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Women, Art, and Community: A Proposal for a Non-Profit Pottery Program in Appalachia

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Division of Cross-Disciplinary Studies

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

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by

Lahla K. Deakins

December 2008

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## ABSTRACT

Women, Art, and Community: A Proposal for a Non-Profit Pottery Program in Appalachia

by

Lahla Deakins

Many Appalachian women are creative individuals who enjoy making and sharing quilts, songs, paintings, poetry, and other art. However, many women in rural areas of Central Appalachia lack access to basic resources because of poverty.

While many agencies help poor women find shelter, clothing, and food, there are few that help them find their creative voices. I assert that women who are given the tools to practice creative expression can overcome the mental oppression of poverty to become self-assured individuals who benefit their communities.

This thesis examines the socioeconomic condition of women in Central Appalachia and the positive impacts of pottery in the lives of women potters in the United States to make the case for a non-profit pottery program in Appalachia. The research covers the time period from the early 1900s to 2008 and employs scholarly journal articles, books, Web sites, and interviews to support the thesis.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Beginnings of the Project

This project came about through my love for the art of pottery and my desire to build a graduate program around my artistic interests. While I never studied ceramics full-time, I had the opportunity to take some classes as electives during my college education. During late nights and weekends at the campus pottery studio, I found myself woven into the fabric of a community of student artists and friends helping each other with technical problems and encouraging each other in our various artistic endeavors. The environment felt nourishing, and as I began looking for a graduate program some years later, I knew I wanted to find a way to incorporate a study of that feeling of community associated with my pottery experience into my academic goals, which also included studying women's issues and non-profit organizations. Therefore, I decided on my thesis topic of a non-profit pottery program for women practically before I applied to graduate school. As a result of my graduate coursework, I became interested specifically in Appalachian women, and the thesis topic evolved from there.

I have been inspired further to pursue my interest in women and pottery in the United States by the countless friends and family members with whom I have shared the topic of this thesis. In so many cases, when I told someone that I was researching women and pottery, the individual responded quickly with a question: "Have you heard of the potters at Seagrove, North Carolina?" or, "Have you been to Cherokee to see the Indian pottery?" Others responded with their own personal connections to women potters—private pottery lessons, a friend with a home studio. Almost everyone with whom I have spoken has a personal story or experience in which they saw and appreciated pottery and, in many cases, women's pottery. While I was unable to

follow up on every lead provided, I was further convinced of the significance of pottery in the lives of both artists and non-artists, as it seems to be an art form to which anyone can relate, as everyone uses bowls, mugs, and other ceramic objects in their everyday lives. Therefore, while the topic for this project began with a personal connection to an art form, the community of fellow pottery lovers I have found because of my research has truly shaped this thesis into a call for community action in the arts.

### Overview and Context

Many scholars and researchers have addressed both poverty and culture in Appalachia. The Appalachian Regional Commission provides access to a number of state and county data sets as well as census and statistical research reports via its Web site, where one can review evidence about poverty in the region as compared to the nation as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Other scholars have highlighted the socioeconomic status of particular regions and demographic groups within Appalachia. For example, Ronald D. Eller's work on Kentucky's economically depressed counties and the Kentucky Commission on Women's reports on women's employment and educational status are only two works that focus on economic conditions among specific groups within the state.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, a number of studies point to the mental suffering of the poor and the increased rates of depression among low-income mothers in particular, as illustrated by the article "Implications of Family Income Dynamics for Women's Depressive Symptoms During

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<sup>1</sup> Appalachian Regional Commission, "Online Resource Center: Regional Research and Data," Appalachian Regional Commission, <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=46> (accessed October 12, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Ronald D. Eller, *Kentucky's Distressed Communities: A Report on Poverty in Appalachian Kentucky*, (Lexington: Appalachian Center, University of Kentucky, 1994); and Kentucky Commission on Women, "2008 Employment and Earnings Fact Sheet," Kentucky Commission on Women, <http://women.ky.gov/ffphtm> (accessed August 12, 2008).

the First 3 Years After Childbirth.”<sup>3</sup> Still other scholars have endeavored to combat the stereotypes and conclusions drawn by observers of the region’s poverty by publishing volumes dedicated to showcasing the literary and other cultural attributes of Appalachian people, and in many cases, Appalachian women in particular. Such works include *Appalachia Inside Out Volume 2: Culture and Custom*, edited by Robert J. Higgs, Ambrose N. Manning, and Jim Wayne Miller, as well as *Listen Here: Women Writing in Appalachia*, edited by Sandra L Ballard and Patricia L. Hudson.<sup>4</sup>

But the works cited above seem disparate. The neat categories they present allow readers to examine, on the one hand, the existence of poverty in the Appalachian region and the debilitating mental impacts of that poverty, or, on the other hand, the vivid culture that seems to exist despite the poverty in the region. There is little, if any, connection between poverty and rich culture. Yet, many artists’ testimonies indicate that their creative expression allows them to tap into enriching communities of fellow artists and also provides a positive outlet for self-fulfillment. Native American women potters and non-indigenous women potters in the United States, such as Santa Clara Pueblo potter Autumn Borts and potter Cynthia Bringle, who lives and works at Penland in North Carolina,<sup>5</sup> provide examples of the ways in which creating pottery has affected their lives and their interactions with their communities.

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<sup>3</sup> Eric Dearing, Beck A. Taylor, and Kathleen McCartney, “Implications of Family Income Dynamics for Women’s Depressive Symptoms During the First 3 Years After Childbirth,” *American Journal of Public Health* 94, no. 8 (August 2004): 1372-1377.

<sup>4</sup> Robert J. Higgs, Ambrose N. Manning, and Jim Wayne Miller, *Appalachia Inside Out Volume 2: Culture and Custom* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995); and Sandra L Ballard and Patricia L. Hudson, *Listen Here: Women Writing in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Rosemary Diaz, “Speaking With the Earth: The Tales of Four Women Potters.” *Native Peoples* 14 (September/October 2001): 25; and Cynthia Bringle, “The Pot is a Mood of Many Hues,” *Studio Potter* 31, no. 1 (December 2002): 4-18. <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com> (accessed February 7, 2008).

Despite the evidence of the positive role art plays in the lives of those who practice it, it is rarely considered as a valuable enterprise for those suffering from poverty in Appalachia. Most organizations devoted to helping poor adults provide access to basic resources such as food, shelter, and job skills training. Few non-profit organizations approach poverty relief in terms of relieving the mental and emotional burdens of poverty for women. If poor women in Appalachia were allowed to appreciate and tap into the rich cultural and artistic heritage in their region without focusing on their lack of financial stability, they could experience the positive impacts of art-making that wealthier members of society enjoy on a regular basis—art as a cathartic exercise, art for pure enjoyment, art for socializing and building community. I propose, then, that poor women in Appalachia who lack access to so many resources could benefit from exposure to the arts—specifically, pottery—through a non-profit pottery program that allows them to access free classes, build relationships with other women, and experience the personal fulfillment associated with pottery-making by many women potters in the United States.

I have used a variety sources to support my thesis, including scholarly journal articles, books, and personal interviews with a practicing potter and a non-profit arts organization director. I also have relied heavily upon research reports such as those mentioned above from the Appalachian Regional Commission and others for information about women's socioeconomic status in Central Appalachia. Non-scholarly sources have often proven necessary to my research on contemporary community arts organizations and individual women artists, as they often do not appear in published books or peer-reviewed articles. In such cases I have consulted the Web sites of specific organizations and schools or articles in trade magazines such as those pertaining to the ceramic arts. Because each chapter in this thesis contains an individual literature review, I will not include an extensive literature review here.

## Definitions: Appalachia and Central Appalachia

Each chapter of this thesis contains definitions of terms pertinent to the subject matter of the chapter; therefore, I have not included a comprehensive set of definitions in this introduction. Because I refer throughout the thesis to Appalachia and Central Appalachia, I will outline the definitions of those terms here. Furthermore, because a great deal of the statistical evidence cited in Chapter One is found in research reports and other data from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), I refer to the commission's definitions of Appalachia and its subregions. The Appalachian Regional Commission's Web site defines the region in the following way: "Appalachia, as defined in the legislation from which the Appalachian Regional Commission derives its authority, is a 200,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the commission has divided the region into three subregions—Northern, Central, and Southern Appalachia—determined by similarity in "topography, demographics, and economics."<sup>7</sup>

As a map outlining the subregions reveals, Central Appalachia consists of counties in the eastern half of the state of Kentucky, some counties in middle and northern Tennessee, parts of western Virginia, and parts of southern West Virginia.<sup>8</sup> This central region, and at times parts of the southern region which border it, are the focus of the examination of this thesis. While most references to statistical evidence focusing on the whole of Central Appalachia will be noted as

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<sup>6</sup> Appalachian Regional Commission, "Appalachian Region," Appalachian Regional Commission, <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=2> (accessed October 12, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., "Regional Data and Research: Maps," <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=58> (accessed October 12, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

such, references to specific counties, towns, and other areas will also appear, and some of these locations may lie outside the borders of Central Appalachia as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission. However, most of the areas cited in the following examination lie close to the heart of the Appalachian region.

### Outline

The thesis is divided into five chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. Chapters 2 through 4 each focus on a unique topic that in turn links to the other chapters and topics. The second chapter centers on the socioeconomic status of women in Central Appalachia from the 1960s to 2008 using primarily statistical data. Chapter 2, which illustrates the lack of employment and educational opportunities available to many Central Appalachian women, provides the framework for much of the argument presented in the following two chapters. Because poor women in Appalachia lack access to many basic resources, they almost certainly also lack access to cultural and creative outlets that are readily accessible to many wealthier members of society. While Chapter 2 points out the personally-limiting effects of poverty upon women, Chapter 3 illustrates the positive impacts of the arts, particularly pottery, on the lives of women in Appalachia and the rest of the United States from the early 1900s to the present. This chapter rests upon the testimonies of women potters and other artists—found in journal articles, books, and my own personal interviews—who exhibit a belief in the personal fulfillment and communal feeling that can be nurtured through creative expression. Finally, Chapter 4 illustrates the ways in which poor adults are excluded from opportunities to participate in arts and crafts education and includes a proposal for involving poor women in a non-profit pottery program in Appalachia.

## CHAPTER 2

### WOMEN IN APPALACHIA: SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS SINCE 1960

#### Appalachian Women and Stereotypes: Introduction and Brief Literature Review

For decades, Appalachians have been misrepresented and unfairly characterized by media and historical accounts, thus creating in the minds of many Americans a distorted image of what it means to live in the southern mountain region of the United States. Some scholars have argued that Appalachian stereotypes have “replaced” those of other regions of the country, specifically the American South. Ronald D. Eller writes in the foreword to the book *Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes: Back Talk from an American Region*, “Once disparaged as the ‘bung-hole’ of the nation . . . the South has risen in stature in recent years . . . . Not so Appalachia. Always part of the mythical South, Appalachia continues to languish backstage in the American drama, still dressed, in the popular mind at least, in the garments of backwardness, violence, poverty, and hopelessness once associated with the South as a whole.”<sup>1</sup> Appalachian women are doubly disadvantaged; they are women living in patriarchal society in the United States, subject to the disadvantages associated therewith, and they are women who, by virtue of their location within that society, are stereotyped as inferior to their sisters who live in other parts of the country. The stereotypes applied to Appalachian women range from the downtrodden, over-worked mountain woman to the toothless, barefoot, and perpetually pregnant woman; all of these characterizations have been legitimized and perpetuated by journalists and scholars since the antebellum period.<sup>2</sup> This chapter focuses on deconstructing stereotypes, just as many scholars

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald D. Eller, “Foreword,” in *Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes: Back Talk from an American Region*, eds. Dwight B. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1999), ix.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Wilma Dunaway, “Stereotypes of Appalachian Women in Literature Before 1990,” Wilma Dunaway’s Online Archive for *Women, Work and Family in the Antebellum*

have begun and continue to do, by acknowledging the stereotypes and seeking to explain the realities of poverty and hardship for rural women in Central Appalachia and, more specifically, eastern Kentucky.

Wilma Dunaway has noted how deep-seated the stereotypes of Appalachian women are, tracing their origins back to “Social Darwinist<sup>3</sup> assumptions about biological inferiority” from the nineteenth century, which continue to color the imaginations of the public today.<sup>4</sup> She further points out that repeated literary and historical characterizations of Appalachian women as “mountain matriarchs” who suffer from the drudgery of life and work in the mountains have had a detrimental effect upon the history of the region: “The journey toward a meaningful analysis of Appalachian women is made more difficult by the need to overcome the burden of a century of outdated social Darwinist assumptions about their character flaws and about their debilitating isolation in the separate sphere of their homes.”<sup>5</sup> Other scholars of Appalachia similarly have bemoaned the persistence of stereotypes and their impact on the work of Appalachian historiography and study. For example, in her chapter “Creating Appalachian Women’s Studies: Dancing Away from Granny and Elly Mae,” Elizabeth S.D. Engelhardt describes a football half-

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*Mountain South* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), [http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/faculty\\_archives/appalachian\\_women/stereoty.htm](http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/faculty_archives/appalachian_women/stereoty.htm) (accessed August 5, 2008); Elizabeth S.D. Engelhardt, “Creating Appalachian Women’s Studies: Dancing Away from Granny and Elly Mae,” in *Beyond Hill and Hollow: Original Readings in Appalachian Women’s Studies*, ed. Elizabeth S.D. Engelhardt (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 1-19; and Sally Ward Maggard, “Will the Real Daisy Mae Please Stand Up? A Methodological Essay on Gender Analysis in Appalachian Research,” *Appalachian Journal* 21 (Winter 1994): 136-50.

<sup>3</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* defines social Darwinism as “the Darwinian theory of evolution extended and applied to various aspects of the concept of social progress,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.etsu.edu>, (accessed October 21, 2008). For example, Tim Lewens notes that proponents of eugenics applied the theory to their ideas about the “threat of social decline, and [blamed] . . . that decline on alleged hereditary deficiency among individuals.” Tim Lewens, *Darwin* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 219.

<sup>4</sup> Dunaway, “Stereotypes.”

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

time show at a game between the University of Virginia and West Virginia University in which the University of Virginia presented a square-dancing, barefoot, overall-clad, and toothless woman as its West Virginia team rival personified.<sup>6</sup> This stereotype, acted out by college students during a game, poignantly reveals the pervasiveness of the negative characterizations of Appalachian women. Engelhardt, like Dunaway and other scholars, argues for a departure from such characterizations and promotes a feminist bent to Appalachian studies that allows for more fully-developed images of women from the region.<sup>7</sup>

While the stereotypes of Appalachian women always have been based upon broad generalizations about the lives and work of the women, it bears noting that some communities within the region have at times borne out some of the stereotypes. For example, Shaunna L. Scott, who studied a Pentecostal revival in Harlan County, Kentucky, for her article, “‘They Don’t Have to Live by the Old Traditions’: Saintry Men, Sinner Women, and an Appalachian Pentecostal Revival,” describes a religious community in which women are expected to be subordinate to men and are obligated to play traditionally “female” roles.<sup>8</sup> The revival Scott examined was orchestrated to draw the community back to deteriorating traditional roles for men, women, and followers of the church, but it was ultimately unsuccessful at restoring the flock to previously-cherished customs and ways of life.<sup>9</sup> As Scott points out, “Their romanticized images of the local community harked back to the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries . . . . In 1986, however, women had jobs in town and were not available to grow the gardens, preserve the produce, cook the meals, and make the quilts that had been shared and jointly produced by

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<sup>6</sup> Engelhardt, “Dancing,” 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Shanna L. Scott, “‘They Don’t Have to Live By the Old Traditions’: Saintry Men, Sinner Women, and an Appalachian Pentecostal Revival,” *American Ethnologist* 21 (May 1994): 227-44.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

the community.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, even within communities that were traditionally patriarchal and based upon stereotypical women’s roles, some Appalachian women have shed the old expectations of both their communities and the outside world. That both continue to place these expectations upon Appalachian women is not productive for the women, their communities, or the larger society of which they are a part.

While it is indeed counterproductive to view Appalachian women and their fellow citizens in terms of stereotypes, one cannot ignore the statistical reality of life for many residents of Central Appalachia. Since the nation turned its attention to the region in the 1960s during President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, much has changed in Appalachia in terms of living standards and poverty, but problems of joblessness and stunted economies persist, as illustrated by reports produced by the Appalachian Regional Commission that examine data covering decades from 1960 to 2000.<sup>11</sup> Appalachian Regional Commission reports, notably one titled “Households and Families in Appalachia” by Mark Mather, point to the high incidence of poverty among women and female-headed households in Central Appalachia.<sup>12</sup> Still other reports, such as Ronald D. Eller’s *Kentucky’s Distressed Communities: A Report on Poverty in Appalachian Kentucky* from 1994 and the Kentucky Commission on Women’s Governor’s Task

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>11</sup> See for example, Appalachian Regional Commission, *Trends in National and Regional Economic Distress: 1960-2000* (April 2005), by Lawrence E. Wood (Washington, DC: Appalachian Regional Commission, 2005) <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=57> (accessed August 5, 2008) and Appalachian Regional Commission and Population Reference Bureau, *Standards of Living in Appalachia, 1960 to 2000* (September 2007), by Dan A. Black, Mark Mather, and Seth G. Sanders (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau and Appalachian Regional Commission, 2007), <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=57> (accessed August 5, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Appalachian Regional Commission, “Households and Families in Appalachia (May 2004),” by Mark Mather, from the series *Demographic and Socioeconomic Change in Appalachia* (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau and Appalachian Regional Commission, 2004), <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=57> (accessed March 31, 2007).

Force on the Economic Status of Kentucky's Women from 2003, have found educational and job opportunities lacking for women in the state and poverty in the rural Appalachian areas of Kentucky a particular problem for women.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, scholars in Appalachian and women's studies, including those noted in previous paragraphs, have highlighted the marginalization—both economically and socially—of Appalachian women, which, combined with Central Appalachian women's likelihood of poverty, paints a bleak picture for women of the region.

### Racial and Rural Characteristics of Stereotypes

Many of the stereotypes discussed above seem to apply only to white, rural, mountain women living in Appalachia, as opposed to women of color or women living in urban—or rural—areas of the region. The ideas that Appalachia is racially homogenous or even uniformly isolated and rural are yet additional aspects of the region's stereotypes. Appalachian women are white, black, Asian, Hispanic, rural, and urban, although stereotypes and many statistical analyses sometimes ignore the diversity of the area. While Kevin M. Pollard notes that Central Appalachia is indeed lacking in ethnic diversity, with only four percent of the region's residents representing “a racial or ethnic group other than ‘non-Hispanic white,’”<sup>14</sup> it is still inaccurate to characterize the area as completely devoid of any people of color. Furthermore, Pollard points out that the “number of minorities in Appalachia increased nearly 50 percent” throughout the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> But perceptions of the “whiteness” of Appalachia are based on historical beliefs or projections of racial purity in the region, to which Jane S. Becker alludes in her book, *Selling*

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<sup>13</sup> Eller, *Kentucky's Distressed Communities*, and Governor's Task Force on the Economic Status of Women, *A New Vision for Kentucky: The Final Report of the Governor's Task Force on the Economic Status of Women* (June 2003), <http://women.ky.gov/ffphtm> (accessed April 1, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Population Reference Bureau, *Appalachia at the Millennium: An Overview of Results from Census 2000* (June 2003), by Kelvin M. Pollard (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 2003), <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=57> (accessed August 5, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

*Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940*. She writes that in the late nineteenth century, “writers, ballad hunters, and social workers in the mountains fostered the myth that a traditional American culture existed in Southern Appalachia, characterized by a preindustrial economy, face-to-face relations, and the persistence of Anglo-Saxon folk traditions.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, the myth of a pure, Anglo-Saxon race in Appalachia is both romanticized and, as examples of stereotypes discussed above illustrate, denigrated for its backwardness. Karissa McCoy also discusses this contradiction in her dissertation, “Re-Writing Region, Re-Constructing Whiteness: Appalachia and the ‘Place’ of Whiteness in American Culture, 1930-2003” when she writes, “Appalachia registers its classed and racialized significance through a central paradox: as a cultural signifier, the racial visibility of Appalachian whites is alternately implemented in the commodification of a racially ‘pure’ national heritage, and invoked as an image of degraded, aberrant whiteness against which normative, middle-class whiteness imagines its claims to privilege.”<sup>17</sup>

Because Pollard’s work posits that the whiteness of Appalachia has been largely imagined or at least too broadly applied, it is particularly important to point out the connections between race and poverty in the region. Daniel T. Lichter and Lori Ann Campbell note that, “In Appalachia, the poverty rate among Blacks was 27 percent, compared with 12.1 percent among non-Hispanic whites. . . . If poverty is our measure of well-being, racial and ethnic inequality clearly persists in Appalachia.”<sup>18</sup> They also note the greater percentages of poverty among

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<sup>16</sup> Jane S. Becker, “Introduction,” in *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Karissa McCoy, “Re-Writing Region, Re-Constructing Whiteness: Appalachia and the ‘Place’ of Whiteness in American Culture, 1930-2003” (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2004), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Appalachian Regional Commission and Population Reference Bureau, “Changing Patterns of Poverty and Spatial Inequality in Appalachia (April 2005),” by Daniel T. Lichter and Lori Ann Campbell, from the series *Demographic and Socioeconomic Change in Appalachia*

women of color in the region—46.4 percent of single, black, female-headed families with children under eighteen years old lived in poverty in 2000, as did 48 percent of single, Hispanic, female-headed families, and 27.1 percent of single, Asian, female-headed families; by contrast, 37.4 percent of single, white, female-headed families with children under eighteen years old lived in poverty in the region in the same year.<sup>19</sup> Amy K. Glasmeier has also noted that “Poor black women are more likely to be found in Appalachia and the Mississippi Delta” as opposed to the United States as a whole.<sup>20</sup> She further points out that women of color in the country earn lower incomes than white women.<sup>21</sup> These statistics illustrate not only the presence of women of color in the Appalachian region but also their increased danger of living in poverty there.

While not all poor women in Appalachia are white, and certainly not all women in the region are poor, it is crucial to note that not all areas of Appalachia are strictly rural. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the Appalachian region covers a fairly large geographical area on the map of the United States. Because the region is primarily defined in terms of the Appalachian Mountain range along which it is located, it is naturally a mountainous area with many hills and hollows, and many Appalachian women and their communities call these more rural areas home. Yet there are many metropolitan areas, cities, and towns in Appalachia, and while stereotypes of Appalachians tend to place all of the region’s residents atop an isolated mountain or deep in a remote hollow—away from town life and “civilization”—even many rural residents have at least occasional access to urban centers and experiences. For

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(Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau and Appalachian Regional Commission, 2005), <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=57> (accessed August 5, 2008), 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., “Table 9: Families in poverty, by race of householder and family type, Appalachia, 2000,” 21.

<sup>20</sup> Amy K. Glasmeier, *An Atlas of Poverty in America: One Nation, Pulling Apart, 1960-2003* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 10.

example, the documentary *American Hollow*, directed and produced by Rory Kennedy, highlights the experiences of an eastern Kentucky family who live in a rural area of their county.<sup>22</sup> While their homes are located approximately an hour and half away from the nearest town (Whitesburg, Kentucky), the documentary shows some of the Bowling family members making trips into town to take care of certain matters. For example, after the arrest of one of the brothers, his siblings journeyed to town to secure his release at the city courthouse and jail.<sup>23</sup> Kennedy emphasized, however, that the trip into town was an inconvenience for the rural, low-income family, as it was costly and time consuming, and made only out of necessity.<sup>24</sup>

The situation depicted in the documentary points out that even persons who live in relatively isolated areas of Appalachia have at least some experiences with the urban centers of their counties; many rural residents must “come to town” to conduct legal and personal business, and do so as they are able and as needed. That such experiences occur is not to imply that there is no distinction between town and country in Appalachia. For example, in her essay “On Being ‘Country’: One Affrilachian Woman’s Return Home,” Crystal E. Wilkinson notes, “One thing I vividly recall about growing up in Indian Creek, Kentucky with my grandparents is the square-offs between my city cousins and me, the country cousin, during June family reunions. They laughed at the way I spoke and called me country.”<sup>25</sup> Linda Scott DeRosier, whose memoir *Creeker: A Woman’s Journey* provides another example of the difference between rural and urban Appalachia, writes, “I want, at the outset, to differentiate between those Appalachians who grow up in the towns and those from rural areas—the creeks and hollers. . . . I would suggest to

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<sup>22</sup> Rory Kennedy, *American Hollow*, DVD, Moxie Firecracker Films, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Crystal E. Wilkinson, “On Being ‘Country’: One Affrilachian Woman’s Return Home,” in *Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes*, 184.

you that there is as much cultural difference between rural Appalachians and Appalachian townsfolk as between white folk and black folk who happen to live in the same city.”<sup>26</sup>

Throughout DeRosier’s book, she discusses the differences between her rural home at Two-Mile Creek and the nearby (but difficult to reach and culturally distant) towns of Paintsville and Pikeville.<sup>27</sup>

While DeRosier derides Appalachian townsfolk and rural residents’ being “lumped together by outsiders” in demographic studies and other circumstances,<sup>28</sup> I argue that for the purposes of this chapter’s examination it will be impossible to differentiate between the two in all circumstances. Statistics and other data cited here often differentiate between Appalachian segments of states and non-Appalachian segments, or subregions within Appalachia itself, but rarely specify the difference between rural county and urban county seat. I submit that most of the Central Appalachian counties discussed in the following sections are situated in predominantly rural areas, where towns are relatively small and often distant from a large part of the county’s population. Furthermore, while this examination of Appalachian women acknowledges that not all Appalachian women face poverty, and that some face deeper poverty than others based upon a variety of factors including race, subsequent data will not specify racial differences in poverty levels. As many of the sources consulted here provide total population percentages of poverty, I assume that these totals include women of all races and, therefore, employ them to illustrate the struggles of women in general in Central Appalachia. Finally, in this chapter it is not my intention to support or confirm stereotypes of Appalachian women as poverty-ridden, backward, and downtrodden folk, but to prove that women in

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<sup>26</sup> Linda Scott DeRosier, *Creeker: A Woman’s Journey* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 2.

<sup>27</sup> DeRosier, *Creeker*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Appalachia continue to suffer from a lack of basic resources and opportunities decades after the end of the War on Poverty.

### Women and Poverty in America

Poverty among women is not a condition limited to Appalachia but rather is a nationwide trend in the United States in recent decades. Many scholars have written about the “feminization of poverty” and what it means for American women and their families. For example, Miriam Dinerman explores “The Woman Trap” in her chapter of the same name in the book *Feminist Visions for Social Work*, edited by Nan Van Den Bergh and Lynn B. Cooper. Writing in the 1980s, Dinerman asserted, “The ‘feminization of poverty’ is a complex phenomenon with a number of forces and factors that push women—especially women who head families—into poverty or inhibit their escape from it.”<sup>29</sup> Michael B. Katz elaborates on the “number of forces and factors” causing the trend of increasing numbers of poor women in his book *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*. He cites “Deindustrialization, the lack of day care, poor education, inadequate child support, increased numbers of female-headed families” and a variety of other reasons that, over the 1970s and 1980s, worked together to “[trap] many women in poverty.”<sup>30</sup> Judging by more recent examinations of poverty rates in the United States, the trend continues into the twenty-first century. Glasmeier’s *An Atlas of Poverty in America: One Nation, Pulling Apart, 1960-2003* features a section on women and poverty in America in which she claims, “The story of women in America today reflects many of the concerns commonly highlighted in research on the

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<sup>29</sup> Miriam Dinerman, “The Woman Trap: Women and Poverty,” in *Feminist Visions for Social Work*, ed. Nan Van Den Bergh and Lynn B. Cooper (Silver Spring, Md.: National Association of Social Workers, 1986), 229.

<sup>30</sup> Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*, (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 284.

persistence of poverty: higher numbers in poverty compared to men, greater vulnerability to the condition, and lower access to the basic needs that keep their families together.”<sup>31</sup> She goes on to connect the labor force and women’s lack of access to comparable wages to men’s wages and adequate employment as causes of women’s poverty.<sup>32</sup>

It is not only more likely for women than for men to experience poverty, but once ensnared in it, it is particularly difficult for women to escape for the reasons noted above and because of the current organization of the welfare system in the United States. While, as Vivyan C. Adair notes in her article “The Missing Story of Ourselves: Poor Women, Power and the Politics of Feminist Representation,” it was once reasonably attainable, if not easy, for poor women to obtain government assistance while raising their families and seeking higher education in an effort to escape poverty, the welfare reforms of 1996 have only served to discourage poor women from educating themselves.<sup>33</sup> The result of the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* was to drive “welfare-recipient students to leave college for low-wage jobs in record numbers,” Adair argues.<sup>34</sup> Considering the statistics on the wage gap for women, the lack of access to education that could put women in higher-paying jobs is debilitating to their personal futures and those of their children. A number of authors and scholars have pointed to the likelihood of working women’s poverty, in many cases directly caused or exacerbated by welfare requirements. For example, in his book *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*, David K. Shipler notes, “most of the working poor in this book are women, as are most of them in the country at large. Unmarried with children, they are frequently

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<sup>31</sup> Glasmeier, *Atlas of Poverty*, 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Vivyan C. Adair, “The Missing Story of Ourselves: Poor Women, Power, and the Politics of Feminist Representation,” *NWSA Journal* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

burdened with low incomes and high needs among the youngsters they raise.”<sup>35</sup> One example of such a subject from Shipler’s examination is a woman named Christie, who, although she worked as child caregiver, could not earn enough to get off the welfare rolls and out of poverty, because “whenever she got a little pay raise, government agencies reduced the benefits, and she felt punished for working. She was trapped on the treadmill of welfare reform. . . .”<sup>36</sup> Catherine Pelissier Kingfisher’s book *Women in the American Welfare Trap* also illustrates the stigma and complications associated with welfare systems and the people who need their help to survive. Kingfisher writes, “In sum, the political climate is not a friendly one for poor women on relief. It is against this backdrop of an escalating war against the poor that the women’s narratives must be interpreted,” in preface to her examination of rural Michigan women and welfare.<sup>37</sup> Kingfisher further examines the stereotyping of welfare recipients by their case workers, who apparently used “theories of poverty that locate the cause of poverty in defects of personality” to characterize their clients.<sup>38</sup> Adair also points to the negative connotations of the “welfare mother”: “Throughout the fall of 1996, on the floor of the U.S. congress, women on welfare were characterized as dirty, oversexed and dangerous.”<sup>39</sup>

Such negative characterizations of poor women are strikingly similar to those of rural (white) Appalachian mountain women as illustrated by Dunaway and Engelhardt. The implication is that stereotypes of poor women in the United States combine with stereotypes of Appalachian women to stunt opportunities for understanding regional poverty and negatively

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<sup>35</sup> David K. Shipler, “Preface” in *The Working Poor: Invisible in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), xi.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, “Work Doesn’t Work,” 40.

<sup>37</sup> Catherine Pelissier Kingfisher, *Women in the American Welfare Trap* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996) 22-23.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>39</sup> Adair, “Missing Story,” 5.

impact poor women throughout the country. While the work of Kingfisher and others on women and poverty in America adds to the discussion of how the United States emerged from the War on Poverty and embarked upon the “war on welfare,”<sup>40</sup> still further discussion is needed to insert Appalachian women’s specific issues into the dialogue about poverty in America. Therefore, the following discussion on women and poverty in Central Appalachia illustrates the particular conditions of rural Appalachian poverty since the 1960s. As my specific interest in Central Appalachia lies in eastern Kentucky, which is located in the heart of Central Appalachia, details and statistics specific to that region will be interspersed throughout the discussion.<sup>41</sup>

#### Central Appalachian Women and Poverty: Coal Economies and Unemployment

While women in the United States in general are at a greater risk than men of living in poverty, the likelihood of any individual or family living in poverty in Central Appalachia is even greater than those for the nation. This fact consistently emerges in studies regarding Appalachian poverty, which reveal that Central Appalachian poverty is, in almost all cases, more severe than poverty in most other places in America or in the rest of Appalachia, and is compounded by a number of factors unique to the region.<sup>42</sup> For example, Lawrence E. Wood’s

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<sup>40</sup> For more on the history and evolution of the War on Poverty and the “war on welfare,” see Katz, “Part III: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare,” 259-334.

<sup>41</sup> Some of the ideas and sources presented in the following sections about Appalachian women and poverty were developed and used in my own unpublished class papers from my graduate coursework.

<sup>42</sup> Mather, “Households and Families.” The following journal article was presented, with additional information, as part of the Conference on Appalachia in 1986, and therefore some of the information is duplicated in the two items; however, the cited conference report covers additional material not mentioned in the article, and the article contains some wording not present in the report, so both are cited here and are referred to separately throughout. Ann R. Tickamyer and Cecil H. Tickamyer, “Gender and Poverty in Central Appalachia,” *Social Science Quarterly* 69 (December 1988): 875; and Ann R. Tickamyer and Cecil H. Tickamyer, “Gender, Family Structure, and Poverty in Central Appalachia,” in *Land and Economy of Appalachia: Proceedings from the 1986 Conference on Appalachia* (Lexington: Appalachian Center, 1987), 87.

report for the Appalachian Regional Commission, *Trends in National and Regional Economic Distress: 1960-2000*, highlights the attention the 1960s brought to poverty in Appalachia and “addresses the question of what has happened between the 1960s—the time when the federal government took on a previously unparalleled commitment to address regional socioeconomic concerns—and the present, where approximately two decades have passed since the federal government considerably backed off from these earlier efforts.”<sup>43</sup> As the remainder of Wood’s report reveals, Central Appalachia has suffered poverty almost regardless of federal efforts to alleviate it during the decades since 1960. Wood points out that Northern Appalachia historically has suffered relatively little poverty, and Southern Appalachia has witnessed considerable decreases in poverty since the 1960s, but “Contrasting this improvement is Central Appalachia, an area of persistent and relatively widespread economic distress. A total of 72 percent of the counties in Central Appalachia were distressed in 1960, and by 2000 this figure had only dropped to 46 percent.”<sup>44</sup>

Eastern Kentucky counties specifically suffer from economic instability and poverty, and a number of studies link at least some of their persistent problems to the coal industry. Ronald D. Eller’s 1994 examination of eastern Kentucky’s distressed counties lists three areas of poverty in the region based upon poverty percentage rates.<sup>45</sup> These include “foothill counties” that have poverty rates of 16 percent to 35 percent, and which are home to new “growth centers” that contain diversified economies in counties such as Whitley, Clark, and Madison; counties bordering the West Virginia and Virginia state lines that have poverty rates of 25 percent to 35 percent and which are home to old “growth centers” that have predominantly coal-based

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<sup>43</sup> Wood, *Trends in National and Regional Economic Distress: 1960-2000*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>45</sup> Eller, *Kentucky’s Distressed Communities*, 10.

economies in counties such as Floyd, Pike, and Harlan; and the ten poorest counties in eastern Kentucky—comprised of Morgan, Wolfe, Magoffin, Breathitt, Knott, Owsley, Jackson, Clay, Knox, and McCreary—that had poverty rates above 38 percent at the time of the report.<sup>46</sup>

According to a 2001 study on the Appalachian coal industry, Clay, Owsley, Knott, Breathitt, Magoffin, and Knox counties are among the seventeen major coal-producing counties in Appalachian Kentucky.<sup>47</sup>

That these coal-producing counties are also among the poorest in the region indicates that while the coal industry may be the mainstay of the economy in those counties, it is not sufficient to support the residents there and contributes to their poverty. According to data on Appalachian Kentucky's county economic status in 2006 from the Appalachian Regional Commission, Clay, Owsley, Knott, Breathitt, Magoffin, and Knox counties are all distressed counties, which means that, among other criteria, they have at least two times the average United States poverty rate.<sup>48</sup> Their poverty is explained to some extent by a 2001 coal report's evaluation of income generated by the coal industry in Appalachian states. The report lists Kentucky as third among the states in earnings from the coal industry, behind West Virginia and Pennsylvania, and yet Kentucky produced 44.7 million tons more coal in 1997 than Pennsylvania—the lower generation of

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 10, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Eric C. Thompson, Mark C. Berger, and Steven N. Allen, "Appendix A: Major Coal-Producing Counties in ARC Kentucky," *A Study on the Current Economic Impacts of the Appalachian Coal Industry and its Future in the Region* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Center for Business and Economic Research, 2001), <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=57> (accessed March 31, 2007).

<sup>48</sup> This evaluation is compiled from the following data sources: Appalachian Regional Commission, "County Economic Status, Fiscal Year 2006: Kentucky," ARC Online Resource Center, Regional Data Results, <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=56> (accessed March 31, 2007); and Appalachian Regional Commission, "Sources and Methodology—Distressed Designation and County Economic Status Classification System," from "County Economic Status, Fiscal Year 2006: Kentucky," under "View sources and Methodology," ARC Online Resource Center, Regional Data Results, <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=56> (accessed March 31, 2007).

income for Kentucky shows “that although Pennsylvania has lower production and employment [in the coal industry] than Kentucky, its workers earn higher wages.”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, while coal mining may be one of the only sources of employment in many counties in eastern Kentucky, it is not necessarily a very lucrative one.

The above data reveal the problems associated with reliance upon a single industry in Appalachian Kentucky and undoubtedly tell the story of many other Central Appalachian counties and communities. Particularly troubling is that apparently even those who are able to find work in the mines are not necessarily out of danger of living in poverty because they are not paid a competitive wage in the industry. This is especially problematic for women who have fewer employment opportunities than do men in these areas because mining is typically a male-dominated industry. The poverty rates in the particularly distressed counties of eastern Kentucky likely include a number of women and their families, and the following studies and data indicate that women in the Central Appalachian region indeed struggle with poverty and its effects.

All women living in Central Appalachia, particularly those who are the heads of their households, are at a great risk of poverty according to a variety of sources. Mark Mather points out in his examination of demographics in Appalachia that the 2000 census reported thirty percent of female-headed households in Appalachia at the time were living in poverty, and in Central Appalachia the percentage was even higher, at forty percent of female-headed households.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, women who are the primary income earners for their households—regardless of where they live—are more subject to poverty, especially when they have to care for children. Mather asserts, “People living in female-headed households typically do not have

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<sup>49</sup> Thompson, Berger, and Allen, *A Study on the Current Economic Impacts of the Appalachian Coal Industry and its Future in the Region*, under “Economic Profile for Individual States,” <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=608>.

<sup>50</sup> Mather, “Households and Families,” 31.

access to the economic or human resources available to people in married-couple families.”<sup>51</sup>

Women in Central Appalachia are no exception to this trend and, in fact, may be more prone to living in poverty simply because of their gender and the lack of opportunities associated with it. Gender, however, combines with a number of economic problems, including those associated with coal-mining economies, specific to Appalachia to create particularly difficult circumstances for Appalachian women.

Employing a feminist approach, Ann R. Tickamyer and Cecil H. Tickamyer discuss poverty in Central Appalachia. They argue that according to a feminist framework, “gender has taken its place along with race and class as a major predictor of poverty status” because of “women’s disadvantage in the wage labor force, women’s predominance in unpaid labor, and state policies toward women’s work.”<sup>52</sup> While the Tickamyers presented their findings in the 1980s, women’s disadvantage in the labor force persists in Kentucky according to a 2008 report from the Kentucky Commission on Women. The report shows that women are disproportionately employed in education, health, and social services, while men dominate manufacturing and construction jobs as of 1999.<sup>53</sup> In areas such as eastern Kentucky that tend to have single-industry economies like mining, the dominance of manufacturing and construction jobs by men could mean that women are without employment altogether. Furthermore, the state “ranks 46<sup>th</sup> in the U.S. for women’s business ownership,” and the women in Kentucky also are more likely to live in poverty than their male counterparts: 15.6 percent of women lived in poverty as opposed to 11.6 percent of men in 1999 in the state.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>52</sup> Tickamyer and Tickamyer, “Gender and Poverty,” 876.

<sup>53</sup> Kentucky Commission on Women, “2008 Employment and Earnings Fact Sheet.”

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Appalachian Kentucky women, who are likely to live in rural areas, are especially impacted by the low rankings of the state in terms of women’s employment. Daniel T. Lichter and Lori Ann Campbell point out that “Rural Appalachians experienced a rate of poverty tha[t] was 40 percent higher than the rate in metro Appalachia in 2000.”<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, family structure—to reassert Mather’s findings noted above—is a significant determinant of poverty, both nationally and in Appalachia. Lichter and Campbell reveal that while the female-headed families in the nation as a whole experience a higher rate of poverty than their married-couple family counterparts, poverty among women heads of household decreased in the 1990s—but female-headed families in Appalachia experienced “exceptionally high rates of poverty—five to six times the rate of married couple families.”<sup>56</sup> While these data indicate female-headed families in Appalachia, and, therefore, arguably in Appalachian Kentucky, are worse off than female-headed families elsewhere in the country, further statistics regarding the importance of employment for women in such family situations is striking. Lichter and Campbell assert, “For single women working full-time in Appalachia, the poverty rate is nearly 10 percent, roughly equal to the national average. If these women are not working full-time, their poverty rates exceed 40 percent. Clearly, employment is a defense against poverty, especially in families with one worker.”<sup>57</sup> These statistics are particularly alarming for women in areas with limited access to employment, as it indicates that it is very difficult for them to avoid poverty through full-time employment.

Limited economies in Central Appalachia are significant in determining poverty rates among all citizens in the region. Eller points out that unemployment is often generated by the

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<sup>55</sup> Lichter and Campbell, “Changing Patterns,” 10-11.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

downturn of an industry in a single-industry economy as illustrated when “many Appalachian communities experienced dramatic economic decline during the 1980s as the nation moved from an industrial-based economy to one that is communication/information-based.”<sup>58</sup> For women, limited economies are especially financially debilitating because their employment options are even more limited than men’s, particularly when the primary industry in an area is coal mining, as it has been historically for many areas of Central Appalachia. Tickamyer and Tickamyer note that mining economies in Central Appalachia place a greater burden of poverty on women: “High mining employment has a stronger impact on female-headed families than on male-headed families. This results from the lack of other employment opportunities in areas characterized by the male-dominated resource extraction industries.”<sup>59</sup> While men naturally suffer from the fluctuations in employment brought on by economic reliance on the mining industry, women are at an increased economic disadvantage because of their limited ability to participate in the labor force in the first place.

Women’s exclusion from certain economies in Central Appalachia is evident in literature that shows they often do not participate in the public labor force at all. Mather’s report on families in Appalachia shows that many parents (both mothers and fathers) in Central Appalachia are not part of the labor force, and for women, specifically, this exclusion may stem from a lack of affordable childcare that keeps them from entering the workforce, as only forty-five percent of women of working age in Central Appalachia participated in the labor force in 2000.<sup>60</sup> The Kentucky Commission on Women also cites unaffordable childcare as a reason for women’s unemployment but notes that just over half of all women in the state participated in the

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<sup>58</sup> Eller, *Kentucky’s Distressed Communities*, 20.

<sup>59</sup> Tickamyer and Tickamyer, “Gender and Poverty,” 888.

<sup>60</sup> Mather, “Households and Families,” 22-23.

labor force in 2006 and that the state ranks forty-sixth in the country for women participating in the workforce.<sup>61</sup> The large number of women who fail to enter the paid labor force in Kentucky indicates that a lack of affordable childcare is merely one of many factors that work together to keep women from engaging in the workforce.

In areas where the economy is predominantly supported by mining, a shift of economic emphasis away from coal mining can mean widespread unemployment and little prospect of any other type of work in those regions. In fact, even without a downturn in the mining industry, unemployment in the coalfields is a problem. Cynthia “Mil” Duncan argues that “[i]n 1980—before the downturn of 1982—almost one fourth of coal-field families had no one working,” and between 1978 and 1984 eastern Kentucky lost 10,000 coal mining jobs.<sup>62</sup> The great number of people overall who are at times unemployed in Central Appalachia and eastern Kentucky implies increased problems for women. Eller notes that high unemployment rates in the 1980s and 1990s drove many residents, particularly young males, away from eastern Kentucky, leaving mainly women, children, and the elderly behind to live in more severe poverty.<sup>63</sup> More recently, unemployment rates in eastern Kentucky continue to look discouraging, particularly as compared to the rest of the country, with Appalachian Kentucky’s unemployment rates at 126.8 percent of the United States’ total unemployment rates between 2001 and 2003.<sup>64</sup>

Men’s unemployment often directly impacts their wives and other women in their communities. An Appalshop video called *Fast Food Women* documents the struggles of miners’

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<sup>61</sup> Kentucky Commission on Women, “2008 Employment and Earnings Fact Sheet.”

<sup>62</sup> Cynthia “Mil” Duncan, “Myths and Realities of Appalachian Poverty: Public Policy for Good People Surrounded by a Bad Economy and Bad Politics,” in *Land and Economy of Appalachia: Proceedings from the 1986 Conference on Appalachia*, Conference on Appalachia (Lexington: Appalachian Center, 1987), 28.

<sup>63</sup> Eller, *Kentucky’s Distressed Communities*, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Appalachian Regional Commission, “Regional Data Results—County Economic Status, Fiscal Year 2006: Kentucky.”

wives and other women in eastern Kentucky in the late 1980s. One woman in the video noted that her husband had been laid off from his mining job several years prior to her interview for *Fast Food Women*, and that she had been forced to seek a job at a fast food restaurant as a result of his unemployment.<sup>65</sup> She barely made the minimum wage, had no health benefits, and supported her household alone.<sup>66</sup> Another young woman working at a fast food restaurant in Whitesburg, Kentucky, summed up the problem for women working in the area and the reasons they settle for low wages and poor working conditions: “There’s nowhere else to get a job around here.”<sup>67</sup> The lack of job opportunities for women in eastern Kentucky is evident according to the women who work in the restaurants depicted in the film. As noted above, women in Kentucky tend to work in the service industry, but even these jobs are scarce and most do not pay well. Eller notes that even as the economy in eastern Kentucky began to shift toward the service sector in the 1980s, “the greatest increase in service sector jobs came in growth center counties . . . instead of the poorest counties in the region.”<sup>68</sup> Therefore, women’s economic disadvantage, given their significant participation in service industry jobs, is compounded by the lack of these jobs in eastern Kentucky and other parts of Central Appalachia.

Furthermore, even if adequate, competitive-wage jobs were available in Central Appalachia, few women would have sufficient access to education in order to obtain those jobs. A report by Kelvin M. Pollard of the Population Reference Bureau points out that the number of adults with high-school diplomas and college degrees is lower in Appalachia than the rest of the country, and Central Appalachian adults are considerably less likely than their northern and

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<sup>65</sup> Anne Johnson, *Fast Food Women*, VHS (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop Film & Video, 1991).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Eller, *Kentucky’s Distressed Communities*, 22.

southern counterparts to have achieved high school or college educations.<sup>69</sup> The report further reveals that Appalachian Kentucky fares worse than Appalachian sections of all other states listed in percentage of high school and college graduates.<sup>70</sup> Other research confirms that Kentucky women, particularly, are impacted by a lack of access to education. Data about women's economic status in Kentucky presented in the Preliminary Findings of the Governor's Task Force on the Economic Status of Kentucky's Women from December 2002 shows that despite the number of postsecondary schools within reasonable distance from almost all counties in Kentucky, the state ranked 49<sup>th</sup> in the United States for women with college educations.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, rural women are most likely to seek online education, but the report notes that "very few programs or degrees are available entirely online."<sup>72</sup> The task force also found that "Kentucky does not have an adequate number of quality jobs that will lead to self-sufficiency for women at all education levels."<sup>73</sup>

#### Beyond Poverty Statistics: Effects on the Lives of Women

The implications for Appalachian women and their communities are clear: if the persistent poverty and lack of opportunities associated with it are not adequately addressed by diversified economies and concerted efforts by government and other organizations to alleviate the lack of resources and jobs available in the region, countless future generations will continue to suffer the debilitating effects of poverty in the southern mountains. Joblessness and the poverty that often accompanies it can equal helplessness for people anywhere, and stories of some of the women of Central Appalachia certainly seem to affirm their loss of hope and the

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<sup>69</sup> Pollard, "Appalachia at the Millennium," 29.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Governor's Task Force on the Economic Status of Kentucky's Women, "Preliminary Findings," <http://women.ky.gov/ffp.htm> (accessed August 12, 2008).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

psychological effects of poverty. *Fast Food Women* points out that the value of the (mostly female) fast food workers to their employers is insignificant because the workers are unable to grow and learn additional skills in their jobs, and their pitifully low wages (mere cents above the minimum wage after years of employment) and lack of benefits reflect that lack of value placed on them.<sup>74</sup> Many of the women interviewed for the film were exhausted and at times defeated—after all, their efforts to contribute to the financial security of their families had yielded few positive results.<sup>75</sup> Another set of data from Lichter and Campbell’s work reveals why some women in the fast food industry and other employment where part-time work is a likelihood might feel defeated. Single, female-headed families in Appalachia whose householder worked part time in 2000 were actually more likely to live in poverty than those who did not work at all—44.4 percent versus 40.2 percent.<sup>76</sup>

Other examples of Appalachian women who seem in some ways defeated by their poverty come from West Virginia women—many located just a few hours from eastern Kentucky—who were interviewed by Melanie Light for *Coal Hollow: Photographs and Oral Histories*. The women shared stories of lives spent in poverty, and their words indicate a sort of fatalism and hopelessness. For example, a woman named Faye summed up her current financial situation with these statements: “I don’t have anything. I’m broke now. That’s the reason these vehicles is sittin’ out here. You can’t do anything if you don’t have money. Now, why, it’s got down to where I even have to ask for charity sometimes, to pay my light bill and things.”<sup>77</sup>

Another woman in the book, Janet, tells a story of family alcoholism (from which she appears to

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<sup>74</sup> *Fast Food Women*.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Lichter and Campbell, “Changing Patterns,” 25.

<sup>77</sup> Ken Light and Melanie Light, *Coal Hollow: Photographs and Oral Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 116.

suffer herself), failures, poverty, and abandonment.<sup>78</sup> At the time of her interview she was apparently not working, living with a sister, and spent most of her days drinking.<sup>79</sup> Again, there is an air of resignation and sadness in her words, as if perhaps the difficulty of her life has led her to stop trying, and thereby, to repeat what seems to be a generational pattern of poverty and despair.

The plight of rural Appalachian women is shared by their rural counterparts throughout the South, as evidenced in a study of rural, black, single mothers by Bonnie Thornton Dill. She argues that even an adequate education, so difficult to come by for Appalachian and other rural women, as noted above, is not “sufficient to assure women of obtaining a job where they will earn enough to support a family adequately” because of the bleak “employment and economic picture of the rural communities” where they live.<sup>80</sup> This characterization of poor, rural women’s struggle with poverty is strikingly similar to the problems of rural Appalachian women’s poverty. While there are specific mitigating factors involved in any region’s economic troubles, such as coal-mining based economies in Appalachia, Dill’s study reveals the similarities of rural women’s struggles throughout rural America. Perhaps, then, her argument about a solution could be applied in Appalachia as well as the rural South. She writes, “In these two economically depressed rural communities where both the poor and the elites depend on government transfers, the need for a welfare policy that permits women to package work, welfare, and support from kin and friends is a critical interim step.”<sup>81</sup> In other words, allowing

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 124-125.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Bonnie Thornton Dill, “A Better Life for Me and My Children: Low-Income Single Mothers’ Struggle for Self-Sufficiency in the Rural South,” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1998), 419-28, under “Conclusion,” <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com> (accessed August 1, 2008).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., under “Conclusion.”

women to gain momentum for success based upon their own methods for survival—not only economic, but also spiritual, emotional, and creative survival and thriving—could allow poor, rural women gradually to achieve a firm foothold on a permanent escape from poverty.

Residents of the region—women especially—clearly need access to tools to help them escape the economic statistics of poverty, but they also need skills to cope with the mental and emotional burdens of living in poverty. Access to these skills that wealthier members of society enjoy could allow poor women in Appalachia to be empowered agents of their own success.

### Conclusion

It should be noted that this is a very brief exploration of the complexities of rural Appalachian women's lives and socioeconomic status. Other scholars undoubtedly have researched, and continue to research, this topic in greater detail than space or purpose permits in this thesis; but I hope that this short examination of women and poverty in Central Appalachia will contribute to the existing dialogue. Most importantly for the purposes of this thesis, however, the preceding discussion should provide some insight into the needs of Central Appalachian and, specifically, eastern Kentucky women. My aim here has been to reaffirm what other scholars have argued about the lack of access Appalachian women have to basic employment and educational opportunities, and thereby use that information to make arguments about their lack of access to certain cultural and community-building creative opportunities, upon which I will elaborate in the following chapters.

Furthermore, this examination does not intend to paint a narrow, negative portrait of the lives of women in Appalachia. Indeed, many of the areas that historically have suffered from oppressive poverty have experienced recent improvements in their economies and standards of living. For example, Lichter and Campbell note that there was a considerable drop in “high

poverty” rates in Central Appalachia from 1990 to 2000.<sup>82</sup> Another report titled *Standards of Living in Appalachia, 1960 to 2000* reveals that homeownership, plumbing, heating and cooling, and telephone service have increased dramatically in Central Appalachia and the Appalachian region as a whole since the 1960s, greatly improving the quality of life for residents of the area.<sup>83</sup> And, from a state perspective for women, the Kentucky Commission on Women reports at least gradual gains for women in the workforce during the period from 2003 to 2008.<sup>84</sup> Such research indicates that the seemingly bleak and endless picture of poverty among women in Central Appalachia is not all negative; rather, great improvements have been made in many areas of life for Appalachians since the 1960s, which offer hope, defy stereotypes, and imply opportunities for continued change and growth in the decades to come.

In the following chapter, I will illustrate the ways in which women who suffer from a lack of resources and opportunities in Appalachia could benefit from exposure to educational art-making experiences, specifically pottery-making. Because poverty is not merely a financial burden, but a mental and emotional one as well, individuals who suffer from the limitations of poverty should have access to experiences that allow them to cope with more than the economic hardships of poverty. Chapter 3, then, will provide examples of successful women potters in the United States and the positive personal and community impacts of pottery in the lives of women potters. Furthermore, it will examine types of artistic expression already being explored by Appalachian women and community arts organizations in the region in order to position the rationale for a non-profit pottery program for women in Appalachia.

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<sup>82</sup> Lichter and Campbell, “Changing Patterns,” 9.

<sup>83</sup> Black, Mather, and Sanders, *Standards of Living*, 15-16.

<sup>84</sup> Kentucky Commission on Women, “2008 Employment and Earnings Fact Sheet,” and “2003 Employment and Earnings Fact Sheet.”

## CHAPTER 3

### WOMEN CREATING ART IN THE UNITED STATES:

#### HISTORY, IDENTITY, AND COMMUNITY

##### Introduction and Brief Literature Review

The previous chapter illustrated the lack of employment and educational opportunities available to many Central Appalachian women and the economic hardships they face as a result. Because the analysis in that chapter was largely statistical, it revealed only one facet of the lives of Appalachian women, albeit an important one. Therefore, while Chapter 2 examined problems and hardships, Chapter 3 focuses on creative successes among Appalachian and other American women in order to illustrate opportunities for empowerment through the arts. There is a long tradition of arts and crafts in Appalachia, including music, weaving, quilting, pottery, and furniture making for instance.<sup>1</sup> A number of scholars have provided evidence of these traditions and some have noted women's important roles in artistic endeavors in the mountains. In the following pages, I expand upon the existing scholarship about Appalachian culture and art and connect it specifically to women both within Appalachia and outside its borders. In this chapter, I illustrate the well-established presence of art and art-making in Appalachia, Appalachian women's vital role in creating art and maintaining cultural and artistic traditions in their communities, and examine pottery, in particular, as a positive presence in the lives of American women who practice it. This discussion centers primarily on women artists working between 1900 and 2008.

I have consulted a variety of sources for this discussion, ranging in topic from folk art studies to studies of Native American women potters. To illustrate the long tradition of arts and

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Allen H. Eaton, *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*, (1937; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1973).

culture in Appalachia, works such as *Appalachia Inside Out Volume 2: Culture and Custom*, edited by Robert J. Higgs, Ambrose N. Manning, and Jim Wayne Miller; Allen H. Eaton's *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*; and *O, Appalachia: Artists of the Southern Mountains* by Ramona Lampell and Millard Lampell all have proven useful in providing historic and contemporary examples of both Appalachian arts and Appalachian women artists.<sup>2</sup> To highlight the importance of written expression to women in Appalachia, the collections *Listen Here: Women Writing in Appalachia*, edited by Sandra L. Ballard and Patricia L. Hudson; and *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers*, edited by Joyce Dyer, among others, reveal the wealth of literature by and about Appalachian women.<sup>3</sup> The works *Southern Folk Art*, edited by Cynthia Elyce Rubin; and *Exploring Folk Art: Twenty Years of Thought on Craft, Work, and Aesthetics*, by Michael Owen Jones, illuminate the traditions of folk art both in the South and Appalachia, and highlight the western art world's attitudes toward folk art.<sup>4</sup> And finally, a number of works illustrate the roles and work of both Native American and non-indigenous women potters in the United States, including *Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference*, edited by Pat Kirkham; "Speaking with the Earth: The Tales of Four Women Potters," an article by Rosemary Diaz from *Native Peoples*; and Moira Vincentelli's works, *Women and Ceramics: Gendered Vessels* and *Women Potters:*

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<sup>2</sup> Higgs, Manning, and Wayne Miller, *Appalachia Inside Out Volume 2*; Eaton, *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*; and Ramona Lampell and Millard Lampell, with David Larkin, *O, Appalachia: Artists of the Southern Mountains* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Ballard and Hudson, *Listen Here*; and Joyce Dyer, ed., *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Cynthia Elyce Rubin, ed., *Southern Folk Art* (Birmingham: Oxmoor House, 1985); and Michael Owen Jones, *Exploring Folk Art: Twenty Years of Thought on Craft, Work, and Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987).

*Transforming Traditions*.<sup>5</sup> All of these sources and many more have helped to situate my argument within the existing scholarship on women and art in Appalachia and beyond.<sup>6</sup>

#### Discussion of Terms: Pottery, Art vs. Craft, and Folk Art

Several of the terms used in this chapter warrant explanation for their meaning in this context. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “pottery” as “The art or craft of manufacturing porcelain, earthenware, etc.; ceramics,” and also, “As a mass noun: pots, dishes, and other articles made of fired clay; pottery-ware, ceramics.”<sup>7</sup> Likewise, the dictionary definition of “ceramic” is: “Of or pertaining to pottery, *esp.* as an art,” and, “As *n.* in *pl.* The ceramic art, the art of making pottery.”<sup>8</sup> The terms “pottery” and “ceramics,” therefore, will be used interchangeably here and will refer to utilitarian objects made of clay (i.e. bowls, pitchers, and other tableware). In some cases, an artist might create forms using ceramic materials but not necessarily make utilitarian forms (rather, she might make sculptural forms), and in these cases the difference will be noted.

It is important to note the usage of the terms “craft” and “art” in the dictionary definitions above. They appear to be used interchangeably in defining pottery, but a number of scholars not only assert that the terms are exclusive of one another, but also that pottery is *only* craft and, therefore, not art. While the male art establishment in the West long has relegated pottery to the

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<sup>5</sup> Pat Kirkham, ed., *Women Designers in the USA 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference* (New York: Yale University Press, 2000); Rosemary Diaz, “Speaking With the Earth,” 22-5; Moira Vincentelli, *Women and Ceramics: Gendered Vessels* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000) and *Women Potters: Transforming Traditions* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Some of the sources and ideas in the following chapter were developed in my own unpublished class papers during my graduate coursework.

<sup>7</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, “Pottery,” <http://dictionary.oed.com>, accessed September 9, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, “Ceramic,” <http://dictionary.oed.com>, accessed September 9, 2008.

supposedly less serious realm of craft, a long tradition of women potters' work proves that pottery is not only an ancient cultural tradition but also a true art form and means of expression, which is made evident by scholars who have addressed the supposed differentiation. Yet, some women artists and art historians have left ceramics out of their accounts of the importance of art in women's lives. For instance, Charlotte Streifer Rubinstein, in her book *American Women Artists From Early Indian Times to the Present*, notes in her introduction that because space constraints forced her to leave out some art forms, she omitted "[a]rchitecture, photography, and crafts (except for the Indians, who made no distinction between 'art' and 'craft')." <sup>9</sup> Later in her introduction, Rubinstein indicates the art forms that managed to make the cut for her history—painting and sculpture, and brief, separate acknowledgements of Indian art and "folk art."<sup>10</sup> Thus, while she examines the history of women's contributions to painting and sculpture fully in each delineated artistic period, Indian art and folk art are deserving of only one chapter each, and the general category she terms "craft"—in which she apparently places pottery, judging by its absence from any section of the book other than Indian art—is not even worthy of that.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, author Linda Nochlin omits ceramics from her collection of art history essays called *Women, Art, and Power*. In her introduction Nochlin states, "At its strongest, a feminist art history is a transgressive and anti-establishment practice, meant to call many of the major precepts of the discipline into question."<sup>12</sup> If Nochlin's feminist art history, in the form of her collection of essays, truly was to challenge the patriarchal tradition of art history, it would include discussions on women who have created pottery and shaped cultures for generations, but

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<sup>9</sup> Charlotte Streifer Rubinstein, *American Women Artists: From Early Indian Times to the Present* (Boston: Avon Books, 1982), x.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), xii.

who have been ignored by (largely white, male) critics of art. Unsurprisingly, her numerous illustrations throughout the book include no images of ceramic art and her discussion of artists focuses almost exclusively on painters and sculptors, as does Rubinstein's. While part of Nochlin's argument is devoted to the reasons women have been ignored as serious artists, she fails to note specifically how the reasons apply to potters, and therefore implies that their art, and arguably the artists themselves, are not serious.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*'s "craft" entry defines the term as "Intellectual power; skill; art. (In these and the following senses, art and craft were formerly synonymous and had a nearly parallel sense-development, though they diverge in their leading modern senses: cf. ART.)", and actually provides a hyperlink to the term "art."<sup>14</sup> The first part of the definition implies that potters (who create what art historians such as Nochlin and Rubinstein refer to as crafts) create art, and the phrase "intellectual power" implies that there is some level of intelligence and validity in their work and skill. However, as the parenthetical portion of the definition indicates, art and craft are different in the modern sense, and the "art" entry supports this divergence by making no mention of craft in the following portion of the definition: "The application of skill to the arts of imitation and design, painting, engraving, sculpture, architecture; the cultivation of these in its principles, practice, and results; the skilful production of the beautiful in visible forms. (This is the most usual modern sense of art, when used without any qualification. It does not occur in any English Dictionary before 1880, and

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Nochlin, chapter 7, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"

<sup>14</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, "Craft," <http://dictionary.oed.com>, accessed September 9, 2008. Parentheses around second sentence added to indicate smaller type beneath first sentence on web page—a clarification of the definition.

seems to have been chiefly used by painters and writers on painting, until the present century.)”<sup>15</sup> Yet, in the 1980s, a book called *Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical*, featuring images from the museum exhibition of the same title, blurred the line between art and craft. Paul J. Smith writes, “In its broadest sense *craft* refers to the creation of original objects through an artist’s disciplined manipulation of material,”<sup>16</sup> while in other paragraphs he refers to these artists as “craftsmen.”<sup>17</sup> The artist and craftsperson, then, appear to be one and the same, and, therefore, the work of either or both is ultimately art. Furthermore, the devotion of an entire exhibition and book to the images of crafts made by American artists (or craftspersons) indicates that at least some segment of the public must enjoy viewing the works; in other words, perhaps these objects are representative of “the skilful production of the beautiful in visible forms,” and, therefore, can be accurately described as art.<sup>18</sup>

Smith describes most of the artists featured in the *Craft Today* exhibit and accompanying book as having “attended art programs at a university or private art school,” but acknowledges, “Contemporary craftsmen come from a variety of educational backgrounds.”<sup>19</sup> This is certainly true for makers of “folk art.” Cynthia Elyse Rubin defines folk art as something “generally created by artists who have not received professional training and who exhibit a personal, naïve quality in their mode of representation. Moreover, their manner of work is not akin to the

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<sup>15</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, “Art,” <http://dictionary.oed.com>, accessed September 9, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Paul J. Smith, *Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical* (New York: American Craft Museum, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986), 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>18</sup> In the introduction to the “Crafts” section in the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, Kathleen Curtis Wilson notes the particular connotations of craft in Appalachia—“poverty, utilitarianism, and an absence of sophistication (769).” See for example, “Crafts,” in *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, eds. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 769-841. The relationship between Appalachia and crafts will be further discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, *Craft Today*, 12.

academic styles of the times,” but rather is unique to the individual artist’s vision.<sup>20</sup> Folk art encompasses, therefore, any number of genres and media, as the folk artist may simply decide one day that he or she wants to take up oil painting or sculpture, for example. Several folk artists have become famous for their “naïve” or “primitive”<sup>21</sup> creations. One of the better-known folk artists is Grandma Moses, a farmer’s widow who began painting scenes of rural farm life in her seventies and was later discovered by an art collector who helped make her a national success.<sup>22</sup>

While some folk art is lauded by collectors and the public, much is ignored or dismissed as being too common or ill-conceived to be appreciated. In his book *Exploring Folk Art: Twenty Years of Thought on Craft, Work and Aesthetics*, Michael Owen Jones writes, “Many, perhaps indeed most, commentators on ‘folk art’ historically assume that such products are simple, crude, and naïve, qualities that are used to define folk art or to differentiate between the superior works in an elite tradition and the mean products of the folk.”<sup>23</sup> It seems that the commentators to which Jones refers are likely trained, educated artists or art historians, and their view of folk art is similar to the view of the art historians noted above on craft—indeed, folk art and craft may likely fall into the same category for many critics, particularly where utilitarian objects such as pottery are concerned. Jones further notes, “Folk utilitarian objects are considered inept in execution, crude in construction, and lacking meritorious qualities because the craftsmen have been only the fortuitous inheritors of formal styles emanating from urban centers. . . .”<sup>24</sup>

However, as Jones and others have argued, folk arts and crafts—historically disdained in the

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<sup>20</sup> Rubin, “Introduction,” in *Southern Folk Art*, xv-xvi.

<sup>21</sup> See Rubin, xv, for a discussion on the terms “naïve” and “primitive.”

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Stephen May, “Grandma Moses Country,” *Smithsonian* 32, no. 1 (April 2001): 68-78.

<sup>23</sup> Jones, “Violations of Standards of Excellence and Preference in Utilitarian Art,” in *Exploring Folk Art*, 18.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

western art world<sup>25</sup>—occupy a legitimate spot on the map of American art history and artistic tradition.

The preceding discussion on pottery, craft, and folk art acknowledges some of the scholarship concerning the validity of these art forms in the United States and highlights the nuanced meanings behind the terms. I argue that in spite of the labels attached to a group of art objects and their makers, the creation of art is as beneficial to self-taught artists as it is to professional-trained and educated ones. Perhaps Smith's examination of modern crafts best exemplifies the importance of craft in the art world and art in people's lives when he writes:

As our world becomes more dependent on technology, we are required to do specialized tasks that often disassociate us from a sense of total accomplishment. Craft, which by its very nature represents a unity of hand and spirit, counteracts this alienation, reaffirming the human element in daily life. Amid mass production the craft experience can impart greater meaning to individual expression.<sup>26</sup>

Based upon this assertion of the importance of craft—and arguably folk arts and any other artistic endeavor—the remainder of this chapter connects women artists both inside and outside Appalachia to the importance and meaning of “individual expression.” Furthermore, the following sections serve as evidence of the powerful and positive role of art-making in women's lives, and the illustration of those positive experiences serves as testimony to the potential for the development of relationships and personal satisfaction in the lives of Appalachian women who

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<sup>25</sup> While Jones' arguments refer to the perceptions of the educated or trained art world and its devaluation of folk art, it is important to note that individuals and groups outside the western establishment have placed higher values upon folk art—particularly Appalachian folk art—during certain time periods. Jane S. Becker discusses the popularity of folk art from the region during the early- to mid-1900s as an American obsession with tradition and supposedly traditional peoples and cultures—middle-class, “modern” Americans enjoyed and purchased the crafts produced by Appalachian people because of their supposed cultural “otherness.” See Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940*, 1-10.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Craft Today*, 11.

suffer from poverty and the limitations associated with it. Finally, while the preceding discussion highlights distinctions between different types of art and acknowledges the scholarship on such distinctions, it is not the purpose of this chapter to focus exclusively or repeatedly on perceived differences in the values of certain art forms. Rather, the following sections are intended to serve as evidence of the validity and importance of all art forms and the artists who practice them.

### Appalachian Women Artists

Appalachian history abounds with examples of creative women, as many scholars and historians have documented. As early as the 1930s, researchers interested in folk arts explored and documented the arts, or “handicrafts,” of the mountain region.<sup>27</sup> Allen H. Eaton’s 1937 *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands* provides a thorough examination of the arts and crafts he found in Appalachia at that time and includes several examples of individual women’s work and stories. While the first part of Eaton’s book focuses on the history of crafts in the mountains, the second part is devoted to current practices, and the third and fourth chapters of the work focus on the revival and growth of traditional Appalachian arts; Eaton is careful to name people instrumental in setting up community crafts centers and teaching, and most of them appear to be women, who were key to reviving mountain “handicrafts.”<sup>28</sup> While many of the women who endeavored to revive the craft industry for the benefit of mountain communities were outsiders

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<sup>27</sup> As T.J. Jackson Leary has noted, many interested parties were part of the anti-modernism movement of the time, and their efforts in craft movements and focus on the hand-made were related to their desires to escape an increasingly machine-dominated world. However, Leary makes no mention of Eaton as a part of this movement. T.J. Jackson Leary, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>28</sup> See for example, Eaton, “Chapter III: Revival of the Handicrafts in the Highlands,” 59-68, and “Chapter IV: The Handicrafts Continue to Grow,” 69-91, in *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*.

who moved from other locations into Appalachia,<sup>29</sup> many of the participants in the revival, as well as artists who worked outside the revival, were native Appalachian women who created quilts, coverlets, toys, and baskets, among other items.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Eaton gives Appalachian women much credit for their creativity and ingenuity in the crafts, for example, when he discusses spinning: “Spinning is one of the vestiges of beauty which the women of the Highlands have helped to keep for us.”<sup>31</sup> He also notes the skills of women in other crafts, such as Aunt Cord Ritchie’s basket weaving, a self-taught art of which Eaton writes, “Mrs. Ritchie is one of the best basket makers in the Highlands. . . . Feeling for her material marks her as a true craftsman.”<sup>32</sup>

More recent scholars also have documented early examples of Appalachian women artists. In *Textile Art From Southern Appalachia: The Quiet Work of Women*, Kathleen Curtis Wilson notes that the work of women from outside Appalachia who were instrumental in the crafts revivals of the early twentieth century, as well as some other Appalachian women who became well-known for their weaving skills “should not overshadow the quiet work of women who were weaving overshot coverlets for the pure artistry of the work during the same time period, unaware of the settlement school craft programs.”<sup>33</sup> She further points out the “cultural and social tradition of overshot weaving” among many families and communities and attests to

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<sup>29</sup> See for example, Kathleen Curtis Wilson, “A Distinctive Artistic Tradition,” in *Textile Art from Southern Appalachia: The Quiet Work of Women* (Johnson City, Tenn.: Overmountain Press, 2001), x-xii.

<sup>30</sup> See for example, Eaton, “Part II: Revival of the Handicrafts and Their Present-Day Practice,” in *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*, 59-290.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, “Chapter V: Spinning and Weaving for Home and Market,” 94.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, “Chapter X: Mountain Baskets,” 171.

<sup>33</sup> Wilson, “A Distinctive Artistic Tradition,” xi.

the acknowledgement of the value of the work by families of the weavers, generations of whom “carefully kept the family stories, family records, and family textiles intact.”<sup>34</sup>

Eaton’s and Wilson’s works, and others like them, refute characterizations of Appalachia as lacking arts and culture. The weavers Wilson presents debunk “stereotypical images of Appalachia as a poverty-ridden, art-poor region,”<sup>35</sup> as do the many artists named by Eaton. Wilson further notes, “These [stereotypical] images and a lack of women’s material culture studies in the region have made it easy to dismiss Appalachia as void of objects of art, creativity, and design worthy of special attention.”<sup>36</sup> While much has been written about the existence of and reasons for Appalachian cultural stereotypes,<sup>37</sup> as well as how they relate to women, an ever-growing number of works refute stereotypes of Appalachian women.

While Eaton and Wilson cover historical artists and their hand-made objects, Lindsay B. Cummings discusses women’s involvement in the performing arts in opera houses in Appalachia in the late 1800s and early 1900s.<sup>38</sup> Cummings asserts that women in Appalachia during this time period both viewed and performed in theater productions in opera houses (which served as community centers as well as theaters), and took part in varied other social functions in these

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., xi and xii.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> While space and purpose do not permit a full examination of Appalachian cultural and artistic stereotypes here, a number of works provide in-depth investigations into the topic, and have helped to shape my framework of this discussion. They include: Billings, Norman, and Ledford, *Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes*; Higgs, Manning, and Miller, *Appalachia Inside Out Volume 2*; and John B. Rehder, *Appalachian Folkways* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), particularly his discussions on isolationism, 18-20, and “white poverty culture,” 21-24.

<sup>38</sup> Lindsay B. Cummings, “Women and Appalachian Opera Houses: A Place in the Public Domain,” in *Beyond Hill and Hollow*, 124-136. “Opera houses” of the time period discussed by Cummings seem, according to her analysis, to have been community centers that hosted a variety of performances, including vaudeville, public lectures, and fund-raising events hosted by women, but were perhaps not frequently home to the types of “high art” performances classified as opera today.

establishments.<sup>39</sup> Another historical example of Appalachian women participating in the arts is author Harriet Simpson Arnow, who began publishing short stories and novels in the 1930s.<sup>40</sup> Arnow's work focused on Appalachian life, often in rural Kentucky, and often involved stories about rural women's lives and struggles in the region.<sup>41</sup> Arnow and the women involved in Appalachian opera houses illustrate the historical artistic activity of Appalachian women and the varied roles of the region's women artists outside the realm of three-dimensional art.

Arnow, however, is not the only example of an Appalachian woman who wrote about Appalachian experiences. Cummings' Appalachian opera houses chapter is, in fact, part of a collection of writings about Appalachian women edited by Elizabeth S.D. Engelhardt, called *Beyond Hill and Hollow: Original Readings in Appalachian Women's Studies*. Other collections focus on Appalachian women writers as well. For example, *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers*, edited by Joyce Dyer, and *Her Words: Diverse Voices in Contemporary Appalachian Women's Poetry*, edited by Felicia Mitchell, feature artists such as Jo Carson, who writes poems and other works using common Appalachian speech.<sup>42</sup> A collection titled *Listen Here: Women Writing in Appalachia* also situates the region's women writers within an often male-dominated and elitist (in terms of both social class and geographical region) literary history, and features 105 authors' works spanning the time period from 1826 to 2003.<sup>43</sup> *Appalachia Inside Out Volume 2: Culture and Custom* likewise features a number of male and female Appalachian writers whose works focus on the region, including Verna Mae

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Frederic J. Svoboda, "Introduction," in *Between the Flowers*, by Harriet Simpson Arnow (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999), vii.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., vii-x.

<sup>42</sup> Dyer, *Bloodroot*; and Felicia Mitchell, *Her Words: Diverse Voices in Contemporary Appalachian Women's Poetry* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> Ballard and Hudson, "Introduction" and "Chronology of Works," in *Listen Here*.

Sloan, an eastern Kentucky woman whose works are intended “to dispel the myths and misunderstandings surrounding Appalachia;” Sloan never finished high school and began writing only as an older woman.<sup>44</sup> Sloan’s late start to writing and her lack of formal education illustrate her determination to share her art and thoughts on her home region, and other Appalachian women have shown similar determination. Katherine Kelleher Sohn’s work examines the post-college writing practices of non-traditional women students in eastern Kentucky. In *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices Since College*, Sohn presents case studies of a number of women and illustrates “how the women moved from silence to voice to identity by maintaining their dialect throughout college and beyond, by discovering the power of expressivist writing and completing their degrees to enhance their identity as strong women of Appalachia. . . .”<sup>45</sup> While the “expressivist writing” of Sohn’s former students may not be considered by some to be art, it is certainly a viable form of personal expression (journaling and letters to the editor are some examples),<sup>46</sup> and, therefore, relates strongly to the creative work of other women in the region. Sohn’s work and others’ reveal the importance of creative expression to women in Appalachia and the women’s determination to make their voices heard.

Such collections as the ones mentioned above draw attention to the region’s women authors; other compilations focus on contemporary craft and folk art in Appalachia and the artists who are often ignored by mainstream art historians (as discussed above). The volume *O, Appalachia: Artists of the Southern Mountains* features folk artists who live and work in the mountain region and provides examples of the artists’ work and philosophies behind them.

Women are not absent from Ramona Lampell and Millard Lampell’s examination—indeed, there

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<sup>44</sup> Higgs, Manning, and Miller, *Appalachia Inside Out Volume 2*, 445.

<sup>45</sup> Katherine Kelleher Sohn, *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices Since College* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-86.

are several highlighted, including artist Cher Shaffer, who is “a painter, wood carver, housewife, stone sculptor, and maker of haunting figures created from torn strips of cloth, wood, clay, human hair, seeds, shells, claws, fur, and feathers.”<sup>47</sup> Another woman artist featured is Minnie Adkins, an eastern Kentuckian who carves figures out of wood and then paints them with bright colors.<sup>48</sup> The diversity of the media in which these women work and the creative inspiration revealed in their art is an additional example of the strong presence of women artists in mountain communities and their drive to create.

### Pottery Traditions in Appalachia and the South

While Shaffer and Adkins are Appalachian women artists who create decorative works of art, there is a long tradition of utilitarian art in the southern mountains where they live. While until recent decades the rich history of potteries in the southeastern part of the United States had been ignored by scholars, a number of works now attest to the long presence of folk potters in the region. For example, in his 1985 chapter on southern folk pottery, Charles G. Zug III wrote, “Southern folk pottery has begun to receive its proper recognition only in the last decade,” although seemingly all other regions of the United States had already been examined for their pottery traditions.<sup>49</sup> Zug goes on to examine thoroughly the forms and methods of the southern folk potter, and the locations where potteries existed in the past or still exist today, including North Carolina, parts of Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky, and extending farther south beyond the Appalachian region.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Zug notes that the pottery craft was handed down from

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<sup>47</sup> Lampell and Lampell, “Cher Shaffer,” in *O, Appalachia*, 48.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, “Minnie Adkins,” 182-190.

<sup>49</sup> Charles G. Zug III, “Pottery: The Pottery Tradition,” in *Southern Folk Art*, ed. Cynthia Elyse Rubin, 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-23.

men to boys, from one generation to the next, and that these potters created wares specifically for utilitarian purposes to meet the needs of their communities.<sup>51</sup>

Eaton's work also illustrates the presence of pottery in the mountains, and he, too, indicates the predominance of male potters in the region.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, in the foreword to Nancy Sweezy's book *Raised in Clay: The Southern Pottery Tradition*, Ralph Rinzler points out that "the potters were surprised and intrigued to talk with a woman [Sweezy], who was herself an accomplished potter,"<sup>53</sup> which indicates that most of the potters Sweezy interviewed for the book must have been men. Sweezy's work does feature some women, including Celia Cole Perkinson, who learned the craft from her father and continued his pottery after his death.<sup>54</sup> Sweezy's main purpose in writing the book, however, is to reveal the tradition of pottery in the South, and she argues, "The continuous potting industry in the South—unbroken since colonial settlement—may be the oldest traditional craft of European origin still practiced in America today."<sup>55</sup> But while the women Sweezy cites seem to participate in pottery-making by virtue of their husbands' or fathers' family involvement, Eaton's work indicates that women in Appalachia have a historic place alongside male potters in the southern pottery tradition. For example, he writes, "A unique product is the work of Mrs. Annie Latham Bartlett of Buckhannon

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 23-25.

<sup>52</sup> Eaton, *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*, 209-219. See also Margaret Duncan Binnicker, "Chapter Four: Seeking Industries, Setting Up Shop: Erwin's Civic Capitalism and the Opening of Southern Potteries," in "Erwin, Tennessee: Transformation of Work and Place in an Appalachian Community, 1900-1960," (PhD diss., Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Middle Tennessee State University, 1999), 124-163. Binnicker discusses Southern Potteries in Erwin, Tennessee, which also was called Blue Ridge Pottery and Clinchfield Chinaware at different times, and notes that women were well-represented among the pottery's employees—however, they seem to have been mainly decorators and finishers, not the makers of actual ware, which supports the idea of a male pottery tradition in the South and Appalachia.

<sup>53</sup> Ralph Rinzler, "Foreword," in *Raised in Clay: The Southern Pottery Tradition*, by Nancy Sweezy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 10.

<sup>54</sup> Nancy Sweezy, "Cole Pottery," in *Raised in Clay*, 183-185.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., "Preface and Acknowledgements," in *Raised in Clay*, 17.

. . . West Virginia, who took up the study of ceramics after she was well on in years. . . .”<sup>56</sup> His mention of a woman potter who apparently created painterly decorative wares for sale, and his praise for her work and methods<sup>57</sup> could indicate that enough women practiced the art to be worthy of mention in Eaton’s brief examination of the male-dominated pottery business in the region. Eaton’s examination and the more recent investigations of the history of southern and Appalachian pottery are evidence of a vibrant historic, and in some cases current, practice of pottery in the mountains. The few hints at women’s participation in these endeavors are key to prefacing the following sections on indigenous and non-indigenous women’s roles as potters in their communities.

#### Native American Women Potters

The role of women potters in cultures past and present is related to ancient traditions of women potters as creators of culture and art. Women who create pottery are aware of the cultural traditions behind their work and through this knowledge forge an identity that is linked to other important identities within their tribes, communities, groups of artists, and/or among other women. The following discussion primarily focuses on Native American women in tribes located mostly in the Southwest region of the United States, but also a few southeastern tribes. Southwestern Native American tribes seem to have a stronger, or at least better-documented, tradition of pottery making, but this could be in part because of the removal of many tribes from the eastern United States throughout the country’s early development. Therefore, some eastern tribes that may have had engaged in pottery-making for cultural and other purposes may have taken those traditions with them as they moved west, and are not now identified as eastern tribes. The experiences of Native American women potters in relation to their art and communities

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<sup>56</sup> Eaton, *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*, 216.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

serve as a point of reference for poor Appalachian women who might reap similarly positive results from participation in a pottery education program that exposes them to Native American traditions.

There have been a number of well-known women ceramic artists in American history, particularly among Native American tribes. In the late nineteenth century, for instance, a Native American woman potter, Nampeyo, became internationally known for her pottery and the traditional designs she recreated from studying ancient Native American pottery.<sup>58</sup> Her work was valued by audiences for its artistry and the skill of her painting on the pots as well as the role it played in reviving the art of the Hopi Indians.<sup>59</sup> That Nampeyo studied the work of previous potters illustrates her appreciation for the art form and reveals her dedication to learning and improving her art. Likewise, during the mid-twentieth century, San Ildefonso Pueblo potter Maria Martinez became an international figure known for her innovations in Southwest Native American pottery.<sup>60</sup> Martinez was respected and well known in the art world, as Moira Vincentelli points out, partly because museum curators and archaeologists in the early 1900s encouraged her to produce traditional Indian pottery; these connections exposed Martinez to the notion of pottery as art to be used for economic gain, rather than as simply practical craft aimed at producing utilitarian or cultural objects.<sup>61</sup> A few more currently successful Native American women potters are Mary Lewis Garcia, Pahponee, Tammy Garcia, and Autumn Borts, all of

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<sup>58</sup> Gussie Fauntleroy, "Great Women Potters of the Past," *Native Peoples* 14 (September/October 2001): 27.

<sup>59</sup> Vincentelli, *Women Potters: Transforming Traditions*, 112-13, and Fauntleroy, "Great Women Potters of the Past," 27. I have not identified Nampeyo's tribe here because while Fauntleroy calls her Hopi, Vincentelli points out that Nampeyo was actually from the Tewa (112), but lived in the Hopi region and thus her work became known as Hopi pottery.

<sup>60</sup> Vincentelli, *Transforming Traditions*, 111-12, and Fauntleroy, "Great Women Potters of the Past," 26.

<sup>61</sup> Vincentelli, *Women and Ceramics: Gendered Vessels*, 74.

whom Rosemary Diaz discusses in her *Native Peoples* article, “Speaking with the Earth: The Tales of Four Women Potters.” As of 2001, each of these women was making and selling pottery and enjoying recognition in countless art exhibits, contests, and art collections around the world.<sup>62</sup>

Women potters—particularly Native American women potters— are part of a matriarchal tradition, and the women who play the important roles of potters are valuable to their people as providers of cultural items and income (if the items are sold); therefore, pottery-making is a meaningful activity, both to the potter and to her community. In her article about today’s Native American women potters, Diaz not only focuses on the artistic abilities and successes of the four women she discusses but also on the context of a matrilineal heritage of pottery-making among their ancestors. She notes the potters’ awareness of the importance of their art to their people, as well as to themselves, and writes that while each woman’s pottery is distinct from the others, “they share a philosophy which acknowledges the importance of the carrying on of tradition, and holds [sic] that privilege in the highest esteem.”<sup>63</sup> In their profiles, each of the artists mentions her version of this philosophy. For example, Autumn Borts’ profile begins with her own words about what her art means to her: “Pottery ties me to an ancient tradition; it connects me to my ancestors. Knowing that a thousand grandmothers did this before me is amazing, and to have been born into this heritage is a gift.”<sup>64</sup> Another woman, Mary Lewis Garcia, revived interest in the near-forgotten polychrome designs of the Acoma Pueblo by studying and recreating them in her own work.<sup>65</sup> The women’s statements and work show an intricately-woven personal artistic dedication and philosophy combined with a deep cultural interest and indicate their

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<sup>62</sup> Diaz, “Speaking With the Earth,” 22-5.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 25.

<sup>65</sup> Diaz, 23.

acknowledgement of the importance and meaningfulness of their activities. Borts also points to the important familial link involved in her work: “All of this knowledge I hold very dear to my heart, because it was passed down to me from the women in my family. The clay gives me energy, and I’m grateful to be a part of this tradition.”<sup>66</sup> With this remark, Borts highlights the positive, or energetic, impact of her art on her life and also exhibits the strong communal ties involved in the art form for her family and arguably others of her tribe. Pottery in this case not only becomes a personal means of expression and gratification but also an important link to the community and its traditions.

Some other Native American women potters have revived and created traditions out of economic need. Thomas John Blumer, in his book *Catawba Indian Pottery*, writes, “Trade in pottery saved the [Catawba] Nation from extinction” at times when they faced joblessness and had no other means of making an income.<sup>67</sup> He also discusses the importance of passing down the knowledge of pottery-making skills in keeping the tradition and, therefore, the economic impact, alive among the Catawba. In his 1970s interviews with Catawba women who were still making pottery, many of them reported having watched their mothers and grandmothers, or perhaps even aunts and neighbors making pots; eventually they worked up to helping with smaller aspects of finishing the pottery, and then at last to making the pots themselves, just as their mothers had before them.<sup>68</sup> That many of the women interviewed mention having learned from women, particularly female family members, is a testament to the strong matrilineal tradition among women in their nation. Moreover, their descriptions of the long process of informal learning required to become a professional potter indicate the importance and revered

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<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Diaz, 25.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas John Blumer, *Catawba Indian Pottery: The Survival of a Folk Tradition* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 29.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-67.

positions pottery and pottery-making have among their people—and the strong community and familial bonds required to pass the knowledge down through the generations.

One notable Native American woman who endeavored to keep cultural traditions alive through her pottery is Santa Ana Pueblo artist Eudora Montoya. Francis H. Harlow, Duane Anderson, and Dwight P. Lanmon write in their book, *The Pottery of Santa Ana Pueblo*, that Montoya was responsible for multiple revivals of traditional Santa Ana pottery. One such revival occurred in the 1970s and involved classes she taught to other Santa Ana Pueblo women on how to make and then sell traditional wares.<sup>69</sup> In a list of potters contained in an appendix in the book, at least nineteen out of thirty-three potters listed learned their art from Montoya.<sup>70</sup> Judging by the names on the list, almost every one is a woman, which illustrates that the tradition of women as the primary creators of pottery survives into the twenty-first century. It is also notable that Montoya—one woman—seems to be almost singularly responsible for keeping her people's traditions and art alive over the decades. Her ability to do this, and the apparent willingness of her community to follow her lead, attests to the powerful position of the female potter among some native peoples.

Santa Clara Pueblo potter Marian Naranjo is also a testament to the important role of women potters in some Native American cultures. In an interview with Sue Dean, Naranjo points to the significance of pottery to her people's customs, saying, "Pottery has been used since the beginning of our tribe in the most sacred way, not only for utilitarian needs but also inside our kivas . . ."<sup>71</sup> She attests to the significant role of female potters to herself and her tribe by

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<sup>69</sup> Francis H. Harlow, Duane Anderson and Dwight P. Lanmon, *The Pottery of Santa Ana Pueblo* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2005), 148-151.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-164.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Sue Dean, "The World of Pottery: A Conversation with Marian Naranjo," *Callaloo* 17 (Winter 1994): 285.

noting, “Learning pottery brought me closer to women. I learned from them, not just about pottery, but about our culture and the meaning of things. It made me want to share this beautiful thing that we have at Santa Clara . . . . I am proud to be able to do this, as a woman and a potter.”<sup>72</sup> Naranjo’s experience shows that while the pots themselves are historic instruments of both culture and survival for Native American people, pottery is also a means of connecting with one’s female ancestors and community members and deriving a particularly female identity from the matrilineal traditions of women potters.

#### Native American Pottery and Identity

The importance of women like Eudora Montoya and Marian Naranjo in keeping tribal and matriarchal traditions alive also translates to their own personal sense of importance and identity as well as their deep connections to their communities. For women potters in tribes such as the Catawba, or the Cherokee basket weavers who are discussed in the following paragraphs, making and selling art fortifies cultural traditions and at the same time eases financial strains. But perhaps more importantly, the ability to create something and master a skill seems to give the Native American women discussed here a sense of accomplishment and independence within the context of their communities; these positive effects of art-making can be viewed in terms of their potential to address the stresses of poverty not only for Native American women but for non-indigenous women as well. For example, the women profiled by Diaz all indicated that the pottery they share with their tribes, families, and sometimes even the global community, is worthwhile to them on specifically personal levels. Mary Lewis Garcia, an Acoma Pueblo woman who learned pottery from her mother, said, “Making pottery is hard work, but when one of my children or grandchildren comes to me and asks me to teach them how to make pottery, I

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 289.

can do it. Then I know that all of my hard work has been worth it.”<sup>73</sup> Garcia seems to view her personal artistic skills as a means of passing along her experience and legacy to her grandchildren, perhaps even allowing some part of her personal contributions to her community to live on after her death. In other words, individual hard work is rewarded through communal advancement and continuation of tradition. Likewise, Diaz quotes Pahponee of the Kansas Kickapoo/Potawatomi as saying, “No matter what kind of clay or tool I’m using, I am never detached from what I’m creating or from what courses through my blood.”<sup>74</sup> These statements show that the act of making pottery for these women is not simply one of creating art or carrying on traditions but a way for the women to connect with something greater than themselves and to derive personal satisfaction and meaning from that communal connection.

Native American women practice other art forms as a means of self-expression and source of personal and communal identity as well. Gretchen M. Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands discuss the importance of the literary tradition as a means of expression for Native American women in their book *American Indian Women: Telling Their Lives*. One particular avenue for this expression is the writing or telling of autobiography as a means of sharing cultural traditions. Bataille and Sands write that while autobiographies of the past were ethnographical in focus and, therefore, largely ignored the individual teller’s role in the ethnographical record, they more recently have become geared “toward a more specific interest in the individual narrator and her experiences, [and] Indian women’s autobiographies have portrayed fuller and more detailed histories or personality and conscious narrative technique.”<sup>75</sup> Through autobiography, then, some Native American women have found a way to achieve both a

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<sup>73</sup> Diaz, “Speaking With the Earth,” 24.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 24.

<sup>75</sup> Gretchen M. Bataille, and Kathleen Mullen Sands, *American Indian Women: Telling Their Lives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 130.

sense of individuality and a sense of maintaining the knowledge of the traditions of their ancestors.

Similarly, the art of basket weaving among Native American women has offered them an opportunity to claim an individual identity along with their communal identity. In her book *Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and Their Basketry*, Sarah H. Hill examines the meaning of basket weaving for Cherokee women over generations, beginning with legends that support its meaning and purpose in village life. Hill summarized three Cherokee legends that “Together . . . establish the significance of basketry and connect baskets with women, fertility, life, and sustenance.”<sup>76</sup> Like pottery, the art of basketry is linked to women’s roles as enablers of the survival of both people and culture, and weavers, like potters, are aware of their important role in society. Hill quotes a Cherokee woman, Louise Goings, who derives a sense of personal pride through the work of weaving, which brings her much-needed income: “what I make with my hands, that’s my money. It’s a different type of money than what you make working your regular job and taking care of things that way.”<sup>77</sup> It seems that in this weaver’s case, the income she makes from selling her baskets allows her to feel that her art is both valuable to others and significant to her own survival and independence; because she made the items she sells with her own hands and creative instinct, the money she makes feels more deserved or hard-earned. Goings’ placement of a higher intrinsic value on the money she makes from selling her art as opposed to the money she makes from her “regular job” illustrates the importance of basket weaving—and the money it generates—to her personal identity and feeling about the value of her individual skill as a weaver.

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<sup>76</sup> Sarah H. Hill, *Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and Their Basketry* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 316.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 321.

Just as basket weavers find meaning and identity through creating objects that are related to sustenance—baskets hold grain and other items for family and community consumption and selling them provides economic gain in some cases—women who have used baskets for tasks related to sustaining the cultural mores of their people have found similar meaning. In *Sifters: Native American Women's Lives*, editor Theda Perdue points out that other traditionally female activities in Native American culture are associated with sustaining and giving life and also give the women a sense of identity. In her introduction, she discusses these activities through the lens of the activity of sifting and notes the importance of the Cherokee corn sifters who made the grain into food: “For the Cherokees, sifters, like women, represented both production and sustenance.”<sup>78</sup> Perdue connects this societal role to personal identity by using sifting as a metaphor for “personal meditation” and by noting that the women discussed in the essays included in the book have “sifted their experiences in order to preserve and refine the essential ingredients; then they sifted these ingredients together to create their identities and values.”<sup>79</sup> Sifting, and the metaphor of sifting, therefore, allow women to create something (tangible or internal) that at once contributes to the cultural record of their people and allows them to create an identity connected to that contribution, much as pottery does.

Native American women's societal and artistic roles discussed above are deeply rooted in their culture, which, according to an article by Steven E. Hobfoll, Anita Jackson, Ivonne Hobfoll, Charles A. Pierce, and Sara Young, “is traditionally based on collectivist principles . . . [and] emphasizes fitting in, getting along with others, and reliance on the social group.”<sup>80</sup> While the

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<sup>78</sup> Theda Perdue, ed., “Introduction,” in *Sifters: Native American Women's Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>80</sup> Steven E. Hobfoll, Anita Jackson, Ivonne Hobfoll, Charles A. Pierce, and Sara Young, “The Impact of Communal-Mastery Versus Self-Mastery on Emotional Outcomes during Stressful

importance and potential benefits of such group connections are illuminated in Chapter 4, it is important to note here that collectivist activities have also been a part of non-indigenous women's art in the United States. In the 1970s, the Women's Movement created awareness among American women artists of the art world's failure to include and acknowledge their contributions to art, and as Charlotte Rubinstein points out in her chapter on the Feminist Art Movement, they began to band together to create art about women and make opportunities for it to be showcased.<sup>81</sup> Lyndel King further illuminates the consciousness-raising that was a part of this movement; she writes in the foreword to *WARM: A Feminist Art Collective in Minnesota* that she remembers learning (from a speech by Linda Nochlin) "that the system that trained artists we considered masters had for centuries systematically excluded women. . . . Feminist consciousness had reached the art world: in 1970, the Ad Hoc Women Artists Committee . . . protested . . . the low percentage of women artists at the shows of the Whitney Museum of American Art, and in the 1980s the Guerrilla Girls" highlighted the low representation of women artists in New York art venues.<sup>82</sup> As women artists became more aware of their societal and artistic status as related to their gender, and as women in general began to feel more free to express themselves, it seems that women's art became a significant tool for understanding and expressing individual, female identity. Some, as King illustrates, grouped together to achieve their social and artistic goals of inserting women into the public art sphere and art history, but Rubinstein notes several different categories and movements within the Feminist Art Movement that testify not only to the communal aspect of the feminist art movement but also a personal

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Conditions: A Prospective Study of Native American Women," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 30, no. 6 (December 2002), 855.

<sup>81</sup> Rubinstein, *American Women Artists*, 374-375.

<sup>82</sup> Lyndel King, "Foreword," in *WARM: A Feminist Art Collective in Minnesota*, by Joanna Inglot (Minneapolis: Weisman Art Museum, 2007), x.

identity women derived from creating art. For example, she writes of the Pattern and Decoration Movement, “In a deliberate expression of their femaleness, women artists began to incorporate needlework, embroidery . . . and ornamentation of all kinds in their work;” she furthermore points out that women artists “broke down the elitist separation between ‘high art’ and ‘low craft.’”<sup>83</sup> Rubinstein thus implies—even though she does not mention pottery-making in particular—that such female activities as pottery at last may have been acknowledged and justified as a means of creating identity through art. The Feminist Art Movement highlights the lower status of women’s art throughout western art history and also provides examples of women artists’ claiming their art as a means of expressing themselves individually and as members of a community of like-minded women.

#### Non-Indigenous Women Potters in the United States

Women potters in the United States participated in the Feminist Art Movement. Cheryl Buckley’s chapter on women and ceramics in *Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000* addresses the role of women potters in the Feminist Art Movement. She writes that as women potters questioned “the value systems and assumptions” of the field of ceramics in light of new feminist thought, they gave “high priority . . . to examining aspects of crafts that had been devalued due to their association with women, particularly textiles and ceramics.”<sup>84</sup> Buckley’s chapter does not include any references to Native American women potters’ participation in the Feminist Art Movement, and this is perhaps because Native American women would not necessarily have had to resist or rethink western patriarchal traditions of ceramics. As preceding sections of this chapter indicate, many Native American women potters approached pottery from

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<sup>83</sup> Rubinstein, *American Women Artists*, 378-379.

<sup>84</sup> Cheryl Buckley, “‘Quietly Fine’/Quietly Subversive: Women Ceramic Designers,” in *Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference*, ed. Pat Kirkham, (New York: Yale University Press, 2000), 358.

a revered matrilineal tradition within their cultures and, therefore, their art seems not to have been underappreciated by their own communities.

Although non-indigenous women potters often do not have the expressly cultural or familial ties to pottery-making that many indigenous women have, they are still connected to traditions of women as creators of domestic wares. Moira Vincentelli argues that it is the “tension between pure art and functional form with strong domestic associations that creates a productive plurality of uses and meanings” in women’s ceramic art.<sup>85</sup> One ceramic artist whose work embodies this tension is Betty Woodman who uses conventional functional forms such as pitchers and vases to make unconventional artistic statements and sculptural forms. In an article devoted to Woodman in *Art & Antiques*, Joseph Jacobs writes that Woodman is “not making a vase per se but instead . . . using it as a device to explore the history of vases and world culture.”<sup>86</sup> Therefore, Woodman positions herself within the tradition of women potters as creators of domestic objects but transforms the objects to defy patriarchal western expectations of what that object should look like and represent. Other women potters, however, have not felt confined by making strictly utilitarian wares. For example, Marguerite Wildenhain, a German woman who spent most of her ceramics career in the United States, until the 1970s dedicated her teachings and work to strictly functional, expertly-made tableware and other objects.<sup>87</sup>

Whether or not women potters transform the domestic object or create it for its intended use, they connect with the history of that object and its relationship to women and women’s lives. In Wildenhain’s case, her art was a way of life, and as Christy Johnson and Billy Sessions

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<sup>85</sup> Vincentelli, *Women and Ceramics*, 256.

<sup>86</sup> Joseph Jacobs, “A Singular Duality,” *Art and Antiques* 29, no. 9 (October 2006): 74-6, 78, <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com> (accessed September 15, 2008).

<sup>87</sup> Christy Johnson and Billy Sessions, “Women’s ‘Werk’: The Dignity of Craft at the American Museum of Ceramic Art, Susi Singer and Marguerite Wildenhain,” *Ceramics: Art and Perception* 61 (2005): 79.

note, she believed “that an artist’s life must involve total commitment and cannot be separate from day-to-day life.”<sup>88</sup> For her, domestic ware and its creation defined the entire essence of her existence, and arguably, because of this infusion, her personal identity. However, tableware and items for kitchen use are often associated with women and women’s work, and these types of functional items and their associations are not always considered—by critics and other artists, as well as the public—as valuable contributions to the art world.

Entrenched societal expectations about women’s roles prevent even successful women potters from being taken seriously by the western art world. Jacobs’ article about Betty Woodman at once derides ceramic art’s low status in an elitist art world and then claims that Woodman is, in fact, not a ceramic artist anyway. He writes, “Ultimately, Woodman should be viewed as a brilliant, consummate painter who happens to use her own sculptural forms as her ‘canvas.’”<sup>89</sup> He goes on to compare her painterly skills to those of a handful of French, male artists.<sup>90</sup> His statements not only imply that painting is a more valued art form than pottery, but that while Woodman is celebrated as an artist, it is only because of her art’s more masculine qualities both in the handling of her subject matter and her decoration of it. Similarly, a retrospective article about the magazine *Ceramics Monthly* includes a significant number of women ceramic artists who were invited by the magazine to share their influences and best/worst ceramic advice—yet none of these women, who comprise six out of the fifteen artists in the article, cited a single female mentor among their influences although they credit many men with aiding their careers.<sup>91</sup> The omission of women mentors could be indicative of a lack of access to

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Jacobs, “A Singular Duality.”

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Kim Nagorski, “Looking Back, Looking Forward,” *Ceramics Monthly* 51 (January 2003): 84-91.

female teachers and artists in a male dominated field. However, that these women artists seem to have, perhaps unwittingly, ignored their successful predecessors and peers illustrates that women potters sometimes participate in their own marginalization, even as their work and artistic identities subvert patriarchal artistic norms. Nonetheless, the subject matter of the *Ceramics Monthly* article indicates that the author and the editors at the publication, as well as the artists interviewed, are aware of a community in which they operate as artists. While each artist is indeed an individual who works according to personal creative desires and instincts, none of them seems to operate independent of guidance from an artistic community—teachers, friends, fellow potters. Therefore, the women and men featured in the retrospective article themselves highlight the importance of the human connections forged through art making.

There are a number of both historical and contemporary examples of women potters' involvement in, and enthusiasm for, artistic communities, which are further testament to the importance of such connections. During the early 1900s, for instance, the Arts and Crafts movement, an anti-modernist art movement in which women played a key role,<sup>92</sup> spurred the creation of a number of artistic communities. One such community was developed by Philip King Brown, a doctor who founded a women's tuberculosis clinic in Marin County, California, and began the Arequipa Sanatorium Pottery there for the patients.<sup>93</sup> Brown believed that the "work cure" (a tenet of the Arts and Crafts movement) was part of the key to ridding the women of their illnesses, and their work in the pottery at the sanatorium not only provided distraction

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<sup>92</sup> Wendy Kaplan, "Women Designers and the Arts and Crafts Movement," in *Women Designers in the USA 1900-2000*, 85-76.

<sup>93</sup> Suzanne Baizerman, "Curing with Clay: The Arequipa Sanatorium Pottery," *Style 1900: The Quarterly Journal of the Arts & Crafts Movement* 14 no. 1 (February 2001): 64-68. Interestingly, Dr. Brown was apparently inspired to begin the large undertaking of the sanatorium and accompanying pottery by his mother, a doctor who established a children's hospital in San Francisco (65).

from the boredom of forced rest treatment but also allowed the patients to help pay for their stay at the facility as their wares were sold in local stores.<sup>94</sup> Suzanne Baizerman writes in her article on the pottery, “Women apparently enjoyed time spent in the Pottery, fulfilling the Arts & Crafts prophecy of the healthful effect of work with the hands.”<sup>95</sup> Other women were also involved in establishing commercial potteries and other small communal creative enterprises around the same time period as the Arequipa Pottery’s founding, such as Maria Longworth Nicols, who founded Rookwood Pottery in Cincinnati in 1880, and Mary Chase Perry Stratton, who co-founded Pewabic Pottery in Detroit in 1903.<sup>96</sup> These creative women potters illustrate the independence (both in a financial sense and in the sense of empowerment or self-fulfillment in achieving personal goals) that can be fostered through involvement with other artists and community members, as well as the therapeutic nature of creating art.

More recently, a number of women potters have been involved in artistic educational communities that include male and female artists but in which women are well represented in number and participation. For example, the potter and poet Mary Carolyn Richards (or M.C. Richards) writes about her involvement with Black Mountain College<sup>97</sup> in North Carolina in the 1940s and 1950s, and its positive impact on her artistic, personal, and community development.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 65-66.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>96</sup> Kaplan, “Women Designers and the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 88-90.

<sup>97</sup> Black Mountain College was founded in 1933 by John Andrew Rice, a university professor who became disillusioned with organized higher education. He created his school based on concepts of egalitarianism and creative learning and expression—there was no administration; students and teachers were to contribute equally to the curriculum and community at Black Mountain. The college disbanded in 1956 due to financial problems. See for example Mervin Lane, “Introduction,” in *Black Mountain College, Sprouted Seeds: An Anthology of Personal Accounts*, ed. Mervin Lane (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 1-2.

<sup>98</sup> M.C. Richards, “Black Mountain College: A Personal View of Creativity,” in *Opening Our Moral Eye: Essays, Talks, & Poems Embracing Creativity and Community*, ed. Deborah J. Haynes (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1996), 61-76.

Richards argues, “The threefoldness of the Black Mountain educational thrust brought me into a current of living and learning that was new: community building, artistic participation in studio experience, intellectual study.”<sup>99</sup> The Black Mountain College experience led Richards and others who had taught and learned there to create another artists’ community at Stony Point outside New York City where they lived and worked.<sup>100</sup> One of the artists who joined Richards in that enterprise was potter Karen Karnes, who had also been a teacher at Black Mountain College, and who, like Richards, seemed to enjoy the communal environment—she lived and worked there for 25 years.<sup>101</sup> Karnes’ and Richards’ continued devotion to living and working in a communal setting indicates the powerful connections forged between artists as well as the artists’ devotion to these kinds of communities and the creativity that is fostered there. The reach of Black Mountain College’s influence is evident in a recent exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, which featured an inventor, Buckminster Fuller, who also spent two summers teaching at Black Mountain College and worked with M.C. Richards during his time there.<sup>102</sup> A number of other renowned artists and designers working in a wide variety of media also convened at the school as students or teachers at one time or another,<sup>103</sup> and the involvement of so many different kinds of creative minds from so many different backgrounds in one particular setting illustrates the far-reaching impacts of one positive creative community.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>101</sup> Karen Karnes, “Karen Karnes, February 1998,” in *Clay Talks: Reflections by American Master Ceramists*, eds. Emily Galusha and Mary Ann Nord (Minneapolis: Northern Clay Center, 2004), 22.

<sup>102</sup> *Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe*, exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York, visited by the author on September 13, 2008.

<sup>103</sup> See for example, Richards, “Black Mountain,” 61-76, and Karnes, “Karen Karnes,” 22.

A contemporary example of an artist living and working in an educational community setting is Cynthia Bringle. Bringle's studio and home are located on the grounds of the Penland School of Crafts, "a non-profit craft school founded in 1929 by Lucy Morgan."<sup>104</sup> Bringle says she was drawn to the school in North Carolina by the mountains and because she "wanted to live in a community of craftspeople and felt that would happen there."<sup>105</sup> Bringle, like Richards and Karnes, exhibits great satisfaction with her long-time connection to an artists' community. She has been teaching, living, and/or making pots in the Penland community since 1963.<sup>106</sup> Of her continued involvement with the school, its students, faculty, and administrators, she says, "I am very involved. Everyone has to return something back."<sup>107</sup> Bringle feels that she has gained something positive—perhaps a sense of belonging or encouragement—from the community in and around the Penland school, and indicates that is indebted to the people there who live, learn, and work near her.

#### Appalachian Women Artists, Identity, and Community

While Bringle's Penland location lies within the borders of the Southern Appalachian subregion, potter Alice Anders<sup>108</sup> practices her art in the heart of Central Appalachia. Anders rents studio space at the Blue County Artisan Center,<sup>109</sup> where she makes and sells her work and offers visitors an opportunity to experiment with clay.<sup>110</sup> While Anders spent her career as a teacher, she discovered pottery upon her retirement from the school system and began taking

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<sup>104</sup> Bringle, "The Pot is a Mood of Many Hues," under "Penland School, NC." Lucy Morgan, according to Bringle, was involved in the craft revival in Appalachia during the time period, teaching poor women to weave for money, and the school developed out of that endeavor.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., "Penland School."

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>109</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>110</sup> Alice Anders (pseudonym), interview with author, Blue County Artisan Center, October 6, 2008.

lessons at community colleges and workshops; she has been making pottery for approximately ten years, and says she is “strictly into it because I enjoy it.”<sup>111</sup> Anders says that although she knows she could make a living from selling her pottery, she has no interest in launching another career in her retirement, but the experience of being a potter has shaped her life in the last decade.<sup>112</sup> She notes that she likes how clays feels, and if she’s having a bad day, she comes to her studio, and “all my worries and trials go away when I’m doing this.”<sup>113</sup> However, making pottery is far from a strictly personal experience for Anders; her work with the artisan center allows her to interact with members of her community on a regular basis, and throughout an interview with the artist in her studio one morning, she refers again and again to how she enjoys sharing her work. Anders notes she often gives away pieces of her work to people who admire it but cannot afford to buy it and gets a deep satisfaction from watching her students and visitors learn about the process of pottery-making as she teaches—she asserts, “Blessings come when you share.”<sup>114</sup> Anders’ experiences with her community illustrate the bond that can form between teachers and students, or artists and audiences, and furthermore illuminate the potential for deep personal fulfillment through pottery.

While Anders illustrates the ways in which women potters draw identity and community through their art, potters are certainly not the only women artists who find great personal and communal meaning in the creative process. Women artists throughout Appalachia also provide testimony to the importance of art in the lives of individuals and their communities. For example, Minnie Adkins, who is featured in the book *O, Appalachia: Artists from the Southern Mountains*, shares these thoughts on her art and sharing it with others: “I wouldn’t want to live

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

anywhere but these mountains. But it does me good to know that people out there somewhere are enjoying my work. When I'm a'makin' it, I like to think about all the different places it might end up."<sup>115</sup> Adkins indicates that her art has allowed her to feel connected to a larger society than the small mountain community where she lives—sharing her wood carvings with an audience outside her region and knowing that others appreciate her creativity seems to inspire Adkins as she creates. In *Listen Here: Women Writing in Appalachia*, writer and ballad singer Sheila Kay Adams indicates that her art connects her strongly to her family and region when she says, "I love writing, using the language of my home. I get lost for hours in the rhythm, the lyrical sound of the mountain dialect. And there's such a richness of material just waiting to be plucked from the strong oral tradition . . . in my family."<sup>116</sup>

Adkins and Adams provide present-day examples of Appalachian women artists' connection to community via their art, but Kathleen Curtis Wilson illustrates the desire of some Appalachian weavers to continue the tradition of weaving in the early 1900s for reasons similar to those cited by Adams. Wilson notes the differences among Appalachian communities, writing that while women in some areas had stopped weaving completely by the 1930s, "women in Floyd, Grayson, and Tazewell Counties, Virginia, never ceased weaving overshot coverlets in colors and patterns that defined their creative spirit—priding themselves on an ability to perpetuate the artistic traditions of previous generations."<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, Eaton's work on Appalachian crafts in the 1930s highlights the many efforts by women to continue crafts traditions in the area and to begin new ones.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Quoted in Lampell and Lampell, "Minnie Adkins," 190.

<sup>116</sup> Quoted in Ballard and Hudson, "Sheila Kay Adams," 6.

<sup>117</sup> Wilson, "A Distinctive Artistic Tradition," xi.

<sup>118</sup> Eaton, Part II, in *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*.

Both the weavers and other crafts makers of the 1930s and earlier indicate many Appalachian women's strong inclination to preserve community and tradition through the arts. But perhaps some more current examples of the fulfillment and connections derived from art best illustrate what art can mean to women and their communities. Just south of the end of the Appalachian geographical region, women quilters from Gee's Bend, Alabama, with the encouragement of art collectors, have reclaimed their families' traditions of quilting, by bringing together women in a community group called the Gee's Bend Quilter's Collective and thus inspiring new generations who now live outside the community to learn the art.<sup>119</sup> Loretta Pettway, one of the women whose quilts appear in an exhibit of the collective's work, says of her art, "I thank God that people want me to make quilts. I feel proud and happy. The Lord give me the strength to make this quilt with love and peace and happiness so somebody would enjoy it. I'm doing something with my life."<sup>120</sup> Pettway reveals both the personal identity and sense of accomplishment she feels from quilting, and the connection she feels to others from making objects for them to enjoy. Her words seem truly joyous and exemplify the many layers of positive communal and personal emotions that can result from creating art.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have illustrated the many and varied traditions of the artistic endeavors of women from Appalachia and across the United States and the positive impacts of art, specifically pottery, in the lives of women artists. I argue that the personal benefits of creating art are particularly fostered in community settings, and that even individual art-making links the artist to a community outside her studio walls—whether it is the community in which she lives and works or the larger national or global community that views and purchases her art. I also

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<sup>119</sup> Amei Wallach, "Fabric of Their Lives," *Smithsonian* 37, no. 7 (October 2006): 70.

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Wallach, 72 (picture caption).

argue that the long line of creative women in Appalachia is evidence of the presence of an artistic tradition among Appalachian women.

Finally, it is important to point out that many of the women artists discussed above have reached some level of success in their art with which they are pleased, and it seems that the mastery of their art forms—the possession of a true skill and the artists' own realization of that possession—is a significant part of the personal satisfaction derived from creative activity. But perhaps just as importantly, each of the potters and other artists seems to find true joy in her work and the creative process—indeed, in many cases it defines and shapes her identity. I argue that providing low-income Appalachian women access to an educational pottery program could enable them to tap into and develop their creative skills, thereby allowing them to feel pride in their creative efforts and empowerment through their own successes. The program could also expose the women to a process and work that so many women potters find deeply satisfying and enjoyable and often therapeutic. Therefore, in light of the illustrated personal benefits and communal development through ceramic arts among women in America, I argue that such a program could help poor women access the independence and self-fulfillment that many women artists experience. Thus, the next chapter examines existing community arts programs at work in Appalachia and illustrate the potential for community-building and self-empowerment for women suffering from poverty who become involved in arts programs.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROPOSAL FOR A NON-PROFIT POTTERY PROGRAM FOR APPALACHIAN WOMEN

#### Introduction and Brief Literature Review

As the statistical analysis of Chapter 2 indicates, decreasing poverty levels—especially among women and children—in Appalachia is still necessary and vital to the improvement of living standards for many who live in the mountainous region. However, many discussions of poverty and ways to alleviate it fail to recognize the individual who lives in poverty as a human being with a variety of interests and needs. While a single mother struggling to raise her children certainly needs access to resources such as food, clothing, and shelter, pretending that these are her only needs robs of her personhood—her need for spiritual growth, intellectual stimulation, or creative outlets. Of course, as many studies suggest, eliminating poverty would significantly benefit the lives of those who suffer from it,<sup>1</sup> but decades of efforts to do so have not succeeded in eradicating poverty or even diminishing it considerably in many parts of Appalachia and elsewhere in the United States.

There is, indeed, validity in efforts to ease the material suffering of the poor, but it seems that currently there is no feasible way to erase poverty completely and, at any rate, a plan to do so would take generations to put into practice. Therefore, I argue that the most immediate problem is not how to eliminate the financial condition of poverty but how to appreciate the humanity of people who suffer from poverty. In order to view the poor as members of society who, besides their lack of monetary capital, are very like their wealthier counterparts, one must be able to appreciate the many levels of deprivation associated with poverty, including a lack of access to the cultural and intellectual luxuries that those who live above the poverty line take for

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Dearing, Taylor, and McCartney, “Implications,” 1372-1377.

granted. I contend in this chapter that, while there is a need for agencies that provide food, shelter, and other basics to the poor, there are equally important, non-material needs that must be acknowledged and met among poor women living in Appalachia. Therefore, I will combine the acknowledgement of poverty among women in Central Appalachia presented in Chapter 2 with the evidence of the positive impact of art, particularly pottery, in the lives of women from Chapter 3, to conclude that women living in poverty in Appalachia could significantly benefit from a non-profit pottery program.

In constructing the arguments in this chapter, I have consulted a variety of scholarly and non-scholarly sources. While books and articles have been instrumental in providing theory and relevant scholarship on poverty, community organizing, and gender, I also have found the Web sites of various arts organizations to be particularly helpful in illuminating the missions and histories of community art centers in Appalachia. Therefore, while psychology and health journal articles such as “Adolescents Coping with Poverty-Related Family Stress: Prospective Predictors of Coping and Psychological Symptoms,” by Martha E. Wadsworth and Lauren E. Berger; and “Implications of Family Income Dynamics for Women’s Depressive Symptoms During the First 3 Years After Childbirth,” by Eric Dearing, Beck Taylor, and Kathleen McCartney, have provided information on the mental health impacts of poverty on women, children, and families, the Internet sites of the Appalachian Women’s Alliance and other organizations illustrate some constructive ways for combating the oppression of poverty.<sup>2</sup> For information about community arts organizations the Internet was also useful and yielded the

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<sup>2</sup> Martha E. Wadsworth and Lauren E. Berger, “Adolescents Coping with Poverty-Related Family Stress: Prospective Predictors of Coping and Psychological Symptoms,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 35, no. 1 (February 2006): 57-70; Dearing, Taylor, and McCartney, “Implications;” Appalachian Women’s Alliance, “Who We Are and What We Do,” Appalachian Women’s Alliance, <http://www.appalachianwomen.org/index.html> (accessed September 24, 2008).

archives of Community Arts Network's Reading Room, covering topics from rural community arts to activism, but books such as *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change*, edited by Stephen L. Fisher, help place current community arts movements in Appalachia in the context of the region's rich grassroots organizing history.<sup>3</sup> Other sources, such as the book *Mountain Sisters: From Convent to Community in Appalachia*, by Helen M. Lewis and Monica Appleby, illustrate the efforts of Catholic nuns in Appalachian community organizing and arts endeavors; and the Web site for David (Ky.) Appalachian Crafts reveals the ongoing work of other sisters in the arts and crafts in mountain communities.<sup>4</sup> Still other sources, such as Virginia Rinaldo Seitz's *Women, Development, and Communities for Empowerment in Appalachia*, reveal the difficulties, social barriers, and gender issues at play in many community-organizing efforts in Appalachia, as well as the efforts to overcome such limitations.<sup>5</sup>

In the following pages I construct an argument regarding the need for creative expression in the lives of low-income Appalachian women. I begin my discussion from the premise of the centrality of women to Appalachian society as asserted by Katherine Kelleher Sohn, who writes, "Because they are the cement of the Appalachian culture in spite of the appearance of a patriarchal society, the women shape the region as it shapes them."<sup>6</sup> I argue that these shapers of

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<sup>3</sup> Community Arts Network, "Reading Room," Community Arts Network, <http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles>, (accessed September 23, 2008); and Stephen L. Fisher, ed., *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Helen M. Lewis and Monica Appleby, *Mountain Sisters: From Convent to Community in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003); and David Appalachian Crafts, "Upcoming Shows," David Appalachian Crafts, <http://www.davidappalachiancrafts.com/upcomingshows.html> (accessed September 24, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Virginia Rinaldo Seitz, *Women, Development, and Communities for Empowerment in Appalachia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Sohn, *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women in Appalachia*, 5.

the region deserve a society that is willing to feed them intellectually and creatively, besides feeding them physically, and that the society in which they live likewise deserves self-assured, empowered women who can contribute to the well-being of their communities, families, and themselves in meaningful ways.

### Discussion of Terms: Community Art, Community Development, and Empowerment

Some terms that will appear frequently here warrant explanation, as some do not have specific dictionary definitions and are used here in a particular context. For example, in her essay, “An Introduction to Community Art and Activism,” Jan Cohen-Cruz explains community art in the following way: “Community art is that which is rooted in a shared sense of place, tradition or spirit . . . Not all community art has an activist agenda; it is as likely to celebrate cultural traditions or provide a space for a community to reflect. But even such community art projects share activism’s commitment to collective, not strictly individual, representation.”<sup>7</sup>

While Cohen-Cruz examines the community arts movement from a political or social activist perspective (e.g., art to protest wars, to promote civil rights, or to protest social or environmental inequities),<sup>8</sup> it is not my purpose in this discussion to promote political activism through the arts. Rather, I draw primarily from Cohen-Cruz’s last two sentences in the excerpt above; therefore, “community art” will refer to art made in a collective setting in a celebratory manner, in honor of old traditions and in an endeavor to create new ones. Furthermore, I use the term “community arts” to refer to art made by members of a certain community, in this case Appalachian communities. While some of the community organizations discussed in this chapter focus on art

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<sup>7</sup> Jan Cohen-Cruz, “An Introduction to Community Art and Activism,” Original CAN/API Publication (February 2002), [http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/02/an\\_introduction.php](http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/02/an_introduction.php) (accessed September 23, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., under “II. Current Configurations of Community Art-and-Activism,” and “I. A Few Historical Markers.”

by professional, trained artists, or even self-trained artists who make art for a living, I assert that the ideal community arts organization is a non-profit entity aimed at involving non-artist community members in the making of art.

The community arts movement, which, according to Patricia A. Shifferd and Dorothy Lagerroos, was born of “a reaction to the ugliness, increasing inequality and changing character of work that resulted from the industrial revolution,”<sup>9</sup> is closely related to other development movements, however, and such relationships will also be a part of this discussion. Shifferd and Lagerroos connect the community arts movement to the sustainable community-development movement—an environmental movement launched in response to increasing industrialization and people’s acknowledgement of its impact on their environment.<sup>10</sup> Both of these movements, they argue, share principles of social justice, appreciation of nature and beauty, and education, among others.<sup>11</sup> The linkages between these two movements are key, as, where appropriate, the discussion in this chapter will focus on other types of community development in Appalachia, a region with a rich history of grassroots organizing. While Stephen L. Fisher and the authors in his volume *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance* focus on such community-organizing movements as resistance to strip mining in parts of Appalachia, other Appalachian community movements focus on development—economic in particular, but also development of gender equity and social change, as illustrated by Virginia Rinaldo Seitz.<sup>12</sup> “Community

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<sup>9</sup> Patricia A. Shifferd and Dorothy Lagerroos, “Converging Streams: The Community Arts and Sustainable Community Movements,” Original CAN/API Publication (November 2006), under “The Community Arts Movement: A Brief History,” [http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2006/11/converging\\_stre.php](http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2006/11/converging_stre.php) (accessed September 25, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., under “Origins of the Sustainable Community-development Movement.”

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., under “Comparison of Basic Principles.”

<sup>12</sup> Fisher, *Fighting Back in Appalachia*; and Seitz, *Women, Development, and Communities for Empowerment in Appalachia*.

development” in Appalachia seems, in most cases, to refer to economic development, however, as many counties in the region have long depended on exploitative resource extraction industries, such as coal mining, which increasingly employ fewer and fewer individuals.<sup>13</sup> While this kind of development is vital in Appalachian communities, I will focus on different types of community organizing, such as organization of women and development of cultural appreciation and participation within communities. Seitz’s work is instrumental in situating development within these alternative contexts.

Seitz examines community and economic development in Appalachia through the lens of women’s empowerment, or the possibility for it. She writes,

“Empowerment is a capacity in thought and action to address the condition and position of marginalization. Women are empowered when they recognize and act on strategic (relational) interests as well as practical (material) interests (Molyneux 1986): not only do women in collective association work to materially improve the conditions of life, they challenge the power relationships inherent in their gendered and class position. Thus, a portion of the operative definition is collective action.”<sup>14</sup>

Seitz’s discussion of women’s empowerment effectively brings together the elements of community development and community organizing discussed above. This chapter’s examination of community arts organizations and their potential to empower women, then, draws heavily on the idea that participating in group activity opens meaningful avenues for community change or evolution, beginning with individual, personal empowerment and change.

### Effects of Poverty: Mental, Emotional, and Social

Chapter 2 discussed the economic instability faced by many Central Appalachian women and their lack of access to adequate educational and employment opportunities. While poverty obviously makes it difficult for women to obtain basic necessities for themselves and their

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<sup>13</sup> See discussion on coal in Chapter One of this thesis.

<sup>14</sup> Seitz, “Introduction,” 8.

families, insufficient income also touches virtually all aspects of the lives of those who suffer from it. Possibly the most debilitating aspect of poverty is the cultural stigma attached to it, which in turn affects what types of services and aid are provided to the poor and how they are treated by their community members and greater society. In his article “The Myth of the ‘Culture of Poverty,’” Paul Gorski attacks many of the societal misconceptions surrounding those who experience poverty and traces the origin of the term “culture of poverty” back to Oscar Lewis’ 1961 work, *The Children of Sanchez*.<sup>15</sup> His article refutes a number of “myths” about the cultural attributes of the poor (which he lists as section headings), including “Poor people are unmotivated and have weak work ethics;” “Poor people are linguistically deficient;” and “Poor people tend to abuse drugs and alcohol.”<sup>16</sup> Gorski asserts, “The myth of a ‘culture of poverty’ distracts us from a dangerous culture that does exist—the culture of classism,”<sup>17</sup> and further points out that through this lens of classism, “We ignore the fact that poor people suffer disproportionately from nearly every major social ill. They lack access to health care, living-wage jobs, safe and affordable housing, clean air and water, and so on . . . —conditions that limit their ability to achieve their full potential.”<sup>18</sup>

Cynthia M. Duncan has also pointed out the limitations facing the rural poor in particular. In her book, *Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America*, Duncan argues, “Impoverished communities in the [Mississippi] Delta and in Appalachia are divided into *haves* and *have-nots*,” and that “The poor are stigmatized, blamed for their poverty, and often deliberately blocked from opportunities in the world of the *haves*. They do not develop the

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Gorski, “The Myth of the ‘Culture of Poverty,’” *Educational Leadership Journal* 65, no. 7 (April 2008): 32-34.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

habits, skills, and ambitions they need to make it in the mainstream.”<sup>19</sup> Duncan and Gorski bring up important points about poverty—it is not merely a lack of funds but also a lack of almost everything else a person needs to lead a successful, fulfilling life. Furthermore, what is lacking is both perpetuated and exacerbated by society’s impressions of the poor as somehow at fault for their own condition.

Such limitations—financial and otherwise—cause a great deal of distress for people who suffer from poverty. For example, Eric Dearing, Beck A. Taylor, and Kathleen McCartney illustrate the linkages between income fluctuations and women’s mental health after childbirth. They found that loss of income increased depressive symptoms in women in the first three years after giving birth, and further, “Women who were chronically poor experienced the strongest effects of changes in income on their depressive symptoms, perhaps because income gains and losses for these women were associated with the largest *relative* changes in economic well-being.”<sup>20</sup> They also note the “public health” implications of the results of their study, given the negative impact of parental depression on child development in the child’s first three years.<sup>21</sup> Another study that notes the impacts of poverty on children in low-income families is Martha E. Wadsworth and Lauren E. Berger’s work, “Adolescents Coping with Poverty-Related Family Stress: Prospective Predictors of Coping and Psychological Symptoms.” Wadsworth and Berger found that poverty-related family stress (which they characterized with questionnaire items divided into economic strain and family conflict, e.g., “My parents didn’t have enough money to pay the bills,” and “I argued with my parents about money”<sup>22</sup>) was related to increased

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<sup>19</sup> Duncan, *Worlds Apart*, xiii.

<sup>20</sup> Dearing, Taylor, and McCartney, “Implications,” 1376.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Wadsworth and Berger, “Adolescents,” 61.

“anxious/depressed behavior” in the sample of poor, rural, New England adolescents.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, they question the ability of adolescents to use coping skills effectively to manage poverty-related stress because:

Chronic poverty-related family stress, especially as measured by the adolescents themselves, may be such a powerful influence in an adolescent’s life that it is difficult to compensate using coping. Thus, family stress in the context of more disadvantaged, low-income families may create a very different type of stressor in comparison to coping with other kinds of stresses among adolescents from more advantaged families.<sup>24</sup>

Wadsworth and Berger’s work seems to indicate that the parents’ suffering from poverty-related stress directly influences the stress levels of their children. Furthermore, their study as well as Dearing’s, indicates that chronic poverty is a major contributor to mental health problems for families with low incomes. Dearing also argues, “With approximately 17% of all families in the United States living in poverty and most of these households headed by women, the mental health of poor women remains a pressing topic for both public health science and public health policy.”<sup>25</sup> Given the statistics on the likelihood of women’s poverty in Central Appalachia, as well as their difficulty in escaping it,<sup>26</sup> the mental health implications for both poor women and their children in Appalachia are alarming. When women suffer from poverty and, therefore, mental and emotional distress, the entire community suffers with them. As the “shapers of society,” to revisit Sohn’s phrase, their well-being is key to the successes of their children and the communities in which their children live, as well as their own personal success. It seems that stereotypes, the lack of resources available, and the mental health problems associated with those who suffer from poverty are all factors that work together to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Dearing, Taylor, and McCartney, “Implications,” 1376.

<sup>26</sup> See discussion in Chapter One of this thesis.

the feelings of helplessness that it engenders. Decreasing poverty levels among Appalachian women would likely also decrease their risk of depression; but, as Wadsworth and Berger point out rather understatedly, “Given that eradicating poverty has proven to be rather difficult, preventing psychopathology by teaching how to cope with poverty’s stress and manage one’s involuntary stress reactivity may be a viable step toward breaking the cycle of poverty.”<sup>27</sup> From this standpoint of proposed teaching of coping mechanisms, I will examine what I consider an alternative coping tool in dealing with poverty-related stress—teaching creative expression through the arts.

### Historic Endeavors in Community Arts in Appalachia

Some historic examples of Appalachian community arts organizations were discussed in Chapter 3. Jane S. Becker’s book, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940*, further illuminates some of the craft-revival efforts in Appalachia in the early part of the twentieth century. Becker notes, “The 1910s and 1920s saw the development of numerous craft programs in Southern Appalachia—many centered in schools, missions, and community centers.”<sup>28</sup> She cites a number of such organizations and the women who were instrumental in establishing them, including the Hindman (Kentucky) Settlement School and Katherine Pettit’s Department of Fireside Industries there, as well as Olive Dame Campbell’s John C. Campbell Folk School craft guild; many of the schools of the day focused on weaving and basketry.<sup>29</sup> Wilson also discusses craft schools in the mountains in *Textile Art from Southern Appalachia: The Quiet Work of Women*, which features individual weavers such as Harriet Howard Bright of Harlan, Kentucky, who “completed her first coverlet at the Pine

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<sup>27</sup> Wadsworth and Berger, “Adolescents,” 69.

<sup>28</sup> Becker, *Selling Tradition*, 67.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

Mountain Settlement School in Eastern Kentucky and later earned her degree in home economics at Berea College, in Berea, Kentucky, by working in their crafts program.”<sup>30</sup>

Bright’s participation in Berea’s “Fireside Industries,” which allowed students to earn money to support their college tuition,<sup>31</sup> is key to understanding the thrust of many similar community craft endeavors of the early to mid-twentieth century. Many of these efforts, begun in most cases by women social reformers from middle-class backgrounds, were intended, at least in part, to involve Appalachian craftspersons in generating income by selling their wares through the organizations to consumers in the rest of the country.<sup>32</sup> As Becker and Wilson note, craft programs involving community members were also intended by their organizers to rescue what they perceived as dying customs among mountain people.<sup>33</sup> Becker points out, however, that the reformers’ efforts to preserve traditions often conflicted with the reality of life in the mountains; she further argues that “although craft producers engaged by the mountain benevolent agencies found in the craft training they received a useful means of earning some cash income, they also encountered constraints upon their work imposed by gendered division of labor, control of production and design by industry leaders, and a romantic interpretation of the mountain handicraft worker.”<sup>34</sup> These historic endeavors in community arts organizations illustrate the conflicted nature of social and arts reform in Appalachia as well as women’s key role in the movements. Countless organizations aimed to assist mountain women and their communities by helping them make and sell craft items for income, but at the same time women reformers and their supporters often promoted images of the residents they professed to serve as backward folk

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<sup>30</sup> Wilson, *Textile Art from Southern Appalachia*, 92.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See for example, Becker, *Selling Tradition*, 41-71.

<sup>33</sup> Becker, *Selling Tradition*, 58, and Wilson, *Textile Art from Southern Appalachia*, 92.

<sup>34</sup> Becker, 67.

in need of civilization. The problem of negative representations of the poor persists among charitable organizations today and will be discussed further in later sections of this chapter.

### Contemporary Appalachian Community Organizations Devoted to Creative Expression

Appalachian women have been deeply involved in the arts in their communities. While early twentieth century endeavors often concerned weaving, quilting, basketry, or other crafts, today women in Appalachia are involved in a variety of artistic enterprises in their community arts organizations, including “traditional” work such as weaving but also extending to filmmaking, poetry, and theater work, among other endeavors. Often a community arts organization is the venue for such creative work, and many Central Appalachian towns and counties are home to these often small but usually vibrant and active centers. While the following section could easily consist of a lengthy listing of such organizations, time and space do not allow for a fair examination of each Appalachian community arts center. Instead, the following paragraphs examine a small sample of these organizations since 1960, their roles in their communities, and women’s involvement in them in order to illustrate what non-profit arts organizations in Appalachia have already accomplished and what they have yet to achieve.

Just as women from outside the region came into Appalachian in the early twentieth century to encourage Appalachian people to continue or take up certain craft traditions, women in the latter part of the century also came to the region to nurture creativity and to effect social change through the arts. One such example is a group of former Glenmary Sisters who formed the Federation of Communities in Service, or FOCIS, to conduct community-organizing work in Appalachia.<sup>35</sup> In their book *Mountain Sisters: From Convent to Community in Appalachia*, Helen M. Lewis and Monica Appleby note, “The late 1960s and 1970s were the beginnings of

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<sup>35</sup> Lewis and Appleby, *Mountain Sisters*, xx-xxi.

the Appalachian cultural revival movement, and the FOCIS ARTS program became a source of support and a participant in this.”<sup>36</sup> The women organizers of FOCIS ARTS teamed with a number of communities and organizations to encourage community work in the arts, sparking a variety of festivals and fairs as well as new organizations, including some that continue today.<sup>37</sup> While the organization provided a starting point for many offshoots, “It underscored the importance of helping communities develop projects from within while it strengthened the paradigm—first developed on mission in Glenmary—of art as an essential aspect of community development. . . .”<sup>38</sup> The organization helped provide access to art for community members and helped some women participants to realize the monetary value of their artwork.<sup>39</sup>

While the former Glenmary sisters saw the potential for community development through community participation in the arts, artists at Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky, saw the potential for social change in the community through their art.<sup>40</sup> Through its films, radio programming, and other projects, the organization focuses on problems and concerns facing communities in Appalachia; a number of these projects are directed by women and/or are about Appalachian women. For example, the film *Fast Food Women*, directed by Anne Lewis, illustrates the plight of women seeking employment in eastern Kentucky, while a number of films directed by women at Appalshop feature individual women who have impacted their communities in meaningful ways, including *Evelyn Williams*, the story of an African-American

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 127-143.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 129-130.

<sup>40</sup> While Appalshop is an arts organization, it seems that its main focus is upon activism, albeit through the arts.

Appalachian woman.<sup>41</sup> While Appalshop's many projects involving a variety of media are intended to educate community members and help them tell their stories, which in turn reach a national and international audience, according to the organization's Web site,<sup>42</sup> other groups and individuals seek to illuminate the lives and struggles of community members on a somewhat smaller but no less important scale.

For example, Appalachian poet and playwright Jo Carson has helped to orchestrate the Swamp Gravy Project in Colquitt, Georgia, which focuses on the story of a community in a theatrical production. In her chapter "'Room is Made for Whoever': Jo Carson and the Creation of Dialogical Community," Jennifer Mooney writes, "Carson has helped bring a community's collected oral histories to the stage, [where] the actors 'are themselves, in costumes that suggest an older time, telling stories that come from other people. . . .'"<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Mooney points out that in telling stories such as those of abused women, Carson's community theater actors initiate a "healing process," which suggests the possibility of the therapeutic nature of the arts in communities.<sup>44</sup> Other organizations, including the Appalachian Women's Alliance, an organization dedicated to examining women's issues in the mountains, also support the idea of cathartic creative experiences. The Alliance offers a number of creative opportunities for women, including participation in the Clothesline Project in which women paint T-shirts with

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<sup>41</sup> Appalshop, "Appalshop General Store," Appalshop, [http://appalshop.org/store/index.php?main\\_page=product\\_info&cPath=44&products\\_id=273](http://appalshop.org/store/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=44&products_id=273) (accessed October 4, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., "Misson," <http://appalshop.org/about.php> (accessed October 4, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> Jennifer Mooney, "'Room is Made for Whoever': Jo Carson and the Creation of Dialogical Community," in *Her Words: Diverse Voices in Contemporary Women's Poetry*, ed. Felicia Mitchell (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 52. Mooney quotes Carson in this passage.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 56.

images of violence in order to confront the abuse in their lives.<sup>45</sup> The organization also features a traveling performance production, *Mountain Women Rising* that highlights “the struggles and triumphs of Appalachian women from diverse cultures and communities” and informs audiences “about the Alliance's work for human rights and dignity, economic justice, and safety for women and children.”<sup>46</sup>

Still other organizations within Appalachia’s borders encourage individual women and organizations to continue or begin feminist artistic expression. The Kentucky Foundation for Women offers grant opportunities for women artists and their community arts endeavors to “promote positive social change by supporting varied feminist expression in the arts.”<sup>47</sup> In an article for *CityBeat*, foundation director Judi Jennings said, “We’ve seen over and over again how, with a little bit of money, these small grants can make a big difference not only in the women artists but how their community thinks about women, how they think about change, how they think about beauty and how they think about art.”<sup>48</sup> The foundation has granted funds to organizations such as Appalshop and the Brick House Community Center of Louisville, Kentucky for their feminist art projects but also has awarded funds to numerous individual

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<sup>45</sup> Appalachian Women’s Alliance, “Outreach and Engagement,” Appalachian Women’s Alliance, <http://www.appalachianwomen.org/caravan.htm> (accessed October 4, 2008); and The Clothesline Project, <http://www.now.org/issues/violence/clothes.html> (accessed October 4, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., “Education and Enlightenment,” <http://www.appalachianwomen.org/workshops.html> (accessed October 4, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> Kentucky Foundation for Women, “Home,” Kentucky Foundation for Women, <http://www.kfw.org/> (accessed October 4, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Chris Charlson, “Art meets feminism through the Kentucky Foundation for Women,” *CityBeat.com*, May 7, 2008, <http://citybeat.com/cincinnati/article-4205-cover-story-kentucky-woman.html> (accessed September 23, 2008).

women artists working on projects including one-woman performance pieces and documentary films.<sup>49</sup>

Individual communities in the Appalachian region are also home to a variety of community arts centers where women's issues are perhaps not the focus but where women participate as artists or directors and in a variety of other capacities. For example, David Appalachian Crafts in David, Kentucky, according to its Web site, was "Founded in 1972, as a way to help area residents to improve the quality of their lives, [sic] through its activities over 65 people are able to supplement their income;"<sup>50</sup> it is currently under the direction of Sister Ruth Ann Iwanski.<sup>51</sup> While the center provides local quilters and other artists the opportunity to sell their wares for income, it also offers community members opportunities for free art instruction, although the classes are only offered once a month or in some cases twice a month.<sup>52</sup> Another eastern Kentucky arts organization is located in Hindman, the Appalachian Artisan Center. The center is part of an economic development plan for the area and is a resource for local artists to market and sell their work.<sup>53</sup> While this organization is devoted to the cultural and artistic development of the region, it appears to offer no community art resources to the general public beyond gallery showings and artist visits.

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<sup>49</sup> Kentucky Foundation for Women, "Grant Recipients," Kentucky Foundation for Women, <http://www.kfw.org/grrec.html> (accessed October 4, 2008).

<sup>50</sup> David Appalachian Crafts, "History," David Appalachian Crafts, <http://www.davidappalachiancrafts.com/ourhistory.html> (accessed October 4, 2008).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., "David Appalachian Crafts Information Page," [http://www.davidappalachiancrafts.com/contact\\_us.html](http://www.davidappalachiancrafts.com/contact_us.html) (accessed October 4, 2008).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., "Home," <http://www.davidappalachiancrafts.com/index.html> (accessed October 4, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> Appalachian Artisan Center, "About the Appalachian Artisan Center," Appalachian Artisan Center, [http://www.artisancenter.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=29](http://www.artisancenter.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=29) (accessed October 4, 2008).

A similar situation exists in another eastern Kentucky community arts organization. The Blue County Artisan Center<sup>54</sup> offers First Friday events each month, featuring lectures by visiting or community artists and an open house of the center's facilities and artists' work. The community is invited to these free events at the beginning of each month. The center occasionally offers weekend workshops, for which members of the public must pay to participate, and signs on the door of the building announce that classes are available. But Blue County Artisan Center director Bill Brown indicated in an interview that it is difficult for the center to offer regular classes because of a lack of space in its narrow downtown building, even though the individual artists who rent studio space at the center sometimes offer small classes in their studios.<sup>55</sup> In fact, Brown pointed out, the center is scheduled to relocate soon into a larger space, and the goal for the center in the new building is to become an educational hub for the community.<sup>56</sup>

The artisan center is a small organization, however, and it, like many other small arts organizations, has little funding with which to implement new projects. Brown cites a lack of adequate funding as the center's greatest obstacle in achieving its goals and making an impact in the community, but he says that the organization plans to begin seeking grants for a free after-school arts program for area children and teens once it relocates to a new building.<sup>57</sup> When asked if any part of the educational programming planned for the expanded center will include free classes for adults, Brown responded that while funding for at-risk children is often readily available from government and other funding agencies, it is nearly impossible to find funding for arts programming for adults; he attributes the lack of interest in such programs by funders to

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<sup>54</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>55</sup> Bill Brown (pseudonym), interview by author, Blue County Artisan Center, October 6, 2008.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

greater emphasis being placed upon job-training programs and other work-related educational opportunities for adults.<sup>58</sup> Brown also points out that the center has had a considerable community demand for art classes, which indicates that despite the small size of the organization it is important to the community and has the potential for growth and increased support from residents of the area. While small community arts organizations like Blue County Artisan Center aim to educate the public or provide cultural experiences in whatever ways they can for a low cost, a number of much larger institutions focus solely on providing arts and crafts experiences to as wide an audience as can afford to participate.

#### Elite Arts and Crafts Schools: Non-Profit and Non-Accessible

A number of non-profit, community-oriented arts and crafts schools exist throughout the United States; these schools aim to reach an audience of both experienced artists and beginners in the arts. While such schools claim a policy of inclusiveness by inviting all levels of artistic ability to participate in their programs, which often range from ceramics and fiber arts to painting and sculpture, the registration and course fees involved likely preclude a large segment of society from enrolling in the classes. For example, the Southwest School of Art and Craft in San Antonio, Texas, offers a variety of ceramics classes for adults, but the tuition for the fall 2008 handbuilding class is \$285—a sum that poor adults likely could not afford.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, while the school offers community outreach programs, these are targeted almost entirely for children, with the exception of one free family art class, which seems to involve parents more as

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Southwest School of Art and Craft, “Basic Skills: Introduction to Handbuilding,” Southwest School of Art and Craft, [http://www.swschool.org/classes\\_detail.php?id=1423](http://www.swschool.org/classes_detail.php?id=1423) (accessed September 29, 2008).

caregivers of the child-students than as active students themselves.<sup>60</sup> In Appalachia, the Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina offers a wide variety of classes, including ceramics, but the base tuition fees for one week of summer 2008 classes is \$425, not including room and board, application fees, and other expenses.<sup>61</sup> Again, the cost of one course seems prohibitive for many prospective students. As with the Southwest School of Art and Craft, Penland offers community outreach programs that are described on Penland's Web site: "The Teaching Artist Initiative provides art programs in the Mitchell County schools and helps artists develop their teaching skills. Summer art camps offer a variety of children's activities led by area artists. Each year on the first Saturday in March, Penland's community open house welcomes hundreds of visitors into the studios for demonstrations and hands-on activities."<sup>62</sup> Therefore, it seems that the extent of Penland's efforts to involve adults in art education free of charge is one day's open house event in the spring.

Another rather ironic example of a financially exclusive craft school is the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina. The school was founded in 1925 by Olive Dame Campbell after her husband John's death; after visiting and studying Appalachia and its people, the two "were hopeful that the quality of life could be improved by education, and in turn, wanted to preserve and share with the rest of the world the wonderful crafts, techniques and tools that mountain people used in every day life," according the school's Web site.<sup>63</sup> If the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., "Classes: Youth, Saturday Morning Discovery and Mobile Arts Program," [http://www.swschool.org/classes\\_youth.php#saturday\\_morning](http://www.swschool.org/classes_youth.php#saturday_morning) (accessed September 29, 2008).

<sup>61</sup> Penland School of Crafts, "Fees Summer 2008," Penland School of Crafts, <http://penland.org/classes/fees.html> (accessed September 29, 2008).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., "Community Education," [http://penland.org/programs/community\\_education.html](http://penland.org/programs/community_education.html) (accessed September 29, 2008).

<sup>63</sup> John C. Campbell Folk School, "A Unique History," John C. Campbell Folk School, [http://www.folkschool.org/index.php?section=articles&article\\_cat\\_id=5&article\\_id=5](http://www.folkschool.org/index.php?section=articles&article_cat_id=5&article_id=5) (accessed September 30, 2008).

founders of the school were concerned with educating the people of Appalachia, they might be surprised today to find that the education provided by the school is priced beyond what many low-income Appalachian citizens could afford—one five-day ceramics class in October 2008 costs \$478.<sup>64</sup> But a section of the Web site called “For Locals” notes that residents who live near the school “are eligible for a 50% discount for any regular course on a space-available, stand-by basis. The discount may not be available for certain classes and does not apply to the cost of materials for a class.”<sup>65</sup> While the Web site proclaims, “Local people donated their resources, time and land to get the Folk School started—the local tuition policy is an attempt to give back to the communities that helped start the school,”<sup>66</sup> it seems that the stipulations attached to the “discount” for residents almost guarantees their exclusion from the school’s activities, rather than their inclusion to reward them for their ancestors’ devotion to the John C. Campbell Folk School.

Penland also offers some scholarship opportunities to help with the cost of tuition, but the intensive nature of the classes—which are at least week-long, workshop style endeavors that require students to live on the premises—prohibits the participation of individuals who are unable to leave jobs and families.<sup>67</sup> The limitations for the working poor, particularly women with children, seem obvious, and also seem to defy Penland’s mission of being an “egalitarian”

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., “Pots That Work: Beginning to Intermediate Pottery,” [http://www.folkschool.org/index.php?section=class\\_detail&class\\_id=2373](http://www.folkschool.org/index.php?section=class_detail&class_id=2373) (accessed October 1, 2008).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., “Local Tuition Policy,” [http://www.folkschool.org/index.php?section=articles&article\\_cat\\_id=20&article\\_id=78](http://www.folkschool.org/index.php?section=articles&article_cat_id=20&article_id=78) (accessed October 2, 2008).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Penland School of Craft, “Fees Summer 2008,” Penland School of Craft, <http://penland.org/classes/fees.html> (accessed September 29, 2008).

organization that nurtures education and creativity.<sup>68</sup> While schools such as Penland are certainly more accessible than universities or private art schools to non-artist individuals who may lack professional training but who want exposure to the arts, there remains an air of exclusivity and elitism to these non-profit organizations that charge high fees for involvement in their programs. As noted in Chapter 3, potter Cynthia Bringle acknowledges that Penland offers students and faculty an excellent sense of community and communal art education, but this enriching community experience is only accessible to those who can afford the tuition and free time to attend such schools.

### Analysis and Critique

The examples of Southwest School of Art and Craft and Penland School of Crafts make it clear that a primary segment of the American population—low-income adults—is left out of many creative community education endeavors. While organizations such as non-profit crafts schools and others offer an endless array of after-school, summer, and weekend opportunities for children and teens of varying socioeconomic backgrounds to participate in the arts, parents and other adults who struggle to make ends meet are ignored, their need for a creative outlet or education apparently outweighed by the needs of their children. Indeed, the neglect of low-income adults' need for access to the arts is evident in a non-profits listing of an eastern Kentucky newspaper. The Pike County *Appalachian New-Express* often includes a non-profits news section in its pages; a July 2008 edition provides a list of approximately 71 agencies in five counties and the services they offer, including assistance with obtaining food, shelter, clothing, heating, job skills, abuse counseling, and other necessities.<sup>69</sup> None of the agencies listed appear

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., "Mission," <http://penland.org/about/mission.html> (accessed September 29, 2008).

<sup>69</sup> "Need Help? These Agencies Are Working for You," *Appalachian News-Express*, July 3-4, 2008.

to offer any cultural experiences or non-job related educational experiences. The implication is that poor adults should be concerned with feeding, clothing, and providing shelter for their families, while obtaining the skills required for gainful employment that will remove them from the assistance rolls of non-profit agencies.

The emphasis on such priorities is also evident in a number of articles from *Appalachia Magazine: Journal of the Appalachian Regional Commission*. For example, the article “Leveraging Hope: The New Opportunity School for Women,” by Fred D. Baldwin, focuses on how the school, located in Berea, Kentucky, provides women with valuable job-training and life-skills education.<sup>70</sup> While standard resume-writing courses are part of the curriculum, the school also offers Appalachian literature and creative writing courses; but the focus of the program as a whole is to prepare women to join the workforce.<sup>71</sup> Two other similar articles by Baldwin highlight the organizations Sarah’s Place Resource Center of Elliot County, Kentucky, and Women Initiative Networking Groups (WINGS), based in Berea, Kentucky, both of which offer courses and resources key to introducing women to the workplace, higher education, and small business development.<sup>72</sup> While programs such as Sarah’s Place and WINGS differ from traditional aid agencies that simply provide free or low-cost food, clothing, or other services, specifically in that they provide an environment in which women can be proactive in their own life change and success, they are further examples of organizations that specifically emphasize economic improvement for women.

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<sup>70</sup> Fred D. Baldwin, “Leveraging Hope: The New Opportunity School for Women,” *Appalachia Magazine: Journal of the Appalachian Regional Commission* (2004-2005), <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=2723> (accessed September 30, 2008).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., under “Achieving Results.”

<sup>72</sup> Fred D. Baldwin, “Sarah’s Place: Transforming Lives,” *Appalachia Magazine* (January-April 1999), <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=1301> (accessed September 30, 2008); and “WINGS: Women Entrepreneurs Take Flight,” *Appalachia Magazine* (May-August 1997), <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=1345> (accessed September 30, 2008).

Even many of the community arts organizations in the region, both historic and contemporary, focus on the financial potential of art-making. As noted above, for example, the David Appalachian Crafts organization aims to provide supplemental income for the local artists who sell their work there, just as the craft revivalists of the early twentieth century intended to put poor mountain people to work to help them make money. While much economic development is clearly needed in many Appalachian communities, the continued emphasis on financial needs among the poor, even by cultural organizations, reaffirms limitations placed upon whom deserves access to creative expression and to what end. Organizations in the region that encourage individuals to make art for money reinforce conceptions of the supremacy of economic advancement among the priorities the poor are “allowed” to address in their own lives.

These organizations send a message—however unintentional—that the poor are merely laborers rather than creative, independent artists and human beings. Supporting socially-acceptable priorities for the poor is one of a number of ways non-profit organizations exploit the populations they aim to serve. Diana George’s chapter, “Changing the Face of Poverty: Nonprofits and the Problem of Representation,” illustrates the negative depictions of the poor used by non-profit organizations to encourage the public to give to their cause. For example, George cites a Children, Inc. ad in the *New Yorker*:

“You don’t have to leave your own country to find third-world poverty.”  
Alongside the ad copy, from a black-and-white full-page photo, a young girl in torn and ill-fitting clothes looks directly at the viewer. The copy continues, “Just travel along the hillsides and down through the valleys where the Appalachian coal mines have been shut down. Sad, hungry faces of little children, like Amy’s, will haunt you.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Diana George, “Changing the Face of Poverty: Nonprofits and the Problem of Representation,” in *Popular Literacy: Studies in Cultural Practices and Poetics*, ed. John Trimbur, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 209-210. The date of the issue of the magazine is not given.

George's examples, including the Children, Inc. ad that applies specifically to Appalachia, show that non-profits use images of the poor appearing stereotypically downtrodden to appeal to potential donors. These images, George argues, "result in charity but not activism—not in real structural change or an understanding of the systems that remain in place to keep many in poverty even while the culture at large is a prosperous one."<sup>74</sup> To apply this argument to the arts and crafts organizations in Appalachia that encourage the poor to sell their work for "supplemental income," one could argue that the main selling point of organizations such as David Appalachian Crafts is that the crafts are made by the poor or needy—perhaps customers would not be enticed to buy a hand-sewn Christmas ornament or quilt from a middle-class woman with a well-paying job. The artists are to some degree, then, workers serving the needs of elite consumers, rather than individuals who control their own creative activity.<sup>75</sup> Whether intentionally or unintentionally, such organizations both promote novelty or otherness of Appalachian crafts and Appalachian people and thereby allow existing class and social structures to remain in place.

Yet arts organizations that promote real social change are sometimes seen as threatening by community members, and a variety of obstacles often stand in the way of success for community organizations of all kinds. For example, in his dissertation "Discourses of Sustainability: Grassroots Organizations and Sustainable Community Development in Central Appalachia," Christopher Scott Rice discusses problems faced by Appalshop organizers in 2000 as they tried to implement a new community project involving creating a public space for the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>75</sup> The artist as worker for elite consumers was also true in the 1930s craft revivals. See for example Becker, *Selling Tradition*, and Lears, *No Place of Grace*.

community to learn about environmental issues through art and design elements.<sup>76</sup> He writes that a planning meeting location for community members was held away from Appalshop headquarters because “Some people involved in the process might not be comfortable coming to Appalshop, [organizer Kara] said, because ‘they don’t want to be associated with it,’ because of its perception among many local residents as consisting of mostly liberal ‘hippies.’”<sup>77</sup> Rice further highlights a problem that almost any non-profit organization faces regardless of its goals—getting people involved. He explains the difficulty of gaining support by citing an organizer’s lament: “Resignedly, Kara said that projects like hers can be difficult to get off the ground here because so many people are already involved with so many things, they seem like they’re overwhelmed by it all.”<sup>78</sup> A similar problem arises when organizations seek public donations for funding their programs; there are many organizations and a limited number of people who are able and willing to support them with their own limited resources. The problem of organizations’ competing for funding and the attention of a public bombarded with pleas from countless institutions is part of the reason for negative representations of the poor, as illustrated in George’s work. She writes, “In a culture saturated by the image, how else do we convince Americans that . . . there is a real need out there? The solution for most nonprofits has been to show the despair,” with images of hungry children and deplorable living conditions, among others, which stereotype the poor as somehow degraded or “other” from the rest of society.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Christopher Scott Rice, “Thinking Outside the Box: Sustainability in Letcher County, Kentucky,” in “Discourses of Sustainability: Grassroots Organizations and Sustainable Community Development in Central Appalachia,” (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2002), 151.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>79</sup> George, “Changing the Face of Poverty,” 210.

Despite problems obtaining funding, community support, and acceptance, a number of organizations continue to offer services and promote positive change in Appalachia. Organizations such as WINGS and NOSW encourage women to be strong, educated, and independent through their programs. One participant in NOSW said, “It’s given me the courage and self-esteem to know that I’m intelligent . . . after being told for so many years that I wasn’t.”<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, programs like NOSW’s promote community involvement among their students, and Fred. D. Baldwin writes that “Two messages are explicit: you should give something back to your community; and, when you do, you can make a difference;” the school reports that half of their graduates are involved in their communities and most are registered voters.<sup>81</sup> Still other historic endeavors illustrate the willingness of Appalachian communities to rally around social causes, and to do so with a creative bent. In their chapter, “Sowing on the Mountain: Nurturing Cultural Roots and Creativity for Community Change,” Guy and Candie Carawan discuss their work in Appalachian Kentucky on behalf of the Highlander Center (based outside Knoxville, Tennessee) to address problems associated with coal mining and other social and political problems during the 1970s. The Carawans assert that community leaders in the region were interested in using music and dance to help address the area’s problems and to build community.<sup>82</sup> They argue, “Our experience has taught us that music and other powerful cultural forms have a lot to do with resistance and survival. . . . Singing together, even in the face of terrible difficulties, can be empowering.”<sup>83</sup> Building upon the traditions of grassroots

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<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Baldwin, “Leveraging Hope,” under “Achieving Results.”

<sup>81</sup> Baldwin, “Leveraging Hope,” under “Promoting Community Work.”

<sup>82</sup> Guy and Candie Carawan, “Sowing on the Mountain: Nurturing Cultural Roots and Creativity for Community Change,” in *Fighting Back in Appalachia*, 247.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 259. The Carawans also discuss the power of song at rallies during the Civil Rights movement in the American South, which they wanted to incorporate into their work in Appalachia. See for example page 248.

community organizers who have long been willing to seek creative methods for changing the social and political conditions that oppress them, and further building upon the positive life outlook promoted by women's programs like NOSW, the following section addresses the problems and concerns highlighted in the preceding analysis to present a rationale for a non-profit pottery program for women in Appalachia.

#### Rationale for a Non-Profit Pottery Program for Women in Appalachia

The analysis and examples cited above make clear that the poor lack access to the arts, particularly to creating and owning their own art. "Art for art's sake," rather than for financial gain, is especially reserved for wealthier members of society who can afford to take lessons for enjoyment, to keep and appreciate their own work, and to buy that of others. I argue that to be truly successful at achieving the goals of women's empowerment and self-fulfillment that will be discussed in the following paragraphs, such a program should focus solely on the creative experience of making pottery and the relationships formed among students and teachers rather than on any goal to generate income from participants' works of art. Therefore, I propose that a non-profit pottery program for low-income women in Appalachia can offer personal empowerment to participants in three particular ways: by subverting individualistic worldviews to engender communal support systems and creativity such as those embraced by some Native American women; by subverting social conceptions of who should have access to art-making experiences; and by subverting stereotypes of Appalachia as a region devoid of culture and art. Finally, the following rationale and proposal for a pottery program rather than any other art program (although any arts experience is valuable) is based upon the apparent lack of opportunities for women to be exposed to pottery-making in Appalachia. While some of the organizations highlighted above feature artists who make and sell pottery, the lack of clay classes

available through community organizations makes pottery seem particularly inaccessible, likely because of the time and expense involved in providing the materials and equipment necessary to the process.<sup>84</sup>

First, building upon the communal and artistic experience of many Native American cultures, a non-profit pottery program for poor women in Appalachia could address problems of mental stress and depression associated with poverty. While Chapter 3 noted several examples of Native American women potters who find personal and communal fulfillment through their participation in their people's matrilineal tradition of pottery, an article called "The Impact of Communal-Mastery Versus Self-Mastery on Emotional Outcomes During Stressful Conditions: A Prospective Study of Native American Women" indicates that some Native American women are also well equipped to handle life stressors because of their collectivist culture.<sup>85</sup> The authors note that Native Americans "living on Indian Reservations are likely to be exposed to a high probability of unemployment and widespread economic disadvantages;"<sup>86</sup> the economic condition of Native Americans, then, is quite similar to that of women in Appalachia, as shown in Chapter 2. The authors of the study on Native American women defined communal-mastery "as a sense that individuals can overcome life challenges and obstacles through and because of their being interwoven in a close, social network."<sup>87</sup> The results of the study showed that

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<sup>84</sup> I am specifically aware of the absence of pottery classes from a community education program in eastern Kentucky for which I am teaching a pottery class this fall. The program organizers indicated that there had been a community desire for clay classes over the years, but the absence of a kiln available for community use made the classes impossible. Because I was able to volunteer the use of my personal kiln for class purposes, I am able to offer and teach the class.

<sup>85</sup> Stevan E. Hobfoll, Anita Jackson, Ivonne Hobfoll, Charles A. Pierce, and Sara Young, "The Impact of Communal-Mastery Versus Self-Mastery on Emotional Outcomes During Stressful Conditions: A Prospective Study of Native American Women," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 30, no. 6 (December 2002): 853-871.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 855.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 856.

“Native American women who were higher in communal-mastery reported less negative effect of increasing stress levels than women who were lower on communal-mastery.”<sup>88</sup> By extension, women in Appalachia who suffer depression and other negative mental effects directly related to their poverty could see health benefits from involvement with other women in a creative learning experience that fosters communal relationships and draws from the rich cultural heritages of Native American women potters.

Second, drawing from the critique of elite craft schools’ educational outreach programs highlighted earlier in this chapter, pottery instruction should not only be made available to all social classes of women, but to women of all ages rather than only children. The graduate work of East Tennessee State University graduate Ben Byers, Jr. on teaching art classes to senior adults in rural Southern Appalachia highlights the importance of making art experiences available to all age groups in society.<sup>89</sup> As Byers notes in his conclusion, “During the implementation of Project Senior Art the study’s population clearly demonstrated a willingness to participate in artmaking when given an appropriate opportunity. Those adults who participated showed themselves to be enthusiastic learners and they were highly desirous of continuing their interests in art even after Project Senior Art came to its end.”<sup>90</sup> In other words, the demand for adult art classes exists, and as Byers’ work further explains, is beneficial both to participants in the classes and to the community where the participants live.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, a non-profit pottery program designed specifically for adult women in Appalachia would likely have

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 865.

<sup>89</sup> Ben Byers, Jr., “Involving a Study Population of Senior Adults in Art: An Intergenerational Teaching Approach,” (culminating project, East Tennessee State University, May 2005).

<sup>90</sup> Byers, 77.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 78.

eager participants, given the lack of organizations extending their art lessons to low-income adults.

Third, building upon the concept of the importance of place to Appalachian women as illustrated in Sohn's work and others, organizations that promote community and provide an environment for positive community exchange are vital to the life of rural communities that often suffer from out-migration due to lack of jobs and other factors as noted in Chapter 2. Lewis and Appleby have noted the importance of the arts during the 1960s and 1970s in Appalachia, where "FOCIS members saw the possibility of using this creativity for community development, personal growth, and a means of improving Appalachian residents' self-image," which was marred at the time by negative stereotypical images that fueled the War on Poverty.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, the Carawans' chapter on social movements including song and dance in Appalachia, the many arts organizations that are based in Appalachia, and the countless individual women artists who reside in the mountains as illustrated in Chapter 3, are all evidence of the strong presence of the arts in the region, despite popular conceptions of the area as somehow lacking artistic appreciation and culture. While a pottery program for women in Appalachia would by its mere existence help to debunk further the myths of Appalachian cultural depravity and backwardness, it could also subvert stereotypes of women and the region and offer a venue for empowerment through its unique (and, therefore, to some degree marginal) position as an arts organization for low-income adult women as opposed to children or wealthy adults. As Virginia Seitz points out, "Marginalization, then, can also provide women the position on the edges of society that allows for critique; it can be the place to imagine more just and creative solutions to the problems of

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<sup>92</sup> Lewis and Appleby, 127.

development.”<sup>93</sup> A pottery program for poor women in Appalachia could, therefore, offer not only a venue through which participants could take pride in themselves and in a region so often stereotyped and dismissed for its supposed otherness but also become an environment in which women work together to solve the problems facing their communities in creative ways, as Seitz suggests. The combined elements of communal activity, fair access to pottery education, and appreciation of place can provide a positive environment that will foster women’s personal creativity and empowerment through the subversion of disparaging social conceptions about the poor.

Finally, the women’s pottery program should take a format through which it can offer a variety of courses, available free of charge, to women on a number of days and for extended periods to achieve the maximum benefit. An ideal schedule would include, for example, a hand-building class on Thursdays that meets for one or two hours per session and that lasts the course of a normal school semester, as well as a throwing class on Tuesdays with a similar duration and schedule. During this length of time students would have an opportunity not only to grow in their skill level, but also to learn about some of the history of the ceramic medium and be exposed to the tradition of women potters in the United States, as illustrated in Chapter 3. By providing an extended course duration (as opposed to the weeklong intensives often offered at more elite crafts schools), participants will have time to develop individual creative styles and confidently make work in which they can take pride. These are key elements in engendering empowerment and strong self-esteem among students in any art program. A semester-long program would further enable students to develop meaningful relationships among other students

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<sup>93</sup> Seitz, “Introduction,” 7.

and teachers, which the research presented in Chapter 3 and above indicates is just as important as the creative process, and indeed an integral part of it.

To address adequately the problem of negative representations of the poor set forth by non-profit organizations, as discussed in the analysis section of this chapter, any promotion of the program and its services must feature positive images of Appalachian women in order to refute negative stereotypes of the poor and Appalachia. Furthermore, in the vein of the FOCIS ARTS organizations and their dedication to community members' involvement in their own local development and project implementation, a balanced coalition of Appalachian "outsiders" and "insiders" must work together to implement the project to ensure its validity and effectiveness in the community it aims to serve. Therefore, while my personal goals in the proposed program are both to teach and help organize and build the program, another aspect of my participation would be to recruit teachers from a variety of backgrounds and to help current students become future teachers in order to escape socioeconomic class distinctions between teachers and students. Finally, the non-profit program must provide access to resources for students who show an intense interest in ceramics and wish to learn more about the craft and marketing of their work than the scope of the program allows. Therefore, the program should include a "library" component to which teachers and students contribute information about arts and crafts festivals, workshops, and further education, as well as information about accessing financial assistance to participate in additional opportunities. The informational aspect, then, will allow students who have an interest in pursuing ceramic arts as a means of income to follow those interests rather.

Admittedly, launching such a program includes many obstacles. A facility with adequate equipment would be needed to house the operation; program participants would need access to free or affordable childcare during their classes; and potential students would have to be

identified and recruited for involvement. Perhaps the greatest obstacle for any non-profit organization is obtaining adequate funding, and while at least one potential source has been identified in this chapter (the Kentucky Foundation for Women), it is not the goal of this thesis to outline logistics of organizing and funding the program proposed here. While I leave the details and exact structure of the program for another project, I hope that I have provided a starting point of discussion for such a program and illuminated the rationale for implementing a non-profit pottery program for women in Appalachia. It is my belief that the positive community relationships and personal fulfillment available to wealthy members of society through involvement in pottery and other art classes should be available to women of all socioeconomic backgrounds and, in fact, could be most beneficial to those who are so often denied the opportunity for creative expression.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### Implications of the Research

Women suffering from poverty in Appalachia lack access to many basic resources, as illustrated in Chapter 2, but as Chapter 4 reveals, they also lack access to cultural and creative activities, including ceramics education. Arts and crafts schools are often priced beyond reach for the poor, and artistic endeavors are furthermore deemed unnecessary for the poor by the rest of society and even non-profit organizations. Providing access to pottery instruction for poor women in the region could greatly improve their lives by allowing them to experience the positive community environment and personal satisfaction that arts education fosters. Yet, the evidence of self-fulfillment and community connections engendered by pottery-making in the lives of women artists in Chapter 3 does not mesh with the evidence of the exclusive nature of ceramic arts education in Chapter 4. Appalachian community organizations that do encourage low-income adults to create art focus primarily on the potential economic benefits of such creativity, which seldom is the focus of arts education for wealthier adults. If wealthy adult members of society, and even poor children, should be allowed access to arts and crafts education through community education programs and schools (indeed, these groups are encouraged to take advantage of the relaxing environments and positive influences provided by elite schools) poor adults should not be excluded and discouraged from benefiting in the same ways.

In the preceding chapters I have discussed stereotypes about Appalachian women and the poor, but this examination has illuminated yet another way in which the poor are limited and confined by the stereotypes placed upon them. Society's restrictions on which activities are

appropriate for the poor further limit how poor members of society are able to develop and excel as individuals. While a non-profit pottery program for poor women in Appalachia would certainly benefit participants and quite possibly change their lives in meaningful ways, perhaps even empowering them to escape from poverty by allowing them to develop new self-perceptions and community interactions, such a program would do little to change key ways in which poverty is supported and perpetuated in Appalachia and the nation. Perhaps the greatest need for change lies in the minds of the “haves,” not the “have-nots,” to borrow Cynthia Duncan’s terminology. Individuals who suffer from poverty are aware of how they are limited—price tags on everything from clothing to health care tell them that certain goods and services are not intended for them. It is more difficult for those whose incomes permit them to purchase certain luxuries to perceive the countless ways their support of such price tags and systems helps to keep the poor in their position on the social class ladder, and the wealthy in theirs. Most Appalachians are aware of how they are perceived by the rest of the nation, as there are plenty of hillbilly stereotypes in many areas of popular culture to let those living in the region know how those outside view them and their culture.

Beliefs about the Appalachian region and the poor are so entrenched in the social and cultural fabric of the United States that many people may not be aware of a need to combat them. In researching and writing this thesis I have encountered my own stereotypes about Appalachia and the poor that I did not even realize I harbored. I was surprised to find that I had bought into certain myths about the homogeneity of Appalachia and the culture of poverty that I saw refuted in the pages of the articles and books I consulted. My personal experience, then, serves as an example of how education can help to eradicate misconceptions that serve to perpetuate unfavorable social conditions for certain groups—in the case of this research, poor Appalachian

women. While I found plenty of indignant outcries against Appalachian stereotypes and social injustices against the poor in the literature, I did not find any evidence of indignation over the exclusive nature of arts education or the poor being encouraged to pursue creative or educational endeavors that lead to income generation. The apparent lack of concern (at least published concern) for the poor person as a *whole person*—a being who has needs and desires that lie outside the realm of monetary gain, and may well include a need for creative expression—indicates that there is more work to be done to address social conceptions of poverty. I believe that the example of the inaccessibility of arts education for poor adults is but one example of the many non-material privations of the poor in the United States that reflects social beliefs about how whole or well-rounded the poor deserve to be. Therefore, I conclude this examination with a call for further research on limitations placed upon the poor by the non-poor and why these limitations exist. When American society can appreciate the varied levels of constraint that surpass financial limitations faced by low-income adults, then we can begin the hard work of dismantling the systems that allow and perpetuate poverty inside Appalachia and beyond.

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