this process, such as graduations, personal setbacks, the ending, or loss of opportunities. Profound moments in close relationships also initiated these contemplations, including separations, births, illnesses, and deaths.

At other times, *eyeing the door* was a passive or casual exercise, one which did not precede real intentions of either coming or going. Mike, for example, had no real intentions of leaving his rural hometown since he settled there with his wife and children. However, he still engaged in *eyeing the door* when thinking about what he had gained and potentially sacrificed through his decision. He considered such factors as the cost of city rent versus a rural mortgage, as well as his daily commute time. He also considered less obvious factors like the availability of culturally diverse foods in local markets and restaurants, observing, "You can't go and buy just whatever you want at the local grocery store. At the same time, I can grow whatever I want to in my garden. If I want hummus, I'll raise chickpeas."

Like Mike, many participants *eye the door* elsewhere by weighing the pros and cons of one's commitments, both real and imagined. Those who stayed in or returned to rural communities often envisioned living in cities. While factors like cost of living, traffic, and noise were voiced as deterrents, many also admitted attraction to the amenities, diversity, and opportunities available elsewhere, both for themselves and their families. In addition to these practical considerations, there were significant discussions of geography and landscape, culture, a sense of purpose, and a feeling of freedom and belonging that were registered in this process, and which ultimately supported young adults' decisions to stay or return to Appalachian Kentucky.

As these imaginings took place, they drew heavily on how young people were *getting place* at that moment in their development. This included not only aspects of the place itself but also how one imagined themselves therein. Tyler's experience illustrates this connection well. Looking forward to life after college graduation, he was *eyeing the door* toward large metropolitan areas beyond the region. He revealed that this desire was based on his understanding that larger cities offer a wider array of opportunities related to both his identity as a gay male and his personal aspirations. Moreover, distance would provide him with a level of freedom he didn't enjoy while being near his parents, who had a strong aversion to his coming out. He shared, "I see the light at the end of the tunnel. If I can graduate, secure that job, and move, then I can live on my own terms...I know what I'm looking for and I can't find that in Appalachia."

For Tyler and others, *eyeing the door* involved a complex blending of personal aspirations into a vision of what type of place was right for him. Several participants shared similar feelings and experiences in relation to their gender identity and sexuality, but also through their age and desire for experiences and opportunities.

Through participant observation at an Appalachian youth conference workshop, for example, the author witnessed intentional efforts to center this intersectionality. This included positioning young queer Appalachians as leaders in the workshop and highlighting legacies and successes of diversity and inclusion, both past and present.

Where their place of origin felt welcoming and nurturing, *eyeing the door* created fewer conflicts or tensions. Yet, where home or the region at large felt restraining, locations beyond became more desirable, and often, a tipping point was reached, and they were propelled to leave. For some, a balance was struck between the desire for easier access to amenities and distance from their pasts by *eyeing the door* toward a place within the region but not their home communities.

Many presume what might happen to their family or community because of the various paths being contemplated. In these cases, many experienced guilt and even a sense of betrayal with the thought or act of leaving their community or region. For others, this aspect of *eyeing the door* became an important method through which they created meaning around the decision to stay or return. Anna's story illustrates this connection precisely. Though she reflected fondly on her childhood, she never intended to go back to her small town after high school. By that time, *getting place* for Anna meant recognizing there was "nothing there for me." When she thought about her community and its myriad problems, particularly with substance use, she questioned, "Do I really want to go back to that?"

As her college graduation approached, Anna set her eyes on raising a family in a more urban community with more diversity and opportunities. However, when an opportunity opened back home, she and her husband began picturing what life might be like if they did return. In fact, she remembered several pivotal interactions which shaped this experience:

I started to miss the little things that I took for granted. I remember one time my husband and I were in Wal-Mart. We had come across my second-grade teacher. She stopped me and was like, "Oh my goodness, I'm so proud of you. I've been keeping up with your progress. I know you're graduating next year." My husband was really surprised. He was like, "My teachers probably don't even know my name. This is totally different from where I'm from. It's a close-knit community. It's safe here. Everyone knows everyone. This is where I want to raise my family." Then it just hit me, "Maybe if I move back I can work and try to help." I just decided to come back to my community and try to make a positive impact and be a positive role model for the kids here.

As a result of exchanges with both insiders and outsiders, Anna began to *get place* in a new way and to seriously *eye the door* back home. Eventually, the benefits identified outweighed any restraints. Because the position involved impacting youth through programs like substance use prevention, she developed a sense of purpose in returning.

Anna is now a mother of two who has settled into that position in her hometown. Still, she sometimes engages in the process of *eyeing the door*, even if imagining something different only bolsters her commitments. She anticipated, “The only thing that would get me to leave would be [work in my organization] at a national level. Then I’d make the move because I feel like it would benefit the youth here too.” In this way, Anna’s story also captures how *eyeing the door* is not a static or one-time occurrence. Rather it is regularly engaged across the lifespan with different motivations via an ever-changing set of values and objectives.

6.5 Securing Place

The third aspect of *working out place* is the act of *securing place*. *Securing place* comprises the decision-making, planning, and movement toward the realization of one’s goals. The first step therein is prioritizing the values and aspirations developed through *getting place* and *eyeing the door*. This involved establishing which pieces of information, which imagined possibilities, and which pros and cons would ultimately direct a person’s decision. Some prioritized living and working in the region over other imagined possibilities.

The next step required setting intentions and making decisions to leave, stay, or return to the region. Some established this aim early in their adulthood. Sam, for example, recalled setting his intentions on returning after college, an aspiration informed by a positive sense of community and attraction to the lifestyle Appalachian Kentucky offered. He revealed how these feelings were only solidified by *getting place* while away at school:

The college years were pretty tough. It was the first time in my life I had been outside the region for a long time... It was obvious to me that I hadn’t been raised up like everybody else. There were some differences in how I thought about some things versus what I saw amongst my classmates and professors. Does a fish know it’s in water, right? You don’t know until you’re pulled out.

While Sam’s foundation for returning home was strong, *securing place* depends on more than desires and intentions. As he shared, planning to act on these intentions required accessing resources and accepting potential losses that may occur in the process:

It ended up that a position back home came open and let me get my foot in the door...I know full well that I could have went and made more money or got up the career ladder a whole lot faster if I had been willing to go other places, but that wasn’t the most important thing for me.

Like many participants, Sam realized that going outside the region may bring him more opportunities for advancement, but he prioritized his connections to the community when he made the decision to return. In these cases, individuals found themselves waiting patiently to find their niche in the work itself. This may mean accepting lower-paying positions or those with fewer educational requirements, even if temporarily.

In other instances, *securing place* transpired through a series of serendipitous right place and right time events. For some individuals, this may have initially included a hesitation to return or even resignation to place. Tess, for example, spent many years away, and though she remembers homesickness during these years, she never planned on returning until her family faced the possibility of losing their multi-generational family business.

Honestly, I didn't really have intentions of going into my family's business...But after realizing it was in jeopardy, I had this vivid nightmare... When I woke up, I felt by selling the business I would have huge regrets. I called my family and said, "What if I came home?" I thought, "I'll give it five years. If I'm miserable, I'll know I've tried it; I gave it my best. What's five years in a lifetime?"

In Tess's experience, her ability to act on the decision and her ability to return was facilitated largely by accessing resources her family presented to support her return. Such access is critical to *securing place* and may also include establishing family and friendship networks, locating housing, and even ensuring emotional readiness. For example, one participant had to determine if they were ready to return to intense family conflicts. Another participant spoke of being unable to leave home initially because they lacked the confidence and skills to be on their own. Those with partners or families had to simultaneously consider what might be attainable for them.

Several young adults struggled considerably with *securing place*; lacking access to many of the previously mentioned resources, including financial and social capital. However, given the many messages about the lack of opportunities in the region, many were ultimately surprised by what they were able to realize in place. A number enjoyed financial benefits by living rent or mortgage free, either with their parents or in a family member's available home. Even more found that their rural communities offered them the opportunity to find fulfilling work in their fields of practice or in areas they were only marginally qualified for but were willing to learn. Many felt these positions were at levels of responsibility and influence beyond what might be possible for them elsewhere. Ultimately, readiness to act on one's goals evolved over time as individuals developed the means to make a move.

Some participants found themselves realizing their initial goals, while others resigned to other directions. Moreover, most participants found that their visions for change and their access to change mechanisms had to evolve over time and respond to local norms and conditions. This was illustrated well in conversation with a community clean-up event organizer during participant observation. When I asked one of the organizers about his motivations and intentions for the event, he explained that during the 2016 elections, he became "frustrated and exhausted" by partisan "bickering" in his community. For him, the clean-up was a neutral event that transcended the national political divide, bringing the community together in a meaningful way to connect people locally to the issues that directly impact their community. I witnessed the power of this strategy as I spent hours picking up trash with other volunteers. We noticed that much of what washed up included needles and pill bottles, and our conversations turned to the deep impact of the opioid crises on individuals, families, and the community at large, facilitating deep connection and reflection that would not be possible at a politicized event.

At the same time, the understanding that informed these connections also sensitized many participants to the types of unintended consequences that often accompany development and change. Ash, for example, noted concern that many of the economic development activities in the region could result in the gentrification seen elsewhere, where growth for some meant decreased access to *securing place* for others:

I've been paranoid about gentrification, and I keep trying to talk about that here. There's this development movement going on which is awesome...I think [some communities] are doing it right. It's a community led process and it's beautiful. But if you don't have that it can do more harm than good and it's just a few people lining their pockets. Sure, we all benefit from going to their trendy new business but what's that doing for people who are trying to pay their bills? It's not solving some of these issues that impact development.

Although unique for everyone, these types of hesitations also become part of the meaning made of decisions to stay and pursue work across economic, social, and environmental domains. Moreover, their positions impacted how they aligned themselves among the many contested visions for the region's future and how it should be attained.

7.0 Discussion

Global trends in rural population loss are expected to continue well into the future. In fact, the United Nations (2014) projected that by 2050, 66 percent of the world and 90 percent of the U.S. population would live in cities. Most studies of human movement focus on the act of moving or the acculturative processes that emerge thereafter (Kokkalainen & Kyle, 2016). This study is rare in that it included participants who were either in the early stages of decision-making or who were able to reflect on recent encounters with the desire to migrate but ultimately chose to stay. By focusing on young adults who choose to live and work in Appalachian Kentucky, this study builds on regional efforts to recruit and retain this population to inspire and inform new directions for the future (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2015). Moreover, this focus contributes to our understanding of a specific group of 'stayers' who identify with place and make commitments to applying their knowledge and skills toward community improvement (Dalsgaard Pedersen & Gram, 2018; Heinemann & Hadler, 2015).

Through the development of the category of *working out place*, the phases identified fit with Kley's (2017) conceptualization of migration as a multi-staged process that should include contemplative and pre-decisional phases. As *getting place* illustrated, for example, this should also consider how beliefs, attitudes, and identity formation impact this process even before active consideration occurs. Echoing previous research, the messages received by young adults in Appalachian Kentucky often associated movement outside of the region with individual progress and development (Dalsgaard Pedersen & Gram, 2017; Toth, 2014). There were also explicit and implicit messages about whether certain individuals were welcome or

belonged, particularly those who presented differences in sexuality, gender, politics, and religion.

As documented by a scholarship from similarly distressed rural communities (e.g., Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Easthope & Gabriel, 2008; Wolfe et al., 2017), these formative interactions often occurred in relationships with important adults and through educational experiences. Through these, many young adults came to associate staying in the region with personal and cultural inferiority. These results thus support regional scholars who insist that exclusionary messaging within and about place has a direct impact on youth motivations to leave (Daniels, 2014; House, 2014; McMichael, 2014).

In addition to these congruencies, a surprising finding within *getting place* was the importance, for many participants, of their experiences outside the region. These facilitated new understandings and meanings associated with Appalachian Kentucky. This corroborates the idea that contact with ‘the other,’ in various forms, is a critical component of individual identity formation and meaning-making (Bhatia, 2011). Rather than internalizing stereotypes or increasing physical and emotional distance from the region, such encounters often fueled desires for young adults to return and contributed to visions of positive improvements.

The second process of *working out place* is *eyeing the door*. This phase is largely contemplative and includes weighing various pros and cons of a decision to stay, leave, or return. As such, this process connects directly to Value X Expectancy models of migration decision-making. These propose that those contemplating migration value certain goals and weigh these based on their expectation that migration will result in their achievement (De Jong & Fawcett, 1981). Many participants identified known “push” and “pull” factors of migration, such as cost of living, career options, and educational opportunities. However, regional uniqueness was uncovered in such elements as the importance of generational ties, connections to landscape, and opportunities to give back to one’s community. This diversity of factors emphasizes the need to balance rational choice models of migration decision-making with those emphasizing structural, emotional, and imaginative processes (Castles et al., 2014; Kokkalainen & Kyle, 2016).

The final step identified is *securing place*. This involves setting and acting upon intentions. According to cognitive behavioral theories (e.g., Ajzen, 1985; 2011), such intentions are the result of beliefs formed around the potential outcomes of an action. This insight produces an important link between the beliefs that young people form while *getting place*, and their eventual decisions. Often, however, there are discrepancies between what individuals intend to do and what occurs (Kley, 2017). Like any behavior, leaving, staying, or returning to Appalachian Kentucky relies on different levels of individual control, skill, and resources (Conner & Armitage, 1998). This requires examining what Black and colleagues (2011, p. 448) term “intervening obstacles and facilitators” that impact migration decision-making. This includes such things as the cost of moving or the availability of social supports or occupational opportunities.

Previous examination of the Millennial experience, for example, suggests that this cohort is “stuck” in place because of national economic trends (e.g., Fry, 2017). For the most part, however, participants in this study did not express a feeling of dissatisfaction or resignation with their location. In fact, many found that upon return, they encountered opportunities unavailable elsewhere, particularly in their

careers and within their community. This stands in direct opposition to many narratives of rural Appalachia region, which emphasize a lack of opportunity and possibility (e.g., Vance, 2016), particularly for children and youth. What is more, some aspects of this process, such as the imaginative elements in *eyeing the door*, may be continuously engaged as a mechanism for reinforcing one's decision. In this way, an additional stage of maintenance should be considered as part of this dynamic. In other words, commitment to staying in the region is an ongoing process rather than a one-time decision.

These findings illuminate the process of migration decision-making in the context of high rural out-migration and aim for the recruitment and retention of young adults as part of rural development. Nevertheless, significant limitations must be noted. Of note, interview participants were pooled in the southeastern corner of Appalachian Kentucky along corridors of either Interstate 75 or major regional parkways. While this reflects the purposive snowball sampling method, it may also indicate a concentration of development and change efforts in these areas while also suggesting that access to major transportation routes plays a role in both the ability to stay and work toward growth in Appalachian communities and the ease of doing so in certain communities over others.

The categorical findings of working out place and its sub-processes have notable implications not only for rural development in and beyond Appalachia. Broadly, this includes finding unique approaches to diminishing the structural impacts of young adult outmigration, such as programs and policies that increase educational and work opportunities (Castles et al., 2014). This may mean advocating for state, regional, or national policy change, such as shifting status quo economic development trends toward innovative initiatives that emphasize diversification via local strengths and desires. Other examples include linking policy to the resources young adults need to successfully persist in the region.

There is also room to consider how an interdisciplinary set of practitioners might help to create, implement, and evaluate programs that promote positive place-based messages and experiences that attend to the more emotional and psychological aspects of young adults' place-based desires (Kokkalainen & Kyle, 2016). Given the findings here, and their relationship to diverse identities and positions, including gender, sexuality, race, and class, such work should consult the expertise of regional scholars and activists engaged in amplifying diverse voices and experiences in the region (e.g., Black in Appalachia, 2021; McNeill, 2022). These sources of knowledge can propel transformative change that explicitly identifies belonging, inclusion, and equity as critical components to recruiting and retaining young people in the region.

This might include such practices as securing funding for and implementing regional conferences and art-based programming that provide opportunities for interpersonal connection, cultural reflection, and the generation of new ideas. Or, for example, investing in environmental preservation and outdoor recreational opportunities as a link between young adults' desire to protect and connect with nature and regional economic development needs.

At the same time, there is a lesson here for the importance of encouraging and supporting programs that explicitly link young adults to places beyond their home communities and the region. Still yet, this should be balanced with crafting creative ways to recruit young people back. Programs that explicitly link cultural exchange

and travel could be particularly instructive when linked to shared experiences of social, economic, and environmental injustice. In all of this, an interdisciplinary, strengths-based, and place-centered approach can contribute to the retention, recruitment, development, and support of young adults in rural communities.

References

- Aagard, J., & Matthiesen, N. (2016). Methods of materiality: Participant observation and qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 13*, 33–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2015.1090510>
- Adams, H. (2016). Why populations persist: Mobility, place attachment, and climate change. *Population and Environment, 37*, 429–448. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-015-0246-3>
- Agnew, J. A. (1987). *Place and politics: The geographical mediation of state and society*. Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin.
- Ajzen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behavior. In J. Kuhl, & J. Beckman (Eds.), *Action-control: From cognition to behavior* (pp. 11–39). Heidelberg, Germany: Springer.
- Ajzen, I. (2011). The theory of planned behavior: Reactions and reflections. *Psychology & Health, 26* (9), 1113–1127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2011.613995>
- Anglin, M. K. (2004). Erasures of the past: Culture, power, and heterogeneity in Appalachia. *Journal of Appalachian Studies, 10*(1/2), 73–84. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40070567>
- Anglin, M. K. (2016). Toward a new politics of outrage and transformation: Placing Appalachia within the global political economy. *Journal Of Appalachian Studies, 22*, 51–56. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jappastud.22.1.0051>
- Appalachian Regional Commission. (2009). Subregions in Appalachia. <https://www.arc.gov/map/subregions-in-appalachia/>
- Appalachian Regional Commission. (2018). Relative poverty rates in Appalachia, 2012–2016. <https://www.arc.gov/map/relative-poverty-rates-in-appalachia-2012-2016/>
- Bell, S. E. (2013). *Our roots run deep as ironweed: Appalachian women and the fight for environmental justice*. Urbana, Chicago, & Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Berry, C. (2000). *Southern migrants, northern exiles*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Bhatia, S. (2011). Narrative inquiry as cultural psychology: Meaning-making in a contested global world. *Narrative Inquiry, 21*(2), 345–352. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.21.2.13bha>
- Billings, D. B., & Kingsolver, A. E. (Eds.). (2018). *Appalachia in regional context: Place matters*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.
- Billings, D. B., Norman, G., & Ledford, K. (Eds.). (1999). *Back talk from Appalachia: Confronting stereotypes*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press.

- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness of merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research*, 26, 1802–1811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>
- Black, R., Adger, W. N., Arnell, N. W., Dercon, S., Geddes, A., & Thomas, D. S. G. (2011). The effect of environmental change on human migration. *Global Environmental Change*, 21, S3–S11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2011.10.001>
- Black in Appalachia. (2021). *Black in Appalachia 2021 annual report*. https://www.blackinappalachia.org/files/ugd/31c746_02e4b8d5b29547dda0ec5b3721da9bd.pdf
- Blackley, D. J., Halldin, C. N., & Laney, A. C. (2018). Continued increase in prevalence of coal workers' pneumoconiosis in the United States, 1970-2017. *American Journal of Public Health*, 108, 1220–1222. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304517>
- Brinkmann, S. (2014). Getting in touch with the world: Meaning and presence in social science. In M. Jacobsen, M. Drake, K. Keohane, & A. Petersen (Eds.), *Imaginative methodologies in the social sciences: Creativity, poetics and rhetoric in social research* (pp. 133–154). Dorchester, United Kingdom: Ashgate Publishing.
- Brown, J. S., & Hillary Jr., G. A. (1962). The Great Migration, 1940-1960. In T. R. Ford (Ed.), *The Southern Appalachian Region: A survey* (pp. 54–78). Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press.
- Carr, P. J., & Kefalas, M. J. (2009). *Hollowing out the middle: The rural brain drain and what it means for America*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Castles, S., de Haas, H., & Miller, M. J. (2014). *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world* (5th Ed). New York, NY: Guildford Press.
- Catte, E. (2018). *What you are getting wrong about Appalachia*. Cleveland, OH: Belt Publishing.
- Chae, D. H., Clouston, S., Hatzenbuehler, M. L., Kramer, M. R., Cooper, H. L. F., Wilson, S. M., Stephens-Davidowitz, S. I., Gold, R. S., & Link, B. G. (2015). Association between an internet-based measure of area racism and black mortality. *PLoS One*, 10(4), e0122963. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0122963>
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd Ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Clarke, A. E. (2005). *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Clarke A. E., Friese C., Washburn R. S. (2018). *Situational Analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Conner, M., & Armitage, C. J. (1998). Extending the theory of planned behavior: A review and avenues for further research. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 28(15), 1429–1464. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1998.tb01685.x>

- Cresswell, T. (2015). *Place: An introduction* (2nd Ed.). Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Dalsgaard Pedersen, H., & Gram, M. (2018). The brainy ones are leaving: The subtlety of (un)cool places through the eyes of rural youth. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2, 620–635. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2017.1406071>
- Daniels, S. (2014). Stay here anyway. *Journal Of Appalachian Studies*, 20(2), 136–138. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jappastud.20.2.0136>
- Drake, R. B. (2001). *A history of Appalachia*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press.
- DeJong, G. F., & Fawcett, J. T. (1981). Motivations for migration: An assessment and a value-expectancy research model. In G. F. De Jong, & R. W. Gardner (Eds.), *Migration decision making: Multidisciplinary approaches to microlevel studies in developed and developing countries* (pp. 13–58). New York, NY: Pergamon Policy Studies on International Development.
- Easthope, H., & Gabriel, M. (2008). Turbulent lives: Exploring the cultural meaning of regional youth migration. *Geographical Research*, 46(2), 172–182. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-5871.2008.00508.x>
- Eller, R. D. (2001). Forward. In D. B. Billings, N. Gurney, & Ledford, K. (Eds.), *Back talk from Appalachia: Confronting stereotypes* (pp. 1–2). Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press.
- Eller, R. D. (2004). Modernization, 1940-2000. In R. A. Straw, & H. T. Blethen (Eds.), *High mountains rising: Appalachia in time and place* (pp. 197–220). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Eller, R. D. (2008). *Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.
- Fisher, S. L. (1993). *Fighting back in Appalachia: Traditions of resistance and change*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Fisher, S. L., & Smith, B. L. (Eds.). (2012). *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia*. Urbana, Chicago, & Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Fox, J. (1999). Mountaintop removal in West Virginia: An environmental sacrifice zone. *Organizations and Environment*, 12, 163–183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026699122002>
- Fry, R. (2017). Americans are moving at historically low rates, in part because Millennials are staying put. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/13/americans-are-moving-at-historically-low-rates-in-part-because-millennials-are-staying-put/>
- Gray, M. L. (2018). “There are no gay people here”: Expanding the boundaries of queer youth visibility in the rural United States. In Dwight B. Billings, & Ann E. Kingsolver. (2018), *Appalachia in regional context: Place matters* (pp. 111–130). Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Griffey, M. (2018, May 17). *Higher Ground* presents ‘Needlework.’ *Higher Ground in Harlan County*. <https://www.highergroundinharlan.com/blog/may-17th-2018>

- Hammer, B., Fletcher, F., & Hibbert, A. (2017). Participant observation: Enhancing the impact measurement in community based participatory research. *Qualitative Report*, 22(2), 439–455. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol22/iss2/6>
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: principles in practice* (3rd Ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Harrington, M. (1962). *The other America: Poverty in the United States*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Hatch, E. (2009). A new company in town: Lessons on local identity and community development in the mountain south. In S. Keefe (Ed.), *Participatory development in Appalachia: Cultural identity, community, and sustainability* (pp. 45–65). Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press.
- Heinemann, L., & Hadler, M. (2015). Resisting economic opportunities? An inquiry into the reasons and motivations of individuals who stay in an economically deprived area. *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 21, 86–104. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jappastud.21.1.0086>
- Hook, D. (2001). Discourse, knowledge, materiality, history: Foucault and discourse analysis. *Theory & Psychology*, 11, 521–47. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1177/09593543011114006>
- hooks, b. (2014). Call and response--Taking a stand. *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 20(2), 122–123. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jappastud.20.2.0122>
- House, S. (2014). Our secret places in the waiting world: Or, a conscious heart, continued. *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 20, 103–121. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jappastud.20.2.0103>
- House, S. (July 26, 2018). Memories from the South: Growing up in a sundown town. A place for us all. *Time magazine*. <https://time.com/5349524/silas-house-essay/>
- Johnson, F. (2014). Claiming a place on earth: The conscious heart of Silas House. *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 20, 151–153.
- Kentuckians for the Commonwealth. (2018). What do we mean by a just transition for Appalachia? Retrieved from <https://archive.kftc.org/campaigns/just-transition>
- Kley, S. (2017). Facilitators and constraints at each stage of the migration decision process. *Population Studies*, 71, 35–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2017.1359328>
- Kokkalainen, S., & Kyle, D. (2016). Imagining mobility: The prospective cognition question in migration research. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 42, 759–776. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1111133>
- Lowrey, A. (2014, June 26). What's the matter with Eastern Kentucky? It's the economy. *The New York Times Magazine*. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/29/magazine/whats-the-matter-with-eastern-kentucky.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3Ar&_r=1

- Marshall, J. L., Thomas, L., Lane, N. M., Holmes, G. M., Arcury, T. A., Randolph, R., Silberman, P., Holding, W., Villamil, L., Thomas, S., Lane, M., Latus, J., Rodgers, J., & Ivey, K. (2017, August 23). *Health disparities in Appalachia*. Report. https://www.arc.gov/assets/research_reports/Health_Disparities_in_Appalachia_August_2017.pdf
- McClay, W. M. (2014). Why place matters. In W. M. McClay, & T. V. McAllister (Eds.), *Why place matters: Geography, identity, and civic life in modern America* (pp. 1–9). New York, NY: Encounter Books.
- McMichael, P. (2014). The power of conversation. *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 20(2), 142-145.
- McNeill, Z. Z. (Ed). (2022). *Y'all means all: The emerging voices queering Appalachia*. PM Pres. https://pmpress.org/index.php?l=product_detail&p=1240
- Meit, M., Heffernan, M., & Tanenbaum, E. (2019). Investigating the impact of the diseases of despair in Appalachia. *Journal of Appalachian Health*, 1(2),7–18. <https://doi.org/10.13023/jah.0102.02>
- Morrice, E., & Colagiuri, R. (2013). Coal mining, social injustice and health: A universal conflict of power and priorities. *Health & Place*, 19, 74–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2012.10.006>
- Padgett, D. K. (2008). *Qualitative methods in social work research*. (2nd Ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pollard, K., & Jacobsen, L. (2018, March 1). *The Appalachian Region: A data overview from the 2012-2016 American Community Survey*. Report. <https://www.arc.gov/report/the-appalachian-region-a-data-overview-from-the-2012-2016-american-community-survey/>
- Reid, H. G., & Taylor, B. (2010). *Recovering the commons: Democracy, place, and global justice*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Rubin, A., & Babbie, E. (2016). *Essential research methods for social work* (4th Ed.). Report. <https://pdfuni.com/sample/Science/SC101-200/SC580/sample%EF%BC%8DEssential%20Research%20Methods%20for%20Social%20Work%204th%204E.pdf>
- Shaping Our Appalachian Region. (2016). 2016 *Impact Report*. <https://soar-ky.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SOAR-2016-Impact-Report.pdf>
- Smith, A. (2016). Appalachian Futurism. *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 22(1), 73–75. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jappastud.22.issue-1>
- Sociocultural Research Consultants, LLC. (2014). Dedoose, version 5.0.11 [Web application]. Los Angeles, CA: About. Accessed July 4, 2016, from <http://www.dedoose.com>
- Spradley, J.P. (1980). *Participant Observation*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Stay Together Appalachian Youth. (2018). August 2018 Newsletter. Retrieved from: <https://www.thestayproject.com/blog-stay-in-the-news>
- Stein, J. (2013, May 20). Millennials: The me me me generation. *TIME*, U.S. <https://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/>

- Stephens, H. M., Partridge, M. D., & Faggian, A. (2013). Innovation, entrepreneurship and economic growth in lagging regions. *Journal of Regional Science*, 53(5), 778–812. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jors.12019>
- Therborn, G. (2006). Why and how place matters. In R. E. Goodin, & C. Tilly (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of contextual political analysis* (pp. 509–533). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Toth, G. (2014). Place-conscious transportation and policy. In W.M. McClay, & T.V. McAllister. (Eds.), *Why place matters: Geography, identity, and civic life in modern America* (pp.48–58). New York, NY: Encounter Books.
- Turpin, A. J. (2015). Review of “Higher Ground 5: Find a Way” by C. Meckler Wright, A. Rutherford, & D. Creech. *Journal Of Appalachian Studies*, 21(2), 292–295. <https://www.jstor.org/page-scan-delivery/get-page-scan/10.5406/jappastud.21.2.0292/0>
- United Nations. (2014). *World urbanization prospects: The 2014 Revision, Highlights*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/publications/2014-revision-world-urbanization-prospects.html>
- Vance, J. D. (2016). *Hillbilly Elegy*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Williams, J. A. (2002). *Appalachia: A history*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Wojan, T. R., & Nichols, B. (2018). Design, innovation, and rural creative places: Are the arts the cherry on top, or the secret sauce? *PLoS ONE*, 13(2), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0192962>
- Wolfe, A. W., Black, L. W., Munz, S., & Okamoto, K. (2017). (Dis)Engagement and everyday democracy in stigmatized places: Addressing brain drain in the rural United States. *Western Journal of Communication*, 81(2), 168–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2016.1236980>
- Wright, L. (2018). Evaluating place in orientations of narratives of internal migration. *Narrative Inquiry*, 28, 198–214. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.17034.wri>